

Fact Sheet 3: Can I donate a used wheelchair to Motivation?

Many people contact Motivation offering to donate used wheelchairs and medical equipment. Although we appreciate the generosity of these offers, the experience of our staff and our partners overseas has shown that many of these donated wheelchairs are ill-suited to the needs of wheelchair users in low-income countries.

This document outlines the main problems with donated wheelchairs in low-income countries and offers suggestions for finding appropriate alternative organisations to take your used wheelchair.



A pile of broken donated wheelchairs in Tanzania. These chairs were unable to survive the conditions in a low-income country and no spare parts were available locally.

Problems with donated wheelchairs

Adjustability	Donated used wheelchairs can rarely be adjusted to fit the individual user and will usually be too small or too large, especially for children. An ill-fitting wheelchair, particularly when it is provided without a pressure relieving cushion, can cause extremely serious and potentially fatal health problems such as pressure sores, spinal curvature (scoliosis) and contractures.
Suitability	Most of these wheelchairs were designed for use in hospital or indoor settings in industrialised countries like the UK or the US. In low-income countries, which tend to have uneven or unpaved roads and sandy terrain, these wheelchairs will be difficult or impossible to use.
Durability	Donated chairs from industrialised countries tend to break easily in the rough conditions in most low-income countries. Repairs are extremely expensive because replacement parts are usually not available locally.
Sustainability	A large influx of donated wheelchairs can put local wheelchair producers out of business, eliminating the long-term source of wheelchairs for that community. There is also no follow-up or support for wheelchair users after the distribution.

Is any wheelchair better than nothing?

For a small number of users, such as short-term users, any wheelchair is better than no wheelchair. However, for most users, inappropriate wheelchairs can cause very serious health problems and often break down within just a few months. They would be better off with no wheelchair than a piece of equipment that is dangerous to their health.

Rather than thinking in terms of something or nothing, Motivation believes that the resources used to ship and deliver these wheelchairs could better be used towards providing appropriate chairs that meet the needs of each individual user and establishing local wheelchair services that provide mobility in the long term. Indeed, isn't something appropriate and long lasting better than just something?

What *should* I do with this wheelchair?

Equipment loan programmes

Many community or religious groups collect wheelchairs for local wheelchair loan programmes. These programmes provide wheelchairs to community members in need of a short-term equipment loan after an accident or during illness. There are many of these throughout the UK and they are almost always in need of equipment donations. Try your local Red Cross office as the Red Cross has a well established medical equipment loan programme and many offices will accept donated wheelchairs.

Internet sales

It may be possible to sell your wheelchair through the internet. You can then donate the proceeds of your sale to Motivation.

Several good websites to try:

<http://www.ebay.co.uk>

<http://www.trade-it.co.uk>

<http://www.loot.co.uk>

Charity shops

You can also contact local charity shops such as Oxfam or Save the Children to see if they accept wheelchairs. You can locate a nearby charity shop through the following website:

<http://www.charityshops.org.uk>

National Trust sites

Often National Trust sites, museums or activity centres will loan wheelchairs to visitors with mobility problems. You can try contacting nearby facilities to see if they might need a wheelchair for such a purpose.

Recycling

Contact your local recycling centre to see if they will accept a wheelchair for metal recycling.



A well fitting and appropriate wheelchair can help promote good health and increase independence.

About Motivation

Motivation is working in partnership with a range of organisations to implement projects that enhance the lives of people with mobility disabilities.

Our programmes aim to improve opportunities for people with mobility disabilities by positively impacting on their physical, social and economic situation, resulting in greater integration into the community. Our partnerships ensure that local people and organisations have the skills to meet the needs of disabled people in their communities.

For more information, please visit our website at <http://www.motivation.org.uk>, email us at info@motivation.org.uk or contact us at:

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