



## THE URGENCY OF MOBILITY

The war in Ukraine has thrust the plight of refugees back into the spotlight, with more than four million people having fled the country as of this writing.<sup>1</sup>

Over the years, Free Wheelchair Mission has served refugees fleeing conflicts around the world, including civil wars in Syria and South Sudan. Around one million South Sudanese have sought refuge in Uganda,<sup>2</sup> which is one of the top three countries in the world to host refugees. Among them are persons with disabilities like Natalina (105, right), who had to be carried to safety by family members until they reached a refugee camp in Northern Uganda. There, Natalina received a new wheelchair from The Walkabout Foundation, one of our local distribution partners.

Since 2004, Free Wheelchair Mission has distributed 23,465 wheelchairs in Uganda. The need for mobility is by no means limited to refugees, however: an estimated one out of every three households in Uganda have at least one person living with a disability.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup><https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

<sup>2</sup><https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/southsudan>

<sup>3</sup>Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2019.

## DONATE NOW

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

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



## HOLISTIC TRANSFORMATION

Uganda is home to almost 45 million people, consisting of about 56 tribes speaking 43 different languages. Its population is one of the youngest in the world, with three out of four Ugandans being under the age of 25.

One in seven people here live with a disability, and of this number, about one million need wheelchairs, according to Francis Mugwanya, the founder and president of Father's Heart Mobility Ministry, our primary distribution partner in Uganda. While polio is one of the main causes of mobility disabilities for Ugandans over the age of 30, malaria and insufficient health care are common causes today. "People here live hand-to-mouth," said Francis, "and for half of our population here, it's estimated that they live on one dollar a day... So, mothers not having access to a balanced meal or access to supplements—

## OFF THE GROUND

Now that she finally has a wheelchair, Agnes no longer has to crawl to move about.

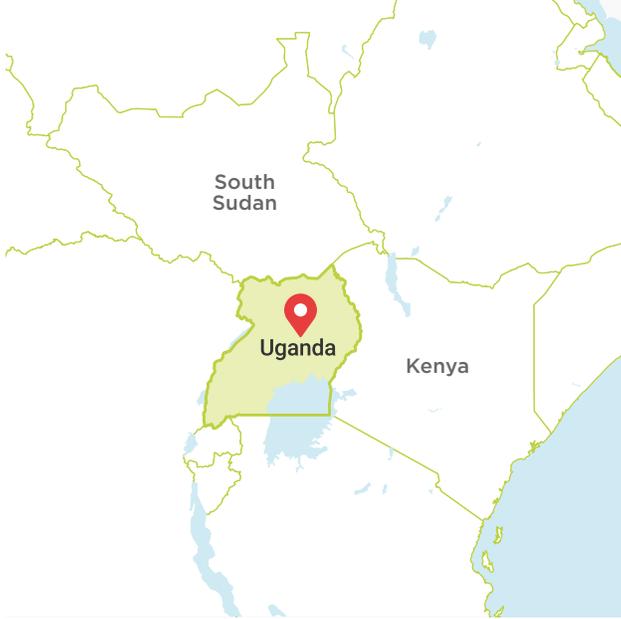


vitamins and folic acid and things like that—have caused children to [be born with conditions such as] spina bifida and hydrocephalus." These children often grow up being stigmatized for having a disability and are less likely to receive an education. "People think persons with disabilities are second class," said Francis, "that they're cursed or bewitched, and because of those misconceptions, most people with disabilities are marginalized or left out."

Francis knows the pain firsthand: he himself lost mobility to polio when he was a child. "Part of my struggles growing up were the words that other people said," recalled Francis. "The neighbors said things about me like, 'You're second class, you will never be able to go to school, you'll be useless, you will never be able to work,' and as I grew up, when I mentioned getting married, they would say, 'You'll never get married, you'll never have children.' The words that people said got to me and I started believing what they said."

Thankfully, Francis' life was transformed when he received his first wheelchair. "I, whom others said was going to be useless, realized that God loves me. I am a child of God, and he has a good plan for me. He created me for a purpose." Francis then chose to dedicate his life to providing wheelchairs to others who are in need. He began to collaborate with Free Wheelchair Mission in 2007 and became an official distribution partner in 2011.

