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Books, not bicycles, comprise traditional teachers' tool kits. But for Fund for Teachers, a national education non-profit, grants are often used unconventionally. Fund for Teachers has awarded more than \$12 million in grants to approximately 3,500 of America's top educators over the past nine years. Fund for Teachers' Fellows hail from across the country and teach a variety of disciplines in pre-K through 12th grades. For the following six exemplary educators, biking evolved not only into classroom curricula but life-long callings as well.

Bikes for Botswana

Gaborone, Botswana needed answers to rising gas prices, escalating greenhouse gas emissions and a scarcity of reliable transportation. Adriana Smyth and Julie Anderson, teachers at Oakland's College Prep School, along with colleague Andy Dean and eight students, delivered an economically and environmentally sustainable solution last summer in the form of bicycles. Bay area retailer Mike's Bikes



Photos on this page courtesy of Julie Anderson

Anderson (right) with one of her College Prep students repaired donated bikes, shipped them to Botswana, and met them there — building Jonmol Bicycle Services from scratch.

assisted the teachers and students by funding a shipping container, providing air pumps and tools, creating a bike drive and serving as a staging area for collecting donated bikes and disassembling them prior to the overseas shipment. Store owners also identified a Botswana Red Cross worker and budding entrepreneur named Bones Moletsane, whom they met through the BikeTown Africa Aid Project. College Prep students joined the bike drive, handled minor repair work on donated bikes, and packed the 40-foot shipping container with 406 bicycles. Anderson applied her Fund for Teachers grant toward accompanying the students to meet the container on the other side of the Atlantic.

For one week, the College Prep team worked alongside Moletsane and the owners of Mike's Bikes as they built Jonmol Bicycle Services from scratch. The team unloaded the container, repaired bikes, distributed flyers around the city and served customers coming through the door with their flyer in hand. By the end of the week, Moletsane paid back his start-up loan and the students left feeling they made a real impact in Botswana.

"I have traveled extensively in my life, but this was definitely one of the best trips I have ever taken," said Anderson. "I felt like we made a positive contribution to life in Gaborone, and even more importantly is what we teachers and students learned from the people we met and the work we did. We not only learned about this



Left: Some of the 406 donated bikes leaned up against the container that brought them from Oakland.



Photo courtesy of Julie Anderson

Two of Anderson's students prep a bike for sale.



Photo courtesy of Julie Anderson

College Prep student with a Botswana customer.

amazing culture so different from our own, but we also realized that it is possible to make a difference in the world through simple and effective projects like this one."

Friluftsliv for Everyone!

A Latin proverb states, "It is solved by walking." Cindy Coughlin and Sandra Collins, teachers at Springfield, Massachusetts's Alice B. Beal Elementary School, put words in ancient Romans' mouths by adding, "...and biking."

Inspired by their concern for childhood obesity and the realization that their local outdoor resources were severely underused, Coughlin and

Collins traveled to Norway with their Fund for Teachers grant to explore its citizens' practice of friluftsliv, or outdoor life. Immersing themselves in the concept, they trekked through the Norwegian wilderness to bring the model back to their community and increase the amount of physical activity in their own backyards.

"Studies prove that a lack of exercise can affect a person socially and physically," said Coughlin. "Our challenge and passion is to educate both students and families on friluftsliv, motivate people to become proponents of exercise and physical movement and open our school community's eye to simple, healthy and enjoyable activities without a high cost."

After returning from their Fund for Teachers summer odyssey, the duo developed a bike program for fourth- and fifth-graders; hosted a bike rodeo; led fourth-graders in their development of a handicap-accessible, walking/biking public orienteering course at their local park; oversaw the installation of new bike racks; and instigated Safe Routes to School bike routes, the only district in the state to do so.

Leading by example, Collins and Coughlin also ride their own bikes to school every day (six-mile and 14-mile round-trips, respectively). "We want to show students that we practice what we preach, and they love the fact that

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we park our bikes on the same bike racks as they do," explained Coughlin. "We certainly generate a great deal of excitement for bike riding when we ride our own bikes!"

"The greatest reward is seeing students who are usually driven to school, riding their bikes," said Collins. "When they park their bikes, they are talking with each other, carrying their helmets like trophies into the school building. At the end of the day, they run out of the building talking excitedly about riding home."

