Celebrating 10,000 Wheelchairs: Wheels for the World in Ghana

Under darkened skies, and working through a power cut, our Ghana team had the thrill of fitting a young man with Wheels for the World’s 10,000th wheelchair. The recipient, Andrew, is 24 years old and has been disabled since childhood, when he had convulsions which left him unable to walk. He lives with his mother, who was delighted that he would no longer have to crawl over rough grass and pot-holed roads.

He thanked God for “this precious gift” - a wheelchair which was rescued from landfill, repaired at Parkhurst Prison Workshop, and transported five thousand miles to help restore Andrew’s dignity. What an amazing practical demonstration of God’s love.

Since the first Wheels for the World trip to Albania in 1998, your support has brought chairs to 10,000 people, mobility aids to 12,000 more, and changed the lives of over 20,000 families, plus extended communities and churches, reaching 40,000 people with the Gospel. Sometimes, the scale of the need can be daunting, but we can point to 10,000 people who have found new freedom through the work you’ve made possible – 10,000 reasons to keep pushing on for another 10,000 chairs!

We’ve been working with Ellen Annan from the Light Outreach Foundation in Tema since 2003, but this is the first distribution to the Central Region of Ghana and the Ashanti people around Kumasi. The team, led by Jill Jenkinson, travelled to four centres over five days, and it was obvious that the need is huge as they distributed 128 wheelchairs, 4 buggies and 166 mobility aids. There’s lots more to do in future visits, but for each recipient and family, it’s a life-changing gift.

That gift of a wheelchair will make a huge difference to Obour. He fell off his bicycle while cycling to work on the family farm 20 years ago and sustained spinal damage. He’s been looked after by his brother and family ever since. When asked what difference his wheelchair would make he replied “I shall not have to stay out in the rain and get wet as I can push myself to shelter”. Apparently the previous day he had been carried into the compound to sit in a chair, but when the sudden rainstorm started there was no one to move him, so he got very wet. His brother said that both of them had been given freedom, as Obour would no longer need carrying. His name means ‘stone’ but the radiant smile that broke out as he pushed himself for the first time was anything but stony!

Although at the start of the distribution the most needy were obvious by their absence, by the end, many clients were being carried in by family members, or crawling on the ground as news spread. The Ghanaian team were all overwhelmed initially at seeing those
more profoundly physically challenged, as these people are generally out of sight.

The team was excited to see local pastors with such a thirst for the Biblical principles of disability. This was partly due to having the same pastors all week, giving everyone time to establish meaningful relationships. One pastor was well known for leading missions and running crusades with an emphasis on praying for miracle healings. However, having worked with us for a week, he humbly acknowledged there was a need for practical intervention, and that he had been touched by witnessing how the gift of a mobility aid could also be in God’s plan.

Dora is a 35 year old lady who contracted polio at 9 months old. She lives with her mother and two of her sisters, and her disability has had a considerable impact upon her life. She arrived at the distribution point in a borrowed wheelchair and during discussions with the therapist it became clear that her mother meets all her care and personal needs without support from friends or members of her church.

Dora told the therapist how her new wheelchair will give her opportunities she has never had before. When asked if there was anything the team could specifically pray for, she brought the team member to tears, asking that, “her nature would continually be evermore changed into the nature of Jesus”. It’s humbling to see this lady, who had suffered so much all her life, having such love for Jesus.

You can find out all about plans for more Wheels for the World trips later on in the Vital Link – we’re seeing lots of new opportunities and places to work. Each of these trips has a life-changing effect on people like Andrew, Obour, and Dora, but costs thousands of pounds to deliver. We need your support! Please get in touch to find out how you can join a team, pray, or donate. Thank you.
Starting this issue, as part of a new regular feature, we’ll be bringing you stories from disabled Christians – all friends and contacts of Through the Roof – who are making a difference. This month, John Williams of Enable shares how he’s helping churches reach out to disabled people.

I was born eight weeks premature and diagnosed with a severe muscular disability. Doctors said that I would never walk, talk or be independent, but by the grace and power of God I have overcome these life-limiting obstacles.

