

A day in the life

Elly Hargreave co-runs a very special group that aims to combat loneliness and isolation in older people – through cycling!

INTERVIEW **JANE YETTRAM**

🕒 7.25am

Time for breakfast with my 11-year-old son, Charlie. We live at the top of a tower block in the city centre and have amazing sea views.

I both work and volunteer for the Brighton and Hove chapter of Cycling Without Age (CWA). We take older people out on free rides on trishaws (three-wheeled cycles with a passenger cab out front). This gets them outside, feeling the wind in their hair and experiencing the city and nature close-up. But just as important is bringing the generations together and reconnecting people socially.

🕒 7.50am

Charlie leaves for school. Now he's at secondary he gets the bus alone, giving me an extra 45 minutes' admin time, so I get started. There is an awful lot – everything from communicating with cycle pilots, care homes and prospective funders to undertaking PR and doing funding applications.

Initially, I juggled volunteering for CWA with freelancing as a communications consultant. But I've put my other work on hold as there's so much to do in this early phase (our first fully operational week was last September).

My co-captain, running the group with me, is Duncan Henderson. After seeing CWA in action in Copenhagen (where it was founded), Duncan brought the idea here, fundraising for the first trishaw cycle. When I contacted Duncan to offer to help, we realised we had an ideal mix of skills – my communications background and Duncan's practical bike expertise – to bring the organisation to life.

Through the power of social media, Brighton residents got behind the idea in droves! People signed up as volunteer cycle pilots and referred care homes and local elders for cycle rides. After local TV coverage was picked up nationally, we reached our crowdfunding target – £6,000 for a second trishaw.

🕒 9.25am

Using my own bike, I cycle the three miles to the garage where our trishaws are stored. We hope to raise enough to buy four more this year. Back in 2007 I broke my spine, and cycling rebuilt my confidence in my body strength. I cycle for fun – especially along the undercliff sea path. I don't own any Lycra though! I cycle in 1950s high-waisted jeans, plus frocks made by a friend from vintage curtain material. The elders love my outfits – they remind them of their dancing and courting days.

🕒 10am

I escort a first-time pilot to a care home and show her how to wrap passengers up well – we go out year-round using wool blankets and rainproof foot covers.

Riding in a trishaw really lifts passengers' mood – they say they feel like royalty! Having the passenger cab out front means people stop to wave and chat. Shirley, 86, said to me recently: 'When I'm in a wheelchair people ignore me; when I'm on this bike everyone waves and smiles and stops to talk.'

Care homes' feedback is fantastic, too. They tell us residents are more animated, chattier and brighter after rides. Those with dementia are often calmer, too. People in other countries who've been on regular rides have reported taking less medication for depression or sleeping.

All elders are welcome on trishaw rides – we have referrals from families, friends and the hospital, as well as care homes. We can do about 1,500 rides per bike per year.

🕒 11am

Time for a new pilot's first training session. I take him for a short ride as a passenger while I explain road positioning; then we swap and I become the 'driving instructor'.

We've been training almost daily recently – more than 100 volunteers signed up in the summer. As the bikes are power-assisted, pilots just need basic fitness. Most are aged 33 to 53 and many have no intergenerational contact. Conversation and sharing life stories mean it's 'feel good' for both parties. Pilots come back buzzing – even mist and drizzle doesn't dampen their spirits!

With Duncan and I as co-captains, we have attracted a 50/50 gender split of pilots. I love that women can access cycling a big bike and that men can undertake a caring volunteer activity – I'm very proud of that.

🕒 12.45pm

No real time for lunch – just a tin of fish eaten in the garage! I fuel up on flapjacks throughout the day. If I wasn't about to take a passenger out, I might be giving a talk at a luncheon club or care home.

🕒 1pm

Time to take 95-year-old Violet and Dennis along the seafront. A winter ride lasts one hour; summer rides last one and a half hours. We mainly go to parks and the seafront, but we've been out on the Sussex Downs.

Graham Carlow



Elly enjoys reconnecting people socially through Cycling Without Age

After Violet's ride, I pop in for a cup of tea with her. Twelve years ago, I helped undertake full-time end-of-life care for the mother figure of my life, and I've also helped care for family members with dementia. So I know that being part of the community is a vital for feeling alive.

🕒 2.30pm

I catch up with Duncan over a mug of tea in the garage – trying not to freeze! Duncan handles cycle maintenance and we co-manage finances and volunteer management, such as training, practice sessions and criminal record checks.

🕒 3.45pm

I'm home just before Charlie gets in from school. While he does his homework, I get in some more calls and emails.

🕒 6pm

Dinner, then bed for Charlie at about 8.30pm. I wash up and finish the day's admin before Skyping my sister in France. If it was Wednesday, my babysitter would arrive and I'd slip out for a spot of Lindy hop dancing.

🕒 10pm

Bath and bed for me – though I'm known to wake in the night and add to the to-do list! Coordinating CWA is hard work, but I love it. Having intergenerational contact inspires learning, conversation, laughter and jollity. Even the shortest ride will always surprise you, bringing something unique and wonderful.

Take action

You can find out more about Elly's local Cycling Without Age chapter, or make a donation, by emailing hello@cwabrighton.org.uk or visiting www.facebook.com/cyclingwithoutagebrighton

To find out whether there is a CWA chapter in your area, see the map at www.cyclingwithoutage.co.uk. Maybe your Guild could fundraise or offer support – or perhaps a Guild member would love a ride herself.



Above: Two happy passengers wrapped up and ready to ride
Left: Elly and co-captain Duncan Henderson