DISABILITY AIDS FOR ZAMBIA

ROTARY CLUB OF MINEHEAD
ROTARY CLUB OF NDOLA CENTRAL
PHYSIONET

Many of the Rotary Clubs involved in this project in the Copperbelt use Facebook extensively to post about their activities – they are listed below and I do recommend that you search for and follow their Pages or Groups. This means that there are lots of photos, far too many to include here. Instead, I have posted a selection of them on a page on our website so they can be viewed alongside this article. Please go to this address: www.mineheadrotaryclub.co.uk/disabilityprojectphotos.html

I'm conscious of the fact that many readers will not be Facebook users, so I've included the texts of some of the participating clubs' posts in this document.

Introduction by Richard Robbins

I established a link with the Rotary Club of Ndola Central in the Copperbelt district in Zambia following a visit to the city in October 2022. I was born there in 1959 and attended Itawa (then Primary) school, along with my two brothers in the late 60's. A visit to the school by the three of us during that trip made us aware that the school had to manage with very limited resources. On my return to Minehead, with the approval of the Club members, I contacted the Ndola Central Rotary Club President, Nkonde Chola and quickly established that that Club's aims and attitudes towards education, and support and empowerment of girls in particular, meant that a partnership between the two clubs could be very beneficial. The Ndola Central Club had already arranged donations of sanitary products to a school and discussions between the clubs led to the plan to target three schools initially, and also to introduce training the school staff and pupils to make the reusable sanitary items, supplying sewing machines and the necessary materials.

Period Poverty Alleviation

The Rotary Club of Ndola Central, in Zambia, among other aims, targets health issues and improving education opportunities in their communities, with an emphasis in both areas on Empowering Girls.

The aim of the over-arching project is to alleviate the impact of period poverty in school age girls, whereby they are forced to miss a significant amount of school time during their periods if they are unable to afford sanitary products. With support from the Rotary Club of Minehead and a grant from District 1200, The Ndola Club carried out a programme of education and awareness of menstrual hygiene issues at three schools in the city and at the same time implemented the delivery of sewing machines, materials, and training to enable the schools to produce reusable sanitary products. This not only provided a more long-term solution for the girls affected by reducing the regular requirement for expensive off the shelf products, but also has a significant environmental impact as manufactured sanitary products and the associated packaging contain a great deal of plastic.

What next?

The Ndola Central Club has continued to support and work with the schools and there have been discussions about another project with the Itawa (now Secondary) School this year. Watch this space!

However, as we approached the end of the 2024-2025 Rotary year, we were discussing what we might collaborate on in the coming year, during which I was to be President of the Minehead Club, and Nkonde mentioned that there is always a desperate need for wheelchairs in the Copperbelt area in Zambia. My research eventually brought to light an amazing charity called **PhysioNet**, based in North Yorkshire and with depots in Gloucestershire and Essex.

> **"PhysioNet is a UK-based charity dedicated to providing surplus physiotherapy and mobility equipment to children and adults with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries. We work throughout the UK operating solely with a network of enthusiastic volunteers."**

Physionet offers the following:

- **Collection**: Sourcing redundant and surplus physiotherapy, mobility, and pediatric equipment across the UK.
- **Refurbishment**: Partnering with skilled volunteer engineers, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, and workshops to service, repair, and safety-check items.
- **Overseas Distribution**: Shipping sea containers of restored equipment directly to vetted clinics, hospitals, special schools, and NGOs in developing nations and low-resource settings around the world.

I made contact and was put in touch with the nearest depot, in Gloucestershire. During initial discussions it was suggested that a variety of equipment should be provided to benefit a wide range of people and disabilities, which seemed sensible. PhysioNet had plenty of stock and it was agreed that we would aim to fill and send a 40' container of equipment. PhysioNet just requested a donation of £1,000 per container as a contribution towards their storage and administration costs (they have no staff costs) so all we needed to do was to raise funds to cover the shipping. Early thoughts that Minehead Rotary Club might cover those costs were soon dispelled when the initial quote was in the region of £10,000! It seemed a lot but the "new" value of the equipment in a 40' container was estimated to be in excess of £100,000. We had to keep reminding ourselves of that.

Following discussions at the club it was agreed that we would seek contributions from other Rotary Clubs in our district and in September 2024 I contacted several with an outline of the project and offered to visit to provide more details, as well as some background as to how the connection with the Rotary Club of Ndola Central came about. Several visits and presentations followed on which I was accompanied by a number of members of the Minehead Club. Aside from the fundraising appeal, it was a good opportunity to visit other clubs in our district and meet and chat with members, something we don't do often enough!

