

guelph lab

Newcomers and Cycling

A Review of Newcomer Bike Mentorship Programs in Canada

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Introduction

Over the last decade, bike mentorship programs for newcomers have emerged as a way to both increase cycling rates and support recently arrived immigrants and refugees as they integrate into a new country. In these programs, newcomers participate in weekly bike rides with volunteers who are experienced cyclists. Guelph Bikes for Community Connection is a bike mentorship program for newcomers being piloted in Guelph in 2020. It is a collaboration between the Guelph-Wellington Local Immigration Partnership (GWLIP), the Guelph Coalition for Active Transport (GCAT), Immigrant Services Guelph-Wellington, Bike Friendly Guelph and The Guelph Lab.

This report aims to support the design of new bike mentorship programs in Guelph and other communities by reviewing information about existing programs. It compiles data from two bike mentorship programs in Canada: one that runs in three locations in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), and one in Vancouver. The report also includes information collected through interviews with staff from each program.

Acknowledgement

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About the Guelph Lab

The Guelph Lab is a joint initiative of the University and City of Guelph that supports research, collaboration and experimentation to address challenges that are relevant to the community.



What are Bike Mentorship Programs?

Bike mentorship programs are free cycling programs that match newcomers with volunteer mentors who are regular cyclists. In small groups, newcomers and mentors participate in weekly bike rides together. Programs also include orientation sessions and access to skill-building workshops (on topics such as bike maintenance), large group bike rides for all participants in the program, and community-wide cycling events.

CultureLink, a settlement agency in the GTA, first launched a bike mentorship program in 2008 in partnership with the cycling advocacy organization [CycleToronto](#). It currently runs the [Bike Host](#) program in partnership with Peel Multicultural Council with funding provided by the Region of Peel in Mississauga, and has run mentorship programs in Scarborough and Markham in the past. For the purposes of this report, all three programs in the GTA will be referred to as the CultureLink program.

On the other side of the country, the Vancouver [Bike Host](#) program is based on the CultureLink model but is not officially associated with CultureLink. It is run by [HUB Cycling](#) and the Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia.

This report will employ the following terms:

- **“Participants”** refers to the newcomers participating in a bike mentorship program.
- **“Mentors”** refers to program volunteers who host weekly small group rides and provide newcomers with reminders or coaching about cycling, but do not formally teach cycling skills to participants.
- **“Instructors”** refers to volunteers who explicitly teach or check specific cycling skills during workshops or orientation sessions.

Methodology

The findings presented in this report were compiled from a review of academic literature on bike mentorship, interviews and email correspondence with staff from CultureLink and Vancouver’s programs, as well as annual program evaluations when available. Each program conducted qualitative reviews of participants’ experiences as well as the following surveys:

- **2016 CultureLink programs:** entry and exit surveys with 37 participants
- **2017 CultureLink programs:** entry and exit surveys with 49 participants
- **2017 Vancouver program:** entry and exit surveys with 59 participants
- **2018 Vancouver program:** surveys of 25 volunteers, entry surveys of 36 participants, exit surveys of 29 participants



Section 1: The Benefits of Bike Programs

“I had a goal of joining the ‘tribe of bikers’ I always see riding round the city. Now I feel like I can more readily identify myself as part of that group.”

- Participant, 2018 Vancouver Bike Host Program

Bike mentorship programs aim to help participants cycle more often and feel more settled in their new country. Both the CultureLink and Vancouver programs reported positive results related to these goals, as well as others positive outcomes.

Participants in these bike mentorship programs reported benefits including:

- **Cycling more:** Participants cycled more often, improved their cycling skills, gained confidence, and showed positive changes in attitudes towards cycling.
- **Feeling more settled:** Participants reported an increased sense of belonging and connection associated with creating networks and friendships and exploring and learning to navigate their new cities.
- **Better health:** Participants reported mental and physical health benefits associated with physical exercise and social connection.
- **Cost savings:** Participants reported financial benefits associated with saving money, having access to a wider variety of stores and services, and being able to travel to jobs.

In Vancouver, for example, newcomer participants reported meeting new people, having fun, and learning safe cycling skills as the main benefits of the program (HUB Cycling and Immigrant Services Society of BC, 2018). Other benefits reported were improved knowledge of the city, improved health and well-being, a sense of belonging, as well as financial benefits from money saved on public transit, gas, and access to a wider variety of grocery stores.

This section of the report explores these benefits in more detail, with specific focus on the outcomes of cycling more and feeling more settled. It uses information from program evaluations involving comprehensive surveys of participants as they entered and exited the programs. The majority of participants responded to these surveys, so these evaluations provide a robust picture of participants' behaviour and attitudes immediately after the program closed.



