

Riding Easy: Porirua Bikes in Schools Story

By Louise Thornley, for the Porirua Bikes in Schools network.

December 2020. All photos by Louise Thornley.



On school sports fields in Porirua, the wheels of change are turning. A few years ago, many children had little opportunity to ride bikes. The Bikes in Schools movement is now set up in six Porirua primary schools, offering universal access to cycling as part of the school day.

How did schools make biking the norm – and what has resulted? This story tells how Bikes in Schools has emerged and expanded in Porirua, focusing on three schools (deciles 1-4). Drawing on what's been learned so far, those involved offer advice for other schools and communities.

This story was written by Louise Thornley, a freelance writer and public health researcher. She met with staff and students from various Porirua schools, a family, and diverse community and cycling groups to hear how Bikes in Schools has emerged.

This story is collectively owned by the Porirua Bikes in Schools network. Its production was made possible by Porirua City Council. Everyone connected to the network may use parts or all of this story to help share what's being learned, and to promote Bikes in Schools and whānau cycling in Porirua and beyond.

Chad's path to riding a bike



Wearing a yellow safety vest and a cheeky grin, 12-year-old Chad Vickerstaff wheels out his bike at home. Decorated with stickers, a medallion and a nifty phone-holder made by his Dad, the bike has thick blue tyres and high handlebars. Chad's itching to go for his usual after-school ride. Today though, sideways rain and gusting southerlies pound the windows.

Most days when school ends, Chad heads over to his old primary school to ride his bike. Titahi Bay School's bike track, part of its Bikes in Schools package, is a powerful magnet for young riders. Though

now in Year 7 at the local intermediate, Chad chooses to ride at his previous school for the track, relishing its large size – and its bumps.

Learning to ride wasn't easy for Chad. Due to disability, he only mastered walking at the age of five. Shantel Croton, Chad's Mum, explains he has high instep hips and requires support from the government's Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS).

Chad credits several teachers, teacher aides and a caretaker at Titahi Bay School with supporting him to learn to ride at the age of nine. His best mate was also a big help. Chad used specially-designed pedals with covers – so his feet wouldn't slip off the pedals. These covers helped to build up his confidence; over time he transitioned to standard pedals.

Shantel says: "It was quite surprising that he could ride a bike, cos I thought it would be too hard for him. There were so many other things he couldn't do – and then he could do this. I'm rapt he learned to ride."

Bikes in Schools is an in-school biking package to aid regular bike riding by all students. A bike track is built on the school grounds to enable safe learning and practice. A fleet of shared bikes, helmets and a storage container are common elements – plus specialised bike skills training and maintenance support.

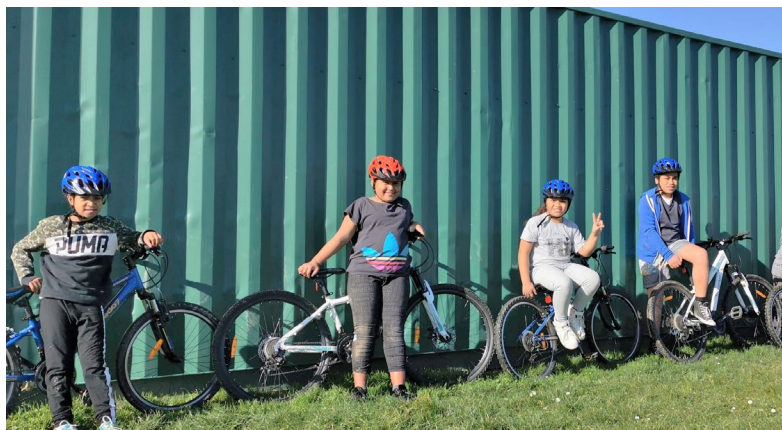
At primary school, Chad rode every lunchtime and with his class. By Year Six he'd progressed to larger-sized bikes. He became a bike monitor, helping to allocate bikes to other children and looking after the bikes.

Now Chad's aunty, Anne Weir, takes him to the bike track to ride almost every day: "He whizzes around with his legs going like crazy."

Shantel says she couldn't imagine him learning to ride at home: their neighbourhood is hilly and heavily trafficked. "Without the bike track, he wouldn't have taken up biking. I think it's changed his life a lot. It's helped him enjoy school more."

Chad's biking skills and confidence have blossomed with all the practice he gets at the track. In recent years he's taken part in three school triathlons: "I don't really slow down for anything now!"

Corinna School enters the triathlon



Across Porirua Harbour and State Highway One, Corinna School sits in the high eastern hills of the children here don't have their own bikes, and learn to ride for the first time at school.

Seated at a boardroom table by the school office, Year Five friends Athena and Mailene say they love the bike track, describing it as fun. They enjoy talking to their friends

while using the track together. Ebony, a Year Six student, exclaims: “It feels like flying.”

Corinna School participated in the Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon for the first time this year. Thirty-seven students completed the course. Students and staff say Bikes in Schools played a big part in helping the children to increase their fitness and skills for this event.

