

King County Bicycle Helmet & Safety Project 2023

Final Report



Written by:

PHSKC - Violence & Injury Prevention Unit

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Table of Contents | 2 |
| Project Summary | 3 |
| Bicycle Helmet Distribution | 4 |
| Communication and Outreach | 6 |
| Bicycle Safety Education and Partnerships | 7 |
| Replication of Bicycle Helmet Observation Study | 11 |
| Conclusion | 12 |

Project Summary

The purpose of this report is to highlight the bicycle safety work of the Violence & Injury Prevention (VIP) unit of Public Health – Seattle & King County (PHSKC) in calendar year 2023.

Activities were funded wholly by the King County Council with the intent to increase bicycle safety education and outreach among traditionally underserved and underrepresented communities in King County. The Violence & Injury Prevention (VIP) unit worked within a racial and social justice framework to successfully complete the following activities in 2023:

- Distributed 1800 free bicycle helmets to community members

- Provided helmet fit trainings to racially diverse community leaders and community-based organization staff

- Garnered input from and provided ongoing communication with community partners

- Provided bicycle safety information and media messages to the public

- Funded community groups to promote bicycle safety

- Replicated the 2022 King County bicycle helmet observation study

Bicycle Helmet Distribution

VIP staff distributed 1800 free bicycle helmets to King County residents, prioritizing low-income, BIPOC, and unhoused communities. When given to organizations, helmet fit training was provided to appropriate staff. VIP purchased helmets from local helmet distributors – Pro Rider in Kent and Helmets R Us in Tacoma -- at a considerable discount, spending a little under \$10,000 at each.



Staff were also able to purchase a small supply of first-ever safety certified helmets for Sikh kids, a population that was very hard to fit in regular bicycle helmets. These helmets were given to community organizations serving Sikh families.



SeaMar Community Health Centers worked in partnership with PHSKC on a pilot project to bring helmets and education to children and their adult caregivers during their clinic-based well-child checkups. VIP staff trained bilingual health educators from two clinics – South Park (Seattle) and Bellevue -- how to fit helmets and educate caregivers on their importance and proper fit techniques. During spring and summer, SeaMar staff gave out about 200 helmets to their clients, most of whom were low-income, Latino, and Spanish-speaking. Due to staffing, storage, and other logistical challenges, this number was lower than anticipated. SeaMar will try different strategies in 2024 and hopes to distribute 400 – 500 helmets during already-established community outreach activities throughout the year.



Nate and Alejandra, staff at the newly opened Family First Community Center in Renton, pose with their new helmets after receiving helmet-fit training by VIP staff in August.

Recipients of PHSKC Free Bicycle Helmets 2023

| Recipient | Region | # Helmets |
|---|---------------------------------|-------------|
| Bicycle Rescue for Youth | Ravensdale | 50 |
| Boys & Girls Club | Mercer Island | 50 |
| Boys & Girls Club | Federal Way | 60 |
| Boys & Girls Cub | Rainier Valley | 10 |
| Center for Multicultural Health | Seattle | 60 |
| City of Kent Bicycle Advisory Group | Kent | 75 |
| City of Renton Neighborhood Safety program | Renton | 50 |
| City of SeaTac | SeaTac | 70 |
| Eastside Fire & Rescue | Issaquah/E King County | 25 |
| Global to Local | SeaTac | 50 |
| Family First Community Center | Renton | 75 |
| HealthPoint School-Based Health Center | Federal Way | 20 |
| International Community Health Services (ICHS) | Seattle | 10 |
| KC Sheriff Community Services Office | Burien | 100 |
| KC Sheriff Community Services Office | Skyway | 200 |
| KC Sheriff Community Services Office | White Center | 100 |
| VIP staff working alongside PHSKC Health Care for the Homeless Mobile Medical Van | South King County | 35 |
| Low Income Housing Institute True Hope Tiny Home Village | Seattle | 15 |
| Mary's Place | Burien | 20 |
| Matt Griffin YMCA | SeaTac | 70 |
| PHSKC Community Health Navigators | South King County | 475 |
| Real Change | Seattle | 20 |
| SeaMar Community Health Centers | South Park (Seattle) & Bellevue | 160 |
| | Total # helmets | 1800 |

Communication and Outreach

When the King County Council designated funding for bicycle safety for years 2023-2024, VIP staff wanted to ensure community voice was incorporated into deciding how to use the funds most effectively. Staff reached out to over 75 community partners to solicit input via phone calls, video chats, and in-person meetings. Three overarching themes to increase bicycle safety came to the surface during this process: (1) infrastructure changes, (2) education aimed at drivers of motor vehicles, and (3) getting more youth on bikes, while ensuring they have helmets and learn basic riding and safety skills.