My name is John Williams and I lead a ministry called Enable. As an initiative of The Message Trust, we seek to help people with seen or unseen disabilities connect with God and understand that they’re created intentionally, intricately and for a God-given purpose. I live with cerebral palsy and am now able to inspire and encourage those facing the same difficulties.

The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism identified that 90% of people living with a disability have not been effectively reached with the gospel, making them one of the hardest-to-reach people groups. But they’re not really hard to reach, we just need to know how! Enable partners with churches to help them serve and welcome those with seen or unseen disabilities. As well as this, we deliver lessons in schools on respect, hopes, and dreams, with the intention to challenge perceptions of disability and encourage pupils to identify areas in their own lives where personal circumstances may be holding them back from achieving.

I see God at work as I share my story in schools. Only recently one student approached me after a session in a college to express that he was going through a really tough time with his disabilities, but that I had really inspired him. I was able to encourage him to speak to his chaplain to get further help through this tough time.

It has also been amazing to see the work God is doing in churches through Enable. One church recently said that until I shared the stats and figures alongside my own personal story, they hadn’t realised that there was such a need. Now we are working together towards making their church accessible.

Please pray that more doors will open in schools and churches so that the team and I can bring the good news of Jesus to more people with seen and unseen disabilities.

Contact me at enable@message.org.uk, 0161 9462 369, or by visiting our website www.message.org.uk/enable to find out more.

Every Church Needs One…

We believe every church needs a Roofbreaker to advocate for disabled people in their church and we’re on a mission to find 1000. We’ll be organising a series of ‘Be a Roofbreaker’ events around the UK, seeking to encourage existing Roofbreakers, and find and inspire new ones to join the growing family. Together we can transform church life by ensuring disabled people can belong and contribute to God’s Kingdom.

Our first event is in the South-East, at St George’s Christian Centre, Barnett Wood Lane, Ashtead KT21 2DA on Saturday 28th April, 10.30am – 3.30pm.

We aim to:

• Inspire you with real-life stories of disability mission and ministry
• Connect you with new people, inclusive ideas and practical resources to help you

The event is open to everyone, and we’d love current Roofbreakers to be there to share their stories, exchange ideas and highlight practical resources to the newcomers. Tickets are £10 for one, or £15 for two, which includes a copy of the ‘Be a Roofbreaker’ publication. Book now through the shop at www.throughtheroof.org, or by contacting info@throughtheroof.org or 01372 749955.
Thank you for all of your support and well-wishes through 2017 – our twentieth anniversary! Lots of you held individual celebrations to promote Through the Roof, and we all enjoyed a terrific service in Ashstead to commemorate the last twenty years. We’ve lots of exciting plans for 2018 and the future work of the charity, some of which are featured in this issue, and some which we’ll be talking about over the next few months. We still have a few of the celebration packs ready to use, so if you’d like to hold a celebration and raise awareness and funds for the charity, please get in touch.

By Dr. Mike Townsend, Chair of Trustees

‘Differently’. This word was everywhere we travelled in India. Am I different? Special access is provided for ‘differently-abled people’. What do you think about that phrase? It is not one I would use. In contrast to Nepal, access provision in India is excellent - despite some rather rough terrain. I found a positive attitude everywhere.

Helping Hands, a project employing disabled people in Nepal, had an outlet round the corner from one of our hotels. As I walked in, the shopkeeper said, “welcome. We met in Nepal!” We were also welcomed into a Tata funded tea village amongst the plantations. Most of the workers there are disabled and are the main breadwinners for their families.

Amongst Hindus, it is hard to share the gospel of Jesus. They so readily accept additional gods.

