Bike mechanics are about more than just the nuts and bolts of a simple machine. Teaching mechanics also teaches patience, communication, and leadership—skill sets that are needed in today’s job market. Which is why, this past spring, we launched a new Job Skills Training (JST) program.

In partnership with Interagency Academy—a network of alternative Seattle Public Schools serving students who have faced extraordinary challenges in their lives—our first class took on eight students. For 11 weeks, these students learned the ropes of bike mechanics, all the while acquiring the skills needed to become responsible, valued employees in any job. The class was a huge success.

Adrian, one of the students, loves to ride BMX but had never worked on his bike before. “I liked how they actually taught us hands-on work,” he said—a welcome departure from what he’d thought of as school work.

Half of the original graduates were hired to work in our new BikeMobile, and also assisted in teaching the next group of JST students over the summer. Together, the JST program and the BikeMobile provide a long-term pathway for youth to stay engaged as students, mentors, employees, and valued community members.

One graduate, Triston, described his first time teaching bike repair: “It went from me sitting down and listening to me doing the talking. It was cool. I never did anything like that before. Usually I have stage fright. Actually teaching someone about how to do stuff…that was pretty crazy.”

Triston has been working down at the New Holly housing development with the BikeMobile. It is his first “real” job. Lots of kids have been coming by with their bikes in need of some love every week. “If kids don’t have any money, sometimes we won’t charge them. We will have them help us do the work. They can leave knowing something and we leave feeling good about it because we helped out a kid who needed help with his bike,” he explained.

It’s incredible to see a transformation take place in real time. Seeing these youth progress from students to employees to mentors shows us that our program is working. And for students like Adrian and Triston, they’re learning that their skills can help others and contribute to a more just world.
Bike Shop: From Volunteer to Shop Mechanic

Two years ago, Nikki was a novice bike commuter at UW. Instead of writing a final paper for class, her professor gave her the option of doing some volunteer work. She took that opportunity to volunteer at Bike Works.

At first, she helped out in the office, but really, Nikki wanted to learn bike repair. She started coming to our Volunteer Repair Parties, helping to fix bikes, and learning bike repair herself. “When I walked into Bike Works, I felt like I was home.”

Nikki advanced quickly. She started volunteering in the warehouse to support our recycle and reuse efforts. Just as her mechanics skills were improving, a bike shop customer service job opened up for the summer. Nikki applied and got the job!

“I am a much stronger individual now, especially biking ten miles each way to Bike Works and then working on bikes all day. If I can do this, I can do anything,” she said.

Since last summer, Nikki has enthusiastically stepped into other roles, too. She co-taught our Bike Repair 101 classes for adults, and assisted in our new Job Skills Training classes. We’re very proud of Nikki’s growth as a rider, as a mechanic, and as part of the Bike Works family. Way to go, Nikki!

Two volunteers wrenching on a bike at a weekly Volunteer Repair Party. Each year, hundreds of adults volunteer to refurbish bicycles, getting them back on the road and into the community!

Kids Bike-o-Rama: Putting the “Cycle” in Bicycle

In our Earn-A-Bike classes, as well as our adult volunteer programs, youth and adults learn bicycle mechanics while fixing up bikes that are then donated out to other youth in need. Twice a year we give kids aged four to eight a bike and a helmet; we call it the Kids Bike-o-Rama!

Our most recent Bike-o-Rama happened on the same day as our bike giveaway program for adults called Bikes-for-All! A few families were able to get bikes for both kids and parents!

One parent said, “I just want to say thanks so much to you and all of the staff and volunteers that made today a great day for us!! My son picked out a great Schwinn bike, and I got to pick a bike as well. We just got back from our first ride together!”

Seeing kids on their new bikes sporting big smiles is super heartwarming on its own. But it’s also incredible to watch our youth and adult volunteers give away the bikes they’ve worked so hard to repair. Through volunteering, they’re strengthening their connection to their community.

RIDES Club: Girls, Bikes, & Local Food

This past spring we brought back our RIDES Club (Ride, Investigate, Discover the Environment & Society) as an all-girls session! This after-school program focuses on developing riding skills while exploring topics like sustainable transportation, environmental justice, youth leadership, and the values of giving back to your own community.

Five incredible girls made up this past RIDES Club. When asked what they wanted to explore, they said they wanted to learn more about our relationship to food. So we developed a curriculum for them that included visiting local community gardens, markets, and produce stands by bike. All throughout, they grew into stronger, more confident riders.

One of the girls reflected back to an instructor, “You know, you guys inspired me. First I thought I’d try to ride to school for Bike to School Day ‘cause I didn’t think I could actually ride there. Then my friends and I decided to try to ride to school twice a month. Then I realized how easy it is and now I’m going to ride to school at least twice a week.” Let’s hear it for the girls!

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In 2013, we impacted...

- 634 youth
- 4,556 miles ridden
- 64% participation rate
- 4,903 bikes donated

In 2014, we anticipate...

- 700 youth
- 4,500 miles ridden
- 70% participation rate
- 5,000 bikes donated