Cycling More

Bike mentorship programs aim to increase how often and how far participants cycle. In this respect, both the Vancouver and CultureLink programs reported positive results.

“Sometimes certain distances, you might think twice, “Oh, do I really have to go?” Now, if my wife asks me or if I feel I have to buy something, I just get on my bike and go and get it. That’s kind of a privilege to me, going about, certain distances are not a distance at all! I can do a lot more things.”

- Participant, CultureLink Bikes and Belonging Program

Key Finding: Participants across both programs cycled more often, whether for work, school, shopping or fun.

In 2017, CultureLink reviewed the outcomes of its Bike Host programs across the GTA through entry and exit surveys with 49 participants. These found that the proportion of cycling trips taken by participants per week increased by 19% between the start and end of the program, representing an increase “from 8% of all trips per week to 27% of trips per week, or an average of 3.4 more cycling trips per week for shopping/work/school related trips” (CultureLink, 2017). Similarly, an evaluation of Vancouver’s 2018 Bike Host program found that 3% of participants reported riding at least once in the last month for recreation at its beginning, compared with 86% at its end (HUB Cycling and Immigrant Services Society of BC, 2018). Both programs reported comparable results in other years.

Cycling more may have led to other positive program outcomes. For example, the majority of participants in both the Vancouver and GTA programs reported that their participation had increased their knowledge of the cities in which they lived.

Key Finding: Participants rode their bikes more, walked or used the bus less, and drove the same amount by the end of the CultureLink program.

The CultureLink program found that participants cycled more and used other modes of transport less by the end of the program, although their rate of car travel did not change significantly. The lack of change in participants’ rate of car travel may be related to the fact that they already primarily used modes of transportation other than driving when the program began. For example, in 2017, participants took more than 70% of trips by bus or walking each week when they entered the program, whereas they took less than 20% of all trips by car. In addition, residents of large urban centres like the GTA and Vancouver tend to have good access to active modes of transportation. Although these results were consistent across programs in downtown Toronto and more suburban cities like Markham, participants were nonetheless already regular walkers and users of public transit. It is unclear whether a similar pattern of results would be found in mid-sized cities where residents are more likely to rely on car travel.



Key Finding: Most participants in Vancouver were not cycling at all before the program began.

In Vancouver's 2017 program, the most significant increase in cycling occurred in the 81% of participants who reported that they never cycled during a typical week when the program began. By the program's end, only 10% of participants reported that they never cycled during a typical week.

"I come around Canadian Tire, or Lowe's, or grocery stuff. Whenever I think that I can carry it on the bike, I always do that, even if it's five minutes, rather than walking."

- Participant, CultureLink Bikes and Belonging Program

Like CultureLink, the Vancouver program taught newcomers road safety and other cycling skills, and the majority of participants in both regions reported that their programs had improved their cycling skills.

Key Finding: Participants' held more positive attitudes towards cycling after participating in a bike mentorship program.

Importantly for cycling advocates, participants in both programs were more likely to have positive attitudes towards cycling after taking part in a bike mentorship program. By the end of the Vancouver program, participants were more likely to encourage their children to cycle, and in Toronto, participants were more likely to agree that there were safe streets to cycle on in their neighbourhoods and that they saw cyclists on the roads in their neighbourhoods.

Feeling More Settled

“86% of participants responded positively to the statement ‘I feel welcome in Vancouver and feel like I belong here.’”

(Vancouver Bike Host Program Final Report, HUB Cycling and Immigrant Services Society of BC, 2018)

The main settlement goals for the CultureLink program are to “foster new connections and relationships between newcomers and more established residents” (Schwartz, 2020). The Vancouver program outlined similar aims. While each program evaluated outcomes in slightly different ways, key findings are summarized below.

Key Finding: Making new social connections is a primary benefit of bike mentorship programs for participants.

Participants in both regions reported that “meeting new people” was one of the main benefits of taking part in a bike mentorship program. In Vancouver, exit surveys found that participants made approximately three to four new social connections while participating in the program. Further, survey data from CultureLink’s 2016-17 programs and Vancouver’s 2017-18 programs showed that participants made approximately three to four additional social connections outside of the program because they were cycling more often.

CultureLink’s 2017 evaluation report discusses the links between new social connections, health and wellbeing. It notes, “increased social connections may also help explain the improvement in health and wellbeing 96% of the participants experienced. It is believed that increased social connections serve as a buffer against psychological distress by improving an individual’s coping mechanism and having a positive effect on mental health. Psychological stress is especially high amongst immigrants as they transition and navigate their way in the new country, frequently without strong family and community ties” (CultureLink, 2017).

