

vital link

Transforming lives through disabled people



Bringing Hope and Opportunities

Through the Roof in Moldova

by Alice Langtree

Through the Roof has been working in rural Dancu, Moldova (Europe's poorest country) since 2012, helping bring hope and opportunities to disabled people. Many disabled people in Moldova live very isolated and confined lives, and the team, consisting of return visitors, Zoe Wilkinson (speech and language therapist), Pip Sutcliffe (occupational therapist), Catherine Westbrook (role model for inclusion), and me, an additional needs educational advisor, were there to train and support educators and encourage access to education and community activities.

After an easy three-hour flight to Chişinău we were met by Pastor Slavic and Rachel Boyes from our partners, Breadline, and driven to Dancu. We got up early on Sunday, ready to join Dancu Baptist Church's twenty year anniversary celebrations. 230 minutes of service later, after worship, prayer and four(!) preachers, four young adults gave their lives to Jesus. We sang and praised God through our tears and laughter, no interpreter needed.

On Monday, it was our turn to start work, giving training to church, community, parents and school teacher groups. Training was delivered on communication, accessible Bible stories, inclusion in education, community assessment, and running parent support groups.

The teachers at the newly built school had only recently been charged to include students with disabilities and many were resistant to this government directive. An older maths teacher flashed a mouthful of gold teeth at me as she challenged, 'are you saying that teaching disability is more important than teaching mathematics?' Thankfully God gave me a way of defusing the tension and we ended up discussing helpful strategies and laughing together.

We even took a photo of 3 maths teachers – myself and the two older ladies – we had 101 years of teaching experience between us!

Some of the teachers are Christians who understand that all are made in God's image and share his heart to include everyone. It was a privilege to support them and share techniques to build confidence and enable each young person to maximise their potential.

A big part of the trip involved visiting vulnerable children and adults in their homes, and finding out the real needs of our clients. We're there to support and be directed by them. Most in my prayers is 32 year old Dima, a lovely man with uncontrolled hydrocephalus (resulting in a very large head and inability to stand). He lives in squalor with alcohol-dependent parents, surviving on support from the Dancu church community. He had a small radio and enjoyed listening to a music programme daily at 1pm. We suggested he turn the radio on early, but he told us that it wasn't time. He could accurately tell the time by the shadow on his outside steps, and told us "the sun is my friend".

Friday was family day at the community centre and we facilitated a 'messy church' type event featuring free craft and sports followed by parachute team games, a Bible story, puppets and food for all. Hopefully, this is a model that the church can continue to use.

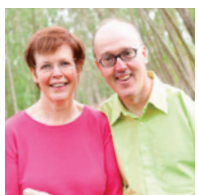
Through the week we gently explored the implications of autistic spectrum conditions (ASC) which we had identified on our previous visit but is not yet known or understood in Moldovan communities. As we talked about classic ASC behaviours, parents were able to share and recognise similarities in their young people and talk about ways of managing the anxieties and resultant difficult behaviours. ▶



All Access
Holidays



Roofbreakers
Assemble!



Gault News
Travels Fast



I Can Now Talk
to People
Face-to-Face

All Access Holidays

Through the roof

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Fellowship DCF

Wheels for the World

Our Vision

'... is of a world where all people live interdependently, mutually giving and receiving as God intended.'

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This year, DCF will be making a return visit to Treloar College in Alton, Hampshire. We're looking forward to running another activity holiday at this fantastic venue – it's a purpose-built college for people with severe physical disabilities, so it's completely accessible for our break.

We're offering a two day all-ability retreat from 8th - 10th August, followed by a four day activity holiday from 10th - 14th. If you would like to come on either or both, please do get in touch - we would love to have you with us. Activities planned so far include all-ability cycling (very popular last year!) and possibly bowling or ice skating, plus a lot of fun and laughter mingled with plenty of fellowship and good food.

We're also excited about our seaside holiday at Babbacombe in Devon - some places are still available. We'll stay in a hotel with sea views from most rooms from 12th - 19th September, have at least one outing during the week, and (weather permitting) we'll enjoy some lovely seafront walks.



Take a relaxing break in Babbacombe

If you would like more information on these breaks, please get in touch with jenny@throughtheroof.org or phone 01372 749955. We're always on the lookout for more helpers, so if you'd like to bless someone by supporting them on a holiday, please contact Jenny and find out more.