Plans change

To cut a long story short several clubs engaged with the project, the plans for which evolved during the process of raising support and firming up the shipping costs and logistics.

Our original target was to fund the shipment of two 40' containers and include the cost of physiotherapist training at the destination. The total project target was £27,000 and we intended to apply for a Global Grant from the Rotary Foundation. However, despite making encouraging progress initially with pledges from District 1200 clubs towards the contribution that would have been required to enable a Global Grant to be added, progress stalled at the beginning of the Summer in 2025. After consultation and agreement with those that had pledged funds, it was decided to focus on sending one container. Shipping costs had increased due to unrest in the Middle East affecting access to the Suez Canal, the preferred shipping route, and it was agreed that we should focus on the one container and avoid further delays so that the equipment could be delivered for the benefit of many, many people, sooner rather than later.

At this point we had generous pledges from the following Rotary Clubs in our District: **Brit Valley**, **Brue Valley**, **Chelwood Bridge**, **Devizes**, **Shepton Mallet**, **Taunton Vale**, and **Wiveliscombe**. In addition, we received a significant pledge from the **Rotary Club of Belleville in Ontario**, and generous personal pledges from individuals who had become aware of the project. Having made the decision to proceed we gathered in the funds and the total amounted to just under £7,000. The target had become £11,500; £1,000 donation to PhysioNet towards their admin costs, and shipping costs of £10,500. The transportation was to be from the PhysioNet depot in Gloucestershire, road/rail to London, ship from London to a port in Mozambique (via the Atlantic and the Cape of Good Hope) and then by truck to Ndola in Zambia's Copperbelt. We had also raised £550 at a quiz night for the project and obtained a District Grant of £600. Members of Minehead Rotary Club kindly agreed to fund the balance required and we were finally able to go ahead and book the shipment!

Finally, loading the container

My wife Lorna and I visited the PhysioNet depot near Berkely in Gloucestershire in July 2025 to see how they operated and discuss arrangements for our shipment. In fact we also ended up helping to load a container bound for the Gambia on what had been the hottest day of the year up to then!

We subsequently heard from PhysioNet that our container was to be loaded and despatched on Saturday 13th September 2025. A Minehead Rotary Club working party was arranged and we convened at the depot early that morning. We joined number of regular volunteers, some PhysioNet and several members of nearby Rotary Clubs, Bristol and Cotswold Tyndale. The clubs have long been helping PhysioNet with collecting, refurbishing and cleaning the donated equipment, and then with the loading of each shipment!

The Minehead team pitched in enthusiastically and the well-managed process went smoothly, helped by cake, and the container was loaded and sent on its way by midday!

The journey

The container went to London Gateway Port to be loaded on 24th September on to the vessel, MSC Sofia Celeste, for the journey to Beira in Mozambique. It was fascinating to follow the progress (on the vesselfinder website) as it visited Germany then the Med before heading south, down the west coast of Africa and then up into the Indian Ocean to Mozambique.

The journey from the port to the final destination in Ndola sadly turned out to be problematic. The Rotary Club of Ndola Central had worked hard to make preparations for the receipt of the shipment. They started during the Summer when the arrangements for funding the shipment became certain and they made enquiries locally about what permissions and documentation would be required to allow the equipment to be brought in

without the imposition of import duty and other taxes, due to it being a not-for-profit, charity consignment. The Rotary Club of Ndola Central also appointed a local shipping agent, some thing that Physionet had said would be essential to enable the customs process and documentation to be handled efficiently.

They were told by the Ministry of Finance that a Tax Waiver Certificate would be required and that it should only take a matter of weeks for it to be issued. This would be presented at the Mozambique/Zambia border so that the container could pass through. Application was made and the certificate was expected to be ready before the container reached the border. Unfortunately, despite frequent enquiries with the Ministry of Finance, there was no news about the Tax Waiver Certificate when the container reached the border and it was then held up there while enquiries were made. In the absence of the certificate the Zambian Revenue Authority (ZRA) calculated VAT and Import Duty which totaled approx. £2,000. The items remained in storage and charges started to accrue. After some discussions the container was transferred into the care of the shipping agents, but still not released to be delivered. Further negotiations led to the ZRA agreeing to let the goods be transferred to the shipping agent's storage facility in Ndola, but in bond (i.e. under customs control). Once that had happened they were transferred to the ZRA warehouse where they were stored for the remainder of the saga.

