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Meet a Newcomer Bike Mentorship Match: Dan, Lili, and Francis

Last year, Ecology Action Centre launched its bike mentorship program, the Bike Buddy, in the spring and summer in Halifax. The program was a success, with thirty-nine newcomers enjoying all the benefits of cycling with a mentor and different areas in the city.

The program is an excellent way for newcomers to learn to ride safely in the city, meet people, and enjoy being outdoors. It is also a great experience for mentors who want to share their cycling knowledge and passion with others. “Initially, the Bike Buddy Program attracted me as a fun way to share my cycling knowledge, experience, and enthusiasm with like-minded people. It was also a great opportunity to meet and welcome people new to our country”, says Dan.

Dan Desgrosseilliers is a retired Federal Public Servant who joined the Bike Buddy Program as a mentor last year. Dan has been volunteering with a volunteer-run bike repair shop called *Bike Again!* for the last couple of years. His volunteering at *Bike Again!* has provided Dan with knowledge and experience in repairing and maintaining bikes and a rekindled love for cycling.



Dan was matched with Lili Li and Francis Tian, who arrived in Halifax from China in 2021. Both like to ride bicycles to be close to nature and explore some beautiful views.

“When we were in our home country, sometimes we would ride together and enjoy the riding journey,” says Lili. Francis and Lili learned about the Bike Buddy program through the

settlement agency. They both saw the program as a good opportunity to improve their communication skills and familiarize themselves more with their neighbors and the community. More importantly, the opportunity to make friends during this program.

Lili and Francis met with Dan once a week for 12 weeks. Previous experience riding their bikes in China was helpful but different from riding their bikes in Halifax. Lili says, "I thought it's pretty easy to ride a bicycle because we have some experience in bicycling. However, the road is up and down in Halifax." Dan's mentorship taught them best practices, such as changing gears to ride on Halifax's many hills and riding on trails and roads safely.

After completing the program, Lili reflected on their most significant achievement: "I'd like to say my friend, mentor Dan, is my biggest achievement during the bike program. We built a strong friendship with each other. His rich experience in bicycling and repairing bicycles, his humor, and his kindness impressed me a lot. Once, both of our two families rode together, and we enjoyed a happy time. Actually, this is also the precious fortune in my life."

One of the benefits of bike mentorship is developing meaningful friendships. "It was such a pleasure meeting up with Lili and Francis every week and sharing new cycling adventures and sights with them. The biggest benefit was befriending this wonderful couple, getting to know them, and sharing fun experiences with them. I was always

looking forward to our next get-together", says Dan.



Lili and Francis continue riding their bikes and already have their next big bicycle adventure in mind for this year: "We plan to ride bicycles in Peggy Cove."

The program is a rewarding experience for everyone involved. "The Bike Buddy program is an awesome fulfilling experience and a great way to open your mind to other cultures through new friends while exercising and enjoying the outdoors through cycling. A truly unique life experience," says Dan. The first Bike Buddy cohort of 2023 started in May, and a second cohort ran in July.