All access cycling was a big hit at last year's Treloar holiday

Time for Teens at Dalesdown Plus

Our Easter holiday for families with autistic children is almost full and ready to roll, but there are still places available for the first 'Dalesdown Plus' holiday coming up in October. This new holiday will be aimed at teenagers rather than younger children, and will run during the half-term break, from 27th - 30th October. It will still be all-inclusive, with one-to-one helpers provided, but the programme will include some exciting



Dalesdown Plus will feature new activities for families with teens



The holiday still offers relaxation and one-to-one support

new age-appropriate features such as a puppet-making workshop, T-shirt painting and bonfire night.

If you have teenagers on the autism spectrum or with Down's syndrome and fancy a relaxing, fun break, then please get in touch with the office to find out more. Phone 01372 749955 or email margaret@throughtheroof.org

◀ Continued from Front

Our final evening included a barbecue with lots of speeches and thanks to our inspirational generous hosts. It was an amazing, exhausting, God-filled week, and we left hoping that we'd made a real difference for disabled people in the area. Through the Roof will be returning to Moldova in September 2015 under the Churches Inc programme. We're looking forward to working with Breadline and continuing our ongoing mission to support the people of Dancu, and expanding the work to surrounding areas. Your support is making amazing changes, and bringing hope to disabled people all over the region – but we need more help to keep it going. Please get in touch to find out ways to help, or to donate to our overseas programmes.

Roofbreakers Assemble!

Through the Roof recently launched its new 'Roofbreaker' initiative. Our aim is to witness Roofbreakers across the UK ensuring disabled people can belong and contribute to enrich their local church.

Christians from Somerset to Shropshire and Edinburgh to Essex have signed up to begin this journey together. Everyone received a starter kit which went down well, judging by the responses. Revd Zoe in Shropshire enthused, "I love the clear and simple format of all your Roofbreaker material so far", while Kerry from Somerset commented that, "My overall impression is: 'excellent'. I think it's perfectly pitched towards a person who may never have done anything like this before and the starting point actions are really achievable for anyone...and I like the 'ramp it up' options which are also broken into several steps. The vision of an inclusive church is inspiring. Everything comes across so well. I am truly impressed and excited to be on board with this!"



Roofbreakers are springing up everywhere, including this supporter in Shropshire

Roofbreakers were also sent their first monthly encouraging e-newsletter, while Through the Roof has already initiated Area Networks so Roofbreakers can meet together for prayer, encouragement and share news and ideas in their geographical location.



Thanks to our intrepid loaders

to be sent out to Kenya, and sorting others that could go on to be refurbished for future distributions.

A big thank you to all those who've been involved in sorting, collecting and moving these chairs – particularly those who struggled through storms!

The equipment goes with prayers from Northern Ireland that it may bring freedom to all those who receive it. Children's wheelchairs are a particular focus in Northern Ireland, and the team continue to look for used manual chairs, all to bring freedom and independence to children in developing countries. If you have anything suitable in NI, please get in touch with the office on ni@throughtheroof.org



There's a Roofbreaker at Malmesbury Cathedral

Meetings are now happening in Bath, Edinburgh, Liverpool and Bristol, with Shropshire and Lancashire starting soon and further interest in Wiltshire, Essex and Sheffield.

Christians from the churches in Edinburgh and Lothians have already been inspired to establish a Roofbreakers Facebook page - with 119 Likes - dedicated to encouraging one another in this vital area of ministry. They meet together every four months, hosted by different churches around the city, and the Facebook page is a good way to keep in touch inbetween.

Roofbreakers across the country are:

- **Building** friendships between disabled people and church members
- **Connecting** disabled people with local Christian-led activities
- **Serving** the church to enable disabled people to participate more fully

If you, and/or others in your church are interested in joining up and finding out simple, straightforward ways to make a difference, visit <http://goo.gl/BSS8IE> or e-mail us at info@throughtheroof.org for a one page form.

Shipping News

Through the Roof's Northern Ireland team have sent over another welcome container full of children's wheelchairs and mobility aids. Four volunteers braved wind and rain to load up nearly 100 children's wheelchairs at the storage facility in Hillsborough to send on to the Aldershot warehouse at the beginning of December. Two days later (in slightly better weather conditions) a team unloaded and sorted the chairs at the warehouse – selecting a few that were immediately ready



Dear Roof-Breaking Friend,

Often disabled people turn to the book of Job for encouragement, and I'm no exception. The other night as Ken and I were reading in chapter 16, I was struggling with a sharp pain in my back and hip. It made it hard to concentrate. That is, until Ken read the last few verses in the chapter. In the midst of great disappointment and pain, Job cries out, "Even now my witness is in heaven; my advocate is on high. My intercessor is my friend... on behalf of a man he pleads with God as a man pleads for his friend."