But what is sharing the Gospel? At breakfast in Agra, an American strolled over and asked how long I had been blind. He then proceeded to tell me that he could help God heal me! He was an evangelical missionary. How strange! What is the Gospel? Paul said, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). ‘Salvation’ is the essence of the Gospel. This is a saving relationship with Jesus. As Paul describes it, “the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Colossians 1:27). So why would this missionary offer a disabled person a temporary fix rather than an eternal relationship? Is there a ‘different’ gospel for ‘differently-abled’ people? Paul expressed his disappointment to the Galatians. “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel - which is really no gospel at all.” (Galatians 1:6-7)

There is not a different Gospel for different people. The Gospel, which Through the Roof lovingly offers, is a saving relationship with Jesus for everybody.

Tim and I went to a presentation at the London Central Hall in December. We were given the silver award for the best project for advancing the Christian faith for the Roofbreaker project. Thank you for partnering with us in sharing the gospel of ‘Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today and forever’ (Hebrews 13:8).

As I said to the missionary, it is good to be an ambassador for Jesus even though I am an ambassador with a ‘difference’.

Gratitude Going Forward

Thank you for celebrating TTR’s birthday!
Oar Inspiring Efforts

Last summer our first Dragon Boat crew powered their way along the River Thames to finish 20th out of 53 boats and raise over £3,000 for Through the Roof. This year we want to do even better, so if you’re looking for a fun and active way to spend a summer’s day whilst helping those in need, please get in touch to join the team on Sunday 15th July.
Full training won’t be given, but you will get a free drink and t-shirt and help to change lives!

Stay in Touch

In May some changes to the law about how charities and companies keep information and contact their supporters are being introduced. We want to make sure that we’re sending you the information that you want about our work and contacting you in the way you’d prefer, especially as we are now legally required to make sure our records stay up to date.

Please take a few minutes to let us know your preferred address, phone number, and email address, and how you’d like to hear from us, by phoning 01372 749955, emailing info@throughtheroof.org, returning the letter that will have arrived with this copy if you’re a regular subscriber, or signing up for updates at www.throughtheroof.org. There’s plenty of exciting news to come from TTR in 2018, and we’d love to keep you informed about all of it.

We promise to never pass or sell your personal information on to any other people or organisation, and only use it in ways that allow us to run the charity and carry out our work. If you’ve got any questions about what information we hold please contact us, and we’ll be happy to talk it through with you.

Prayer Changes Things

All of us at some time in our lives need prayer, and to know the support of loyal praying people. Maybe you are one of those who faithfully pray for Through the Roof – if you are, we’d like to say a huge thank you to you. If you are not yet receiving the weekly prayer email, and would like to, please do get in touch. It usually flies out on a Thursday and is open to items of prayer and praise for the family of Through the Roof. If you are one of those many people who need prayer, then we would love to be able to pray for you. We don’t put your surname in, just your Christian name and the town where you live. All we need from you is a phone call or an email to ask us to pray for you, with a short description of your prayer need. Please do get in touch!
My nephew once asked me why Jesus had to die so soon, when He was only born at Christmas and then died a few months later! Of course, we know that there was 33 years of life and ministry in-between, and that during His time on earth Christ changed the lives of hundreds of people. We are still able to rejoice in His love, as the message travels worldwide and His Kingdom grows daily.

So much of Jesus’ ministry was directed at the less fortunate, the stressed, the ill, the disabled, the worried, the angry, and many others who desperately needed His love, compassion, and saving power. Today is no different. His love reaches everywhere to all people with many varied needs.

I was given a book for Christmas called ‘The Cat Lovers Devotional’, which tells of the way we can see God’s love through the behaviour of our cats! One word appears frequently throughout the book: ‘otherly’. The author stresses many times of our need to be ‘otherly’ to those around us, to put Jesus first, others second and ourselves last. All of the New Testament is about Jesus being ‘otherly’ to all races, creeds, and types of people, with no exceptions. It is just a gentle reminder of how we should be, so in 2018, let us all try to be more ‘otherly’ and to reflect Jesus’ love for others in our own lives.

Jenny’s cat, Biscuit, practicing being ‘Otherly’ by the bath

St Oswald’s Church, Croxley Green, recently invited Through the Roof to speak about the Christian message of disability with their congregation during a Sunday morning service. Chief Executive Tim Wood shared his personal experience of the charity’s work, as well as from the Bible, highlighting those passages which clearly demonstrate God’s heart for disabled people.

