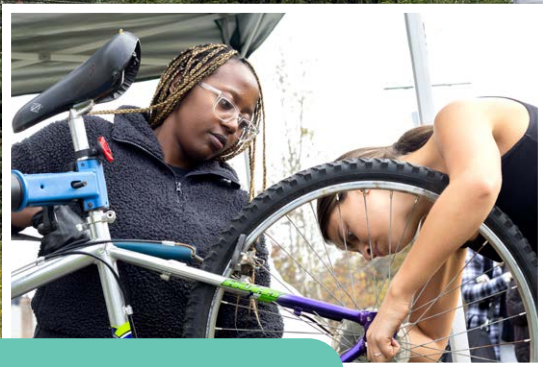


Pedaling Progress:

THE STORY OF THE POP-UP BIKE HUB

by **BIANCA MARZAN** /// EAC Volunteer



The PUBH crew hard at work.
PHOTO: Sara Farias



The PUBH ready to begin their day.
PHOTO: Matt Bawtinheimer

Before the town had fully awakened, the trailer rolled in. Soon, Ecology Action Centre (EAC) volunteers began taking names. Bikes lined up, and curiosity rippled through the morning air. Some folks lingered, studying the turns of bolts, while others dropped off their bikes and vanished into the day.

The Pop-Up Bike Hub is the latest evolution in the EAC's history of cycling initiatives. Starting with the Bike Again program in the 1990s, communities combated rising maintenance costs through a DIY repair space, complete with tools and used parts, alongside repaired bikes sold at an affordable rate.

A few years later, Welcoming Wheels emerged, which supported newcomers with bicycles and safe cycling education, a need that surged during the onset of the Syrian Refugee Crisis.

The success of these programs revealed a gap: most repair shops are located in concentrated urban centres, leaving those who live in remote or rural areas without access. The Pop-Up Bike Hub solves that problem, bringing services directly to those who need them the most. "We always do our best to arrive in a community with the goal of listening first," said Matt Bawtinheimer, the program coordinator. "Community members will tell you what kind of programming they want, as long you don't pretend to know everything."

Bianca (she/her) is a grade 12 student at Dartmouth High School who finds joy in cycling, connecting with nature and writing about collaborative initiatives that inspire environmental awareness and long-lasting change.

I booked a phone interview with Bawtinheimer during his final busy days working in the position, just before transitioning into a new role in another organization. Jovial and animated, he had led his team in working with communities across Nova Scotia/Mi'ma'ki, increasing equitable access to transportation throughout the region. His philosophy (listen first, act next) has blossomed into bike barbeques, rodeos and giveaways: events framed by discussions with local leaders and community needs.

In 2020, the hub was featured by the CBC for its role in breaking gender norms. When I asked how Bawtinheimer supported his predominantly female team, he highlighted the importance of creating a safe space in a field that is traditionally male-dominated.

"The best way to learn is by getting your hands dirty, without being judged for it," he explained. "Anything that breaks is just another chance to figure things out."

The team's diversity has been particularly inspiring for youth, who learn firsthand that anyone can be both a cyclist and mechanic. More than anything, Bawtinheimer hopes the initiative offers knowledge and confidence.

"We want bikers to feel like they can repair and maintain their bikes on their own," he explained. "That keeps bikes out of landfills and communities rolling all year round."

As the trailer rolls onto its next stop, it carries with it a quiet but steady revolution: the rise of a self-sustaining cycling community.