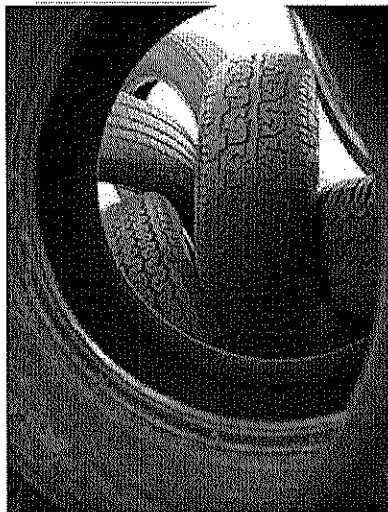




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## Recycle a Bicycle

By: [Kathleen J. King \(View Profile\)](#)

In most major metropolitan cities, everywhere you look these days, you're bound to see a discarded bike. Sometimes a tire is gone. Or it's an old rusty clunker abandoned on a sidewalk somewhere.

Karen Overton, an avid biker and activist, started Recycle-A-Bicycle, a non-profit, to salvage and sell used bikes to the public, creating an innovative program that combines recycling and youth job training. Added benefit: sustainability.

Karen started by teaching middle school classes in New York City how to fix bikes through her involvement with Transportation Alternatives, a non-profit citizens group focused on better bicycling, walking, public transit, and fewer cars. At first she learned along with the kids, fixing chains, tires, handlebars—whatever needed fixing. The program grew in popularity and expanded to many schools. As an offshoot of that, she opened two retail bike shops in Manhattan and Brooklyn.

At the Recycle-A-Bicycle retail shops kids find and refurbish old bikes, sell used bikes, offer bike repair and mechanics, sell bike equipment, post bikes for sale, take donations for bikes, and offer classes and training for bike riding groups. Sales from the retail shops in turn support the youth programs. They also get involved in community awareness about bike safety, and alternative forms of transportation.

Recycle-A-Bicycle is the place to go for used bikes. *Time Out New York* magazine named it one of the top bike shops in the city. Its mission is to encourage a healthy alternative to driving—one that's affordable and sustainable.

The kids benefit, too. Once kids finish the program, they can earn a bike. And inside the shop, they do more than learn how to fix bikes, gaining real on-the-job training and marketing skills, as well as a "can

do” attitude.

Recycle-A-Bicycle also encourages young cyclists to explore the city by using bike-riding clubs. The program also helps young people and adults map their neighborhoods. Recycle-A-Bicycle has made six maps already, documenting environmental and historical issues in neighborhoods in Manhattan and the surrounding boroughs.

In November 2005 Recycle-A-Bicycle raised money for Katrina victims. Partnering with the New Orleans Community Bike Project, they sent five mechanics to Louisiana to get more bikes on the ground. Bikes were \$15 and offered free of charge in the hardest hit areas.

Karen recently left the program to work on other projects. Her predecessor, Lisa Stein, continues the work of Recycle-A-Bicycle today.

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