

# Gear up to help

## Bike Works is providing training, incentive for youngsters to get involved

BY KATHLEEN TRIESCH SAUL  
Seattle Times staff reporter

There may be no such thing as a free ride, but the folks at Bike Works may be offering the next-best thing.

From a little shop just off Rainier Avenue in the Columbia City neighborhood, this 4-year-old nonprofit organization is getting kids rolling in more ways than one — giving them not only a hands-on course in maintaining and repairing bikes but also a chance to take one of them home.

The Earn-a-Bike program — as far as organizers know, the only one like it in the state — was begun as a small pilot project in 1997 with "win-win" in mind. At the shop, discarded and dysfunctional bikes could be rescued and rehabilitated. Many could go to programs serving needy children. The rest could go to kids willing to work for them. Those kids would learn some basic mechanical skills and get bikes they might not otherwise be able to afford. But more than that, they'd learn what it is to meet a commitment, to feel pride in accomplishment, to do something swell for somebody else.

Now the program is a going concern, with multiple classes and a waiting list to enroll. Last year, more than 100 youngsters, ages 11 to 13, participated. About half put in the service time required to earn a bike. Here's how it works:

Kids pay \$20 to take a nine-week course that includes instruction and materials. If they don't have the \$20, they can write an essay explaining why they want to be in the program. They meet in groups of 10 once a week after school, spending the first half hour on classroom-style instruction covering rules, tools and parts of the bike. Then they move to the hands-on part, spending about an hour each time working on parts such as tires, brakes, pedals and

the bike. After that comes the service. Each student who wants a bike must earn 24 hours' work credit before he/she can go home with a set of wheels. The first 18 hours are spent fixing bikes that will go to programs for disadvantaged children. The last six hours go toward fixing a bike the student has picked from the many donations that land at Bike Works' door.

Director Suzanne Carlson says the kids will often vie to collect their credits ahead of classmates in hopes of winning claim to a particularly good bike. Bike Works gets all kinds — mountain bikes, dirt bikes, roadsters, you name it — from a variety of sources including the Bicycle Alliance, which picks up unclaimed cycles left on Metro buses.

Some bikes arrive in relatively good condition, others are rusted hulks, says shop mechanic Montana Novell. "There's a lot of tragedy that goes on here," he says, as the castoffs are sorted according to their intended purpose. The worst cases are often set aside to be cannibalized for parts. The rest are divvied up: some to professional staff people who rehabilitate them for sale at the shop, others to the kids who fix them up either for themselves or for other kids being helped through social-service agencies such as Treehouse.

Proceeds from selling bikes at the shop go toward Earn-a-Bike and its related activities, including group rides and a summer bike camp. Some students will also participate in a fund-raising bike-a-thon, the Summer Cycle Challenge, June 9. The event is open to anyone.

Registration for the next round of Earn-a-Bike classes begins at the end of next month, and forms will be available by the end of this month. For details, call the shop at 206-725-9408, or stop by at 3709 S. Ferdinand St., a half block off Rainier Avenue South. Chris Heitmann coordinates the program.

### Give your bicycle a thorough spring checkup



TOM REESE / THE SEATTLE TIMES  
Classmate Helen Thomas checks the alignment of a bike frame. Helen is also working to earn a bike for her sister's birthday.

### Get ready to roll at Bicycle Expo

during times of stress. If you do, you'll see you exhibit reemancipatory qualities equate to child, they're exhibiting.

Some children just friends, others only buddy up with one regardless of your child, important for parent support those friends.

- Make your honor
- Encourage your scouts, sports, hobbies, support it with your
- Don't embarrass front of peers.

- Avoid labeling or friendless; such as cy, preventing the
- Don't saddle capabilities and schedule to develop.

- Allow your child everyone is wearing conformity signify participation.

Young children's friendships frequent By age 8, reciprocal as kid and the rules and natural maturation when kids have mature, problem-solving.

During the school year, glimpses of positive involving kindness, and sharing, but they take hold until high school.

There will be times of disconnection between kids. As you be downright nasty "She cheats. She whines or brags off remedy her ways.

Merciless teasing "He wears glasses dweeb." When such by the tormentor a tim, that's bullying ed by teachers, parents.

Most children, friends problems with peer your child, listen to tears subside, offer