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EPPING — Andrew Sweet and four fellow Epping Middle School students are members of the newly- launched Youth Venture Team. They have created the Fix—It Bike Shop.

The venture will provide low-cost bike repair for area residents and offer money-saving lessons on maintenance and safety.

Sweet created the Fix-It Bike Shop after noticing that few residents in his town were cyclists. He assumed this was due to the lack of bike shops in the area.

Sweet thought if a shop opened that not only repaired bicycles but taught residents how to maintain them, people would more likely ride them. By riding bikes, people would be in better shape as well as help the environment, he reasoned.

Residents are encouraged to volunteer in the shop. After they log a certain number of hours, volunteers are able to begin building a bicycle as compensation for their time and energy. The bikes are built from miscellaneous extra parts from other bikes.

Through community events and fund-raisers, the young entrepreneurs hope to increase cycling and so decrease driving. They also hope to raise awareness about local trails and take part in conserving them. Fix—It Bike Shop is located at the Epping Recreation Department.

Funding for Fix—It Bike Shop was made possible by a seed grant from the New Hampshire Electric Co-op Foundation and Youth Venture. Sweet formally presented his idea before a selection panel of community members and leaders, who approved the team's proposal and awarded members a \$1,000 grant.

A venture team must be a new club, service or organization; provide a positive, lasting community benefit; be created, run and managed by youth ages 12-20; have clear goals, a committed team, a realistic budget; and have a non-controlling adult mentor. Each team receives up to \$1,000 in venture seed funding.

Ashoka's Youth Venture is a global movement of young change-makers. Youth Venture inspires and invests in teams of young people to start their own sustainable social ventures and connects them to a global network. For information, visit www.genv.net