

## Freewheeling cycling fun day promotes inclusion



**Stephane Marcoux of Pleins Rayons/freewheeling, shows Elodie the importance of getting exercise in a fun way during a special cycling day for those working in the shop.**

On the hottest day of last week, a group of hearty cyclists from Pleins Rayons/freewheeling and Dunham House united to participate in a cycling fun day. An overall mission to promote social inclusion the day's program allowed them to venture out of the shop they work in to experience the actual joy of cycling and partaking together in a healthy leisure activity.

Organized by the gang at Freewheeling, staff, clients, and collaborating partners met at the Sutton Museum to meet Richard Leclerc, who set the tone of fun day by giving everyone a tour of the cycling installation inside before setting off on a cycling adventure. The installation includes memorabilia belonging to Canada's Olympic athlete Clara Hughes and that of provincial champion and pro cyclist Stephane Marcoux, who is also their boss at work.

Marcoux, who has worked extensively in the field of recreational therapy, knows the value of exercise when it comes to personal development and management. He is adamant that the people he advocates for who are often inherently marginalized, be given opportunity for social inclusion. Activities like the fun day are built into the vocational program that he is managing at Pleins Rayons/freewheeling in Cowansville. Knowing

that partnerships, mentoring, and collaboration with other community organizations can be a win-win opportunity, Marcoux opened the doors to residents undergoing treatment at Dunham House whereby five go to Cowansville to work in the bike shop with the Pleins Rayons/freewheeling gang. There they work together to learn the mechanics of rebuilding bicycles.

Lewis is at Dunham House in a six-month program. He works with Moise at Freewheeling. In his former life, the Argentinian-born Lewis worked as a chef in Montreal. The stress of his job was his downfall that led to substance abuse. With treatment and being in the country, Lewis has already, after 10 weeks, found his way back. He loves his time with Moise in the shop. Marcoux says that it has made a great difference for Moise too. Lewis says he is not sure who is helping whom. "It's so great for the soul because we are helping them out, but really, I think that people like Moise are helping me even more. Being at

Dunham House and doing volunteer work at Pleins Rayons/freewheeling has been a godsend for me. My confidence and health have come back. All our stories are different, but generally there is a common thread." It turns out that there were four residents participating in the cycling fun day.

Marcoux says the collaboration between the two organizations started about two months ago and is working very well. "I couldn't be happier with the way things are going. Of course finding money to keep things afloat is still an issue." Referring to the birdhouse project that they launched months ago, they have run out of wood after building over 200 of the 500 planned. President of the board of directors, Mike Herman, says that they really need 5,000 board feet of pine to be able to fulfill their objective. "Already our team has installed 200 birdhouses in local vineyards and we are seeing 80 per cent of them occupied. We build the units and install them, monitor the activity, and then clean them in the fall readying them for the next spring. "The kids who are working at the shop get to go on road trips and meet people. The customers are well serviced, and the bugs are controlled in an environmentally safe way," touts Marcoux and adding again that, "Social inclusion and giving people purpose are such a big part of recovery."

Herman says that with portable mills around perhaps property owners clearing out trees might be willing to donate some boards to the organization. "There is no reason why our team couldn't get their birdhouses out to all the horse farms or where there is livestock being pestered by bugs. Maybe if people are reclaiming fields that had been planted with red pines or other fast growing coniferous trees, what is cut could be transformed to boards and ultimately birdhouses." Herman says there are a lot of other projects that could be done at the shop that would be useful for customers.

Freewheeling is "a non-profit organization with a vision to break the isolation of individuals living with an autism spectrum disorder or an intellectual disability."