

Like riding a bike

By Dave Fagg

Learning to ride a bicycle is a rite of passage for most children. Many people fondly remember the wobbles, the crashes, the yells of encouragement from parents, and the glorious exhilaration at finally staying upright.

But for many children with disability, learning to ride a bike is a skill they do not master. Parents may not feel as confident to teach their children, or children may have developmental or physical disabilities which make learning to ride a significant challenge.

A school in Bendigo is helping students overcome that challenge with an innovative bike education program. With support from the City of Greater Bendigo, Kalianna School uses the Bike Ed program developed by VicRoads.

The Bike Ed program helps students to learn many aspects of cycling, including learning to ride, road rules, and basic mechanics. Several students also made the trek to the Blackwood Special Schools Outdoor Education Centre, a destination for students from Victorian special schools to participate in outdoor adventure programs, where they tackled the challenge of riding 100km in two days along the Wangaratta to Bright Rail Trail.

Kalianna is a specialist school for students aged five to 18, with a reputation for innovation: the facilities are being upgraded, and a



From left: Kane Wilson, George Stockdale, Chloe Felsenthal, Christine Goodes, Angelica Dix, Samantha Hunter and Rick Poulter.

ground-breaking partnership with La Trobe University has been signed. In 2017, its team collected four gongs from the Principals' Association of Specialist Schools Victoria.

Link met with Christine Goodes, the teacher who leads Bike Ed at the school, as well as several students who had participated in the program. Ms Goodes is full of pride for her students.

"The students have really grown in confidence," she said.

"Before this program, one of our students always used training wheels at home. Now he has the confidence to ride without them."

This sense of confidence-building is a key aim of the Bike Ed program. George, a Kalianna student, achieved this in spades.

"I learned heaps about riding, especially about changing gears to get up hills, and riding in pairs. And I got a sore bum!" said George.

The physical aspect of the program is closely tied with the students' mental health.

"We find that so many of our students love being physical; it calms their anxiety. And bike riding is a great way of relaxing while also creating independence," Ms Goodes said.

Angelica, a student who attended the Blackwood Centre program, agreed: "Even though I hadn't ridden a bike much before this camp, it was really relaxing. It was so much fun."

Schools and community organisations can sign up to the Bike Ed program. VicRoads supports the program by training teachers as accredited instructors, supplying printable templates for classes, and hiring out bikes and other cycling equipment.

www.vicroads.vic.gov.au

www.blackwoodssoc.vic.edu.au

www.kalianna.vic.edu.au 