

The Corry Journal

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3 CASD life skills students receive adaptive bikes

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Ryan Mather, a fourth-grader at Corry Area Intermediate School (CAIS) sits on his new adaptive bike that he received during a presentation at AHN's Saint Vincent Hospital on Thursday, May 18. He is pictured with his sister, Maleri, who is a seventh-grader at Corry Area Middle-High School as well as Charles LaVallee, at right, the chief executive officer of Variety — the Children's Charity and Jeffrey Carlson, Saint Vincent's chief operating officer. Brooke Mather/contributed photo

Three life skills students in the Corry Area School District received specially made bicycles last week at an Erie hospital.

Variety — the Children’s Charity and Allegheny Health Network’s Saint Vincent Hospital partnered together to give away adaptive bikes, adaptive strollers and communication devices to 19 local children with disabilities. Three of the bike and communication device recipients were CASD students Jason Beeler, second grade; Ryan Mather, fourth grade; and Cody Morris, third grade.

They were given the life-changing equipment, which was customized individually for each of them, at a presentation at Saint Vincent Hospital on Thursday, May 18. All three CASD students were presented with free adaptive bikes as part of the charity’s efforts to aid special needs children in the greater Erie area.

Jason Beeler, who has nonverbal autism, received an adaptive bike as well as an iPad communication device. He is in Carrie Canchola’s life skills class at Corry Area Primary School and is the son of Jason and Heather Beeler.



Jason Beeler, a second-grader at Corry Area Primary School, was given an adaptive bike as well as an iPad communication device. He is pictured with his mother, Heather Beeler; and father, Jason Beeler. Brooke Mather/contributed photo

“Jason cannot steer a bike, so me being able to help him would be so much easier,” Heather Beeler said. “Jason will also be able to ride with the other kids and take his bike on walks with mom and dad. I also believe my son would truly enjoy himself while experiencing what every child should experience in my opinion — the fun and love of a bike. With a bike specially made for him to be able to learn on is that much better.

“Having a bike for Jason is completely amazing,” his mother added. “It was very emotional and I hold back the tears. He has already taken three bike rides on it.”

Cody Morris and Ryan Mather are students in Mark Chludzinski’s life skills class at Corry Intermediate School. Like Jason, Cody has been diagnosed with nonverbal autism and Ryan was born with down syndrome.



Cody Morris, a third-grader at CAIS, also received an adaptive bike from Variety — the Children’s Charity. He is pictured with his mother, Billie Jo Morris; father, Cody Morris; and brother, Marshall Morris, who is a fifth-grader at CAIS. Brooke Mather/contributed photo

“The two families had to fill out applications for Variety — the Children’s Charity,” explained Chludzinski, a special education specialist. “With the help of their parents and our physical therapy consultant, Jen Hoffman, both boys were able to receive bikes. It’ll be great for them. Both families like to be outdoors. Ryan’s family likes camping and biking. Now he’ll be able to ride bikes with his family and friends and that’s awesome.”

Ryan is the son of Eric and Brooke Mather, who have three other children together.

“We’re very excited because we camp a lot and my kids hop on their bikes to ride off with other kids, but Ryan never could,” Brooke Mather said.

Ryan’s mother said he used to ride a special bike with no front wheel that attached to the back of her husband’s bike.

“He rode that and love it, but it was definitely made for younger children,” she said. “As he got bigger and heavier, we didn’t have a lot of options.”

Eric and Brooke Mather have been trying to make an adaptive bike for Ryan over the last few years.

“We’re so thankful this charity came along,” Brooke Mather said. “He had an instant look and feeling of independence and confidence when he sat on his new bike. It’s a big deal to us.”

Cody is the son of Cody and Billie Jo Morris, who said Cody has already taken his new bike out to ride twice. “He has an older brother, Marshall, in fifth grade and he watches him ride bikes with his friends,” Billie Jo Morris said. “Cody has always wanted to be able to do that with him.”

Earlier this school year, Cody Morris also received a free iPad from the same organization for his communication needs.

“Cody received his iPad right around the holidays, then we found out he could apply for one of the bikes, too, and added it to his application,” Chludzinski said. “The iPad has an app on it that’s full of pictures. He just hits the pictures to communicate, such as yes, no, bathroom, food, etc. We ask him verbal questions to work on his communication skills.”

Cody and Jason have been using iPads at school to communicate, but now each of their families has one to use at home free of charge. The communication devices have become a voice for them to have at all times. Chludzinski said he learned about the opportunity for the students to receive free adaptive bikes and iPads through assisted technology grants from Intermediate Unit 5 in Edinboro.

Variety — the Children’s Charity expanded its programs into the Erie area in March 2014 with the help of Erie County Executive Kathy Dahlkemper. Since then, more than 200 local kids have been impacted with an adaptive bike, adaptive stroller or communication device. That’s more than \$300,000 worth of adaptive equipment that has been presented to kids in Erie, Crawford and Warren counties by Variety.

“They’re so nice and shared so many inspirational stories that make you want to cry,” said Billie Jo Morris.

Local community partners like Saint Vincent Hospital, Intermediate Unit 5, the Barber National Institute, United Steelworkers and AFSCME have been critical to finding local kids that could benefit from these programs.