



ECUADOR



ISOLATED FROM ACCESS

Santiago, Ecuador, is a small, rural town nestled in the foothills of the Andes, where towering peaks dominate the horizon. The region remains relatively isolated, with limited access to major urban centers, and a lack of infrastructure poses unique challenges, particularly for individuals with disabilities, like Gregorio (photo at right).

At 94, Gregorio's weathered hands are a testament to a life of resilience, shaped by hardship and determination. Years of physical labor, coupled with the effects of aging, have robbed him of his mobility. He now lives with his daughter, Lucia, who is 64 and also navigates life with a disability. Together, they depend on a modest government stipend, but collecting it requires a monthly trip to the city office—an almost impossible journey without reliable mobility.

In remote places such as this, access to essential resources such as mobility aids and specialized care can be scarce. Families must often travel long distances for even basic assistance. The challenges of rural living, compounded by limited awareness and support for disabilities, make daily life especially difficult for residents like Gregorio and Lucia.

But thanks to our network of distribution partners, we have been able to bring mobility to them.

DONATE NOW

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

FreeWheelchairMission.org/donate



SERVING THE NEED IN ECUADOR

Ecuador, a country in South America, is bordered by Colombia to the north, Peru to the east and south, and the Pacific Ocean to the west. Its terrain includes the Amazon rainforest in the east, the Andean highlands running through its center, and coastal plains to the west. The economy relies heavily on agriculture and exports bananas, sugarcane, and cocoa. This dependence makes the economy vulnerable to global market fluctuations and environmental challenges such as storms and other natural disasters that affect crops.¹

Ecuador has an estimated population of approximately 18 million, a third of whom reside in rural areas.² Approximately half a million Ecuadorans live with disabilities.³ In remote, rural regions, limited infrastructure presents significant challenges to accessing education, employment, and healthcare. Additionally, in some areas, a lingering belief that disability is a form of punishment for sin has fueled stigma and discrimination against people with disabilities.⁴ Providing mobility to those who need it would empower them to be more visible in their communities, helping to break down stigmas that often result from limited exposure and understanding.

REBUILDING A LIFE

Mobility removes barriers to Reina's recovery, helping her access treatment after losing everything.



Free Wheelchair Mission has been helping to meet the needs in Ecuador by providing wheelchairs through partnerships with local organizations including Junta de Beneficencia de Guayaquil (JBG) and Fundación Vista Para Todos (FVPT). Together, we have distributed over 34,000 wheelchairs across Ecuador since 2005.

This November marks the 19th anniversary of our partnership with JBG, which has been supporting Ecuadorians since 1888 and provides nearly four million medical services annually, including wheelchair provision. “Wheelchairs have contributed to the expansion of our disability program,” relayed Diana Alfonso of JBG, “reaching the most vulnerable populations and those in situations of extreme poverty.” Our regional coordinator, Thatiana Morataya, witnessed this impact firsthand last August when she joined the JBG team to distribute wheelchairs throughout Ecuador.

During one visit, they traveled to the coastal town of Cadeate to meet 59-year-old Reina Isabel (photo at left). Reina's small home had been destroyed by a powerful storm, leaving her to rebuild her life from scratch. Not only did Reina find herself grappling with the loss of her home, but also with her health. Vertigo left her unable to walk, and dialysis treatments added to the challenges, greatly impacting her physical independence. Yet Reina's determination and faith gave her strength. When the team arrived at her home with a new wheelchair, she was overjoyed—not only would she have an easier way to reach her dialysis treatments, but she could once again attend church to worship and connect with others. “This donation has contributed to their social inclusion, allowing their empowerment through the development of their abilities,” stated Diana, “thus changing the vision of their communities regarding people with disabilities.”

Thatiana then followed the JBG team from the coast to the mountains, traversing steep hills and valleys to deliver a new wheelchair to Gregorio in Santiago. With his new wheelchair, Gregorio's daughter Lucia can push him to the city office to collect their monthly stipends, navigating the

¹ World Bank, “Ecuador Overview,” *World Bank*, accessed October 30, 2024, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ecuador/overview>.

² United Nations Population Fund, “The Potential and Challenges in Ecuador,” *UNFPA Ecuador*, accessed October 30, 2024, <https://ecuador.unfpa.org/en/potential-and-challenges-ecuador>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ ExpatFocus, “Ecuador—Disability,” *ExpatFocus*, accessed October 30, 2024, <https://www.expatsfocus.com/ecuador/guide/ecuador-disability>.



RESTORING HOPE

A team member takes measurements to ensure Carlos (right) receives the correct size wheelchair.

bustling cobblestone streets with a newfound ease. For them, the wheelchair is more than just a means of transport—it provides a new level of freedom for both, and for Gregorio, the wheelchair is a lifeline to the world around him. Without mobility, he would be confined to his home, unable to enjoy the warmth of the sun or friendly chats with passing neighbors. “Free Wheelchair Mission’s wheelchairs have allowed more and more people to be included in the communities they belong to,” said Diana, adding that “they are the most suitable for use in more rural areas of the country, enabling beneficiaries to attend therapy and medical centers to improve their health and, in turn, their quality of life.”

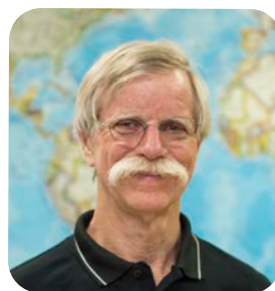
“The impact is always and will always be positive,” said Diego Mauricio Nieto of FVPT. “Providing mobility to those who need it helps elevate their self-esteem. Moving independently brings them great joy, and they actively participate in household and community activities. Some cases involve managing their own businesses or engaging in economic activities, which allows them to meet their needs.”

One example is the story of Carlos (photo above), a 34-year-old farmer who lost mobility after an accident left him with paraplegia. “It has been very hard to accept my problem,” lamented Carlos, “my lack of mobility and, above all, the

fact that I will not be able to work in what I like—agriculture.” But thanks to the new wheelchair he received through FVPT, Carlos got a job at a local market, washing, cleaning, and packing fruits and vegetables for sale. “Agriculture is my life, and I’m very happy [again],” he said with a smile. “Thanks for your help and support. God bless you all!”

Your continued partnership is enabling us to bring life-changing mobility to people like Gregorio, Reina, and Carlos—individuals who now experience renewed independence, connection, and purpose. Each wheelchair delivered is more than a means of transportation; it restores dignity, offers freedom, and strengthens communities. Together, we’re transforming lives in some of the most remote parts of the world, helping people with disabilities to move forward with resilience and hope. Thank you for making this impact possible.

Blessings,



Don Schoendorfer

Don Schoendorfer

President and Founder
Free Wheelchair Mission

Season of Giving

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



With a donation of \$96, 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 Ecuador, Nepal, and Mozambique. Your gift will help ensure that these wheelchairs arrive in time for the holidays.

Order your greeting cards or donate \$96 or more:
[FreeWheelchairMission.org/SeasonofGiving](https://www.freewheelchairmission.org/SeasonofGiving)
Or call 800.733.0858. eCards are also available.

Note: All physical card orders must be received by December 6 to ensure delivery to you by Christmas.

Give Today to Transform Lives



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

Access 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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