



bike host 2016



bike host



Bike Host matches up newcomers who are open to cycling with mentors who ride regularly. In large and small group activities, Bike Host participants practice their communication skills and learn about civic engagement, all while exploring Toronto by bike.

Bike Host was created by CultureLink Settlement and Community Services, and is hosted by CultureLink's Community Connections Mentorship Program. The 2016 program matched 55 newcomers with 22 mentors, with the support of our partners, South Riverdale Community Health Centre and the Scarborough Cycles bike hubs at AccessPoint on Danforth and Birchmount Bluffs Neighbourhood Centre. Scarborough Cycles is a project led by the Toronto Centre for Active Transportation, a project of Clean Air Partnership, with partners Cycle Toronto, the Toronto Cycling Think and Do Tank, and CultureLink.

my cycling experience!!!

BY MOMTAZ

After a long gap of 20 years, when I started riding the cycle at the Birchmount Bluffs Neighbourhood Centre it wasn't just the cycling that I fell in love with again. It was the freedom of cycling in public and having no one in the road or sidewalk stare at me and tease for riding a bike as a woman.

I have loved cycling since I was 8 years old. Being raised in a very conservative and middle class family, I was never that fortunate child to have a bike of her own. My younger brother

had one when he wanted and I encouraged him to have his own bike but he never liked cycling. I had to compromise with my tiny money to rent a bike from one of the local vendors for an hour or so (for \$0.07 per hour). Many times I used to sneak out with my grandfather's bike (that was way too big for me). He was aware of it, I learned later. In fact, my whole family knew about

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my cycling hobby, but overlooked until I reached puberty. Then I started having all the eve-teasing [harassment] around cycling in the road.

In the meantime, many girls in my village started to learn how to ride bikes and to rent them. I take the pride in being a trend-setter. At least they know how to ride a bike and use this skill in need. Knowing how to ride a bike may sounds like no big deal in our present society, but it was in a tiny village of a South Asian Country. The fear of being stigmatized and excluded prevented our families from letting us cherish our hobbies. As I grew up, my love of cycling silently faded. However, deep in my heart, it was never erased. In this long gap whenever I had a chance to ride a bike I jumped on it. However, I never owned a bike in my life.

I share this background only to make you understand the depth of my feeling regarding cycling. In the beginning of this summer, I was actually planning to buy bikes for us. Thank god, I learned about Bike Host and took the privilege to have one bike. It was not the fact alone that I got a bike, but, the group and people I met who love cycling. I touched the handlebars

with those amateur hands and tried riding that red Simcoe bike. My hands were shaky and my body was not flexible enough. I asked the person to adjust the seat again and again until I could reach ground with my feet. I knew, I had to allow myself some time. The biggest challenge was to ride home. For not even once I looked back after I started for home. This was it. This was the beginning again. I will not let it be murdered by anyone this time. I have to go on. I may not have that physical fitness now, but I will gain it eventually. I am getting more and more fit every day I ride.

In the beginning, we used to go for a fun ride along the Taylor Creek trail which is close to my home. I was never able to ride the uphill near the entrance in the way back home. Thanks to my mentor who guided me with different biking rules and techniques! Now, I am able to ride that uphill. From enjoying absolute freedom while cycling to being a confident cyclist in the busy roads of Toronto, I am loving everything about cycling. I have discovered my area, neighbourhood and surroundings every day from a new viewpoint. The group riding has enabled me to interact with the other members. Without being able to bike, I would hardly have known about the beautiful trails around this beautiful city. ■



learning to love biking in toronto

BY JEFFREY TAN

I like biking, and so does my daughter. I began to ride a bike when I was sixteen, and since then I rode almost every day to commute to school and work in Shanghai, China. My daughter learned to ride a bike when she was four years old.

Three years ago, we came to Toronto. During the first two months, I borrowed a bike from my friend to ride for everything, such as shopping and commuting to school. But I found it so different from my experience in Shanghai! First, there are very few streets suitable for biking. Biking beside the cars feels unsafe, while biking on the sidewalk is uncomfortable on account of the bumpy pavement. Second, many intersections have manual button for green lights, which takes more time and makes the biking incoherent. Third, only five months of the year are suitable for biking. Biking in winter is impossible and almost half the year in Toronto is winter, at least compared with the weather in Shanghai.