What a wonderful reminder to anyone dealing with a physical disability! Aren't you glad that we have a friend, advocate and intercessor in Jesus Christ? No one cares for people with disabilities quite like Jesus! He is *constantly* remembering our needs before the Father's Throne.

It's what we try to remind every disabled person and their family at *Through the Roof*. Whether planning for 2015 Family holidays, or taking Wheels for the World to Kenya, the *Through the Roof* team takes great pains to let disabled people know that they have a strong advocate, friend and intercessor... and His name is Jesus.

So thank you for your prayers and support for *Through the Roof*. Together we are connecting many hundreds of special-needs families with their advocate in heaven. And should you be struggling, remember that you have a wonderful advocate, as well! Whatever your situation, 'cast all your needs on him, for he cares for you' (1 Peter 5:7). God bless you for your partnership as we take this Good News to those who need Jesus most!

Joni Eareckson Tada



Like Mike's ageing Christmas tree, we may look a bit ragged, but God can use us

Ragged but Beautiful

by **Dr. Mike Townsend, Chair of Trustees**

Lots of us disabled people struggle to use the gifts God has given us because folk commonly see us as receivers rather than givers. The way we give may also be different – giving directions from a wheelchair; reading from braille; speaking through an interpreter; or taking an off-the-wall approach to an issue.

We have just planted our Christmas tree back in to the garden. It grows taller each year, though some branches have got rather ragged looking with time. "Bring it in!" I say. "I just love the fragrance of the pine. We can make it look pretty with lights and decorations."

I have just heard that my friend Jill has died suddenly of a heart attack at 60. Over the years, as we have been together in various activities, I have seen Jill grow in her Christian faith and service. Severely physically disabled with poor sight, Jill had a mind just bubbling with exciting ideas, though lots of people could not see beyond the wheelchair. I encouraged Jill to offer her spiritual gifts and develop her leadership skills. She often called or emailed to get support and ideas. I was thrilled when I went to take a Disability Sunday service at her church, and I could clearly see that she was a respected and vital part of the church leadership. She will be greatly missed.

We may look a bit different – or even ragged. But God anoints us with his beauty and releases the fragrance of Jesus through us. Through the Roof's planned outcome of discipleship aims to open up more opportunities, and enable more disabled people to grow into mature Christians and valued church members. Together we follow Jesus to 'go and make disciples' (Matthew 28:19).



Join Jenny in praying for all our needs in 2015

Praying Through 2015

by Jenny Edward MBE

I wonder what 2015 has in store for us as supporters, staff and volunteers of Through the Roof! In my wonderings, I have become very aware of just one word: prayer. Prayer has been an important constant companion to us through the years; prayer that has led us through situations we find challenging, prayer that has been answered by healings, and prayer uttered hastily when equipment lets us down or disasters occur. There have also been those prayers that still appear to have had no answer, so they become the continuous prayer that Paul speaks about as we long to see answers.

I am constantly amazed at the loving care and patience God lavishes on us as we send up our cries to Him. Our daily reassurance is that He will always be there for us, and that regardless of how often we ask Him, or how brief our prayers are, His aim is to answer all of our prayers in His time. We must remember that his timing will always be the right time.

We have seen amazing answers to our prayers this past year and would love to pray for you and your family. Every week on a Thursday, a prayer email is sent to those who wish to receive it, including requests for prayer sent to us through the previous week. Please do send us your prayer requests, and join with our prayer supporters receiving this email and praying alongside us. Please contact the office to be added to this list.

Gault News Travels Fast

'Look, No Hands' author and prolific Wheels supporter, Brian Gault, is making a visit to the South-East of England for a short fundraising and speaking tour in March. Brian is one of 456 UK survivors of the Thalidomide disaster in the 1960s, and now writes and speaks about his experiences of living without arms, and how, with God's help, he's achieved so much, and dedicated his life to helping others.

