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Disabled kids get a break

"This will make the difference of him now being able to attend school."

Mike McPhee

The Denver Post

Pete and Christy Kopp were shocked when they had to pay \$3,000 for a walker for their daughter, Kayla, who has a rare genetic disorder that prevents her muscles from working normally.

The young couple, who grew up healthy and unaware of the problems facing families with disabled children, were stung again when a manual wheelchair for Kayla cost them another \$8,000.

Fortunately, the successful entrepreneurs had the means to pay for the equipment.

But Kayla, who is now 10, outgrew the chairs, and her parents were faced with buying a new set of equipment. What surprised them most was that there was no market for the old equipment, more than \$10,000 worth, in great shape.

"We couldn't find anyone to give it to," Pete Kopp said. "Children's Hospital wouldn't touch it because of the liability issues. We said there's gotta be someone who can use this stuff."

So the Koppes started their own company for used "durable medical equipment," the term insurance companies use for mobility equipment for disabled people.

In just over two years, their nonprofit company, Kids Mobility Network, has handed out more than 160 wheelchairs, strollers, car seats and other items worth more than \$500,000.

"You have no idea how this will change my life," said Megan Creager, mother of Kennedy Creager, whose muscles can't carry his body weight yet. On Wednesday she accepted a \$6,200 stroller from Kids Mobility, along with a modified car seat. She paid the suggested donation of \$225. "I have carried Kennedy for three years. This will make the difference of him now being able to attend school."

Once the Koppes overcame the liability issues by finding an insurance company willing to cover them, the floodgates opened. They have a warehouse of more than \$500,000 of equipment,



Kennedy Creager, 3, of Thornton gets a used stroller from the Kids Mobility Network. With him are his mother, Megan, left, and T.D. Shenck, a supplier for Kids Mobility. (Hyoung Chang, *The Denver Post*)

almost all of it donated. They accept up to 20 applications a month from families and rarely refuse anyone.

"Most of the stuff we get is in very good shape — often it's just out of adjustment," Pete Kopp said.

They break even on the equipment after they clean it, adjust it and in some instances refurbish it.

Trying to keep equipment costs to families to a minimum, the Kopps were having trouble paying the overhead costs of a mechanic, a receptionist, the rent, phone, lights, etc.

In stepped Darby Tucker, a racquetball buddy and business manager for Jenny's Markets, a local chain of 40 convenience stores and ConocoPhillips gas stations. Tucker was so impressed by Kids Mobility that Jenny's Markets is donating the sales of all fountain drinks and coffee for four days last month. Tucker will hand the Kopps a check today for \$16,500 at noon at the store at 4175 W. 120th Ave.

"We hope to continue this," Tucker said. "This is a good thing to do for them."