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Bike project helps to build teamwork

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William Kenney at first froze, then was quickly overwhelmed with excitement when he saw the brand new bicycle at Big Brothers Big Sisters headquarters here Tuesday -- his first new bicycle, ever.

William, 8, was one of eight children in the Big Brothers Big Sisters programs in Burlington, Camden and Gloucester counties who received new bicycles as part of a team-building initiative by the organization's staff.

"We had some turnover from a merger between Big Brothers Big Sisters of Gloucester and Camden counties with Burlington County," said Robert Jakubowski, chief executive officer of the combined agency. "We thought team building would be a great way to bring everyone together. Our main mission is the kids. Everything's about the kids."

The two organizations merged on July 1.

Having worked with Team Builders Plus of Cherry Hill in the past, Big Brothers Big Sisters decided to participate in a team-building class themselves.

Team Builders Plus uses a program called Wheels for the World to bring team building to corporations across the nation. Employees team up to build bicycles for children.

"They have to do challenges to earn parts to build the bicycles," explained Merrick Rosenberg, president of Team Builders Plus. "They had to build a free standing structure of a balloon that was four feet tall to earn the tire."

The three BBBS teams had to balance nails to earn the seat.

Eight 20-inch bicycles were assembled throughout the room at the BBBS Cherry Hill office. The blue Huffy Rock It bicycles were handed out to children ages 8-10 in the programs.

"It's fantastic and really helps the family," said LaDonna Kenney, 56, of Bellmawr, the mother of William. "It will get them out riding bicycles."

"It's good," said a shy William before getting his bicycle. "I'm going to ride it."

"I thought it was a great experience," said Melissa Pezzato, 22, a case manager at BBBS and one of about a dozen staff who participated in the build. "We were able to bond. One person would lead and then for the next challenge another person would lead. We're all very passionate about helping people."

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