Brian, who lives in Northern Ireland, arrived in Epsom on Wednesday 11th March, and has spoken in churches, schools and groups in Ashted, Epsom, Roehampton, and Badshot Lea. If your Vital Link has arrived on time, and you're very quick, you can catch him on the evening of Saturday 14th March at 7.30 pm for *An Evening with Brian Gault* at The King's Centre, Chessington (KT9 2GZ), or in the evening of Sunday 15th at 6.30 pm, when he'll be talking at Morden Park Baptist Church (SM4 4SP). Brian is a great speaker, and we're sure it'll be an inspiring and moving week, with plenty of opportunities to find out more about the work of the charity.

If you're interested in finding out more about Brian, and the work he's supporting, please take a look at www.throughtheroof.org, where we'll have links to lots more about the tour.



Brian and his wife May will be with us 'on tour' in March

"I Can Now Talk to People Face-to-Face"

Wheels for the World takes its 50th trip

For our fiftieth trip, we visited our partners *Response Initiative to Learning Disabilities*, who work with disabled adults and children in the outskirts of Kampala, Uganda. The team saw 239 people, 41 of them children under 10, and provided 129 wheelchairs and 8 specialist buggies to a wide range of recipients, including Kjalimpa Jaster, who represents Uganda as a weightlifter. This doesn't mean that Kjalimpa has been entitled to a wheelchair, instead, she's always had to travel by crawling around on her hands and knees. Giving her a wheelchair has changed her life! She said: "I can now wheel and talk to people face-to-face instead of crawling on the floor. Thank you Wheels for the World. We say thank you for allowing this change to happen."

Another man, Odori Joel, was delighted with his new wheelchair. He will be able to self-propel himself to work, rather than having to pay for transport. That extra money will mean his daughter can go to school. The gift of a wheelchair spreads

Transforming lives in Uganda

change around, and affects not just the recipient, but also their families and communities.

Since Wheels for the World was founded in 1998, we've distributed 8810 wheelchairs to Albania, Romania, Kenya, Jordan, Ghana, Ethiopia, Haiti, Nigeria, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Ukraine, South Africa and Kosovo. We've also responded to individual requests through contacts with places like Peru and Zambia. Many lives, families, and communities have been changed for the better as a result.

The work of Wheels touches a variety of lives, ranging from people who donate wheelchairs and see them going to a good cause and a second life, the prisoners refurbishing chairs who get to make a contribution, UK team members who go on the trips, and the recipients themselves who experience a whole new freedom through the gift of a new chair or mobility equipment.



Thank you for all you've done to help!



Find out how you can be a part of Wheels work by contacting the office on 01372 749955

Thank you for your support over the last 17 years and 50 distributions – we only know the smallest part of the good that Wheels has done in so many of these communities. Each distribution costs thousands of pounds to run, and it can't happen without your support. We really need people to spread awareness about the benefits of Wheels. Could you make presentations to your house group, congregations, or other churches about the work? We can support you with leaflets, powerpoint presentations, donation forms and more. Get in touch to find out what you could do!

Music for Wheels

Huge thanks to Anna Blumire, a pupil at St Bede's School in Redhill, who organised a concert as part of a school project in aid of Wheels for the World. Featuring the Reigate Harp Ensemble and a number of very talented young soloists, it proved a fantastic evening of entertainment. Anna's brother Thomas, who has muscular dystrophy, featured his own composition: *The Barn Owl*, and there were performances on piano, guitar, saxophone, and violin. Volunteer and supporter Richard Polley gave a presentation about Wheels and thoroughly enjoyed the evening, saying it was "a privilege to witness so much talent in young people". The concert raised over £2,000 towards our work – a great evening that will change many lives. Thank you!



The Harp Ensemble helped to raise fantastic funds for Wheels

Fundraising is a Walk in the Park

by Dee Peck, Ashtead Wheels Supporter

A group of nine of us took part in a sponsored walk to raise funds for Wheels for the World later last year. The walk, which took in six London parks, raised a fantastic £650.

We were fortunate with the weather and the parks were beautiful in the Autumn sunshine. We stopped to admire the pelicans as they spread their wings in St. James Park and watched numerous herons by the lake in Regents Park. A highlight for several members of the group was passing the Park Lane memorial to animals killed in the First World War, and the amazing views over London which rewarded us following the climb up Primrose Hill.



Our team of walkers ready for their hike



Get in touch to find out some fun ways to fundraise

Our Wheels for the World t-shirts sparked interest with passers-by, and we had a conversation with a young man from one of the African countries Wheels visits who was moved that there were people in London putting effort into raising funds to benefit his fellow countrymen.

