

DAVID'S NAMIBIA TRIP 2017

In late April, Bicycles for Humanity (WA) chairman David Tucker travelled to Namibia where he visited some very inspirational community bike shops, established by Bicycle Empowerment Network Namibia and Bicycles for Humanity.

Bicycle Empowerment Network Namibia (BENN) is a Namibian charity which establishes bike shops as community development projects. As well as providing transport for people, these shops – called Bicycle Empowerment Centres (BECs) – are designed to benefit the community.

In 2017, BENN is celebrating more than 50,000 Bicycles for Humanity bikes imported for community programs since 2006; and demand is still growing!

There are 33 fully operating BECs in Namibia right now doing great things for their local communities. Nine of the 11 bike containers Bicycles for Humanity (WA) has sent to Africa have gone to Namibia.

David visited five of these BECs while he was in Namibia in late April. All five were doing fantastic work in their communities, and all five are screaming out for more bikes – most have sold whatever they have in stock, and are surviving on doing repairs and maintenance.

On his first afternoon in Namibia (April 21), David spent time with Glenn Howard, Chairman of BENN, and Paulina Endjala, BENN's full-time distribution coordinator and mechanic trainer.

Paulina has trained hundreds of shop employees in bicycle repair and is there for ongoing support.



First, Glenn and Paulina drove David to the Welwitschia Bike Shop in Walvis Bay, where he met the four wonderful operators.



Paulina Endjala [left] with the Welwitschia Bike Shop crew.

Welwitschia, one of the older Bicycle Empowerment Centres, has been operating since 2009 and has been resupplied by Bicycles for Humanity (WA) twice, in 2012 and 2017.

Set up in conjunction with Catholic AIDS Action (CAA), Welwitschia uses some of its profits to support CAA and the work they do for AIDS sufferers. It is in a poor area on the northern side of Walvis Bay; however, David said this township has expanded a lot since he was there in 2012, and now features a large area of new government low-cost housing.

With almost no bikes left for sale, the shop employees are keeping busy themselves while they wait for bike resupply containers.

“To keep themselves busy they’ve started a new recyclable waste collection business,” David said.

“Using a bike trailer designed and constructed by BENN, they go about the town collecting bags of recyclable materials which they sell to local recycling businesses.”

“They have a deal with a local recycling business, but more importantly, the recyclable waste project is a bit of a trial; if it works, the plan is to build more of those trailers and get other shops doing this. Good for their community support projects and good for the environment!”



From the Welwitschia Bike Shop in Walvis Bay, David travelled with Bicycle Empowerment Network Namibia's Glenn Howard and Paulina Endjala to the (DRC) township in the city of Swakopmund where they visited the Mr Elephant Bike Shop.

David said that he saw many more bikes in use since his previous 2012 visit to DRC, a shanty town on a treeless sand plain about 5km inland from the Atlantic coast.

Mr Elephant, the recipient of the VERY FIRST Bicycles for Humanity (WA) container in January 2012, now has a most impressive shop.

He told David that he is selling about 30 bikes per month.



Mr Elephant in his shop.

“We saw the evidence of this as we drove through [the township] with lots of people getting around on bicycles, which was not the case when I visited him in February 2012,” David said.

“His shop is very well organised with shelves stacked with all kinds of spare parts, all bagged and priced.

“Paulina, who has seen all 33 BENN bike shops in Namibia reckons his shop is the best organised and a model for others to follow.

“Alongside the bikes he is selling – he said he was selling up to thirty bikes a month when he had them – Mr Elephant does a lot of repair and maintenance work, and has established a really good spare parts business,” David said.

Mr Elephant, who donates part profits to crucial local charity Catholic AIDS Action (CAA), says he always needs more bikes!

“It was good to see how well Mr Elephant is doing. He is not just a successful small business entrepreneur, he is an inspiration in his community,” BEN Namibia director Glenn Howard said.



The following week, on April 30, David visited the OTT Bike Shop in Otjiwarongo in the north central part of the country (about 4 hours’ drive north of Windhoek).

OTT was established by Bicycle for Humanity (WA)’s Container #9 in mid-2016, thanks to sponsorship from Canadian gold mining company B2Gold – which has a gold mine about 60km north of Otjiwarongo – and Namibian bank RMB.



Eden with Sherri Lytle (B2Gold CSR Manager) and David in the workshop doorway.

