

Wheelchair Recycling Scheme

Airedale NHS Trust provides wheelchairs for people with long term mobility problems and has an active patient base of 3000 users. It is standard practice for the Trust to repair and re-issue wheelchairs to patients as many times as economically viable, however once a wheelchair is beyond economical repair it was sent for scrap

Airedale NHS Foundation Trust

Waste

What was the issue being addressed?

The Trust were disposing of condemned wheelchairs and parts which, with the intervention of local charities, could fulfil a need for those overseas who have no means of funding mobility equipment.

What action was taken to overcome the issue?

The Trust approached charity the Margaret Carey Foundation ([MCF](#)) who run a restorative justice programme in prisons training offenders in engineering.

MCF deliver community and prison based projects which helps communities in need at home and abroad through providing refurbished mobility equipment.



Children in Zambia using the refurbished wheelchairs

Prisoners work to make life easier and better for disadvantaged people – whilst at the same time learn skills and become better prepared for employment after release.

MCF work in partnership with charity [Physionet](#) who secure funding to transport mobility equipment overseas and provide volunteers to assess clinical needs.

PhysioNet send items to destinations around the world, including Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia and the Pacific.

The procurement and engineer teams at the Trust designed a process to assess and identify equipment appropriate for donation and worked with the charity around taking responsibility for safety of items once donated.

What was the impact?

To date the Trust have recycled over 200 wheelchairs which would otherwise have been sent for scrap, some of which were up to 17 years old and have served as many as eight NHS patients in their lifetime.

Wheelchair scrappage has been reduced to zero and the scheme had no cost other than the time to set it up. The Trust are now also sending scrap parts so that repair services can be established in the overseas countries which the charities support.

“This is a fabulous partnership between our hospital, the prison and two local charities and volunteer therapists working back-to-back. We are really proud to be involved in this ‘green’ venture, as it enables the trust to be more environmentally friendly and promotes sustainable communities whilst giving hope to many people with disabilities living in poverty overseas.”

Michelle West, Mobility Services Manager
Airedale NHS Foundation Trust

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Lessons learned / success factors?

- The Trust received crucial support from the procurement team agreeing a process for condemning surplus (zero value) stock.
- A great response from engineers who value the re-use and identify all opportunities to recycle.
- There were challenges around storage and relied on a weekly collections by the charities to avoid congestion.
- The Trust also had equipment donations from people in the community for the charities
- The project has had a powerful impact on Staff morale with everyone realising how rewarding it is to be providing a lifeline for someone who otherwise would have no mobility
- It is critical to involve all related departments in this project as inevitably it impacts them somewhere along the way

Scaling up

- The Trust shared the success of this scheme within their regional network encouraging other wheelchair services to participate and so far two services have shown keen interest.
- To date, over 800 wheelchairs have been recycled by the charities for use overseas which could be equivalent to a cost of £90k for basic equipment
- If this was adopted regionally it could realise potential recycling of 1,800 wheelchairs per year with the additional benefits on reducing waste -however the charities would need further investment in infrastructure to support this
- Waste is significantly reduced by these schemes

[More info](#)