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# **“Don’t let anyone tell you you can’t!”**

In 2009 Gerardo, who is 31-years-old and deaf and blind, traveled the Way of Saint James from Roncesvalles to Compostela on a tandem tricycle. This was the start of a group of volunteers who guide their copilots suffering from various types of limitations on the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.

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Moncho, a faithful of Opus Dei who lives in Vigo, Galicia and who assists in this project, explains below its origin and how the initiative also furnishes a respite for the families and caregivers of the physically challenged persons who take part.

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*DisCamino* (an organization for physically handicapped persons [“discapacitados” in Spanish] who travel the *Camino de Santiago* with the assistance of volunteers) was founded in August 2009, thanks to the initiative of Javier Pitillas and Gerardo. After traveling for 30 days on a tricycle-tandem to Santiago de Compostela from Roncesvalles, Gerardo urged Javier: “Try to find other people with problems like mine so we can make the *Camino de Santiago* for years to come.”

One of the persons in charge of this social initiative sums it up in these words: “it is the physical and mental preparation needed to carry out this challenge; it is the companionship which arises in striving for shared goals, with the eagerness to take part in something that can change your life and fill it with meaning; it is the day to day effort of many people who, although they are never going to pedal a tandem tricycle, need the help of someone to accompany them on their way through this world.”

## **Contributing to people's social integration**

The project is assisted by young and “senior” volunteers who share their leisure time in helping out in the activities offered by *disCamino*. Its aim is to further the social integration of people with limited capacities, while at the same time offering support and a respite for

their family members and caregivers.

The physical limitations of the people involved cover a wide gamut of situations: cerebral palsy, autism, Down Syndrome, lateral ataxial sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, Prader Willi Syndrome, poliomyelitis, Sturge-Weber Syndrome, deafness, blindness, etc.

The slogan of *disCamino* is: “Don’t let anyone tell you you can’t!” The letters of this slogan are marked on many of the pieces of equipment used. Due to the many different limitations, a great variety of equipment is needed. Some of these are simple to use and some are more sophisticated: tandem bicycles, tricycles, joelettes, bicycles with a back seat, wheelchairs, saddle bikes, handbikes, two-seater electric bikes, and even specialized items designed by Fernando, our mechanic. All of

this is made possible thanks to the dedication of those in charge of *disCamino* who obtain donations and assistance from various associations.

Each week 75-minute training sessions are organized, with the pilot and copilot choosing their own day and time. The routes we travel are paths and roads on the outskirts of Vigo and help to strengthen people's mobility and intake of oxygen, as well as reinforcing the skills needed to work in tandem with others.

## **Courage of the copilots**

In addition, during the year, in any season, different routes are organized for following the Way of Saint James, whether it be a Jubilee year or not (2021-2022 is a double Holy Year of Saint James). These stages can take three days, a week, a month, and even longer.

Recently trips have been organized covering almost 3,000 kms along a number of different routes: the route from Portugal, the Mozarabic route, the French route, the northern route...

These trips testify to the courage and determination of the copilots, and give rise to many interesting anecdotes and conversations about both ordinary and deeper topics of life. Those taking part are helped to find meaning in their limitations and the capacities God has given them. And the sacrifice and dedication of their families becomes abundantly clear.

When I talk with the “copilots” and see how much they enjoy their hours of pedaling, I recall the words of John Paul II: “Suffering is present in the world in order to unleash love, to give rise to deeds of love towards one’s neighbor, to transform all

human society into a civilization of love.”

The video below (in Spanish) has much more information about *disCamino* and those who are involved in this initiative.

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