



eleanore's project

Eleanore's Project, Inc.

Expedition Journal

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Eleanore's Project, Inc. Board of Directors

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Eleanore's Project, Inc. is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit private operating foundation.

Welcome to the second edition of the Eleanore's Project Expedition Journal. We gratefully enter 2006 with exciting opportunities ahead of us and fond memories of wonderful people whom we are blessed to know through Eleanore's Project. Some of them are supporters and volunteers; others are children and families with whom we have worked. Yet others are professionals in developing countries who are resisting the temptation to follow the "brain drain" to an easier life in a richer place (such as our own). Instead they choose to stay in their home countries and work with great devotion and creativity to improve the quality of life of individuals with disabilities. In the last year we have been honored and inspired to meet and collaborate with them as we all learn together from the children with special needs, who are our best teachers.

- Tamara

Thank you!

A fine group of volunteers helped plan and carry out "A Joyous Party" at a Carousel for Missoula on December 2, 2005. Odette Grassi's original artwork called "Joy Is" was unveiled at the event, and we spent time with many well-wishers. Stay tuned for future opportunities to enjoy "Joy Is", which was created in honor of Eleanore's Project and expresses visually the essence of our mission. Heartfelt thanks go to Amy and Bill Nese, Jim and Rosemary Tackes, Laura Miklautsch, Erin Greytak, Chris Clasby, Dick Stepan, Fran Coover, Sarah Mulligan, Dana McMurray, and Odette Grassi. More thanks as well, to A Carousel for Missoula - especially director Theresa Cox and her very helpful crew. Finally, refer to our website for a listing of the businesses who donated to the cause. If you live in western Montana, please support these places!

Upcoming Events

"Tito's Kids"

The next Peru wheelchair expedition is planned for late May/early June this year. We have measurements for 115 children and young adults in five different venues around Lima. The majority of these kids were identified through the efforts of our friend, Tito Livio Paredes Villafana - hence "Tito's Kids".

Eleanore's Project Jordan

Read Arwen's letter inside to learn more about the needs that initiated this expedition, which we hope will take place in late summer 2006. Raising funds to help sponsor wheelchairs for Jordanian children is our current priority.

Board Expansion

Our board of directors is expanding! In the next newsletter we will introduce the new board members.

Are All Wheelchairs the Same?



From this...



To This!

Not all wheelchairs are created equal, and different people need different kinds of wheelchairs. But most people think of wheelchairs as the basic, folding type chair that is commonly seen in hospitals and airports. Such chairs are frequently given away at wheelchair distributions in developing countries. Other wheelchairs built of innovative materials like plastic lawn furniture cost even less than the folding ones, and are being provided through mission groups in some countries. Any of these chairs can be very helpful for individuals of adult size who have good arm strength, sitting balance, and sensation in their lower bodies but can no longer walk. Many of these people once walked but they lost a leg or have other medical conditions that now prevent them from walking. However, the same chairs that help these people are inadequate and may even cause complications for individuals with severe physical conditions, including children born with motor disabilities.

For children in particular, a properly sized wheelchair with postural supports that can be adjusted as the child grows is more than just mobility. It is a therapeutic tool that can help a child develop motor control, increase tolerance and endurance for sitting up, and improve functional hand use. It can facilitate a child's eating, digestion and breathing. Proper seating and positioning can limit or prevent orthopedic deformities and pressure sores that result in loss of function and sometimes even death. Moreover, people relate differently to those who are able to sit up and interact with them. Somehow it is easier to connect with the essential personhood of an individual when that person is sitting up rather than lying on the floor or bed, being carried by another, or slumping and sliding out of a wheelchair that lacks proper support.

Thus a wheelchair can be much more than just a chair with wheels to provide mobility. If properly chosen and fitted it will support a child's motor development and physiological function, limit or even prevent some complications that cause secondary disabilities,

enhance learning and social acceptance, and provide dignity and the opportunity for fun!

For the complete version of this article, please visit our website or contact us and we will be happy to send a copy to you.

Peru Update

In November 2005 we (Tamara and Rick) returned to Peru. In Lima we spent three days at Colegio La Alegría en el Señor, meeting with the staff, students and parents and providing follow-up for the wheelchairs that were provided there in November 2004. A fun surprise was the discovery that we were slated to be judges in an all-school science fair! We were also able to make a short visit to a wonderful place called Yancana Huasy (House of Work) where amazing disability work has been accomplished over the last 25 years. The seeds were sown for future collaboration on wheelchair work together. Then on to Cusco for a week, for the 2nd International Augmentative and Alternative Communication Conference sponsored by Equip K.I.D.S. Close to 300 people from many countries in Latin America attended. We shared our family's search for a means of communication for Eleonore, and Tamara spoke about basic principles of positioning for functional activities. A highlight was a day spent visiting villages outside of Cusco with Gonna Rota, whom we met while fitting wheelchairs for Equip K.I.D.S. in March 2005. Gonna is a Dutch physiotherapist who was generous with her time in sharing with us about the culture of the Peruvian countryside, and we were able to visit a young man for whom Tamara fit a wheelchair last year. We are looking forward to future opportunities for wheelchair expeditions in that area, and especially collaboration with Gonna and with Equip K.I.D.S. We are very grateful to Sandra, Jorge, and Dana at Equip K.I.D.S., Gonna at Red Sur Andino and many other folks for their hospitality!

