



Victoria Akins, a local pediatrician and recreational cyclist, wanted to enjoy a bike ride one Sunday afternoon in the spring of 2005. She was always looking for a way to get her two pre-teen children to come along. She offered to bike with them to the ice cream store, a five mile journey on quiet Sacramento streets. They were enthusiastic and even invited some of their friends in the neighborhood to join them. Soon, the doctor was escorting five youngsters at a slow but steady pace down American River Drive. The kids had their treat at the ice cream store and then everyone hopped back on their bikes for the ride home. The kids became more interested in their distance and speed and some of them remarked that they had never gone this far on their bike. Everyone agreed that it was a very successful outing.

A few days later, one of the parents asked the pediatrician, “What did you do to my child? She wants to ride her bike all the time now!” This was music to her ears! She sees the effect of inactivity on her patients every day in her practice at Kaiser Permanente.

So, a few weeks later, when the pediatrician was challenged to develop a community project as part of a leadership course that she was taking, she knew that it would involve children and cycling. In addition, she had a special place in her heart for the children of the Mustard Seed School. This school provides education for homeless children in Sacramento and her children had been involved in making Christmas stockings for the Mustard Seed kids for several years at their school. The idea grew to become the Mustard Seed Spin, a 20 mile charity ride for kids 10 to 14, benefiting the Mustard Seed School.

Early in the project, the pediatrician sought advice from a number of people in the community. One of the most helpful individuals was a young British man, who was teaching bike safety classes to children in his spare time. Owen Howlett was enthusiastic, experienced and full of great ideas. She also enrolled the help of the mothers in the school her children attended, friends in the neighborhood, and the Bikeriders and the Wheelmen, Sacramento’s great cycling clubs.

Victoria was delighted to see Owen at the first meeting to plan the Spin. He was knowledgeable about children and cycling, and was as passionate as Victoria about bike commuting. In fact, he rode his bike to almost every meeting the team had. When it came time to ask someone on the team to take over leadership of the project, he was the obvious choice. He took on the task with a little over a month until the ride.

The event was a great example of how an idea can become a wonderful reality with the help of committed volunteers, an enthusiastic community, and the great spirit of children.



The Mustard Seed Spin 2005

The first annual Mustard Seed Spin took place on September 25th 2005. 155 registered riders rode the 20-mile course, along with some parents, youth group leaders, event volunteers and sponsors. Over \$5,200 was raised for the Mustard Seed School.

Kids Ride for Kids

The motto of the Mustard Seed Spin is “kids ride for kids” - stewardship of those less fortunate was a theme of the event from the outset, and was emphasized by Sue Supple, Director of the Mustard Seed School, who spoke at the beginning of the ride about the School’s work with homeless kids.

Also, the riders themselves took a lot away from the event - not only the prizes generously donated by local bike stores, but:

- The accomplishment of riding 20 miles
- New knowledge about trail rules and road cycling laws
- Advice from experienced adult cyclists
- Enthusiasm and confidence to ride more and ride further

Ride Safety

Many of the kids taking part were not accompanied by parents, so ride safety was an especially important part of the event. Our approach covered three essential aspects:

1. Equipment safety: Every registered rider went through a helmet check supervised by Hong Zhang from the Snell Foundation, and a bicycle safety check carried out by volunteers from the Sacramento Bike Hikers.

2. Course safety: Experienced “chaperones” rode along with the kids, to maintain line-of-sight contact and to fix mechanical problems. Kids were told that if they needed help they should pull over to the side of the trail and wait for the next chaperone - all the chaperones wore distinctive reflective vests.

Course “marshals” were positioned at key intersections and at restrooms. The marshals reminded riders about the rules covering intersections, and made sure that other trail users watched out for the Mustard Seed riders.

Every rider’s name was checked off at the half-way point, and at the end of the ride, to ensure that everyone was accounted for.

3. Safe cycling: Before the start of the ride there was a question-and-answer session about safe cycling given by Owen Howlett, a traffic cycling instructor with the League of American Bicyclists. During the ride itself, the chaperones reminded the riders about safe cycling and about the rules of the trail. After the ride volunteers handed out flyers on “Bicycle Riding” from the California Highway Patrol.