



vital link

The Newsletter for Through the Roof



Our 300th Roofbreaker



Learning from Lockdown



First Impressions



Mozambique Meet-Up



A Unique Voice In Lockdown

By Fiona Gosden
– Deputy Church Inclusion Coordinator

Fiona with her government food parcel, before delivery slots were available

Some of you might have seen the widely viewed video I shared at the start of lockdown, which was a response to God prompting me that disabled people have a unique voice to share with the church during this 'new normal' season. When God has a message to share, it is important to get it out there! This message had a big reach on social media and through Christian radio stations, which was a great encouragement to me, and to every Roofbreaker, because we believe disabled people are a unique gift to the church because of our lived experience with a disability.

Right now, I am 'shielding' because I am undergoing medical treatment that compromises my immune system. It's become clear to me that the isolation everyone is experiencing has been an equaliser between non-disabled and disabled people. Lockdown has put everybody in the same situation, where challenging restrictions on our opportunities, working environment, access to transport, socialising, access to food and pace of life have all been the norm.

I have found shielding challenging! I've had to accept a new way of life, and I miss meeting family and friends, swimming and physically going to church. However I know that this 'new normal' might have been more manageable for me because I'm experienced in having limited choices and opportunities

in life, as well as accepting that I can't keep up with the pace of non-disabled people my age (30). Do you know someone who is disabled, who has felt that nothing much has changed for them during this time of isolation?

As the country adjusts the rules on lockdown, and our churches might be talking about returning to meet physically in a 'COVID-19 secure environment', we must consider those who cannot physically access church regardless of the virus. I believe that during lockdown, churches have had space to experience a life without access to worshipping together, fellowship and serving in the way they would usually choose. Of course, church is still church when meeting online, and we have heard from disabled people who have been able to access church meetings, small groups, and other offerings for the first time since their church has moved online. We want to celebrate these breakthroughs in inclusion. I think we do need to be careful however, that when churches begin meeting again physically—whenever and however that might be—disabled people will not be suggested to join online church as the sole alternative to attending church.

You can find Fiona's video, and all the other videos or websites mentioned in this issue, at www.throughtheroof.org/summer2020



Our 300th Roofbreaker!

The Growing Reach of our Roofbreaker Project

We are delighted to have passed the milestone of having 300 Roofbreakers! That means 300 individuals who are involved in making Christian life more inclusive for disabled people. We pray that many lives are being transformed by their work, and for many more people to join us in this important role.

Our goal is to see a Roofbreaker in every church, so we still have a long way to go! Please do spread the message around your churches and Christian communities. Let's raise awareness and encourage more churches and ministries to take steps to be more welcoming and inclusive for disabled people.

During lockdown we have developed a Facebook group to provide extra support for Roofbreakers, and we are now using Zoom to enable Roofbreaker Networks to meet together.



Roofbreaker numbers keep on growing!

This is a time when we are all learning together as situations change, and we want to make sure that churches are aware of the difficulties faced by disabled people, and the importance of including them in the life and outreach of the church.

Visit www.throughtheroof.org to find more details about the roofbreaker programme and to sign up.

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The Center Parcs holidaymakers getting together

Decentralised Parcs

Holidaymakers who were set to enjoy fun, friendship, and physical and spiritual activities at Center Parcs decided to 'meet together' via videoconference when Center Parcs was closed due to COVID-19.

It was great to see each other, connect, catch-up, and share encouragement from the Bible, pray and worship (with BSL) together. We hope that this can continue in the future, as an additional way for people to connect with one another in-between holiday times.

Our Vision

'... is all people enjoying life together, mutually giving and receiving, as God intended'

Our Mission

'... is transforming lives through Jesus with disabled people'

Through the Roof Charitable Trust Ltd is a UK Registered Company number 04201510 with offices at Alpha House, Alpha Place, Garth Road, Morden, Surrey, SM4 4TQ. It is also a Registered Charity Number 1087788.

Quotes are sometimes edited for clarity and length

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Zoom Through A Study

If you're searching for some great material to share and work through in your online groups, or on your own, then take a look at Hearts in Transformation. It's a six lesson Bible study exploring Biblical encouragement for those living

with disability—written to help impact your life as you live with your own or your child's disability, and to equip you to minister to others you meet who are working through similar circumstances. It's available for £3 plus p&p from the resources section of the shop at www.throughtheroof.org, or by calling **01372 749955**.

Home Call of a Faithful Servant

By Jenny Edwards M.B.E.

We were very sad to hear of the sudden death of Chris Petty from the Lancing/Worthing group of Disabled Christians Fellowship.

Chris and his wife Sandy have been part of this group for well over 20 years, providing help and support to many during that time.

