

Michigan Municipal League

# The Berston Bicycle Club Project



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Better Communities. Better Michigan.



## PROJECT DETAILS:

### NAME:

The Berston Bicycle Club Project

### PROJECT START DATE:

May 2012

### LOCATION:

Flint, Michigan

### THE GIST:

A youth bicycle program in Flint teaches kids about health, safety, and their own community.

# The Berston Bicycle Club Project

## PROJECT SCOPE:

### The Challenge:

Program founder Angela Stamps has been an avid bike rider since 2006. She started riding out of necessity but when she moved back home to Flint, after spending years in California, she started to recognize biking as something more than a way to get around. Angela saw things in her community she was uncomfortable with: Many kids in her neighborhood were overweight (in fact, Flint youth suffer from some of the highest rates of obesity in the state<sup>1</sup>) and seemed to be stuck at home. Kids were spending much of their time on the computer, playing video games, or watching TV, and very little time outdoors exploring their city. She felt kids were suffering from a lack of independence and access to effective transportation.

Stamps' passion for bicycling inspired her to start the Berston Bicycle Club Project as a way to address all of these issues and give kids a way to freely explore their city.



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**Overview:**

The Berston Bicycle Club Project is a nine week class for Flint youth (age 10-18) to learn about bicycling, healthy living, road safety, and their community. With two sessions between May and September, students meet two- to three- times each week and ride for at least an hour and a half. During class, students have access to a used bicycle fleet acquired from public donations, yard sales, and pawn shops. Youth who complete the program (ride with the group at least twice a week) take home a bike, helmet, front and rear lights, patches, a bike bag, and a reflective vest.

At the beginning of each class, students gather at Flint's Berston Field House to hear a short lesson on bicycle safety and discuss the afternoon's route. Each week students enjoy Healthy Snack Friday, where they are offered healthy food choices such as fruit, trail mix, and snack bars. The goal of Healthy Snack Friday is to expose participants to food items they would not typically see in their neighborhood grocery store.

**Accomplishments:**

- More than 100 youth have participated in rides with the Berston Bicycle Club.
- 63 students completed the program and were able to take home their free bike—offering them access to jobs, after-school programs, and the independence to travel throughout their community.
- Many participants talk about their changed attitudes after participating in the bike club: They are more confident and proud of their biking ability, and they see biking as a viable and realistic transportation option.
- The 2014 first session rode 178 miles in nine weeks, and the second session will likely meet their goal of riding 250 miles.
- In 2013, students rode 20 miles in the 35th Annual Assenmacher 100, a ride on mid-Michigan trails.
- Many students improved their health and fitness: One participant lost 30 pounds after biking in both 2013 summer sessions. This student is now employed as the program's "sweeper" and mentors younger students.
- Stamps participated in the Imagine Flint master planning process and sat on the transportation and mobility committee.
- The Berston Bicycle Club Project led to another initiative: Bike Teen Clean. The Mott Community College Workforce Development program and the Landbank of Flint pays 10 teens to work 3-4 days a week to clean and maintain 25 lots near the Berston Field House. Students spend the first hour of their day on bikes to familiarize themselves with the area, and spend the remaining time cleaning.

Although not directly attributed to the program, Stamps also said throughout the two years of the project, there seem to be more cyclists on the road and a broader acceptance for narrowing Flint streets and adding bike lanes.



**Participation:**

The Berston Bicycle Club Project partners with many organizations throughout Flint. These partners help support and promote the program.

These partners include:

- The Crim Fitness Foundation
- The Epilepsy Foundation of Michigan
- Friends of the Flint River Trail
- Friends of Max Brandon Park
- Genesee County Health Department
- Michigan Fitness Foundation
- Michigan State University
- SAGE Coalition
- Transportation for Michigan
- The University of Michigan – Flint
- Mott Community College
- The Genesee County Landbank
- American Legion of Grand Blanc
- Residents from in and around the Flint area

**Budget:**

The Berston Bike Club costs about \$50,000 a year to operate. This includes volunteer and in-kind donations, the cost of rent, tools and bike gear, snacks, staff time, and other programming necessities.

**Funding:**

The bike club receives its funding through small grants from local foundations, individual donations, and in-kind support (i.e. donated bikes, volunteer hours, etc.).

## How-to:

### 1) IDENTIFY A COMMUNITY NEED:

If health, safety, and transportation are issues in your community, getting kids comfortable on bikes could be a great way to improve the community.

### 2) START GETTING DONATIONS:

There can't be a program without working bikes, helmets, and other important gear! Start soliciting bike donations of all sizes as soon as possible and be sure to spend time with potential partners and funders. These partners can often make donations (cash or in-kind) on their own or promote the need to their stakeholders.