During lunch, Tim also had the opportunity to tell moving stories about the lives of people being changed by the work of the charity, through Jesus. We are so grateful that the church have adopted Through the Roof as their Parish Project for 2018, and will be running events, activities and raising funds to benefit the work during this year. If your church would like a speaker to share more about the vital work of Through the Roof, and/or you could have a collection or generate funds for this mission, please contact Margaret at the office on 01372 749955 or info@throughtheroof.org.
Over the years, I have heard many people say, “Why would God send me to another nation, when there are so many people here who need to be reached?”

In the book of Nehemiah, we see a remnant of Jews left after the captivity of Jerusalem, who have lived within the demolished city walls for over 150 years. God sent Nehemiah, a man from far away to assist them in rebuilding. Why did He send someone with no experience of masonry all the way from Persia, present-day Iran?

I used to live in the Valley of a Thousand Hills in KwaZulu Natal South Africa. Nearby was a home for two hundred children with albinism who had been abandoned by their families. Some had had their limbs amputated. One young Zulu girl had been sleeping alone on the floor of her shack, when a man with a machete entered. Minutes later he emerged, having cut off her arms, and made his way to a witchdoctor, where he exchanged them for payment. The witchdoctor went to work making charms and potions from them, promoting the belief that they would bring good luck to those who wear and use them.

I had been to the children’s home a number of times to sell wooden toys I’d made, but not taken notice of the children there. In fact, stories like that had little impact on me. In my earlier years as a prison warder, when prisoners had attempted to take my life, I saw it as par for the course. Later, as a policeman, I became accustomed to the violence I witnessed and grew insensitive to the victims. I was indifferent, detached, and focussed on the perpetrators. I became blind and deaf to the anguish, desensitised in a culture where life is cheap.

This is not uncommon in such societies, and it’s a barrier that prevents disabled people from being included in the life of the community. God needs Nehemiahs; people who have not lived their lives within a particular condition to go to places like that. His provision is abundant. The young girl was given prosthetic limbs. But God’s grace abounds too.

Our Churches Inc. teams work with church leaders, encouraging and equipping them to identify and confront these barriers. Our Wheels for the World distributions are tremendous opportunities where a wheelchair or other mobility aid is given to someone with a physical disability. The recipient is afforded a chance for a quality of life that he or she may not have thought possible. Would you like to join us on one of these trips?

Through the Roof will be running the following Wheels distributions in 2018…

Uganda: 10th – 20th of April
Kenya: 5th – 15th September
Nigeria: 14th – 24th November
Mozambique: 14th – 24th November

We are particularly looking for therapists, techies and people with administrative skills for the Nigeria distribution, as well as people with photographic skills for all three distributions.

Our Churches Inc. trips this year are as follows:

Tanzania: 6th – 16th June
Sierra Leone: 9th – 17th October

We need people who can teach God’s Word, and people who have experience of working with disabled people to assist with the workshops.

Please visit www.throughtheroof.org for more details. If you’d like to join one of our teams, or just chat about what’s involved, please contact me on shaun@throughtheroof.org.
Disability and the Gospel

We now have copies of ‘Disability and the Gospel’, a great book by Michael S. Beates, with a foreword by Joni Eareckson Tada. It looks at how God uses our brokenness to display his grace. Michael works through key Bible passages on brokenness and disability while answering hard questions, and offers helpful principles for believers and their churches. He shows us how to embrace our own brokenness and then to embrace those who are more physically and visibly broken, bringing hope and vision to those of us who need it most.

The author’s concern with disability issues began nearly 30 years ago when his eldest child was born with multiple profound disabilities. Now, as more families like his are affected by a growing number of difficulties ranging from Down’s syndrome to autism to food allergies, the need for church programs and personal paradigm shifts is greater than ever.

You can order a copy from our website for £14.99. While you’re there, we encourage you to take a look at the wide range of other books, and our own resources, including the new stewards cards.

