

join2**bike** : *inclusive cycling*

Application for the
European Commission 2020 #BeInclusive EU Sport Awards

join2bike by Belgian Power vzw

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Contents

Our organization.....	2
Our projects.....	3
1. The join2bike physical activity project	3
2. The join2bike bicycle library	4
Example 1: recumbent trikes	5
Example 2: hand bikes.....	6
Example 3: tandems	7
How do we achieve all this?	8
1. Volunteers.....	8
2. Donations.....	8
Our values.....	9
1. Inclusive sports	9
2. Physical and mental health.....	10
3. Challenges, but no competitiveness.....	11
4. Cooperation and mutual assistance	12
5. Quality and professionalism	13
6. Outreach	14
Robby's success story	15
Join2bike in action: short video clips	16

Our organization

"Join2bike by Belgian Power vzw" or "join2bike vzw" is a Belgian non-profit association founded in September 2011 which aims to encourage everyone, with and without physical disabilities, to participate in healthy cycling.

Being aware that exercise is extremely important for both body and mind, we want to offer a helping hand to make cycling possible for everyone, including those with very severe disabilities.

At the same time, we attach great importance to cycling *together*. Cycling side by side, forges a special bond and creates a sense of togetherness. It allows us to learn from each other, to meet challenges and to push our limits.



Our poster boy Simon

Our projects

1. The join2bike physical activity project

Join2bike is a physical activity project, designed to help people exercise in a healthy way, especially cycling. Cycling is an accessible sport and can be practiced by people of all ages, regardless of their physical condition.

We organize weekly progressive training rides for the recreational cyclist. We provide special adapted bikes and by linking these together to form a tandem or a little train, we help each other in case riding alone is difficult. We offer the best possible support during these training sessions, both technical and paramedical.

"Faster alone, further together" -- African saying and join2bike's motto

During the summer we also take on a special sporting challenge which we work towards all season, such as climbing a legendary col.

In addition to the training tours, we organize information sessions about sports nutrition, bicycle repair and other items that fascinate our members.



Training together

2. The join2bike bicycle library

Many of our members are people whose lives have been completely disrupted overnight by, for example, an accident, a stroke, or a serious illness. Often resulting in a long stay in a physical rehabilitation hospital.

During their rehabilitation, these people are encouraged to workout. Cycling is an important part of this. It can be done at low intensity, it renders muscles and joints supple, it improves strength and endurance, and it provides some basic mobility.

As rehabilitation ends, and these people are ready to return home, they face a huge financial burden for adjustments to their home, their car and so on. The purchase of a sporty adapted bike is then usually not feasible because it is too expensive. Training on a regular basis is brought to a standstill. The accumulated fitness is lost.

To fill this gap, we are building a bicycle library to offer members with a disability the opportunity to borrow a customized bike at a fair price (i.e. maintenance costs), so that they can maintain and improve their physical condition.

Over the course of the nine years since join2bike's birth, we have already managed to acquire a nice collection of bikes. These are mainly special tandems, recumbent trikes, and hand bikes, with electric support or not.

Particularly important, is the experience we have gained over these years, which has proved necessary to find the right bike for people with the most diverse – and often profoundly serious – conditions. Join2bike counts among its members people with left or right-sided paralysis due to a cerebrovascular accident, people with high spinal cord injuries, people who suffer from a progressive chronic illness...

The next few pages show some examples of what we make possible...

Example 1: recumbent trikes

People with a one-sided lower limb impairment or with balance or visual problems, are benefited from a three-wheeled recumbent, a trike. We prefer models that allow to be linked together to form a tandem or a small train. In this way, people with less strength in their legs and people with more strength can still perform beautifully together.



A single trike



A train with three linked trikes

Example 2: hand bikes

For people who can only use their upper limbs, a hand bike is the solution. It is wonderful to witness how these people gain strength and independence by training!



