

# Bicycle Safety Programs Save Children's Lives

BY RHODA WEISS

Acting on the principle that it's never too early to save a life, three Michigan hospitals in 1996 launched the Derek Edwards Bicycle Helmet Program. Battle Creek Health System, Battle Creek, MI, which is sponsored by Mercy Health Services and Community Hospital Association; Oaklawn Hospital, Marshall, MI; and Trillium Health Alliance, Albion, MI, present a free bicycle safety helmet and bicycle safety information to every child born in each hospital. The program's goal is to have every child in Calhoun County, MI, own and use a bicycle safety helmet by the year 2000. They're on their way: Nearly 3,000 newborns and their families have gone home with a bicycle helmet, ready for that first bike ride.

The helmet program is part of the Derek Edwards Bicycle Safety Program, established in 1991 in memory of Derek Edwards, an 11-year-old Battle Creek, MI, boy who was killed when a car struck the bicycle he was riding. Derek was not wearing a helmet and died of a massive head injury. Following Derek's death, his mother, Jane Edwards, established a fund to develop, sponsor, and support bicycle safety education programs throughout Calhoun County. The fund is managed by the three hospitals.

Derek's death was not an isolated event. In Michigan, in 1996, the Michigan State Police reported 2,530 bicycle injuries and 22 bicycle-related fatalities; half of the injuries and fatal accidents involved children under the age of 15. Nationally, more than 250,000 bicycle-related injuries are treated in hospital emergency rooms each year.

Most children are injured when they fall from bikes, collide with fixed objects (such as curbs or trees), or lose control of the bike. Head and brain injuries can be severe, not because of speed, but because of the distance the head travels to meet the ground. A study conducted



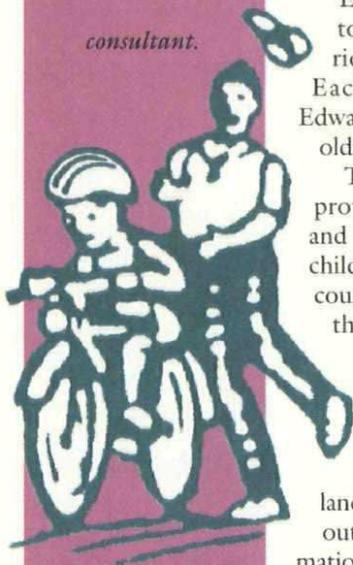
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## THE DEREK EDWARDS BIKE SAFETY PROGRAM

in California showed that a fall from only three feet, ten inches, at 11 miles per hour can cause fatal brain damage.

A bicycle helmet can make a crucial difference. Statistics compiled by the U.S. Department of Transportation, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and the Michigan State Police Office of Highway Safety Planning show that bicycle safety helmets decrease the risk of head injuries and brain damage by 87 percent. According to the Brain Injury Association, universal use of helmets could prevent one death every day and one brain injury every four minutes.

The failure to use helmets translates into healthcare costs, as well. According to the association, one dollar spent on a bike helmet saves \$30 in direct and indirect healthcare costs and costs to society.

Equipping newborns with helmets is one way to ensure that they later start off their bike-riding careers with the proper equipment. Each hospital also sponsors a free Derek Edwards Bike Safety Jamboree every summer for older children.

The jamborees promote bicycle safety and provide information to hundreds of children and parents in Calhoun County. Participating children test their bicycle skills on an obstacle course, take home a free video of themselves on the course, and receive a free bicycle safety helmet. Approximately 3,000 helmets have been distributed through the jamborees.

State Farm Insurance provides the bicycle courses, and K-Mart supplies the bicycles used at the events. Local ambulance companies, the police department, retail outlets, and grocery stores provide safety information and refreshments.

Educational campaigns such as these have been proven to increase safety helmet use by more than one-third and decrease the incidence of bicycle-related brain injuries by more than 60 percent among children. "It is important to start helmet

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## BICYCLE SAFETY

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# A video on Derek's death helps publicize the importance of bicycle safety.

use at a very early age so that the 'helmet habit' will grow with the youth of Calhoun County. Our challenge is to provide an educational message in an entertaining way so that children respond," explains Stephen Abbott, president and CEO of Battle Creek Health System, which also distributes bicycle helmets to youngsters who come to its emergency department because of bicycle-related injuries.

The jamborees and other bicycle safety education programs are publicized through schools, churches, youth clubs, and businesses throughout the community. Local newspapers and radio and television stations promote and cover the events, and a local radio station broadcasts live from the jamborees. Fliers and posters are widely distributed in each hospital's city.

To help publicize the importance of bicycle safety, Battle Creek Health System has also produced a seven-minute video on Derek's death that features interviews with his mother and his nurse. Proceeds from the sale of the video to hospitals help purchase children's bicycle helmets.

"My wish is that no other parent would ever have to experience what I did. I want to let others know how very important it is for children to wear helmets every time they ride a bike," says Edwards. □

 For more information, contact Joel Schneck, public relations manager, Battle Creek Health System, 616-966-8132.

## TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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# The most effective leaders will create learning organizations.

"Wouldn't we all welcome more laughter in the halls of management? I would be excited to encounter people delighted by surprises, instead of the ones I now meet, who are scared to death of them."<sup>4</sup>

**Promote Sense of Purpose** Effective leadership creates a positive culture in which all employees can laugh and be joyful as they work. Such leadership also promotes conditions that enable employers and workers to achieve an inner strength and confidence in their capacity to pursue and realize their personal vision. This vision encompasses both employees' purpose in doing what they do and their ability to enjoy doing it. When employees realize this vision, they begin to see themselves as *leaders*, because their contributions do indeed influence and help shape the culture. At the same time, the culture, which is a collection of individuals, encourages each person to experience personal growth, which in turn serves other people—the ill, the wounded, and the poor.

### LEADERSHIP'S CHALLENGE

Today many organizational cultures are in chaos, torn apart by competitiveness and the struggle to cut costs. All Catholic providers worry about healthcare becoming depersonalized—not only for patients but also for caregivers.

Catholic healthcare leadership must answer this question: How can we help each other to accomplish our first duty, to serve the work? "If our hearts are not wholly in the work, the work will not be good—and work that is not good serves neither God nor the community."<sup>5</sup> Catholic providers need to take a deliberate, active approach in articulating a commitment to good work.

The most effective leaders will create learning organizations, which can, by

drawing on the collective intelligence of their constituencies, determine the best way to meet the challenges of today's healthcare marketplace. Denying employees' need to learn, grow, and express themselves through their work can only compromise patients' needs as well.

Catholic healthcare needs programs that promote transformational leadership. Initiatives can include the following:

- Allowing team members access to information concerning patient satisfaction, because it is precisely such satisfaction that inspires their work<sup>6</sup>
- Confronting problems involving employees with honest disclosure, effective communication, and constructive feedback
- Providing education and innovative approaches to clinical practices

However, programs alone cannot establish a healthy workplace culture. That goal can be met only through a full-scale commitment to honor and empower each employee. In a healthy culture, all participants—both those who deliver services and those who receive them—are treated as sacred, made in the image and likeness of God. □

 For more information, call Richard Glenn at 215-682-7885.

### NOTES

1. Dorothy Sayers, *Creed or Chaos*, Sophia Institute Press, Manchester, NH, 1974, p. 63.
2. Sayers, p. 72.
3. Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco, 1992, p. 142.
4. Wheatley, p. 142.
5. Sayers, p. 63.
6. Barry Heermann, "The Spirit of Team," Expanded Learning Institute, Dayton, OH, August 1995, p. 11.