Khaleesi and Lydia, two friends in Year Three, did the triathlon together and supported each other. Lydia says: “Khaleesi tried to slow down. She was tired, but I grabbed her hand to pull her on”.

All the kids in the boardroom today say they felt proud that their whānau came to support them in the triathlon – and when people along the way called out to cheer them on.

Jeremiah Walton is a Year 7 student, described by teacher Sarah Rees as a “kaitiaki of the bikes.” He’s a dedicated bike monitor, routinely giving up his lunchtime to help at the track. Bike monitors help to make sure everyone gets a bike that suits them, hand out helmets, run a sign-out system, do basic maintenance and pack down when the bell rings. Jeremiah says he pumps up a lot of tyres – a task he enjoys.

Year Four student Reiana has learned how to fix a chain. She loves having a track at school because “you can bring your bike to ride at the track on holidays or the weekend”.

One weekend, Reiana and her cousin rode the Bothamley Park bike trail, linking Cannon’s Creek with Waitangirua. Reiana says: “It was fun going up the hills, and over rocks, and it was bumpy. It was the hardest ride I’d ever done.”

Teacher Sarah Rees oversees Corinna’s bike track at lunchtimes. She says Bikes in Schools is “good for the children’s fitness, confidence and wellbeing – both physical and mental”.

Former Principal of Corinna School, Michele Whiting, reports more interest in biking among the school community since the track was built. Parents told her that biking at school was the only way their children would get the opportunity to learn to ride.

Sean Linton (Greater Wellington Regional Council) recalls that before Bikes in Schools, Corinna students were unfamiliar with bikes. These days at the school, Sean sees “a sense among the kids that bikes are something they can do, and can use for life – there’s a kind of cultural acceptance of biking. There is an easiness about their way around bikes that wasn’t so obvious before.”

Freewheeling at Ngāti Toa School



Back across the highway and harbour, on the slopes beneath bush-lined Rangituhi (Colonial Knob), Ngāti Toa School’s bike track is busy. On this winter lunchtime, the dark low cloud threatens rain, yet it feels like nothing would stop this group of keen bikers from tearing around the track.

There’s Molly, a Year One child in a pink leopard-print jacket and large purple gumboots, furiously pedalling over the purpose-built skills area. Hingano and Mathyis come from the school’s special education unit to ride around the track. And some other kids bike to

the top of the small hill beyond the track's outer corner, then hurtle down to shoot over the jumps below.

The school's groundsman, Glen Robinson, opens up the bike container every lunchtime. He says it's "really special" that disabled kids use the track, like Mathyis and Hingano who are non-verbal with complex disabilities.

Says Glen: "You can't imagine them on a bike because they have problems walking, but then you see them go for it – and now they ride on the track every lunchtime".

All of Ngāti Toa School's pupils (around 160) use the track regularly – all shapes and sizes. Even on unsettled winter days like today the track is well used. In the warmer months it's even more popular.

Now, as the lunch break nears its end, cold rain starts to drop and the young riders barrel back to the bike container, pull off their helmets and return to class.

More wheels are spinning



At Ngāti Toa's office, community leader Chris Te'o arrives for a chat. He grew up in Porirua East where biking wasn't the norm, first learning to ride a bike at the age of forty-three:

"When you pick up biking in your forties and it's transformational, you know how transformative it will be for young kids."

Chris is a founder of USO Bike Ride, an initiative to encourage cycling and health among Pacific peoples. He says cycling has been less common in Māori and Pacific communities, but USO is working to change that. The group has been crucial in helping to kick-start Bikes in Schools in this area, particularly in Porirua East.

Says Chris: "A lot of parents are saying to me that their kids love biking, referring to the Bikes in Schools."

In Porirua East though, he hasn't yet seen a big rise in kids out on bikes in the community. Barriers to biking in this low-socioeconomic community include: low bike ownership rates, road safety concerns, little biking infrastructure like bike lanes or signage, and the lack of a biking culture.

Despite these challenges, fast-growing numbers of children are learning to ride at school. A 2019 review of Porirua Bikes in Schools, by Partners Porirua, found that every student in five schools with the programme could confidently ride a bike – in total, more than 1300 students.

Across all the schools, the number is even higher. In July 2019, the total student roll numbers for the six schools with Bikes in Schools was 1621. Biking in the community has increased in the Porirua region: many of these 1600-plus children now want to bike more outside of school.

Distinct from Bikes in Schools, cycling groups in the area were already underway and have rapidly grown – especially USO Bike Ride and Cycle Safe Porirua. These groups encourage locals to ride (see more detail below). Chris believes that these groups, coupled with Bikes in Schools, have led to a groundswell of change: more Porirua people are biking.

Titahi Bay School’s full bike racks

Just a few streets away from Ngāti Toa, Titahi Bay School (Kura Street) was an early adopter of Bikes in Schools. Principal Kerry Delaney says the bike track is used constantly during the school day. The school’s bike racks are jammed full: every one of the 400 kids now has their own bike.

The school hasn’t yet had a child who couldn’t learn to ride, Kerry reports. It can be tough for some to learn – there are tears of fear – but then they overcome the fright and start biking on their own.

