

The Fort Thomas Fire Department (FTFD) and a Northern Kentucky brain injury support group called BRIDGES partnered to measure, fit and give away 175 bicycle helmets during the fourth of July parade. These groups share a common interest in preventing or reducing the severity of head injuries. By all accounts it was a very successful event.

Fort Thomas Fire Fighter and Paramedic Chris Rust helped organize the event. Central to the Fire Department's mission is preventing loss of life and personal injury. Rust shared his personal perspective: "As first-responders we've seen serious injuries from bicycle-related accidents. The benefits of wearing a helmet are pretty clear. It's a natural fit for us [FTFD] to partner with BRIDGES to advocate for bike helmet safety."

The acronym of BRIDGES stands for **BR**ain Injury **D**emands **G**uidance **E**ducation and **S**upport. The group partners with local cities, schools organizations or events to promote brain injury awareness, safety and prevention. Through its Bicycle Helmet Giveaway Program, appropriately fitted, safety approved bicycle helmets are provided to children and adults. The events also include brain injury education regarding helmet safety with various leisure activities including bicycling, skating, skate boarding, snowboarding, skiing sledding, and horseback riding.

Bob Stark runs the BRIDGES Bicycle Helmet Giveaway Program and is also the Risk Manager with the City of Covington. Through his connection with BRIDGES, he has seen the long-term impact on an individual's life that can come from dealing with a serious head injury. The Program's objective is to help prevent these situations. "A key concept in risk management," says Stark, "is identifying risks and proactively educating people about both the nature of the risk and means to either prevent it, or if it can't be prevented, at least minimize its impact. The Bicycle Helmet Giveaway Program focuses on bicycle-related injury prevention, but hopefully has a wider impact in terms of general awareness and education."

Head injuries come from a variety of causes, but bicycle-related injuries are one that most people can relate to. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) over 600,000 people are treated in the US each year in emergency departments (EDs) for bicycle-related injuries. Head injury is the most common cause of death and serious disability in bicycle-related crashes. Head injuries are involved in 60 percent of bicycle-related deaths and over 30 percent of bicycle-related ED visits.

Bicycle helmets are a proven intervention that reduce the risk of bicycle-related head injury by 80 percent. Yet bicycle helmets are not worn by most riders. The CDC reports that only 19 percent of adults and 15 percent of children use helmets all or most of the time while cycling. The good news is that communities that have made efforts to advocate for bicycle helmet safety have seen drastic increases in these percentages. Both the FTFD and BRIDGES hope to see increased bicycle helmet usage in Fort Thomas, including at least 175 heads sporting brand new helmets!

In addition to the Bicycle Helmet Giveaway Program, BRIDGES holds monthly support group meetings; participates in community initiatives related to TBI awareness and prevention; and organizes an annual conference on Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), which provides education, resources and networking for brain injured survivors, military/veterans, their families, and healthcare professionals. BRIDGES pays for helmets with proceeds from the annual Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Conference that it holds each spring. More information on BRIDGES can be found on their website at: www.bridgesnky.org.

Enjoy the summer and remember: "Be safe, look ahead... Keep your helmet on your head."

Submitted by: Julie Fronk

BRIDGES Board of Trustees

