



## Make This Christmas Season Even More Meaningful

This Christmas giving season, give a meaningful gift that transforms lives: Free Wheelchair Mission Christmas cards. For a donation of \$80 or more, you'll receive a greeting card to give to someone as a gift. Each card features a story of a life transformed by mobility and includes a unique gift code that the card recipient can use to choose which region to send a wheelchair to: Africa, Asia, or Latin America. They'll later receive email updates about the wheelchair they sent.

Not only do these Christmas cards provide gifts to two individuals—the one who receives the card and the one who receives the wheelchair—they help further awareness about the cause of mobility for people living with disabilities in developing countries.

For more information about Free Wheelchair Mission Christmas cards, or to place an order, visit:

[FreeWheelchairMission.org/Christmas](http://FreeWheelchairMission.org/Christmas).

**And don't forget—it's also year end, so remember to make your gifts prior to December 31!**

### Lives are Transformed Because You Give



[FreeWheelchairMission.org/donate](http://FreeWheelchairMission.org/donate)

Go online 24 hours a day for easy one-time or monthly giving.



Please send checks to:

Free Wheelchair Mission  
15279 Alton Parkway  
Suite 300  
Irvine, California 92618



800.733.0858

Call Monday to Friday  
9:00AM to 5:00PM PST

**We Want to Hear From You! Connect With Us Online and Hear More Stories From the Field.**



**FreeWheelchairMission.org**

Transforming lives through the gift of mobility™

FREE WHEELCHAIR MISSION

FALL 2020 UPDATE



COSTA RICA

### MOBILITY BRINGS HOPE

One sweltering summer day, a volunteer made her way through the unpaved roads of Barrio La Carreta in Guanacaste, the most sparsely populated province in Costa Rica. She had come to check on the resident of a humble wooden house tucked away on a quiet street.

When she arrived at the property, she was greeted by José Ramón (photo on right), an 88-year-old man in a rocking chair fashioned out of rebar and rattan, waving at her through a thin barbed-wire fence.

José was cheerful and upbeat in spite of his apparent economic and physical challenges. Years ago, his left leg had been amputated below the knee due to an infection. He lived alone, with no one to help him, and he did not have any mobility aids.

José was part of a growing national trend: Statistics show that, on average, Costa Rican men over the age of 69 and women over the age of 71 live the rest of their lives with illness or disability. This is often attributed to a lack of emphasis on disease prevention and the deterioration of infrastructure and equipment in health facilities<sup>1</sup>.

The volunteer saw José's desperate need for a wheelchair and contacted the Do It Foundation, a nonprofit that serves as a distribution partner for Free Wheelchair Mission in Costa Rica.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.paho.org/salud-en-las-americanas-2017/?p=2656>

### DONATE NOW

Provide the life-transforming gift of mobility and give someone renewed hope, freedom, and independence.

[FreeWheelchairMission.org/donate](http://FreeWheelchairMission.org/donate)



**FREE WHEELCHAIR MISSION**



## A PARTNERSHIP IS BORN

With lush rainforests rich in biodiversity, towering volcanic peaks, and pristine beaches along both the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean, it is no surprise that Costa Rica is the most visited country in Central America.

Yet, problems related to health care and nutrition are prevalent due to a lack of basic services, particularly for those living in less-resourced areas. One out of five households live in poverty, with 7% living in extreme poverty. A large percentage of the workforce is unemployed, especially due to COVID-19. The number of unemployed is nearly three times higher for people living with disabilities.<sup>2</sup>

One out of ten Costa Ricans lives with some sort of disability, the most common being related to vision and mobility. Along with indigenous peoples and immigrants, those living with disabilities are among the most vulnerable in Costa Rica, especially during natural disasters or outbreaks like the novel coronavirus. They have restricted access to education and work, and

## “I WANT TO BE STRONG”

Jennifer (18), an aspiring jewelry designer, can now pursue her dream of taking art classes and learning the craft.



often face discrimination based on superstitious beliefs about disability.

