



The United Methodist Task Force on Disability Ministries

Building wheelchair ramps for community members has many benefits, including training youth and adults as potential Volunteers in Missions (VIM) team members, energizing a cooperative parish or annual conference, and increasing disability awareness as volunteers interact with ramp recipients. Many current ramp teams trace their ministry to "Takin' it to the Streets," an annual blitz building events sponsored by the Louisiana Annual Conference VIM leaders four to twelve years ago. VIM coordinator Rev. Larry Norman partnered with local churches and solicited volunteers from throughout the conference for weekend events which ended with Sunday worship. In the second year 300 workers built 33 ramps in New Orleans. The conference no longer holds the blitz, but at least eight regional groups continue to build ramps.

Greg Forrester, NE Jurisdiction VIM coordinator, attended one of the LA events. A partner organization in his town of Cortland NY alerted him to the need for ramps. His group initially built each ramp from scratch to meet specifications, but realized the benefit of a modular design that could be quickly installed and easily taken apart and recycled when the original user no longer needed it. The Ramp Plans are available on the NE VIM website along with a liability release form. Greg provides training throughout his jurisdiction and beyond, including a session at the Nomads national gathering after Hurricane Katrina. He emphasizes the need for building relationships as well as ramps.



"Ramps of Hope" is a ministry inspired by Greg's work, and was initiated by Erie County area volunteers building modular ramps in the Western Pennsylvania AC by Deacon Debbie Hills. Once aware of the need for ramps, she began assessing assets available, and found donated storage and assembly space in an old school, some seed money, and a group of churches struggling to engage in joint ministry. She located a local agency, Love Inc., to determine need and eligibility, and spread the word through area social service agencies. Funds for building materials come from grants, donations, fund raisers, and recipients or family members. She checks the local building codes and need for permits and inspection, and notes a wide variation in codes and interpretation. Ramp modules are built in advance and stored, then installed when needed. The ministry has five team leaders and a food coordinator who organizes meals which are shared with the recipient family. She and others make intake and follow-up visits, asking about installing ramps, unmet needs, and remembering families with holiday baskets. In the context of establishing relationships, when the time is right (and if they do not have a home church) families are invited to attend the nearest UM church. Since April 2010 volunteers have built 21 ramps.

Debbie Wade, Task Force secretary, coordinates "R.A.M.P." (Reaching Accessibility for all Methodist Persons and Places) for the North Alabama AC. Recipients do not have to be United Methodist. R.A.M.P. is a non-profit ministry and a conference Advance Special. In addition to ramps, churches and individuals have assisted with the installation of bathrooms, chairlifts, and elevators. This assistance is provided for churches and individual homes. Some projects only need funding, while conference volunteers help build others. A retired engineer who happens to have a disability draws up most of the plans. Unique features include fund raising through a Conference Advance Special and through the conference Bridge Builders program for congregations committed to being active in disability ministry.

R.A.M.P. accepts applications on a first-come, first-serve basis, and provides assistance as long as funds are available. Churches forward applications to their pastor or the district director of Disability Ministries. Applications include a statement of need and what is requested, affirmation that a grant is needed for financial reasons, tell what workers are available, and provide plans, supplies needed, or costs as possible. R.A.M.P. also lists how anyone can help: first, by providing donations to the Advance Special fund, by praying, by providing technical assistance, such as plans, and recruiting people to build ramps.

On the north side of Indianapolis, "SAWS" (Servants at Work) is a joint effort of the Construction Ministry of St. Luke's UMC and Second Presbyterian Church. Ramp sections are built in a garage at Second Presbyterian and installed at locations around the city. In 2008, 30 ramps were built, with 2281 volunteer hours, in 2011, the number reached 103 and 11200. The group takes referrals from Central Indiana Council on Aging, the Multiple Sclerosis Society, and others. It also cooperates with similar groups in the metropolitan area. In addition to construction, there are opportunities for volunteers to interview clients and survey sites.



Further guidance regarding ramp specifications is available through the US Access Board.

- [UM Volunteers in Mission, Northeastern Jurisdiction](#) (plans and guides can be downloaded from this page)
- [Reaching Accessibility for Methodist Persons \(RAMP\)](#), North Alabama Conference
- [SAWS Construction Ministry](#), St. Luke's UMC
- [SAWS of Indianapolis](#)
- [Ramps of Hope](#) 
- [The Texas Ramp Project](#)

- [ADA Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities](#)

— revised July 2012