The shop is run by two young men, Eden and Sylvestre, who sell bicycles, spare parts and accessories and offer maintenance and repair services.

This Bicycle Empowerment Centre doesn't just provide an opportunity for these young entrepreneurs to develop a business for themselves; it improves mobility and recreational opportunities in the local community and support Namibian non-profit KAYEC's youth program with bicycles and a source of revenue.

To combat Namibia's youth unemployment rate of 43 per cent, in KAYEC's school support is helping 375 children in 2017, aged between 10 and 18, to increase pass rates in areas across the country. Its skills training is also helping 750 youths who are out of school to start vocational work.

David said that OTT was also crying out for more bikes.

"In less than one year of operation they have sold over 250 bikes; so they are not quite out of bikes yet but at this rate it won't be long!" he said.

"They are also about to move the shop from the outer part of the town to a more central location, where they will have more passing traffic."



On May 1, David visited the King's Daughters Bicycle Shop and PAY (Physically Active Youth) in Katatura, Windhoek. Bicycles for Humanity (WA) has resupplied Kings Daughters with bikes twice (Container #2 in April 2012 and #6 in April 2014), and donated container #7 to PAY in July 2014.

David said he was blown away by the tremendous work that both Kings Daughters and PAY are doing in the large township of Katatura, the poorest part of Windhoek. Of the 350,000 people who live in Windhoek, 200,000 are in Katatura.

The King's Daughters Bike Shop is run by a local church group, who set up the King's Daughters charity to help rehabilitate women rescued from sex slavery, most of whom are suffering from AIDS.

They use profits from selling and repairing bikes to buy food packages for the women affected by AIDS. While the Namibian Government is supplying anti-retroviral drugs free-of-charge for the women, they work an awful lot better if the women are eating regularly.



The KD team in their bike store are Esme Kisting, Rhian and Laban (Bike mechanics) and Eileen Louw (Finance and Admin Officer).

“These food packages are an important part of their rehabilitation,” David said. “King’s Daughters also needs more bikes; when I visited they only have had about 8 or 10 left in their store.”

Kings Daughters executive director Esme Kisting expressed deep gratitude to Bicycles for Humanity (WA) volunteers for their wonderful contribution to changing the lives of former sex slaves in Namibia.

“We were indeed honoured by your visit,” she said.

“Please thank your team of B4H volunteers for the awesome work you do, to ensure that our bike shops in Namibia and other African countries can continue.

“King's Daughters Bicycle shop creates employment and [helps Kings Daughters provide] psychosocial support and rehabilitation programs in our community, helping commercial sex workers who choose to leave the sex trade.”



About 7 minutes' drive from Kings Daughters is Physically Active Youth Bike Shop (PAY), which is part of PAY's mission to provide activities outside of school hours for children in low socio- economic areas.

PAY supports school children from Year 1 to Year 12, by offering out of school hours support from supervised homework, special tutoring to health and fitness, including a broad based cycling program. The bikes remain the property of PAY - the children share them in supervised cycle training for exercise and fitness.



With the container of bikes Bicycles for Humanity (WA) sent over to Namibia three years ago, PAY now does cycling activities with the younger kids, teaching them how to ride and road safely.

The older kids are taken for training rides, and now PAY have has a competition cycling team in three classes; BMX, Mountain Biking, and Road Bike. Some have even progressed to elite cycling events.

“The week before I arrived, a PAY team had been up to Omaruru for a road cycling event, and had brought back several podium finishes in different age categories!” David said.

“They were really pleased with that. You can imagine how important it is for the self-esteem of the kids from a poor township to be able to participate – and excel – in those kinds of events.”

What's next for Bicycles for Humanity (WA)?

“My trip to Namibia has convinced me that we need to resupply the bike shops we have helped set up to keep them going to ensure their sustainability,” David said.

“It’s been almost 6 years since a few people got together to establish B4H WA, and we should all be extremely proud of our achievements; illustrated especially by the bike shops I visited in Namibia last month.

“However, it is also clear that there is a lot more we can do, both supporting the shops in Namibia and establishing new ones elsewhere in Africa.

“I have not mentioned the work we have been doing in remote indigenous communities in WA. We are working on new plans to expand this work also.”

We are only able to do what we do thanks to the extraordinary efforts of all our volunteers, our supporters and sponsors. Thanks everyone!