

Activate Omaha program rolls into summer

BY LIZ STINSON WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

The 10 kids in tennis shoes were lined up at 78th and Cass Streets, eagerly waiting on their bikes.

Well, not their bikes. Borrowed bikes.

The Activate Omaha summer bike program is running now through Aug. 2, giving more than 100 kids the opportunity to ride bikes along the Keystone Trail every Tuesday, Wednesday and the occasional Friday during the summer.

A \$15,000 grant from the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services two years ago allowed the organization to buy a fleet of 20 bikes as well as helmets for the participants.

The kids come from summer programs Campfire USA and Girls Inc., and most live in urban areas of Omaha, making it challenging for them to get out and ride their bikes in a safe area.

"If you're living downtown it's going to be kind of difficult to ride because there's a lot of traffic and a lot of people walking," said Jerry Wade, a 12-year-old eighth grader from Beveridge Magnet Middle School. "This is a really good opportunity if you can't get out and ride your bike."

Throughout the summer, the participants will make stops during their rides at the Trek Bicycle Store to learn more about biking and the trails, as well as to hear speakers talk about nutrition and the environment.

This week, a Campfire USA group of 11- to 14-year-olds waited at the Peak Performance Running Store, where the bikes are stored. Spinning pedals and fiddling with the gears of their Trek bikes, they were eager to hit the road for a six-mile ride on the Keystone Trail.

But first, they had a few things to learn — rules like signaling for loose gravel, watching out for runners and staying in a relatively straight line.

"Before we take off, we like to teach the kids trail etiquette," said Tammie Dodge, program manager of Activate Omaha, an organization that promotes physical activity and healthy living.

The quick lesson in bike safety and trail manners is one component of the program, which is a collaboration between Activate Omaha, the Douglas County Health Department and the University of Nebraska-Omaha.

Josh Gillman, one of the leaders of the Campfire group, said the program is a great fit with Campfire's goals of keeping kids active and healthy.

"We try to get the kids as many experiences outside of their typical element as possible," he said.

The program has a limited number of bikes in its fleet, but Dodge said she hopes the program will expand in other ways.

"We really just hope to expand it to additional youth groups and maybe even expand it into the school year."

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