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Chinese sisters take on the world on six wheels BEST FRIENDS ON BIKES

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SHARON — Fourteen-year-old Sarah Smedley (front, left) receives her own adaptive bicycle Monday afternoon, as her mother, Traci Smedley (back, left); brother, Sam (center); and sister, Lizzie (front, right) celebrate alongside her. Photos by Molly Moser/R-A

SHARON — Five years ago, best friends Sarah and Lizzie — young girls living with cerebral palsy — were taking on the world together in a Zhu Hai, China, orphanage.

When a Titusville family adopted 10-yearold Lizzie in 2014, Sarah stayed behind to await the arrival of her own adoptive parents — but they never came.

“[Sarah] thought a family was coming, but they didn’t show up. Everyone deserves a family,” said Traci Smedley, who adopted Lizzie in 2014, and went back for Sarah in 2017 after learning her prospective parents backed out of the adoption. “Sarah and Lizzie used to be best friends, and now they’re sisters.”

One year after being reunited, the two girls are once again taking on the world together — this time, on three wheels.

Monday, Sarah received a Rifton adaptive bicycle, which will allow her to ride on her own.

Although riding a bike can be an everyday activity for most 14- year-old girls, the physical limitations that come with cerebral palsy had previously made it impossible for the sisters.

“They can’t balance on other bikes, because they don’t have the core strength,” Smedley said.

With Lizzie receiving her own adaptive bike in 2016, the Smedleys can now take bike rides as a family.

“Before, someone had to walk so they could take turns. Now we can all go riding together,” Traci said. “It gives them a feeling of independence — and they’re 14 now, they want to be independent — but they still need to be safe, and they can be safe with these bikes.

“Lizzie used to tell me, ‘Mom, I just want to be like the other kids,’” she added. “This lets them be like any other kid on a bike.”



SHARON — After being diagnosed with cerebral palsy, Sarah Smedley, of Titusville, finally received a bike that allows her to ride on her own Monday.

In addition to Sarah, three other youngsters received an adaptive bike Monday courtesy of Variety Children’s Charity and the Sharon American Legion.

Each bike is built to meet the needs of the individual child, with variations in handle bars and steering mechanisms added based on a prescription by a physical therapist.

“People tend to associate these bikes with special needs children, but these are not ‘special needs’ children, these are just special children,” said Mickey Sgro, a Variety board member. “They can accomplish anything they set their minds to; all we’re doing is giving them a tool to do something people said they could never do.

“Today, when they’re riding their bikes, the smiles on their faces will tell us that everyone who ever said they couldn’t, was wrong,” he added. “We are all so proud of them today.”

In all, \$16,000 worth of adaptive equipment was awarded, including two strollers and five communication devices for nonverbal children.