

**PEDALLING TO POSSIBILITY:  
SOCIAL INCLUSION, MARGINALISED  
SOCIAL GROUPS AND THE BRISTOL  
BIKE PROJECT**

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**JANUARY 2012**

Presented as part of, and in accordance with, the requirements for the Final Degree of B.Sc. at the University of Bristol, School of Geographical Sciences, January 2012 (Geography with Study in Continental Europe)

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## **Abstract**

The Bristol Bike Project (BBP) is a co-operatively-run community project established in 2008 with the intention of providing bicycles to marginalised social groups in the city. This is a study of the transformative effect of the work of BBP on its users. More precisely, this study evaluates how the bicycle and the process by which it is acquired impact upon the social inclusion and wellbeing of service users. Literature on mobility's role in social exclusion is evaluated, as is pertinent work on community action and the bicycle. Analysis of interviews, participant observation and sketch mapping illustrate how service users experience greater autonomy of movement, can access a greater range of services and activities and can more easily maintain social networks. Both their psychological and physiological health improve as a result of using the bicycle. In addition, the workshop acts as an important space of empowerment and social interaction.

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# 1. Introduction

“We aim to help people from all walks of life get out on two wheels and for it to be an inclusive and empowering experience in the process”

([www.thebristolbikeproject.org](http://www.thebristolbikeproject.org))

The Bristol Bike Project (BBP<sup>1</sup>) is a co-operatively-run community project located in the Stokes Croft area of Bristol, UK. It was founded in December 2008 with the intention to provide bicycles for marginalised social groups. It combines donations of unwanted and unused bikes, volunteers from all backgrounds and underprivileged members of the local community in need of affordable and sustainable transport (sustainable in this context refers to both environmental and mechanical; BBP run weekly Wednesday repair sessions for users to fix problems for free). Recipients include asylum seekers or refugees, some are recovering drug addicts, or people with mental handicaps – the Project sets out to help anyone who would benefit; consequently the demographic of recipients is diverse and heterogeneous.

They started by simply repairing the bikes themselves and bringing them along to a nearby drop-in centre for refugees and asylum seekers. However they quickly realised that to make the Project’s work more effective and empowering, they needed to involve recipients of the bikes in the process of repairing the bikes. The vocabulary used speaks of this ethos underpinning the Project; recipients are called service users (seen to be more empowering than ‘recipient’) and the weekly sessions where service users initially get their bikes are called ‘Earn-a-Bike’. This approach means that BBP is about more than just distributing bikes; the bike can transcend its materiality in how it alters a service user’s life. The Project has grown rapidly (they now have around 40 organisations who have referred a service user, with approximately 400 bikes ‘earned’) and their operations are constantly evolving. They now have a core team of paid staff and offer services to the general public – e.g. selling and repairing bikes, maintenance courses – to fund the benevolent work of the Project<sup>2</sup>.

Globally, BBP is situated within a context of vast global movements of displaced people (see Khosravi (2007, 2010) for an insight into the experience of being an ‘illegal

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforth abbreviated to BBP or the Project.

<sup>2</sup> To keep up with the Project’s future evolutions see their website: <http://www.thebristolbikeproject.org/>

traveller') and of global environmental climate change with an attendant need to transition to a more sustainable mode of living. At the national scale BBP is framed by an erosion of welfare provision for socially marginalised groups (Smith, 2000) and an economic recession and consequent austerity measures. Both these political economic developments have put more members of society in a vulnerable position. In its local context, BBP inhabits a landscape with many community projects already mobilised to help disadvantaged groups. Regarding asylum seekers (who constitute a significant proportion of BBP's service users), the city recently became a 'City of Sanctuary', which represents a pledge to provide a certain array of services, and to be welcoming to refugees and asylum seekers – it is a deliberately open slate pledge not to limit its applicability. BBP exemplifies such a service in its work with asylum seekers and refugees.

This is a study into the potential transformative effect of not only the bicycle, but also the process by which that bike is acquired, on services users' lives. I am not seeking to assess the entire range of service users' experiences through an extensive sample; I will instead provide a detailed illustration of the extent to which a community project of this nature can alter and change the lives of some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in our society, if working successfully, with a view to the potential for transferability or lessons to be learnt in other contexts. As such, the research question at the heart of this dissertation is:

How does the work of the Bristol Bike Project foster social inclusion and wellbeing for its service users?

Social inclusion is understood as being able to participate in society (see section 3.1 for elaboration of social exclusion), and wellbeing as one's quality of life or happiness.

This study is human geographical in its concern with personal mobility, notably how people's spatial and temporal regimes can be altered. There is also a focus on how we function together as a society and how people are included in or excluded from it. I will initially illustrate the principal problems faced by service users. Subsequently I will assess to what extent, firstly, the bicycle and, secondly, the work of the Project enables them to overcome these challenges. Finally, I will evaluate frequently arising difficulties faced by BBP. Before doing this, I will introduce the methods employed and review relevant literature on mobility, social exclusion, community action and the bicycle.



## **2. Methodology**

As outlined previously, the goal of this research project is to assess the potential transformative effect of a bike on the life of a service user rather than seeking to provide a representative sample of the experiences of all those who have received bikes from BBP. As such, I thought qualitative methods were most appropriate as they don't seek a representative sample, rather an illustrative one (Valentine, 1997). The methods employed were interviews, participant observation and sketch mapping.

### **2.1- Interviews**

I conducted nine semi-structured interviews in total (see appendix B). Eight were carried out with service users who had received bikes from BBP. The ninth was with James Lucas – one of the co-founders and principal co-ordinator of BBP. Seven out of the eight were with asylum seekers, whilst the eighth was with a recovering drug addict. The eight lasted between 10-20 minutes whilst James Lucas' was longer at around 40 minutes. My interviewees were self-selecting to a certain extent because they were those who were keen to recount their experiences with BBP. However, this is not problematic for my research project since I am looking to assess the Project's impact when working successfully. Valentine (ibid) notes that an interview is a dialogue rather than an interrogation. As such, in each case I had a set of questions and topics I wanted to cover and introduced these in a flexible manner depending on the flow of conversation. For the eight, I used the same set of questions each time, yet in some cases all questions were not broached, were approached in a different order, or from a different tack.

The majority of my interviewees were in a vulnerable position; accordingly I have anonymised the service users who I interviewed. In most cases I refrained from broaching subjects of money, previous histories or current situations because they were not directly relevant to my research and could have put the interviewee in an uncomfortable position.

I experienced various practical difficulties with my interviews. The principal difficulty was the interviewee's grasp of the English language, in the case of those with asylum seekers. This limited the scope to which interviewees would develop answers, but it rarely impeded understanding, even if answers often remained simplistic.

Accessing interviewees was also difficult. After having solicited only one interview at BBP's workshop, I went to a refugee drop-in centre which refers service users. Here I found that many people were happy to talk, yet I missed accessing other voices due to my obtaining interviews principally through the refugee centre. In fact I wanted to interview one of the few women who had received a bike, after a conversation about her with a project co-ordinator, but she no longer came to the drop-in centre and didn't have a mobile phone. This influences my findings because BBP does not *only* give bikes to refugees and asylum seekers from this centre (although that is how it started and still represents the majority).

Finally, all my interviewees were male. This was not because of a selective imbalance on my part but a reflection of the overwhelming predominance of male service users at BBP. I will consider possible reasons for this later in my analysis (section 4.4.iv).

## **2.2- Participant Observation**

I spent many days at BBP's workshop over the course of September and October 2011. During this time I immersed myself in the life of the Project in order to "understand how they work 'from the inside'" (Cook, 1997, p.167). This involved conversing with fellow volunteers, service users, co-ordinators and making notes of our conversations. I also attended co-ordinator meetings to understand how the Project functions as a social enterprise. For the most part, however, I was simply doing the work of a volunteer, which included mechanical work on bikes, greeting and problem solving with service users and the general maintenance of the workshop. This enabled me to better understand the limitations and constraints which weigh upon BBP.

## **2.3- Visual Methods**

In addition to the interviews conducted I asked the eight service users to draw a sketch map of the city as it is to them (see appendix C). After the interview I gave them a blank sheet of A4 paper and asked them to draw the city before and after receiving their bike. I tried to offer as little guidance as possible, whilst still making the activity clear to them. The emphasis with these maps was to see if there has been a tangible difference in their movements and activities as a result of the bike. The value of this method was to allow the service users to 'tell a story' (Lashua, 2011) in an alternative medium to language. I was unsure how effective this would be but considered that the use of a visual medium of communication could be, in some cases, more powerful than the verbal in conveying the

empowering effect of the Project's work. Each map has quite a different style, thereby allowing contrasting perspectives of the city to be conveyed (Lynch, 1960).

In addition to the interviews I found that a few short documentary videos had already been made on BBP and its service users. I chose to use two of these documentaries because they feature very similar information from that garnered in my interviews. One features an interview with a recovering addict, whilst another includes two asylum seekers talking about their experiences.

#### **2.4- Textual Analysis**

To provide the framework for the empirical data acquired I read academic journals and books relating to the domain. I used BBP's own material as a starting point to better understand their perception and intentions with the Project; subsequently I read newspaper articles and online blog posts about BBP. I also used other NGOs' and the Home Office's websites to inform myself about refugee support.

#### **2.5- Positionality**

Here I must place a caveat about my positionality. I had already volunteered at BBP, and knew several of the co-ordinators and volunteers. I am also a keen cyclist and I cycle daily around the city. Consequently I've been conscious throughout of my potential bias as 'pro-bike', especially given my research bent which looks to focus upon positive experiences rather than negative. Nonetheless, I feel that this study allows service users' voices to shine through without my bias.

### 3. Literature Review

#### 3.1- Social Exclusion

Social exclusion refers to more than economic poverty. Whereas poverty refers to the unequal access to material resources, social exclusion refers to “processes of unequal access to *participation in society*” (Kenyon et al, 2002, p.208, emphasis in original) – accordingly I take social inclusion to mean a greater level of social participation. The value of this concept is that it refocuses attention on non-material types of deprivation, which can be, but are not necessarily related to a lack of income (ibid). Social exclusion is defined thus:

“the denial of access, to an individual or group, to the opportunity to participate in the social and political life of the community, resulting not only in diminished material and non-material quality of life, but also in tempered life chances, choices and reduced citizenship.”

ibid, p.209

At the heart of this definition is the idea that social inclusion is about overcoming the constraints of space (‘denial of access’) in order to participate in society (Cass et al., 2005). We can see that wellbeing (‘quality of life’) suffers as a result of social exclusion, conversely it improves as a function of social inclusion. Finally, social inclusion/exclusion refers to a range of conditions and processes, rather than a dichotomous notion of polar opposites; Cass et al (2003) also note that social participation is a relative notion and varies from community to community.

#### 3.2- Transport

“Smooth displacements require the machinery of placements.”

Amin and Thrift, 2002, p.82

Human geography is concerned with the spatial dimension of social life; therefore the way individuals move is of central interest to the discipline. Almost all movement is

technologically mediated – even walking usually involves the wearing of boots or clothes – therefore attention should be paid to the technological possibilities and barriers posed by our bus and train networks, our motorways, walkways and cycleways. The study of transport geography was an important subdiscipline in the 1960s and ‘70s during the positivist heyday with its drive to quantify and produce laws. This phase of study saw gravity models, push/pull factors and a rational-mobile-individual making his decisions at the centre of it all (Cresswell & Merriman, 2011).

However, geography’s progression beyond positivism to a more humanist approach (e.g. Harvey, 1973, Smith, 1977) brought with it a consideration of the inequality that can be bred within transport systems. Hodge (1990) writes that “urban transportation is important in defining which social groups ... are to gain and which are to lose” (p.97). Equally, Star (1999) (writing in relation to wheelchair access) notes that “one person’s infrastructure is another’s difficulty” (p.380)<sup>1</sup>. Graham and Marvin (2001) talk about the ‘tunnelling effect’ of urban transport whereby mobility is channelled into conduits or grooves which warps the time-space and accessibility of the city; this effect creates ‘hot’ or ‘cold’ zones of (non-) connectivity. A tangible example of this comes from the urban planning of Robert Moses in New York City in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Star (1999) cites the construction of the Grand Central Parkway with bridges that were too low to permit buses to pass, effectively denying poor people access to the Long Island suburb<sup>2</sup>. This example is indicative of how “values are inscribed in technical systems” (ibid, p.388); our transport systems are not merely benign technological frameworks, they are produced by political decisions and social relations.

### **3.3- Theorising Mobility**

“Travel has been for the social sciences seen as a black box, a neutral set of technologies and processes ... that are explicable in terms of other more causally powerful processes.”

Sheller & Urry, 2006, p.208

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<sup>1</sup> An instructive example of this is the map of the London Underground network as it is available to wheelchairs users. The network effectively shrinks drastically for a disabled passenger.

<http://www.tfl.gov.uk/assets/downloads/step-free-tube-guide-map.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the Grand Central Parkway: <http://www.nycroads.com/roads/grand-central/>

### 3.3.i- The ‘New Mobilities Paradigm’

Within the social sciences there has recently emerged a body of thought around mobility dubbed the ‘New Mobilities Paradigm’ (Sheller & Urry, 2006, Hannam et al, 2006). This stems from John Urry’s (2000) book ‘Sociology Beyond Societies’, which sees mobility, rather than society, as the central building block of sociology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the context of globalisation, Urry sees the study of society as outmoded in “an increasingly borderless world” (ibid, p.i). However, his focus on the global scale of mobilities overlooks what can be revealed by analysing the micro scale of everyday mobilities. In addition, some still criticise the mobilities paradigm for idealising a mobile subjectivity which fetishises movement to the “exclusion of others who are already positioned as *not free in the same way*” (Ahmed, 2004, p.152, emphasis in original). Skeggs (2004) reiterates this point by arguing that the mobility paradigm privileges a “cosmopolitan, bourgeois masculine subjectivity” (p.48) – essentially a focus on a privileged subject for whom mobility is a given, for whom space doesn’t matter because it can be overcome with fibreoptics, with automobiles and with aeroplanes (Mitchell, 1997).

Equally, Urry’s work (Buescher & Urry, 2009) is dismissive of the paramount importance of face-to-face propinquity for constructing the social self. He argues that there are many connections which are not based upon propinquity, such as imagined or telecommunicative presence (ibid), yet, as Boden & Molotch (1994) outline, co-present interaction remains the principal building block of social life. Urry’s words are those of someone who takes propinquity for granted, overlooking those without the means to bring it about. To use Urry’s own lexicon, I will use his work itself as a ‘mooring’ (Adey & Bisell, 2010) from which to depart and examine other theorisations of mobility.

### 3.3.ii- Everyday Mobility

Tim Cresswell’s work also falls under the umbrella of the ‘New Mobilities Paradigm’. He asserts that mobility is more than movement; movement is merely abstracted mobility, i.e. abstracted from the contexts of power (Cresswell, 2006). Mobility in its fuller sense is i) pure motion (abstract movement), ii) representational (discursive constructions of what mobility means, e.g. freedom, transgression, creativity), iii) practiced and embodied (it is part of our being in the world, it varies according to our mood) (ibid). In a later piece, Cresswell (2010) calls for a politics of mobility whereby we are conscious of the ways mobilities are produced by and productive of social relations.

Mobility, in its discursively constructed sense, can be fundamental to identity formation; take, for example, the conflation of modernity and mobility – “the modern individual is, above all else, a mobile human being” (Sennett, 1994, p.255). Here we see mobility as constituent of ‘being modern’. Indeed, modern citizenship can be defined as much by the ‘right to move’ as by any territorial belonging (Cresswell, 2009). Ascher (2008) notes how our daily mobility practices are integral to our daily identity construction, for example, a bus rider as poor, or a cyclist as environmentalist. Another example of mobility practices constructing identity is ‘impression management’ performed by illegal travellers at immigration controls (Khosravi, 2007), or by homeless people in gaining trust and favours from others (Cloke et al, 2008). Here we see how social relations dictate the mobility practices of individuals.

### 3.3.iii- ‘Motility’

“The speed potential permitted by the technology of transport is often seen as an instrument for offering people mobility ... only by integrating the intentions of people and the reasons which make them mobile or leave them immobile will a fuller understanding of mobility be achieved.”

(Kaufmann, 2002, p.37)

‘Time-space compression’ (Harvey, 1990) and ‘social fluidification’ (Bauman, 2000) have come to be seen as markers of the contemporary age of high mobility. However these conceptions remain underexamined in terms of their social distribution (Uteng, 2006). Vincent Kaufmann’s theorisation of mobility goes some way towards alleviating this silence.

Kaufmann focuses on the notion of an individual’s *potential* for mobility. He elaborates the novel concept of ‘motility’<sup>3</sup> to refer to this propensity to be mobile (Kaufmann, 2002). An actor’s capacity to be mobile is constituted by three aspects. Firstly there is access, which refers to the range of possible mobilities, according to constraints of place, time, and the actor’s socio-economic position. Secondly, competence refers to the set of skills and abilities available to the actor. Finally, appropriation refers to the action of the actor, if they take up the possibilities available to them (Kaufmann et al., 2004). Mobility refers to the resultant observable travel of the actor. Kaufmann argues that ‘motility’ is a form of capital – in which one can be rich or poor – which is delimited by the financial,

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<sup>3</sup> Motility refers, in biology, to the capacity of an animal, a cell or an organ to move.

cultural and social capital at the disposal of the actor (Kaufmann, 2002). In this way, an individual's 'motility' can be seen as "a vector for quality of life" (ibid, p.103) as it is vital resource to break the spatial constraints that can bind people.

In my eyes, the term access is the most important facet of the concept of 'motility' because it sets the frame of possible mobility. Sen's theory of entitlement (1981) is mobilised elsewhere to illustrate the importance of access (Preston and Rajé, 2007). During the Bengal famine of 1943, Sen argues that the problem was not the absolute quantity of food available, but a lack of access to that food. Extending this analogy to mobility we can see echoes of Kaufmann's (2002) work – just because society has a greater technological potential of mobility, it does not mean that every actor has ready access to that potential.

### 3.3.iv- Access and Mobility-related Exclusion

Having previously defined social exclusion, I wish here to weave in mobility's role to our understanding of social exclusion. Kenyon et al (2002) define 'mobility-related exclusion' as "reduced accessibility to opportunities, services and social networks, due in whole or in part to insufficient mobility in a society and environment built around the assumption of *high mobility*" (p.211, emphasis added).

In this definition we can see the term access arising once again as a crux in our understanding of mobility. Within the contemporary transport geography literature, the term accessibility refers to the possibilities for reaching necessary services or activities; often implied in this is proximity yet this isn't strictly true with the possibilities afforded by virtual mobility (ibid). Accordingly, mobility is clarified as not *necessarily* a component of accessibility, and a system to combat 'poverty of access' needs to provide more than just transport (Farrington & Farrington, 2005). Moreover, the temporal dimension is equally important as the spatial in terms of accessibility (Dijst and Kwan, 2005), for example, a person may technically be able to walk to access a service but the time taken precludes their partaking in certain other activities that day. Indeed distance is no longer the relevant spatial variable in assessing accessibility, it is about connectivity (Cresswell, 2010); "valued areas are connected, whilst others are disconnected" (Graham and Marvin, 2001, p.201). Tolley (2008) notes that in Germany, within one generation the same time is spent travelling to access equivalent services, yet the distance has grown. In such a society, the penalty of not owning the necessary tools of mobility, i.e. a car, is severe.



### 3.3.v- Immobilities

So how do immobilities manifest themselves, and what is the experience of being immobile in a highly mobile society? Much discussion relating to immobilities revolve around breaking the assumption that all citizens have free and equal access to mobility (Cresswell, 1997, Rajé, 2004). Indeed the ‘smooth’ mobility of some is only possible through the organised exclusion of others (Cresswell, 2006, Mitchell, 1997); a kind of ‘inclusive exclusion’ (Agamben, 1998) operates whereby ‘undesirables’ are ostensibly included in society whilst simultaneously kept on the threshold of in and out (for example, the building of elevated highways over low-income housing (Mohl, 1993) or the prerequisite of a bankcard to use London’s ‘Boris Bikes’<sup>4</sup>).

Immobility implies control by authority (Cresswell, 1993) correspondingly placing the immobile subject in a subordinate position (Hanson, 2010). Space for the well-off doesn’t matter, whereas the city, as experienced by those who are immobile, is a space of confinement rather than liberation and possibility (Mitchell, 1997). The message of subordination is communicated in the built environment of infrastructure and practices (Langan, 2001), for example, waiting for a smelly, crowded bus at a decrepit, graffiti-covered bus shelter sends a message to those waiting about their societal position (Hodgson & Turner, 2003).

Indeed the act of waiting itself is central to the subaltern experience (Jeffrey, 2008). Immobile individuals often have to face up to a surplus of time – as a result of being ‘locked out’ of various activities (Lucas, 2004). In Bourdieu’s terms (2000) there is a difference between the abstract future and the forthcoming; the latter refers to the mundane consequences of immediate, routine action. He argues that work and everyday activity provide a reassuring sense of *being oriented* towards a set of forthcomings. The breakdown (or non-existence) of this can be a burden, a worry; it can provoke *horror vacui* (fear of empty time and space).