Cutting a long story short, the Tax Waiver Certificate was finally issued in March 2026 and further bureaucratic complications ensued during the process of getting to ZRA to enable the tax liabilities to be cleared and there was much more to-ing and fro-ing with the Ndola Rotary Clubs continuing their chasing and following up until finally in mid-July the items were released from the ZRA warehouse. After payment of some storage charges, all of the items were transferred to the Rotary Club of Ndola Central's premises, the Lowenthal Theatre in the centre of Ndola. Finally, planning could start for the distribution of the items to the beneficiaries.

Distribution planning

In view of the quantity of equipment in the consignment, the decision had been made to distribute the equipment over as wide an area as possible in the Copperbelt, and the Ndola Central Club did an excellent job of liaising with other clubs in the Copperbelt area and ultimately the following Rotary Clubs were involved:

Ndola Central, **Ndola**, **Ndola Mukuba**, **Ndola Kafubu**, **Luanshya**, **Kitwe**, **Kitwe North**, **Kalulushi**, **Mufulira**, **Chingola Metro**, and **Solwezi**!

Clearly, too many clubs and people to get together for one distribution event, so their committee carefully planned a gradual collection and distribution process which I will try to summarise here.

Collections from Ndola

Sachibondu Mission – the first collection

While we were making arrangements with PhysioNet for our shipment they were contacted by a charity that operates a mission in the Copperbelt in Zambia, not far from Ndola. They asked if PhysioNet could supply some specialist equipment to help them with the care for Sarah at the mission. "Sarah is a severely disabled young lady with cerebral-palsy. She is non-verbal, and her arms and legs are non-mobile. she is unable to sit up. Although she is non-verbal, she is able to communicate using her beautiful smile and laughter." You can read about Sarah's story on the mission's website: **www.sachibondu.org/caring-for-sarah** .

PhysioNet were able to source a motorised hospital bed and a specialist wheelchair and they asked if the 2 items could be included in our container on the basis that the charity would arrange collection from Ndola for delivery to the mission. Of course, we agreed and the UK charity subsequently made a contribution to us towards the shipping cost.

Once all of the kit from the container had been transferred to the Rotary Club of Ndola Central's premises, Nkonde sensibly arranged for the mission's 2 items to be collected before the wider distribution got underway - we wanted to ensure they went to the right place.

Soon after that I received a message from Jane, who had been my contact with the charity:

Hi Richard

Finally, the equipment for Sarah has arrived at Sachibondu mission! Thank you so much - they are over the moon with it all.

I am attaching two video links for you to see Sarah in her new bed.

Best wishes, Jane

(The video clips have been combined - you can view the video on the website page mentioned above)

Of course, all of the equipment from the containers will make life-changing differences to scores of people with disabilities when it is distributed in the Copperbelt. However, our small contribution to Sarah's ongoing story really does embody Rotary's 2026-2027 message - CREATE LASTING IMPACT. It's so good that we were able to help PhysioNet to improve Sarah's situation and make things a bit easier for her carers.

RC Chingola Metro

Members from this club collected items from Ndola on 3rd August. A message posted on their Facebook Page on 5th August:

We are delighted to have officially received a consignment of disability support equipment that will help transform lives across our community. The equipment was formally received on behalf of the Rotary Club of Chingola Metro by our Projects Director, Rotarian Avinash in Ndola.

This consignment is part of a remarkable international collaboration between Rotary clubs in Zambia and the United Kingdom, spearheaded by the Rotary Club of Minehead in partnership with PhysioNet. What began as a conversation between Rotary leaders has grown into a shared commitment to improving mobility, dignity and inclusion for people living with disabilities in Zambia. The initiative aims to deliver refurbished wheelchairs and disability aids valued at over £100,000, providing life-changing support to communities across the Copperbelt.

As Rotarians, we believe that meaningful partnerships create lasting impact. We are grateful to every club, donor and volunteer who has contributed to making this project possible, and we look forward to ensuring these resources reach those who need them most.

Together, we are creating hope, restoring dignity and changing lives, one wheelchair at a time.

Collections by other Rotary Clubs

The 5th of September saw a large gathering of Rotary Club members at the Lowenthal Theatre as other Copperbelt clubs involved in the distribution of the equipment came to collect the items they had agreed to deliver in their areas.

The Ndola clubs also presented equipment to Ndola Day Care for Children with Special Needs, and Mitanda Home for the Aged.

