

WORDS - GEORGIA COSTELLO

BICYCLES FOR HUMANITY ... YOUR BIKES AFTERLIFE

Give a man a bicycle and he rides for a while; teach a man to fix and sell bicycles and he could be on the way to resurrecting a country.

Bicycles for Humanity (B4H) functions by the philosophy, 'give a hand-up, not a hand out' and accordingly not only delivers pre-loved bicycles to the developing world, but teaches people how to maintain bicycles and how to run a bike shop.

Matt McCullough is responsible for initiating the Melbourne chapter of the world-wide, volunteer-run organisation, Bicycles for Humanity. "The thing that appealed to me was that it was just so practical and transparent. You're connecting an unused resource with a clear need."

With the help of dedicated volunteers, Matt coordinates the collection of donated bicycles to ship to communities in Namibia and more recently to Zambia.

The morning I met with Matt he was just back from his first trip to Namibia. With more than 25 workshops now established there, it was time to get a better sense of what happens at the other end and determine how B4H can further evolve. One of the most rewarding aspects for Matt was knowing that whenever he saw somebody on a bike in rural Namibia he knew it was from the B4H fleet.

And these bikes are far from being your recreational Sunday morning jaunt kind of bike. In countries where B4H operates, a bike allows someone to travel twice as far, twice as fast and carry four times the load. A bike can mean access to education, health care, fresh water, economic opportunity and community. The adage 'one man's trash is another man's treasure' is really no embellishment. A bicycle to somebody in a disadvantaged community will change a life.

More than 2000 bicycles have been shipped to Africa to date from Melbourne alone, helping contribute to the 15,000 bicycles from the rest of the world. To add to this resourceful operation, the shipping container that is used to deliver the bikes becomes the bike workshop.

Matt explains that while just giving bikes is fine, it wouldn't come to much after a couple of years: "They'd break down and if there is nowhere to

fix them, then that's it. Whereas this model really works. The focus is on the bike shop as a small business."

Matt adds that the unemployment rate in Namibia is 40-50% ... so projects like these help to stimulate the economy from the ground up.

So Matt's call to all bike riders out there, before looking for a few dollars on ebay for your pre-loved bike, consider giving it a new life in a role that will lift other people's lives.

Breaking the cycle of poverty by providing sustainable transport for one person impacts not only their life but also the lives of their families and communities. *

KEEN?

www.bicyclesforhumanity.com



Bicycle Empowerment Centre (BEC) in Opuwo, Namibia.



Matt, Ylva, Andy and Anna - the core of B4H Melbourne.



Christoph at King's Daughter's BEC, Windhoek, Namibia.