



THAILAND



REACHING THOSE IN NEED

Asama, a 51-year-old woman, has always felt like an outsider.

Her family is from the Lisu tribe, which was originally from China but was forced to leave after World War II. They migrated to Burma as refugees and were forced to leave there as well. Eventually, the family settled just across the border in the mountains of northern Thailand. That's where Asama was born.

Asama cannot walk. She was born with a disability that was never diagnosed, what with healthcare being hard to come by in her remote village when she was a child.

All her life, Asama would crawl from place to place or wait to be carried, first by her mother, and later, by her husband, Pata. The couple has one child, a son who also lives with disabilities and has difficulty communicating.

Pata serves as the primary caregiver to Asama and their son. He ekes out a living as a day laborer, and when he has to go to work, he has no choice but to leave Asama and their son alone at home. He would worry about them all day, then rush home to tend to them.

But thanks to our network of like-minded partners, including friends like you, Asama's life was transformed by the gift of mobility.

DONATE NOW

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

FreeWheelchairMission.org/donate



**FREE
WHEELCHAIR
MISSION**



MEETING THE NEED IN THAILAND

Thailand, which is bordered by Burma, Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia, is home to nearly 70 million people, approximately two million of whom live with a disability.¹

Disability rates tend to be higher in rural areas, such as those in the northern part of Thailand.² Researchers found that in northern Thailand, around half of all disabilities are mobility-related, with major causes being polio, congenital conditions, amputations after trauma, and cerebral palsy.³ Access to health services can be challenging in the rugged, mountainous terrain of this region.

Free Wheelchair Mission first began wheelchair distributions in Thailand in 2007, continuing until our former distribution partner ceased its wheelchair program in 2017. Then, in 2020, we began to collaborate with a new partner, the Rajanagarindra Institute of Child Development (RICD) Wheelchair Project. Generously funded by RICD, which is a distinguished children's hospital in the city of Chiang Mai, the Wheelchair Project is also bolstered by the support of the Thai royal family.

This past summer, I traveled to Chiang Mai in northern Thailand to visit RICD. "Meeting with our partners in-person is critical to cultivating a strong partnership for the long-term," said Free Wheelchair Mission Senior Programs Manager Tess Stansbury, who works closely

with RICD. "It allows our team to better understand the country context our partners are working in and see firsthand how we can better support or strategize with them." The purpose of my trip was to establish a deeper connection with this organization, witness the impact of our partnership, and document stories of individuals whose lives were changed by mobility.

Wheelchair distributions are primarily conducted by the RICD Wheelchair Project on-site at the hospital. However, their impact resonates far beyond the hospital walls. Collaborating with sub-distribution partners such as Rotary, the Wheelchair Project organizes group distributions involving volunteers from around the world, thus expanding our reach throughout Thailand. Although home distributions are fewer in number, the impact on wheelchair recipients is immeasurable.

During my visit, our team loaded new wheelchairs onto trucks and drove for hours on end, over bumpy, winding, unpaved roads and enduring tropical downpours, to deliver new wheelchairs to the homes of individuals living with disabilities in the mountain villages of northern Thailand.

FREEDOM FROM PAIN

After driving through seemingly unending brush, our convoy reached a clearing and caught sight of a simple house, unevenly constructed of wood slats, cinder blocks, and a corrugated tin roof. It was the home where Asama (photo on left) lives with her husband, Pata, and their son.

The doorway had no door, leaving the home open to the elements. The floor appeared to be hand-poured concrete, jagged and rough. As I took this all in, I couldn't help but wonder what it was like for Asama to be without mobility in this house, crawling on coarse concrete and being left vulnerable should any venomous creatures make their way inside.

In one part of the main room were makeshift racks of colorful fabric and a sewing machine, where Asama would sometimes make a little bit of money by making clothes for her neighbors. However, she could not work for very long.

"A BIG DIFFERENCE"

Asama no longer has to spend most of her days confined to her bed.



1 <https://hadt.or.th/en/stat65.html>.

2 The 2012 Disability Survey, National Statistical Office of Thailand.

3 "Prevalence of disabling conditions in a rural northern Thai community: a survey conducted by village health communicators." Southeast Asian J Trop Med Public Health, March 1994.



MORE PRODUCTIVE, LESS PAINFUL

With her new wheelchair, Asama can sit for longer periods of time without pain and can move around her home, allowing her to do more of what she enjoys as a tailor.

Someone had once given Asama an old, hand-me-down wheelchair that was broken. Even though she had what technically used to be a wheelchair, it might have actually been doing more harm than good: simply sitting in the old wheelchair would cause her pain because it was nearly falling apart and desperately needed to be replaced.

Our skilled team had pre-assembled a brand new GEN_2 that would fit her best. Through rigorous training, we equip our distribution partners not only with expertise in wheelchair assembly, but also with the crucial skills to assess potential recipients and maintain these life-changing devices.

With her new wheelchair, Asama can now sit safely and comfortably while Pata is out at work. "It's much easier for her to get around," he said, "and she is in less pain when she is sitting in the wheelchair." And not only is Asama more mobile, she can also sit up for longer periods of time and do what she loves.

"The wheelchair has made a big difference in my life," she beamed. "Thank you for all you are doing to give out wheelchairs."

ALIGNED FOR THE FUTURE

By the end of my visit, we had distributed 17 wheelchairs to individual homes and 60 wheelchairs to people at large group events.

With their high capacity and standards for wheelchair provision, backed by WHO training, organized inventory and operations, a strong volunteer program, connections to the Thai royal family, and their commitment to give a message of Christian hope with every wheelchair, the RICD Wheelchair Project is poised to remain in firm alignment with Free Wheelchair Mission for years to come.

Together, we hope to continue distributing wheelchairs to some of the most marginalized, isolated people in Thailand and beyond: worldwide, an estimated 80 million people need wheelchairs, and most have no access to one.

But all of this begins with friends like you. It is your generosity that starts the process and gets wheelchairs shipped to our distribution partners across the world. Would you give someone the gift of mobility today?

With gratitude,



A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Nuka Solomon".

Nuka Solomon

Chief Executive Officer
Free Wheelchair Mission



Season of Giving

This Christmas and holiday season, you can transform lives by celebrating Free Wheelchair Mission's "Season of Giving."

With a donation of \$96 or more, you can provide a wheelchair to someone in need and receive a beautiful Christmas or Holiday greeting card to give someone as a gift. Each card showcases a life transformed by mobility and contains a unique gift code that can be used to select the destination for the wheelchair: Africa, Asia, or Latin America and the Caribbean. The card recipient will then begin to get updates about the wheelchair they sent.

Containers of new wheelchairs are slated for delivery to places including the Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, and Guatemala, and your gift will help ensure that these wheelchairs arrive in time for the holidays.

Order your greeting cards now—or donate \$96 or more—at FreeWheelchairMission.org/SeasonofGiving or call 800.733.0858.

Note: All orders must be received by December 8th to ensure delivery to you by Christmas. E-cards are also available!



Give Today to Transform Lives



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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
9:00 AM to 5:00 PM PT

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



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