Free Wheelchair Mission’s work in Costa Rica began when John Scheman, founder of the Costa Rican real estate development company Grupo Do It, noticed infrastructure needs in rural schools and local health centers. While working together with the community to make these public spaces safer, John became aware that a high number of people were living with mobility disabilities in Guanacaste. Grupo Do It then began to partner with Free Wheelchair Mission in 2005 to bring the gift of mobility to these individuals, forming the Do It Foundation as a charitable arm of the organization.

## “QUALITY OF LIFE”

Before the pandemic struck, a team of staff and supporters from Free Wheelchair Mission joined members of the Do It Foundation to distribute wheelchairs in Costa Rica. One of the individuals they served was Jennifer (18), who was born with hydrocephalus and spina bifida. Jennifer cannot move her right hand or her legs. Her mother would carry her places when she was younger but couldn’t take her very far once she became a teenager.

Jennifer’s school had one wheelchair that was loaned out for two weeks at a time before being passed along to the next student. This made regular school attendance difficult, and it hindered Jennifer from consistently going to physical therapy sessions.

When Jennifer finally received a new wheelchair of her own—a Free Wheelchair Mission GEN\_3 delivered and fitted just for her—she could barely contain her giddiness. “I want to be strong,” she declared, eager to go to school and resume physical therapy. Her dream is to learn more about art and make a living as a designer of bracelets and earrings.

“More than an act of charity, we see this as a work of God using us as a tool to help others and give them a basic human right such as mobility,” said a representative from the Do It Foundation. “Anyone who receives a

<sup>2</sup> <https://ticotimes.net/2006/05/26/access-for-disabled-lags-despite-law>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.paho.org/salud-en-las-americanas-2017/?p=2656>



## NEWFOUND FREEDOM

José Ramón (88) lost a leg to an infection years ago and was living alone, with no help or mobility aids, in rural Costa Rica.

wheelchair will be impacted in an individual way as well as in their family environment, helping them all to have quality of life and more independence.”

To date, 18,584 of our wheelchairs have been distributed in Costa Rica through Do It Foundation and a network of sub-distribution partners, which are often more localized organizations that have direct and longstanding ties to the communities they serve. “Our network of sub-distribution partners has increased and helped us to impact more individuals throughout Costa Rica, aligning with our cause,” said Do It Foundation’s Daniela Cortez, who leads the training of sub-distribution partners in the country. This network of distributors collaborates to share referrals for wheelchairs and health services, coordinate volunteers and wheelchair transportation, and celebrate one another’s successes.

One story they celebrated is that of José Ramón. When the Do It Foundation learned of his need for mobility, they dispatched their network to assess his condition, take measurements, and determine which size of wheelchair he would need.

Upon arriving at his home with the new wheelchair, the team found José bristling with enthusiasm over the gift of mobility he was about to receive. While adjustments were being made to his new wheelchair to ensure a correct fit, José regaled the team with jokes and stories of the adventures he’s lived. Hardships haven’t dampened his sense of humor.

No matter the circumstances, José Ramón has always done his best to bring joy to others. Now, with his new wheelchair, he can venture beyond his gates and socialize with others. Now, he won’t feel as lonely as he once did.

“We are definitely convinced that a wheelchair is more than a gift,” mused Diana. “It helps people in their daily life activities and makes them feel independent ... God works through Free Wheelchair Mission and Do It Foundation to give this to more people in need, every day.”

Thanks to your continued support and prayers, Free Wheelchair Mission distributes an average of 205 wheelchairs per day in communities spanning five continents.

You’ve helped us provide more than 1.2 wheelchairs in 93 countries, but our work is far from over. There are still an estimated 75 million people in the world who are waiting for a wheelchair.

Together, with friends like you and distribution partners like the Do It Foundation, we can continue to empower these individuals with the life-transforming gift of a wheelchair.



Blessings,

Don Schoendorfer, Ph.D.  
Founder and President  
Free Wheelchair Mission