**Friday 1 December**

**Virgin Trains employee gears up for charity bike ride with a chain of fundraising events**

* *Keen cyclist and Virgin Trains employee, Iain Robinson, is taking part in his first ever cycling challenge to raise money for Railway Children and Rethink Mental Illness*
* *Iain will journey through India on two wheels, as part of Ride India 2018*
* *Virgin Trains station team at Carlisle are hosting fundraising events to help Iain reach his fundraising target of £3,000*

A Virgin Trains employee at Carlisle is gearing up to take part in his first ever cycling challenge halfway across the world, whilst raising thousands of pounds for charity.

Iain Robinson, 29, who is a Virgin Trains Station Announcer, will take to his bike in March 2018 for Ride India – a 450km cycling challenge through Rajasthan, known as Land of the Kings - to raise money for Railway Children and Virgin Trains’ charity partner, Rethink Mental Illness.

Along with three other representatives from Virgin Trains on the west coast, Iain will pedal 450km (nearly 300 miles) over six days, tackling a variety of terrains across India. The cycling challenge will involve cycling to Jaipur – pedalling through the sights and sounds of the towns and villages of Rajasthan between five and nine hours each day, whilst taking in the Taj Mahal and a tiger sanctuary.

A cycling enthusiast, Iain is already on track to cycle over 5,000 miles this year – nearly the same distance from Carlisle to India’s capital, Delhi. But despite cycling most days and clocking up around 100 miles each week on his bike, this is the first time Iain has ever taken part in a cycling event for charity.

To reach the fundraising target of £3,000, the Virgin Trains team at Carlisle have rallied around to create a calendar of fundraising activities at the station in the lead up to Christmas, including a car wash, bake sales and cheering on Iain who is cycling 600 miles (twice the distance he is expected to cycle in India) on a stationary bike at several stations along the West Coast Main Line. Iain and the team at Carlisle are planning more fundraising events before he goes to India next year.

During his time in India, Iain will see first-hand how Railway Children have helped save children in India from a life on the streets – he will meet the children who are benefitting from the money raised and see how the charity’s ‘Child Friendly Stations’ project is making the railways safer for children forced to live in dangerous environments.

In the New Year Iain is looking to arrange a bike ride with Virgin Trains colleagues on the west coast in preparation for his trip to India and to raise further money for the two charities.

Iain, who lives in Currock with his partner and two children, said: “I’m really excited to be taking to two wheels in India, as part of this great cycling challenge. I’m proud to represent Virgin Trains at Ride India to raise money for Railway Children and Virgin Trains’ charity partner, Rethink Mental Illness, whilst doing something I love. At Virgin Trains we care about the local communities we serve and here in Carlisle my colleagues have been a great support in helping me to raise hundreds of pounds for charity, whilst giving something back to the local community. I’d like to thank the people of Carlisle who have supported me so far in my fundraising efforts and I look forward to continuing to raise money for two great causes.”

Lisa Fraser-Ashton, Corporate Partnerships Manager at Rethink Mental Illness, said: “We are delighted that Virgin Trains continue to put mental health centre stage across the business by raising awareness, as well as vital funds to help those affected by mental illness. We wish Iain and his colleagues the very best on their cycling trip to India and would like to thank them for choosing Rethink Mental Illness as one of their beneficiaries.”

Railway Children’s Events Manager, Katie Mason, said: “The Ride India challenge is going to be a great adventure and we’re delighted that Iain will be joining us for what promises to be the trip of a lifetime. His fundraising efforts have been brilliant and every penny he raises for us will help in our fight for street children in India, as well as Africa and here in the UK. We have been lucky enough to have had huge support from Virgin Trains over many years and we can’t thank Iain and his colleagues enough for their continued generosity.”

To support Iain and help raise money for Railway Children and Rethink Mental Illness, visit: <https://www.sponsorme.co.uk/iainrobinson/ride-india.aspx>

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**About Virgin Trains**

Stagecoach and Virgin are working in partnership to operate the East Coast and West Coast inter-city routes under the Virgin Trains brand. Together, they are on track to revolutionise rail travel across the UK.

The combined network connects some of the nation’s most iconic destinations including Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Leeds, York and London.

Virgin Trains is committed to delivering a high speed, high frequency service, offering shorter journey times, more comfortable travel and excellent customer service. Customers consistently rate Virgin Trains as one of the top long-distance rail franchise operators in the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) commissioned by industry watchdog, Transport Focus.

On the East Coast route, £140m is being invested to create a more personalised travel experience. We have already invested over £40m in our existing fleet, including £21m refurbishing interiors and £16m towards improving the engines of our trains. Customers can now benefit from 42 additional services between Edinburgh and London every week, and an extra 22 Saturday services between Leeds and London – a total of 1.74 million additional seats since May 2016. 2018 will see the introduction of completely new Azuma trains being built in the UK by Hitachi.

The West Coast route has a proud record of challenging the status quo - from introducing tilting Pendolino trains, to a pioneering automated delay repay scheme and becoming the first franchised rail operator to offer m-Tickets for all ticket types.

Visit the Virgin Trains Media Room - [virgintrains.co.uk/about/media-room](http://mediaroom.virgintrains.co.uk/) - for the latest news, images and videos. Subscribe [here](http://www.mynewsdesk.com/follow/47939) for regular news from Virgin Trains.

Press Office: 0845 000 3333.

**About Rethink Mental Illness**

Rethink Mental Illness supports millions of people affected by mental illness by challenging attitudes and changing lives.

They support almost 60,000 people every year to get through crises, live independently and realise they are not alone. Rethink Mental Illness run 190 mental health services and 130 support groups across England.

Rethink Mental Illness runs an advice and information service for people who are affected by mental illness. Lines are open 10am – 4pm Monday to Friday (excluding Bank Holidays) and the number is 0300 5000 297 or you can email [advice@rethink.org](mailto:advice@rethink.org)

For more information, go to: [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org)

**About Railway Children**

Railway Children is an international children’s charity working in Africa, India and the UK to reach children fighting for survival on the streets and keep them safe.

Over the last 22 years the charity has protected 300,000 vulnerable children, reaching them before abusers do and keeping them from the violence and exploitation they risk every day. Railway Children works with families and communities, so they can become stronger and safer together and campaigns for governments and policymakers to ensure the system is changed to support them.

Railway Children will not stop fighting until no children ever has to live on the streets.

For more information, visit: [www.railwaychildren.org.uk](http://www.railwaychildren.org.uk)