

## Customized bikes, strollers given to special needs students at Schuylkill IU

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**Lindsey Shuey / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER Brooklyn Plesnarski, 7, of Minersville, tries out her new bike Tuesday at Schuylkill Intermediate Unit 29, Mar Lin, the site of a bike and stroller giveaway by Variety, a Pittsburgh-based organization.**



**Lindsey Shuey / STAFF Photographer Michelle Hansen, certified nursing assistant, pushes Dylan Scherer, 19, of Frackville, in his new pushchair at Schuylkill Intermediate Unit 29 in Mar Lin.**



**Lindsey Shuey / STAFF Photographer Victoria Krise, 7, of Shenandoah, front, and Brooklyn Plesnarski, 7, of Minersville, back, play pretend on their new bikes Tuesday at Schuylkill Intermediate Unit 29, Mar Lin.**

MAR LIN — When Brooklynn Plesnarski’s family goes on camping trips over the summer, they ride their bikes.

However, walking and balance issues mean the 7-year-old Minersville girl has trouble riding a regular one.

But on Tuesday, she received a new bike specially designed for her needs that will allow her to ride alongside her family members.

Brooklynn was one of 16 county special needs children in seven school districts who received a bike or stroller Tuesday at Schuylkill Intermediate Unit 29’s Maple Avenue campus.

Pittsburgh-based Variety gave away 18 pieces of equipment Tuesday: 12 bikes and six strollers.

They were made by Blackburns, also of Pittsburgh.

Families who came to pick up one were directed to spaced-out stations in the IU’s gym.

They were taught to use and disassemble them by Kathie Ryan Motuk, a physical therapist at the school, and Emilee Barkus, an assistant physical therapist.

Instructional videos also showed families how to put the bikes or strollers into vehicles.

Deanna Glover, a program manager with Variety, Nick Rossey, a sales representative for Blackburns, and IU Executive Director Gregory S. Koons were also on hand as the equipment was given out.

## More independence

Brooklynn, a second-grader at Minersville Area Elementary Center, came with her mom, Christina Plesnarski, to pick up her bike.

After being taught how to use it, she pedaled it in circles around the gym as her mom and Mary Ann Wynosky, the Minersville Area director of special education, looked on.

Brooklynn was later joined by Victoria Krise, 7, of Shenandoah.

“I’m never getting off,” Brooklynn said as she wheeled past her mom and Wynosky.

After her ride, she said it “feels good” to have the bike and to ride one like her brother, Nolan, 12, and sister, Isabella, 11.

“Sometimes they go on bike rides and I can’t go. I lose my balance on a regular bike and get stuck in the pedals,” Brooklynn said. “But now I can ride with this.”

Brooklynn has spina bifida, a birth defect that occurs when a baby’s spinal cord fails to develop properly.

Her mom said although it was corrected surgically, she still needs assistance with walking and balance.

While her daughter she can ride a regular bike with training wheels, Plesnarski said that Brooklynn’s balance issues mean she needs close supervision.

“The Variety bikes are definitely safer,” the mom said.

Plesnarski said having the bike gives Brooklynn more independence, adding that the ease of transporting the bike means the family can take it to their campsite at Treasure Beach in Delaware.

“She’s able to go out on her own,” she said. “She’s able to keep up with her brother and sister.”

Dylan Scherer, 19, of Frackville, who has cerebral palsy, was given a new pushchair at the event.

Scherer was joined by caregiver Michelle Hansen, a certified nursing assistant from Shamokin.

She said getting the new 25-pound pushchair was “really good” because it’s difficult to haul the regular 100-pound pushchair, which Scherer has owned for seven years, into their van, which does not have a lift.

“It takes two people to get it in there,” she said. “This is going to save my back.”

Hansen added that the new chair gives them more freedom to go to different places, take longer walks and visit the Susquehanna Valley Mall outside Selinsgrove, Scherer’s favorite place.

“I’m happy to have the new stroller,” he said.

IU Special Education Director Debra Arnold, who coordinated the event, said seeing the children on their new bikes and strollers is “the most amazing thing.”

“This is going to get them outside doing things they weren’t doing before,” she said.

## More information

The equipment is given to families at no cost.

The bikes, which come in small, medium and large sizes, include stationary stands to allow users to ride them in place.

Children who outgrow bikes can get a new ones, also at no cost, and give the old one to their home school districts.

Tuesday's distribution was the third the IU did this year. Arnold said a combined 144 pieces of equipment were given out at the three previous events.

Any child ages 3 to 21 residing in the county who meets eligibility requirements can get a bike or stroller through Variety, with equipment given out when enough applications, eight on average, are received.

The application and information on how to donate to offset equipment cost is available at [www.iu29.org](http://www.iu29.org).

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