

New initiative aims to increase mobility for disabled children worldwide

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A team of global partners has tasked itself with the daunting challenge of bringing mobility to disabled children of developing nations.

"Mobility to a child in a [developing country](#) is the difference between education versus no education, societal engagement versus no societal engagement and individual freedom versus dependence," said David Dausey, Ph.D., director of the Mercyhurst University Institute for Public Health, who directs the partnership.

Dausey recently traveled to Guanajuato, Mexico, with a team of students, volunteers and researchers to develop and pilot test the Lifelong Mobility Project, using the 4R model (Recycle, Reuse, Repair and Retrofit). The research project is designed to increase the life cycle of wheelchairs by establishing a depot of parts and tools manned by trained technicians. All too often, Dausey said, children outgrow their wheelchairs or they break, often due to [rough terrain](#). Typically, the wheelchairs are abandoned. It is hoped that the new depot in Guanajuato will strengthen mobility opportunities for [disabled children](#) and serve as the prototype for similar stations that Dausey hopes to replicate throughout Latin America.

The [World Health Organization](#) estimates that there are more than 650 million [disabled people](#) worldwide and that one in ten children in the world is disabled. Less than 5 percent of disabled children in [developing nations](#) have the opportunity to go to school.

Several years ago, Dausey began working with the American [Wheelchair Mission](#) and Teletón Children's Rehabilitation Center in Mexico on a research project designed to better understand the causes of disability in developing countries and to increase the availability of wheelchairs to disabled children. The project, funded by the Benter Foundation, became known as the "Lifelong Mobility Project" because of its focus on helping disabled children to remain mobile for their entire lives. In recent years, multiple partners have joined or supported the effort, including Carnegie Mellon University, the University of Pittsburgh, Rotarians and Knights of Columbus.

"The Lifelong Mobility Project is designed to ensure that all children in the world have the ability to be mobile," Dausey said. "Its goals are threefold: to find ways to prevent disability in children before it occurs, to maximize the availability of wheelchairs and mobility devices to disabled children and to ensure that children in need of a wheelchair get one that is designed to meet their needs."

Provided by Mercyhurst College

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