It was a wonderful day, and a great help to Wheels' work - many thanks to all our walkers and everyone who supported them.

Get Planning for Disability Sunday

It's time to get ready for Disability Sunday 2015. On July 5th, churches all over the country will focus on celebrating the abilities and involvement of disabled people. Through the Roof, alongside our partners in the Churches for All network (www.churchesforall.org.uk), will be supplying a Disability Sunday pack full of materials to help churches make the most of the day. This pack will include some new materials, such as an interactive sermon outline, a drama for churches to perform during the service, a resource booklet and materials for Sunday schools and youth groups to use (featuring a board game!).

The findings of a recent survey by SCOPE have revealed that 67% of people admit to avoiding disabled people. Additionally, Through the Roof have carried out a survey with disabled people about their experience of church. The greatest heart-cry that came across in our survey results was a longing for real, deep, reciprocal friendships between disabled Christians and their fellow church members. We recognise this need, and so in response to our survey and the SCOPE findings, the theme this year will be on a Biblical understanding of friendship.

In an attempt to defuse the fear which stems from anxiety about unwittingly offending or encountering needs one cannot meet, the resource will take a look at what the Bible says about friendship, and hope to demonstrate how building Biblical friendships with disabled people will transform not only their lives, but the whole church and ultimately the world.

How are you planning to mark Disability Sunday? Is your church doing anything new or out-of-the-ordinary? Get in touch to let us know, or leave a comment to spark discussion on our facebook page at www.facebook.com/throughtheroof.



We're focussing on the cry for authentic, meaningful friendships



A well-used chair, ready for a new life

Turning 1 Good Deed into 3

This Lent, Through the Roof launched its 3-in-1 good deeds appeal, encouraging people to do 1 good deed that we will turn into 3.

The good deed is to give £40 to our Wheels for the World project – which could fit with saving £1 a day for 40 days of Lent, but could be at any convenient time of the year. Through the Roof will then use your donation to do three good deeds...

- **Save an old wheelchair from landfill** – taking disused wheelchairs on to a second life
- **Help a prisoner to make a meaningful contribution to society** – giving those in Parkhurst prison workshop the opportunity of refurbishing wheelchairs to 'as-new' standard (sometimes even better!)
- **Change the life of a disabled person** – giving the gift of a wheelchair or mobility aid and a Bible to someone in a developing country

In return we will send you a thank you, and once the distribution has taken place, a laminated wheelchair certificate of a recipient, and a report telling the real-life story of someone who, as a result of your financial support, can now experience dignity and freedom, demonstrating God's love for all.

Visit www.3in1gooddeeds.org to do your good deed for the day.



Every chair and gift makes a difference



Prisoners make a contribution and learn skills

Full Marks for Enabling Training

Are you interested in an 'Alpha-style' course aimed at equipping people to get started with disability-inclusive ministry? Through the Roof and partners have developed something that may be just the thing for you.

Last year Through the Roof, as part of the Churches for All network, collaborated with Lichfield Diocese to deliver a one-day Enabling Church conference. Since then we've been working with our partners, including Roy McCloughry, the National Disability Adviser to the Church of England, to develop further materials and produce a ground-breaking new 'Enabling Church' ministry training pilot course.



Ros leads training in Lichfield

The course offered delegates (mostly ministers or ministers-in-training) a theological understanding of disability, awareness of available resources, and practical strategies to use in their churches and communities. Modules included 'Theology and Disability', 'Church and Practice', 'Health and Healing', and 'Transforming Communities'.

Skilled and experienced contributors from around the country led the training, and all those who attended the pilot – including a number of ordained disabled leaders – received supporting course materials to help them continue the journey. Everyone also got the opportunity to feed back their impressions, which will help us in planning our future courses.

Over 20 delegates attended the four sessions, all with positive outcomes and responses. Everyone greatly enjoyed the course and many have committed to take action, including becoming Roofbreakers, celebrating Disability Sunday, doing a church audit, and promoting Messy Church as a good way to include children with additional needs. 60% of those who returned their evaluation form said it had better equipped them for church leadership, and 90% said it better equipped them personally. Excitingly, 100% would recommend the course! One delegate commented: "Thank you to everyone involved in putting this together, an invaluable resource."

We're going to keep developing this 'Alpha-style' course for disability' and aim to make it available nationally soon. Contact us if you would like to run it in your area.