

# The Daily Review

Matt Jennings

## BLaST, charity partner bring mobility to area kids

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*Eleven year-old Nevaeh and her mom Danielle get acclimated to Nevaeh's new adaptive stroller at the BLaST IU in Canton.  
Review Photo/Matt Jennings*

CANTON — Wednesday was a loud day with some patient (and not so patient) youngsters awaiting their new mobility aids in Canton. The kids and their families received adaptive strollers courtesy of a partnership between the BLaST Intermediate Unit #17 and Variety — The Children's Charity.

“We've now given more than 170 pieces of equipment to children served by BLaST,” remarked Tom Baker, CEO of Variety.

Variety started out in Pittsburgh and now has a presence in close to 60 Pennsylvania counties. According to their website, they “deliver children equity, independence, social inclusion, and self-esteem by funding and delivering equipment and services.”

Baker, along with Variety program manager Molly Crawford, gave a presentation about the charity's programs My Voice, My Stroller, and My Bike.

“You can qualify for all three programs and any family making up to five times the federal poverty rate can qualify,” Baker said.



*Children like Neveah (pictured above) tried out three different sizes of adaptive bikes provided by Variety – the Children’s Charity in partnership with the BLAST IU 17. Review Photo/Matt Jennings*

On Wednesday, four children were receiving adaptive strollers designed with specific needs in mind from the My Stroller program. Several other children were fitted for adaptive bicycles such as balance bikes. The My Voice program provides adaptive communication technology for children with communicative struggles, though no kids at Wednesday’s event received any. Christopher Gundersen, a 10-year-old, was excited to get fitted for his bike.

“I’m going to ride it to the McDonalds,” declared Gundersen.

His mother, Sara, clarified that he was referring to a McDonalds with a Play Place they’d visited in Selinsgrove, which might require still using a car to reach. Nonetheless, the presence of a bike for Christopher is a huge development according to Sara.

“I’ve never been able to afford a balance bike for him, so this is wonderful,” she said.

While the Gundersens waited, the other children received their adaptive strollers complete with an instructional manual for their parents and guardians and a teddy bear.

Danielle Stebbins, who’s daughter Nevaeh received one such stroller, said the portability of a stroller would be quite the positive change for her family.

“We use a wheelchair when we need it and it’s so heavy,” she explained. “This is a big upgrade over that.”

Volunteers helped instruct guardians over the proper use and portability of the strollers, pointing out safety features on some that would allow them to be used in conjunction with car seats.

Crawford and Baker met with each child that received a stroller and bike fitting and explained a bit more about their programs.





*Sierra and Gracelin Aumick take Gracelin's new adaptive stroller for a test drive in the BLaST IU parking lot on Wednesday.*  
Review Photo/Matt Jennings

“The bikes in the My Bike program are so diverse to serve a wide range of kids,” Crawford said. “We’ve had several sets of twins where one twin rides a typical bike and would refuse to go riding unless their twin was able to go with them. We were very grateful to get them their adaptive bikes so they could go riding.”

Crawford also mentioned that the bikes and strollers are typically more capable of “off-roading” than standard electric wheelchairs, remarking that some kids they’d served were able to go through corn mazes or play baseball in their strollers and bikes.

BLaST executive director Christina Steinbacher-Reed said she was glad the IU was able to help facilitate the stroller and bike donations.

“We want to change lives and change our communities and days like this are that vision in action,” she declared to the crowd.

While some gathered kids were nervous about testing out the new strollers, their eyes would often light up when buckled in and pushed around. It was smiles all around for the BLaST employees, Variety representatives, and families who had gained new mobility in a short amount of time.

“We’ve had a great time since we came up to this area yesterday,” remarked Baker, who traveled to Williamsport from Pittsburgh on Tuesday, “But this is the best hour of the week right here.”

The kids in their snazzy new wheels seemed to agree.



*A display of adaptive strollers and bikes provided by Variety – The Children’s Charity and BLaST IU to families in need of mobility aids.*  
Review Photo/Matt Jennings

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