



Community house lends

bikes for children's summer fun / Wednesday, August 11,

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The kids don't know about the naysayers, and the grownups who matter didn't listen. Proof that an urban bike-loan program can work just fine pedaled along the Alum Creek Trail yesterday, all sweaty and giggly and determined.

"It's not too hot," 9-year-old Shanise Collins said. "It's fun."

St. Stephen's Community House started lending bicycles at no charge this summer as a way to promote exercise among children who live in neighborhoods where safe recreational opportunities - and money for bikes - can be in short supply, agency chief Michelle Mills said.

The Community Health Funders' Collaborative - a group that includes doctors, philanthropists and the United Way of Central Ohio - contributed \$92,000 for bikes, racks and sports or play equipment at St. Stephen's and the city's six other settlement houses.

"We heard from a lot of naysayers who said we couldn't do it in an urban area - the bikes would never come back, they'd be all cracked up, that sort of thing," Mills said. "Thank goodness we had some courageous funders who believed."

The program also provides summer jobs for teens who staff the bike garage.

"I've been telling a lot of people about it," said Jashon Poindexter, a 17-year-old who works in the program at St. Stephen's at 1500 E. 17th Ave. "It's mostly younger kids, but adults (use) bikes, too."

The collaborative is trying to focus on small projects that can lead to significant improvements in health, said Lisa Courtice of the Columbus Foundation.

Bikes are often just that ticket, Mills said. The agency has about 40 available. "Bike-riding is a childhood rite of passage," she said. "Every kid should know how to ride a bike."

Mills rode along with the small group of children and teens yesterday. Some had their own bikes, others didn't, and still others were using the loaner program temporarily because their bicycles need new tires or other repairs.

"Riding is good for you," said Jayla Ray, 9. "It's exercise."

When the group stopped at Cooper Park to cool off and drink water, a few children who had ridden in the St. Stephen's vans asked if they could pedal instead.

"If I had to say no, I could just cry," Mills said. "But we have the bikes. Yea!"