



# DOMINICAN REPUBLIC



## RESTORING HOPE

Aleyus (bottom-right) is an 11-year-old boy who lives in the Dominican Republic, a Caribbean country of rugged highlands and fertile valleys that shares the island of Hispaniola with neighboring Haiti.

Aleyus was born with a degenerative psychomotor disease that affects his mobility. Throughout his first few years, his parents would take him to different doctors, hoping for a cure. Their spirits were crushed when one doctor informed them that Aleyus would never be able to walk. His parents stopped taking him to see any doctors or seeking any kind of help for him.

They seemed to have given up hope.

Aleyus' family is of Haitian origin. An estimated half-million Haitian migrants live in the Dominican Republic, with thousands more attempting to enter the country after the earthquake that struck Haiti in August 2021. Many Haitians work on settlements known as *bateyes*, harvesting sugarcane for a few dollars per day.

With their meager earnings, Aleyus' parents could not afford to buy him a wheelchair. Mobility aids were simply beyond their reach.

But thankfully, this was not the end of Aleyus' story.

## DONATE NOW

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

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



**FREE  
WHEELCHAIR  
MISSION**





## DISABILITY IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

According to a 2010 census, roughly one out of eight people in the Dominican Republic lives with a disability. More than half of them are women, and almost two-thirds are between the ages of 15 and 64.<sup>1</sup>

People with disabilities are among the most marginalized communities in the country, hindered from pursuing education and employment due to barriers that are physical as well as social. As a result, one out of four Dominicans living with disabilities cannot read or write, and less than one out of seven attains a higher education. This, in turn, further limits opportunities for people with disabilities to earn a living, perpetuating financial hardship.

Free Wheelchair Mission began distributing wheelchairs in the Dominican Republic in 2006. To date, 16,710 wheelchairs have been distributed in-country by our distribution partners, which include Food for the Hungry and Fundación Hospital El Buen Samaritano. In addition to wheelchairs, they also receive medical supplies and other mobility aids, such as canes and walkers. “With these donations, we have been able to satisfy the need for masks, mainly in

## MOBILITY OUTREACH

Our distribution partners deliver wheelchairs in areas where residents have little access to medical care.



primary care centers, which often lack product availability,” reported Odalis Ruiz, a program manager at El Buen Samaritano. “We have also been able to supply hospitals with supplies for surgery and liquid soap to clean and disinfect.”

El Buen Samaritano operates eight medical facilities throughout the Dominican Republic to provide health care to those in need. They also offer medical outreaches in the *bateyes*, the vast sugarcane fields located in the coastal lowlands on the island’s southeast, where the need for medical care and mobility is staggering.

## REACHING MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

Sugarcane, a tall plant that grows in tough stalks like bamboo, thrives in the region’s strong sunlight, warm temperatures, and ample moisture. Sugar has historically been one of the Dominican Republic’s leading agricultural products and still provides one of the biggest sources of employment in the country.<sup>2</sup> However, sugarcane harvesting is hard, dangerous work.

Sugarcane is chopped down with machetes. The strongest, most skilled workers can each harvest several thousand pounds of sugarcane in a single day, earning anywhere between \$3 and \$11, based on their yield.<sup>3</sup> Injuries are common in the flurry of blades, and with little medical care available in the *bateyes*, a lack of timely treatment often leads to the loss of fingers or limbs. Health care is even less accessible to migrant workers who have no legal status in the country and cannot receive basic services. Their living conditions can be harsh, often lacking adequate access to sanitation, potable water, and electricity. Cuts can easily get infected in this environment, leading to further complications.

El Buen Samaritano holds clinics in the *bateyes* to provide medical care and distribute wheelchairs to those in need. Many of those they serve are older sugarcane harvesters who have sustained injuries in their line of work, but not all of them are. Some of them are younger, like Aleyus, the 11-year-old whose parents could not afford to buy him a wheelchair.

<sup>1</sup><https://uprdoc.ohchr.org/uprweb/downloadfile.aspx?filename=408&file=EnglishTranslation>  
<sup>2</sup><http://www.dominicansugar.org/>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/10/03/sugar-workers-human-labor-rights/2919687/>



**“THE IMPACT HAS BEEN VERY POSITIVE”**  
Moises Sifren, the CEO of Fundación Hospital El Buen Samaritano, stated that their partnership with Free Wheelchair Mission “has allowed our organization to have a national platform as an institution that helps people with disabilities.”

When El Buen Samaritano held a clinic in his community, Aleyus’ father carried him there, and the medical team quickly assessed that Aleyus would benefit from one of our wheelchairs. They gave his father an application and took Aleyus’ measurements to determine what size wheelchair he would need.

The team delivered a new, assembled GEN\_2 wheelchair to Aleyus’ home a week later, and as soon as he laid eyes on his new set of wheels, his face lit up with joy.

His teary-eyed parents praised God and gave thanks as the team lifted their son into the wheelchair. “His life is improved with this wheelchair,” grinned Aleyus’ father, “and so is ours.”

“These wheelchairs have been a blessing for the community and the people who cannot move for themselves,” said Odalis of El Buen Samaritano. “People are very grateful for this gift. Our organization is also very grateful because we are able to give the gift of mobility.”

**“A POSITIVE IMPACT”**

Free Wheelchair Mission’s work in the Dominican Republic spans beyond the *bateyes*, reaching other regions in the country through our distribution network, transforming lives one wheelchair at a time.

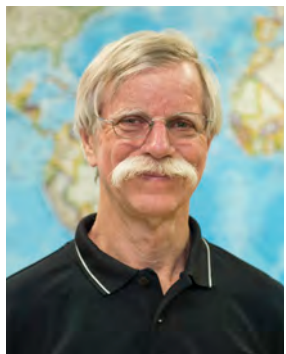
“For people, families, and society, [the wheelchair

program] is a positive impact because it helps users to rejoin a working life and be more productive and independent,” said a representative from Food for the Hungry, “and for our institution, it is a blessing to be able to help a person to recover mobility and be able to make life as normal as possible.”

Our distribution partners might serve as “the last mile” delivery of the transforming gift of a wheelchair, but it all starts with friends like you. We would not be able to manufacture and ship our wheelchairs to places like the Dominican Republic without your continued prayers and support.

Through your partnership with us, you are making a difference for individuals like Aleyus and his parents, right from wherever you are.

Thank you for choosing to partner with Free Wheelchair Mission. Wishing you a blessed Christmas and holiday season.



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





# Celebrate the Season of Giving

As 2021 draws to a close, we would like to thank all of you for making this—our 20th anniversary year—so special.

Because of you, we have been able to continue sending wheelchairs to those in need all over the world, despite the challenges that we have all faced.

We have celebrated together through webinars, fundraisers, and other events that you have helped make successful.

And now, as the year comes to an end, you can help us finish strong by making a year-end gift by December 31, 2021.

Every \$96 you give will provide a new wheelchair to someone living with a disability in a developing country, transforming the lives of individuals as well as their families and communities.

**To donate, visit  
[FreeWheelchairMission.org/SeasonOfGiving](https://www.freewheelchairmission.org/SeasonOfGiving).**

**Make your gifts prior to 12/31/2021 and take advantage of current tax laws before they change!**

Wishing you a Happy New Year 2022!

## Give Today to Transform Lives



[FreeWheelchairMission.org/donate](https://www.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  
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Irvine, California 92618



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

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