



sustainable, independent lives by offering language and literacy instruction, as well as support with life skills and integration into U.S. culture and community. RISSE serves hundreds of individuals of all ages.

While the purpose of the 2021 mustard seed grant was to supply bicycles to immigrants and refugees, the project did so much more—it established people-to-people connections as congregants from the five involved churches met with families and children. Prior to this project, most congregants had never connected with refugees or immigrants.

Bicycles were delivered to 10 households; two bicycles were donated without mustard seed funds. Each family represented five people on average, so the total impact of the bicycle program supported about 50 people.

The families that were given bicycles expressed the upmost gratitude and happiness. The bikes were most often used to commute to work. The Albany area does have public transportation, but it often takes multiple transfers to make it across town. The bicycles gave the recipients hours back to their day that they would have to use to wait for busses.

The Rev. Holly Nye, pastor at Burnt Hills UMC, said “Our program taught us that outreach doesn’t have to be gigantic to be meaningful. We started with two-thousand dollars and touched 10 families. We didn’t try to give away cars or homes or fifty-thousand-dollar checks. Rather, we offered a practical item and the good wishes of strangers to help the families in their daily lives. People our families didn’t know came with a meaningful gift and asked for nothing but the families’ well-being in return. The smiles in our pictures tell it all.”

the
Bridge

Connecting local churches to each other & ministries around the world




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The Bridge is a Conference Communications Ministry tool that delivers to local churches news and stories of ministry from around the Upper New York Conference and the world. For more news and stories visit:
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 *The Upper New York Conference’s vision is to live the gospel of Jesus Christ and to be God’s love with our neighbors in all places.*

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Across the Upper New York Conference, individuals and local churches are instilling hope to those who need it most. Here are two such stories.

Keeping it beautiful with Rolling Nation



By Shannon Hodson

The challenge of cerebral palsy has never prevented the Rev. Chris Wylie from pursuing his dreams. His faith has helped to reveal God's love throughout his life.

A banker for many years, in his mid-30s, he felt a call to ministry. Chris said, "All I knew is that I had to go to this place called seminary as a first step."

Chris pulled out the phonebook and called the first seminary he saw, Buffalo Seminary. He was told he could not attend that seminary—to his surprise, Buffalo Seminary was a school for girls!

The next seminary Chris called was the United Theological Seminary, which was at Houghton College. He passionately pursued his MDiv. God called on Chris at the right time. Chris was in the

last class to earn their MDivs at United Theological College in Buffalo because United closed the program to allocate funds to other resources.

Becoming ordained and pastoring at many churches in the Upper New York Conference, Chris had to go on disability leave in 2016. His cerebral palsy limitations were exacerbated by a failed knee replacement surgery.

The Rev. Dave Masland, former Upper New York Director of New Faith Communities, said, "From the time I met Chris, his heart and mind were filled with a sense that God was calling him to find new ways of reaching people with the good news of God's love, and to change the Church (or create a new church) so that it was truly a safe place of accessibility and inclusion for all people no matter the bodies in which they live. He was a gifted pastor. But his body simply would not allow him to continue the daily grind of typical full-time congregational clergy. Though his body limited his ability to work full time as a pastor, his mind and spirit continued to be alive with dreams and visions."

Chris had to switch gears and wasn't quite sure how until God stepped in to start paving Chris's new direction—music.

Awaiting the doors to open (literally and figuratively) at a Sam Baker concert in November 2019, Sam approached Chris.

Chris said, "As if I didn't know who he was, Sam came up to me and said, 'Hi, I'm Sam Baker.'"

They started a lively conversation about their limitations (Sam lost the use of his fingers and sustained a brain injury when a terrorist group's bomb exploded during a train ride in Manchu Picchu in 1986).

Sam and Chris started a strong friendship and stayed in contact with each other.

In December 2019, Chris attended an Aquabats concert in Buffalo. The band's opening act, rapper, MC Lars, approached Chris and thanked him for coming. Chris was especially impressed by Lars' improvisation skills.

Chris said, "I ended up talking with Lars during a break—he was at his own merch table. He asked me what I do, and I told him I was a pastor. He said, 'You're a pastor? I want to know more about that. He handed me his card and asked me to call him.'"

Lars also offered advice, "Write about what you know."

"That's it. The Bible, Faith, Love," Chris thought.

By February 2020, with the help of his new professional musician friends Sam and Lars and his tech-savvy wife, Jennelle Torrey, Chris begins writing lyrics and making music using Logic Pro.

Wait until you hear what happens next! Visit <https://bit.ly/rollingnation> to find out. Or scan the QR code with your mobile device.



Churches in the Albany District help refugees and immigrants through a Mustard Seed grant

By Shannon Hodson

Mustard Seed Migration grants continue United Methodist Committee on Relief's 80-Year tradition of welcoming the stranger. These grants of up to two-thousand dollars are funded to local churches in the United States to fund local projects that assist refugees and migrants.

In 2021, Burnt Hills Church in the Albany District earned a two-thousand-dollar mustard seed grant

from UMCOR. They collaborated with four other UMC churches in the Albany District (First UMC East Greenbush, First UMC Delmar, Jonesville UMC, and Emmaus UMC) to distribute bicycles to refugees through the Refugee and Immigrant Support Services of Emmaus (RISSE), which is housed at Emmaus UMC.

RISSE was founded in 2007 to equip immigrants and refugees in the Albany area to build

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