

The Otesha Project: empowering the youth of Victoria

For a group of young Victorians, spreading the word on environmental sustainability means doing it town by town and on bikes—all 1,300kms of the way.

Key issues

Sustainability
Youth participation
Rural engagement

Compiled by

The Otesha Project
info@otesha.org.au



Since 2000, The Otesha Project (Aus.): *Cycling for Sustainability* has pedalled across Australia educating youth and raising awareness about environmental sustainability and social justice issues. Otesha cycling groups consist of young people aged 18–30 who deliver theatre performances and interactive workshops in high schools to empower students to consider their life choices to ensure a positive future.

The Otesha Project is inspired by Ghandi's famous line "be the change you want to see in the world". The organisation's name itself—Otesha—is a Swahili word for "reason to dream" and is the underlining philosophy of the organisation.

The Otesha Project recently completed a six-week bicycle tour of rural Victoria, which started in Melbourne on 18 January 2009. The group rode from Melbourne to Geelong, across to Portland, up through the Grampians, and made its way over to Bendigo before finishing back in Melbourne on 1 March. Cycling the entire distance of 1,300kms was part of the team's commitment to "being the change you want to see in the world", resulting in not a single drop of petrol being used to transport the group to 15 different schools across Victoria to raise awareness of the benefits of living sustainably.

Tour participants travelled around rural regions of Victoria and presented the comical *Morning of Choices* theatrical skit and engaging workshops to young people throughout the state. The collective community worked together to make all this possible by creating workshops around issues they are passionate about, as well as helping to organise the school bookings and tour logistics prior to the tour's departure.

For Philippa Cook, one of the coordinators of the Victorian tour, the experience of The Otesha Project was fulfilling on many different levels. "Spending six weeks on this tour has showed me that living sustainably is not a chore, but is a much more fulfilling, energising and creative way of being part of this world," says Philippa.



◀ Members of the Otesha Project setting out on their six-week tour of rural Victoria to raise awareness about environmental sustainability



◀ Enjoying the scenery while taking a break on the jetty at Lake Colac during the 1,300km journey

The Otesha Project will be facilitating more tours this year and is seeking youth from various walks of life—people with different experiences, backgrounds, and interests—to help build a roving community. While on tour, participants not only learn skills to become strong advocates of living sustainably, but also develop skills such as media communication, leadership, acting, and communal living.

For information about upcoming tours or to find out more about the organisation, visit the Otesha Project website at: www.otesha.org.au or info@otesha.org.au.