- Because King County Council funding was provided for outreach and education, Public Health was not able to fund projects involving infrastructure. However, staff collaborated closely with the Target Zero Traffic Safety Engineering Committee and continues to identify other ways to advocate for safer bicycling infrastructure.
- In honor of National Bicycle Safety Month in May, VIP staff, with support from our Communications Specialist, wrote a blog targeted to drivers of motor vehicles featuring an original graphic and important tips for drivers to help keep bicyclists safer.



The full article can be accessed here: [May is Bicycle Safety Month – Let's Commit to Share the Road – PUBLIC HEALTH INSIDER](#)

- The program also contracted with C+C Communications to purchase two billboards targeting motor vehicle drivers. The billboards, with their bright coloring and positive messaging, stayed up for 4 weeks in August. C+C determined site placement based on both traffic density and cost.



At 1st Ave South Bridge at East Marginal Way in Seattle



At 128th Ave. SE in Factoria (South Bellevue)

- VIP staff provided other bicycle safety outreach and messaging to the public by
 - Updating the PHSKC Bike Helmets and Bicycle Safety webpage: [Bike helmets and bicycle safety - King County, Washington](#). In 2023, the webpage received **over 400 views**.
 - Updating the list of free and low-cost bicycle helmet resources on webpage [Free and Low-Cost Bicycle Helmets in King County, updated April 25, 2023](#)
 - Printing and distributing over **3,000 copies of bicycle and helmet safety educational materials** in multiple languages. All materials went to community-based organizations that requested them or were distributed by VIP staff during trainings or events.
- As part of its ongoing communication strategy, VIP staff created and managed an email list of 200 individuals and organizations involved and/or interested in bicycle safety in King County to share information, resources, and a myriad of funding opportunities.

Bicycle Safety Education and Partnerships

The VIP Program targeted bicycle safety education and services to historically underrepresented and underserved communities through two innovative projects

➤ **Community Health Worker Training**



This was a highly collaborative effort among VIP staff, PHSKC Community Health Worker (CHW) staff, PHSKC Environmental Health staff, and Seattle Children’s experts. The team developed, implemented, and evaluated a play safety training for 30 community health workers serving marginalized communities throughout King County. The goal was to educate CHWs, who could then bring that education to the families with whom they work.

Presenters educated CHWs on playground safety, bicycle safety, and water safety. Interactive components included audience practice in properly fitting bike helmets and life jackets.

Of the 18 surveys received, 100% of participants felt the training was useful and that they could apply what they learned.

Seattle Children’s water safety expert Isabell Sakamoto demonstrates how to fit a life jacket. PHSKC Community Health Worker Maria Rodriguez happily stands in as a model.



Trained participants try out their new skill of properly fitting a bicycle helmet



➤ Bicycle safety grants to community groups

The VIP program awarded three grants through a competitive Request for Application (RFA) process. A group of evaluators individually commented on and scored each application and then came together to collectively decide the top three awardees. Here are summaries of the successes of each of the three nonprofits that received grants:



Cycle Therapy Racing, an all-volunteer nonprofit organization, received \$10,000 from PHSKC to implement, with support from City of Auburn Parks and Recreation, a twice-a-week pilot program for underserved youth ages 3 – 17 in the Auburn Valley. The goal of their 6-week summer program was to teach and support biking safety skills, including basic riding skills, mountain biking skills,

helmet safety, and basic bike maintenance while promoting increased physical activity and mental health. Cycle Therapy Racing used their grant funds to purchase 10 new BMX bikes and 20 helmets. They also used funds to subsidize the purchase of a trailer for storing and transporting bikes and other supplies.

A huge number of youth participated – 224 (unduplicated) in total, with an average of 42 children attending each session. Kids 4 – 7 years old made up the largest age group. Many parents/guardians also rode during the program but were not counted.

