

40 local foster youth get bikes at Elks Lodge giveaway



Resource parent Matt Pennon, left, and Kenneth Dahmen, right, of the Santa Barbara Bicycle Coalition, help a young girl with her new bike at the Santa Maria Elks Lodge. New bicycles were given to 40 foster youth on Saturday.



Righetti High School football player Angel Perera, standing, acts as a turn-around point as foster youth ride their new bicycles at the Santa Maria Elks Lodge on Saturday.



Resource parent Jessica Winyehem adjusts a bicycle helmet chin strap for a foster child at the Santa Maria Elks Lodge on Saturday.



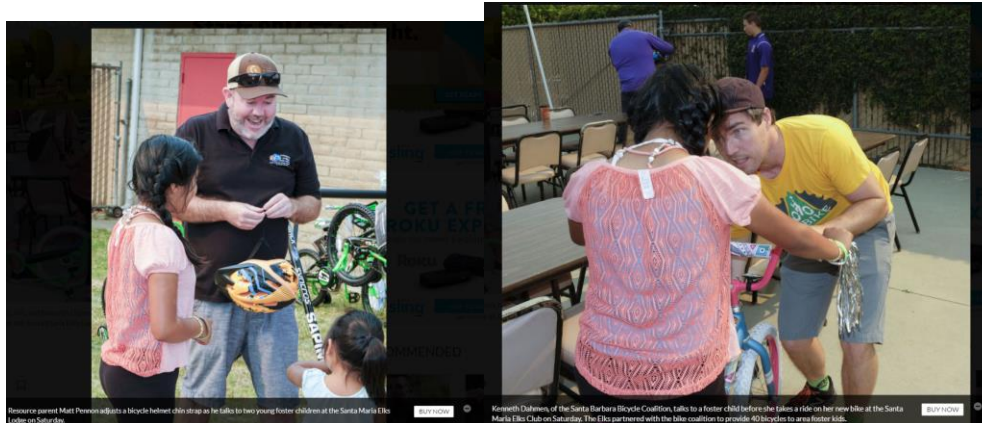
Kenneth Dahmen, of the Santa Barbara Bicycle Coalition, third from right, gives foster kids a safety lesson before they take a ride at the Santa Maria Elks Club.



Righetti High School football player Ricky Turcott, upper left, arranges bicycles for foster youth at the giveaway at the Santa Maria Elks Lodge on Saturday.



Volunteer Obadiah Wheeler, of Santa Maria, adjusts a chin strap on a new bicycle helmet for a young girl before she rides her new bicycle at the Santa Maria Elks Club on Saturday.



When it comes to aiding a community in need, especially children, the Santa Maria Elks is always the first to lend a hand, whether it's a community service event or bike giveaway.

And that's exactly what Saturday's bike clinic at the Elks Lodge was all about. Through a collaborative effort between the Santa Barbara Bicycle Coalition, Santa Barbara County Department of Social Services Our County Our Kids, Tailwinds Bicycle Club of Santa Maria and Santa Maria BICI Centro, 40 bicycles were given away to local foster youth from 3 to 11 years old.

"We put this together with the Elks Promise Grant," said Karen Feldpouch, 2016-17 exalted ruler. "The grant today funds each bike, and the promise is that the Elks will pledge to continue the grant for the next few years. It's our promise to the community that we'll continue to be involved.

As part of the event, student volunteers from Righetti High School helped assemble bikes. The Tailwinds provided each child with a new helmet and BICI Centro manned the bike safety clinic to teach the kids the basics of safe riding.

There are currently 425 children in foster care in Santa Barbara County, according to the Department of Social Services.

"Our County Our Kids program is always addressing the urgency of the issue regarding a foster youth in need," said Gustavo Prado, department specialist with the county's Social Services division. "Some children, when they leave their homes, they come to foster care with nothing, leaving everything behind -- from their rooms, pets, families."

He added: "So when the community comes together like this, they're responding to the reality of such a high need for help. We're so grateful and it helps us continue working with families."

Jessica Wasylychyn, a resource parent whose role is to be a foster caregiver for youth, said that children of all ages in foster care need so much love, commitment and guidance. Wasylychyn got involved in the role just recently and was an acting guardian for nearly 30 children over just two years.

"They're all amazing children," she said. "We teach them that life doesn't have to be so hard, make sure they're safe and happy. Giving them the loving and nurturing they need at such times is an amazing feeling."

"It's so heartwarming for the Elks to be a part of this because we always want to be a part of something bigger than ourselves," said Feldpouch, as she watched a volunteer strap a helmet on one of the children.

"Everyone who gets involved in working with youth, whether it be city government officials, Social Services, law enforcement, we all want to be visible and let Santa Maria Valley know that we'll always be here for them."

http://santamariatimes.com/news/local/local-foster-youth-get-bikes-at-elks-lodge-giveaway/article_6b1b07b5-48b1-52d6-a369-7f4da418a4d0.html