Key Finding: Participants expressed a sense of belonging and settlement, although these outcomes are harder to measure.

“You feel free. I can go when I want to go. If I have any job or anything, small job, like buy some groceries, go to the mosque, go around, visit a friend, I can use the bike. I don’t have to wait for the TTC bus, which is sometimes late, sometimes doesn’t come.”

- Participant, 2016 CultureLink Program

Almost all participants in the Vancouver program responded positively to the statement “I feel welcome in Vancouver and feel like I belong here” in exit surveys (100% in 2017 and 86% in 2018). The CultureLink program measured participants’ senses of belonging before and after the program and noted increases, although these were not always statistically significant.



“[A memorable experience for me was] seeing the light go off in the (participants’) eyes that the city actually gets smaller and more accessible by bike. To see them get excited about exploring the city in a whole different way.”

- Volunteer mentor, 2018 Vancouver Bike Host Program

How many rides are necessary to have an impact?

Individuals designing new bike mentorship initiatives must decide on how many rides to include in their programs. The Vancouver and CultureLink programs discussed in this report ran for a minimum of three months to a maximum of five months, which represents approximately six to eight small group rides, three larger group rides, and two to three community events.

There is some evidence that the number of bike rides included in a program influences its outcomes. For example, participants in CultureLink’s programs reported a greater sense of belonging the more they cycled (Ledsham, 2020). Similarly, a bike mentorship program for female refugees in Germany found that participants’ prolonged and sustained engagement in the program as volunteers, and not just as participants, was necessary to foster social inclusion (Mohammadi, 2019). The benefits of bike programs for participants likely depend on the length of the program, the number of activities it includes, as well as other factors. As a result, it is unclear whether a minimum number of interactions or rides are necessary in order to achieve specific benefits.

What are the long-term effects of bike mentorship programs?

While the immediate effects of these programs are clear, follow-up evaluation is required to understand long-term program outcomes. Without further research, it is unclear how long the positive effects reported in exit surveys will last. For example, long-term research could help determine whether participants continue to cycle after a program ends, whether they cycle more or less often on their own, and whether they maintain the social connections they created through the program.

The article *Increasing Cycling for Transportation Through Mentorship Programs* (Kearns et al., 2019) reviews cycling outcomes over four years of the CultureLink bike mentorship program. Although this paper attempted to measure long-term outcomes through follow-up surveys with past participants, the response rate was too low for the researchers to draw firm conclusions.



Section 2: Designing with Newcomers in Mind

Effective bike mentorship programs are designed with an understanding of the diverse experiences and cultures of the newcomers who participate in them. For example, some newcomers may be particularly receptive to cycling, and there's evidence that newcomers in general already cycle more than Canadian-born individuals. At the same time, newcomers also face unique barriers to integration within Canadian society that should be considered when designing bike mentorship programs. The following section discusses some of these differing experiences, cultures and barriers in more detail, and explores their implications for bike program outcomes, program design and recruitment.

Note on Newcomers and Refugees

The bike mentorship programs described in this report are open to all newcomers to Canada. Newcomers include permanent residents who have immigrated to Canada for economic or family reasons, as well as refugees who have been forced to flee from persecution and have been relocated to Canada through an application/sponsorship process.¹ While the experiences of both refugees and newcomers are varied, many refugees come to Canada in highly precarious situations and face numerous economic, social and cultural barriers upon arrival. While some newcomers integrate easily into Canadian society, many face barriers to employment, social inclusion and belonging in their new country.

1. The 1951 Geneva Convention defines a refugee as someone who has been forced to flee his or her country 'owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group' (UNHCR, 2020).



Newcomers Cycle More than Canadian-Born Individuals

Newcomers to Canada come from a variety of countries, and this influences their experience with biking. For example, newcomers from East and Southeast Asia are more likely to cycle than Canadian-born individuals or other immigrant groups (Smart, 2010). There is also evidence that newcomers to North America “already travel by personal motor vehicle less, and cycle more, than those who are born here, even after controlling for socio-demographic factors” (Smart, 2010; Tal, & Handy, 2010 as cited in Verlinden, 2017). This reflects the finding discussed above, that newcomer participants in the 2017 CultureLink program primarily used transit and walking as modes of transportation even before entering the program.

For cycling advocates who hope to increase support for cycling, the newcomer population may offer a rich source of new cyclists and cycling enthusiasts. For example, the Toronto Cycling Think and Do Tank identified “mobilizing marginalized communities” as a “social tool” to increase cycling participation (Toronto Cycling Think & Do Tank, 2020).