“The joy of seeing a little person learn to ride is quite magical”, says Kerry.

Kerry says new opportunities have arisen for students with emotional or behavioural challenges: “When children are sad, angry or bored, they can head out for a ride on the track – and return to class ready to participate and learn”.

The track’s popular after hours, too. Chad’s one of many children who enjoy riding the track after school. Some Mums ride every single day with their kids.

Some of the school’s teachers have learned to ride alongside the students. Kerry is seeing an increase in riding by teachers and parents – more families go biking together on local roads and bike trails.

Benefits for the community



The outcomes of Bikes in Schools extend to whānau and the wider community. Michelle Robinson, Executive Director of Partners Porirua (a youth development organisation), is aware of families using the tracks after hours. She thinks this is especially the case in low-decile schools where the track fills a leisure gap – heading to the track is “free, easy and just down the road”.

Rachel Scott, a former school partnerships facilitator with Partners Porirua, agrees the bike tracks have become assets for the whole community. Whānau use of the track at weekends helps to make the school a local destination – and safer for everyone. Rachel says the power of the Bikes in Schools package is that all kids can access biking, not only those who have their own bikes.

Movin’ March is an annual campaign by Wellington region councils to encourage whānau to get active by walking, biking or scooting to school. Associate Minister of Transport, Julie Anne Genter, said in 2018

that less than a third of New Zealand school kids walked or cycled to school. This has plummeted since the 1980s, when more than half walked or biked to school.¹

Greater Wellington Regional Council's Kirsty Barr reports a recent rise in Porirua primary schools taking part in Movin' March. In 2018 only 19% of Porirua primary schools took part. But in 2019, more than half (59%) of Porirua schools participated. That's a 40% increase in just one year.

Both Corinna and Ngāti Toa schools participated in Movin' March for the first time in 2019. USO Bike Ride and the regional council each encouraged local schools to take part, which helped to boost participation. The increase also coincided with the rise of Bikes in Schools and other cycling initiatives in the area.

John Poppleton runs Porirua's Green Bikes Trust, rescuing and recycling bikes. He's noticed big changes in the local biking landscape over the past decade. In earlier years, the Trust would loan bikes to schools but they are not requested so much now, suggesting there's less need.

Says John: "Bikes in Schools has made a big difference, it's changed the landscape – there's been a big increase in kids with bikes. It's because of the combination of all of it – tracks, funding, bikes and Pedal Ready cycle skills training".

Preventing health problems

Bikes in Schools is one way to work to prevent and reduce diabetes and other health conditions among Porirua youth. Regular physical activity is woven into the school day – and encouraged outside of school.

At Titahi Bay School, one particularly heavy boy had struggled with physical activity and couldn't get his leg over the bike. So a father, who was on the school board, built him a special bike – strong enough to hold his weight, which he could easily use. After learning to ride, the boy lost weight and gained confidence. And the other kids who witnessed his learning felt proud of his achievement.

Pedal Ready instructor Marilyn Northcotte, who taught cycle skills to Titahi Bay students for many years, also has stories of weight loss and health gains. A boy in Year Six, for example, took a while to learn to ride but he persevered, ending up "healthier and fitter".

Early-onset Type 2 diabetes is a rising concern in the Porirua community. It's a worrying problem: child or youth diabetes puts people at higher risk of developing serious diabetes complications in mid-life, or even in their twenties or thirties.

In 2017, 95 children and young people in Porirua were diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes. More than half of these were aged 20-24 years, but a proportion of younger children and teenagers are facing a diabetes diagnosis at a young age.²

¹ Virginia Fallon, Stuff 2018. *\$23 million in Government funding announced to get more school children cycling*. Available at: <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/108863277/23-million-in-government-funding-announced-to-get-more-school-children-cycling>

² Porirua City Council 2019. *Status Report 2019: Trends in the wellbeing of children and young people in Porirua*. Pg 20. Available at: <https://porirua.govt.nz/your-council/city-planning-and-reporting/our-strategic-priorities/children-and-young-people/>

Cycle Safe Porirua supplements Bikes in Schools by providing cycling opportunities outside of school, encouraging new adult riders, promoting health benefits and normalising cycling.

Biking for health

Cycle Safe Porirua is a community group that promotes being active and encourages riding for enjoyment. The group is open to riders from all walks of life and all cycling levels. It leads free rides for all abilities during the week.

A weekly bike ride in Porirua East is popular. Māori and Pasifika take part, both men and women. Some are brand new to riding a bike, and some have challenges with their health or weight.

New riders sometimes choose to start riding on local school tracks – it’s a safe place to learn to use gears and ride safely before moving to the streets.

Benefits of taking part include social interaction and gains in bike skills, confidence and health. Participants say they feel like they’re achieving something, and are inspired to try out other ways to improve their health, like healthy eating.

Coordinator Findlay Siania says he loves riding with his son, who has cycled with the group since the age of 16. Bike riding has increased his son’s confidence – he’s now one of the lead riders for Cycle Safe Porirua.

“My wife never liked bikes and was afraid to ride on the road. Now she is a regular with the group”, says Findlay.