### 3.3.vi- Inclusionary Capacity of Mobility

How can enhancing mobility contribute to social participation? Principally, it seems that mobility *permits* access to other rights and activities (Blomley, 1994, Lucas et al, 2001). Binavince (1982) notes that “mobility rights cut across the grain of other rights and

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/roadusers/cycling/14811.aspx>

freedoms” (p.341). Mobility opens up a virtuous cycle of social participation – one can get to hospitals, social centres, jobs or schools – which boosts quality of life.

Secondly, if an individual has genuine mobility (for example, they’re not restricted to one return journey per day on an excessively expensive bus) they gain a ‘time sovereignty’ (Breedveld, 1998). This refers to an individual’s flexibility and control over their temporal regimes and trajectories. Psychologically, this autonomy can restore the ‘locus of control’ to an individual (Bohon et al, 2008). ‘Locus of control’ refers to an individual’s perception that events are determined internally or by their own behaviour rather than by external forces or authorities (Rotter, 1966).

Thirdly, we are inherently social beings and, despite technological advances in social interaction at a distance, we still have a ‘compulsion of proximity’ (Boden & Molotch, 1994). Face-to-face (or co-present) interaction remains of paramount importance in the constitution of our social selves (ibid). Axhausen (2008) refers to social capital as the “joint skilled ability of members of a network to perform, act and enjoy each other’s company” (p.981); this capital is built up through joint activity, i.e. co-presence brought about by mobility. Putnam (2000) also highlights the link between mobility and social capital. In his study of American community life, he emphasises that greater mobility permits the establishment and maintenance of dense social networks. Finally, as an extension to the discussion of social capital, attention is drawn to the importance of leisure travel for wellbeing. Hodgson & Turner (2003) cite the developmental benefits of leisure trips for children, whilst Axhausen (2008) reiterates the role leisure travel plays in bolstering social capital.

### **3.4- Community Action**

#### **3.4.i- Social Enterprise**

As a co-operatively run social enterprise, the Bristol Bike Project exemplifies emergent community action to tackle undermet social needs and build social capacity (Amin et al, 2002). Gibson-Graham (2006) refer to a shared ethic of care for the local community and the local (and global) environment which underpins such enterprises. It represents a “new possibility of community” (Gibson-Graham, 2003, p.49) which has emerged in relation to processes of globalisation. For socially excluded members of society, the community

represents the point of re-entry; Byrne (2005) notes that “community development has been just about the only strategy of empowerment attempted ... in anti-exclusion policy” (p.117).

In their theorisation of the ‘community economy’, Gibson-Graham (2006) are cautious of conflating community economies with an idealistic, pure view of community. They warn that social difference can be suppressed within value systems which prize localism, self-sufficiency or sustainability. They introduce the term ‘solidarity economies’ which refers to a kind of ‘being-in-common’ which accommodates difference and marginality (ibid).

‘Being-in-common’ encourages multiple, disparate encounters whereby “subjects are made anew through engaging with others” (Gibson-Graham, 2003, p.67). Integral to this social mixing is the reinsertion of ‘hot’ sociality of social interaction (Barry, 2002), which is obscured by the ‘cold’ negotiations of the market (Callon, 1998). Returning to the previous discussion of social capital, social enterprises, as sites of social reintegration, are sites of social capital in that they extend economic and political engagement through networks of inter-personal and collective engagement (Putnam, 1993).

#### 3.4.ii- Welfare Erosion

Social enterprises and community action have arisen within a context of a wider erosion of universal, egalitarian welfare regimes (Smith, 2000). Their work seeks to fill an ‘institutional vacuum’ (Rifkin, 2000) resulting from a steady disengagement of government from communities. This could possibly be construed positively, for example, it could be said that community projects are more sensitive to the distinctiveness of the local economy instead of a generic model of development being imposed from on high (Gibson-Graham, 2003), however, much of the literature views this negatively. Rose (1998) sees a society increasingly polarised as welfare recipients are increasingly viewed as ‘non-citizens’ who are pathologically different from mainstream society. Whilst politicians themselves seek to articulate this trend as a move towards “the state as an *enabling* force” for communities (Blair, 1997, p.4, emphasis added), critics brand the deployment of the word community as nothing more than camouflage for a massive government withdrawal from society (Morton, 2000); David Cameron’s ‘Big Society’ merely represents the most recent articulation of this trend (Kisby, 2010).

### **3.5- Why the Bicycle?**

#### **3.5.i- Health Benefits**

The medical consensus is that regular physical exercise is a vital part of being healthy and fostering wellbeing (Carnall, 2000). Health benefits resulting from exercise include lower blood pressure and reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, cancer and diabetes (ibid, Scully et al, 1998). Carnall asserts that building walking or cycling into daily life is easier and more sustainable than sport or gym-based exercise; it also accords a double benefit in the sense that travel and exercise are combined. In addition to physiological benefits, regular exercise offers psychological health benefits, such as increased self-esteem, relaxation and reduced level of stress, depression and anxiety (Scully et al, 1998). Hassmén et al's (2000) empirical study in Finland reinforces this point. They found that those who exercised two or three times per week experienced significantly less depression, anger or stress than those who exercised less frequently. Moreover, the former group reported a greater sense of coherence and higher levels of social integration (ibid). From a less scientific source, Hanson (2010) cites a suffragist called Frances Willard's 1895 account of learning to ride a bike at the age of 53. The freedom of mobility, for her, was bound up with confidence and accomplishment, as well as a sense of expanded possibilities, aspirations and personal growth.

#### **3.5.ii- Sustainable Transport Mode**

As a mechanical transport mode which doesn't require any non-renewable fuel, bicycles are viewed as ideal for medium distance journeys – particularly intraurban journeys (Black, 2010). Hudson (1982, in Tolley, 2008) provides a succinct summary of the benefits of bicycle use. Firstly, it is cheap to buy and maintain a bike (therefore equitable); the infrastructure is also cheap to install and maintain. Secondly, ten times the number of bikes can use the same road as one car, as well as bikes being quicker (than cars or buses) for journeys of less than 10km. Thirdly, a cyclist can travel 2,500km on the calorific equivalent of 5 litres of petrol. Finally, it is benign, i.e. it is quiet and clean. Thus we can see that not only do bicycles provide individuals with a cheap, flexible form of mobility but it accords a benefit to society in a more holistic sense of environmental sustainability and a safer, more pleasant urban environment.

### **3.6- Pertinent Previous Research**

Smart (2010) and Bohon et al (2008) both carried out studies into the use of bicycles by immigrant groups in the US. Smart notes that immigrants are twice as likely to cycle as native-born Americans. Both articles make the point that cycling is not a preferential choice but is a result of constraints – financial, legal, administrative, discriminatory, for example, illegal immigrants may avoid travelling by car because it increases their chances of being stopped and asked for documentation (Smart, 2010). This lack of access to a car (in a society built around automobility) creates a ‘bottleneck’ of adjustment for immigrants (Bohon et al, 2008). The bicycle is chosen from the non-car options – bus, car pooling – because it affords the greatest independence and flexibility (ibid). Cervero et al’s (2002) reiterate the importance of private mobility over public mobility in providing better access to employment.

Rajé (2004) studied the role of ethnicity in transport in a British context. She found that understanding cultural legacies and attitudes remaining from countries of origin were important to understanding mobility patterns. For example, Jamaican men’s desire for automobility and corresponding distrust of public transport stemmed from the restrictive import policy on cars in 1970s Jamaica. Alternatively, she found that cultural attitudes amongst the Asian community in Leicester resulted in women being strongly discouraged from cycling. Rajé’s study also draws attention to how the language barrier exacerbates immobility. She quotes an African resident of Easton, Bristol: “there’s no transport information for new arrivals, refugees ... it’s all in English ... They end up feeling isolated and they are forced to walk and they can’t get to work” (p.52).

Lucas (2004) discusses community transport projects, which provide not only transport to work or healthcare, but also for leisure and cultural purposes. She notes that such projects respond to social needs in a more ‘tailored’ way than state provision; they are more sensitive to the varied needs of different individuals. They can provide more independent, sustainable transport and act to “keep people mobile rather than just providing the means in the first place” (p.128). Lucas observes, however, that many of these projects are on the margins of financial sustainability, meaning day-to-day existence can be a struggle.

Pesses (2010), in an article on long-distance cycle tourers in the US, calls for research to focus its “critical gaze on the cyclist who rides on the sidewalk, without lycra-spandex, a helmet, or the benefit of the latest technologies ... who rides for economic benefit without

much resulting economic benefit at the end of the day.” (p.21). He cites Koeppel’s (2005) article on Los Angeles casual workers; the “bicycle is the blood of this invisible body of labour” (p.1). They view their bikes as workhorses rather than as recreational machines. For these cyclists, the bike is essential to get to their work because the bus would be too expensive. The bike is a stepping stone for them to participate in the prosperity of the USA.

Finally, Uteng (2006) conducted a study of non-Western migrants’ discourses on mobility in Norway. She found that access to mobility is highly stratified along lines of structural difference in society, e.g. class, gender, race. Norwegian society, as in most of the Western world, is automobile dependent – it is synonymous with freedom and mobility. Those who do not possess a car feel excluded, whilst feeling that owning a car would improve their social status. She cites an example of an immigrant who had bought a BMW, only to be accosted by Norwegian youths accusing him of theft. For those who don’t own a car, public transport is the main means of mobility, with ticket prices weighing heavily on spending – between 6-15% of monthly budgets. In her analysis, she mobilises Sen’s (1999) capability approach, which proposes that agents should be given the power necessary to take their lives in their own hands rather than being in receipt of handouts. As such, being dependent on public transport in a society structured around automobility is clearly disempowering and injurious to immigrants’ wellbeing.

Despite referring to the importance of empowering individuals to ‘take their lives in their own hands’ Uteng did not refer to the potential offered by bicycles as an empowering form of private mobility. Many empirical studies of mobility’s role in social exclusion similarly overlook the bicycle as a viable form of mobility for marginalised social groups (Church et al., 2000, Hine and Mitchell, 2001, Lucas et al., 2001, Preston and Rajé, 2007). Thus this research project seeks to attend to this silence in the literature, to shed light on the transformative power of the bicycle for socially excluded members of society.

## 4. Analysis

My analysis is structured in four broad sections in order to explore the ways in which the work of BBP fosters social inclusion and wellbeing for its service users. The first section considers the realities of everyday life for, and forms of social exclusion experienced by, service users before they had gone to the Project. The second section deals with the ways in which the bicycle offers new horizons, opportunities and solutions. The third section examines the role of the process employed by BBP and of the workshop as a space. The final section evaluates some of the difficulties and hurdles experienced by service users and the Project.

### 4.1- Everyday Challenges

The Bristol Bike Project was set up to attend to undermet needs of members of the local community. In order to come to an understanding of the ways in which the Project works for them, it is first important to paint a picture of the challenges they face. In this section, therefore, I will outline common experiences which repeatedly arose in my interactions with service users - themes introduced here cut across the different contexts of the various service users, for example, asylum seekers may also face racial prejudice and a linguistic barrier but recovering addicts do not. This section will demonstrate how service users are socially excluded due to a lack of money, mobility and the opportunity to work and socialise which, in turn, fosters a melancholy borne out of isolation and inactivity.

#### 4.1.i- A Lack of Money

Service users experience severe financial constraints. They have very little or no disposable income, and in some cases finding money for basic spending, i.e. food or shelter, is a genuine problem. Interviewees would put it starkly; “they [BBP] just helped me because I didn’t have any means.” (Irvin, appendix B, l.49), “Always I walked because I don’t have money.” (Narain, appendix B, l. 106). In these cases the interviewees seemed to be severely constrained by their lack of money rather than simply having an insufficient amount. A co-ordinator from the refugee drop-in centre explained the different support levels received by

members of the centre. Asylum seekers are entitled to £36<sup>1</sup> cash per week (as of October 2011) as part of the National Asylum Support Service whilst awaiting a Home Office decision (known as Section 95 support). If they are subsequently refused asylum but feel they have grounds to remain (for example, they feel the decision was flawed), they are entitled to the same amount but in the form of supermarket vouchers (Section 4)<sup>2</sup>, although this is notoriously hard to obtain (Fell and Hayes, 2007). Finally, some fall outside of the system of support altogether and are completely destitute. Of c.180 members at the centre, the majority (100) were on Section 95, whilst the next largest group were destitute (30-40).

Derek explained to me that, as part of his recovery programme, he was not allowed to work so had to subsist on his benefits payments alone. Moreover, he told me that his “debts from the past have caught up with me” (Derek, appendix B, l. 74) thereby further constraining his finances. Thus it is clear that money is in severely short supply amongst service users. A kind of ‘inclusive exclusion’ (Agamben, 1998) is at work as service users are technically included within society as they receive money but those funds do not go far enough to permit a full social participation.

#### 4.1.ii- Walking

This lack of financial freedom constrains and dictates the mobility of service users. Their mobility potential, i.e. their ‘motility’ (Kaufmann, 2002), is reduced to walking or taking buses. However, buses are particularly expensive in Bristol<sup>3</sup> as evidenced by Bahir: “I took a bus just one way, it was £3.50 – very expensive, crazy.” (appendix B, l.38). For someone who is destitute or on Section 4, this is simply an impossible expense; indeed for someone on Section 95 or on other benefits it is still stretching their budget thin. As a consequence service users were simply “walking, just everyone, just walking.” (James Lucas, appendix B, l.43). Zewedu said he “used to walk all the days. It takes like 1 hour to go and 1 hour to come.” (appendix B, l.23). Walking as one’s only means of transport is time-consuming, fatiguing and very restrictive; it also has knock-on effects in terms of missing important appointments (Reynolds, 2010). Cresswell (2010) notes that walking becomes ‘a drudge, a travail’ if it is experienced to reach a destination. In a built environment structured around high mobility, service users’ limited motility creates a disability (Langan, 2001).

<sup>1</sup> Current support amounts: [www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/asylum/support/cashsupport/currentsupportamounts](http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/asylum/support/cashsupport/currentsupportamounts)

<sup>2</sup> See ‘Time to Cash in the Azure Card’ on the demeaning and inefficient administration of Section 4. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/nov/06/asylum-seekers-azure-card>

<sup>3</sup> See comments from Bristol residents on the expense of buses: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/bristol/hi/people\\_and\\_places/newsid\\_8495000/8495115.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/bristol/hi/people_and_places/newsid_8495000/8495115.stm)



#### 4.1.iii- Solitude

“Most importantly, as a human, you are a social creature, so you have to have social networks in order to feel human.”

(Representative of a refugee community organisation in Hynes, 2011, p.155)

As a factor of their restricted mobility, service users are at risk of loneliness and isolation. They find themselves spending more time at home than they would want to; “I like to move a lot really. I don’t like to stay in the house.” (Bahir, appendix B, l. 32-3). A lack of frequent face-to-face interaction impacts negatively on their psychological health; Boden and Molotch (1994) note the deleterious effects of solitude – “solitary confinement is a harsh punishment” (p.263). Narain’s comments exemplify this: “I don’t like sitting in my home. When I’m sitting simply in my home the past memories coming and getting stressed.” (appendix B, l.102-3). He is here referring to traumatic experiences in his home country, upon which he dwells when sitting alone in his house.

In addition to lacking social interaction, service users struggle with inactivity. “There’s a real problem with not actually doing anything ... a sort of malaise, a depression” (James Lucas in Oldham, 2010). Service users are often not allowed to work or at least have not found employment and so grapple with a surplus of time with little to occupy it; they suffer from a lack of ‘forthcoming’ which provides a reassuring sense of being oriented towards something (Bourdieu, 2000). This negative reaction to their immobility and inactivity stems from a strong desire for community: “Bristol is something ... the community, the people you socialise with ... I have more opportunity here.” (Bahir, appendix B, l.21-2). There is also a strong will to work, to participate and to be involved (during my time at the workshop I helped run several ‘earn-a-bike’ sessions; the patience, efficiency and speed of service users put my own skills to shame).

#### **4.2- The Bicycle as Mobility**

In the simplest terms, BBP gives people a bicycle. Thus in this section I will examine how the bicycle, as the performative technology of inclusion, allows service users to overcome the problems outlined in the first section. The fundamental principle underpinning this is that “a more socially just community [is one in which] everyone has mobility” (James

Lucas, appendix B, l.90). This section will illustrate how service users gain an independence and a flexibility in their movements, how they can access new places and activities and take less time in getting there, and how the bicycle accords physical and mental health benefits.

#### 4.2.i- Autonomy of Mobility

The bicycle provides a form of movement which gives a greater sense of independence to the user. Derek explains there is a meeting he likes to attend in Bath as part of his recovery program: “There’s a good meeting at Bath, what I want to go to ... I could have got a lift but [pause] I dunno, I like to independent-ish.” (appendix B, l.34-6). This valuing of independence came out in many conversations. I was told by a service user in the workshop how she favoured private mobility to public because she could ‘visualise where she went’ instead of taking buses. She preferred to dictate her path through the city rather than be led by the existent infrastructure (which can have a ‘tunnelling effect’ (Graham and Marvin, 2001)). This independence of movement is important for service users because it restores a sense of agency in their own destiny – it replaces the ‘locus of control’ (Rotter, 1966) in the individual rather than in the Home Office or in an addictive substance. Bahir has “always got to be on time” (appendix B, l.52), rather than be at the mercy of late-running buses. He prizes being in control of his trajectories, his destinations. Mehran similarly likes having control over his own movements: “I can ride my cycle myself. I can stop any place I like” (Mehran, appendix B, l. 112).

In the same way as they feel more independent, service users can be more flexible in their activity planning. “I don’t plan anything, it just happen ... I feel good and more comfortable in the daily of my life” (Yohannes, appendix B, l.136), “I find it very easy to get to places, I can just wake up and grab my bike if I have a plan.” (Irvin, appendix B, l.151-2). They can be more spontaneous and fluid in their planning. Derek says it is the time he saves that is the major difference (rather than gaining access to different places). In a conversation we had in the workshop, he told me that he goes to the same places as before but it takes him a fraction of the time, therefore freeing up his day for other activities. We can see that service users gain a greater ‘time sovereignty’ (Breedveld, 1998) over their movements – more often the preserve of social elites (Shove, 2002) – whereby they have more flexibility and personal control over their temporal regimes; their days effectively grow due to the reduction in time spent travelling.

#### 4.2.ii- Social Participation

“Transport often acts as an enabler of greater social inclusion, in that increased mobility can stimulate a virtuous cycle of enhanced accessibility and social and economic engagement.”

