

Tandem Bike and Hike



- **Cleveland Sight Center Recreation Department**
- **Type:**
 - To provide access for people who are blind, visually impaired and may have additional challenges to Cuyahoga Valley National Park and sports and leisure activity
 - To Improve Health & Wellness
 - To offer Education Safety Training, and New Skills
 - Access to Nature through social activity
 - Exposure to diverse cultures & history of CVNP
- **Year Started c.1990**

County: Cuyahoga
(Cuyahoga District #)

**A Partner
for Life**
Cleveland Sight Center



Imagine the sublime pleasure of riding a bike on a nature trail, wind on your face, exhilarating feeling of speed and action, getting healthy, appreciating diverse habitats along your journey, and the satisfaction of becoming or staying fit and healthy. Now imagine you are blind and the satisfying experience of tandem bike riding with a friendly captain to achieve this same experience with added meaning and value to your quality of life. Cleveland Sight Center's Tandem Bike and Hike Program began c.1990. to provide the opportunity locally for our clients. The program began small with a donation of a tandem bike to the agency. Volunteer 'captains' or 'pilots' would ride on Martin Luther King Dr. from our University Circle location with sometimes anxious but always adventurous clients seeking ways to be independent and included in fitness and outdoor activities. Bike and Hike utilized paths in the Cleveland Metroparks before the program eventually found partners in the Cleveland and Akron Hiking Clubs but really came into its own in 2005 through a partnership with the Cuyahoga Valley Recreation Area, now National Park. Best practices include strict safety guidelines, all riders wear helmets, no sandals, and receive hands on training. Donuts, while enticing are not a healthy start up snack... fruit, vegetables, granolas make for better snacks, hydration is mandatory, and matching captains with riders based on compatibility and size is important. Offering the opportunity to hike while waiting your turn to ride offers additional benefits to 'hear' and feel the nature trail, continue physical fitness activity, and socialize with peers and sighted volunteers.

Contact:

Name: Greg McGrath

Phone # (216) 658-4592

E-mail address: gmcgrath@clevelandsightcenter.org

Tandem Bike and Hike



- **Participants:** 60 Teens and adults
- **Staff & volunteers:** Typically 1-2 Cleveland Sight Center staff with 8-10 volunteers
- **Location:** Cuyahoga Valley National Park Hunt Farm. Gravel paths for riding and nature trails for hiking.
- **Program frequency:** Monthly April through September. Third Saturday of month 9 AM to 12 PM
- **Other:** Limited by number of bikes, volunteers, and transportation capacity

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Today there are information resources for Tandem Biking for people who are blind. These resources were not available when our program started. Google search will lead individuals and organizations to web sites for competition, individual enthusiasts, and help to get started. One can try <http://bicyclingblind.org/> , http://www.blindstokersclub.org/BSC_website/Homepage.html , <http://www.paralympic.org/cycling>. Costs: our program began with a donated bike and through grants and donations we have added eight bikes and a recumbent side by side tandem for people who also have mobility challenges. Bikes range in cost from \$200 for a used bike to upwards of \$2,000 for a new quality built bike. Buy the best bike within your budget. Cleveland Sight Center provides transportation in 2-3 vans for our participants, the largest expense (\$800 - \$1,000 per outing). We alternate eastern Cuyahoga residents one month and west side participants the next. Recreation Department staff provide about 8 hours per month preparation time calling participants, arranging transportation schedules, coordinating with volunteers and CVNP, and purchasing and preparing snacks. The event occurs from 9 AM to 12PM and staff work until 1PM putting bikes away and clean up of snacks, etc. for a total of 13-15 hours per month. Specific line items in a budget to consider are staff – 15 hours/month, bikes, transportation, snacks \$30 month, maintenance for bikes \$250 annually, marketing materials for volunteer and participant recruitment – web page, Facebook, print \$125-\$250. Collaborations and partnerships make program sense for a program serving people with special needs.

Participants are requested to pay a \$35 annual fee and nominal transportation fee **if they can afford it**. Many of our clients live on fixed incomes. Cleveland Sight Center funds the bulk of this program with donations and endowment income.

