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## ■ TownNews

### Finding kids a bike

By Alina Smirnova

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Neighbourhoods: [North Toronto](#)



ALINA SMIRNOVA/TOWN CRIER

**LIFE CHANGING RIDE:** Lenni Eubanks remembers how receiving her first bike opened up her horizons growing up in Rexdale. Now, she collects cycles, cleans and fixes them up before giving them to charities who will distribute them to children in need.

Having a bicycle as a kid changed Lenni Eubanks' life.

Growing up in Rexdale without a lot of money, Eubanks said her family couldn't afford after-school activities or a car. So when a family friend gave Eubanks a bike — a rusty one with crooked handlebars — she taught herself to ride it.

"I'll never forget that feeling," she said. "I must have been smiling from ear to ear."

Aside from giving her something to do, the bike also gave her a chance to see other neighbourhoods, meet friends and get to a part-time job.

"I know that without my bike, I wouldn't be where I am today," said the North Toronto resident. "I was able to get an education and get out of bad circumstances."

Given her history, it isn't surprising that Eubanks founded a charity that provides bikes to children whose families can't afford them. Her organization, My First Wheels, donates bikes to community organizations that passes them on to kids who need them.

"They're in a similar situation that I was in," she said. "There's limited income, having a bike is a total luxury. It's an impossible dream."

Eubanks said before starting My First Wheels, she was looking for a way to help the community in a meaningful way.

One day she was cycling through a neighbourhood that reminded her of the one where she grew up and the idea came to her.

She began picking up slightly used bikes and storing them in her backyard under a tarp. When she collected a larger batch, she delivered them herself.

Months away from its first birthday, My First Wheels has donated almost 100 bikes. Eubanks said she is thrilled with the way her organization is going. She now has a storage locker for the bikes and registered her group as a charity.

"This is exactly what I'm meant to do," she said. "I'm just so happy with it, it's incredibly rewarding and satisfying."

Although My First Wheels has occasional help, Eubanks does most of the work herself with the help of

her seven-year-old son, Owen.

She said he helps her clean, fix up and deliver the bikes. He also has ideas and suggestions, such as donating books with the bikes.

"He really enjoys doing My First Wheels," she said. "He talks about it to his buddies, he's very nonchalant about it."

She said he wrote a story for school about My First Wheels and the environment, ending it with "I feel I am making a difference in the world."

"I didn't put those words in his mouth," Eubanks said. "I was so proud, I didn't prompt that, that was totally him."

Eubanks still calls My First Wheels a community effort since other people donate the bikes. One woman gathered 10 bikes in St. Catharines and drove them to Eubanks in Toronto.

"That's what moves me on those days that I'm cleaning a dirty bike or lugging them in and out of the car and they get all tangled up," she said.

"I meet people like that and it's invigorating."

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