From its beginnings in October 2018, Findlay has been the main driver of Cycle Safe Porirua, supported by USO Bike Ride and others (Coventry Cars, Catalyst Pacific Limited, Evo Bikes).

How Porirua Bikes in Schools began



Titahi Bay School’s bike track has been in place for six years, since early 2014. Before the track was built, the school started an annual triathlon as a way to fundraise. At that time, only a few kids had their own bikes, and hardly any kids rode to school.

A committee of parents formed to investigate options for encouraging biking, and to start fixing up old bikes – helping create a supportive school biking culture before Bikes in Schools was adopted.

When Principal Kerry Delaney heard about Bikes in Schools, she invited founder Paul McArdle to meet with parents and staff. The project “snowballed from there”. Downers installed the track, a fleet of bikes were purchased, and Pedal Ready came on board to teach bike safety skills.

Once Bikes in Schools was established at Titahi Bay School (decile 4), other schools came to visit the track to inform their approach to biking. The school shared its funding details and what had been learned so far.

After seeing Titahi Bay's positive outcomes, in 2017 Porirua City Council and Partners Porirua began to work together to support other schools to take up Bikes in Schools. The council provided funding to Partners Porirua to help facilitate Bikes in Schools.

At this time, Rachel Scott was the school partnerships facilitator for Partners Porirua, working closely with schools. Partners Porirua and Bike On NZ Charitable Trust (the Bikes in Schools charity) established a Memorandum of Understanding to formalise the close working relationship.

Then, with the council's Wendy Barry, Rachel initiated regular Bikes in Schools hui and other discussions with schools and organisations (e.g. USO Bike Ride, Sport Wellington, Bike On, Green Bikes Trust and others). Regular hui were held from late 2017, and are ongoing.

USO Bike Ride was instrumental in supporting Ngāti Toa (decile 3), Holy Family (decile 1) and Corinna (decile 1) schools to get their bike programmes up and running. The council and Partners Porirua also assisted the schools, including working with students at each school to design the tracks. In the last term of 2018, all three schools held formal launches to open their tracks.

In recent years, government support of school-based cycling has strengthened. In November 2018, the NZ Transport Agency (now called Waka Kotahi) tripled the funding for Bikes in Schools, and a nationwide BikeReady cycling education programme was launched (Wellington's Pedal Ready is part of this). Since 2018, Bikes in Schools has been adopted in 56 more schools nationwide – extending access to biking for 20,000 more kiwi kids.³

Late in 2019, Sean Linton was appointed Bikes in Schools Facilitator at Greater Wellington Regional Council to work across the region. He'd worked in Porirua schools beforehand as a Pedal Ready instructor.

By the winter of 2020, a total of six Porirua schools had established Bikes in Schools (Titahi Bay School, Pukerua Bay School, Postgate School, Holy Family School, Ngāti Toa School, Corinna School). Papakowhai School has begun to develop a programme, with a new concrete track now built. Four other local schools are exploring the potential for Bikes in Schools.

What helped establish Bikes in Schools?

Three crucial success factors helped Porirua Bikes in Schools to emerge:

- 1) a whole-school commitment
- 2) the involvement of students and whānau
- 3) the backing of a diverse partnership of local community and cycling organisations.

³ Hon Julie Anne Genter 2020. Press statement: *20,000 more Kiwi kids on bikes*. Available at: <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/20000-more-kiwi-kids-bikes>

Collective school responsibility

Those leading Bikes in Schools in Porirua agree that a whole-school commitment has been vital. The Principal, Board members and a group of teachers, students and whānau all need to be enthusiastic and actively involved.

Examples from Porirua schools

Titahi Bay School has designated one main coordinator of the bikes: Matua Delwyn Gardner, a teacher at the school. In Terms 1 and 4, he is excused from the usual duty role at lunchtimes, instead spending time at the bike container to supervise and maintain the bikes. Plus, Principal Kerry Delaney gives Delwyn and the two caretakers a day off occasionally to do an intensive bike fix-it session.

Ngāti Toa School's groundsman, Glen Robinson, is responsible for the bikes every lunchtime. Principal Kaye Brunton adds that it's vital to integrate Bikes in Schools into the school curriculum. As part of the Health and Physical Education curriculum, teachers take their students onto the track during class time.

Biking can also be used for learning throughout the wider curriculum. Greater Wellington Regional Council is working with Porirua schools, including Corinna, to adopt its new Active Travel resource, which links biking with environmental awareness and action.

Student and whānau participation



The schools say it's important to engage students early on. In all three schools, a group of students helped to design the track. Each school involves students in a bike monitor system. Students are responsible for helping to allocate bikes and helmets, and to do basic safety checks on the bikes.

The schools also underlined the need for whānau support. This can be a big ask in lower socioeconomic communities where parents are often under pressure and dealing with the effects of poverty. Chris Te'o says many families, especially in Porirua East, "have challenges to even put food on the table". He's aware that whānau at the schools contribute what they can, but he feels extra support is sometimes needed in low-decile schools.