Lucas et al, 2001, p.v

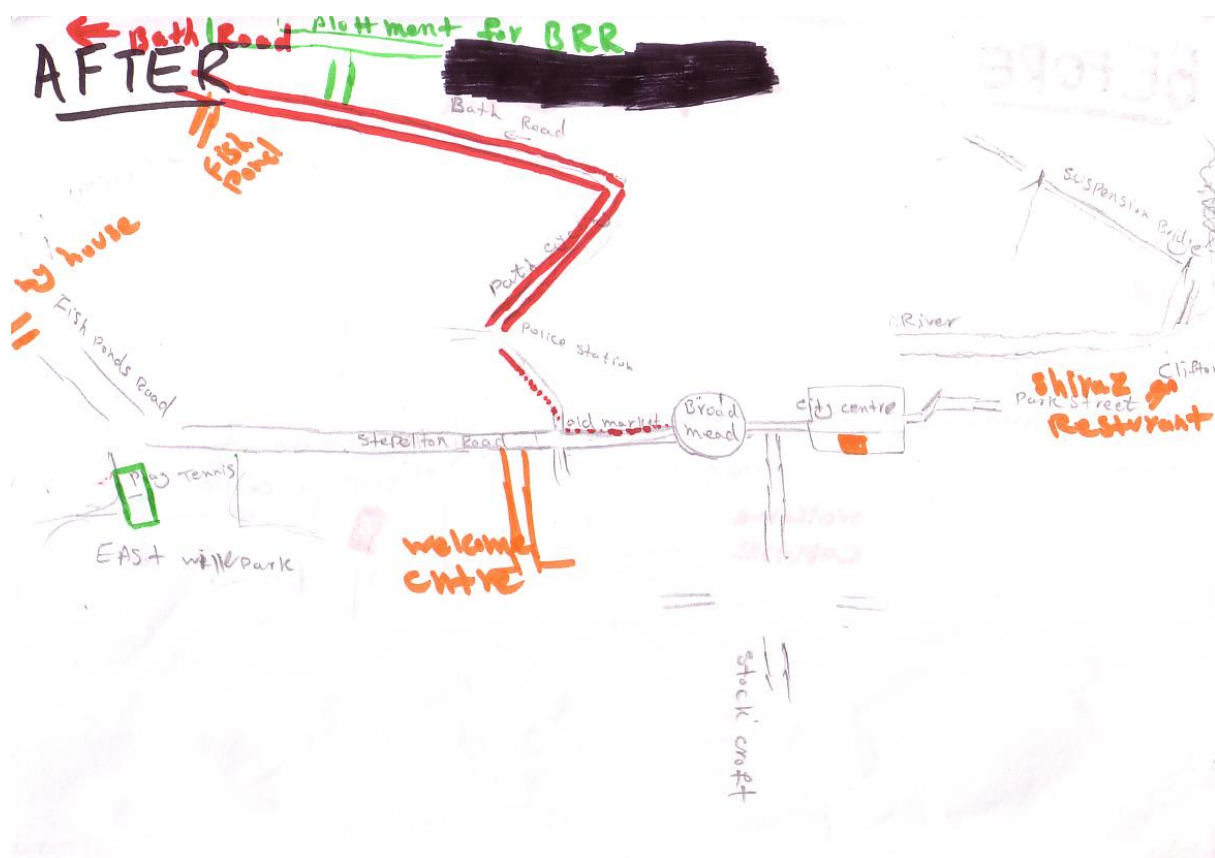
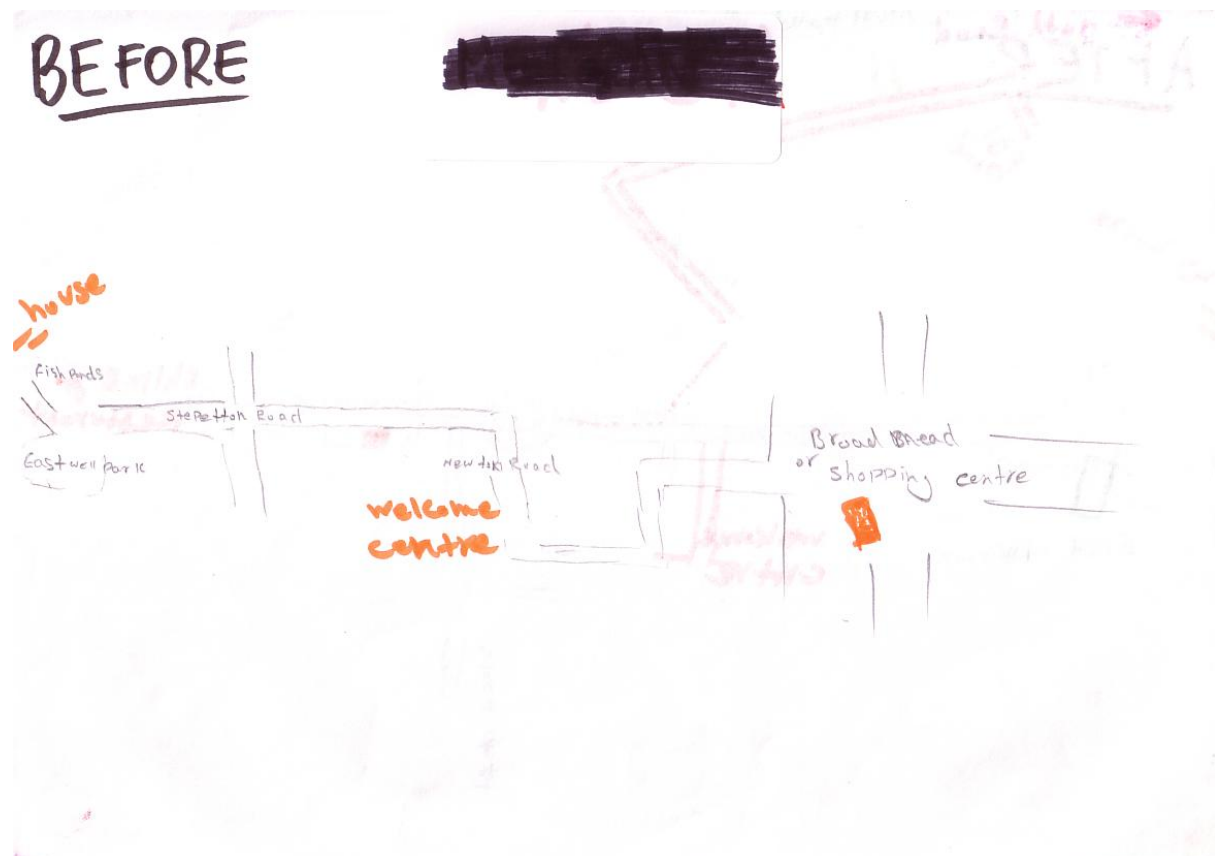
The bicycle permits service users to access other activities which were previously difficult, or indeed impossible, for them to get to. Derek puts it simply but eloquently: “it’s extended my reach” (appendix B, l.31). Within Kaufmann’s (2002) framework of ‘motility’, the bicycle provides greater access because it offers options and conditions previously unavailable.

Owning a bike opens up the city to service users. This is illustrated by the sketch maps drawn by Mehran and Narain (appendix C and overleaf). In Narain’s map his ‘before’ sketch depicts only the refugee centre and his house. After receiving his bike we see that he now volunteers in four different places across the city, as well as attends college. In Mehran’s map, his ‘before’ map is similarly sparse, whilst ‘after’ we see the addition of an allotment where he volunteers, a different district of the city – Clifton – and the Sustrans cycle path to Bath. The bicycle permits a frequency of movement, which allows regular attendance at college, voluntary organisations or recovery meetings. A service user may be able to traverse the city by bus or on foot for an important meeting but it is unfeasible for him or her to do that every day.

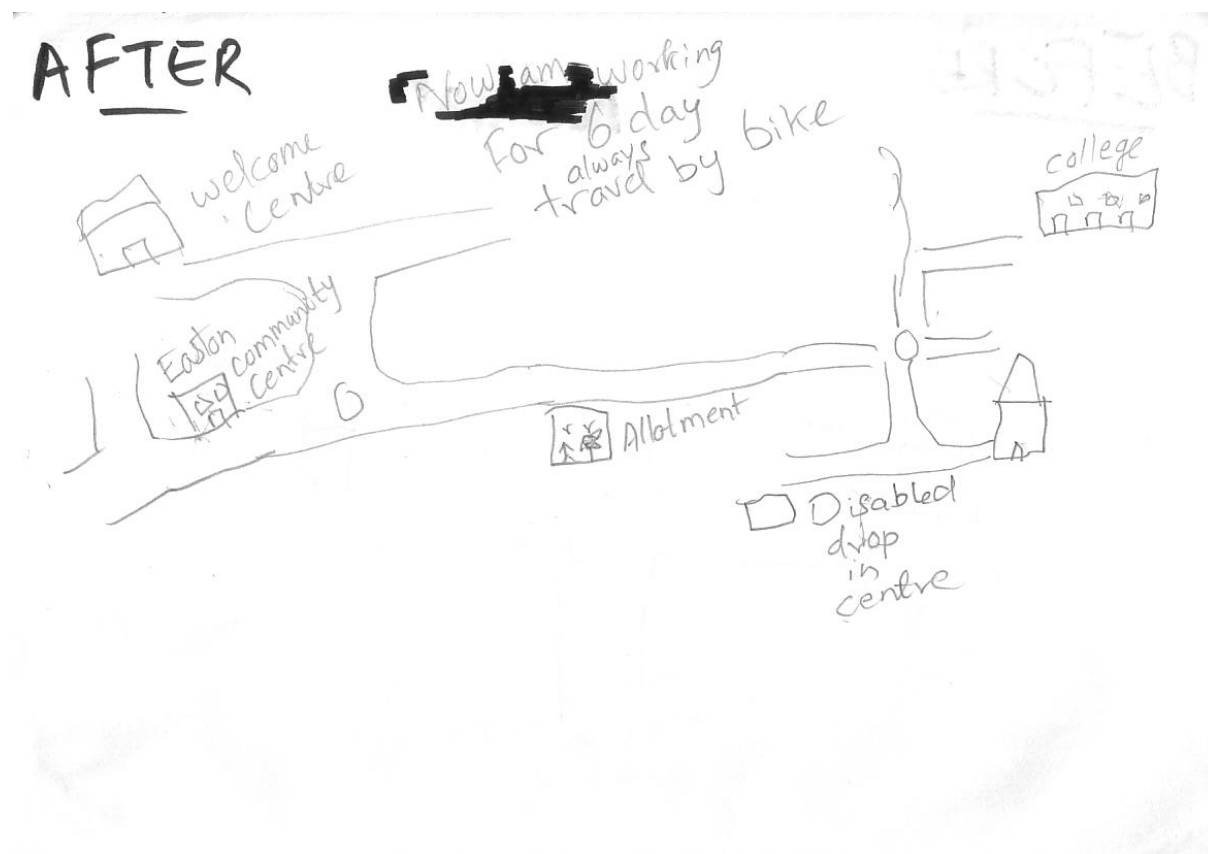
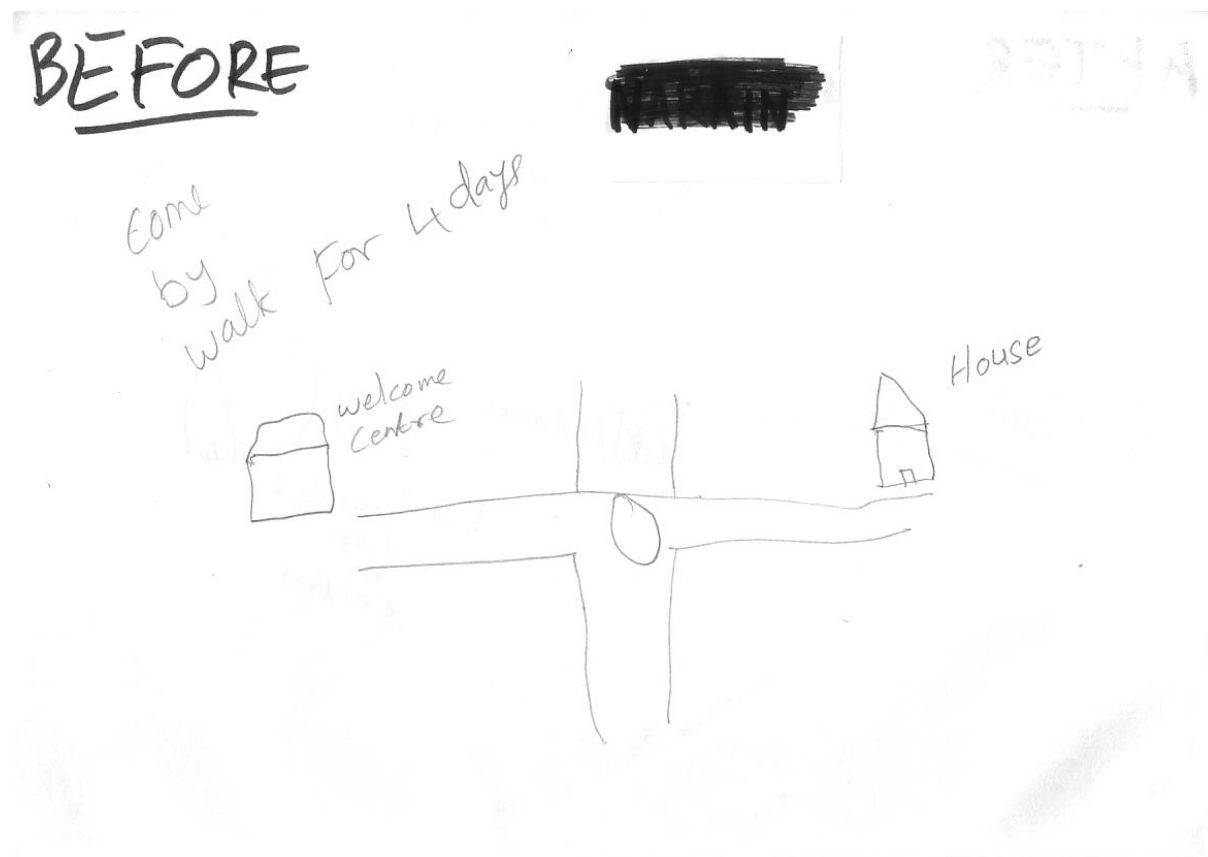
##### 4.2.ii.a- Voluntary Work

The bicycle permits service users to frequently volunteer in different places. It provides an opportunity for them to get involved and so to stave off the malaise of inactivity. “Before I’m not work like this, after I had the bike then only I’m working like this” (Narain, appendix B, l.99-100). It is clear that Narain enjoys being involved and busy so that he doesn’t dwell on past memories and become stressed; the bicycle affords him this opportunity within the context of constraints in which he lives – i.e. not being allowed to work for remuneration as an asylum seeker.

Mehran's sketch maps



Narain's sketch maps



#### 4.2.ii.b- Education

Many of my interviewees learn skills at college as a result of the reliable mobility of the bicycle. These skills could potentially lead to employment when they get refugee status. Irvin studies Maths and English, and has also studied health and social care. His former studies had opened a door for him to volunteer in a hospital. We can see here in the case of education how mobility allows access to other rights; Blomley (1994) argues that whilst mobility is not necessarily a right in and of itself, “it makes other rights possible” (p.414).

#### 4.2.ii.c- Meetings

For Derek and Sean, the bicycle allows them to move towards reintegration into mainstream life. It allows them to regularly attend meetings, which are crucial to their recovery program. In addition to this, Sean (anon, 2010) claims that the bike allows him to cycle past drug dealers, politely say hello, but not have to engage with them. The bicycle as a non-monetarised form of transport is important for Derek. He talks about not “chasing the pound note” (appendix B, 1.80) too soon as an important factor in his reinsertion back into mainstream society.

#### 4.2.ii.d- Social Networks

Being more mobile allows service users to maintain their social networks more easily. Axhausen (2008) argues that social capital is built up through joint activity, which requires travelling to be in each other’s company. The importance of community at the refugee centre and seeing friends elsewhere is brought up by Bahir, Mehran and Marcel. Indeed Marcel (appendix B, 1.95) says that with his bike he can now visit a friend who lives far away from him. Boden and Molotch (1994) note the importance of co-present interaction for an individual’s wellbeing; face-to-face conversations remain the fundamental mode of human intercourse and socialisation.

#### 4.2.ii.e- Leisure and Recreation

In addition to opportunities to socialise, the bicycle offers an avenue of leisure. Derek, Bahir, Mehran and Yohannes all say they use their bike for recreational rides, whilst we can see that on the latter two’s maps (appendix C), the Bristol-Bath cycle path<sup>4</sup> features.

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<sup>4</sup> This is a traffic free 14 mile cycleway, which is very popular with recreational cyclists.  
<http://www.bristolbathrailwaypath.org.uk/home.shtml>

Mehran and Bahir in fact went on a 90 mile two-day group cycle the weekend after I interviewed them, whilst Bahir had previously been to a festival on the other side of the city with his bike. Zewedu comments: “sometimes we go because we no working so we don’t have anything to do. Sometimes we take our bike and have fun.” (appendix B, 1.77-8). Axhausen (2008) argues that leisure travel is anything but unnecessary, in fact it plays a central role to social life and thus wellbeing.

#### 4.2.iii- Health Benefits

##### 4.2.iii.a- Physiological

“The amount of walking wasn’t compensating the amount of eating I was doing ... The cycling like, I’ve lost a bit of weight since I got the bike, got a bit fitter.”

Derek, appendix B, 1.52-4

It is well documented that regular exercise is good for an individual’s health (Carnall, 2000, Scully et al, 1998, Hassmén et al 2000). This was borne out by my interviewees, most of whom claimed to have got fitter since riding their bikes; “really I get quite healthy. My legs, my body are quite fit now.” (Narain, appendix B, 1.109). In addition to getting fitter Mehran actually found that using the bike had effectively healed a chronic knee problem he had: “I couldn’t walk sometimes but when I start to use the bicycle I can do anything I like ... It’s more better than physiotherapy, than hospitals, than doctors.” (appendix B, 1.104-6). Sean had a similar experience whereby he found travelling by bike put less strain through his arthritic knee (anon, 2010).

##### 4.2.iii.b- Psychological

I have already mentioned how service users derive wellbeing from recreational rides and from fostering social networks but bicycling also affords other psychological benefits. The freedom and autonomy of movement afforded by the bicycle can increase self-confidence of the service user. For Sean (anon, 2010) the speed of the bike removes the ‘fear and impediment’ of distance, which gives him a greater freedom of mind and self-confidence; the city becomes *his*. Yohannes draws attention to the importance of finding your own way round the city: “it’s really helpful people to know the whole city, people easy going to every places” (appendix B, 1.52-3). In the same way as with Sean, Yohannes’ comments show how cycling the city can help you to find a sense of place within it.

Several service users illustrate how the experience of riding a bicycle allows them a freedom of mind, a space for reflection. Daahir: “I feel free when I’m riding a bicycle. I’m not preoccupied by anything else. It’s just me and the road.” (Oldham, 2010). Derek: “it’s like freeing isn’t it ... it is good relaxation.” (appendix B, 1.101-2). Abdul: “I feel like an eagle, like a bird.” (Oldham, 2010). All these testimonies illustrate the positive headspace that cycling can bring, as service users can get free of other preoccupations weighing on their mind. The bicycle here moves beyond a mere technology of mobility. However, this space of reflection does not always work positively. Narain describes how his “thinking is going somewhere ... past problems ... because the army they tortured me.” (appendix B, 1.68-73). Equally Zewedu recounts an instance when his mind was so preoccupied with his Home Office case that he cycled through a red light without realising (appendix B, 1.96).

### 4.3- The Work of the Project

The work of BBP consists of more than simply distributing reconditioned bikes. The process by which the bikes are ‘earned’ and the workshop as a space in itself are both important facets in fostering social inclusion and wellbeing of its service users. In this section we will see how the process of ‘earning a bike’ teaches service users skills (which subsequently allow them to volunteer at the workshop) and generates a sense of attachment to their bikes. In addition we will see how the inclusiveness of the space makes people feel more comfortable and confident.

#### 4.3.i- Inclusive Empowerment

“when they give you a bike they don’t just *give* you a bike, but they even show how to work with your bike ... they give you a chance to work on your bike even the first day you go there.”

Irvin, appendix B, 1.68-73

The process by which BBP distributes bikes is of paramount importance. James Lucas stresses the point: “the process is so important. It’s got to be empowering” (appendix B, 1.166). The following proverb adorns the wall of the workshop:



Tell me and I'll forget,

Show me and I may remember,

Involve me and I'll understand.

For James this encapsulates how the Project should (and does) run. Thus the key element of the work of the Project is the fact it involves service users in the process of repairing their bikes, in line with Sen's (1999) articulation of empowerment as giving agents the power necessary to take their lives in their own hands. The 'Earn-a-Bike' sessions are run in a way to make the service user do as much of the work as possible – this was stressed to me before my first session. Similarly when they come in for repairs, volunteers and co-ordinators are there to help diagnose the problem and navigate the workshop but the emphasis remains on the service user to do the work. For James, this empowering experience is as important a part of the work of the Project as the actual distribution of bikes.

As a result of this inclusive process service users learn how to maintain their bikes. Yohannes says he is "now quite confident to do ... punctures ... some gears and stuff, fixing, adjusting" (appendix B, 1.46-7), his confidence a result of the support he was given in the workshop. Equally, Narain says he learnt some skills from there: "always I'm trying myself but so far I don't have much tools." (appendix B, 1.38). Support and skill sharing are prioritised in the workshop, even if it doesn't represent perhaps the quickest or most efficient way to get people on the road. However, it renders the Project and the mobility of service users more sustainable because they are not wholly dependent on the mechanics in the workshop to get their bike running again if it breaks down. This furthers the independence of service users.

The actual mechanical work itself provides an activity to beat the malaise of inactivity, whilst they can subsequently use these skills to help others. In my time at the workshop I noted that the vast majority of service users worked hard when they came in. They were not absent-minded or expecting work to be done for them; they wanted to learn how to do it so they could do it all themselves. The further benefit to the Project of teaching service users skills is that they can return themselves as volunteers. Mehran, Sean and Derek have all returned to the Project to help others work on their bikes, whilst Irvin says he sometimes takes some new members of the refugee centre across to BBP on their first visit. For James, this makes the Project truly successful at fostering an inclusive community: "if the

experience has been good then people just coming back and wanting to be involved and wanting to help people and then it's a really cyclical thing. For me it's really sustainable then." (appendix B, 1.355). He says he was inspired by the notion of 'Sweat Equity' that he'd experienced when volunteering in Colombia, which revolves around a reciprocity of mutual community aid. He contrasted this approach to a large team of "volunteers from overseas coming in and doing something and then leaving again ... it's quite disempowering that way." (appendix B, 1.25).

Besides fostering an inclusive community, including service users in the process of repairing their bikes generates a greater attachment to their machines. I discussed this with James: "It's really important, like a sense of ownership. And the only way to do that is for them ... to be working on it themselves." (appendix B, 1.391). This attachment manifests itself in various ways. Some service users keep their bike clean – "wanna keep it looking good" (ibid, 1.312) – or come to repair sessions to just put some air in their tyres. Another indicator can be if a service user customises their bike. Irvin said he had 'pimped' his bike; "I added some few stuffs, the handles, you know ... you can make it your own make." (appendix B, 1.89-97). By the same token I noticed serial attendees to the Wednesday repair sessions who would come each week to exchange a saddle or put a fluorescent bottle cage on their bike. Finally, several interviewees had named their bikes. Bahir called his 'the Legend bike' (appendix B, 1.87), whilst Marcel's was his 'Little Donkey' (appendix B, 1.55). Whilst these names both reveal an attachment, they indicate quite different relationships – Bahir took more pleasure in riding and showing off his French racing bike, whilst for Marcel his bike was more of a faithful working companion. Mehran showed the most attachment, calling his bike a 'BMW' and treating it "like his son ... I don't like to leave him very far from myself or outside" (appendix B, 1.74). We can see here that certain service users derive a real pleasure from owning their bikes.

