

Injury Prevention Success Stories

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Every day in Washington State, many people of all ages take action to reduce their risk of dying or becoming disabled. Whether they consciously know it, they are practicing injury prevention techniques when they, for example:

Buckle their seat belt,

Test their smoke alarm,

Drive the speed limit and avoid aggressive driving,

Put on a life jacket when in a boat or by the water,

Remove firearms and ammunition from the home of a depressed person,

Take a strength and balance exercise class, or

Take a parenting class

We often do not hear about the saves or success stories of our prevention efforts. We hear about the crashes, the drowning, fires and suicides. There are many success stories and this publication documents some of them as inspiration to the work of many injury prevention professionals, volunteers, advocates, and others statewide who know that prevention does save lives.

Motor Vehicle Occupant Protection & Safety

- Our daughter, son-in-law and three month old granddaughter came to visit on a Saturday in August 2004. As they drove into our yard, I think the car had not come to a full stop when the first words out of my daughters' mouth were, "Dad, the car seat WORKS!" En route from Auburn to our home in Gig Harbor, they were involved in a three car, chain reaction crash. Car #1 failed to stop, struck car # 2 and pushed it into the rear of their car, which was stopped. Much of the energy of the collision had been dissipated by the time they were struck, and the energy absorbing bumper on the rear of their car worked as designed. Our grand baby was snugly strapped in her rear-facing infant seat and both adults were properly belted in the front. They both said the impact was significant, but due to the "snug hug" of the seat, the baby did not even wake up. I inspected the seat, and confirmed that it was properly installed – rear center position, non-LATCH, using the manual adjustable center lap belt, proper seatback angle, correct fit of the restraining straps, clip at arm-pit level, etc. I saw no evidence of any change, of any kind, to the seat as a result of this event. It was gratifying to see our kids actually listened to "old dad" when I originally taught them how to use the seat.
- In January 2001, a vehicle was involved in a serious rollover crash. The child, correctly restrained in the car seat, was unscathed. The parents had been at a car seat check about two weeks prior to the crash. The father was very appreciative.

- A woman stopped by the Kitsap SAFE KIDS office with a new car seat that she wanted to have correctly installed. She had been in a severe frontal crash and knew that she needed to get a new car seat only because when the SAFE KIDS Child Passenger Safety Team put in the old seat, she was told to replace it if ever in a crash. The police officer at the crash scene told her that her baby (an adorable 4 month old girl) was saved because the car seat was so well installed.
- Two weeks after being in a Kitsap car seat workshop and purchasing a booster seat for her child, a truck pulled out of a driveway right in front of her as she was going 35 MPH. Her vehicle hit the truck hard enough to break the truck axle. Everyone in the vehicle was fine, without even bruises. All were in lap/shoulder belts and her child was in the new booster seat.
- The Mary Bridge Children's Hospital Emergency Department (ED) received a call telling them about a roll over crash and an infant who was ejected from the car and still in the car seat. On scene, the infant was placed in c-spine precautions and still in the car seat. The seat was scraped up badly; the top edges were bent and worn from having been thrown from the car and down the street. It looked like someone had taken an industrial sander to it. The infant was fine, the unbelted mother was not. The ED nurse said, "It's one of those cases that stayed with me... a father crying, holding his child."
- In July 2005, a three year old was riding in the car with his father and brother when they were struck by another vehicle. The driver of the other vehicle got out of his car and left the scene. Firefighters responding to the call said the boy survived the crash because he was restrained in a car seat. Without it he probably would have died. He had head trauma and was sent to Harborview and released a week later. The brother did not sustain any injuries. The father was still in ICU a month after the crash.
- In the summer following the distribution of the anti-DUI telephone calling cards, I gave a card to my teenage neighbor boy, along with yet another brief lecture on the dangers of drinking and driving. He was a regular for getting himself into "trouble" and I figured he could use it someday. About a week after I gave him the card, he came over to say that he had used the card to get himself out of jam. He had been down at the river with some older friends and the driver of the truck they drove over in was drinking. He decided to walk up the hill and across the street and use the card at the gas station payphone to call another friend to come and get him. A day or so later he had heard that the driver had rolled the truck after leaving the river. Had he ridden with him, he would have been riding in the bed of the pickup since there wasn't enough room in the cab. The driver wasn't hurt, and he didn't get caught, but a passenger in the bed of the truck without a seatbelt might not have been so lucky.

