

# Free Wheels Kansas City

## Digital Story Transcript

In the urban core of Kansas City In the urban core of Kansas City, recreational opportunities for children are limited at best. Parents are concerned about gangs, traffic, violence and a lack of infrastructure to support safe travel. Combined with low-income levels, these conditions severely limit the ability of families to seek out healthy opportunities for children. The results are clear: urban counties in Kansas City have much higher rates of childhood obesity than more affluent, suburban areas.

FreeWheels for Kids is an exciting new program which is fighting childhood obesity in the urban Kansas City. FreeWheels exists to get more kids on bikes more often and more safely. We teach youth to repair bicycles and ride safely. This increased mobility, empowerment leadership opportunities for at-risk youth. Through our Earn-a-Bikeclasses, youth in low-income neighborhoods repair bikes for younger children and earn a refurbished bike, helmet and tools. After completing the repair course and safety training, graduates are encouraged to participate in regular group rides around the city and to form ride clubs in their neighborhood.

One dedicated FreeWheels member said it best. When asked why he wanted to earn a bike, he responded: "I really like riding a bike. The one I had broke and I don't want to spend my time inside with nothing to do." Participants have enthusiastically gone on rides up to 25 miles (with a cold!), sometimes in snow, in neighborhoods they don't know, after falling off their bikes and all with a smile because the next best option is graffiti-covered, dangerous urban parks.

More than one FreeWheels participant has told staff that he or she would barely leave the house were it not for FreeWheels events.

To date, FreeWheels has given almost forty bikes to kids in need and ridden hundreds of miles together. Many of our participants have been recent immigrants or refugees, and the feeling of empowerment they get upon learning how to repair a bike is palpable. One dedicated participant, an African refugee, said he wants to be a bike mechanic when he grows up, something he didn't even know existed two months ago. Many of the participants have never touched tools in their lives, and learning how to repair ball bearings in a bicycle is something they can control and succeed with, even with very limited English fluency or a learning disability.

Seeing the satisfaction on the kids' faces when they master a task is very humbling and an awesome part of FreeWheels mission... second only to seeing them laugh and have fun as they ride down the street together on their new bikes.