

## Trust on two wheels



Renee Jones Schneider, Star Tribune

Officer Mark Klukow handed Dajanae Coleman, 6, her new bicycle Wednesday afternoon in Minneapolis. The Minneapolis officers with the Bike Cops for Kids program had promised bicycles to children they had found wearing the helmets the department had given them.

In handing out bike helmets and bikes in north Minneapolis, two officers are hoping to build relationships, promote safety and change the reputation of a neighborhood associated with crime.

By [VINCE TUSS](#), Star Tribune

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Waiting to get his hands on his brand-new bicycle Wednesday, J.T. Fletcher wanted everyone to know one thing. ¶ Yes, the bicycle had training wheels, but the 6-year-old didn't need them. Yes, he liked his new bike and bike lock, but he wanted those training wheels off. ¶ But the one thing J.T. wasn't taking off was his bike helmet, which is how he and eight other kids who live in north Minneapolis earned the bicycles presented Wednesday by two Minneapolis police officers.

The kids were two-time winners: First, they received helmets from the officers in June, and then they were spotted wearing the helmet while out on a bicycle.

Bike Cops for Kids is the brainchild of officers Mark Klukow and Michael Kirchen. Over the winter, the two veteran school resource officers drew up the effort to spend the summer reaching out to the children of north Minneapolis. Assigned now to the department's juvenile unit, they are focusing between W. Broadway and 36th Avenue N. and between Penn Avenue N. and the Mississippi River.

"It's probably the best job I've ever done," said Kirchen, who credited commanders in the juvenile unit "for giving us a lot of freedom" to work with kids.

As they hand out bicycle helmets, they also share a word about safety and a more important message.

"We want them to see us as one of the many people who care about them," said Klukow, fresh from handing out the nine bikes at the corner of 16th and Girard Avenues N. "Our mobility and our uniform allow us to come up to them with a bunch of trust."

They are no strangers to the area. Kirchen is an officer at Lucy Laney at Cleveland Park Elementary School. And before he went to work at Southwest High, Klukow spent 12 years as a street officer in north Minneapolis.

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