Corinna School's Principal, Trish Nash, notes that Bikes in Schools can help whānau to engage with school. Trish says the initiative has boosted their school community culture, as it's a great way to bring whānau together. She especially saw this in the Weet-Bix TRYathlon, which Bikes in Schools made feasible for the first time.

Partnership and sharing

All schools and organisations in Porirua Bikes in Schools say collaborating is crucial, as is the involvement of local community-based groups. Some in the network said that without USO Bike Ride, Bikes in Schools and other biking initiatives wouldn't have happened in Porirua East, at least not to the current extent.

Regular hui have helped enable collaboration: Partners Porirua and the council knew the community well enough to know who to invite to the hui, and had already established credibility and trust.

Bike On's Paul McArdle says what's happening in Porirua is "very unique". He's not seen such a diverse range of organisations involved elsewhere, who are all so supportive of their local schools. Porirua is distinctive, Paul believes, in the degree to which community people 'working on the ground' are involved, and the close links between councils (Porirua City Council and Greater Wellington Regional Council).

Ash Peters is part of the Porirua collaboration. Founder and lead instructor for the non-profit WORD (Wellington Off-road Riding Department), she teaches young people mountain bike skills after school and in holidays. She's instructed many children from Titahi Bay School, whose high participation she attributes to the biking culture and infrastructure now well established at the school.

"One of the neat things about Porirua Bikes in Schools is the connection between organisations", says Ash. In contrast to being competitive, "each organisation does what they're good at and doesn't step on each other's toes".

Compared with other places where Ash works, she thinks Porirua's level of whānau and community commitment is especially strong. She describes its approach – regular hui with a wide mix of community groups – as a model for other locations.

Ash says a synergy comes from the diverse elements. Opportunities to ride outside of school help to complement the in-school experience – and produce more powerful aggregate effects.

Pedal Ready's Tessa Coppard also sees the Porirua collaboration as positive: "It's an excellent example of everyone working together for the common good. I'm glad to be part of it".

Chris Te'o agrees the partnership is vital and constructive. He also feels it could be further developed to better serve Porirua East – to meet its unique community needs:

"With respect, I would challenge the other organisations to really back community-led organisations to take the reins, especially in Porirua East."

Chris says that for any community programme to work better, local people from that community should be running the programme:

"That's where you have a better connection, the kids and the adults...There are a few in USO [Bike Ride] – Porirua East is where they've grown up, it's where they've lived all their life, so they've got that layer of connection and relationships. They go a long way in encouraging families to come and actually have a go [at biking]. Whereas if you don't have that, then it is a real, real challenge".

Chris has spoken candidly with the councils and Partners Porirua to advocate that community organisations like USO Bike Ride should be a priority for any available future funding, "given the extent of what we've been able to achieve in Porirua East."

What elements of collaboration are important?

Paid roles to help coordinate Bikes in Schools are crucial to Porirua's partnership. Ash Peters describes Wendy Barry, Porirua City Council's senior partnerships advisor, as an "absolute driving force, with her finger on every pulse". Rachel Scott and Aashif Sacha (Partners Porirua) have also been central, working closely with schools and connecting them with bike-specific contractors and local support.

All schools and organisations emphasised the major role of USO Bike Ride and Chris Te'o. As mentioned, USO Bike Ride helped to kick-start Bikes in Schools in three low-decile schools. The group provided leadership, donations and practical help, such as donating bikes to these schools, which made a real difference.

Chris' input is described by Ash Peters as "phenomenal", and Principal Kate Brunton says: "I don't know how Chris does his magic!"

Sharing learning across the schools has been helpful in Porirua. For example, to explore the potential for Bikes in Schools, a group of students from Maraeroa School visited Ngāti Toa School to interview staff and students about its pros and cons.

Elements of successful collaboration:

- Designated paid coordinator/s with strong local networks and credibility
- Involvement of local groups and individuals with strong community networks and credibility
- Regular hui and other communications
- Diverse organisations who know their roles and don't compete
- Shared goals – e.g. putting kids first, wanting to encourage biking, wanting to support local schools, whānau-centred and community-centred
- Close links between schools, community groups and councils
- Tailored support for low-decile schools
- Provision of various complementary services – e.g. after-school and holiday biking programmes, bike skills training and maintenance support
- Extensive goodwill among organisations and the community
- Sharing learning between schools – openness and trust.

Challenges – and some help



Unsurprisingly, the path to Bikes in Schools hasn't been completely smooth. Like the bike tracks, there are bumps and obstacles – occasionally, even the odd pothole.

Porirua schools consistently report three main challenges: 1) securing funding over time, 2) keeping up with regular maintenance of the bikes (and tracks), and 3) ensuring longer-term sustainability, especially given the turnover of staff and students. Ensuring a smooth bike monitor system,

especially when students move on or get bored, can present a challenge.

A final challenge – for the network as a whole – is the need to enable and support community-led leadership, whānau involvement, and a culture change towards a biking culture.

Organisations and schools in Porirua said getting the initiative up and running is “a big hurdle”. Schools will rightly focus on the initial set-up and the launch – but then it’s also important to make sure the bikes and track are maintained as the months and years go by.