#### 4.3.ii- The Space of the Workshop

The workshop serves as an important function as an affective space as well as a site of learning and empowerment. The Code of Conduct which adorns the wall of the workshop emphasises that it is a 'safe space' (appendix A). This quality of the space came out in my research. Bahir comments that "they never say no. Always they are ready to help and are saying nice things." (appendix B, 1.68-9). He feels that the workshop is somewhere he would always feel welcome. James Lucas says they try to create a space where they "give people

the benefit of the doubt” (appendix B, 1.190) instead of rigorously vetting the suitability of potential service users. They set out to create an egalitarian space; “a lot of workshops can breed that sort of “I know more than you” ... and create a hierarchy without knowing it.” (ibid, 1.175). He says it’s a “much nicer way of being” (ibid, 1.191) if they can create a space in which people feel reassured and safe. Sean articulated this abstract quality of the space. “I can’t explain the vibe but for anyone who is an addict will know, I just felt comfortable and at home here the minute I came in” (anon, 2010). He continues in telling us that he was so wrapped up in his work that he had to be sent home at the end of the day – he had even forgotten to eat.

This effort to create an open, inclusive, welcoming space has given the workshop a diverse demographic. Service users are asylum seekers, disadvantaged young people, recovering addicts whilst volunteers range from carpenters, white collar workers, students to unemployed draftsmen. Key members of the volunteer team are ‘supported volunteers’ who may have learning difficulties or mental handicaps. As Derek puts it, “everyone’s different” (appendix B, 1.43), which has been a really valuable experience for him as before he would “only mix the people who were like me” (ibid, 1.38). He told me his social skills and self-esteem have been boosted by this social mixing and it has opened doors for him:

“L: I mean do you wanna work in bikes? ...

D: It’s people really ... since I’ve started doing all this I’ve realised I like working with people, I can work with people”

Derek, appendix B, 1.86-90

Derek’s experience exemplifies Gibson-Graham’s (2003) point that through a practice of diverse social mixing, “subjects are made anew through engaging with others” (p.67).

Thus we can see that the workshop space serves a vital function in fostering social inclusion and wellbeing for service users. I posed the question to James as to whether the Project would exist if adequate state support structures were in place. His response homed in on the notion that the process of earning a bike and the workshop space have a resonance with service users, which would be difficult to achieve through state provision. There is also the possibility that service users would be reluctant to participate in a state-run scheme – with the state having contributed to their exclusion – especially if they are living on the margins of legality.

#### 4.4- Challenges and Discussion

The work of the Project is not without problems. I have previously said that this research paper focuses on the transformative effects a project of this nature can have if working successfully, rather than thoroughly evaluating the positives and negatives of BBP. However, in this section I will briefly focus on difficulties encountered which include safety (of the body and of the bike), the perception of bicycles as inferior to cars, constraints on the scope of the Project and the gender imbalance of service users.

##### 4.4.i- Safety

Safety arose in most of my interviews as a concern for service users. This refers both to their personal safety riding on urban roads, the deterrent of abject British winters and also to the likelihood of their bikes being stolen. Irvin recounted an episode where he was hit by a scooter which injured his coccyx: “I spend almost four month with a lot of pain there” (appendix B, l.134); he had also fallen on icy roads in winter. Equally, Narain showed me semi-healed wounds on his shin from a fall: “Many time I have [an accident] because my vision is not good left side.” (appendix B, l.60). Nevertheless neither Irvin and Narain were deterred from cycling – “still I’m cycling. Yeah no problem. I love the bike ride.” (ibid, l.65) – yet a more timid cyclist may be put off by the risk. Moreover BBP doesn’t give out helmets (it does give a lock and lights) to service users<sup>5</sup>.

Several of my interviewees were on their second or third bike, having had previous ones stolen. However, James Lucas points out that, generally, when bikes are stolen there is a certain culpability on the part of the service user. Irvin admits this has been the case: “the first bike ... I locked it but I didn’t lock it on something ... Another bike they stole it from the gym ... I forgot to lock it, actually, it was my fault.” (appendix B, l.34-7)

##### 4.4.ii- Cars

Many of the benefits of having a bicycle (e.g. autonomy, access to a broad range of activities) are synonymous with the benefits of any type of private mobility. In some cases I thought that service users would have preferred to have a car and that a bicycle was deemed inferior. A critique which was raised in discussion with a fellow student was that the bicycle

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<sup>5</sup> In email communication, James Lucas said that helmets are beyond the budgetary constraints of BBP, whilst few service users request them. Moreover, second hand helmets are not viable because it is not possible to vouch for their safety.

could be perceived as perpetuating an underclass in society – a type of inferior status symbol. James, however, dismissed the notion of a linear progression from bikes to cars: “it has to change, that notion of cars being proper, that’s what adulthood is and that’s freedom.” (appendix B, 1.325). Here we can see the representational element of mobility (Cresswell, 2006) as cars are socially constructed as the ultimate tool of freedom and independence, when in reality, for intraurban journeys they are often slower and more inhibiting (Tolley, 2008).

#### 4.4.iii- Constraints on the Scope of BBP as a Social Enterprise

The functioning of the Project has changed during its growth and evolution. Over the course of 2011, it has undergone a process of formalisation to a certain extent as the administration grows to deal with more and more requests from service users, as well as standardising the process itself (through a checklist). Part of this evolution is trying to find ways to make the Project financially sustainable through selling higher quality bikes, offering maintenance courses, paid repair services and hire bikes. In order to provide better continuity and retention of volunteers, the Project has started to pay wages to its core of co-ordinators. This has led to compromises whereby the actual benevolent work is squeezed, or at the very least remains at 4-6 ‘Earn-a-Bike’ sessions a week; James says that he now spends one day per week doing administrative work and that “it’s hard to have as much time for people as Colin [co-founder] and I used to” (appendix B, 1.139). They now refuse to replace a working bike once it has gone out – “they make it that once you get it they can’t do it again. But a year ago it used to be fine ... It’s changed completely now” (Yohannes, appendix B, 1.33-4) – to the frustration of some service users. Couple this with hectically busy Wednesday repair sessions and the Project could risk losing its supportive, personal touch (see section 4.3.ii).

#### 4.4.iv- Gender

As outlined in my Methodology (section 2.5), the absence of women from this research project is not due to a selective imbalance on my part. It is instead a reflection of the predominance of men participating in the Earn-a-Bike sessions. I do not wish to take up too much space here fully evaluating the reason for this gender imbalance – that could be the subject of a complete dissertation in itself – however, I would like to outline certain factors which could contribute.

The high proportion of asylum seekers who are male is likely to play a role. A proactive response to encourage female asylum seekers to cycle has been the setting up of a separate ‘arm’ of BBP which operates at the refugee drop-in centre to not only provide bikes for women but also to teach them how to ride bikes, or build up their confidence on the bike. In conversation with a co-ordinator of that ‘arm’ we touched on the role of traditional cultural attitudes from source countries – i.e. the idea that riding a bike is not an acceptable feminine activity. Finally, a trend not restricted to asylum seekers: there is a tendency for men to prefer the mechanical and individualistic nature of private transport, i.e. bikes (Pooley et al, 2006).

## ***5. Limitations and Further Study***

As discussed in the Methodology (section 2.1) I would have liked to access a broader cross-section of service users coming from different backgrounds. This would have made for a perhaps more complex study but would have more accurately reflected the heterogeneous spread of service users. Equally, I would have been interested in engaging in a more in-depth way with perhaps fewer service users. My initial intention was to ask interviewees a bit about their past and current situation. However, at the request of co-ordinators at the refugee drop-in centre I refrained, as the information was not vital for my research purposes. Nevertheless such information could have given a deeper understanding of interviewees' lives, and this was useful on the few occasions it was volunteered. If I had had more time to spend with interviewees, in order to generate a level of trust between us, perhaps I could have solicited such information.

As for further study, I would be interested to see the results of a more in-depth study in to the affective geographies surrounding the bicycle and the workshop, perhaps following only two or three service users' journeys from before they had a bike to afterwards. I touched upon emotional attachment and the affective space of the workshop yet have deliberately steered away from devoting too much of the study to it.

In addition, as previously raised, a study into the gendered geography of service users – examining why women are marginalised and how the bicycle has altered that in the few cases that exist – would be fascinating. Women often represent a marginalised group within a marginalised group, as a co-ordinator put it to me in a conversation. The additional hurdles which present themselves are legion, yet this makes the overcoming of these hurdles of even greater interest.

## ***6. Conclusion***

This dissertation has illustrated the significant role that personal mobility plays in fostering social participation and wellbeing. In addition we have seen how the benefits of owning a bicycle can be augmented if surrounded by a support structure which is empowering and inclusive. BBP's work represents an innovative, effective way to help some of the most vulnerable members of our society, without much financial input. As such this dissertation should be of interest to anyone engaged in dealing with social exclusion and marginalisation.

We have seen how the work of BBP fosters social inclusion and wellbeing of service users in various ways. Firstly, the dependable technology of mobility that is the bicycle enhances service users' 'motility' (Kaufmann, 2002) which allows them to more easily access activities and services – volunteering, college, meetings – whilst facilitating the maintenance of their social networks. Secondly, service users' physiological health improves through regular exercise and their psychological health improves as the bike offers a space of reflection, an autonomy of mobility and an avenue of recreation. Thirdly, the Project's empowering approach supplies service users with bike maintenance skills which provides an occupation to beat the malaise of inactivity and gives them a greater understanding of and attachment to their machines. Finally, the diversity of the workshop has valuable effects on their social skills in exposing them to all sorts of people whilst providing an important place of belonging.

How could this research contribute to conversations around government policy? In policy literature it is widely recognised that leaving people without the means to mobility is a serious factor in social exclusion. However, the transport literature which examined policy responses to social exclusion neglected the potential of bicycles. Buses were the primary consideration, overlooking the constant drain on personal finances that they represent, the dependency they can perpetuate and the way they constrain and channel mobility. This research paper therefore represents a remedy to this hole in the literature. All the same, the value of BBP's work goes beyond the one dimensional perspective of providing transport. Their work is not just in providing bicycles; if the state provided free bicycles, or even an equivalent support structure as that offered by BBP, it would be unlikely to have the same



success. Instead community-based provision is preferable because of its sensitivity to local conditions and the input of all members of the community. Nevertheless, as funding is such a perpetual issue for such projects, government's role is not precluded; policy responses could be to offer better long-term funding for community projects.

Moreover the Project's work has perhaps surprisingly wide-ranging and profound benefits. All bikes received are unwanted by their previous owners, therefore the Project's work cuts down on waste, channelling underused machines to meet undermet demand. Besides the benefits flowing to the service users, society as a whole benefits due to a more sustainable use of our resources. In addition, the workshop offers as important a space of learning and personal development for volunteers as for service users.

Finally, this research is of use to BBP itself. In initial conversation with co-ordinators, the prospect of an impact assessment of their work was a welcome one. Thus, I can only hope that my findings will allow them to better understand the Project and help shape its future direction.

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## ***Appendix A – Code of Conduct***

**A space for learning, skill-sharing and empowering yourself and others around you.**

### **Our code of conduct policy**

The Bristol Bike Project is working to create an atmosphere of respect and understanding in which everyone is valued and we strongly believe in working co-operatively together and learning from our shared experience. This workshop is an inclusive, safe space for all, where everyone will be treated with equal respect and worth and we ask that all people entering this space respect these goals and treat each other accordingly.

We will not tolerate any form of discrimination, or any behaviour which makes other people feel vulnerable or threatened. This includes, but is not limited to, discrimination based on race, age, gender, sexuality, faith, disability, and social background. You will be asked to leave the premises if it is felt that you are violating this safe space.

If you encounter such behaviour, please speak up! It is our responsibility to keep this space safe and welcoming to all. If you don't feel comfortable challenging abusive behaviour, ask someone else for their support.



## *Appendix B – Interviews*

**Bahir**

**29/09/2011 – Bristol Refugee Rights Welcome Centre, Newton Hall, Easton, Bristol.**

**Interviewer: Louis Devenish (L)**

**5 Interviewee: Bahir (B)**

L: What's your name?

B: My name is Bahir. I am a member of BRR [Bristol Refugee Rights].

L: Where are you from?

**10** B: I'm from Iraq.

L: How long have you been in... well in Bristol and in the country?

B: I moved to Bristol last year. This is my first year in Bristol. And I was living all my time in London, four year and a half about in London. So this is my first year.

L: How do you like Bristol compared to London?

**15** B: Err much better socialising, much better.. you can manage all the time to meet people. Then they're always busy, and very much... you are always running, all the day just try to catch your friends, do your things, very difficult. So I feel... very much better this pressure than when I used to live in London.

L: I think particularly in Easton the community is quite strong.

**20** B: It is it's true.

L: Particularly this centre.

B: Exactly, Bristol is something, I'm really amazed when I come. The community, the people you socialise with is much different. I have more opportunity here, I go... and it's not very far from my house so I go with my cycle and I go volunteer with different organisations like Fairshare and Easton Community.

**25**

L: Do you live near here?

B: I live in Fishponds Road.

L: Ah, OK.

B: So it's not far, I go with my cycle.

**30** L: So you got a bike from the bike project? Was it about a month ago you said. No, you haven't said.

B: No, it was last year.

L: Ah OK, early on.

B: Yeah. And this bike was something was coming at the right time for me, I like to move a lot really. I don't like to stay in the house. If I'm working or not.

**35** L: Before you had the bike, did you find yourself you felt....

- B: It's very difficult for me to move without the cycle. Is very expensive the transport for the buses. Especially if you are not working. You are from abroad, you are an asylum seeker, it is difficult for you sometimes to manage that. You have to walk really. The bus is really expensive even than in London in here. Which is one time, I took a bus just one way it was £3.50. Very expensive, crazy. I mean with £3.50 you spend all the day the buses in London. But here £3.50 one way is just too much.
- L: Yeah, Bristol's strange. Do you know the little train, the little train that goes from Lawrence Hill, Stapleton Road, Montpellier?
- B: I've never been to that train.
- L: It's actually cheaper than... it's like 80p or something.
- B: Oh my god!
- L: But it's not very useful because it only goes Temple Meads, Lawrence Hill, Stapleton Road. It just goes one way, it's not very helpful.
- B: Yes, but it's much cheaper than the buses. Because sometimes I used to go to Temple Meads, I wanna catch the train. If I don't have a cycle I would take a bus and bus very expensive, it's true it's much cheaper than the bus. If you take it from Stapleton Road to Temple Meads.
- L: So do you find that since you've had a bike you can do more things, there are more places you can go?
- B: Definitely, I move a lot. I see my friends, always have got to be on time. I enjoy cycling. There's much more difference for me than without the cycle – I'm like without legs! That's how I say it. It's difficult. Without a cycle it's very difficult to move, especially in Bristol. Sometimes the bus getting late, so I prefer always the cycle. Always keeping active, always moving about. I enjoy cycling.
- L: What is a typical day? Do you just go and see friends, do you come to the centre here, do you go to meetings?
- B: I volunteer with Fairshare, with various different organisations.
- L: Where do you go to volunteer with Fairshare?
- B: Fairshare is just in St. Nicolas Road, just round the corner. Yes, not far. I volunteer... it used to be near Temple Meads so was a bit far, but now is better, is not really far. I come here also to BRR, I go to different meetings sometimes for the church at the Pierian centre in Portland Square. I see my friends sometimes in Gloucester Road. That cycle is mean a lot to me really. Once is broken, I'm really frustrated with it.
- L: Has it broken?
- B: Sometimes, yeah.
- L: But you took it back to the project to get it fixed?
- B: I go to them sometimes, they really are very friendly, very nice. Never say no. Always they are ready to help and are saying nice things.
- L: Did you know much about repairing bikes when you got it?
- B: I know about the bike project through BRR. Without BRR I have no idea who is the bike project and BRR who has link, friendship link with the network of bike project. And they give every week free cycle to BRR members. So when I came I put my name on the list with BRR, and I was waiting a few several weeks and then the right time has come and I picked up a bike and built it with the team there.
- L: Did you know how to maintain a bike before?
- B: I know a little bit but I still don't have confidence. I hate it really! They did really help me with a few things, for example, how to do with a tyre when there is a puncture, so I did learn something from them, it's really good. I mean they always really, very encouraging people, encouraging team.

Always they like they're cycle to learn how to deal with their bikes, if they got trouble and if they are outside, and you don't have someone with you – they always encourage you how to do it.

L: Is your bike here? Did you bring it?

B: My cycle is outside actually, I chain it outside.

85 L: Yeah it's pretty full here. Do you want to tell me a bit about it? What does it look like? Do you have a name for it?

B: Yeah actually it's a good question really. I do sometimes joke with my friends and I call it the 'Legend Bike'. They laugh about it always. Because it's very much.. it's a racing bike. It's an old racing bike.

90 L: Is it similar to that blue one? Thin frame?

B: Yeah, thin frame. It's racing, French. It's a racing bike. It's outside, I could show you in a bit.

L: Yeah I'd like to see it.

B: It's very good. Actually that one I got from my friend. He also got a bike from the bike project. And I got a yellow one, I used to call it 'Lamborghini'! Because it's yellow. And after that,... it's  
95 kind of funny to call a cycle Lamborghini or Legend but another one because I always love the tour of France. The tour of cycling in France.

L: Tour de France. It's exciting isn't it.

B: They write it on that cycle. I always say to my friends it's the legend cycle.

L: Are your friends a little bit jealous of it?

100 B: I don't know really. But I'm really happy with the cycle since I swapped with my friend. It's much better, not very much problem, very much fast, always on time.

L: You've never had a problem with it being stolen or damaged?

B: No, no not really.

L: Do you just use it as transport, or do you go for fun rides also?

105 B: I also go for fun rides, with groups. We're going to have soon a tour of 90 miles.

L: Manesh was telling me about that, yeah.

B: He's going to join us. Will be a good challenge.

L: How many days?

B: Two days. Saturday we do 45 miles, we chain the bikes up in a place. And then we come back and  
110 then on the second day we go in a car and continue 45 miles. Is a good challenge.

L: So you're gonna get pretty fit doing that?

B: Yeah I go to the gym, I work really hard now so get fit ready for it.

L: You must have strong legs.

B: Erm, I'm a decent guy, I don't know if I have it. I keep fit and go exercise always to the gym.

115 L: Do you find that there are place that you go now that you didn't go without the bike?

B: Yes, for example, there is, in Ashley Down, there is the [Pollen\*?] festival. Was too far and without a car is difficult and was thinking how to go and the guys around me, my friends were saying is much better if we go on a cycle. And we went there and I really enjoy it. And we went also to some more places I never been to, and my cycle was much easier to go – in Bath and in Bristol.

120 L: One final question. When you're riding a bike how do you feel? Are you thinking about other things, are you thinking about the road, are you just relaxed...

125 B: I really, the things is with the road. Some of my friends say be careful a little bit because I do, I am a bit sometimes too confident to go on the road, and stop and check my way. The drivers they piss me off I do something to them. It's a bit sometimes worrying on the evening when you come back for sometimes you might see a drunk driver who might come and hit you and go away. So a bit scary sometimes in the evening. I do also use the cycle path when I go to Fishponds but in general I am fine.

L: Cool I think that's all. Thanks.

**Derek**

**14/10/2011 – Bristol Bike Project, Hamilton House, City Road, Bristol.**

**Interviewer: Louis Devenish (L)**

**Interviewee: Derek (D)**

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L: What's your name?

D: Derek.

L: Where are you from?

D: Middlesbrough, North East.

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L: How long have you been in Bristol?

D: I've been here 13 months.

L: When did you find out about the project?

D: I found out about it practically a month or so of being here. But I didn't actually come and check the place out until 6 or 7 months ago.

15

L: So yeah, when you came down did you just chat to James [Lucas]?

D: I actually phoned him first, a service I was attending in Bristol – is alright to mention names and whatnot?

L: It's up to you man.

20

D: ARA, it's a drug and alcohol service in Bristol, they actually referred me to the project. I rang James, had a chat with him on the phone. He invited me down just to speak to him.

L: And you've basically built up a bike?

D: Yep I've built a bike. My intention was to work voluntary, I wanted some voluntary work. Hence why I didn't contact the bike project as soon as I come to Bristol.

L: Did you know how to fix bikes before?

25

D: Not really, no.

L: You had sort of practical skills?

D: I did but I didn't know. Basically, most of my life I hadn't been interested in it. But since I got sober and clean, my sort interest's coming out.

L: You said to me before the project's really helped you, do you wanna just explain a bit...

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D: Obviously the first, the most obvious thing is transport. Since I've got my bike I've been doing about 100 mile a week on my bike. It's extended my reach.

L: Do you live far away?

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D: I live just off Stapleton Road, Easton. I've cycled to Bath 5 times now in the last 3 weeks. Whereas I'd never been to Bath before I got a bike. Now there's a good AA meeting at Bath, what I want to go to, now I've got my bike I can go there, I'm going again tomorrow. I couldn't access that before, I could have got a lift but... I dunno, I like to be independent-ish. So it's helped with that. But it's helped with lots of other things. Improving my communication skills with people, and social skills. Mixing with a diverse group of people, whereas before I'd only mix with people who were like me. If they weren't I judged them, I'd stay away from them.

40

L: I think the workshop's a great space for that.

D: Yeah fantastic.

L: Literally everyone is there.

45 D: Yeah everyone's different, everyone's got... yeah. So it's been beneficial for that, dya know what I mean. What else? It keeps me busy, it gives me something to occupy two days of my week. It's also helped me with my confidence with engaging with people out in the public now. I was always fearful, not exactly fearful of people but... like I said it was my people, I only mixed with people who were like me. Now it's built my self-worth up, it's built my confidence up, my self-esteem, it's done all that.

