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Article published Dec 15, 2007

The gift of good wheels

County sheriff's office donates bicycles to family services agency

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LANCASTER - The new bicycle Jonathan Harrison received Friday is not just a means of transportation. He considers it the key to new opportunities.

Harrison has been homeless for the past four months since losing his job.

He walked into the Fairfield County Job & Family Services looking for help in October.

"They helped me out a lot. They gave me emergency food stamps, and now, they gave me this bike and everything has been looking up for me," Harrison said.

Fairfield County Sheriff Dave Phalen donated seven bicycles to the agency to benefit its clients. Phalen said deputies find the bikes while on patrol or people will report abandoned bikes in the community when they see them.

The bicycles are held at the Sheriff's Office for minimum of 90 days before they are considered for donation. If no one claims them, they're donated to the agency.

"It helps kids who don't have bicycles, or adults who may not have transportation or may not have a car. It gives them a way to get to work. It gives them a way to get to a store," Phalen said.

The bicycles are distributed to children and adults who might not have a car or had their driving privileges revoked, said Phalen.

"There are many people in the Lancaster area who have children and they may not be able to afford bicycles. The ones we give away are typically in good shape," Phalen said. "I just think it's a very good thing to do. Hopefully, it will help some kids."

The demands for bicycles at the Fairfield County Job & Family Services are not low.

"It helps us tremendously," said Jenny Ruff, community resource coordinator for Fairfield County Job & Family Services.

"We actually have a waiting list for 11 (bicycles) for adults, and children's bikes typically go out the door right away."

Ruff said she appreciates all the community support during the holiday season and all year around.

"The program tells the children that people care, and sometimes when children are desperate and feel there's no hope left, it is the smallest act of kindness that makes the biggest difference for a child," Ruff said.

