

Bike program gets kids rolling

Children learn how to fix and earn bicycles

BY DONNA GRAY, CALGARY HERALD APRIL 9, 2009



twin brothers Abdullah, left, and safi cheema, 13, work on a bicycle at the earn a Bike program organized by two Wheel View.

Photograph by: Ted Jacob, Calgary Herald, Calgary Herald

Last summer, twins Safi and Abdullah Cheema, 13, were bored out of their skulls.

Other than hanging out at home in front of the TV, or spending time with their friends, they were hard pressed to find something to do.

They couldn't go very far either. Abdullah's mountain bike had been stolen. When his best friend suggested he join the Two Wheel View, an organization that helps kids learn how to repair and earn a bike from scratch, he was intrigued.

"We went over to the community centre where the workshops are," Abdullah says. "I found out that I could get my own bike for free as long as I showed up and earned credits by learning how to repair them."

He admits he was surprised at the program's generosity.

"It was a win-win situation for me," he says. "I got to learn how different bikes work and how to fix them. I helped out a neighbour and a friend with their bikes. They were so impressed they joined the club."

It only took another week for brother Safi to catch on to the program. His friends also encouraged him to show up at a workshop, and within a month-and-a-half, he too was riding his own bike.

"I've already earned one bike, and I'm shooting for my second," says Safi. "I didn't join just because of getting a bike. I got to hang out with my friends."

Safi admits he didn't really take care of the single bike that was stolen because he didn't pay for it. He says the program has made him more responsible.

"It makes me want to take care of my bike more often," Safi says. "We keep them inside now, so they don't get stolen. I'm still working on mine, making it even better."

Rick McFerrin, who owns and manages Two Wheel View, says the idea for the after-school program spawned from a two-year cycling trip across the world with his wife Tanya about eight years ago.

When they returned to Calgary, the couple began hosting youth bike trips and repaired kids' bikes for free. Years later, the concept morphed into a charitable organization that offers community-based workshops and cycling activities for children and teens.

Qualified individuals volunteer their time to assist in teaching skills and responsibility, while rewarding attendance and willingness to learn and share.

"As volunteers, we enjoy giving the youth an opportunity to make decisions, learn about ownership, self-esteem and doing something constructive," he says. "They also experience the freedom that comes from riding a bike."

Shannon Woloshyn, a programmer with Good Life Bikes and a promoter of Two Wheel View, says the focus of their organization parallels that of McFerrin's. That is, promoting community growth, education, and recycling.

"Our services are similar to what Rick and Tanya are doing, but for the general public," she says. "We have a complete bike shop and members can use our space and tools for free. We also fix up bikes and sell them in the store."

Encouraging equity between genders is a priority for both organizations. Two Wheel View is hosting a fundraiser tonight at the Palomino, 109 7th Avenue S. W., starting at 7 p. m. Tickets are \$20 and available at the door, online or at Good Life Bikes. Organizers aim to raise \$15,000 from a silent auction.

For more information about the Earn a Bike program, or to donate used bikes, accessories, tools and equipment, call Rick at 403-698- 9418 or e-mail to info@twowheelview.org. Good Life Bikes is open every day, at 200 Barclay Parade in Eau Claire. For information, call 403-984-4727. Their site is www.goodlifebikes.ca.

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