European Pedal Power

This summer, four of Fund for Teachers' 315 fellows will incorporate biking into their summer fellowship experiences. Ardell Siegel and Lenicia Gordon, teachers at Houston's School at St. George Place, plan to bike and barge through historic Holland to connect this experience to Dutch



Photo courtesy of Cindy Coughlin and Sandra Collins

Coughlin and Collins trekking across a fjord in Norway, experiencing friluftsliv first hand.



Two fourth-graders plotting out the handicap-accessible walking/biking course in a Springfield, Mass. park.

Photo courtesy of Cindy Coughlin and Sandra Collins

children’s literature, concluding with a study of Anne Frank’s life in Amsterdam. They will ride 25 to 30 miles a day on fully-equipped, 21-speed hybrid bikes at a social ride pace to fully take

in the sights and photograph landmarks and landscapes. They will spend the nights on an accompanying barge waiting on a nearby canal.

“As a librarian and a third grade language arts teacher, we recognized a shared passion to utilize literature that embeds important historical events into engaging stories,” explained Siegel. “For example, *The Greatest Skating Race* is about a young boy in Holland during World War II who is charged with the ominous task of helping two younger children escape to the safety



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Photo courtesy of Liza Eaton

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of Belgium by skating along the frozen Sluis canals of the Netherlands. In another book entitled *Luba, The Angel of Bergen-Belsen*, the main character cares for orphaned Dutch children of diamond cutters who were relocated to the infamous concentration camp during the Nazi regime.”

“We felt that by choosing this bike and barge experience, and this particular route, we will be able to truly experience the land and its people at a pace that provides optimal communion with the culture we seek to understand,” continued Gordon. “Our ultimate goal is to create an historical literature unit with a multi-disciplinary approach for our demographically-diverse elementary school.”

Liza Eaton, seventh and eighth grade science and literacy teacher at Denver’s The Odyssey School, might cross bike paths with these Houston Fellows. Eaton’s own bike will cross the pond with her to journey through Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands for one month this summer as she investigates the efficacy of alternative energies in these small countries.

“My own response to impending oil depletion and rising greenhouse gases, beyond teaching students about these issues, has been to bike more,” said Eaton. “I found a new passion in biking, which provides great reward and increased fitness. Biking also informed my commitment to using less energy and releasing less carbon dioxide. Consequently, I am struck by Europeans’ decisions to consume less by biking more, as well as their use of renewable energies.”

Eaton chose to use her Fund for Teachers fellowship to research Europe’s current renewable energies – and to do so from the seat of her bike. She plans to bike 40 miles a day

(800 miles total) from Copenhagen, Denmark to Amsterdam, Netherlands, predominantly along the North Sea. The Colorado educator hopes that by modeling the option of traveling by bicycle, a sustainable travel choice, she’ll encourage her students to develop similar habits. She also chose her route to better interact with people and places while learning more about Europeans’ sustainable lifestyle.

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- Liza Eaton

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Liza Eaton on a previous bike tour of Germany.

Photo courtesy of Liza Eaton

Eaton's month-long tour culminates with a visit to Groningen, Netherlands, where the owner of Hembrow Cycling Holidays agreed to lead a private two-day bike tour to facilitate her investigation of the infrastructure and lifestyle that results in a greater population of bikes than people.

Upon returning to Denver, Eaton plans to implement her fellowship through the creation of two semester-long courses called Engines, Energy and Oil, and Global Climate Change.

Consider the Possibilities

These teachers' life- and career-changing experiences stem from grants awarded by Fund for Teachers, a national, donor-supported organization that recognizes the power of teachers to transform learning for themselves, their students and the world. Over the past nine years, Fund for Teachers awarded more than \$12 million in grants to approximately 3,500 of America's top teachers.

"The common denominator for these educators was biking, but our Fellows interests and pursuits run the gamut from physical education to history to literature and languages," said Karen Kovach-Webb, Fund for Teachers' executive director. "Unlike any other educational effort, Fund for Teachers trusts that teachers know best what they need to remain inspired and engaged in the classroom. So we put no constraints on their hopes and invite them to propose their ideal experiences, and then we rely on individual and corporate donors to help make them happen." •

For more information on these teachers' odysseys or to help make another teacher's dream a reality, visit www.fundforteachers.org.



All photos on this page are courtesy of Lencia Gordon and Ardell Siegel

Siegel and Gordon, with students, preparing for their European tour.

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Gordon bicycles near a canal in Holland.



Siegel and Gordon on their bike tour of Holland.