L: That's good to hear. Do you find you've got fitter?

50 D: Yeah since I started cycling, yeah. Like I said the only exercise I was getting was walking, walking's exercise but it's not enough exercise for someone my age, maybe when I'm 65 it might be but for someone my age it wasn't. The amount of walking wasn't compensating the amount of eating I was doing. Dya know what I mean? [Laughs]. The cycling like, I've lost a bit of weight since I got the bike, got a bit fitter.

55 L: Like, I mean, feel free to say I don't want to answer these questions or whatever. As someone who is recovering from addiction, do you find... what kind of things do you find helpful? Do you find I dunno having something to focus on, like the mechanical, is that something that's helped?

60 D: Yeah, it has helped. But it can also... I've also noticed how like... my obsession around things. I can recognise my obsession around things, around all bikes. It's like I can tell when my obsession is on me, and I'm obsessing about it. Dya know what I mean? It's helped me recognise things that I wouldn't have noticed before. I would have been obsessing about it and wouldn't have even realised I was obsessing. There's things like choice and all, and I don't mean this in a bad way or an ungrateful way but it's like I look at my bike and I'll finish it and I'll see something else and I'll go awwhhh!

65 L: It's always like that!

D: Yeah but dya know what I mean? It's like it brings them things out in me, I can recognise, "why don't you just be grateful for what you've got?", instead of looking at what you haven't got.

L: That's really interesting. If only you could find the perfect saddle, I think you just need build up some strength down there... they're never comfortable, saddles.

70 D: Like I say I haven't cycled for like 15 years or summat so...

L: It'll get there. Is, ermm.... is money an issue?

75 D: Yeah especially with transport, because of the situation I'm in, in recovery, and because I live in a dry house, we're not allowed to work, so I have to survive on my benefits and plus since I come into recovery all me debts from the past have caught up with me. Part of my program is addressing them and being responsible so all my money's taken up.

L: Is that program for a limited period of time?

D: No it's for the rest of my life.

L: You're not allowed to work for the rest of your life?

80 D: No, sorry. I'm allowed to work, but the place that I live we're not allowed to work, we can work voluntary. So basically it's not about rushing back into mainstream life and chasing the pound note again and thinking it's all about the money, like it was. Because of the place that I live in we're not allowed to work. I get a flat in about three weeks off them, which is the next stage, and then I can stay there for two years, after that I'm on my own. So within those two years we do more and more voluntary work, more and more qualifications and by then... it's like walking back into mainstream  
85 life instead of rushing back in there, just going at a gentle pace.

L: I mean do you wanna work in bikes? Or is there other stuff you do during the week?

90 D: It's people really, 'cause I work at the hospital as well, I work at Bristol Royal Infirmary. I work in the education department in there, and then in November I'm starting in the main reception, working the main reception. And since I've started doing all this I've realised I like working with people, I can work with people, whereas before.... But the bikes like I say, I don't mind messing about. When my housemates have got summat wrong with their bikes I'll help them fix their bike, fix their punctures. There's a girl who lives with us whereas before...

95 But actually work wise, I dunno, it's still early doors isn't it. I mean myself I still think I don't even know enough about bikes to even contemplate whether I'd work with them. But I like coming here, I still like coming here, I've got not intention of stopping coming here so ... who knows.

L: You've got time. When you're riding a bike, do you think about anything in particular? Because some people find it quite a good time to relax, because you can switch your head off.

100 D: Yeah exactly that, I dunno... I have different experiences on it. I have experiences where I'm tired and lethargic where I'll push myself, and challenge myself. And then other times I'll be so relaxed, that I'm like I'm free, this is great, you know. So I just like experience... I suppose everyone does. I just experience all different things. But yeah it's like freeing isn't it. That's how I find it, you're mobile, you can go where you want. It is good relaxation, it does kill time for me, what with us not being able to work and I'm just going out for a ride, and just go out. So yeah.

L: Good to hear, I think that's all to be honest.

**Irvin**

**6/10/2011 – Bristol Refugee Rights Welcome Centre, Newton Hall, Easton, Bristol.**

**Interviewer: Louis Devenish (L)**

**Interviewee: Irvin (I)**

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L: What's your name?

I: My name is Irvin.

L: Where are you from, Irvin?

I: Originally?

10

L: Yep.

I: Originally I'm from Uganda. That's East Africa. East Africa consists of three countries – Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania – but I'm from Uganda. Uganda landlocked country, it's inside without a sea port. But here I live in St. George, Bristol St. George.

L: Actually, how far away is St. George? Is it a long way away from here?

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I: If I take a bus, it's like 15 minutes, but if I use a bike it's like 10 minutes, or even less.

L: So the bike's quicker?

I: Yeah the bike's quicker than a bus because the bus stops. And the traffic as well. But by bike I can go anywhere without stopping. But if I walk it takes like 30 minutes, 25... between 20 and 30 minutes.

20

L: Cool. OK. So a little way, not very close. How long have you been in Bristol?

I: I've been in Bristol for like 3 and a half years. I came to England in 2007, May 2007. And then I went back home and then I came back in July, 2007 still. And when I came back in July until now. but when I came I lived in the north, in Rotherham. Next to Sheffield. For a couple of months and then from there I went to London for a couple of months as well. And then from there I went back  
25 north to Sheffield, Rotherham, then from there for just a few months, 2 only. Then I came over to Bristol. So I moved to Bristol in, I think 2008, yeah, towards the end of 2008, until now. So 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, so almost 3 and a half years.

L: When did you get your bike?

30

I: I got my bike not long ago. I got my bike, I think, that was... today is.... I think I got my bike in 2010 around. July/August, around August.

L: You've had it over a year?

I: Yeah over a year.

L: The same bike?

35

I: No. No, I had like 4 bikes now! But they get lost, they steal them. Yeah sometimes. The first bike I had they stole it from here, from the drop-in centre downstairs. I locked it but I didn't lock it on something. So somebody just carried it and took it away. Another bike they stole it from the gym, just there, the Easton Leisure Centre. I forgot to lock it, actually, it was my fault. And because of the cameras – there were CCTV cameras – I thought they would see it but somebody took it. When I came out of the gym I didn't find it. Then the third bike, yeah, I lost two bikes so this one I'm having  
40 is the third one.

L: Only 3, not 4.



I: Only 3. Not 4 bikes. But I've been with this one for a long time now. I've had it now for 4 or 5 months.

L: Did you get any of those bikes from the project?

45 I: All of them. I got them from the project.

L: So you went back and they gave you the bikes?

I: Yeah, as long as I explained to them they were actually good to me and just doing me a favour. When you lose a bike I think you only have two chances or one chance. But me I lost bike twice so I was not meant to get this one but they just helped me because I didn't have any means. I use bike almost everywhere, it's easier for me now, it helps me with transport since I'm not allowed to work, I'm not working, I'm not earning anything. They give me a lock but I had to buy a lock.

L: Did you buy the lights as well?

I: Yes I had to buy the lights as well because they only give one chance to get free lights and lock. But somebody gave me money from the drop in here and I bought a lock and lights. But.... yeah that's it.

L: You've been back to the project quite a lot of times, you must know the people quite well?

I: Yeah, almost I know... I know most of the people there now. The thing is they... some people come and go, some people come just to volunteer there and some people come for like placement or to learn how to fix... work with bikes. There are a couple of new faces there when you go, all the time you find some new people. Then the old members, who are permanently work there, almost everyone knows me.

L: They're good guys.

I: Yeah, very nice guys. Helpful. They're really nice.

L: The project tries quite hard to teach people skills rather than just giving them bikes. Did you find that you learnt stuff there or did you know about bikes before perhaps?

I: I had some ideas about the bikes because back home I had a mountain bike so I had learnt a few things, how to fix a few things, to work on a few things. But when I came here they are helpful because they teach... when they give you a bike they don't just *give* you a bike, but they even show how to work with your bike in case you get a problem on the way so you can be able to fix it or to fix some few fixable easy things and when you go there because they are extremely busy so they won't have a lot of time to fix every individual bike. They show you, they teach you every time you go there. They give you a chance to work on your own bike even in the first day you go there, to get a new bike, you pick a bike and then because they are not new bikes – some bikes are new, but most are second hand so they have problems – so they show you how to fix it, how to work with it, first time. So every time you go there in case your bike has a problem, they only fix bikes on Thursdays so if a bike has a problem you go there you fix it... they can show you what to do and then you learn how to work with it by yourself. So that's what happens.

L: Could you tell me a bit about you bike?

I: I think it's a mountain bike with shocks.

80 L: Suspension.

I: It's a nice one, it's orange. I don't know if it's a girl, a girly girl, but it's a big bike to be for girls. it's a nice bike, orange with some designs on it.

L: Do you have a name for it?

I: Oh god, ha ha ha. I've realised to have that in mind. I think I can see it down here. I don't have a name.

L: Not everyone has a name.

I: What I know is it's a mountain bike. Suspensions in front and back.

L: Nice, very nice! Have you added bits to it? Customised it?

I: Yeah uh huh. Like pimping it? I pimped it! I added on some few stuffs, the handles, you know.

90 L: The bullbar things?

I: Yeah, the bars, just to look nice. But it has a problem, I need to take it today to fix it, with the pedals, yeah it has a problem. I need to take it to get fixed, after here. I think after college. But I dunno, a few stuff. When you go there to get a bike they have a lot of spare parts so you can make your bike what you want it to be, you can improve it, you can do anything because they have a lot of spare...

95

L: You can make it your own.

I: Yeah, you can make it your own... make.

L: Do most of your friends have bikes as well?

I: Yeah most of the guys here they have bikes. Most of them they got it from the bike project. Actually I'm the one who take some of the new members who don't know where the bike project is. Yeah they ask me to take them to volunteer, take them where the bike project is.

100

L: So you help a bit with the project then?

I: Yeah, just a bit. I think as you can see downstairs, most of all those bikes. Most of all those guys they got them from the project. Almost all of them.

105

L: Do you just use it to get around town? Or do you ever go into the country or go for a ride just for fun?

I: Actually, I just use it for transport. To get me to places, get me to college, to centre, around the centre, around to go see my friends. It's the only transport mean I have, I can afford. It's the only transport mean I can afford.

110

L: Are buses just too expensive?

I: Yeah, I don't have money for that. I can't afford the bus so that's why it's easy for me to use the bike. It's the only transport means, I got no option. I just have to cycle the bike.

L: But do you like riding the bike? Or would you rather be in a bus, or....

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I: You know, it depends. I like exercising, that's one of the things. So it keeps me fit. That's one of the advantages. And another thing is it's quick and easy to use. I get to places quickly and easily, you know. But the problem is when it comes to winter, that's where the problem comes. When it's freezing and when it snows it's where the problem comes. Last winter, I had a terrible fall, a slip on the snow, the ice.

L: Did you hurt yourself?

120

I: Yeah, my ankle, my knee and my elbow. I had a bit of dislocation of my leg for quite.. almost a month.

L: Has that healed now? Is it better?

I: Now I'm ok. I forced exercise and yeah I got better. But I find it very easy to use and I like it, the bike.

125

L: When you're on the bike do you feel relaxed or quite stressed? Or maybe do you think about other things? Are there any particular things you think about when you're on the bike?

I: Errr. What I think is my life when I'm riding on the road because most of the time I don't use bike path because my route... almost all of the routes I take, I have to ride on the road so I just think about my life, about the cars that come behind me because you never know, anything can happen. Any car can go out of control and you can get hit since you're on the road.

130

L: Have you ever been hit?

135 I: Yeah I've been hit by a car. Actually by a scooter, not a car. Yeah I was crossing in Easton there and they hit me and I damaged my lower spinal bone, around my bum. Very, very, very terribly. I spent almost four month with a lot of pain there. And the police they never did anything, they just made me sign some stuff which I didn't know. So afterwards they told me I couldn't claim anything or I can't blame anyone, that it was my fault because I signed for it and all that kind of stuff. I was really pissed off and angry with the police about it. So yeah... I got hit. So that's why I get worried sometimes because I spend most of the time on the road.

L: What's a typical day? Do you come to the centre, do you go volunteer places?

140 I: I go to college.

L: What do you study? English, maths?

145 I: I was doing health and social care, but now I'm doing maths and english. 'Cause I'm going to be volunteering in the hospitals. It's going to be like work experience, like a placement. Just to put in practice what I've learnt in health and social care. At the moment I'm doing math and english, improving my math and english.

L: Do you find that the things that you do have changed since you've had a bike? Before you had it you did other things and now you do new things?

I: Yeah, things have changed really because I can get to places easily where I couldn't get to places before easily. With a bike I can get to places very easily, so it makes my work easier.

150 L: Do you find you can be a bit more flexible in the day?

I: Yeah that's true. I find it very easy to get to places, I can just wake up and grab my bike if I have a plan and I go to places. Sometimes when I'm somewhere and I do my work quickly and then I finish up, plans come from there and I say OK I'm gonna go to such and such a place to see some friends or to the library.

155 L: Cool, I think that's all I wanted to say.

**Marcel**

**29/09/2011 – Bristol Refugee Rights Welcome Centre, Newton Hall, Easton, Bristol.**

**Interviewer: Louis Devenish (L)**

**Interviewee: Marcel (M)**

5

L: What's your name?

M: My name is Marcel. I'm an asylum seeker. I've been here for a long time, I've been for 14 years.

L: 14, wow.

M: And I'm still waiting a Home Office decision.

10

L: Still?

M: Yes, yes. I love our community, what is mean BRR [Bristol Refugee Rights]. They are very amazing people here, so friendly, we are confident with them, and we love them. They do the best and we love them so much. So, about the bike project, they are very amazing people, absolutely. They support asylum seekers, they do nice things for them, they need a help to repair bikes etc. etc. But they give good bikes then they help us, especially asylum seekers. They are surprised about the project. They are very nice people there around us, definitely. So some of them are asking when they want to collect the bike, they are asking for a little help to get us how do make that, how do you repair that, how do you... yeah, that's great. So and err the big job they do is the volunteer job. That's all I wanted to talk about the bike project. I think they need some more voluntary people... [Nathan (another member of BRR) interrupts to say hello]... that's all I know about the project.

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20

L: Which country did you come from?

M: I'm Moroccan, yes.

L: Have you been in Bristol the whole 14 years?

M: I've been in Oxford, Nottingham, Leicester, Doncaster.

25

L: And how long have you been in Bristol?

M: Four and a half years. Lovely Bristol, amazing people, a green, green, green place. Very nice people.

L: Have you had a bike for most of that time?

M: Not really, there is no other community which has that kind of project, only in Bristol.

30

L: How long ago did you get your bike from the project? You said about 1 year ago.

M: About 2 years, 1 year and something.

L: And you had that bike for 1 year

M: For 1 year.

L: And then you said it got stolen?

35

M: Yeeesss.

L: That's tragic.

M: Is my fault...

L: Everyone in Bristol has a story...

M: It was my fault, I didn't lock it properly. It was my fault yes definitely.

- 40 L: Do you remember much of you experience at the bike project? You went for a session to do the finishing touches.  
M: I did the little jobs.  
L: Did you know much about bikes before you went? How to fix them?  
M: Yes, when I was young I knew how to fix some things, like tyres, like brakes. But I had more  
45 experience in the project.  
L: So you found that they helped you learn?  
M: Yes definitely.  
L: Do you go back to the project at all?  
M: Yes sometimes, if I need something for my bike. I knock on the door, they open the door, very  
50 friendly, you're welcome, warm welcome they told me and then that's all.  
L: Once your bike was stolen you went and bought another one?  
M: I bought another one from a second hand shop. Somebody helped me about the money, financially. And then I got right now.  
L: Tell me about it about it. Is it a nice bike, a mountain bike?  
55 M: It is actually a very fast bike. I call her 'Little Donkey', my little donkey. She is very hard working. So anywhere, the hills. Like that [clicks fingers] absolutely yes. She's green, a green one, a fast one.  
L: It sounds like your quite fond of your bike.  
M: Absolutely, I like my bike, yes.  
60 L: Do a lot of your friends have bikes?  
M: Yes, all my friends have got one, have bikes.  
L: Do you find it's a sort of common way of getting about for your friends?  
M: Pardon.  
L: Is it a thing that a lot of your friends use to get around?  
65 M: Yes, definitely. They are very happy to have a bike. We can go all of us to Bath sometimes. We can go the surprising charity for anyone, for riding the bikes  
L: I was just talking to Manesh, he said he'd been to Bath as well.  
M: For charity.  
L: He said next week there's a cycle festival?  
70 M: I don't know about that. I've done two times cycling to Bath, from Bristol to Bath.  
L: Do you like riding in the country?  
M: I hope in the future I can do a charity ride with all of my friends.  
L: Yeah sounds nice. Do you find that you've become healthier or fitter with your bike or has it made no difference?  
75 M: I feel much better when I ride, healthy, so I start drinking lots of water.  
L: It's important!  
M: Yes. Yes.

- 80 L: When you're riding a bike, what goes through your head? Do you feel.. do you have any emotions or do you think about other things, or do you just think about riding or do you think about...I dunno nothing?
- M: Actually, it's an important question. Actually, when I start riding my bike, I think all of people they are crazy, only me I am honest. So I shouldn't do any mistakes. And then I think all of people they are crazy, only me I am honest and then erm, and be careful about other people, not to make accident or whatever. So I think all of people crazy, only me I am... do you understand what I mean?
- 85 L: Yeah I think I see what you mean. Sort of the sensible or responsible one.
- M: Yes is big responsible. So I don't like to hurt anybody or myself.
- L: That's a good thing to do. So what is a typical day for Marcel? What kind of thing... do you go to meetings, or err do you come here a lot?
- M: Actually I love my community, BRR.
- 90 L: Do you live near the centre?
- M: No, I live very far. But all the time I come by my bike. So, most of the time I come to my community, that's all. Sharing, charity, chatting.
- L: Do you find that there are things that, now you have a bike, there are new things that you didn't do before? Things that a quite a way from your home?
- 95 M: Yes, I go to visit a friend of mine who lives far from me. Sometimes I go for a dinner, sometimes I invite him. He came with his bike, of course he's riding his bike. So that's what I'm doing with my bike all the time.
- L: How did you come to the centre today? You said you left your bike somewhere else.
- M: Because I had an interview with my solicitor. I left it far, somebody gave me a lift in his car.
- 100 L: But it's a nice day to be on your bike.
- M: Yes, I'm going to collect it later. After my drop-in. I locked it properly. I make sure is good lock, I locked it.
- L: Do you ever take buses before?
- M: Actually, I stopped to take the buses, is expensive. And then I prefer walking sometimes, but most times I prefer my bike.
- 105 L: I think I've asked about as much as I want to. Thank you very much.

**Mehran**

**29/09/2011 – Bristol Refugee Rights Welcome Centre, Newton Hall, Easton, Bristol.**

**Interviewer: Louis Devenish (L)**

**Interviewee: Mehran (M)**

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L: Hi there, what's your name?

M: Hello, hi there my name is Mehran, I'm from Iran.

L: Have you been in Bristol a long time?

M: Yes, two years.

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L: OK. Do you live near here?

M: At the moment Fishponds.

L: So not too far.

M: Not too far, just further than Eastville park, 10-5 minutes further.

L: Did you get your bike from the bike project?

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M: Yes I did yes.

L: And how did you find out about the bike project?

M: The Welcome Centre suggested me to get bike from the project bike.

L: Was that long ago?

M: More than a year.

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L: And you've still got the same bike?

M: Yes.

L: That's impressive, it hasn't been stolen!

M: Yeah.

L: Do you remember much about you experience at the Project?

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M: Before I got this bicycle, I got another bike from the project bike. But unfortunately, that was stolen.

L: Was that a very nice bike? A pretty bike?

M: Yeah very very nice. After that one I got another bike from my friend but that one was stolen again. This is the third one. More than a year I have. I come actually to the project bike for repair my cycle, for help in the project bike.

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L: Oh, to volunteer?

M: Yeah as volunteer, sometimes, not recently but before I did actually, a few times.

L: Yeah, you seem to know James [Lucas] quite well when I came, he seemed to recognise you.

M: Yes, I know James for nearly two years.

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L: So you like going back to the Project?

M: I like, yes. I'm going to makes plans to go... At the moment I'm a volunteer at another place, and I'm quite busy. I'm working sometime.

L: What other things are you doing?

