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**Camps help people with disabilities learn to ride bikes**

From August 13 through 17, volunteers in [Cambridge](https://icanshine.org/ican-bike-cambridge-ma/) and [Scituate](https://icanshine.org/ican-bike-scituate-ma/) helped a combined total of 59 youth with disabilities learn to ride bikes at [iCan Bike Camp](https://icanshine.org/parents/ican-bike-parents/). An initiative of the national nonprofit [iCan Shine](https://icanshine.org/), the one-week bike camp runs in many communities across the country – anywhere that volunteers organize it. Two other Massachusetts communities hosted camp earlier this year: [Bellingham](https://icanshine.org/ican-bike-bellingham-ma/) in June, and [Groton](https://icanshine.org/ican-bike-groton-ma/) in April.

The five-day camp includes five sessions each day, each 75 minutes long. Campers sign up for one session, which they attend every day. Over the course of the week, two dedicated volunteers work with each camper, helping them ride an adaptive bike and gradually phasing out supports. By the end of the week, approximately 80 percent of participants are ready to ride their own two-wheeled bike without supports. The camp focuses on balance and does not cover topics like riding safely in a community or with traffic. After camp, parents are encouraged to help participants practice their skills and learn to ride safely.

Riders come to camp for a variety of reasons. One Cambridge camper this year was very excited to learn to ride a bike so he could be included in the bike trip planned as part of the Boy Scout Camp he was going to later in the summer. A participant of the camp in Groton was [overjoyed](https://icanshine.org/participant-of-the-month/) to be able to ride with her mother on their local rail trail.

Camp is run as a partnership between iCan Shine and local volunteer organizers. The national organization sets eligibility criteria: campers must be at least eight years old, and participants must be able to walk without assistance and sidestep to each side, among other requirements. [Hosts](https://icanshine.org/program-hosts/ican-bike-hosts/) recruit participants and volunteers, manage space logistics, organize housing for the iCan Shine staff, and fundraise to cover program costs. iCan Shine staff members manage programming during the week and bring adaptive equipment.

Host entities vary from one community to the next. The [Scituate Community of Resources for Special Education](https://www.corsefoundation.org/) (CORSE) Foundation was the first to bring bike camp to Massachusetts in 2008. An all-volunteer organization that runs approximately 60 recreational, social and academic programs annually for youth with disabilities, CORSE partners with the town’s recreation department on this bike camp. Since 2009, CORSE has offered bike camp every three years, to maximize demand.

The [Hopedale](https://sites.google.com/site/hopedalesepac/home) and [Bellingham](https://www.facebook.com/BellinghamSEPAC) Special Education Parent Advisory Councils (SEPAC) partnered to offer Bellingham’s camp in June. Theresa Ehrlich of Hopedale brought her daughter to an iCan Bike camp in Arlington in 2013 and was amazed to see her daughter’s progress: “I was astonished. I cried. On the way home, I decided our community needed that. I wanted every parent to feel the happiness that I felt.” For two years, Ehrlich organized a Hopedale camp, and then developed the partnership with Bellingham. This year, they served 35 campers. Arlington was also the inspiration for Cambridge’s camp. When the host organizing Arlington’s camp moved away, long-time camp volunteer Nina Katz-Christy assumed the role of host, and moved camp to Cambridge.

Hosts note that organizing the logistics and raising the funds are daunting tasks, but the effort pays off when they see the impact on participants and their families. In the words of CORSE Co-Founder Tracy Johnston, “It’s a big endeavor, but so worth it. You’re literally changing people’s lives. Independence is a huge thing for people with disabilities. Biking opens doors socially and work-wise. It allows people to get where they need to be, but it is also a rite of passage. You can get yourself to a job, and you can also go to where your friends are hanging out.”