So I quit biking after I got a driver's license. That is, until I found the email from CultureLink regarding Bike Host. After the orientation, I decided to participate the program in order to gain some knowledge from a mentor, and because my daughter could also get a bike to ride herself.

My mentor, James Rhee, is a nice teacher. We went to Tommy Thompson Park with my daughter and the trail near my home. James told me and my daughter some tips of biking on Toronto roads. I commute by bike twice per week. I find wonderful views of downtown and my community, and I started to love biking in Toronto. The only regret is we don't have more time for biking because my daughter's grandparents come to visit us and we cannot change our vacation plan.

My family has participated in many activities organized by CultureLink in the past two years. Bike Host is the latest and longest program and the most exciting one. I hope I can bike more and more, and my daughter as well. ■

fff (fun filled family) time

BY BISHAN

Does anyone see a bike in the word “Toronto?” I do!

I had never thought I would ride a bike in my 30s, since I never did this in my 20s. But while passing through James Town Library, a CultureLink volunteer drew me into a discussion about Bike Host and encouraged me to join.

First, with a hesitation and slight confidence, I dared to give it a try. After the initial bike training and assessment, I got a signoff that I could ride safely. I rode back 3 km from Eastview Neighbourhood Community Centre watching other cyclists on the road, closely observing them to see if I could learn any tricks from them. Also, resting my knocked-out legs on every occasion I got. Thanks to block after block of red lights in downtown Toronto!

Next day I got a text from my mentor, Elizabeth, inviting me to our first introduction meeting and a ride south to Waterfront Trail. The temperature was in higher 20C, and the

**i have learned
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observe toronto**

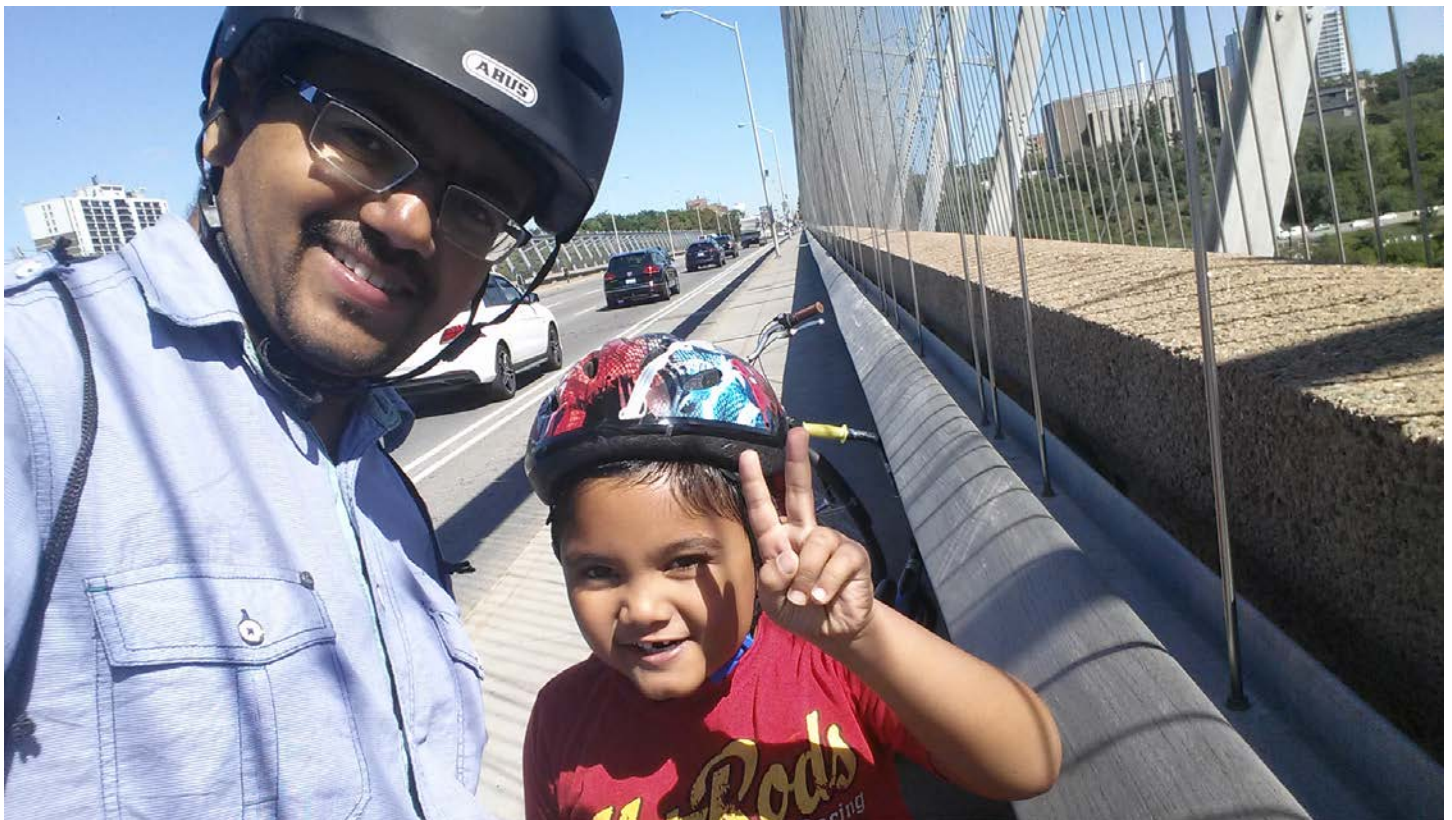
entire bike group was rolling and chatting about places to visit on bikes. My mindset started to change and it did not take long, going from a slight fear and doubt to comfort and fun in riding bike around our community. Last but not least came awareness of biking’s importance.

