

# Caps of Love turns trash into mobility for children

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**A**n electric scooter might not seem like a means of independence to some. But to Natalie Ceron, whose ataxia telangiectasia severely impairs her physically, it means a lot of freedom.

Natalie, 13, a resident of West Palm Beach, recently received the scooter from Caps of Love. Founded by Valerie Mathieu in Lake Worth, Caps of Love collects plastic caps from soda bottles, water bottles, milk jugs and other containers. The collected caps are sorted and sold to a recycling company and the proceeds are used to purchase wheelchairs for children whose families might not otherwise be able to afford one.

Without Caps of Love, said Natalie's mother, Mery, Natalie would need to be pushed in a non-electric wheelchair.

"For her being 13 and in middle school, what she really wanted was to be independent," she said.

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The electric scooter, she said, does draw some attention to her daughter but someone pushing her from behind would draw even more.

"What she really wanted was to try and fit in. She's able to make friends and socialize on her own without having to have someone constantly with her. Even just going to the mall, she feels she can do it on her own," Mery Ceron said.

Natalie's not alone.

Last year, Mathieu donated 18 new or refurbished wheelchairs to children throughout South Florida.

"It's not the biggest charity in the world. I'm not fooling myself. But it's something," she said.

Founded seven years ago, she recently "reached the humanitarian stage," and finally sold enough caps to start providing wheelchairs. Mathieu likes to emphasize how low-impact the donations are to those who give. She does accept monetary donations and wheelchairs but she's asking for something anyone and everyone can give.

"Anyone can do this. I'm basically asking for your garbage. You're throwing this away anyway," she said.

Anyone can donate, from children to adults, but those who do are asked to separate the caps according to the type of plastic of which they're made.

"It's critical you separate. We won't collect them if you don't separate," Mathieu said.

That's because the recycling company won't pay for caps that aren't separated. And it takes a large amounts of caps – 8 tons of plastic is worth about \$3,000.

Visit [capsoflove.com](http://capsoflove.com) for information on how to sort and donate.