

BIKE COURSE IN FORT WILLIAM FIRE STATION TO BENEFIT BIRCHWOOD HIGHLAND SERVICE USERS

On the 31st July, Birchwood Highland service users in Fort William are to be the first people to complete the 'refurbish your own bike' training course delivered in partnership with social enterprise Black Bridge Bikes. They will celebrate with an hour-long fun ride around Fort William and then be presented with their certificates by Janet Pringle, Community Fire Officer.

Patrick McGrail said, “I feel a lot more confident about cycling now and I enjoyed learning about cogs and brakes!”

Tony Thynne really enjoyed the course. “I learnt a lot more than I thought I would and I am looking forward to getting out and about around town. This is the first bike I have owned.”

Building on their successful refurbished bike sales in Inverness, Black Bridge Bikes has teamed up with Birchwood Highland, to provide a range of supported training courses for service users who have mental ill health. Together they have developed the first 'refurbish your own bike' training course specifically for people who are interested in bikes and basic maintenance or would just like to have a bike and the freedom they provide. Each participant in Fort William picked a bike that they wanted to work on and then worked on their bikes for 10 weeks at the local Fire

Station. The fire station team has provided a great deal of encouragement to the participants.

Maria Throp, manager of Black Bridge Bikes which is part of Merkinch Development Ventures, said: 'It is estimated that two-thirds of abandoned bikes can be done up again and are much better value and quality than cheap new bikes. We're fighting against our throw-away society and at the same time using the opportunity to turn lives around. There is growing evidence that providing worthwhile work experience in a supported and mentoring environment can have real life changing outcomes. Successfully building your own bike encourages you to actually use your bike, to widen your social networks and also take more exercise. These benefits, especially social inclusion are a crucial part of an individual's journey to recovery'.

Peter Cattanach, Chief Executive of Birchwood Highland said, " It has been an excellent opportunity for our service users to learn new skills and to work together as a team and to benefit from physical exercise. The links between exercise and positive mental health is well founded.

I am very pleased we have had the opportunity to be involved in this project that had been highly rated by our service users."

Notes to Editors.

Birchwood Highland was founded in 1987 and is a Charity and a Company Limited by guarantee. Our staff design and deliver individual support and plans for with people who have mental ill health.