Stijn riding a hand bike



Simon riding a hand bike

Example 3: tandems

Finally, our special tandems allow everyone, even those with tetraplegia or with locked-in syndrome, to enjoy cycling together. The tandems are equipped with a front seat where the disabled person can sit safely and comfortably. These tandems also exist in a version with hand or foot pedals so that the front rider may contribute to driving the bike.



A special tandem



A special tandem with hand pedals

How do we achieve all this?

1. Volunteers

Our operation is entirely based on the efforts of a small group of volunteers. Organizational, administrative, and logistic tasks are taken care of by them. With a lot of attention, together with the people, a suitable bike is selected, which is then accommodated with the necessary adjustments. Everyone has their own needs and sometimes we must go through a week or even month-long process of trying out, finding the right accessories, and making improvements...

In addition, there is a very nice spirit of togetherness in our group, so that each member enjoys doing his bit, each according to his or her own ability: we help each other in and out our bikes, we share our muscle strength on a tandem or in a train of linked trikes, those who are technically savvy, help with repairs on the road... And above all, we share friendship and moral support!



If you are going to sit in a trike, your back number has to go on your chest!

2. Donations

Almost all of our resources go to extending our bicycle library. A recumbent trike, a hand bike or another adapted bike quickly costs several thousand euros.

The money for this comes from donations, support projects, sponsorships, and fundraisers.

Our values

1. Inclusive sports

Join2bike strives for maximum integration of physically disabled people. The word 'integration' means to us that everyone, with *and* without disability, can participate and that we do sport together. In this sense, we prefer not to present ourselves as a disability sports club, where activities are often targeted at impaired people only.

We want everyone to enjoy cycling: male or female, young or old, whatever your background or your physical condition. Everyone is welcome and everyone is equal.



Ready and eager to go!

2. Physical and mental health

By encouraging each other to exercise and by training together, we are improving our physical health. It is well known how exercise benefits anybody's health. But for people with reduced mobility, it is even more vital to build strength and fitness, and to preserve it well.

Many also experience how their mental strength improves. Depression, stress and anxiety diminish, not only through the effect of the effort, but also due to the enjoyment of cycling, the pleasure and friendship in the group, and the satisfaction we experience when we face great challenges together and push our boundaries.

"It's a funny thing how something as simple as turning pedals, can suddenly become a moment of pure happiness." -- Luc



Bravo! You are doing great!

3. Challenges, but no competitiveness

By taking on great challenges together, such as climbing a legendary mountain (the *Mont Ventoux*, the *Kaunertaler Gletscherstrasse*, The *Passo dello Stelvio*), each one of us – sickly or healthy – gets a new perspective on his or her limitations.

People who, through one or another unfortunate event, feel they can no longer do anything, discover how they are still capable of a great deal! Every goal we achieve, is a victory to these people over their illness or impairment. It raises their confidence in their ability to also do other things.

"When we conquer the mountain together, we make it clear that illness or impairment can't stop us from doing incredible things." -- Dominique

At the same time, we are not competitive – we do not measure ourselves against each other. What counts is achieving your personal goal; the speed at which you do so, is of no importance.



We may look small but... victory is near!

4. Cooperation and mutual assistance

Cycling together creates a bond and a sense of togetherness. The participants of our group stimulate and motivate each other to push their limits and to improve their physical condition.

We help each other in practical ways, but we also learn from each other: how to cope with changed circumstances, to face challenges, to push back boundaries.

In addition, partners and family members of disabled people come across each other at join2bike. Having the opportunity to interchange support and advice, means a lot to them.



From wheelchair to tandem

5. Quality and professionalism

Above all, we want to enable sports in a safe and pleasant way, through the right equipment and a good support framework. That is what our volunteers strive for.

Several of them are nurses by profession, including in a physical rehabilitation hospital. They are thoroughly familiar with the needs of disabled people, as well as the potential dangers of great exertion.