This is a post from the Rotary Club of Ndola Facebook Page:

On Saturday, 5th September 2026, the Rotary Club of Ndola took part in the Mobility Aids Project held at Lowenthal Theatre in Ndola, bringing together Rotary Clubs, partners, volunteers and members of the community to support people living with mobility challenges. The project brought together 11 Rotary Clubs across the Copperbelt namely; The Rotary Club of Ndola, Rotary Club of Ndola Central, ROTARY CLUB OF NDOLA-MUKUBA, Rotary Club of Ndola Kafubu, Rotary Club of luanshya, Rotary Club of Kitwe, Rotary Club of Kitwe North, Rotary Club of Kalulushi, Rotary Club of Mufulira, Rotary Club of Chingola Metro, &

Rotary Club of Solwezi in partnership with Minehead Rotary Club and PhysioNet , the main partners, alongside Ladies Circle Zambia and other supporters.

The mobility aids included wheelchairs, walking frames, walkers, crutches, walking sticks and other assistive devices, which were provided to beneficiaries including Ndola Day Care for Children with Special Needs and Mitanda Home for the Aged.

The initiative was driven by identified community needs and aimed at promoting mobility, dignity, independence, and participation for people who need these essential aids.

We sincerely appreciate the Rotary Club of Minehead UK and PhysioNET for their partnership and support, as well as all participating Rotary Clubs, Ladies Circle Zambia, volunteers, donors and community members who contributed to making this initiative possible.

Mobility is more than movement. It is about dignity, access, participation, and independence. Proud to be part of Rotary International and a movement that continues to put Service Above Self into action!

Distributions by some of the participating Clubs

RC Chingola Metro

A message posted on their Facebook Page on 11th August:

Three Wheelchairs, Three Lives Touched: Rotary Chingola Metro Brings Hope to Three Families

For Gibson and Cosmas, life changed in ways no family could have imagined. The 30-year-old twins from Nchanga North were growing up normally until, about eight years ago, illness changed the course of their lives. They later progressively lost motor function in their lower limbs and have since depended heavily on their mother for support. But perhaps the most heartbreaking part of their story is this: around the same time they became paralysed, the twins also stopped talking. For years, their mother has cared for both sons, carrying the weight of uncertainty while the family struggled to access the diagnostic care needed to fully understand their condition.

Today, however, their story was met with an act of compassion. The wheelchairs were made possible through a remarkable international Rotary partnership between clubs in Zambia and the United Kingdom, spearheaded by the Minehead Rotary Club in partnership with PhysioNet, bringing much-needed mobility aids to communities across the Copperbelt.

Rotary Chingola Metro donated three wheelchairs to three community members living with mobility challenges, including Gibson, Cosmas and 53-year-old Nicholas Mvula.

For the twins, the wheelchairs mean more than mobility. They represent dignity, comfort and a little more independence for two brothers whose lives have been profoundly changed.

Nicholas, who has lived with progressive loss of lower-limb motor function for 25 years, also received support. A former rugby player who represented Nchanga Rugby Club and later the Zambia national rugby team, Nicholas now relies on family members for mobility and daily activities.

The donation may appear simple, but for these families, it is anything but. It is a mother carrying a little less weight, It is a person being given back a measure of independence, It is a reminder that they have not been forgotten.

Rotary Chingola Metro's gesture is a beautiful demonstration of what service to humanity can look like: seeing a need, responding with compassion and restoring a little hope. The journey for Gibson, Cosmas and Nicholas continues, and they still need appropriate medical and social support. But today, three people have been given something that can make everyday life just a little easier.

Three wheelchairs. Three lives touched. One powerful reminder: sometimes, a simple act of kindness can help someone move forward.

RC Luanshya

A post on their Facebook Page 11th August:

Rtn Prof Sherry overseeing the community service project of the Interact Club of Luanshya Skills Centre, cleaning and setting up medical equipment for distribution to the needy.

So good to see the Interact members involved with preparation for the delivery of the equipment in Luanshya

RC Kitwe

ROTARY CLUB OF KITWE HANDS OVER 51 MOBILITY AND REHABILITATION AIDS TO KITWE TEACHING HOSPITAL AND COMMUNITY

Their report on Facebook:

KITWE, Saturday 19th September 2026 – The Rotary Club of Kitwe, in partnership with the Rotary Club of Minehead and PhysioNet of the United Kingdom, has donated mobility and rehabilitation aids to Kitwe Teaching Hospital and some community members as part of efforts to improve access to rehabilitation services and support people living with disabilities.

Speaking during the handover ceremony held at Kitwe Teaching Hospital, Rotary Club of Kitwe President Bertha Nenga Chama said the donation demonstrates the impact that can be achieved when organisations and communities work together to address practical needs affecting people's lives. The President said access to appropriate mobility and rehabilitation aids can significantly improve the quality of life of people living with disabilities by enabling greater independence, participation in family and community life, and access to education, employment and other opportunities.