To build cycling advocates and advocacy, bike mentorship programs could consider:

- **Focusing the program on a single neighbourhood.** A guide to increasing cycling in suburban and mid-sized cities suggests focusing on one neighbourhood, preferably one with a high number of newcomers. Researchers note that “incubating cycling in a neighbourhood with high potential [...] can then support initiatives in more neighbourhoods nearby” (Ledsham & Verlinden, 2019, p.7). Evidence from the CultureLink program also suggests that programs might not need to focus on downtown areas to be effective, in that participants cycled more often regardless of how far away they lived from a central business area (Kearns et al., 2019).
- **Including rides that reflect participants’ day-to-day travel.** A 2014 report in the magazine *Canadian Immigrant* notes that “although many of the newcomer participants have cycled recreationally in their home countries, Bike Host [Toronto] places a heavy emphasis on cultivating commuter cyclists” (Evans, 2014). Every mentor is expected to “do a ride with their mentee in their neighbourhood to figure out a route to the subway station or a nearby library or where they go to work or school, to help them figure out the day-to-day route they may take using their bike” (Schwartz as cited in Evans, 2014)

Newcomer Women Face Barriers to Integration

Newcomer women are disproportionately impacted by issues surrounding access to programs and services (Flagler-George & Lafrienière, 2015). Research suggests that newcomer women find it difficult to establish an income source and social networks upon their arrival in a new country, and experience isolation due to a lack of language proficiency.

It is important to consider the barriers faced by newcomer women when designing bike mentorship programs. Approximately 70% of participants in the Vancouver program identified as women in both 2017 and 2018, and when families registered, female family members were more likely to participate than male family members. In the GTA, 49% of participants in CultureLink's programs identified as women in 2017, while 40% of participants identified as women in 2016.

CultureLink aims to operate all programs with an emphasis on diversity, equity and inclusion. To make its bike mentorship program accessible to newcomer women, CultureLink offers supports including on-site childcare, free program access, communication in multiple languages, flexible timelines, and refreshments. CultureLink also writes all communication materials using gender-neutral language, with images, videos and cycling presentations representing diverse backgrounds and genders equally.

In Germany, a program called [Bike Bridge](#) is an example of a bike mentorship program designed specifically for female asylum seekers and refugees. Bike Bridge aims to increase female newcomers' physical and social capital and counter preconceived notions that female immigrants and refugees lack interest in sports. Multiple features make this program successful:

- It is free of charge, reducing socio-economic barriers to participation.
- It offers “flexible, informal, female-only and intercultural training in which at least one (refugee) volunteer trainer works as [a] translator [to] create a sense of respect, trust and belonging for the newcomers” (Mohammadi, 2019).
- It is located close to where participants live, so that “factors such as lack of access to transportation and childcare services as well as a shortage of time become less problematic” (Mohammadi, 2019).
- It partners with refugee housing and accommodation providers to recruit participants.
- Interviews with women who participated in the pilot phase of the program found that they were more interested in cycling than in the other physical activities and sports commonly offered as recreational programs (Mohammadi, 2019).

These examples suggest that to support newcomer women, bike mentorship programs should consider:

- Incorporating faith-based or family-oriented activities into programs that reflect the holistic, family-based view of community and health held by some non-Western cultures.
- Providing childcare, since women are often responsible for childcare and other family obligations.
- Involving members of newcomer women's existing communities in program outreach and recruitment (Flagler-George & Lafrienière, 2015).



Access to Transportation is a Barrier to Employment for Newcomers

A 2016 survey of immigrants in Guelph and Wellington County found that "of the 36% of [newcomer] respondents who were not working, 47% identified transportation as a barrier to employment" (Patel & Henderson, 2016). A bike mentorship program could address this barrier by helping newcomers access cycling as an affordable and convenient mode of transportation. Making employment the primary goal of the program would, however, be a departure from existing programs.

None of the bike mentorship programs reviewed in this report aim to increase newcomers' access to employment and education as their primary goal. This may be due to their demographics: for example, the majority of participants in CultureLink programs in 2016 and 2017 were already employed or in educational programs when their programs began. Instead, the findings that some participants are more likely to cycle to work or school after the program and that cycling has helped them find employment have been unexpected benefits of bike mentorship.

Since existing programs have not yet targeted employment as a key goal, there is an opportunity to assess how to modify the design of bike mentorship programs in order to best support newcomers in finding work. For example, networking is a valuable way for newcomers to find employment. CultureLink already tries to match mentors and participants according to their goals, preferences and skills, which could lead to networking-related benefits. Further, bike mentorship programs could aim to recruit mentors working in industries relevant to the skills and job prospects of participants to assist them in finding employment.



