

Young Ashwell

Megan Hollidge

I am 15 years old and have my GCSEs coming up in only a few months' time. To be honest, it is terrifying having to summarise all your subjects throughout your entire school career, just on the basis of one or two ridiculous tests. On top of this, I was half way through frantically applying to sixth form colleges and in the middle of mock examinations when my mum told me about the Mindfulness course going on in Ashwell.

Now, I'm no expert, but with everything at school being so fast paced and pressured, you would think I needed something relaxing to do as a break for a while - a chance to escape, to sit back and breathe. However, whether it was a defence mechanism, or pure stress from everything going on, I refused. I was just "far too busy" and had "far too much work to do" to think of doing a Mindfulness course as well.

Looking back on this moment now, I realise that herein lies the problem with our modern day lives. Everything is just too fast paced, competitive and, quite frankly, flipping stressful.

It does not matter whether we are at school or work; we all live in a demanding, maddening, hypersonic world that (for most of the time) does not possess a pause button. Thinking about it, when was the last time you sat down, closed your eyes and just breathed? Because I can honestly tell you I couldn't remember the last time I had.

Eventually, after a little persuasion and more consideration, I decided that killing an hour out of my constant revision schedule so as to have some time to unwind and calm down could only have its benefits. I was not disappointed.

I have just finished a Youth Mindfulness course in Ashwell, funded by the Henry Colbron Trust and run by The Letchworth Centre for Healthy Living. Doing the mindfulness course in the village has been so beneficial to me. Suddenly, I found myself stopping, concentrating on a space and just breathing (in the middle of exams).

Just taking a step back, being aware of your body, controlling your breath is such an undervalued thing to do. It is harder than it sounds, but once you have properly cracked it, I guarantee it's worth it. I feel so much calmer and controlled in stressful situations and very much happier.

I would like to thank the Henry Colbron Trust for such a wonderful opportunity and would 100% recommend Mindfulness to everyone else, whether it be online, through an audio book or attending a class.



Photo by Hannah Pitkethly



Photo by Attain

Sophie Lewis

Sophie Lewis, 16, remains a member of Cycle Club Ashwell but is now also a member of British Cycling's Junior Academy and is competing for Great Britain. This year, Sophie came third in the Elite women's road race at the London Nocturne, her first televised race, competing with some of the best female riders in the UK and overseas. I talked to Sophie about her rise, her pastime and her tips for success.

How did you start cycling? What was your biggest inspiration?

I started riding with the village cycle club, Cycle Club Ashwell, when I was 9 years old. I used to see them riding on the Rec on a Thursday evening and I thought that it looked like a fun thing to do. (The Cycle Club now has its own grass track just behind the Small Gains football pitch and tennis club). Max Pendleton was one of the coaches at the time and his daughter, Victoria, was an Olympic gold medal winner, so both of them really inspired me.

At what age did you begin competing? What was it like?

I did my first race when I was 10, racing track bikes on a grass track. I did my first road race when I was 12. Grass track was a great way to learn as it was an easy and safe environment to learn the key skills for racing; and the club was extremely friendly.

What is your workout routine like?

I train six to seven times a week on my bike (a range of road rides, turbo, rollers, Wattbike, track sessions or races) and two gym sessions. In total, 12-15 hours a week.

What would you say is your biggest achievement to date?

Winning two national titles on the velodrome (scratch and madison races) as an under-16 youth rider.

Have you ever racing internationally?

In August, I took part in the European Junior Tour in Assen, in the Netherlands, where I raced on six different courses over six days, ranging from 2.5km to 65km. I had one 2nd and two 4th places, but my overall classification chances were spoiled by a crash on day five, which set me back.

What are your plans for the future?

I have now joined the Great Britain junior team and will be competing for GB in several road and track events across the world in the next year. I hope to be selected for the European and World track championships this summer.

Outside of sport, what are you studying?

I am currently studying for four A-levels: maths, further maths, economics and PE. At some point, I would like to study economics at university.

Tips for aspiring cyclists?

The skills and fitness you gain through cycling rub off on so many other aspects of life. It has taught me so much already and given me many opportunities. When opportunities arise, you may be scared but take the chance and try new things. Cycle Club Ashwell is a great club to learn cycling skills with. The coaches are fantastic and it is a really friendly environment. They give you the chance to try track racing, mountain biking, cyclocross, and road riding. The emphasis is on training and taking part rather than racing and competing.

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