"This is much more than a donation of equipment. It is a demonstration of what can happen when people, organisations and communities come together with one purpose to improve the lives of others," she said.

The donation also supports the work of healthcare professionals at Kitwe Teaching Hospital by providing equipment that can strengthen rehabilitation and patient care. The President noted that the initiative is aligned with Rotary International's focus on Disease Prevention and Treatment, which seeks to improve access to healthcare and strengthen communities so that people can live healthier and more productive lives.

"The true value of today's donation is not measured simply by the number of disability aids we are handing over. Its value will be measured by the number of lives that are improved because of them," the President said.

The Rotary Club of Kitwe further emphasised that the donation represents an investment in people, better healthcare, rehabilitation, independence and the creation of a more inclusive community. Receiving the donation, Kitwe Teaching Hospital Senior Medical Superintendent Dr. Chileshe Mboni highlighted the realities of life and how circumstances can change unexpectedly, leaving a person who was previously able to move independently requiring assistance.

Dr. Mboni noted that a person may be walking independently one moment but, due to illness, an accident or other life eventualities, may find themselves having to rely on a mobility aid. He said this reality underscores the importance of having mobility and rehabilitation aids available for people when the need arises.

Dr. Mboni thanked the Rotary Club of Kitwe, the Rotary Club of Minehead and PhysioNet UK for the donation and appealed to other organisations, partners and well-wishers to emulate the gesture and support institutions providing care to people in need.

Also speaking during the handover, Kitwe Teaching Hospital Head Clinical Care, Dr. Joseph Kasongo, thanked the Rotary Club of Kitwe and its partners for responding to the hospital's identified needs.

Dr. Kasongo said when some of the hospital's needs are met through the support of sponsors and cooperating partners, it enables the institution to channel resources and attention towards other priority areas, including infrastructure development.

He expressed gratitude for the support and pledged that the hospital would ensure that the donated aids are used for their intended purpose and benefit the people for whom they are meant. Delivering a vote of thanks, Kitwe Teaching Hospital Head of Physiotherapy, Mr. David Ngosa, said the department was grateful that the Rotary Club of Kitwe and its partners had responded to the hospital's request for assistive devices.

Mr. Ngosa said the donated aids would particularly support children with disabilities by improving their mobility, independence and overall quality of life. He said the devices had come at the right time, noting that assistive devices are costly and beyond the financial reach of many families who need them.

"The devices have come at the right time. They will help children with disabilities with their mobility and improve their quality of life. These devices are very costly and beyond the reach of many families," Mr. Ngosa said.

The Rotary Club of Kitwe President meanwhile expressed appreciation to the management and staff of Kitwe Teaching Hospital for the important role they continue to play in providing healthcare and rehabilitation services, particularly through doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and other rehabilitation professionals. The President urged the hospital to ensure that the donated equipment is appropriately managed and maintained so that it can continue benefiting patients for many years.

The President also commended the partnership between the Rotary Club of Kitwe, Rotary Club of Minehead and PhysioNet UK, noting that collaboration across countries demonstrates Rotary's commitment to turning compassion into practical action.

The Club expressed hope that the donation would mark the beginning of further collaboration aimed at identifying gaps in rehabilitation and healthcare and developing sustainable interventions that respond to the needs of hospitals and communities.

The Club reaffirmed its commitment to Service Above Self and to working with partners to Create Lasting Impact in communities.

Conclusion and thanks

It is a real shame that the final delivery of the equipment was delayed by bureaucratic issues. It also resulted in a lot more work for Rotarians in Ndola, having to follow up the progress of the documentation required while busy with the Clubs' many other activities. However, persistence paid off in the end and we have been so pleased to finally see the equipment being distributed. The words of the President of the Rotary Club of Kitwe sum up the value of the project perfectly:

> *"The true value of today's donation is not measured simply by the number of disability aids we are handing over. Its value will be measured by the number of lives that are improved because of them,"*

We are grateful to everyone who has been involved; the members of the Rotary District 1200 clubs and private individuals who contributed to the shipping costs, of course those at the charity PhysioNet without whom this would never have happened, and all of those on the ground in Ndola and in the surrounding districts whose determination enabled the lives of so many to be enhanced by the items they distributed.

The project truly embodies the Rotary International message:

Minehead Rotary Club | CREATE LASTING IMPACT

Richard Robbins

Rotary Club of Minehead President 2024-2025 & International Lead
September 2026