Section 3: Bike Program Design

This section of the report aims to support organizations in developing their own bike mentorship programs. Existing bike mentorship programs share a number of features:

- They match newcomer participants with volunteer cycling mentors.
- Participants and mentors are organized into small groups and plan weekly bike rides together.
- Programs organize orientation sessions and facilitate access to skill-building workshops (on topics such as bike maintenance), as well as larger rides that bring all participants together.
- Participants attend larger community-wide cycling events.

This section will cover the topics that were most relevant when developing Guelph's 2020 pilot bike mentorship program. It will address the questions:

- What happens at orientation sessions and workshops?
- What types of rides (and how many) do bike mentorship programs involve?
- What is the total time commitment?
- How do participants access bikes and accessories?
- Who runs bike programs?
- Are waivers, informed consent and insurance necessary?

These questions are answered based on the findings of both current and closed bike mentorship programs. As a result of the limited amount of data available on bike mentorship, it is difficult to provide conclusive best practices. Nonetheless, the practices and insights of other bike mentorship programs offer a valuable starting point for new initiatives.

The table at the end of the report organizes these answers by location/program.

Orientation Sessions and Workshops

Orientation Sessions

Most of the programs reviewed for this report included some form of orientation for both mentors and participants, often run by qualified trainers.

Orientation for Participants

These sessions tend to include program information, bike safety and urban cycling skills, a bike skills assessment, bike fitting, and matching with mentors. Orientations can provide a way for newcomers to learn about a program even if they do not ultimately participate in it. For example, CultureLink's 2019 Mississauga program had 40 to 45 orientation participants, compared to 30 final participants (matched with 16 mentors) in one cohort. Their orientation consisted of two sessions in total. In the first, participants received information on risks, fines, maps, handbooks, scenario activities, rules of the road, helmet fit, how to do an ABC bike check and matching with their mentors. In the second session, newcomers received bikes, helmets, locks, lights and bells and had to demonstrate that they could ride a bike by successfully completing a series of activities (for example, using a helmet, bell, and other equipment, using the brakes and making proper hand signals). After the second session, participants signed waivers and insurance forms and took group photos.

Orientation training is flexible and could also include information on other topics, such as bike maintenance and road/cycling rules. For example, the Vancouver Bike Host program offers a cycling course run by HUB Cycling that provides newcomers with specialized training in urban cycling. However, bike mentorship programs primarily aim to build skills and create opportunities for newcomers to practice cycling safely, rather than teach them how to ride. Newcomers must already know how to ride a bike in order to participate, and some programs include a cycling test in their orientation sessions. For those without cycling skills, "Learn to Ride" courses are available separately. For example, Vancouver's [HUB Cycling](#) partners with settlement and immigrant service agencies to offer targeted courses that teach newcomers how to cycle. Teaching an adult how to ride a bike requires considerable time and trained instructors, which could explain why bike mentorship programs tend to be separate from "Learn to Ride" initiatives. If programs also taught participants how to cycle, this could limit the number of qualified volunteers available to act as mentors. [Bike Bridge](#) in Germany is the only program from this review that combined learning how to ride a bike with mentorship. The literature highlights that it is important for bike mentorship programs to have qualified trainers, in addition to mentors, who can ensure newcomer safety by providing comprehensive cycling and road rules training.

Orientation for Mentors

These sessions tend to include training on program guidelines and safe cycling, as well as how to be an effective mentor. In the CultureLink program, six hours of mentor orientation was spread over two sessions and included interpersonal mentorship guidelines and intercultural communication training. Mentors were also required to pass a criminal record check.

The first session is a 3-hour indoor orientation including a program overview, key dates, guidelines and expectations, communication and risk management skills activities. The second 3-hour session is indoors and outdoors, and includes a safe cycling presentation, trip planning tips and tricks, and an outdoor bike handling skills review/test.

Written Resources

The programs run by CultureLink used or developed various guides, such as the [Toronto Cyclist Handbook](#) (which is available in 16 languages), and the [Peel Region Cycling Handbook](#) (Mississauga Program), as part of their curriculum. These documents are available for use by the general public.

Workshops and Skills Building

When participants need or want additional training, bike mentorship programs can refer them to additional resources. These resources are normally open to all cyclists in the community (not only program participants) and are commonly tailored to local conditions. For example, the Mississauga CultureLink program shares information and workshops from their local partners the [Region of Peel](#) and [City of Mississauga](#).

Workshops can reinforce topics already covered in orientation sessions (road rules, safe cycling) or additional topics like biking in all weather conditions, and basic and advanced bike maintenance. Participants were referred to this type of workshop on an as-needed basis.

