



TART Trails, Inc. Recycle-A-Bicycle Program Annual Report 2016 By Program Director Don Cunkle

As in past years, we close for the months of January, February and March to take a break from bicycle repairs and to pursue winter activities.

We started to get requests in late February and early March. I went into the R-A-B workshop five days after school to repair and deliver four bicycles for our neighbors in need of transportation. After spending a week out West to visit my family at the end of March, I returned to many messages for requests for bicycles from several agencies. We hit bike repairs with intensity.

We gave 22 bicycles in the month of April for requests from five different agencies, working three afternoons a week. Some clients were coming in 2 and 3 at a time and up to 5 clients per day when we were open. A few times we had to ask clients to return in a few days so we could finish repairs on their future bicycles. The month of May was even busier with the distribution of 30 bicycles, with as many as six bicycles given in one afternoon. In mid-May I have a mass bike repair day where I invite about 15 friends to help fix as many bicycles as possible in seven hours. We were able to complete repairs on 28 bicycles with 95 volunteer hours. Also during May we finished preparing for our 6th annual Bike Swap at the end of the month in the Old Town Parking Garage. The Bike Swap was a success mostly because of our returning volunteers who help every year. This has become a great community event that attracts well over 400 prospective buyers of bicycles and related items (bike racks, trailers, tag alongs etc.). The Bike Swap used the time and expertise of 31 volunteers who put in 238 hours of time.



Early in the year I received a call from Oak Park Elementary School and they asked if I could repair more than a dozen trikes and bikes that the school has for children to ride in the gym during the colder months. I picked a day and brought tools and an air pump. Most of the repairs consisted of tightening up very loose training wheels, handlebars and seats, broken pedals and flat tires. This December 2016, I called Blair Elementary School and offered about 15 bicycles for their students, I am hoping I can deliver them this spring.



R-A-B needs:

We have many volunteer opportunities, like joining our mass bike repair for one day in the middle of May to fix as many bicycles as possible in 7 hours to get ahead for our high demand period. We are always hoping for more volunteers who can give 2 or more hours a week to help with repairs of the many bicycles in stock and donated throughout the year. Some volunteers take bikes home and do repairs because it is more convenient for them. We also need help stripping usable parts from scrap bicycles, organizing our parts and thinning out the over stock of used parts like wheels, cranksets, bike seats, pedals and many other parts.

R-A-B Goals: Our goal is to supply 150 bicycles per year to people in need of alternate transportation and offer 50 free bicycle repairs to keep these citizens mobile.

2016 was another prosperous and productive year at Recycle-A-bicycle as we again have exceeded our goals. As of the end of December 2016 R-A-B has given away 175 Bicycles to people and families in need of transportation and supplied 52 free repairs to help recipients remain mobile. R-A-B has benefitted at least 227 people in 2016 and given away 1450 bicycles since the program started in 2007. And of course our main goal is to provide opportunities for families to play together and also remove obstacles for people to move forward. R-A-B serves Antrim, Kalkaska, Grand Traverse, Leelanau, Benzie, Wexford and Manistee Counties. We have even provided transportation as far away as Roscommon County.

Making a difference: A lady came into the workshop in late spring and was delighted to see that I was there. She had called me to see if I would be in but my phone doesn't always work inside the steel building with my doors closed. She lives in Buckley and doesn't own a vehicle. She was referred to R-A-B for bikes for herself and her teen daughter to be able to make scheduled appointments and buy a few groceries when in Traverse City. She was able to borrow a truck today just to pick up some bikes. The lady always rides the bus into town. I had just finished repairs on two bikes, and that was all I had available to give away. Her timing couldn't have been better. She kept telling me how these bikes will make a huge difference. She took a chance and I was glad to be able to help her out. Sometimes fate happens that way.

Dec 9 was very busy afternoon. I was trying to repair two shifters when a gentleman walked in with his referral paper to receive a bicycle. After a fitting we were talking for a while and learned this man had many skills as a mechanic in both cars and heavy equipment plus some body work and managed a couple shops for a few years. After six years in prison, all his possessions and tools were either auctioned off or stolen, which left him with just some clothes and back child support payments. Holy Cow talk about starting over! Then another lady came in from Paper Angels, a support group that helps out with children that are removed from their homes for certain reasons. She was in a week or so ago to pick out four children's bikes to give a family with four children for Christmas. I needed to make repairs first and clean them up for her.



She wanted to pay for the bikes but I declined as I would rather she used the money to buy other necessities or presents for the children. I was feeling a little down after these two clients passed through, thinking of people's hardships and circumstances. There was a knock on my workshop door. I answered the door to see this woman with two teenage girls and a six year old with the best smile. I said well hello and the little smile responded with a big hello back and walked right in. The woman walked in next and presented three referrals for bikes for the three foster children. I started with the oldest, a 17 year old girl and found a bicycle for her. Then while she was test riding the bike, in a snow storm mind you, I found a bicycle for the 15 year old and brought her bicycle outside for a test ride. These two young ladies both had jobs and wanted to be able to ride a couple miles, some on dirt roads. I saved the best for last as she was very patient and never stopped smiling, but I could see she was very anxious. As I was sizing her up we wandered through my mess of bikes I asked if she needed training wheels. "Oh yes, I can't ride without training" 😊 As we came around to the back corner there was this pretty Lilac colored bike with training wheels and this young lady was practically dancing to the bike. She was now so excited she was trying to drag me and the bike through the workshop. Once outside she hopped on and started to ride through about three Inches of snow. I said I don't think this is your color and her response was I'm taking it anyway. My payment today was the best hugs.

R-A-B Funders and Supporters:

My thanks for the many foundations and organizations for your kindness and much needed financial support for the Recycle-A-Bicycle program.

Cherryland Cares has provided funding for an additional 100 cable locks and they have provided necessary funding for bike repairs on more than 23 bicycles for the 2015-2016 season. Cherry Capital Cycling Club has been a major funder since the program started in 2007. They provide funds to help with repair costs and the general operations of the program.

TART Trails provides administrative support in addition to assistance applying for grants and organizing and running the annual bicycle swap.

Optimist Youth Foundation provided funding to help provide repairs for 30 youth bicycles.