- M: Volunteering at the allotments, Welcome Centre.
- 40 L: Busy guy!
- M: Quite.
- L: You've had to come back to the Project for repairs quite a few times. That's how I met you.
- M: Actually, it's very helpful and useful place the project bike. I've known it more than two years, more than 100 people have got bikes, especially from the Welcome Centre and it's very, very useful.
- 45 L: Do a lot of your friends have bikes from the Project? Do they use them a lot?
- M: I know many people they got bicycles and they use them. I have a very nice and pretty bicycle, if you wanna buy that bike from a shop it quite expensive.
- L: Tell me a little bit about it. Do you have a name for it?
- M: Yeah it's called BNV.
- 50 L: BNV?
- M: Like car BMV.
- L: Sorry?
- M: Like a BMV, B M W.
- L: Ahh yeah I understand. So yeah a very nice car!
- 55 M: I love my cycle. It's called BMW.
- L: You said before it's like your son.
- M: Yeah I like informally call it my son.
- L: I see.
- 60 M: But people call it BMW. "Mehran is that your BMW?" "Mehran where is your BMW?" If sometimes I don't bring it outside, people ask: "oh Mehran where is your BMW?"
- L: Is he ok?
- M: Yeah is ok!
- L: He's been a bit troubled recently. He's got some problems hasn't he?
- 65 M: Yeah. Last time before I came to project bike for repair my cycle. One of my friends was in the project, called Bahman. He rang me, "where are you Mehran? How's your BMW? I'm waiting for your BMW, come to the project bike." But actually I was here [Welcome Centre] and I couldn't catch him at the project bike.
- L: So yeah you've done well not to have it stolen if it's such a nice bike. Do you lock it up, do you have a big lock?
- 70 M: This one, yes.
- L: Do you keep it indoors at your house?
- M: Most of the time yes. But the lock I've got is a really, really strong lock. Very good yeah.
- L: Do you use it just to get around the city or do you go out for fun?
- 75 M: 90%, as I say it's my son, always he's close to me, I don't like to leave him very far from myself or outside.
- L: What I meant is do you go for rides for fun, for pleasure? Just round a park or round the city?
- M: I do sometimes. I come here. If I have something to do I use my cycle. I use for fun, I use for... I went with that cycle two times to Bath.



- L: Oh along the cycle path? Really nice, isn't it?
- 80 M: As I said before, we have a festival cycling on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> around Bristol. For more than 100 miles.
- L: Wow.
- M: I wanna use that one as well. It's quite useful for everything.
- L: Yeah you can do a lot of things with it. Do you feel you've got fitter since you've had the bike?
- 85 M: Absolutely, before I came in England. I operated my knee, and always I had a problem with my knee. But when I came here and I started to cycle, my knee is really really good. I can play football, I can run. It's very, very useful for me.
- L: That's good to hear. So what is a typical day for you? What sort of things do you do? Do you go to meetings, come here to the Welcome Centre...
- 90 M: Yeah, actually most of time I come Welcome Centre. Three times a week: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday. I used to come.. I came here for English classes. Sometimes I come here just to be with people. Chatting.
- L: They have games and stuff.
- M: Games, yeah. Pool, backgammon.
- L: Are you good at pool?
- 95 M: Yeah I like it.
- L: Are the places you go quite near to where you live? Is it a small area?
- M: What do you mean?
- L: Do you go... I mean you come which isn't too far from Fishponds but do you go places that are a long way away from Fishponds with the bike?
- 100 M: Erm. No. Just if I want to go camping I use bike.
- L: Do you think your life.. the things that you do have changed since you used the bike?
- M: The most important thing, I say, is about my knee.
- L: So using a bike has, sort of, healed your knee?
- 105 M: Made it very much better. The muscle comes out, it's really, really good for me. I couldn't walk sometimes but when I start to use bicycle I can do anything I like. It's very useful. It's more better than physiotherapy, than hospitals, than doctors.
- L: And a lot cheaper!
- M: Yeah!
- L: Did you ever use buses before? Or do you ever use buses? Because the buses in Bristol are really expensive, I've found.
- 110 M: Just a few times, and then no. I prefer to use my bicycle. If you give me two choices: bus and bicycle, I chose to use bicycle.
- L: Even when it's raining?
- M: Doesn't matter, I use for two winters and I didn't get any problem.
- 115 L: So what particularly do you like about the bike? Is it the fact you can go anywhere?
- M: I'm feeling... err first of all I don't use for a long time – maximum 20 minutes or 15, if I wanna use. But when I use my cycle I feel like I'm free, I can... ride my cycle myself. I can stop any place I like. I feel actually very better to ride my cycle, than bus or my car.
- [Masseur interjects: Are you busy? I'll see Youssef now and then you after. OK?]

120 L: What's he doing?

M: He's doing like a massage.

L: Physiotherapy?

M: Not quite. Like a traditional therapy.

L: I think I've got more or less what I want. So yeah we can stop. Cheers.

**Narain**

**6/10/2011 – Bristol Refugee Rights Welcome Centre, Newton Hall, Easton, Bristol.**

**Interviewer: Louis Devenish (L)**

**Interviewee: Narain (N)**

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L: What's your name?

N: My name is Narain.

L: And where are you from?

N: From Sri Lanka.

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L: And did you come to the UK a long time ago?

N: Two and half years.

L: Have you been in Bristol for most of that time?

N: Yes, from the beginning in Bristol.

L: And do you like it here in Bristol?

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N: Much! Nice people everyone, I love this place. Really I love this Welcome Centre.

L: Do you live nearby?

N: Sorry?

L: Do you live near the Welcome Centre?

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N: No, before I live near the Welcome Centre. Now I'm living far from the Welcome Centre. Six miles from here to my home. Really I'm not happy in my home because it's too far from here. Six miles I want to ride the bike is up the hill so everyday I'm riding the bike more than 12 miles.

L: Wow that's a long way. You must be getting strong!

N: Yeah. Before I really got tired, now I'm ok. Really I'm unhappy, not happy because of my home.

L: That's a shame. So you got a bike from the bike project?

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N: Yes brother that's why I got a bike.

L: How long ago was that?

N: I'm riding the bike more than 1 year.

L: Do you remember much about your experience there when you went to fix up the bike? Do you have any memories of that?

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N: Yes, of course. So far I'm doing the bike repair myself. I learnt how to repair from the bike project.

L: OK, so you learnt... they taught you to repair. The tyres?

N: The tyres, when the gear is missing, I want just a screw.

L: Oh yeah the adjustment.

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N: So I'm learning from there. Some weeks ago, really I learn to change the brake pad shoe. I learnt from there also.

L: So you don't have to go back for your repairs, you can do them yourself?

N: Always I'm trying myself but so far I don't have much tools. Without tools I'm ready to do it myself, manage myself. If I need tools so I need to go to the bike shop, project.

40 L: Yep.

N: The bike project is really, really a good help for me as well. Really amazing help that is the bike project.

L: How many times have you been back since getting the bike?

N: Yes I'm going, if I need a repair I'm going to that.

45 L: Do you find it to be a welcoming place? Like here, is it somewhere you like to go?

N: I like to go the bike project, it's a nice place.

L: Tell me a bit about your bike. What type of bike it is. Does it have a name? What colour is it? What style is it?

50 N: Urrr I don't know how to say. I don't know about that. Before they give one bike, that bike the frame was broken. So I took it back to the bike project, they looked at the frame, they told me "this frame is really complicated to repair". Then after they replaced the bike. Now the bike is good.

[Phone call interrupts conversation]

L: So yeah, where were we? I asked about your bike. Is it a fast bike?

55 N: OK, no problem it's not a fast bike or strong. It's just a normal bike. It's not a racing bike, it's normal.

L: This is the one that got replaced?

N: Yes. They replaced it.

L: Did you have an accident with the old one or did it just break?

60 N: I had an accident. It's not because... it's not a bike problem. It's my problem. Many more time I have. Many times I have because my vision is not good left side so always I fall down left side.

L: You've never hurt yourself badly? An injury?

N: Just injury only, not bad. Still I had a problem [shows wound on shin]. Yeah like that, and here in the knees as well.

L: But still you cycle.

65 N: But still I'm cycling. Yeah no problem. I love the bike ride. But anyway my vision is not good so that's why I'm getting accident.

L: What do you like about riding? What do you think about when you're riding?

N: I'm happy to ride the bike yeah, but mostly whenever I'm riding the bike my thinking is going somewhere.

70 L: Somewhere else?

N: Well past problems. When I live in my country now, that time I had a problem.

L: Is it a particular problem?

N: Yes because the army they... tortured me. Always I'm thinking about that.

75 L: So do you find it helps you to think about it or do you not like thinking about that? Do you find it's a helpful thing to think about it and sort of understand that problem?

N: I'm trying to stop those accidents, but sometimes without my conscience I'm doing the problem.

L: You've never had a problem with your bike being stolen?

N: No, no.

- L: Do you lock it up?
- 80 N: Always I'm locking it nicely.
- L: Do you put it in your house?
- N: It stay in my house always. Whenever I'm parking at my house always I insert it.
- L: So you take good care of it.
- N: Yes.
- 85 L: Do you find you just use your bike to just come here? To get around? Or do you use it for fun? To go to Bath, to the countryside?
- N: No always I'm doing the volunteer job. I'm working the volunteer job.
- L: So you always have places to go?
- N: Yes. That time I'm going using the bike.
- 90 L: OK. Rachel said you might be going to Keynsham to work in the community centre. Is that right?
- N: Yeah. Different place. Six days I'm working as volunteer in the day, so different places I'm using the bike. Whenever I'm going to the work, I'm always using the bike.
- L: So a typical day... you're always volunteering. But before you had a bike did you find that your life has changed since you had the bike, do you do different things? Do you find you can volunteer
- 95 more since you've had the bike?
- N: I'm sorry?
- L: Before you had the bike did you feel restricted? Or there were things you wanted to do but couldn't?
- N: Before really, I don't know how to say the answer. Before I'm not work like this, after I had the
- 100 bike then only I'm working like this.
- L: OK, because you could get to the places?
- N: Yes I don't like to sitting in my home. When I'm sitting simply in my home the past memories coming and getting stressed. After I got the bike, now I'm... then after I found a volunteer job. So I'm happy to do the volunteer job.
- 105 L: Before, how did you get around? Did you walk or take buses?
- N: Always I walked. Before I walked. Because I don't have money. I can't able to take a bus ticket. I don't have enough money to buy bus tickets.
- L: I understand. Finally, do you find that feel physically better? Healthier or fitter?
- N: Yeah really I get quite healthy. My legs, my body are quite fit now. Now it's quite fit.
- 110 L: Good to hear. Now I'll stop there.

**Yohannes**

**13/10/2011 – Bristol Refugee Rights Welcome Centre, Newton Hall, Easton, Bristol.**

**Interviewer: Louis Devenish (L)**

**Interviewee: Yohannes (Y)**

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L: What's your name?

Y: My name is Yohannes.

L: And where are you from Yohannes?

Y: From Eritrea.

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L: How long ago did you come to the UK?

Y: About 4 years ago. And I've lived for three years in Bristol.

L: Do you like it in Bristol?

Y: Actually it's really the best place in the UK, I like it and as everyone been friendly, the structure of the city as well. I feel happy about Bristol.

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L: Have you lived other places in England?

Y: Actually I have lived in London but it's not... I haven't settled there, I lived with my friends there. But in Bristol I've lived now nearly three years.

L: Where do you live in Bristol?

Y: I've lived in St. Pauls, which is other side of Easton.

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L: Do you live there now?

Y: No, I live now in Bishopston, on Gloucester Road.

L: OK I live off Gloucester Road as well. So you got a bike from the bike project. How long ago was that?

Y: It's about two years.

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L: Have you had the same bike all that time? Or have you had problems? Have you had one stolen?

Y: No I have been changing my bike from them all the time. You know if the other bike is not really good I change it better one.

L: They've given you a different bike?

Y: Yeah.

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L: 'Cause they don't often do that.

Y: Yeah they don't do that but they used to do that. Because now time is quite busy, a lot of people coming to the centre and a lot of people asking a bike. So they make that once you get it they can't do it again. But a year ago it used to be fine. Some people if they lost their bike they get another bike. It's changed completely now.

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L: Do you remember much about your experience of the bike project?

Y: I knew the bike project since 2009 and when they started the place where they work wasn't exist before. They used just to bring 5 bikes here during opening day on Wednesday and Thursday and they give people here. And later they improved a lot of things and they opened this place and everyone go there every week – they used to take 4 people in the beginning of 2009. 4 people they go and work on the bike you know change the things that needed changing and renew some stuff. It was

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quite good and a lot of people get help from them – maybe a couple hundred people get bike from them. It's quite good place, one of the good places for people who are asylum and refugee because it helps them, cycling is how important. Some people get a bike and they don't know how to ride and they get help, they can train, how to fix the bike.

45 L: Did you learn how to fix a bike there? Did you know how to do it before?

Y: I wasn't good but I'm now quite confident to do some things – specially punctures, stuff to change a flat tyre, tyres and stuff. And some gears and stuff, fixing, adjusting. Now much confidence because we go to work ourselves, and they tell you how to do it. It gives you confidence to do for next time.

50 L: Do you like going back to the project?

Y: Yeah as a I say before it's a really good project. It's not easy to give a bike for free, encourage people how to cycle, what's the importance of cycling. It's really helpful people to know the whole city, people easy going to every places. I used to go for college about 40 minutes by my cycle for 7 months. So I knew I could do it by my bike and I feel good. That's why it's important, because it encourage you that cycling is good and give you cycle if you don't have so this is make you to cycle another way. It's not only giving you but changing you how is a cycle – the bike project is important for the future as well.

L: Do you want to tell me a bit about your bike? What colour is it?

Y: My bike is kind of yellow/red. It's a colourful bike. It's a mountain bike, quite a tall bike.

60 L: Do you have a name for it?

Y: Well, I can't remember it, but it has a name. Because when they give me this bike, they register it they put the name of the bike which is written, what company, what kind of bike and stuff. In general I can say that it's a mountain bike, not a road or a race bike.

L: Does it have suspension?

65 Y: No not suspension. I used to have that bike but I changed it.

L: They often have problems.

Y: Yeah and it used to be disc brakes. Yeah that was my bike, my own bike. So they used to be really confused with that bike. Later they changed me this bike. But they give you a lot of stuff as well – a lock.

70 L: Have you customised your bike? That means have you put extra things on to make it your own?

Y: Errr no actually. When first I took from them, I put everything from the project, everything that I need, I spent about 3 hours or two hours to look at least for 7 month or a year, this kind of equipment. Still I haven't changed anything since I got this bike, I haven't put any other stuff.

L: Do you clean your bike at all?

75 Y: [Laughs] Actually, I do clean my bike sometimes but it's not like you know much. I don't really care about my bike that much, you know having my bike looking just like that. And I'm quite I can jump on pavements, I don't just ride on the roads, if it's a very rough road I can just ride.

L: It's fun.

Y: [Laughs].

80 L: Do most of your friends have bikes as well?

Y: Yeah 90% I would say.

L: Did most of them get it from the project as well?

Y: Yeah most of them.

L: Do you ever go for rides together for fun, or out into the countryside?

- 85 Y: I went on the bike project 2009 December, we went to bike trip for whole day for about 12 miles, it's just about 2 or 3 miles away from Bath. We went there, really had a good time with them. We went to pub, local pub, traditional by the side of river. And we had fun and it had been really good day. And that was longest trip by bike for me. Since I came to Bristol.
- L: Do you find that you've got fitter or healthier since you've ridden the bike?
- 90 Y: Well, yeah. As I said to you, last year I used to ride my bike to my college which is in Kingswood. In the winter it's not really easy to ride with the cold weather, it doesn't really feel you good but as I keep to ride it make me all the time easy to reach more far places, I can do it. I feel very good and fit. That's why I keep it to do easily, when you ride bikes. If you haven't done it before, you know, aww this is kind of far, I'll take bus.
- 95 L: You had the habit.
- Y: Yeah I had the habit, if its really far off, I can understand I can do it by bike. And this kind of... it's give you a good idea, ideology, what's the importance of bike. Some people think it's just for fun, for relax but it doesn't mean only that. It make you easier for transport, a lot of people are going to their job by bike, they don't wait anything and at the same time they are exercising.
- 100 L: So you're more free with the bike?
- Y: Yeah I quite like it in Bristol. From 2009 until now I'm cycling.
- L: Do you think of anything particular when you're riding? Or are you relaxed, are you always concentrating on the road?
- 105 Y: It depends, because if just I'm going to town, or to this place, I don't need to hurry, I come very relaxed. But when I go to college, I have to focus to my destination, you know what time I should arrive and how I will be fast to cycle and have to concentrate all on the road, the distance. If it is kind of far away. But if it is just from home to this place, very relaxed. As I say to you, sometimes I have to ride on the pavement, in the different places.
- L: Do you find riding on the road is safe? Have you had a crash?
- 110 Y: I've never had a crash. It's not because I'm very good, very serious in everything but you know most of the time when I ride I don't really have a problem in the world. Sometimes I do when it's wet. Two years ago I used to do this, I used to go by Cabot Circus and pass the amber light, between that I used to cross it. But now I feel quite scared and focussed, I have to wait now. But when first I used to ride, I used to forget that I'm riding in a danger place. But now I learn more and I concentrate
- 115 more on safety, learn the rule of traffic, have to show my hand for left or right. A lot of things I learn, nobody tell me but actually I saw a lot of people. It's been a good experience riding a bike for me.
- L: What's a typical day for you? You say you go to college, where else do you go?
- Y: To my friends, sometimes I go to Fishponds house, yeah different places. This year on the 29<sup>th</sup> April we went as well a trip, bike ride. Everything, this bike is... in every single movement of my life
- 120 I use bike, most of them... this year 90% I use bike. Two years ago it's 100%, I can't move without bike, any place. You go to shop I have to take my bike, that's I used to do. But now that's changed, maybe 90% I use my bike.
- L: What do study at college?
- Y: I study science, English and sociology.
- 125 L: Do you remember what it was like before you had a bike? Did you walk, did you take buses? Did you find there were things that you wanted to do but they were too far away.
- Y: When I came to Bristol already I had a bike. I used to live in hostel and when my friend he left, he's Portuguese, he gave me his bike and I start to ride this bike and I just put the bike inside my friend's house and they just stole the bike from there. I remember the first bike I had, I just ride it a
- 130 month and I used to forget it locking, I didn't know much, you people can steal. Because I don't have back home like that, you can leave it nobody touch it. So I just left it inside the building, the hostel,



and they just took it. That was my first bike and next I had with the suspension and later, since I came I had three bikes.

L: Do you find you can be quite flexible in your planning with the bike?

135 Y: Well, no, no. I don't plan anything, it just happen. I don't really plan anything with bikes. Once I had a bike I feel good and more comfortable in the daily of my life so it's not just to make myself how I am flexible, in which time to use my bike. Whether it's raining or snowing or hot day anytime, when I just move I need my bike. When I start to move out from the house I remember my bike and I take out my bike with me, whether it be 200m or 5km, I take my bike.

140 L: Cool, that's all I want to say so cheers.

**Zewedu**

**13/10/2011 – Bristol Refugee Rights Welcome Centre, Newton Hall, Easton, Bristol.**

**Interviewer: Louis Devenish (L)**

**Interviewee: Zewedu (Z)**

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L: What's your name?

Z: My name is Zewedu.

L: Where did you come from originally?

Z: Originally I'm from Ethiopia. East Africa.

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L: How long ago did you come to the UK?

Z: To the UK, since 6 months.

L: Wow very recent.

Z: Oh yeah, it's quite new.

L: Have you been in Bristol all that time?

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Z: No I've been in Bristol before 5 months, for 1 month I have been in Cardiff. And I just moved here.

L: How long have you been in Bristol?

Z: 5 months.

L: Do you like it?

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Z: It's nice, it's better than Cardiff. Cardiff is so quiet but this is nice place to live. I like it.

L: Do you live near the centre? In Easton?

Z: I live in Fishponds. Before I live in Horfield. It was quite far, and in that time I never had a bike so I used to walk all the days. It takes like 1 hour to go and 1 hour to come. So I walk like 2 hours in a day.

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L: That's a long time. So did you have a long time where you didn't have a bike? How long ago did you get your bike?

Z: Maybe 1 month ago.

L: So your bike is new?

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Z: Is not new! The bike project gives you, you have to fix it with them, it means old things. And after that you fix it, it becomes a new bike... not new, but better!

L: But it works?

Z: Yeah it works.

L: That's good, that's important. So you got it 1 month ago?

Z: I get my bike after I came here after 1 month.

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L: Ah OK, so about 3 months ago?

Z: 3 months ago I got my bike.

L: Do you remember much about your experience at the bike project? You said you had to go in and fix it up? I dunno, do you remember the volunteer that helped you?

- 40 Z: At first there are a lot of bikes there, you've gotta chose what you want to repair it and after that you chose by yourself and you're gonna fix it with someone who's volunteered there but who knows how to work. So you gonna help them is how you know whatever you know, and you fix together and they bring you some form and I filled it out and I sign on it that I take the bike and that's it.
- L: Did you know much about bikes before? How to fix them?
- Z: Nothing, I never do like that but was nice to...
- 45 L: Do you know how to fix little bits?
- Z: Yeah little bits. But before I never even touched a bike. So now it's really nice.
- L: Did you have a bike in Ethiopia?
- Z: When I was a little boy I had a bike. And I always ride it and I break it every time, my father stopped buying for me when I was like 8 or 9 years I stopped riding bikes.
- 50 L: Have you had to go back to the project for repairs?
- Z: Yeah every Wednesday and Thursday, mostly on Thursday.
- L: Have you yourself had to go back for repairs?
- Z: Yeah because of my chain was so old, it was broken all the time. I go there and I ask them to swap the bike and they told me it's impossible. So I just repair it, nice, nice.
- 55 L: Cool, good to hear. Do you want to tell me a bit about your bike? What style is it?
- Z: The colour? I don't know in English what colour it is... [goes to find a green coloured toy nearby] The frame is like that...
- L: Green!
- Z: It's kind of like that.
- 60 L: So it's a green bike.
- Z: It's a green bike. It's kind of tall, but it fit me. It's kind of old but still works. I wish to change it because mostly when I ride it the chain still have some sounds like gah gah gah. I don't like that. But there is a lot of peoples on the list if you go there and you ask them to swap they told you there is a long list.
- 65 L: Yeah it's difficult. Is it a mountain bike?
- Z: No just a city bike.
- L: Do you have a name for it? Does it have a name on it? Do you personally have a name for it?
- Z: [Laughs].
- L: Not everyone does! Do you ever clean it? Do you ever do little things to keep it nice?
- 70 Z: Not really, no.
- L: Have you added any bits to it? Customised it? Pimped it? Ivan, another member here, was telling me how he's pimped his bike.
- Z: I never do that.
- L: Do you most of your friends have bikes as well?
- 75 Z: Yeah they have.
- L: Do you ever go for rides for fun, for pleasure?
- Z: Yeah sometimes we go because we no working so we don't have anything to do. Sometimes we take our bike and have fun and back home.
- L: Where do you like to go?