Available now in the TTR shop

Campus Mission to all Students

Following the partnership with UCCF (The Christian Unions) started up last year, we’re pleased to be able to say that we have now also made a connection with Fusion. This student Christian movement equips students for a life of mission and discipleship at university and serves churches by encouraging them to be at the heart of student mission. Fusion have kindly published a blog post from Through the Roof, which you can find in the blog section at www.fusionmovement.org. They have also posted a link to our student version of Be a Roofbreaker, which you can download from our own website shop.

We’re passionate about seeing student Christian groups reach out to disabled students on their campuses. Student life can be a lonely experience if you have a disability, and Christian students have a great role to play in sharing God’s love and laying the foundations for a truly inclusive church of the future, where all of us belong and all of us contribute.

Holidays and Retreats in 2018

We’re excited to offer several holidays and retreats this year. They’re filling up fast, and some are already approaching capacity, but it’s always worth asking! Here’s a reminder of what’s happening when. Please phone the office if you are interested in coming along. Helpers are also always required, particularly for Babbacombe, so if you could spare some time to help someone take a holiday, please get in touch.

June 11 – 15 TTR @ Center Parcs in Nottinghamshire – Cost £415.
Jul 30 – Aug 4 Treloar’s College, Hampshire – All-age activity holiday – Cost £555. Fully booked, apply now for the waiting list.
Sept 21 - 28 Babbacombe Hotel near Torquay - Relaxed Coastal Holiday – Cost £745.

Join in the holiday fun in 2018
NEW AND UPDATED – Stewards / Welcome Team Cards

If you’re involved with a welcoming or stewarding team in your church, you’ll find our new and updated Stewards’ Cards helpful. They contain best practice guidelines for welcoming disabled people to your church, and lots of handy hints for keeping your services inclusive and accessible. We’ve redesigned and modernised the content to enlarge the text and improve readability, but they’re still wallet or pocket sized for easy reference. **£2 for 10**, or save by getting **50 for £8**.

We have several other books and resources available. Please visit [www.throughtheroof.org](http://www.throughtheroof.org) to see the full range.

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**Through the Roof Publications:**

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<td><em>UPDATED</em> Steward / Welcome Team cards – Folding pocket sized cards give the information needed to provide a warm and informed welcome to disabled people.</td>
<td>£2 for 10 or £8 for 50</td>
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<tr>
<td>All Welcome: Ensuring different aspects of church life are inclusive of everyone (includes topics such as communication, diversity, mission, baptism and communion).</td>
<td>£5.00</td>
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<td>Be a Roofbreaker! Lists simple, practical ways to equip your church to be a welcoming and inclusive place for all (topics include mental health, autism, blindness, and new sections on disability in the Bible, and dementia).</td>
<td>£5.00</td>
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<td>A Welcoming Place – Autistic Young People in Church: helping you create an environment in your youth and children’s work which includes everyone, including those with autistic spectrum conditions. It includes practical strategies, proven approaches, and a comprehensive index.</td>
<td>£5.00</td>
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<td>Parachute Bible Stories: A series of 20 Bible stories with directions for delivering hands-on Bible experiences for all abilities.</td>
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<td>Removing Barriers: A self-assessment resource to find out how inclusive your services, activities and programmes are for disabled people.</td>
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<td>Hearts in Transformation: A six lesson Bible Study, exploring Biblical encouragement for those living with disability</td>
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<td>Bible Teaser Postcards - A simple game that will inspire players to look at disability in the Bible, and to reflect on the amazing role disabled people have played. Two different packs available.</td>
<td>£5.00 for one pack of 10 or £7.50 for both packs</td>
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We’d love to keep you up to date with all of Through the Roof’s ongoing work. Please choose and tick below what you’d like to receive from us.

☐ Vital Link Email (3 times a year)  ☐ Vital Link in Print (3 times a year)  ☐ Weekly Prayer Email  ☐ International Missions Newsletter (Roughly every two months)  ☐ Occasional Event Information

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