



Mentoring on Mountain Bikes

By Lauren Ober, Mentor, Little Bellas

I am a child magnet. For some reason that I cannot quite figure out, kids stick to me with the strength of

Krazy Glue. So when I was asked to be a mentor in the Little Bellas girls' mountain biking program, I didn't balk. I knew that if nothing else, I'd have a good time romping around with a bunch of fun girls. But the experience of Little Bellas has proved to be so much more.

My specialty has always been elementary-schoolers. They're not yet old enough to realize what a geek I am, but plenty old to have distinct personalities. So for the past two years I have worked with the youngest group in Little Bellas, aged 8 to 9 years old. This year the girls decided to name themselves the Mud Budz. The group gelled immediately, despite the fact that many of them had never met before and most had never been mountain biking. The Mud Budz enthusiasm for riding was infectious and my fellow mentors and I couldn't help but pedal with smiles.

Watching these girls grow as riders has been a treat. Mountain biking is not something that comes naturally to most people. It is challenging and scary and there is higher risk for injury than many other sports. But over the course of just one summer, the girls overcame many fears.

There is a particularly challenging part of a trail at the Catamount Family Outdoor Center where we ride with that is covered in exposed roots and surrounded by trees. The trail is part of one of the adult race loops and I've seen many a senior rider get tangled up in those roots and pitched off their bike.

We used that section of the trail to teach the girls how to get over obstacles. Hit the roots at a 90-degree

angle, keep your feet on the pedals, look ahead of you. If you stare at an obstacle, you will hit it. We ingrained these mantras in their heads until every single member of Mud Budz could clear the roots. It didn't happen in one session, or even four, but by the end of the summer it was as if the girls had been riding that trail their whole lives.



The Mud Budz cheering on team members at a race at Mt. Snow.

Through Little Bellas, the girls learn to set micro-goals and work to achieve them. They build confidence and conquer their fears with panache. The can-do spirit is very much alive in Little Bellas and it's an inspiration. Through the generous support

of the Vermont Women's Fund, our mentors are able to receive the training they need and more girls in the region will be able to participate in this truly unique program. As a fledgling organization trying to do right by girls, we cannot thank you enough!

In 2008, Little Bellas received \$3,000 grant from The Vermont Women's Fund. For more information on the program please contact Sabra Davison, Coordinator, at 496-9690 or sabra.davison@gmail.com