### 3) SECURE A SPACE AND FUNDING:

Pretty soon, those donations will start to take up a lot of space. The program needs an area to store gear and act as a meeting place for participants. Ensuring there is enough funding to rent space and pay staff throughout the program's cycle will ensure students will be able to meet without interruption.

The program can operate on an even smaller budget if organizers are able to secure an in-kind venue and a reliable volunteer base. It may be wise to secure agreements in a contract or memorandum of understanding.

### 4) PROMOTE THE PROGRAM:

Reach kids across the community by distributing flyers in schools, putting up flyers and road signs near other events, and talking to community partners to identify young people who may be interested. Make the registration process simple to ensure all interested youth can participate.

### 5) DEVELOP A LEARNING CURRICULUM:

Once you determine the need, start collecting information on health, cooking, bike safety, reading a map, and other topics students may be interested in. Plan a short (10-20 minute), engaging presentation for the beginning of each class.

### 6) PLAN THE ROUTES:

Each ride should be enjoyable and expose students to a new area of their city. Setting target ride goals can be helpful to determine how far each session should travel. Remember to start slow and allow kids to get comfortable on their bikes.

### 7) RIDE!:

The Berston Bike Club rides three times each week to keep kids active and healthy. Students must participate at least twice a week to get their free bike at the end of the program.

### 8) GET INVOLVED:

Having a group of young people in your community who are passionate about bike riding can be a great way to promote bike lanes and making streets more pedestrian-friendly. Make sure the youth have an opportunity to talk about their experiences at city meetings and throughout community planning processes.

### **Lessons Learned:**

➤ **Take advantage of the resources around you.**

It takes time to become familiar with the wealth of information, people, and programs throughout your community. But time spent up-front will help build partnerships and relationships to enhance the project. Remember there are a ton of resources in the community that aren't necessarily monetary – many people have used bikes stored in their basement, as well as the knowledge and tools it may take to get them running.

➤ **Be patient.**

Especially in the early stages of the program, things can sometimes be slow-moving. Keep your momentum and keep pushing forward. If nothing else, biking teaches you to always move forward... or else you fall over!

➤ **Continuously promote safety.**

Riders need to be aware of the dangers cars pose, and cars need to be more careful on the road. Get involved in community initiatives to encourage safety for everyone who uses the public streets.

➤ **Keep track of in-kind donations.**

Tracking everything that is donated (gear, time, space, and information) will help you build your case to potential funders. Being able to illustrate community support will positively impact the likelihood of getting the cash donations that help keep things moving.

### **Similar Projects:**

There are many youth bike programs across Michigan. Some, like Back Alley Bikes in Detroit, are community focused and give young people an opportunity to get a free bike. Others, like Michigan Youth Cycling, are more focused on the sport of cycling. Search your area to see what programs already exist and work with partners to get kids active in your community.

### **Contact the Experts:**

Angela Stamps, Berston Bike Club Project founder and program coordinator  
kentakee@ymail.com

### **Endnotes**

1. "Healthy Food Access for Youth," Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, accessed 8/20/14, online <https://cfgf.org/cfgf/GoodWork/CommunityIssues/TuuriHealthFund/ChildhoodObesity/tabid/806/Default.aspx>.

# The Center for 21st Century Communities

## Building 21st century communities

Experts from around the world—in academic, business, and public sectors alike—agree that investing in communities is a critical element to long-term economic development in the 21st century. Michigan’s future depends on its ability to attract and retain knowledge-based workers. Central to attracting this priceless commodity is *place*. Research proves that successful 21st century communities effectively leverage the assets summarized in this brochure. Learn more and stay engaged at [mml.org](http://mml.org).

## Who we are...

The Michigan Municipal League is the one clear voice for Michigan communities. We are a nonprofit, but we act with the fervor of entrepreneurs; our people are dynamic, energetic, and highly approachable, passionately and aggressively pushing change to achieve better communities and a better Michigan.

## What we know...

Never before have so many diverse interests, from academic researchers to the business community to government leaders, shared a single conclusion: Michigan’s future depends on its ability to attract knowledge-based workers. And what is central to attracting this priceless commodity? *Place*, specifically vibrant 21st century communities.

## What we offer...

Through its Center for 21st Century Communities (21c3), the League provides education, technical assistance, public outreach, and unprecedented access to experts and resources. The 21c3 is a “one-stop-shop” for communities interested in creating and sustaining livable, desirable, and unique places that attract the highly skilled, creative, and talented workforce of the next century.



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