CTR organizers and Auburn Parks & Rec staff personally taught approximately 15 children to ride on their own, without training wheels. Additionally, some parents taught their own children to ride solo during the program. Organizers discouraged the use of training wheels and were able to put kids on loaner balance bikes instead. Most kids transitioned from using a balance bike to riding a bike with pedals on the same day.

Many youth came back multiple times; those that showed up at least 3 times received a free t-shirt (about 100 shirts were given out to youth plus approximately 40 more to volunteers and engaged parents). Youth that came at least 8 out of the 12 days were put in a raffle to win a helmet. And those who participated 11-12 days also earned a spot in a raffle to win a bike. Seven youth went home with bikes, ranging from balance bikes to full-size BMX bikes, and 15 received a new helmet. Program organizers also gave away 50 free water bottles, approximately 400 stickers, and over 300 bright green “Pedal to the Mental” silicone wrist bands on a first come, first serve basis.



First Five Years & Beyond (FFYB), based in South King County, “is actively contributing to closing the education and opportunity inequities for families of children further away from educational justice.” Their award of \$10,000 allowed them to provide bike safety education, bikes, helmets, and locks to 22 African immigrant and African American youth ages 5 – 13. This was the first time FFYB expanded their educational offerings to include bicycle safety.



Bike Works provided consultation for program development and implementation, and assisted with selecting, purchasing, building, and delivering bicycles. Bike Works trained FFYB staff members how to become educators and ride leaders, provided four bikes for them, and also trained two staff members how to perform basic bicycle repairs.

Three FFYB staff facilitated five, one-hour long educational sessions to youth via Zoom (the fifth being a make-up session). Knowing transportation was a big challenge for families they serve, program staff offered virtual sessions on weekdays followed by in-person group rides sessions on the weekend, so families only had to drive their children to the FFYB office in Kent once a week.

Three youth who had little or no biking experience learned to ride a bike during the program. Although 19 youth had previous bike riding experience, none of them had opportunities to ride for at least two years prior to the program. According to parents’ input, only three youth had a bike at home before they enrolled in the program but none of those bikes functioned properly. Only two of the 22 youth had previously participated in any kind of bike rodeo or bike safety lessons.

To assess participants’ acquisition of basic bicycle skills, such as “riding in a straight line with control and balance”, staff used a checklist form from the Iowa Kids on the Move curriculum. Most kids “needed improvement” in the four basic skills observed, but staff felt confident that, with more time on their bikes, youth would definitely progress.

Of the seven parents surveyed (via Survey Monkey and phone calls), 100% said they were satisfied with the program.



As a coincidental side benefit of running this program, staff made connections with members of the City of Kent’s Bicycle Advisory Board and plans to pursue future collaborations.



Bike Works is a non-profit organization that promotes the bicycle as a vehicle for change to empower youth and build resilient communities since 1996. Their grant award of \$10,000 supported their ongoing and successful BikeMobile and Bikes for All (BFA) programs. The BikeMobile provides free bike repair for BIPOC residents living in neighborhoods which have been historically underserved by public investment in transportation, education, healthcare, and other public services. Bikes for All gives away bikes and bike locks to youth experiencing homelessness and/or reside in Southeast Seattle or South King County.

During the months of August and September, Bike Works made 8 BikeMobile visits to three sites - High Point (a Seattle Housing Authority community) and neighborhoods adjacent to Van Asselt Community Center and John C Little Park in South Seattle -- serving a total of 77 people. They also gifted an additional 10 youth with free bikes and locks as part of their BFA program. *These numbers represent a nearly 100% increase in people served compared to their projected goals.*

Additionally, Bike Works deepened their ongoing relationship with site partners at High Point, such as Ella, the Seattle Housing Authority's Community Builder, and formed a new and fruitful partnership with HOSTED (Healthy Othello Safer Through Environmental Design) at John C Little Park. Staff learned that, by having active partners at their BikeMobile sites, they are better able to connect with constituents and respond to community feedback and need for services. By providing free bike repair services in these neighborhoods, without bike shops, and giving away bikes and safety gear such as helmets, they helped to promote bicycle safety in South Seattle, one of the highest-risk regions in King County for traffic-related injuries and deaths.



