

Bicycle trips break teens' dropout cycle

BY EMMA GILCHRIST, CALGARY HERALD APRIL 3, 2009



Six Calgary teens went on this cycling trip in Norway last summer.

Photograph by: Courtesy, Two Wheel View

At this time last year, Kacie de Wit was being picked on so much at school that she was thinking about dropping out.

"I'd been going down a wrong road, flirting with danger," de Wit says.

Then she applied to go on an inter-national bike trip with Calgary nonprofit group Two Wheel View.

"I didn't expect to get in," she says. "But then I got the letter."

As it turns out, spending two-and-a-half weeks cycling around Norway last summer was just what the doctor ordered for de Wit.

"My confidence has gone up so I'm not picked on as much at school, and I don't flirt with danger anymore," says the Grade 9 student at H. D. Cartwright school in Dalhousie.

The 15-year-old has improved her marks and is now torn between her dream of being a criminal profiler or a journalist.

"The trip taught me that even though it feels like I just can't do anything, that sooner or later I will succeed," de Wit says. "Now I make better life choices."

That's exactly the kind of result Two Wheel View aims to achieve by taking kids at risk of dropping out

of school on challenging cycling odysseys in Norway and Argentina.

"Our hope is to get them back on track," says Two Wheel View founder Rick McFerrin.

Last year, 28 Calgary teens applied for the international trips, but only eight were given spots.

That's because the expeditions are entirely funded through donations and cost between \$3,000 and \$4,000 per kid.

With the airline tickets being the biggest expense, one wonders why the groups don't just stick closer to home?

"The unique part about our program is that we're taking kids well beyond their comfort zone to a new culture," McFerrin explains. "They're reinserted into their communities as leaders because they've done something no one else has."

Besides, when you're in the Arctic Circle in Norway and you want to drop out, well, you can't.

The organization has smaller scale programs, too, including an after-school program, called Earn-a-Bike, which runs in three Calgary locations.

In Falconridge, Castleridge and Rundle Manor, 45 Calgary kids learn how to build and repair bikes in two-hour sessions, earning credits toward a bike of their own.

"We're at capacity for the spaces that we have," McFerrin says. "We could definitely do more if there was more space and money. There's a huge interest."

That's why the organization is holding a fundraiser on April 9 at 7 p. m. at the Palomino. (For more information on how you can contribute, see the sidebar.)

The funds will allow Two Wheel View to continue operating local cycling field trips, the Earn-a-Bike program and to help local teens go on international excursions.

How You Can Help

Two Wheel View is a charitable organization that provides leadership, environmental and cultural education programs to young people through their participation in bicycle education and expedition programs.

The charity is holding its annual fundraiser, including live music, food, drink and a silent auction, on April 9 at 7 p. m. at the Palomino (109 7th ave. S. W.)

The goal is to raise \$15,000 for Two Wheel View's Calgary programs. Visit twowheelview.org to buy tickets to the event.

Here are a few other ways you can help: - Donate a silent auction item. - Make a cash donation. - Donate a bike. - Donate your time by volunteering for the earn-a-Bike program.

Call 403-698-9418 for more information or to donate.

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