Frequency and Type of Bike Rides

Participant and Mentor Rides

In the bike mentorship programs reviewed for this report, mentors hosted weekly rides with their participants that were approximately 30 to 60 minutes in length. Mentors were largely given the discretion to plan routes and destinations that reflected their group's interests and needs, although one of the CultureLink programs outlined that at least one ride should reflect participants' daily routines (for example, getting to/from a transit station, library, or workplace).

Rides were held exclusively in small groups to support the formation of trusting, on-going, and reciprocal relationships between mentors and participants. Small groups also helped mentors personalize rides according to participants' schedules, interests and needs.

Both programs aimed to match one participant to one mentor, although this was flexible in situations where families, couples or close friends registered and wanted to ride together. One of the challenges when starting a bike mentorship program is recruiting enough mentors who share the interests, languages, and locations of newcomers to participate. As a result, there was some variation in actual participant to mentor ratios, although there were never more than two to three participants per mentor.

Group Rides and Community Events

In addition to weekly small group rides, bike mentorship programs plan larger group rides and activities that bring all program participants together on a less frequent basis (approximately once a month). Some of these events may be part of larger citywide cycling initiatives. Community cycling events such as municipal bike days are often used to bookend the program. At large group or community events, the Mississauga program checked in with participants by referring them to additional skills training in bike practice or bike adjustments on a case-by-case basis.



Time Commitments

In general, bike mentorship programs run from June to October. The total time commitment for mentors and participants - including small group rides, large group rides, orientation sessions, community events, and end of program celebrations – tends to be 20 to 35 hours. This time commitment depends on the number of rides included in the program.

Mentors are normally required to make a commitment for the entire program. Recently, some CultureLink programs reduced the time commitment required of mentors to 10 hours (not including orientations and a year end celebration), because they found that higher time commitments discouraged potential volunteers. With 10 hours of volunteering, mentors can lead approximately 20 bike rides that are each 30 minutes long.

Participants are not required to complete a specific number of hours, but are asked to commit to attending the main events throughout the program (i.e., end of year celebrations, large group bike rides). In CultureLink's programs, participants made commitments by identifying the mentors they wanted to work with, attending an initial meeting with their mentor, signing a pledge form, and participating in public events such as Kensington Pedestrian Sundays and public school outreach events, where they represented the Bike Host program (Lui, 2014).

Access to Bikes and Accessories

Providing newcomers with access to a bike is a key element of bike mentorship programs. For example, most participants in CultureLink's 2016 and 2017 programs did not have access to a bike when their programs began. It is unclear whether this was due to financial barriers or other factors, such as a lack of knowledge about local cycling routes and rules or negative attitudes about cycling in one's local area.

During the program, participants required access to a bike, helmet, bell, lock and lights. These are typically either loaned to participants or provided through memberships to bike-sharing programs. For example, the CultureLink program in Mississauga uses a fleet of bikes that are loaned to participants for the duration of the program and returned to CultureLink at its end. The Vancouver program did not give bikes to its participants, but instead provided them with a membership to the municipal bike-sharing program.

Both CultureLink and Vancouver have used different models to provide participants with on-going access to a bike after their program ends. For example, CultureLink has provided participants with helmets, lights, bells and locks through other initiatives, such as a bike maintenance program where individuals earn a bike through volunteering. In 2017, the Vancouver program gifted bikes and accessories to 26 graduating participants, and in 2018, it gifted 21 graduates with an annual membership to Vancouver's municipal bike share program.



Waivers, Informed Consent and Insurance

All physical activity is inherently risky. However, the bike mentorship programs reviewed here did not report many accidents or injuries: one reported injuries as extremely rare, while the other reported no cases in its seven years of operation. Despite this, insurance companies generally classify cycling as a high-risk activity, and this is reflected in their policies.

The resource *Increasing Cycling in Canada: A Guide to What Works* (Ledsham & Verlinden, 2019) discusses the implications for mentorship programs:

“Insurance companies vary widely in their understanding of the risk involved in cycling programming. Some offer coverage that is prohibitively expensive with onerous requirements; others have very affordable options available for non-profits. Research will be needed to determine local options, and cycling organizations operating in a nearby community may be able to offer suggestions. Be prepared to provide program descriptions and to require participants to sign a traditional physical activity waiver or other document indicating that they understand the risks of participating and will not hold the organization legally responsible in the event of injuries or loss of property.”