Based in the capital city of Kampala, Father's Heart Mobility Ministry distributes wheelchairs in approximately 140 districts throughout Uganda. They had been distributing 150–200 wheelchairs per month, with an annual goal of 2,000 wheelchairs, until COVID-19 disrupted their plans in March of 2020. Faced with strict lockdown restrictions and an overall sense of uncertainty in the early days of the pandemic, "we paused all wheelchair distributions to try to keep people alive," said Francis. However, as restrictions gradually eased, wheelchair distributions resumed with smaller scale events, depending on the number of people permitted to gather. "We did 20 [wheelchairs] here and 20 there, but as things open up again, whatever opportunity we find, we just rush in, hit the field, and serve as many people as possible—up to 100 to 200 people."



## MOBILIZING REFUGEES

Our distribution partner, Walkabout Foundation, is based in Kenya but also distributes our wheelchairs to South Sudanese refugees in northern Uganda.

One of the individuals who recently received a wheelchair is Agnes (29, photo on opposite page), who also contracted polio as a child. Agnes lives alone, and since she had never had a wheelchair before, she would spend most of her days confined to her home, taking care of herself and crawling to get from place to place. “This wheelchair will make it easy for me to have more access to the outside world,” said a grateful Agnes, excited for the new possibilities she now has.

“When you receive a wheelchair, it just changes everything—it gives you a new identity,” stated Francis. “You no longer have to drag yourself in the dirt or the mud. You’re presentable, you’re clean, and you’re able to interact with people. And once you have a person with a disability out there in the community, not hidden away in the backs of houses, people begin asking questions. ‘What happened to you? Are you able to do this or that?’ And the more they learn about you, the more that stigma goes away. People begin to realize you’re actually normal and you have potential. You can do certain things that many people thought you were not able to do. You get out there, people get assured that you can do something. You’re able to start making friends. You’re able to work. You’re able to go to school.”

The insights shared by Francis serve to remind us that the gift of mobility meets much more than just the physical needs of the person receiving a wheelchair. Mobility can also help meet emotional and spiritual needs, all while fighting long-held misconceptions about disability and promoting inclusion into society.

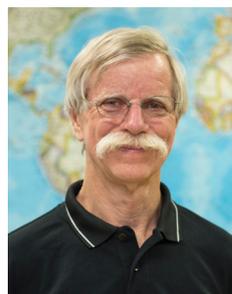
## CONTINUAL IMPACT

“The wheelchairs have enabled us to carry out our mission, transforming the recipients’ lives and their entire communities,” said Francis, “and the community leaders are now equipped with how to reach out to them now that they are out and about.”

As COVID cases decline and more restrictions are lifted, our hope is that distribution partners like Francis would be able to get even more wheelchairs to those who desperately need them.

And, as the situation in Ukraine continues to unfold, would you pray with us? Although we have distributed nearly 16,000 wheelchairs in Ukraine since 2005, we currently do not, as our former distribution partner is unable to continue during this chaos. We have, however, been able to help send critical medical supplies to serve Ukrainian refugees in neighboring Moldova.

Your prayers and support have helped make this possible. There are an estimated 75 million individuals worldwide who still need a wheelchair, and together, we can continue in our mission to provide the life-transforming gift of mobility to those in dire need.



Blessings,

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

# MIRACLE OF MOBILITY *live*



Join Free Wheelchair Mission on Thursday, July 21, 2022, as we celebrate the transforming gift of mobility with Miracle of Mobility Live!

This year's livestreamed event will include inspiring stories of transformation, special guests, musical performances, and updates from our friends and partners around the world.

We are also excited to bring back in-person events at locations around the country, including Costa Mesa, California; Houston, Texas (on July 13); Boston, Massachusetts; Rich Fork, North Carolina; and Missoula, Montana!

Check [MiracleofMobility.org](http://MiracleofMobility.org) for the latest information on dates and locations, and to register for these events.

Register today!  
[MiracleofMobility.org](http://MiracleofMobility.org)

## Give Today to Transform Lives



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

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



Please send checks to:

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Irvine, California 92618



800.733.0858

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

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



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Transforming lives through the gift of mobility®