During this program, I got an opportunity to be introduced to many different places in the city with our assigned mentor. Some of the places are not possible to reach without a bike. Toronto can be beautiful with natural scenic places under the scorching skyline, and also

a well organized infrastructure to make riders feel safe at the core heart of downtown. I felt biking in this summer is also an interesting time to familiarize yourself with the diverse cultures pumping in the heart of Toronto. After a few weeks of regular meetup events, I realized I have gained a lot of skill and knowledge, and appreciate more about my own city.

Another aspect of the program is to get your family moving around and having FFF (fun filled family) time. From biking, to repair camps, to roaming on street festivals offering plenty of activities, I also got to play a role of a bike trainer to my son Rohan. Like me, Rohan has become a confident rider and we are getting more familiar with safe riding skills and rules.

I have learned that biking is a great way to observe Toronto, roaming under a blue sky, observing things around your diverse culture, and finally preserving a healthy spirit, fitness, and friendly Torontonians feeling. ■



bike host ride and picnic on the pan am path

BY KRISTIN SCHWARTZ

One highlight of CultureLink's summer was the *P4K Pathfinding* bike ride and picnic on Sunday July 17. The event began with a ride led by Cycle Toronto along the Pan Am Path, from Warden Station to Morningside Park, mainly by on neighbourhood streets and on car-free trails. At Morningside Park, CultureLink hosted games, kid-friendly activities and a popular picnic, thanks to volunteers with Bike Host and our Playing for Keeps program. Many participants appreciated a second ride led by Scarborough Cycles, from the Park down to Lake Ontario, along a trail following the Highland Creek. The sun smiled as the group discovered and enjoyed the beauty of Toronto's natural spaces.

"P4K Pathfinding Walks, Talks and Rides" is a new program by Friends of the Pan Am Path in collaboration with Playing for Keeps, Cycle Toronto and Jane's Walk. P4K Pathfinding connects young and established leaders to explore Toronto's trails and ravines. Toronto Foundation is the presenting partner of P4K Pathfinding. ■

P4K Pathfinding

Sunday July 17, 2016

Cycle Toronto Rides the Pan Am Path

with CultureLink and Scarborough Cycles, featuring a talk from Jared Kolb & TO35Cycles.

Ride includes picnic, music, & activities at Morningside Park.

Free Event
RSVP required: cyclo.to/panampath

Pickup 1:
11 am MEETING POINT: St. Clair Ravine Park (Warden Station)

Pickup 2:
12 pm MEETING POINT: Kennedy Station

Return Trip:
4 pm MEETING POINT: Morningside Park (Kennedy Station return)

Presenting Partner: TORONTO FOUNDATION
Lead Partners: CultureLink, Friends of the Pan Am Path
Supporting Partners: Scarborough Cycles, Playing for Keeps

Photo Credit: Maria Bell





long rides and new friends

BY KATIE WITTMANN, WITH SAMANEH ZELLI

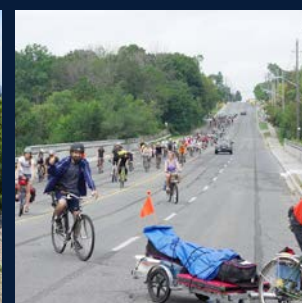
This is my third summer being involved in Bike Host, and it won't be my last. I love seeing the excitement on the mentees' faces when they receive a bike to use for the program. Bike Day is full of memorable moments, and kicks off a season of valuable experiences.