People will remember him as the person who collected them by Dial-a-Ride transport so they could join in the fellowship of DCF, others will remember his cheerful smile and obvious love of the Lord. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him, and personally I will miss the invaluable support he gave me during my time with DCF.

Please remember his wife Sandy and their children as they come to terms with their loss.

Learning from Lockdown

Four UK-wide events in response to lockdown

Lockdown has been a challenge in so many ways, and we have had to find different methods for doing things. Instead of being able to meet together for events in different parts of the UK, we have instead organised a series of four online events.

In May we held 'Roofbreaking in Lockdown', an event specifically to support Roofbreakers in dealing with these changing times. One of our Roofbreakers, Sarah Wadsworth, spoke about how her church has adapted its ministry and are making sure disabled people are included. It was good to get feedback from everybody about the challenges of lockdown, but also the new opportunities and ideas that have emerged in relation to including disabled people in church life in the future.

Our June event was 'Disabled People's Insights for the Church during Lockdown'. Our own Fiona Gosden spoke about the fact that for many disabled people isolation is the norm, and their experience can bring an important message to the church. Disabled people's voices need to be heard, and we had plenty of chances during the event for some helpful insights to be gathered from everyone present. One interesting finding from our survey was that 81% of those attending thought that churches had become more aware of disabled people's needs during lockdown.

At the July event we had Matt Lloyd, a church leader from Bromley, speaking about 'Learning from Lockdown' - looking at how the church can respond, particularly as restrictions begin to lift. Matt's desire is to make sure that the church of the future is better able to reach



Matt's talk from the third event is available now on our Youtube channel

disabled people, and particularly that the church is better at listening to disabled people. The embrace of developments in technology forced on us all by the Coronavirus have brought new opportunities for disabled people to be able to contribute to church life, and to bring their own ministry and message to the church.

We're looking forward to our final event on Saturday September 12th; 'Church disability inclusion as a new normal - how can we ensure the Gospel reaches everyone?' Do look out for details on the Through the Roof website or Facebook page, and join us then!

DCF Leaders On Call

Disabled Christian Fellowship groups have been unable to meet in-person at this time but faithful leaders up and down the country have been keeping in contact with their group members on the phone, by post or text, and through deliveries. Several leaders took time out of caring for their members to attend a special video-conference call. Through the Roof staff and DCF Leaders met to encourage one another, to update on their own situations and to pray together. We were particularly encouraged by the story of Ray, faithful leader of his group in Essex for 40 years who told us how God had used his 12-month stint confined to hospital (pre Covid-19) as an opportunity to witness to patients in the ward he was in.

We're continuing to support and share with DCF groups and leaders, and look forward to chatting again, and helping them as circumstances change, and groups can hopefully begin to meet again.

First Impressions



Does Oxford make a fierce first impression?

have told me how pleased they are to lead services, develop virtual small groups, evangelise, and counsel people under these new circumstances. Ok, other problems do arise, often with using new technology. However, our disability often remains unnoticed.

It is great that God doesn't judge us by our clothes, hair dos, or disabilities. When God was advising the prophet Samuel about choosing the next king for Israel, he rejected the strapping young men before him. God chose the rough looking young shepherd boy David. The secret is this: *"The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."*

(1 Samuel 16 7).

Have you got a heart for God's service? At Through the Roof, we know God wants to use the gifts of disabled people. Let us know about the fresh opportunities that have become available to you during these extraordinary times.

By Dr Mike Townsend, Chair of Trustees

First impressions influence the way we get on with people. But what do you think about this dog? Fierce?

People's visual appearance makes no difference to me, as I can't see—but it is of no importance to the way I get on with folk. I tend to gather my first impressions from voices and handshakes. These don't work during lockdown and over Zoom—no hands, and voices can be pretty garbled!

The dog with the muzzle in the photograph is Oxford. He is the gentlest dog there is, but recently, he nearly died. Labradors eat anything, and Oxford gulped down some horse manure which clogged his gut, and a serious operation was necessary. Oxford now has to bound around with this muzzle on to stop him scavenging. He is the same dog with a heart for his guiding work.

For many disabled people, this virtual life can lead to opportunities that we don't often get. Many are excluded from serving God in various roles because people see the disability and not the person with gifts and abilities. Physical access and travel are no longer such barriers as we are all doing a lot more things from our homes. Several people

Introducing Our New Student Roofbreaker Network

By Fiona Gosden, Deputy Church Inclusion Co-ordinator

It is fantastic to see our new Student Roofbreaker network growing so quickly! We were delighted to have Heather, a medical student from Edinburgh University (Student Roofbreaker Coordinator) and Amy (an audiology student from Leeds University) at our first UK-wide zoom event at the end of May: 'Roofbreaking in Lockdown'. We hope to see more students with a heart for Christian disability inclusion join us over our next few online events.