(Ledsham & Verlinden, 2019)

In both the Vancouver and CultureLink programs, a partner organization has insured the bike mentorship program through its existing insurance coverage. CultureLink has its own insurance, while in Vancouver the program is covered by HUB Cycling’s insurance. This covers their organization, staff and volunteers from liability arising from their roles in administering the program, including injury and property damage. It also covers injury or loss to employees when they are at work, but does not insure loss or injury for participants. Both programs require participants to sign waivers acknowledging the risks and injury that could occur by taking part in the program. One program also provides an incident reporting form to all participants to track accidents or collisions, and to ensure any relevant information is passed on to the proper agencies.

It is important to note that there are two types of legal agreements commonly used for sports and recreational programs. “Informed Consent” agreements are used to ensure participants understand and accept the physical risks associated with an activity. “Waivers” (or “Releases”) similarly deal with physical risks, but *also* transfer legal risk to the participant – this is the risk that the organizers of a sport activity will behave negligently. By signing a waiver, participants give up their right to sue the organizer of the program or activity for negligence.



Recommendations as to the appropriate legal approach for a bike mentorship program are beyond the scope of this report. There are, however, several factors that influence the validity of these legal agreements that are particularly relevant to bike programs that serve newcomers. In particular, newcomers whose first language is not English may require assistance translating a legal document and may not be used to signing similar documents. Under these circumstances, programs should ensure that:

- Participants fully understand the physical risks inherent in the program.
- Participants understand what they are signing. Programs could consider translation and interpretation of waivers and agreements, and facilitators could ask: have participants signed something similar before? Were the contents of the agreement brought to their attention?
- Participants are given advanced warning that they will be asked to sign an agreement. Facilitators could ask: did they have enough time to read and understand the agreement?

Roles for Bike Program Partners

Bike mentorship programs are run by multiple stakeholders. Programs tend to involve two types of partner organizations that each hold distinct roles:

- Cycling organizations, such as cycling advocates and/or municipalities, often run cycling programming (orientation sessions, cycling workshops) and recruit mentors.
- Settlement organizations and/or health agencies often recruit participants or track specific program outcomes, such as participant health and well-being.

The Vancouver program is run by HUB Cycling and the Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISSofBC). HUB Cycling runs cycling programming and mentor recruitment, while ISSofBC deals with recruitment and selection of participants.

In the past, the GTA programs have been run by CultureLink, Cycle Toronto, and local partners such as regional governments, municipal governments and local health authorities. For example, the 2016 program in Scarborough was a partnership between the South Riverdale Community Health Centre and Scarborough Cycles. Scarborough Cycles is itself a partnership led by the Toronto Centre for Active Transportation, a project of the Clean Air Partnership that has as partners Cycle Toronto, the Toronto Cycling Think and Do Tank, and CultureLink. CultureLink is the main organization that implements programs in the GTA, with local partners offering expertise in specific areas such as health or cycling.



Conclusion

While relatively few bike mentorship programs have been implemented in Canada so far, those that do exist have developed a strong track record over multiple years. In particular, evaluations conducted by CultureLink and Vancouver's programs show that they lead newcomers to cycle more often, hold more positive attitudes towards cycling, and create new social connections.

The positive outcomes of these programs reflect existing research about the diverse experiences of newcomers. For example, many newcomers are already frequent users of active modes of transportation, which may increase their readiness to learn about safe cycling and become cycling advocates themselves. The engagement of newcomer women in these programs also indicates the importance of reducing barriers to their participation in sports and recreational activities. While these insights may not come as a surprise for experienced settlement agencies, cycling organizations are less likely to be aware of the diverse experiences of newcomers. As a result, it may be useful for agencies to highlight the experiences of the newcomers they hope to serve and explore their impacts for the design of bike mentorship programs.

The broad elements of the programs reviewed in this report have been consistent, which may be due to the central role that CultureLink played in their development. All programs included a mix of small and large group rides, with minor variation in mentor-to-participant ratios. While there is some evidence that programs with more rides and more interaction lead to stronger outcomes, an evaluation of long term effects is necessary to develop best practices. In the meantime, new bike mentorship programs may choose to experiment with the number of rides they include, especially during pilot versions of the program.

Guelph Bikes for Community Connection is an example of a new bike mentorship program that will add to understanding about best practices for program design, particularly for mid-sized cities that are not part of a large metropolitan area. This report reflects the commitment by project partners to consciously learn from successful bike mentorship programs in other cities. This report will also enable and encourage other communities to adopt bike mentorship programs as a way to successfully support newcomers in adjusting to their new country.

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Summary of Bike Programs

This table summarizes information about each of the programs reviewed for this report. For further comparisons of CultureLink’s three programs in the GTA, see the report *Increasing Cycling for Transportation Through Mentorship Programs* (Kearns et al., 2019).

