



Pedaling for Sustainability: The Otesha project (Australia) begins 1300km journey down the N.S.W coast

The Otesha Project (Australia) has hit the road! Formally known as cycling for sustainability, the Otesha Project is committed to engaging young people in issues concerning environmental sustainability and social justice.

The seventeen strong Otesha crew has begun its 5-week tour (18 November – 22 December) down the N.S.W coast: A journey which will see them pedal 1300km from Brisbane to Newcastle... Otesha's largest tour yet! Along the way they will be performing for over 20 high schools, empowering youth to make choices in their daily lives that will impact positively on the sustainability of their environment and society.

And if cycling over 1,000 kms without vehicle support isn't inspiring enough, the Otesha crew will astonish youth with their performance of Otesha's hilarious Morning of Choices play, which depicts a day in the life of two young individuals and the impact their daily choices have on poor old 'Mother Earth'. Targeting issues such as water, clothing, media, food and transport, the play challenges high school students to consider their life choices to ensure a positive future. The Otesha crew will also present various slideshows and interactive workshops to further explore these issues.

Current consumption behaviours in Australia have far reaching consequences that are both unsustainable and inequitable. The negative impacts of these practices usually affect the most disempowered people in society, including young people who now face an uncertain future. For Dan Carey – volunteer coordinator of Otesha's NSW tour – The Otesha Project is primarily about empowering youth to be the change they want to see in the world: "Society these days doesn't always encourage creative thinking. We're encouraged to jump on the bandwagon of eating, working, sleeping, consuming, breeding and dying. Our tours challenge this. We want to encourage youth to strive for a positive future and find their own solutions to the problems they see in the world. We want to inspire them to follow their dreams," she says. "Otesha is actually a Swahili word for 'reason to dream'. And it's the underlying philosophy of the organisation".

Yet the Otesha Project aims to do more than just inspire youth along the tour route. The multifaceted nature of the project is also designed to empower the participants on the cycle tour. Tour members were selected to create a diverse cycling team: people with different experiences, backgrounds, and interests. As they pedal down the coast, participants further their own skills to become strong advocates for living sustainably, while developing skills such as media communication, leadership, acting and communal living. "One exciting aspect of being on tour is the change and growth of the actual participants," says Dan. "Being the change they want to see...they're actually living their dream. They're doing something different to the norm. It's inspiring and makes me hopeful for a positive future." For first time rider, Sophie Ellis, the tour represents an opportunity to engage kids in thinking creatively and critically about environmental and social responsibility. "When we hear about sustainability and about the gravity of contemporary social and environmental problems, it can often feel daunting and overwhelming: Where do we begin? But Otesha isn't about preaching, and that's what I love about it: It's about inspiring and encouraging youth to take action through their daily choices, using fun, dynamic performances and workshops."

Since 2000, The Otesha Project (Aust.) has pedaled over 13,000 km across Australia connecting with communities. As a volunteer non-profit organisation, it is continuously reliant on community support for the success of its projects. If you are able to support the crew with accommodation or in-kind food donations, or would like to make a school booking or to arrange an interview please call **0410215511**. For more information about The Otesha Project including a detailed route description, visit: www.otesha.org.au

Notes to Editors:

* The Otesha Project (Australia): Cycling for Sustainably – 'reason to dream'

* Now taking school bookings for schools!! And seeking accommodation.

* Tour Route: Brisbane to Newcastle (see website for route specifics);

* **Tour Dates: 15 November – 21 December 2008**

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