The bright blue Bike Works' BikeMobile houses a full-service bike shop and prioritizes service to under-resourced and underserved King County residents.

Replication of the Bicycle Helmet Observation Study

In 2022, the VIP unit contracted with Almeida’s Consulting & Training to perform an observation study to determine overall bicycle helmet use in King County. To ensure accuracy of the data and to identify changes possibly due to the repeal of the King County Board of Health Bicycle Helmet Regulation (in February 2022), VIP contracted with the strong team at Almeida’s to replicate the study in 2023. Observation teams recorded more than 2,000 bicycle and scooter riders in 2022 and over 3,000 riders in 2023. Observations occurred in September and October of both years, and the 50 observation sites remained exactly the same. The study found consistent overall helmet use in bicyclists and scooter riders between 2022 and 2023.

| | 2023 | | 2022 | |
|---|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|
| | # Observed | % Usage | # Observed | % Usage |
| AGE | | | | |
| Adult (18+) | 2896 | 88% | 1850 | 87% |
| Teen (15-18) | 79 | 70% | 101 | 72% |
| Child (5-14) | 136 | 88% | 102 | 91% |
| Infant (<5) | 30 | 87% | 42 | 91% |
| GENDER | | | | |
| Male | 2270 | 86% | 1489 | 84% |
| Female | 846 | 90% | 589 | 89% |
| Unknown | 25 | 96% | 17 | 88% |
| VEHICLE TYPE | | | | |
| Personal Bicycle | 2939 | 91% | 1911 | 91% |
| Ride Share Bicycle | 41 | 7% | 68 | 45% |
| Personal Scooter | 79 | 54% | 42 | 50% |
| Ride Share Scooter | 69 | 6% | 74 | 9% |
| Personal Sit-Down Scooter | 9 | 89% | 8 | 38% |
| Ride Share Sit-Down Scooter | 4 | 0% | 14 | 14% |
| KING COUNTY REGIONS | | | | |
| Downtown/Central/West Seattle - South of Ship Canal | 859 | 86% | 632 | 84% |
| Seattle - North of Ship Canal | 608 | 83% | 298 | 85% |
| Northeast King County | 1283 | 91% | 945 | 89% |
| Southwest King County | 14 | 100% | 50 | 86% |
| Southeast King County | 377 | 83% | 170 | 68% |
| OVERALL OBSERVED USAGE | 3141 | 87% | 2095 | 85% |

Overall helmet use among bicyclists and scooter riders in King County remained consistent over the past two years of observations. In 2022, 85% of observed riders wore helmets; in 2023, 87% of observed riders wore helmets. Of all age groups observed in both years, teens remained the least likely to wear helmets.

Strikingly, the data for both years show that riders of electronic *ride-share* bicycles and electronic *ride-share* scooters have much lower helmet use than riders of *personal* bikes and scooters. Less than 10% of ride share users wore helmets in 2023 compared to 91% of riders of personal bikes and 50% of riders of personal scooters.

Most significantly, helmet use among ride-share bicyclists decreased from 45% in 2022 to 7% in 2023.

Helmet use in Southeast King County, which in 2022 was at 68%, increased to 83%. Although a direct causation can't be determined, helmet giveaways concentrated in South King County may have contributed to the increase.

Attempts were made to observe riders in low-income, BIPOC neighborhoods, and sites where unhoused residents live, congregate, or access services. However, in order to observe as many riders as possible in the short good-weather window, teams observed at mostly well-known, popular bicycle paths, trails, and commuter paths.

Conclusion

In summary, the work of the Violence and Injury Prevention Program in 2023 accomplished the directives of the King County Council – to increase bicycle safety within traditionally underserved and underrepresented communities in King County and to assess bicycle helmet use among King County bicyclists.

The VIP Program employed multiple educational and outreach strategies to meet their social and racial equity goals, including distributing bicycle helmets while ensuring organization staff received helmet fit trainings, using social media and road billboards to target safer driving, training Community Health Workers to share information in culturally appropriate ways, and funding community groups to work with targeted populations.

The Violence & Injury Prevention Team wishes to thank PHSKC leaders for supporting the efforts outlined in this report.

The VIP Team is extremely grateful to the King County Council for funding these 2023 activities and for their continued financial support of bicycle safety work through 2024.