

## The wheelchairs roll on

For 6 years the wheelchair project of Signum vitae has been going on or, more precisely, rolling on in Addis Abeba. More than 2000 wheelchairs have already been given to physically disabled people since the start of the project. New wheelchairs from Switzerland, or wheelchairs that are already in use, are adjusted and fixed in a fully equipped workshop. Moreover, physically disabled people from Addis Abeba and other towns are provided with further assistive technology and medical aid. Members of the firm „hock'n roll“ have visited the project four times, providing technical support, and have supervised the project for a period of two weeks.



*Getachew bringt einem blinden Knaben mit einem amputierten Bein das Gehen an den Stöcken bei.*

## Getachew is doing a good job



*A father carries his daughter to the Behindertenzentrum*

We were amazed and deeply impressed by the quality of the work carried out by the project, especially as it is short of staff. Getachew, the manager of the wheelchair



*Young woman with polio*

project, is doing an excellent job and deserves particular praise; he coordinates, modifies and repairs wheelchairs. He is very committed and receives physically handicapped people with great empathy, trying to find appropriate solutions for their needs.

Before our visit, he and Gerhard had already made contact with numerous different organisations (in three towns within 150 km) catering for disabled people's needs. Getachew contacted around 40 affected people for assessment and measuring in Adama, Gebre, Guracha and Ambo. Based on this data and the drawings we were able to realize our teamwork.

## Stories of life and loss

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The time is short, the language barriers high and the cultural differences huge, however, many interesting encounters occur. Our work is taken notice of with interest and respect. With the help of interpreters we are able to understand each other. Humor, as it has no specific language, helped to overcome the walls of sadness and suffering. Gestures, eye contact and physical expressions can help where understanding otherwise might be difficult.



*Markus demonstrate driving and braking*

The stories that we were told were touching and sad. A young man's condition was caused by a fall from a horse whilst riding to the hospital suffering from



*This morning, they got their wheelchairs*

stomach complaints. Two young women were dropped whilst being carried by their brothers as children. A seven year old boy fell from the latrine into the pit. Others suffer from birth defects or muscle atrophy. Many of these people live in difficult conditions, often with relatives, because their parents have died. Particularly disconcerting are the deformations, the stiffening of joints and the muscle atrophies. They clearly show the lack of physical therapy and orthopedic treatment.

However, it is impressive to experience the positive attitude and joy of life despite these impediments. Although sadness and sometimes depressive moods can be felt, we met mainly open minded, curious and self confident people.

## It is a good project

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This is Gerhard's statement. It is a good project: this is also our opinion. On this occasion I would like to thank all the people with whose help and support the project could be realized. I sincerely thank all the donators, the Signum vitae association and Hanni and Gerhard. Special thanks go to Fred Wyss for carefully collecting and dispatching the material and Edel Matthäus for organizing and establishing the project in the first years.

It is a good project. Wheelchairs that are not longer used in Switzerland are recycled. They are used by people in Ethiopia who don't have the means to get appropriate assistive technology. New jobs have been created in addition to already existing ones. Thanks to the fully equipped workshop, wheelchairs can also be repaired before delivery, if necessary. Handicapped people not only get an appropriate tool to improve their independence, they also get a better chance for integration and participation in daily life. Further physical deterioration can be prevented and some of the strain can be reduced for the family members. The project intends to enhance the quality of life for disabled people in a difficult social environment.

After the „glasses workshop“ has been handed over to the Eye-Care cooperative, the continuity of the project is uncertain. Various matters have to be clarified. We strongly feel that looking for new solutions is well worth the effort. We will give all the necessary support because „it is a good project“.



*Koras can move neither his arms nor his legs*



*17 wheelchairs are ready for delivery*