

How One Committed Person Grants Foster Children's Cycling Wishes

I continue to be amazed and encouraged by the generosity I find in the cycling world. I have an opportunity to meet many of these inspiring people while interviewing them for our weekly Facebook Live program. This week I interviewed Kathy Downs, known in Orlando as the Bike Fairy. Her story is another classic example of one person having an idea and the courage to act upon it.

In 2017, Kathy saw on Nextdoor App that a child needed a bicycle. She put out a post on social media and quickly had six people offering to donate a bike. She collected them, cleaned them up and found a home for them with needy children.

Her efforts have morphed into a program through which over 1,300 bikes have been donated to children in the Orlando area in just the last two years. She is assisted by her partner, Victor Thacker, who often picks up the bikes, makes minor repairs, replaces tires and tubes and cleans them up for delivery. Victor is a cyclist who introduced Kathy to cycling when they met six years ago. They typically have between 50 and 150 bikes in their garage at any one time.

Kathy is also assisted by Bethanie Barber of the Legal Aid Society of Orange County. Bethanie and her staff provide invaluable assistance to Kathy and Victor and identifying a steady stream of kids in foster care who desperately need someone to show them some kindness. These kids have been removed from their homes on short notice, often lacking the opportunity to take anything with them when they were removed other than the bare necessities of a few items of clothing. Children generally get into the foster system because of abandonment, abuse or neglect.

Kathy and her partners each work full-time. This is a part-time endeavor of love. I was curious what Kathy would like to have occur as a result of her Live Stream appearance. Her dream is that others would step forward to do what she and her partners are doing in every county in Florida.

If you're not familiar with the magnitude of the foster care in Florida, consider the following numbers. In Orange County alone there are nearly 1,800 kids in foster care, the vast majority of these are represented through the Legal Aid Society of the Orange County Bar Association's Guardian Ad Litem program. A guardian ad litem is someone who stands with a child through the foster care process. Florida has over 37,000 kids in foster care. The average child in Florida remains in foster care for over 14 months, which is actually well below the national average of over 20 months.

Kathy does not have a website at this point. If you would like to find out what you can do she can be reached at Kathleen.Downs@roberthalf.com.

Will you be the next person to step forward in your county?

Jim Dodson is a cyclist and an experienced injury & bicycle accident lawyer. Although his primary office is in Clearwater, he represents injury victims throughout Florida. He is a bicycle safety advocate and serves on the Board of the Florida Bicycle Association. He is also the author of the Florida Bicycle Accident Handbook. For answers to you cycling questions, please visit www.floridacyclinglawyer.com.

**Legal information is not legal advice. Nothing in this article may be considered legal advice. If you have specific questions for Jim Dodson, simply call his office at 1-888-340-0840. There is never a charge to talk about your case.*