Cleveland Sight Center Tandem Bike and Hike



- Our program is **unique** in Cuyahoga County, Ohio and one of few across the country
- **Benefits, Goals and Results:** .60 participants gaining access to fitness and outdoor activities, National Park, and socialization. Weight loss and miles ridden tracking recently introduced for some participating in the WellPoint/United States Association of Blind Athletes Fitness Challenge. However for all participants quality of life factors – confidence, independence, inclusion and socialization... priceless
- **Transferability:** Replication is absolutely doable and encouraged. We'll provide technical help!

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The Cleveland
Hiking Club



Our program places a first priority on participation for a population without access to many fitness or outdoor experiences. Sixty participants making the effort to be in an unfamiliar environment is a significant personal and institutional outcome. People in blindness rehabilitation have many challenges and react to the loss of vision in various ways including grief, social isolation, loss of job, depressive feelings, fear, anger, loss of self esteem, impact on family. Tandem biking lifts the spirits, builds confidence, brings peers together, and provides physical and emotional benefits to mitigate the above losses. The presence of our bikers in the National Park is a statement that challenges pre-conceived notions about people who are blind and helps shape community perception about ability. The unique convergence of resources of our fantastic National Park in between two major urban areas, a dedicated volunteer pool, and an organization with a mission to Educate, Empower, and Employ provide volunteers and clients multiple benefits related to well-being, quality of life, overcoming obstacles, self-advocacy, and gaining or reclaiming independence.

Cleveland Sight Center Tandem Bike and Hike



“I love this program. It gets me out and lets me feel independent”

-Paula



“How cool is this: Once a month, for over 20 years, groups from the Cleveland Sight Center head down to the Hunt Farm visitor’s center to hike, enjoy the outdoors and, amazingly enough, ride a bike.”

– CoolCleveland.com

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Officially Cool!



Our client population has access to technology, social media, and the web, but training and competency is still emerging. Print media is generally not useful unless one has a reader. We post events on our website and Facebook, and our volunteers respond with enthusiasm. Recruitment is one to one, usually a participant talking to a peer about their positive experiences, or staff recruiting people new to blindness and vision loss.

Cleveland Sight Center Tandem Bike and Hike

Future Hopes:

- We imagine a participant achieving competitive status i.e., Paralympics
- Tandem biking available 'on demand' for individual w/ vision loss
- Municipal recreation programs including tandem opportunities for residents who are blind, family tandem outings,
- Inclusion with tandem clubs for sighted people

Tandem Bike and Hike is a companion program to Cross Country Skiing and Hiking offering year round trail opportunities. Cleveland Sight Center also offers sailing, golf, walking club, Tai Chi, and field trips to Metroparks



Ask me about cross country skiing and winter hiking on the trails!

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Requirements or certification is not required for staff or volunteers. Experience with tandem bikes is important and understanding that it is not the same as bike riding – balance, synchronization with the rider, and safety can be taught. Knowledge about the bike itself is helpful and in our case supplied by experienced volunteers and our friends at Century Cycle. The equipment in good working condition and routine (but not too complicated) maintenance is important

Tandem fits in well with park trails and paths, but can be accomplished in one's neighborhood in the city or suburb. The added benefit of the natural setting of CVNP is immeasurable.

Challenges include resources financial and human. As a non profit we are constantly looking at efficiency and cost. Our partners at the national park have experienced personnel cuts. The solution has been creative cost sharing, asking more of volunteers, and setting limits for participation to maintain already stretched budgets.

Cleveland Sight Center's Tandem Bike and Hike has had many champions. Pamela Bokshon-Nemec began the program c.1990 with the support of the agency administration and board of trustees. Her successor, Jeri Rask, Recreation Specialist grew the program from the 1997 to 2012 when she retired. Greg McGrath Director of Camping and Recreation and Desmond Kennedy Recreation Specialist champion the current program. Doug Palmer and Margaret Adams of the CVNP support the program with enthusiasm – keeping it alive during the current sequestration of the federal government. These few are aided by the real champions – the many dedicated volunteers who show up each month to pilot the bikes, provide sighted guide to hikers. and help with maintenance of the bikes. These are the

champions, the heroes of the program are the courageous people with blindness who challenge themselves to ride on a bike with a volunteer and travel where they cannot see.