Quick History

Eleanore's Project, Inc. began in 2004 in memory of Eleanore Kittelson-Aldred as a legacy from her family. Our mission is to improve the quality of life for children with disabilities and their families, through provision of mobility equipment, education and related activities in collaboration with like-minded organizations in the U.S. and other countries.

Letter from the Middle East



Assalamu Alaikom! (Peace be upon you) I am Arwen, Eleanore's eldest sister, and I currently serve as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Jordan. I work in the Special Education Program, teaching music to young students with mild to moderate mental disabilities. My students do not have physical challenges; but as I visited

the communities where some of my friends work, I learned that Jordan has a large population of people who do. Many who have severe physical handicaps are not often seen because of the social stigma attached to having a child with any sort of disability. Until recently it was the norm for kids with special needs to simply be kept in a back room and hidden from sight. That is changing slowly, but there is undeniably still a "shame on the family" mentality regarding people with disabilities, particularly in more rural areas of Jordan. The services for children with severe disabilities are limited, and availability is dictated by a family's geographical location and financial state. Hospital-style folding wheelchairs are around, but I have not seen any child with disabilities using a wheelchair that fits even close to properly according to standards I know at home.

One of the first children I met and measured for an Eleanore's Project wheelchair is named Ghassan. He lives with his mother and siblings in a village in northern Jordan; his house is on a hillside with a footpath down from the road. I was enchanted by this boy - he has physical and mental disabilities, but also the most delightful, joyous smile; he and his mother are very close. His family situation is sad, but not unusual. He is the eldest son, a role which in Jordan carries with it much importance. Because of Ghassan's disabilities his father not only took another wife, but divorced his mother - yet another social stigma. Ghassan has spent his 13 years hunched and scooting around on the floor in an unbalanced position, resulting in a severe back deformity. This additional complication of his condition might have been limited or even avoided, if he had been given a wheelchair with a supportive seating system at a young age. Ghassan cannot leave his house, as he is too big for his mother to carry, so he lives his life on the floor. He has never been able to sit at eye level with his siblings and relatives; his back is so deformed that he is uncomfortable in a regular chair when he is lifted into it. A wheelchair would change this boy's entire life - but not just any chair. A wheelchair with a special seating system would give him comfort and mobility that is beyond his dreams.

This is only one child's story - as I spend more time here, I realize more and more the need for specialized

adaptive equipment in Jordan. Eleanore's Project hopes to bring approximately 100 specialized wheelchairs to Jordanian children and young adults this summer, together with education about wheelchair positioning and how to maintain the chairs long-term. But we need your help. The families I have visited over the last year do not have enough money to heat their houses properly in the winter, let alone dream of buying a specialized wheelchair. We have a responsibility as human beings to help those less fortunate than ourselves. I have given my word to many families that we will try to provide wheelchair mobility for their children; in some cases two, three or four in one family need help. I ask each of you to carefully ponder this situation and imagine yourself in their shoes. You can make a tremendous difference in the life of a single child through a tax-deductible donation of \$300 (or a portion of that amount), to provide a specialized wheelchair that will be fitted by professionals. If we do not take the initiative and try to improve the quality of life for children like Ghassan, who will?

We live in a time of war, and I live in what I refer to as the "Eye in the hurricane of Middle Eastern politics." From my house I can see the disputed territory of Jerusalem and the West Bank. I know Iraqi refugees who fled their family homes to escape war; and yet I live in a tremendously peaceful and strong country. I love Jordan and its people, and I firmly believe that an Eleanore's Project Expedition to this country will not only change the life of each recipient, but also celebrate the fact that there are people of peace in every country as we reach out to others. Allah Khaliku (God be with you)

Do you want to hear from us again?

Everyone has different interests, and our cause may not be your cause. We want to send communications to folks who want to receive them, whether by postal or email. Please let us know if you want your name removed from our list - we will not be offended! Call us at 406-370-4717 or send an e-mail to us at info@eleanoresproject.org if you wish to be removed, or use the form on the reverse of this page to indicate your mailing preference. Thank you!

**Would you like to
change a child's life?
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Yes! Keep me informed about what's new with Eleanore's Project by sending me newsletters!

I am including a tax-deductible gift of \$ _____

Please tell me how I can become a monthly donor.

I cannot make a monetary donation now, but please tell me other ways I can be involved!

Please **do not** contact me via **postal mail**; I prefer to use **e-mail only**.

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