UK wheelchair charity & Google collaborate to explore how 3D printing can transform mobility solutions

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International development charity Motivation and Google.org collaborate to explore how 3D printing can revolutionise mobility solutions for people with disabilities living in developing countries.

The application of 3D printing is already proving to be a force for good in the development sector, and now wheelchair specialists Motivation and Google have teamed up to run a project looking at how 3D printing can be used to tailor mobility solutions for wheelchair users.

Motivation celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, and this new collaboration marks an exciting new phase of the charity's journey, as it continues to work towards meeting the vision it set out with a quarter of a century ago – to create a world in which people with disabilities are included and can fully participate in all aspects of life.

For the last 25 years Motivation has evolved a unique approach to wheelchair provision combining industrial design with humanitarian programmes. The charity has gone from making wheelchairs in one local workshop in Bangladesh to helping to set the standard for wheelchair provision globally. They have shown the world that with the right wheelchair, training and support, even the most disadvantaged and vulnerable can lead full, healthy and productive lives.

Now with the support of Google's philanthropic arm, Google.org, Motivation is building on the great strides it has made in the sector to date, and is looking to reaffirm design and innovation at the centre of its mobility solutions. With Google's support this project will allow Motivation to capitalise on advancements made in materials, technologies and manufacturing techniques to explore new ways to provide the right wheelchair in the right way. Commenting on the collaboration, Senior Designer at Motivation, Ian Harris said “we are thrilled to be working with Google.org and believe that together we can really help wheelchair service providers in developing countries toward the goal of tailored postural support, reducing the risk of life threatening complications from poorly fitted chairs and dramatically increase mobility and independence."

The 24 month project will develop and test a model for using 3D printing to create customised postural support devices, which will enable the charity to move towards a model where appropriate wheelchairs are adapted and fitted to the unique needs of the wheelchair user. Motivation will also engage in outreach and advocacy efforts to encourage broader adoption of 3D printing within its network and elsewhere across the sector if successful.

An integral part of the project is the piloting of a 'Print Pod' overseas, which will act as a temporary wheelchair clinic, kitted out with a 3D printer and raw materials. From here trained clinicians and technicians will access a protected online server of modifiable CAD files developed by Motivation design experts. The local team will be able to select a template from the online library, upload the individual component measurement data from the wheelchair user, and from these parameters the programme will generate a customised version that can be printed in country and fitted to the wheelchair. No need to wait for a container of products to be shipped overseas, no need to spend time manually adapting the component. All of this will hopefully reduce waiting times, eliminate storage issues and ultimately be more cost effective.

Commenting on the collaboration Brigitte Gosselink, Head of the Google Impact Challenge: Disabilities said: “At Google.org, we support organisations that offer innovative solutions to complex challenges. We're thrilled to back Motivation as they help build a world that works for everyone."

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?Funding for this project (£573,737) is being provided by Google.org as part of their wider Google Impact Challenge: Disabilities initiative. Launched in May of 2015, the Google Impact Challenge: Disabilities put $20 million in Google.org grants behind non-profits using emerging technologies to increase independence for people living with disabilities.

?Motivation is the leading provider of quality products, training and support for wheelchair users in low income countries. Working with local, national and international partners, Motivation has been transforming the lives of people with mobility disabilities for 25 years.

?Without mobility millions of disabled people in the developing world are unable to leave their homes, go to school or work. Many are left to lie on the floor; many more die from preventable complications. It doesn't have to be this way. The right wheelchair, with the right support, can be life-changing.

?Motivation's strategic goal is to support 100,000 disabled people annually by the end of 2017

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