80 Z: The centre, sometimes we go to Bedminster.

L: You're bike it hasn't been stolen, no one's kicked it when it's been locked, damaged?

Z: I think it's because it's old so nobody wants it! So nobody test me... Once my friend have good bike and he lost his key so I tell him to lock his bike with my bike because nobody's going to take it, and nobody did take it! So it's so surprising.

85 L: That's helpful, kind of. You've never had a crash or an accident?

Z: Once I had a crash on the subway, just where is kind of like this [slopes arm]. When I come out she come on my front, she also got a bike and we like crash.

L: Did you hurt yourself?

Z: Not much, just a little bit. My hand was problem [wriggles thumb], after that I was fine.

90 L: When you're riding a bike, do you think about anything in particular? Do you feel relaxed or do you think about your life or is there anything particular you think about?

Z: Sometimes you feel happy and you smile when you ride a bike. And sometimes you feel bad, you think about your family back home, about your kids, what will happen. Once I got a delivery and I go to the post office and I open it and I was so shocked. I thought it was about they refuse me, about my case from Home Office. And I didn't know how write it. I was just sitting on my bike and was thinking about that and I passed the traffic light but there was no accident. I realised I had to stop and walk and just keep going. Sometimes you feel something bad it's better to stop the bike and walk.

95

L: What is a typical day for you? Where do you go? You come here, do you volunteer places?

100 Z: I try to go to the college many times. Once I came here three days in a week. Sometimes I go to the library and go back home. I go to the college and ask them to do some course and they told me I had to be 6 months in the country and I already did. I go to the college and they say you have to get some paper to go to this college, if you don't have the paper you have to pay. But we don't have any money, we just get £35 in a week we have to use it, that's it. We try to contact with them, they said the rule was changing in this year because last year was so free. If you're in NASS [National Asylum Support Service] house or Jobseeker doesn't matter. Now if you are in NASS you have to pay, if you are in Jobseeker Allowance and you've got the paper, you pay like £70 for one year for ESOL class.

105

L: Sorry, which class?

110 Z: ESOL [English for Speaker of Other Languages], English, maths, IT together. If you are in NASS house, it means you don't have a paper and you're waiting a result. In that situation you have to pay the same, ask to the college a loan, after that if they pay you 75% you have to pay 25%. I'm still waiting, I just asked the support from the college, and they say you have to wait.

L: Which college is that? Ashley Down?

Z: College green.

L: Is there a college there?

115 Z: Yeah.

L: I didn't know. Do you find there are things that you do now you have a bike that you couldn't do before?

120 Z: Sometimes I go just to the centre, just by bus. Now I feel good to go anywhere I want and sometimes I was going to the small shops and that is expensive there. But now I get my bike I can go to the big one Tesco and shop in there so it's better to save money also.

L: Did you used to get buses in the past?

Z: No it's quite expensive. Sometimes when I feel so tired I take one bus but not much because my house is in Horfield. I come to the centre, it's so far from the centre and it's hill. So hilly.

L: There's always hills in Bristol. Do you find you can be more flexible? You have to plan less?

125    Z: No, it's still the same.  
      L: OK I think that's all, cheers.

**James Lucas**

**29/09/2011 – Bristol Bike Project, Hamilton House, City Road, Bristol.**

**Interviewer: Louis Devenish (L)**

**Interviewee: James Lucas (J)**

5

L: So James, when did you start the Project [The Bristol Bike Project]?

J: December 2008, it was. Not long before Christmas.

L: Was there a particular catalyst or an initial intention?

10 J: Yeah, there were a few things really. It'd be in South America, in Colombia, doing bits of voluntary work there and there was a group and the way they did things was nice, the way they, sort of, got the community involved in rebuilding, building houses for people. And the idea of 'sweat equity' as well.

L: Could you just explain 'sweat equity'?

15 J: It's kind of less of, sort of, a financial motivation but that you're committed to doing something and putting in your energy and hard work and you're dedicated to doing it. And they... it kind of worked around the community, normally it was small villages where they were building. So one in a neighbourhood, so one group would build a house and then help another so everyone would help each other out sort of thing. And it just felt like a really nice way of going about... of going about that sort of thing, you know. Quite an empowering way of doing it, rather than just large teams of volunteers from overseas coming in and doing something and then leaving again. I dunno, I think it's quite disempowering in a way. It strikes me as that anyway. I really liked that and also becoming aware of about displaced people and what it means, the word refugee. Which prior to being out there I didn't have much of an idea about; it wasn't really on my radar, you know, what a problem it is. In Colombia, it's like the second country – Sudan is the first, apparently – but Colombia is the second  
20 for number of displaced people 'cause of the civil war there.

25

L: So that's sort of within the borders?

J: Yeah, actually within its own country because of the war which has been pushed further and further out into the countryside. So you've got all these campesino people then who are then having to leave their land and move elsewhere, more often than not coming to big cities where there's poverty and  
30 you know.... So I was becoming aware of those things. Definitely something for me was there and then I came back here and started volunteering at the Welcome Centre [Bristol Refugee Rights drop-in centre], which supports refugees and asylum seekers. And obviously was then really exposed to it and what it means. At the same time myself and my good friend Colin had done a bicycle ride to Norway to do like a job for a friend out there. For me it just got me really excited about being on a bike again, and what the freedom and independence that can give you. I talked to Colin about the idea of setting some sort of bike project up and then I was working at the centre, the Welcome Centre, and became aware of the need for mobility for the people there. A lot of the housing for asylum seekers, even people who get refugee status, tends to be out the city but then a lot of the activities are in the inner city. So people were walking for hours every day.

35

40 L: Yeah, I was gonna say. At that time, how were people getting about? Did some of them have bikes, had they bought cheap full suspension bikes or whatever? Or were they literally just walking for hours?

J: Walking, just everyone, just walking because obviously can't afford to get on a bus. Bus fares are so expensive, especially in Bristol.

45

L: Bristol's particularly bad.

J: *Yeah*. It is. So everyone was walking, I don't even remember seeing... wow maybe the odd one bike there. Now they've got bike stands.

L: I went this morning...

J: Oh cool.

50 L: ...for the first time. Really like such an inspiring place.

J: Yeah it's great isn't it. It's such a lovely place.

L: It's got such a nice buzz to it. It feels like a place wanna be.

J: Yeah, and hopefully you saw lots of bikes outside.

55 L: Yeah, so full! I reckon... there are about 7 or 8 racks or something and each one was full and some had 3 or 4 bikes clamped to each other and then they were spilling out onto the street. It's really good.

60 J: No it is good and as I said, before when I went there I maybe saw one bike you know. So it was an obvious necessity, like it was something we could do here in the community, and not overseas – there's loads of bike projects that do stuff with overseas. So it was nice to feel like we could do something actually here so Colin and I started doing it in my sister's garden in Montpelier. I just put posters up and they just started flooding in, you know, unwanted bikes – it's such a huge resource, that's the other thing, it's massive. People wanna give their bike they no longer want somewhere, on the whole anyway. And then it just went from there, and then I was storing them at my house, like I said before to the other chap, I had like 15 bikes in my flat at one point, and was literally climbing  
65 over them to get into bed. And so I was like OK I can't carry on like this. And also from a practical point of view people need to come somewhere to maintain the bike as well. And also now people need to come down to work on the bike with us, whereas before Colin and I were just taking bikes down to there and giving them to people, which just wasn't the way to do it. So yeah that was ... a bit longwinded.

70 L: No it's cool. Do you know if there's a similar project elsewhere in the UK? Because there are plenty of community bike projects, but the thing is the Bristol Bike Project strikes me a bit particular. Do you know if there are others?

J: There are definitely other bike projects, we've had lots of people get in touch with us asking about setting one up and how we did it and stuff. Which is cool, and I hope that it's sort of...

75 L: Because it is a good model, it seems to work well.

J: Yeah I think it is a good model. It's quite complicated as well ermm, there are other bike projects definitely.

L: There's one in Glasgow or something, I don't know whether it does a similar thing or not.

80 J: There are a few, but they're all... trying to think of ones... there's nothing which is quite as particular as what we're doing, or that covers as much as we're doing now. Not that I'm aware of.

L: Something that seems particularly good about this project is the fact that it, quite rarely, combines a socially just focus but at the same time promoting sustainability. I mean was there ever a consideration of using anything other than a bike in terms of promoting mobility. Or did it just seem like the obvious thing?

85 J: It just seemed like the obvious thing. Because we'd just come back from cycling to Norway. We were so fired up about, for both of us, it was the first proper touring we'd done on the bike. We were just so, like, this is great. It just felt like the obvious thing, Colin had the mechanical skills, of which I had pretty much next to nothing – and still compared to a lot of people still have very few. I was more interested in the social side of what it could do and still now I'm really interested in how the project's worked out, in terms of promoting a more socially just community in that respect so  
90 everyone has mobility. But also within the space itself, how I think it's great for people to have direct

contact with people from all walks of life. I think it's the only way you build stronger communities, like that.

95 L: Yeah. I first came down to the project about 18 months ago and then I went away for about 10 months. It was pretty impressive to see how it physically grew. The thing is, it's getting more complicated but it's kind of a necessary change isn't it. You very much want it to be social enterprise?

100 J: Yeah and it is. We established as a community interest company earlier in the year. It's sort of formalising it but without losing that grassroots thing which is really where it's at still. But it's sort of inevitable that it's gonna grow because we were saying yes to everything in a way and now as a result we're working with 40-odd organisations that are referring people because we... originally it was just with the Welcome Centre. It was very simple in that way and straight forward.

L: Have you had to make any compromises?

105 J: Yeah we have. I mean I'm not doing a day a week just admin stuff because of the growing amount of things that are going on. I'm not always sure that's necessarily what I wanna be doing but someone needs to do at the moment. I also think that like it's hard to have as much time for people as Colin and I used to when it was just him and I. It was nice to feel that there was more time to give to people coming down whereas now because there's such a lot of people I feel sometimes that is jeopardised a little bit, which is a shame, but kind of inevitable.

110 L: I mean Seb said to me the other day, it's actually strange but you almost do fewer appointments per week now on Earn-a-Bike, or is that not necessarily true?

115 J: Well something that's definitely happened, I just spoke to someone earlier about it from the Salvation Army is that because we're working with such a breadth of organisations now, ermm and people referring to us through the website on the contact form, you know, and we get back to them. It... a lot of the people we work with have chaotic lifestyles so we do get cancellations – it happens a lot, one this morning, for example – but like today we've worked with 6 people and last week I think it was 3 or 4, it averages out. We tend to book more appointments now on the basis that someone's not going to turn up. It was much more straight forward, with the Welcome Centre it was easy. We were like there's three people coming over whatever, they're definitely here because we had that direct contact on the day. Whereas now we're booking appointments a month in advance.

L: Yeah I think the forward planning is tricky.

125 J: Yeah it's tough. And this was something I was just talking to a guy at the Salvation Army about. I said to him: until you guys, at your end, have sorted out more of a strategy of making sure people are turning up I'm not going to continue to book Earn-a-bike sessions for you at the moment. They need to come to us. I was saying that possibly what needs to happen is that they need to accompany their client down here.

L: The Project, another sort of change that seems to be happening, is it's necessarily moving away from being completely volunteer run. Is that a necessary change?

130 J: Yep very necessary. For me how I see it with the voluntary thing is great and that's why the project is where it's at today. erm... But it's difficult, you know, it's like how much can you delegate when it's all volunteer run? How much are you sure things are gonna get done? The commitment is different... well it is and it isn't... I dunno. It's erm...

L: Is it maybe less a case of commitment and more a sort of a responsibility?

135 J: Yeah, accountability. Who's accountable for these things. So by saying now right, Henry is overseeing second hand bike sales, Seb is doing the paid repairs, you know, Jamie's looking at hire bikes, I'm doing a day a week admin – all these paid roles for one or two days a week. It's totally necessary because you can say he's accountable for this, I'm accountable for that. If the project's going to be sustainable then that has to happen. And then obviously also with the fact that people can't do everything for nothing, it's you know the...

140 L: the crushing reality of life...



J: Yeah it is. And why not be able to generate some employment for the core team of people, and so I think that's the other way of keeping the project sustainable is by needing a core group who are here a lot. So I'm really happy about that.

145 L: I sort of have two questions relating to that. One, I mean, the workshop has a really... one of the special things about it, when you talk to anyone and you feel it yourself, is the diversity and the inclusive, welcoming nature of it. And it very much feels like a community project as in everyone in the community contributes. It seems to be a massive part of it. Tricky if anything meant that you move away from that.

J: It would be.

150 L: Personally, do you feel a particular ownership over the project or do you feel it's just something you happened to start and just let go?

155 J: Yeah definitely that more. I definitely don't feel an ownership, more just a kind of excitement at the inclusive nature of it. And I like to think that's something that Colin and I, we created that, and have nurtured. I, especially, I've been really... for me that's the most important thing about the project is the fact that it feels inclusive and that it is about involving the whole community and that it's welcoming. Yeah, so, if that wasn't to be there I wouldn't be interested in it as a project. Even if it, you know, 'cause I feel like that is such an important part of it. And the process of how the bikes go out to people, is important as the fact that they're going out, if that makes sense. Otherwise we'd just be doing them up and handing them out but it's about involving people.

160 L: Is there quite a strong ethos that underpins the project? The terms that you use seem quite carefully chosen – 'Service User' and the 'Earn-a-Bike' sessions – there's the 'sweat equity' thing in there but there's also a sort of involvement thing. Is that important?

J: Yeah Absolutely key that.

L: And I've seen the two quotes you have up on the wall. Well the proverb...

165 J: Yeah that's right. It's such a good proverb that one when I came across it. For me it sums exactly how it works, or should work, the project. I... yeah, no definitely Louis, like I say the process is so important. It's got to be empowering, you know, that's the thing. If people just came in and we did it all for them or if we just handed out bikes, it's really a disempowering way of doing it. Sometimes I still... we don't always get it right. Sometimes we do too much for people, or getting that balance is tricky. But it is absolutely key to the project and also to its success and like people wanting to come back and supported volunteers like David and Dean who's in there now. Yeah, come on, come and get involved and we'll support you with this, if I don't know how to do this I'll ask someone, if you don't know how to do then you've gotta feel comfortable to ask. It's all about feeling comfortable in the environment and there not being any competitive nature. Because I think a lot of workshops can breed that sort of "I know more than you" or "you know more" and create a hierarchy without knowing it. And I think we've managed to not do that, and by not having people who are the boss.

L: And there are the women's bike sessions as well.

J: Yeah, Monday nights, yeah. And we're starting a volunteer's night now, Matt and Giacomo are gonna start that one.

180 L: A volunteer's night?

J: Which is gonna be... which you might be interested at helping out actually, man, 'cause you've... but that's gonna be on an evening, like the bike kitchen but it's gonna be purely for volunteers who want to work for the project and help for the project. 'Cause we're just finding the capacity on the daytimes is reached. We can't keep.... yeah.

185 L: You've said you work with a massive range of organisations, referral organisations now, but how do find you judge who merits? I imagine it's quite tricky. Do you have... do you rely on the other organisations to make that assessment?

J: We do really. So the contact form on the website they have to now, when they contact us actually give some information about why their client would benefit from owning a bike. But that is it, really, there is no more assessment than that. It's sort of giving people the benefit of the doubt really which is much nicer way of being, you know. And something that I think we do as a space. And sometimes it is tricky; sometimes things come up and we're like hang on a minute, does this person really... could they afford to go and buy a cheap bike somewhere? Or this or that. And then I guess it comes back to... then the process is even more important 'cause that's what their experience of the project is. What it's about sometimes, well no all the time. In terms of the balance with the actual bike itself.

Yeah it's a tricky one that, especially on Wednesdays when people just turn up at the door and are like, you know, I'm living in this hostel and I... generally we will work with people who it's clear they couldn't afford to fix it anywhere else to keep people mobile but again it's done in a way that they've really gotta come in and get their hands dirty with the support from us. But then people come in and say I'm on benefits and stuff like that, well hang on, what are our criteria? That's one of the things at the moment we're needing to reassess 'cause there's a bit of confusion around that. But having the bike kitchen on a Thursday night, which is £4 for the tools and stuff, but then that's meant to be aimed at people who have some mechanical experience. We don't wanna just send people who have not done that before. So yeah it's a tough one, Louis.

L: It's always gonna be tough, there's no real sort of solution... I was wondering, you got the award from the Observer. Do you find that has made a tangible difference to life at the project? I mean you received some money for it but beyond the grant do you find the recognition helps? Or is it just a nice addition?

J: It's been a nice addition, yeah definitely on the ground no tangible difference. Part from the £2000 Timberland gave. Timberland want to continue like a working relationship with the project and get us involved the other events, possibly at the stores they've got in Bristol. Helping to raise awareness about it. So that would be a bit more tangible. But it was nice, the most exciting thing for me with winning that was felt like wow that people would be more aware of it and then more likely to start their own bike project in their own city, you know. That is what excites me most about it.

L: Do you see the existence of the project as a response to a lack of support from the state? Say, in an ideal world, would the project not exist?

J: I think aspects of it wouldn't exist if there was the support there. Hmmm maybe, interesting one that. I think the more peripheral stuff that goes on, the bike kitchen, the women's night, the kind of feel of the DIY ethic and skill sharing side of it would still exist, or there's definitely a place for that, even if you haven't got people who need mobility but can't afford it. So if that was covered because of the way it was run, but I still think the other parts would exist 'cause I think there's increasing, there's a strong DIY ethic – and there always is around bikes, much more so than cars in a way because they're simpler and less costly to fix up yourself and do. So I think that side and the community feel of it all.

L: But it wouldn't be the same if the state provided free bicycles?

J: No.

L: It might function, but it wouldn't have the same... charm.

J: No it wouldn't, and how seriously people would take it I don't know. In terms of whether the bikes cost something or were free. And the sustainability in terms of the maintenance side. I don't know... but it definitely wouldn't have the same charm, like you say, or kind of resonance that I think the project... people coming to the project should have as an experience.

L: I think we're nearing the end. From your dealings over the last couple of years, initially what are the principle challenges that refugees face? Or rather where do you think personal mobility ranks among those, do you think it's a really, really major one?

J: Yeah I think it is. It is a pretty major one, definitely. Being mobile is really important for people. Because life's so much easier being able to get around, getting to college to learn English, to study,

which could then hopefully lead to employment once they do have refugee status. And also the other thing, being able to stay in touch with friends, they could make friends here in the city but then live miles away from them. To keep that happening, to be able to foster friendships, to grow friendships with people because they can get to places. I think mobility is really high up on the list of necessary things. Sometimes I worry about creating a dependence on something. I was thinking about that the other day. 'Cause once you have a bike, and you're used to having a bike, the idea of walking becomes quite hard, even with friends of mine I know or for myself, you get used to having that mobility, speedy mobility. As soon as you then don't have it.... in some ways it creates a bit of a dependence on having a bike but that's no bad thing.

L: In some of the little bits of reading that I've already done I've heard... there are relatively few critical voices in handing out bikes in the sense that they're environmentally sustainable and quite cheap to maintain but I have heard critiques that it's quite prescriptive and it could also perpetuate a kind of underclass. Almost branding like you have a bike because you can't afford a car. I have heard that critique.

J: That's such bullshit isn't it. Increasingly, that's exactly what has to change. It is happening. I was talking to someone about that just this morning. Rob who'd been travelling through Asia and China on a bike, and how there it still is very much seen as a poor man's transport, you know, so people generally have motorbikes. And then the state has tried to encourage electric bikes as a happy medium because of the pollution, and he was talking, it was really interesting actually. Yeah, definitely it has to change, that notion of cars being proper, that's what adulthood is and that's freedom. You grow out of a bike and into a car. And that's what happened for me as well, I was always encouraged to learn to drive 'cause that's really where it's at, to be independent and free. And we just need to get away from that, that's the only way it's gonna happen. So I think by getting more people out on bikes, you know, I mean it can only be a good thing, especially, just cycling around Bristol this morning, it's a great feeling seeing loads of bikes, you can really feel a community even when you're out and about. So yeah I definitely I don't feel it's in that sense....

L: Finally, and I guess most interestingly. You touched on it a little bit already but what, to your eyes, what appear to the principle benefits of the service users once they receive the bikes? You said they go to college, for example.

