Evan Smiley wants you to have a bike!

He’s launching a program through which he accepts donated bikes, repairs and tunes them up, then donates them in usable condition to the community.

Smiley is a mechanic at Bike Fiend, a bike shop in downtown Moab. He wanted to do something socially uplifting.

“I used to work with kids a bit more and kind of had that rewarding aspect of getting kids in the outdoors,” he recalled.

Before Bike Fiend, Smiley worked in outdoor education for youth at the local nonprofit Canyonlands Field Institute, and before that, at a Montessori school. Then he started guiding
bike-packing tours, elaborate trips with high price tags aimed at adults.

“It was fun, but didn’t feel fulfilling,” he said of those trips. “So I was trying to do something a little more fulfilling and community-centric.”

For inspiration, Smiley combined things he values with needs he saw in the community.

“The big one was hearing that some people don’t have a means of transportation, who work in the hotels and stuff and have to walk miles and miles to work,” he said of the seeds of his idea.

Smiley heard from friends who work at Seekhaven Family Crisis and Resource Center and from his partner, who works at the Moab Valley Multicultural Center, about people who lack transportation and can’t afford a decent bike. He also sometimes meets shoppers at Bike Fiend hoping to find a bike for around $100.

“We have nothing in that price range,” he said.

Smiley figured if he was willing to donate his time and labor, others might be willing to donate bikes, parts, or money to help distribute bikes to people who want them but can’t afford them. He posted a pitch on Facebook and got a very positive response. Within a couple weeks of his post, he’s been given about 25 bikes and $400 in financial donations.

“The first couple of days, I was just going back and forth in my truck picking up bikes,” he said.

The owners of Bike Fiend have allowed Smiley to use the shop and also put him in touch with their parts distributor allowing that $400 to stretch further. Smiley says he’s been spending around two or three hours on each bike, usually replacing inner tubes and filling them with sealant to prevent flats, replacing cables and cable housings for gear shifters and brakes, and replacing brake pads.

“I’ve got five bikes up and rolling right now,” he said.

He’s giving the bikes to the local nonprofit thrift store WabiSabi. They’re not displayed on the shop floor; instead, people who need a bike can go to Seekhaven or the Multicultural Center to get a $25 WabiSabi voucher. The bikes will have a small cost on top of that: $15 dollars for an adult bike, and $5 more dollars for a child’s bike. The voucher system ensures that the bikes are being reserved for people who really need them, and not being snapped up as a sweet deal by thrift store shoppers who might not be aware of the story behind the wheels. The small additional cost prevents people from taking the bikes for granted.

Smiley wants to help people get into biking as recreation as well as a means of transport.

“Transportation is one thing, but also recreating on bikes is something that’s important to me,” he said, adding, “getting kids on bikes is really important as well.”

If the project gains momentum, it might one day expand to offer bike maintenance skills, giving people “the empowerment that comes from fixing up your bike, in terms of ownership and pride, that ‘I took this piece of junk bike and turned it into something functional,’” Smiley said.
He's already received offers from several people who want to volunteer their time to help repair the bikes, encouraging the hope that the project could grow.

Local man fixes donation bikes up for youth

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– Evan Smiley