We also have extensive experience on a technical level. Maintenance of our bicycles requires much more knowledge and skill than with regular bikes. That is why we attend supplier's workshops on a regular basis and share technical knowledge among the volunteers. In addition, we work very closely with a bicycle shop specialized in adapted and custom made bicycles (Het Fietslab, <https://www.fietslab.be/>).



A job calling for highly specialized skills...

6. Outreach

Since our entire operation depends on a small group of volunteers, we are limited in what we can do. Nevertheless, we manage to give a fair number of disabled people the opportunity to get out on their bikes and thus increase their mobility and breach their social isolation.

In addition, there are different ways in which we get across our message that inclusive sports are good for everyone, that people with and without disabilities are equally worthy, and that they can learn from each other and contribute to each other's happiness.

We hope to also inspire others in different ways:

1. On our weekly training sessions, we make ourselves visible, and thus showcase our ideals in the wide environment of the city of Leuven (Belgium)
2. On our special day trips, we do the same throughout Belgium, and during our travels, in different countries of Europe (France, Italy, Austria...).
3. All over Flanders we have members who use an adaptive bike from our bicycle library and showcase in their own environment what is possible for people with severe disabilities
4. We take part in major sporting events such as the 20 km of Brussels (<http://www.20kmdebruxelles.be/en/>)
5. We regularly appear in different media (see <https://j2b.join2bike.be/nieuws/in-de-media/>)
6. People from abroad who were join2bike members during their stay in Belgium, tell our story in their home country (Denmark, France, Spain, Colombia)
7. We share advice, logistic support and equipment with other organizations and sports initiatives with disabled people, like Transplantoux (<https://www.transplantoux.be/>), Ultrakid Johannes (<https://www.facebook.com/ultrakidjohannes/>), Heroes for Heroes (<https://www.heldenvoorhelden.be/>)
8. We have good contacts with local authorities and share our findings with policy makers in the city of Leuven and the province of Flemish Brabant
9. We are one of the charities of “De Warmste Week”, a huge fundraiser of the VRT, the Flemish radio and television broadcasting organization
10. Sometimes we are at the REVA fair, a large information fair that caters to people with disabilities, their families, professionals, and volunteers (<https://reva.be/>)
11. We applied for and already won some awards (see <https://j2b.join2bike.be/nieuws/in-de-prijzen/>)

Robby's success story

As join2bike members, we have the great privilege to witness several people mustering enormous courage and will power to beat the difficulties they have been dealt. A beautiful example is Robby, a young man who suffered a cerebrovascular accident at age 25. It has been a delight to watch him grow over the years since he joined join2bike.

His story in his own words:

"I was an avid athlete, when fate (a CVA) struck on 01/11/2002. Suddenly sports where out of the question, instead life was a battle for survival.

After physical rehabilitation, I was trying out many sports, when I accidentally found join2bike. Finally again, I could live my heart out while rediscovering the bike. From barely being able to walk to being a trailblazer in 'my' sport. I'm flourishing again.

It was a long, difficult road, but thanks in part to the support and guidance of join2bike, I'm again proud of myself. I may still be different, but I don't feel different when I am sitting (laying) in my bike."



This is torment...



And this is glory!

Join2bike in action: short video clips



Three join2bike trike trains climbing

<https://youtu.be/bedNIhkLKAU?list=PLDSYDTCbHKCinFymH-NNYD5KhW1ERFwG>



A joyful join2bike convoy

<https://youtu.be/mmgOQ6wS6hA?list=PLDSYDTCbHKCinFymH-NNYD5KhW1ERFwG>



Bicycles, hand bikes, trike trains

<https://www.facebook.com/join2bike/videos/2367077680244154/>



Stijn arrives in his hand bike

https://youtu.be/t_mviNrZIMM?list=PLDSYDTCbHKCinFymH-NNYD5KhwW1ERFwG



Join2bike ladies train

<https://youtu.be/8GZaGwGFdvY?list=PLDSYDTCbHKCinFymH-NNYD5KhwW1ERFwG>