The Student Roofbreakers Facebook group seems to be working well connecting students across the UK with a heart for disability inclusion in Christian activities. We are always ready to welcome new Student Roofbreakers and make sure those with a shared vision are connected.

I had the pleasure of being interviewed by Heather recently because the Student Roofbreaker network is keen to share salvation testimonies involving Christian Unions with other students.

It is so encouraging to have a team developing, to ensure that student Christian activities are inclusive because although God can use individuals to make change, when our shared vision, hearts and gifts come together, we are unstoppable!

Our prayer is that this network continues to grow and that ultimately, more disabled people are reached through inclusive teaching and fellowship. The students' network is not only making it possible for disabled people to join in with Christian activities, but it could also be making it possible for disabled students to hear and respond to the Gospel for the first time.

If you are a student (or potential student when Universities are out of lockdown), we would love to welcome you to this network. We have seen that there is a cluster of students in Leeds, proactively ensuring their student church services develop in their disability awareness and making sure churches are ready to welcome disabled students and the gifts they bring, and it'd be great to keep this growing around the country.

If you would like to know what to pray for, we are excited at the thought of more Christian students catching this vision over the country and would need God to open doors for this to happen. We will keep you updated on new developments!



Heather, our student Roofbreaker Co-ordinator

International Innovation

Our International Mission trips are on hold due to the continuing pandemic and Government advice against non-essential international travel. Given current restrictions it is very difficult to plan, however we are cautiously hopeful of rescheduling trips for 2021. In the meantime, we are also looking at innovative ways to equip, empower and encourage our partners.

We are exploring an exciting idea of introducing 'supported distributions'. The plan would be to send a container of wheelchairs to an experienced in-country

partner, while team-members in the UK would buddy up with local therapists via WhatsApp video call, to build a longer-term relationship with them through mentoring, then giving expertise and approving fittings over a few months, rather than a 10 day trip.

These 'supported distributions' would not replace regular trips but would be a positive short-term solution before physical trips can resume, or may be something we incorporate into our programme in an on-going way. Watch out for more details.



Our Churches Inc team visited Mozambique in 2017, and we're rescheduling Wheels for next year

and his family are mostly sheltering at home but still enabling the church to provide food parcels, and deliver printed Bible studies to encourage people at this time.

The container of wheelchairs, although delayed due to the current situation, should have now arrived at its destination, and we are tentatively hopeful that we can re-schedule the team for Spring 2021.

Mozambique Meet-Up

Through the Roof volunteers and partners across four countries on two different continents 'met' via Zoom videoconference, as part of a Mozambique Wheels team get together.

Sadly, due to the pandemic the team members, who should have been distributing wheelchairs to those in great need in rural Mozambique in May were stuck at home. Team members from the UK, Mozambique, Kenya and Zambia were able to update one another on their respective situations and pray into these.

Our partner in Mozambique, Melvin Kelly of One Mission Society, explained how he

Magnifying The Message

During lockdown the needs and circumstances of disabled people have been even more prominent than normal and Through the Roof has been fortunate to have had the opportunity to spread our message even wider. Tim was invited to join an online gathering of 'Pray London' to highlight the needs of disabled people at this time to a new audience for prayer. He also promoted Through the Roof partnering with **Your Neighbour.org** who interviewed David and Carrie Grant – musicians and parents to 4 children with additional needs, on their 'Leaders Lunches' video-conference event.

Fiona and Ros have both had articles featured on Christian websites www.womanalive.co.uk and www.premierchristianity.com, while Fiona has been interviewed on UCB and Premier Christian Radio. Our prayer is that God will have been glorified through

these opportunities and that more people will have a greater awareness, understanding, and desire to act on the injustices faced by disabled people every day.

You can find links to all the websites and videos mentioned in this article, and throughout this issue, at www.throughtheroof.org/Summer2020

Please consider donating to enable Through the Roof to continue its vital mission during this time of uncertainty. You'll find a donation form to cut out and return as the final two pages of this newsletter. Your prayers and financial support could help us inspire and equip Christians and churches. Together we could magnify the message that disabled people are '*fearfully and wonderfully made*' (**Psalm 139:14**) with a vital part to play in God's growing kingdom.

Thank you

Together let's...

Bring Freedom

Encourage Friendship

Enable Faith



Through the Roof is the only Christian charity working with churches and people across the range of disabilities to extend God's kingdom

'We're continuing to reach out to people and finding new ways to develop this vital work even through lockdown and the ongoing restrictions. Please do donate to support these life-changing programmes—you can cut out and send in this page, or visit www.throughtheroof.org to donate securely on our website. *Thank you!*

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