Security can also be a problem at times; several Porirua schools had experienced recent attempted and actual break-ins and theft of bikes.

Some schools in Porirua have had challenges with poor quality bikes, or with having limited options available when purchasing bikes. Not all bike shops gave discounts for bulk purchases.

Holy Family School, in Porirua East, faced a significant challenge with its bike track, which recently had to be rebuilt. Some low-quality bikes needed to be replaced. USO Bike Ride has worked closely with the school to successfully address these challenges.

The early choices on a track contractor and bike fleet have important consequences for maintenance needs over time. Porirua organisations and individuals often recommended a concrete or asphalt track surface (ideally, to suit the weather conditions – though some have limestone). They also advised using contractors who are specialised in building mountain-bike tracks, and seeking advice from other schools to find recommended contractors in the local area.

Learning from schools

Titahi Bay Principal Kerry Delaney advises developing Bikes in Schools in the same way schools would develop any curriculum programme – thinking about sustainability and the longer term, and accessing the right tools to do the job. Each year her school puts aside money for Bikes in Schools, and regularly replaces the bikes as they wear (including donating older bikes – before they’re worn out – to children who need them). The contractors who built the bike track return every two years to check and maintain the track.

Titahi Bay School has invested heavily in security: its container has an alarm system and special bolts, and a Dad reinforced the security system to make the container even harder to break into. So far, the school hasn’t had any break-ins or bike thefts.

Kaye Brunton, Ngāti Toa’s Principal, agrees that it’s important to plan and fund the upgrading and replacement of bikes and helmets over time. Cheaper, low-quality bike fleets haven’t been ideal for Ngāti Toa and Corinna Schools. Ngāti Toa groundsman Glen Robinson says if they could turn the clock back, the school would have purchased better quality bikes with simpler components, so fewer things would need fixing.

Former Corinna Principal, Michele Whiting, advises designating a person (or a committee) to be responsible for fundraising and accessing grants. She says it’s worth exploring the funding options available through the Ministry of Education – e.g. her school was able to use some of its programme grant to fix some drainage problems before installing the bike track.

Support with maintenance

A formal, planned maintenance programme is recommended. In Porirua, schools can access various local community organisations and contractors to help out with maintaining the bikes and tracks.

Examples of support with maintenance

- Biketec offers the schools year-round full professional bike-maintenance service support via a maintenance contract. Currently Biketec's contracts in Porirua are with Corinna School and Holy Family School
- WACC (Workshops for Accessible Cycle Care) is another provider that has carried out bike repair training and support in several Porirua schools (at the time of writing, their service is on hold). In 2019, Partners Porirua facilitated a bike maintenance programme with WACC in three schools (Ngāti Toa, Titahi Bay and Holy Family Schools), with funding support from Greater Wellington Regional Council, Porirua City Council and Bike On NZ Charitable Trust. The goal was for senior students to train a new group of students to maintain bikes
- Simon Bendall, at Get Fixed Café, has also provided maintenance sessions in several local schools. In 2020 he is offering this service to those with Bikes in Schools. There is potential for Get Fixed to train teachers, whānau and community members on more complex bike maintenance tasks, such as changing tyre tubes, brake lines and brakes – who could then teach the students.

USO Bike Ride's Chris Te'o also emphasised the need to build the maintenance skills and awareness of students – so they understand the importance of regular checking, cleaning and tyre-pumping to keep their bikes running well.

Support from secondary students

Year 12 secondary students from Mana College have visited Ngāti Toa School to give practical help with maintaining the bikes. The College offered this mutually-beneficial service, which encouraged primary and secondary school students to interact.

This model could be used more in future. Secondary schools can award NCEA credits for college students taking part in structured workplace learning to prepare them for future training and employment (the Gateway programme). This programme is a way for college students to help with bike maintenance and skills development in primary schools, as part of a training pathway.

See Appendix 1 below – ten tips for schools, drawing from the learning so far in these three Porirua schools. This advice could assist schools that are considering starting Bikes in Schools.

Next steps



The Porirua Bikes in Schools movement has discussed a goal to establish a community bike-repair workshop, where any residents could go to fix up bikes in Porirua East. The vision is for an affordable bike repair hub, with Green Bikes available for people without a bike. Community members could access tools, support and training on how to fix bikes.

USO Bike Ride's Chris Te'o would ideally like to see part of Bothamley Park transformed into a cycling hub. His dream is to turn a section of the park into a hub with a container of bikes, a bike-repair area, a shop, a pump track and a flat area where people new to biking can learn to ride and be supported with training. He feels the park is under-used at

present, and would be an ideal central, visible location for a cycling hub – so that local people could see what's happening and join in.

A community bike workshop would offer opportunities for local jobs and capacity-building, says Simon Phillips, Maraeroa Marae Health Clinic's chief executive. He says a workshop would demonstrate bike-related pathways for skill development, training and employment.

Complementing Bikes in Schools by further developing family-oriented bike events is another plan. Chris Te'o says an organisation that he helps lead, Pacific Men's Health Aotearoa, holds Bike Open Days to encourage families to bike. It is also planning a mini-triathlon for Porirua East schools, inspired by seeing so many children having "the time of their lives" in the Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon.