Bike Program Location	Mississauga	Scarborough	Markham	Vancouver
Name	Mississauga Cycles	Bike Host	Bike Host	Newcomer Bike Host
Local Partners	CultureLink, Peel Multicultural Council, The Region of Peel (funder)	CultureLink, South Riverdale Community Health Centre, Scarborough Cycles Bike Hubs (Partners: Toronto Centre for Active Transportation; Cycle Toronto; Toronto Cycling Think and Do Tank)	CultureLink, Markham Cycles, Centre for Active Transportation, Markham Municipal Government	HUB Cycling, Immigrant Services Society of BC
Years of Program	2019 – 2020 (on-going)	2012 – 2018	2019	2017 and 2018. Seeking funding to relaunch in 2020. Programing has run in some form since 2010, and as Bike Host in 2017 and 2018.



Bike Program Location	Mississauga	Scarborough	Markham	Vancouver
Annual Program Dates	Late spring (June) to early fall (October); varies according to commitment from newcomers			Two cohorts in its first year: spring (May to July) and summer (July to September)
Program Outcomes	Newcomers reported increased companionship, belonging, and community; improved language and health; access to networking, fun, and the city.	Newcomers reported increased belonging and fun; improved cycling confidence and skills; improved understanding of local trails, rules, and the community/city; new friendships; improved health; English practice; freedom.	Newcomers reported increased belonging and confidence; new friends; improved cycling skills and knowledge; increased percentage of daily trips by bike; saving money on transit fares.	Newcomers reported increased confidence and belonging; improved knowledge of city; meeting new people; improved health and exercise; and access to a wider variety of stores.
Bike Experience Levels – Participants and Mentors	Newcomers were expected to be able to ride a bike. Mentors were required to have significant biking experience.	Most newcomers already knew how to cycle, but a few learned from their mentors during the program.		Some participants already knew how to cycle, while some were shaky.





Bike Program Location	Mississauga	Scarborough	Markham	Vancouver
Mentor / Participant Ratios and Matching	30 newcomers to 16 mentors (roughly one to two participants per mentor wherever possible).	55 newcomers to 22 mentors (2016). Groups of two to four participants per mentor. Mentors were matched with participants based on geographic proximity and compatibility.	Six newcomers to seven mentors.	23 newcomers to 16 mentors in the spring 2017 cohort, and 36 newcomers to 23 mentors in the summer 2017 cohort. This created 39 individual and family matches in total.
Time Commitment	<p>Participants do not commit to a specific number of hours but are expected to attend key events – i.e., picnics, end of season celebrations, large group bike rides, etc.</p> <p>Mentors commit to a minimum of 10 hours of biking with participants, plus support at the start and end of the program (i.e. orientation and celebration).</p>	<p>Newcomers were expected to commit to 30 hours. Mentors were expected to commit to 35 hours (including training).</p> <p>Newcomers and mentors who completed 10 or more activities received certificates (2017).</p>		





Bike Program Location	Mississauga	Scarborough	Markham	Vancouver
<p>Training Content and Duration</p>	<p>Newcomers receive a two-part orientation. Session 1 (indoors; 3 hours) covered rules of the road, helmet fit, ABC bike checks and matching with their mentors. In Session 2 (outdoors; 3 hours) participants received a bike and accessories, learned and reviewed bike-riding skills, signed program forms, and took photos with their bikes.</p> <p>Mentor also receive a two-part orientation. Session 1 (indoors; 3 hours) covered program overview, guidelines and expectations and communication and risk management skills. Session 2 (indoors and outdoors; 3 hours) reviewed safe cycling and tested bike skills.</p>	<p>Prior to the program, mentors underwent six hours of training on safe cycling, interpersonal mentorship guidelines, intercultural communication and program guidelines.</p>		<p>Newcomers and volunteers joined the program and received separate orientations (2017 program). Newcomers received a course from HUB Cycling instructors to increase their cycling skills and knowledge.</p>





Bike Program Location	Mississauga	Scarborough	Markham	Vancouver
How Participants Access Bikes and Accessories	<p>CultureLink’s bike share program makes bikes available in rotation to partners. CultureLink maintains a fleet of bikes to loan to participants.</p> <p>Participants as well as newcomer youth can also earn a bike through volunteer hours at the DIY Bike Hub.</p>	<p>Participants were loaned a bike, helmet, lock and lights; bicycles and equipment were from a high school bicycle program and were used over the summer and returned after Bike Host ended. Newcomers also received a used bike as an incentive to continue their cycling journeys in Canada.</p>		<p>26 newcomers received a bike, lock and helmet upon graduating from the program (2017).</p> <p>21 newcomers were gifted an annual Mobi by Shaw Go Vancity Community Pass at graduation, enabling them to continue cycling in the city after the program ended (2018).</p>

