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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Variety the Children's Charity & Highmark Partner with Excelsa Health for "My Bike" Kickoff

NORTH HUNTINGTON, Pa. (March 21, 2013) – Representatives from Excelsa Health, Variety the Children's Charity and Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield hosted the "**My Bike**" – Westmoreland County Kickoff event to launch an identification and awareness campaign in order to find local children with disabilities who are eligible for Variety's "**My Bike**" Program.

Also in attendance at today's kickoff was Pennsylvania State Senator Kim Ward.

The "**My Bike**" Program, which was launched in November, was created to provide adaptive bikes to children with disabilities, so they too can enjoy the freedom of riding a bike.

Gregory Amond, 13, from Derry Township, received his adaptive bike from Variety in December as part of the "**My Bike**" Program. His mother, Clarissa Amond, said, "Greg had never been on a bike before and he has fallen through the cracks so many times with other things. When he got on that bike for the first time I knew that it was going to change our lives."

With 65 adaptive bikes sponsored and ready to be distributed to eligible children with a disability, the Westmoreland County community came together today to form a partnership to identify eligible children for the "**My Bike**" Program.

"I remember getting my bike as a boy. I felt like I could fly. I know this program will give wings to the children who benefit," said Robert J. Rogalski, Esq., Chief Executive Officer of Excelsa Health. "I am pleased for Excelsa Health to partner with Variety, Highmark, and the greater Westmoreland County community. It is my hope that we will work together to identify every eligible child for the "**My Bike**" Program. I also hope that this partnership can create a sense of community for those children living with disabilities and their families,"

Every adaptive bike distributed through the "**My Bike**" Program is customized for each individual child and it can improve the riders' social and physical well-being.

As the founding and premier sponsor of the **“My Bike”** Program, Highmark has provided an initial grant of \$55,000 in support of the program.

“It’s our hope that the **“My Bike”** Program and the new adaptive bikes will help to not only serve as a positive model for surrounding communities to follow, but also as a catalyst of independence for children living with a disability,” said Deborah Rice-Johnson, Division President of Health Services at Highmark, and President of the Variety Board of Directors.

In addition to the kickoff of the **“My Bike”** Program in Westmoreland County, similar events have happened in the other counties served by Variety to identify and serve as many children with disabilities as possible.

“Every child deserves to have a bike and every child deserves to ride a bike with his or her friends, and to feel like they are a part of their neighborhood,” said Variety CEO Charlie LaVallee. “These adaptive bikes give children with disabilities a taste of freedom, a sense of belonging and the opportunity to have childhood experiences and memories that we want for all of our children.”

Since the program began in November, more than 180 adaptive bikes have been distributed or committed, and 245 adaptive bikes have been sponsored by generous individuals and companies throughout Variety’s 10-county service area, which includes: Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Greene, Fayette, Indiana, Lawrence, Washington and Westmoreland counties. The cost to sponsor an adaptive bike through the **“My Bike”** Program is \$1,800. Donations can be designated by county.

For more information on Variety and the **“My Bike”** Program, please call 412-747-2680.