"We need to really shift the culture of our community and Porirua East in terms of seeing cycling as a norm," Chris says.

"Bikes in Schools is a great catalyst, but it's only part of the solution. We really have to get whānau and communities moving as well."

USO Bike Ride is offering free bike-skills training to children and families over the upcoming school holidays, based at the Bikes in Schools tracks. The aim is to enable families to be skilled enough to bike outside of school, out in the community.

Chris says there's also a need to inform and advocate to families so they understand why it's important that children ride bikes in the community – and encourage them to see biking as more than just a school-based activity.

"For parents I think it's still [about] safety, it's still not knowing what cycling can do. Yes, it's great that biking is at school, but once the kids go out of school are they going to be allowed to actually ride the bikes? Or get bikes for that matter. I'd say that will be a challenge."

USO Bike Ride is working with ReBicycle, a Wellington-region community organisation that donates bikes to those in hardship, to access free bikes as needed for Porirua East families.

Normalising biking is important. Says Chris: “In Porirua we talk about wanting to get people on bikes, but how do we do that when our community doesn’t see it as normal, and don’t have bikes?”

In summary, Chris recommends that Bikes in Schools is supported by complementary activities: a cycling hub, provision of donated bikes for families in financial hardship, opportunities for families to learn to ride together – and, importantly, development of a biking culture.

Local transport context and future transport planning

Bikes in Schools is emerging in Porirua in a changing transport context. Porirua City Council’s Ron Minnema (Planning and Programme Manager – Transport) and Luke Benner (Traffic and Road Safety Engineer) say the council considers Bikes in Schools and the rise in youth biking in their planning in several ways.

Cycling is part of the council’s Long Term Plan. A recent shift in the council’s planning approach has introduced a longer planning cycle with identified programmes of work, rather than just annual planning. This means more funding is allocated in advance.

There’s a dedicated role – Strategic Transport Planner – focused on walking and cycling as well as other transport modes. The Strategic Transport Planner has begun setting up a Transport Forum within council – to share information and work together.

Luke says a School Zones Programme will begin later this year, where the council will work with 30 Porirua schools that don’t yet have variable speed zones – to introduce safer speeds, improve walking routes to school, and improve parking management at the school gate. Future measures like reducing speed limits, traffic calming and safer cycling routes in the wider community are also being discussed.

Ron says if kids are used to walking and cycling from a young age, such as through Bikes in Schools, then car reliance is likely to reduce in future. He says the council is planning for a different future – not for continued car dependence.

Biketec’s Simon Gilbert notes that Bikes in Schools is part of an international movement to increase bike use: “All countries are looking to bikes to create the transport revolution.”

Bikes in Schools – more than riding a bike

Sitting in Ngāti Toa School’s staffroom, Chris Te’o reflects on the changes he’s seeing for local kids from Bikes in Schools. He says you can see their growing resilience – and how much their confidence has improved: “It’s an opportunity to build health and wellness”.

A major benefit, says Chris, is that “kids who didn’t get an opportunity to cycle now do get those opportunities – and they can take the skills, confidence and bigger goals with them throughout life”.

School students Chad, Hingano and Mathyis all developed a love of regular biking after learning to ride at school, when they probably wouldn’t have had the chance otherwise.

Titahi Bay Principal Kerry Delaney says the programme has effects beyond biking: “It’s not just about learning to ride a bike; it’s about feeling good about yourself.”

All up, Bikes in Schools has progressed rapidly in Porirua, with flow-on benefits for children, teachers, schools, whānau and communities (see Appendix 2 below for a detailed list of benefits).

None of the schools regret stepping onto the Bikes in Schools path. It's the opposite. Reflecting on the decision to start Bikes in Schools, Kerry Delaney says: "It's probably the best thing we ever did in this school".

Appendix 1: Ten tips for schools

Based on what these Porirua schools and organisations have learned so far, ten tips stand out. These could be useful for other schools interested in taking up Bikes in Schools.

- 1) Leadership and coordination:** Establish a group of committed people to lead the work (Principal, Board, teachers, parents) to ensure sustainability. Appoint one coordinator to oversee and champion the bike programme – and allow some time off to do this work (e.g. spending duty time at the bike container). Identify a student champion.
- 2) Planning and funding:** Long term and annual planning – including putting aside money, and planning to replace bikes and helmets over time. Look for diverse funding options – have one person or a parent committee responsible for fundraising.
- 3) Relationships and info-sharing:** Invest time in developing relationships – especially with Bike On, USO Bike Ride, Partners Porirua, Porirua City Council etc. Learn from other schools and regular hui, including on which bikes to buy and which contractors to use. Use resources for teachers, such as those on the [BikeReady website](#)
- 4) Maintenance:** Proactive, regular approach to maintaining the bikes and track (an organised programme). Use support that's available from community organisations and secondary schools. Encourage students to care for the bikes and explain why it's important
- 5) Security:** Invest in security – alarm, covered locks, extra security measures
- 6) Bike quality:** Don't buy poor-quality bikes – prioritise purchasing good bikes and replace them before they are broken. Basic componentry makes it easier (less parts to go wrong)
- 7) Track surface:** Partners Porirua and bike organisations recommend concrete or asphalt tracks for the Porirua setting (at least for the main part of the track), as they are more durable in the Wellington weather. These are more expensive, but extra NZTA funding is available through Bike On. Having said this, the schools with limestone tracks say they're happy with them
- 8) Involve students:** Students should be engaged from early on, e.g. in track design and organising the track's opening. A bike monitor system is important – and needs to be supported to reduce student turnover
- 9) Involve whānau:** For example, by teaching bike maintenance skills, supporting whānau to help with bike maintenance, starting a parent fundraising committee, and encouraging volunteer whānau support for bike monitors
- 10) Prioritise regular bike safety and skills training:** Use a free Bike Ready provider (e.g. Greater Wellington's Pedal Ready).

