

FEATURES

Alliance also donates several bikes per month that have been recovered from Metro bus racks. Bike Works also gives back to the community by donating refurbished bikes to Treehouse, an organization for foster family support, and Farestart, a program that trains homeless adults to enter the workforce.

Farestart graduates are given their own bicycle and helmet, offering them the freedom of personal transportation and the benefits of good physical health. One class at Bike Works is reserved for the Orion Center, a drop-in center for at risk and homeless youth. Suzanne believes, in addition to other benefits, the structure of the weekly class is particularly helpful. This will be the first work experience for some and many will leave with a bicycle that they earned and repaired themselves.

Earning their own wheels may be the immediate goal for most kids, but their experiential learning results in lifelong benefits. In the age of video games and internet surfing, many kids are missing out on the joy of riding a bicycle and the accompanying mental, physical, and environmental benefits. The Earn-A-Bike program gives many kids the means to earn their own bicycle, while offering practical work skills at the same time.

In addition to learning valuable mechanical skills hands-on, Bike Works' students are encouraged to appreciate their own fitness and health, as well as the independence and responsibility of providing their own transportation. Confidence and self-respect naturally follow increased self-sufficiency, giving

participants a better chance at succeeding in all their endeavors. During instruction and open work hours, teachers and volunteers work closely with each student, conscious of individual learning styles. As jokes and gossip fly, kids learn real skills without even realizing they are working. The informal respect between kids and adults allows them to feel comfortable just hanging out together.

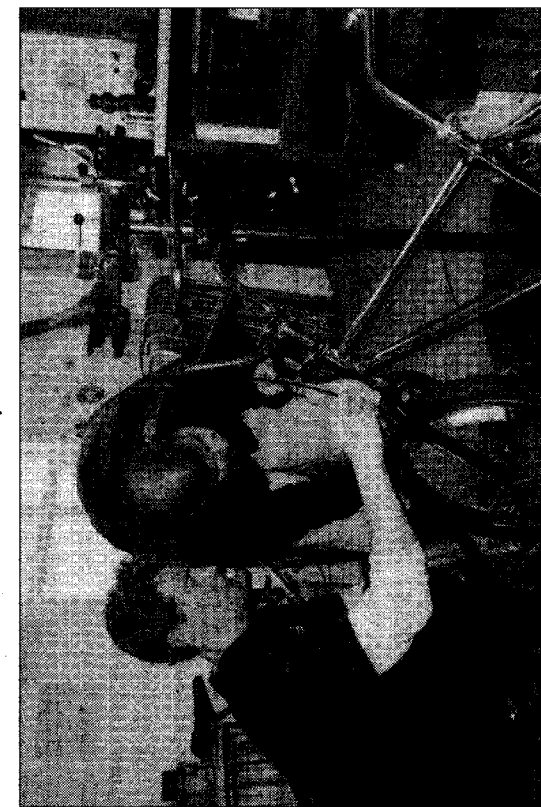


PHOTO BY NICOLE JIM

Chris and Hiram adjust the brakes on a BMX-style bike.

Both Suzanne and Chris are full-time bike commuters, and practice what they preach. During the summer, the Bike Works crew leads weekly rides around Seattle in conjunction with various summer camps, the YMCA, and the Rainier Community Center. The emphasis is on fun, safety, and enjoying the outdoors. Suzanne and Chris do their best to stress the benefits of riding a bicycle for transportation, while being careful not to lecture.

Bike Works is located at 3709 S Ferdinand St., in Seattle's historic Rainier Valley. To get involved as a volunteer or a student (Bike Works offers evening adult classes as well), contact Suzanne at bikeworks@scn.org. The Bike Works full service repair shop operates during normal business hours and the qualified, professional staff provides great service at reasonable prices. The annual bike swap will be held at Genesee Park on May 13 this year, so bring your old bike to sell or trade. Bike Works is always accepting bicycle donations; there is, of course, more demand for BMX and mountain bikes than old ten speeds among teenagers.