- Intensive Care staff at Mary Bridge Children’s Hospital reported that a family visited by a certified car seat technician who helped install their car seat on Monday June 5, 2006, was in an auto crash on their way home from the hospital. Mom fell asleep at the wheel. The car was totaled, but not a scratch on the baby.

Helmets

- Six year old Jake and his brother were riding scooters in the neighbors’ driveway. The brothers’ foot unintentionally went in front of Jake’s scooter and Jake flipped over the handle. He impacted directly on the helmet. Injuries included: broken nose, black eyes, and multiple abrasions. The helmet has permanent, significant deformation. This case is interesting because: it happened from a scooter not a bicycle; the boys were being directly supervised by their grandfather in the driveway not on the street; Jake was not hit by a vehicle yet had significant injuries and helmet damage. The helmet did a wonderful job of keeping Jake alive and without a traumatic brain injury.
- During Martin Luther King (MLK) Holiday Weekend in 2004, the Pierce County SAFE KIDS Coalition and Federal Way Helmet Coalition sponsored a ski/snowboard helmet sale at Crystal Mountain Ski area. Here is a success story from that sale:
 - I purchased the helmet on MLK weekend in January and the following Wednesday was on my way to go snowboarding. I was heading out the door and a friend said to me, “why don’t you try the new helmet today?” So I took it and wore it. I was in Green Valley at Crystal Mountain and chose a line I have ridden hundreds of times. In the middle of the valley there is a mound that is usually a smooth, gradual slope. That day there was a steeper transition on the mound that launched me into the air. When I landed I caught my heel side edge. Someone who saw me said I cart-wheeled from head to board about five times.

The last thing I remember is riding closer to the mound and seeing the transition. I vaguely remember feeling sick in the toboggan ride down, and then I remember waking up at Harborview Medical Center and looking up at the ceiling of the hospital room. I was unconscious for about a day and a half. I have no memory of being in the aid room at Crystal, the ambulance, or the helicopter that airlifted me to the hospital. I’m sure that if I hadn’t had on the helmet I would not be able to write this today. I compressed the Styrofoam on the rear of the helmet and cracked the plastic shell. My snowboard broke behind the rear binding because of the impact. I feel so grateful to those involved in the helmet awareness program. I am so appreciative and thankful for the helmet. I have been encouraging others to wear helmets when they ride, and since the crash I always ride with a helmet on.

- A seven year old Kitsap County boy hit the back of a car with enough velocity to wedge his bike under the back bumper. He was wearing a black multi-sport helmet from Mary Bridge. The child was unhurt and transported by his mom to Harrison Hospital to get checked out.
- An 11 year old girl was going too fast down a hill and hit loose gravel. She had deep cuts and bruises on her left knee and right shoulder, and road rash on her face, shoulders, back, elbows arms and legs. Her helmet was dented on the right temple area with multiple gravel indentations (like golf ball impressions).
- A ten year old boy was riding down a very steep hill and hit a manhole cover. He flipped head over heels multiple times, got very dizzy and blacked out. The boy had cuts on his face, hands, legs, knees, stomach and back. His helmet was badly scratched.
- Though there is a helmet law in both King County and Federal Way, riding without a helmet is commonplace. A study done by the Federal Way Helmet Coalition in 2003 showed helmet use at about 54%. The story here shows how helmet save lives:
 - It has always been a rule in the Veit household to wear a helmet whenever you ride anything with wheels. This comes down from mom who has always made this a rule of no exceptions. And as a mother of two boys ages 12 and 14 she knows the importance of "no exceptions". Mom (Joan) also enforces that if her boys are to ride with friends, and those friends do not wear helmets, the boys are not allowed to ride with them.

In the summer of 2004, Joan, her husband Tim and a group of teenage boys learned first-hand how lucky they were to have Joan helping them make decisions. Tyler, Brian and several friends decided to take a bike trip through Des Moines to a location near Sea Tac Airport. It was an appealing trip since Des Moines has clearly marked bike lanes to make it safer for bicyclists.

With Tyler in the lead they headed down a fairly steep hill into the small waterfront town of Des Moines. Suddenly a car pulled out right in front of Tyler. He barely had time to put on his brakes as his bike broadsided the car sending him flying over the hood and sliding nearly 30 feet on his head across the pavement.