Appendix 2: Benefits of Bikes in Schools – a summary

Drawn from Porirua schools and organisations, this is a summary of the wide-ranging advantages of Bikes in Schools – for students, whānau, schools and communities. Reported benefits are diverse, including for skills, confidence, educational spin-offs, socialising, and health and wellbeing.

1. Benefits for school children:

Bike riding practice and development

- Children ride bikes more often – at school (all students) and outside of school (some students)
- Children who don't own a bike can still learn to ride and can bike daily at school
- Increased bike skills
- Increased excitement about bike riding
- Opportunity to train to take part in triathlons (school triathlons, Weet-Bix TRYathlon)
- Increased riding on local bike trails
- Increased riding to school (for some schools)
- Learning mountain bike skills
- Participation in mountain biking outside of school

Bike maintenance skill development

- Increased skills in bike maintenance – and sense of shared ownership of bikes
- Experience of being a bike monitor – leadership, responsibility, helping others

Confidence

- Increased confidence – about biking and in general
- Pride in biking achievements – children feel good about themselves
- Opportunity to try something new, take part and contribute, take risks, overcome fear, learn self-management skills and see something through

Enjoyment and engagement in school

- New opportunities to achieve, especially for students who have lower achievement in the classroom – biking is a way to engage children who are less engaged in class
- Increased enjoyment in school
- Contribute to planning and co-design for the bike track and future developments

Benefits for behaviour

- Improvements in playground behaviour
- Helps children with behaviour problems to get outside, keep busy, calm down and use excess energy – can be used as distraction from escalating behaviour

Social benefits

- Socialising through biking together, learn to interact with others, new and strengthened friendships, bike with friends and family

- Peer learning – experience in helping each other when learning (e.g. help a child to balance when learning to ride, help others to fix a chain)
- Peer support and caring for others – cheering each other on, encouraging friends to ride, celebrating others' achievements
- Opportunity to ride with whānau on the school track after school and weekends
- Opportunity for interaction with college students – training sessions as part of college unit standards to help teach primary school students bike maintenance skills

Benefits for health and wellbeing

- Increased fitness
- Opportunity to build health and wellbeing – both physical and mental
- Opportunity to lose weight through daily exercise
- Learning to take care of your body through physical activity

Future benefits

- Helps to normalise biking – it's seen as part of daily school life
- Learning about future training and job pathways involving bikes
- A pathway to environmental awareness, engaging with work and getting around the community – and a foundation that can lead to a lifelong love of biking

2. Benefits for whānau

- Parents are amazed and proud to see their children riding for the first time, or taking part in a triathlon
- Biking is a way to bring whānau together
- Increases in the participation of families in bike riding – especially during the Covid-19 lockdown but also generally
- Opportunity for whānau to take kids to the school bike track after hours and weekends
- More parents, especially women, are learning to ride for the first time
- Increased access to an affordable leisure activity – school tracks are free, easy to use, and easy to get to

3. Benefits for schools

- School culture of biking encouragement and support
- Increased bike riding among teachers – some teachers have learned to ride for the first time
- Community use of the bike track after hours, which can increase security and safety of the bike container and bikes
- The bike track and fleet is a major school asset – it's a 'selling point' that can attract parents
- Some whānau donate their children's bikes to the school once they've outgrown the bike
- Sharing of learning among schools about Bikes in Schools – e.g. school visits, provision of information about getting started
- Occasional sharing of bikes with other schools – e.g. Corinna School loaned some bikes to Cannon's Creek School so that some of their students could take part in the Weet-Bix triathlon

4. Benefits for communities

- School bike tracks are seen as a community facility – an important community resource
- Porirua Bikes in Schools is community-driven with many local leaders and organisations involved
- Increased interest in biking in the community
- New adult riders can use the school tracks to learn on, as they are a safe learning environment
- Community use of the bike track means it's a safer place to go for everyone
- Children from all families can learn to ride – without having their own bike, and without needing to find a safe road to learn on
- Having all children learn about bike safety has flow-on effects for community road safety – through more whānau riding and safer biking skills of children
- School-organised bike rides to local trails (for students) helps showcase local opportunities for riding at the weekends
- More awareness of mountain biking – helps to break down barriers to access
- Increased use of affordable local assets like bike trails and parks