J: Getting to college is important. Getting to appointments is another massive one, especially people on rehab programmes, that's always a thing which comes up in the contact form: "it will make it much easier for my client to attend meetings regularly", to get there because they can't afford it otherwise. So I'd like to think it would help towards someone's rehabilitation in that way, on a very kind of practical, getting to meetings. But also the headspace it can create, that sense of independence and hopefully the nature by which it's happened is an empowering thing. Voluntary work, people doing bits of voluntary work.

L: Yeah I've noticed that actually.

J: That's another part of it. What's the other thing? Oh yeah, actually being able to stay in touch with friends, having that sociability it can lead to. I remember a long time ago, about a year ago, this one chap, who was on an alcohol rehabilitation, that same weekend he did Bristol's biggest bike ride around the city and so his support worker came in the following week and said how great it was because all weekend he'd been out on his bike and hadn't touched any alcohol. He'd got a real buzz out of being physically engaged like that. I think that's really exciting.

I think also just aside from having the bike, if the experience has been good then people just coming back and wanting to be involved and wanting to help other people and then it's a really cyclical thing. For me that's really sustainable then – the same people you're helping then come back and help other people who are in their position. So I'm really always keen to see that working more but then that throws up it's own problems. You need people then to support them but that's...increasingly I'm interested in that side of the project, being able to support people in that way, like David. People really enjoy feeling like the space is open and inclusive like that.

L: It's pretty tricky to ascertain, I guess, but do you have a sense of how used the bikes get? Do you know of many negative experiences? I've heard of loads that get stolen but in many ways that's not the fault of the user.

290 J: Not always, generally bikes get stolen because they don't lock them up, they mainly just leave them outside the shop for a second and just run in or they lock it to itself and... which is frustrating that, really frustrating. The other negative thing, I guess being hit by cars. That happens a few times, people come in and say a car hit me and took off. Something else I was gonna say about that... maybe it wasn't, maybe it was just the bikes being stolen. I think that's the most negative. Is that what you  
295 meant? When someone takes a bike away and has a negative experience?

L: Do you know – it's pretty much impossible to tell but – if some of them just get neglected?

J: They get neglected through over-use and not coming back to be maintained enough...

L: But that is a good in a sense – it means they're using them.

J: And we have bikes coming in who like... where the drivetrain has just been completely worn out  
300 because it's been used so much. You speak to people and they say well I use it every day, and you have to explain well this is completely worn out, we're gonna have to change all of this. And it's great you know. It's great seeing people who I recognise from 2 or 3 years ago and they come back with the same bike and it's still going. That's really satisfying. And you know they're looking after it. And I love it when people just come and say I just need to put some air in my tyres.

305 L: Do you see a lot of people coming in or leaving who have a real attachment or a pride in their machines?

J: Definitely. Absolutely. If it's done right I think the Earn-a-Bike that's what it should encourage, people to take that sense of ownership and pride in this thing they've just spent an afternoon or morning working on. It's sort of like a commitment to looking after it, or that's what it should be  
310 anyway. It's really important that, like a sense of ownership. And the only way to do that is for them to... as we do it, for them to be working on it themselves with the support. But yeah it's really nice to see that. People come in occasionally cleaning their bike up, wanna keep it looking good.

L: Cleaning... someone who cleans their bike, it seems to be quite an indicator of how much they care about their bike.

315 J: Yeah I think it can be actually. It's nice to see that, who come back. It's important, people feel like they're excited by having a bike and wanna look after it. We try and encourage that with the Earn-a-Bike, at the end of the session, we say: "Don't leave it 6 months, if you come back every couple of months we can keep an eye on it". It's less work for us then, so they don't come back and the bottom bracket's wobbling about, we can do it.

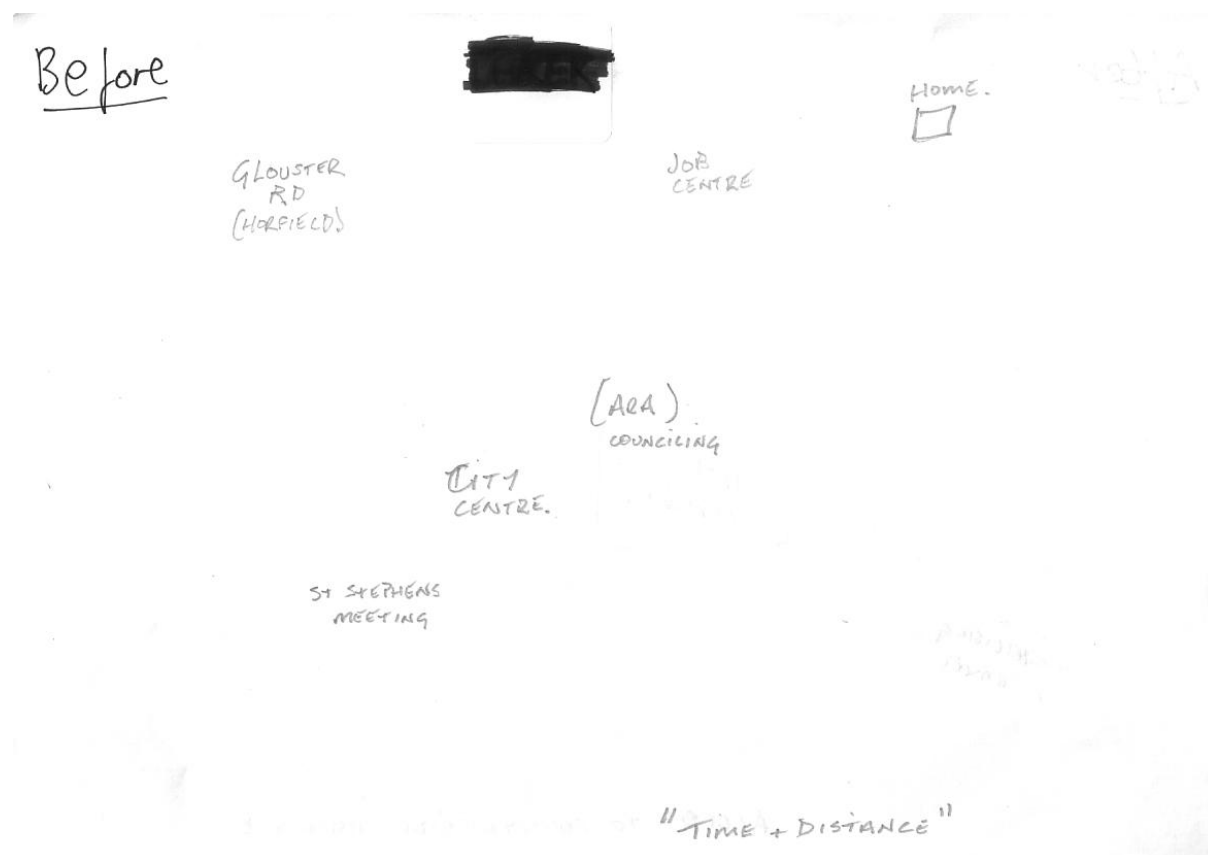
320 L: Well I think that's it. Thanks a lot.

## Appendix C – Sketch Maps

### Bahir



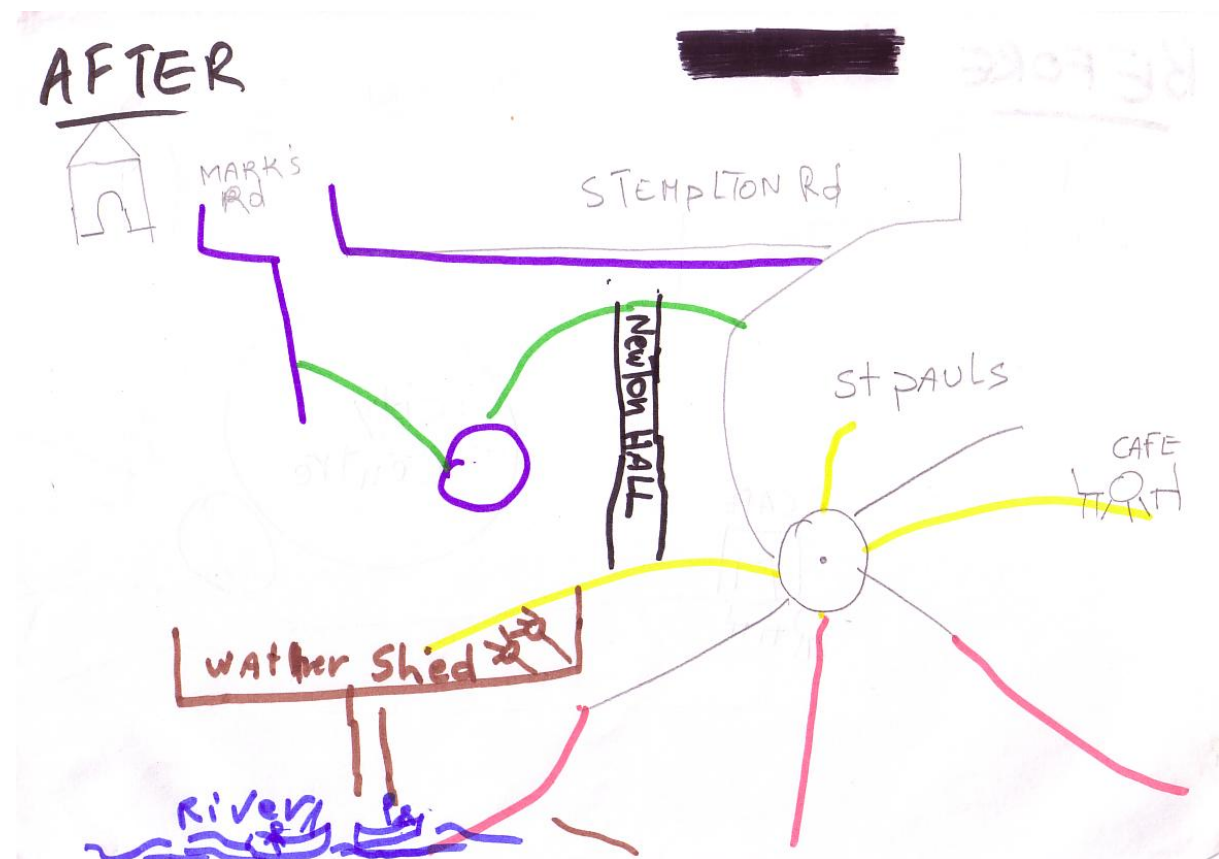
Derek



Irvin

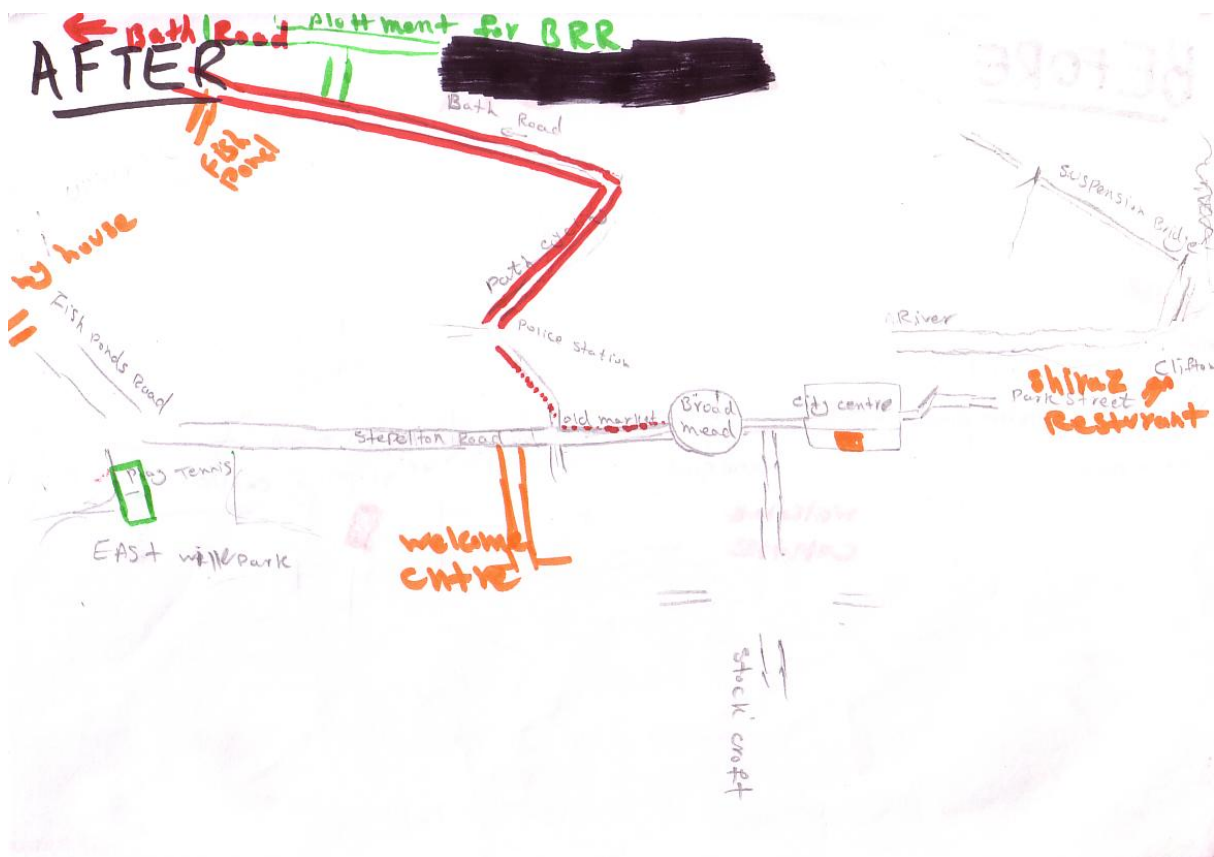
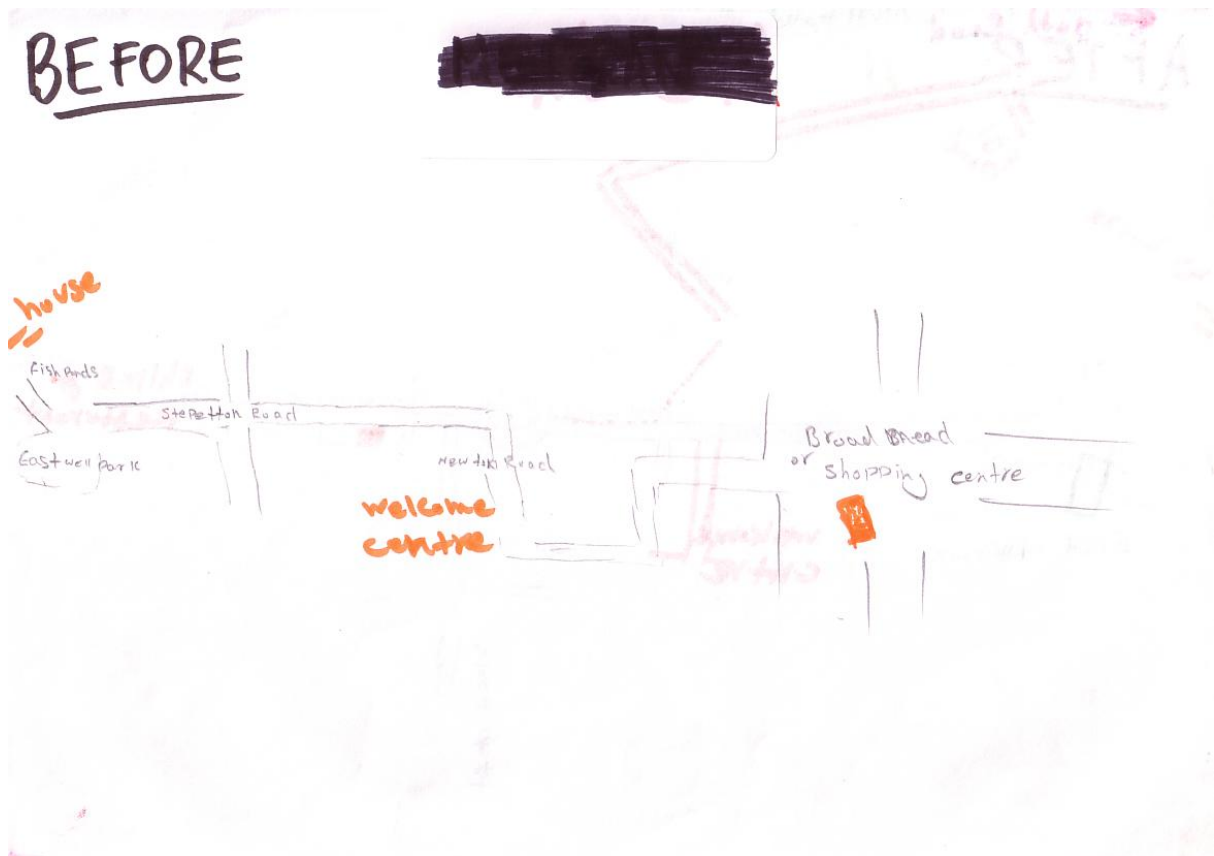


Marcel

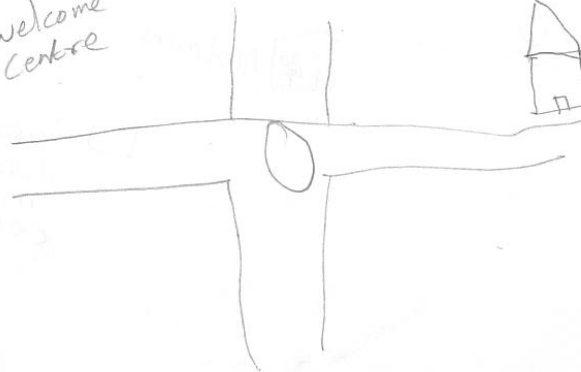




Mehran



Narain

BEFORECome  
by  
walk for 4 days

House

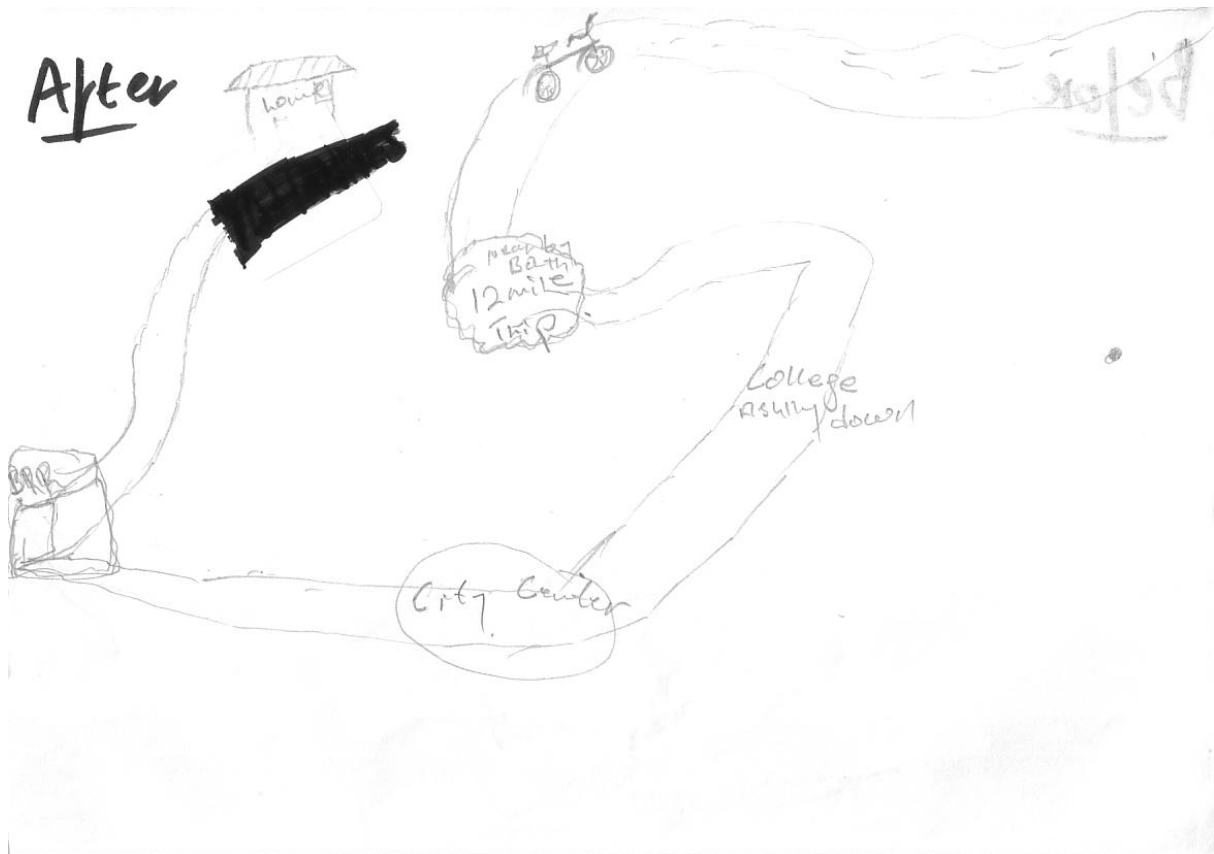
AFTERNow am working  
for 6 day  
always  
travel by bike

Disabled  
drop  
in  
centre



**Yohannes**

Yohannes had a bike when he arrived in Bristol, which was stolen; he subsequently 'earned' a bike from BBP (see his interview in appendix B). As a result he did not do a 'Before' map.



Zewedu

