

Butler Eagle

Joe Genco

HOLIDAY EXPRESS

Children receive gifts of adaptive equipment

December 20, 2017

Butler Eagle



Jayden Miller, 5, of Butler rides his new adaptive bike from Variety — the Children's Charity at the Butler County Government Center on Tuesday. The nonprofit group provides adaptive equipment to children and young adults. JUSTIN GUIDO/ BUTLER EAGLE

Five Butler County children and one adult received adaptive equipment from Variety — the Children's Charity at a ceremony Tuesday in the Butler County Government Center.

Variety, a nonprofit organization that covers 54 counties in Pennsylvania and West Virginia, provides adaptive bicycles, adaptive strollers and iPads equipped with communication devices to children with disabilities.

Butler County was the eighth stop on the organization's "Holiday Express" tour this month during which it is giving equipment to 70 children.

Charlie LaVallee, Variety's CEO, said Tuesday that the organization has recently received \$750,000 in donations, which will enable it to buy about 500 pieces of equipment for qualified applicants. Leo Gerard, international president of United Steelworkers, led a drive that raised \$500,000 of that money, he said.

Three adaptive bikes, three adaptive strollers and one iPad were given out Tuesday at an event hosted by the county commissioners.

Receiving both a bike and a stroller was Jayden Miller, 5, of Butler.

Jayden is autistic and has fragile X syndrome, a genetic condition that causes developmental issues, his mother Amy Stepanian said.

Jayden rides an adaptive bike at The Watson Institute, where he goes to school, and was excited to get seated on his new bike Tuesday.

“His most favorite thing to do is to take bike rides,” Stepanian said.

He is non-verbal and will sometimes run away from his parents when in public, which is why they wanted a stroller too. He was a recipient last year of an iPad, which has greatly improved his quality of life, his parents said.

Amaria Vigle, 8, of Valencia got an adaptive bike.



Valarie Vigle, who adopted Amaria last month, said that she hopes Amaria will be able to ride her bike with other children near their home.

“She has no way to play with other kids right now, she's non-verbal,” Valarie said.

Dylan Dzikowski, who turns 20 Saturday, of Saxonburg previously received a bike through Variety and Tuesday got a stroller.

Dylan loves to see wrestling matches and go to Walt Disney World with his family, but he usually gets around in a heavy electric wheelchair, which makes transportation difficult, said his mother, Christen.

Despite getting tickets, they had to miss a wrestling match last year, Christen said.

“We have a handicap accessible van, but the van broke down and we had no way to get him to his wrestling event,” she said.

Unlike his usual chair, the stroller weighs about 29 pounds and can be quickly folded up and transported in a normal vehicle.

“This is going to make our life so much easier,” she said.

Variety gets referrals through word of mouth and from schools and government agencies, but still wants to spread the word about the equipment it has available, typically at no cost to the families.

While 19 percent of the families the charity works with live in poverty, it also assists middle-income families who don't have disposable income because they have costs that aren't covered by insurance, LaVallee said.

The income limit to receive a free piece of equipment is \$123,000 for a family of four, he said.

Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV, which covers several school districts in Butler County, has been a longtime partner with Variety, said Wayde Killmeyer, the unit's executive director, who attended Tuesday's event.

“It's one of the most concrete ways you can normalize life for a kid,” Killmeyer said.

More information about Variety is available at www.varietypittsburgh.org.

Click the link below to watch a short video from the presentation:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CqSrWocuxc4>