One of my favourite events from Bike Host so far this year was the July 17th ride to Morningside Park. I started the ride from the earliest point – Warden Station – where I met up and rode with a past Bike Host mentee, Amy. We were joined by my co-mentor Sarah, and mentee Samaneh, at Kennedy Station. From there we rode another 10 km to Morningside Park, mostly on trails, and then enjoyed a large group picnic in the park with CultureLink and Cycle Toronto.

We relaxed, ate, and mingled for the afternoon, and then it was time to ride home. Samaneh and Amy rode with Sarah and I (and the larger Cycle Toronto-led group) all the way back to Kennedy Station. While Amy had a lot of experience cycling, this much riding was very new for Samaneh. It was physically challenging for her, but she never gave up! She stayed positive and made it all the way back to the station with us. I was incredibly proud of her. When asked to share some thoughts about Bike Host, Samaneh said this:

"It was such a good experience for me as a new rider. It was the longest route I ever rode. I'm happy about finding new good friends at Bike Host like my mentors."

Though it can be hard to find time for long rides like this, we still get together when possible and learn more about each other while practising English. We're looking forward to more fun events during the program and beyond! ■



enjoying summer with bike host

BY MUSTAFA

When I arrived in Canada this past winter the weather was very cold. I enjoy sports and outdoor activities like walking, cycling and playing soccer with my friends every week, but with snow and cold I could not do anything outside and I felt like I had to stay at home.

In the beginning of spring I started searching for outdoor activities in Toronto. I found a great opportunity through the Bike Host program to make new friends, discover the city and enjoy the summer.

The program started with meeting the great team of volunteers as we gathered as groups with our mentors and were given an overview about the cycling and road rules in Toronto.

The first event was a picnic in the Morningside Park. There were more than 50 cyclists who rode from the park to Lake Ontario! The route was very nice; we went through some amazing wooded areas and cycled along some fabulous roads which I had never imagined would lead to the Lake. Discovering new places around the city by bike has helped me fall in love with Toronto.

Bike Host is a place where you can make new friends, practice English, and explore the city. ■

photography project

BY YVONNE VERLINDEN

As part of the 2016 Bike Host season, we launched a photography project, with funding from the Partnership for Change: RBC Immigrant, Diversity and Inclusion Project at Ryerson University. Participants took pictures of how they used their bicycles and how their bicycles have helped them in their transition to life in Canada. The photographers then met up to discuss their pictures and share their bicycle experiences.

freedom

I took this picture to represent that I used to ride a bus, and now I ride a bike. I wanted to represent independence or a kind of the freedom. At the time, a lot of people were queueing for the bus, and the bus was not there. People are dependent on the TTC, and instead of getting a TTC, they could get a bike, and they could go anywhere on time without wasting their time.