Tyler never lost consciousness but had a hard time moving at first. The medics arrived nearly the same time as his mom and dad. Tyler ended up with a bruised and bleeding kidney, and stiffness that kept him from school for nearly two weeks. Slowly the soreness has gone away...but the memory of the car, the trip through the air and impact stays with him. Because the responding Des Moines Police officer knew Tyler's helmet

needed to be replaced, he did that on the spot... Tyler got a brand new helmet. The helmet Tyler wore that day will never be used again...it has done its job. He has his life to thank for that, and of course his mom for her "no exceptions" rule.

- The emergency department had a child brought in by ambulance after wiping out on his bike. He'd been out doing jumps like on TV. He arrived, and to his credit had worn his helmet, which was split in half. The boy had road rash to his nose and chin, but was otherwise fine. Thank goodness he had on his helmet. The force it took to crack open a helmet would have caused serious injury. The mother and patient both expressed a belief in the value of a helmet and the protection it offers. Mom said, "It was worth every penny."

Katie's Story

- On August 23, 2000 when I was ten years old, I was bicycling with my dad and younger brother. I lost control of my bike and hit a car. Luckily I was wearing a helmet – even though I had many injuries, it saved my life. I suffered a head injury, a broken collar bone, several breaks in my left arm, a torn tri-cusped heart valve (repaired with open heart surgery) and a broken pelvis. My collarbone and arm were repaired with plates, which are still there. I spent two weeks in Intensive Care at Harborview; then was transferred to Children's where I spent another six weeks. The first two weeks were on the medical floor and then to rehabilitation. They helped me with my memory, I started walking again and I had lots of physical therapy to regain the use of my left arm. With the help of so many people in the medical community, my family, friends and the Federal Way Fire Department, I feel that I have achieved that normal happy life that I was trying to get back. Today I still suffer from some short terms memory loss, but I've learned techniques to help with that – I take lots and lots of notes! Remember, unlike a broken arm a "broken" brain doesn't heal. After reading this, I hope that you will choose to always wear a helmet – whether you are biking, skateboarding, rollerblading, or on any wheeled "vehicle". It's great to go out and have fun, so be smart and protect yourself so you can continue having fun.
- In 2005, Tim, a 16 year old boy, returned to the Mary Bridge Center for Childhood Safety in Kent to purchase a new helmet after he crashed his bike. He had been traveling between Highline Community College and the Kent Learning Center when his foot slipped off the pedal and into the spokes of the bike. He was catapulted head-over-heels into traffic on a busy four lane road. The helmet was cracked but his head was fine. He suffered only a few bad scrapes and bruises.

Smoke Alarms & Fire Escape Planning

- Family saved by a smoke detector installed by firefighters: A single mom and her three year old son were able to safely evacuate their duplex apartment when the smoke alarm sounded. The noise of the alarm alerted the downstairs neighbors, too, so that both he and his care providers were able to evacuate safely, as well.
- After firefighters installed a smoke alarm and before they left, they sat down with the family to help them prepare a home escape plan. A few days later a fire started in the home, the smoke detector sounded the alarm and everyone safely evacuated. They used the escape plan that they designed with the firefighters a few days earlier.
- When an early morning fire started in her home, a second grade girl remembered what she had learned about home escape planning from “Fireflies”. After checking her front door for heat, she went to her window to escape. After safely breaking the window, she ran to a neighbor’s house to call 9-1-1.

Life Jackets

- In 1994, with life jackets from the statewide Childhood Drowning Prevention Program, I started a free loan program at four beach sites on Black Lake in Thurston County. One site included a swimming pool. Since all four sites are private parks or clubs, I worked with the park manager or owner to set up the program. I recruited volunteer firefighters to make signs for the self-serve life jacket loaner stations. Life jackets were available every day at all four sites making kids safer and preventing unintentional submersions. On August 14th, with the loan program in place for two months, a paddleboat being operated on the lake by two brothers aged 9 and 11 and their 11 year old friend, was flipped over by the wake of a motorboat. Fully clothed, the boys had trouble swimming and the shock of suddenly being in the cold water stunned them. They might have drowned except that each boy had on a life jacket from the loan station. After being rescued, they told firefighters: “I was really scared” “I couldn’t breathe” and “I was drowning”. The loan program was in place all summer, all life jackets were returned and parents were enthusiastic about the program – commenting that they felt safer taking their young children, especially toddlers, near the water.
- At a lake in the Spokane area, the Sheriff’s Marine Patrol Division set up a life jacket loaner program for boaters. A family was getting ready for a day of boating and borrowed a life jacket for their two year old. Shortly after putting on the jacket, the toddler fell off the dock into the cold, murky water. She bobbed up to the surface and was quickly lifted from the water by her mom.