knowledge

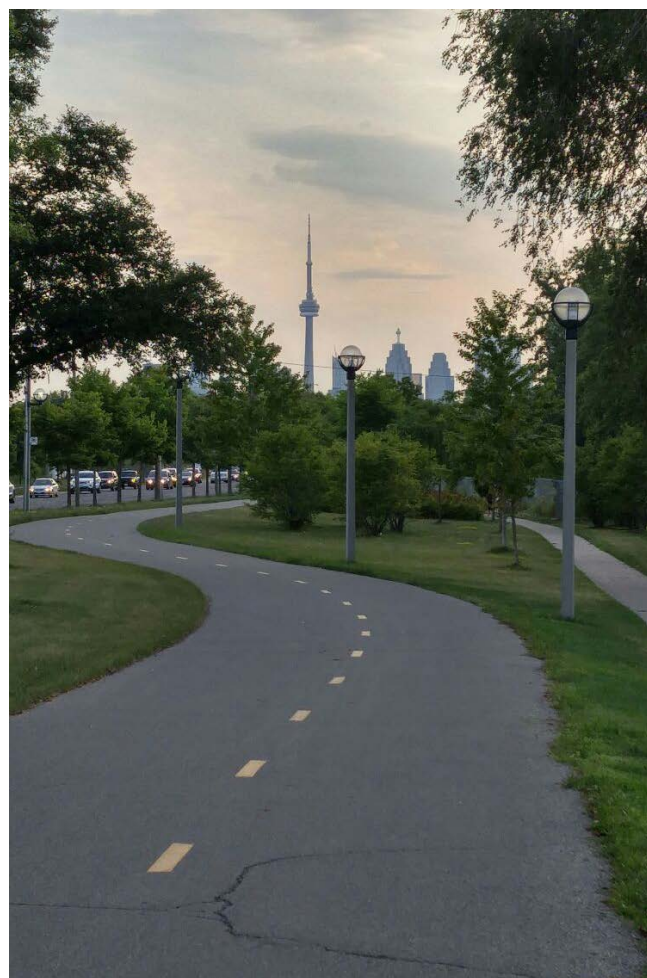
I noticed I look at bicyclists more now. Everytime I walk anywhere, I look at bicycles, how they park it, how they lock it. I look at what bicyclists wear, what kind of helmets - there is their own fashion going there. I never looked at them, never. Now I look, how they turn to the right, to the left, and how they follow the rules.



Esmaeel



Rima Momtaz



Joy

comfort

I felt comfortable right away. It's like part of me, the bicycle. It's like an extension of my arms and legs, as if I'm a centaur.



Esmadeel

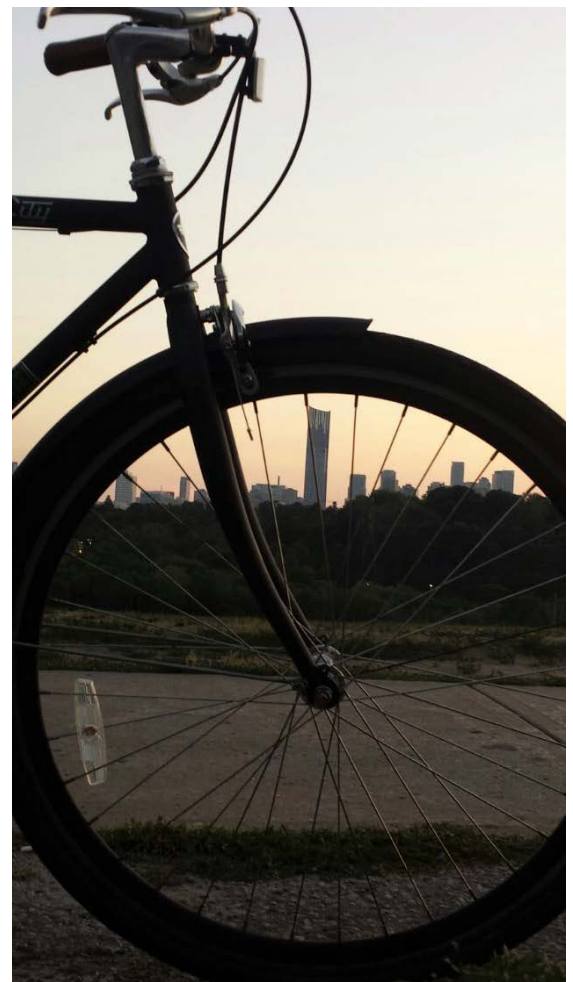


belonging

I feel very comfortable because I feel like I know everything. It's like my country because when I came to Canada, I felt everything is not comfortable, strange, everything is strange. But now I feel everything is comfortable for me, it's like my home. Like back home. ■



Jamila



Bishan Pandey



CultureLink Settlement and Community Services has served Toronto for more than 25 years, guided by our mission:

CultureLink is dedicated to facilitating the active participation and integration of newcomers and the broader community, recognizing the interdependence of these groups in our society. CultureLink works within an anti-discriminatory framework to ensure a respectful, safe and inclusive environment.

We acknowledge the generous support of the funders and partners of Bike Host 2016.



THE RBC IMMIGRANT, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION PROJECT AT RYERSON UNIVERSITY



thanks to

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Scarborough Cycles Mural by Moises Frank at Birchmount Bluffs Neighbourhood Centre