



NEWS FOR
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THE Next Step

Ebola Special Report

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‘Ebola Warriors’ help end the outbreak in Sierra Leone

NEWS

In November 2015, the World Health Organization declared the end of the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone. More than 14,000 people in Sierra Leone contracted Ebola, and 3,956 died.

The outbreak ended thanks in part to Handicap International’s Ebola ambulance project, which was funded by the U.K.’s Department for International Development. With their support, staff launched the only centralized ambulance service for transporting suspected Ebola patients and disinfecting their contaminated homes in western Sierra Leone, which includes Freetown.

Before Handicap International started the ambulance project in 2014, the country counted only a handful of ambulances to safely transport patients—nowhere near the capacity needed to meet an acute, global health crisis. The international community called on Handicap International, present in Sierra Leone since 1996, and known for its expertise in logistics, to fill this critical gap. Handicap International’s 250 ambulance and decontamination staff have since transported more than 3,700 patients with Ebola symptoms to treatment centers, and disinfected nearly 1,800 homes. At its peak, the program was responding to dozens of calls each day with a fleet of 30 ambulances and 15 decontamination vehicles.

“Every day, staff came to work and waited for the calls,” says Mike Denny, an American nurse who worked as Handicap International’s Infection Prevention & Control Manager. “For every case, they put on PPEs (Personal Protective Equipment), often in 95F degree temperature with 100% humidity.

“To reach patients, they had to make their way through hostile crowds, navigate treacherous roads and narrow alleys, and enter unknown dwellings with contaminated fluids and sharp objects that might pierce their PPE. After helping the patient to the ambulance, they removed contaminated material and decontaminated the home. They did this four times, five times a day. The work was exhausting, but they didn’t complain.”

The ambulance service played a big part in breaking the Ebola transmission chain, says Pauline Lavirotte, the ambulance fleet project manager. “We can be proud of the quality of our work. We faced huge challenges, but we managed to find technical solutions that worked.”



Abdullah Mansaray led an ambulance team that focused on dangerous interventions in Freetown’s slums.

Handicap International’s mandate



Co-winner of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize, Handicap International works with people with disabilities and other vulnerable populations living in situations of poverty, exclusion, conflict, and disaster. In 2015, Handicap International supported 331 programs in 57 countries including Sierra Leone.

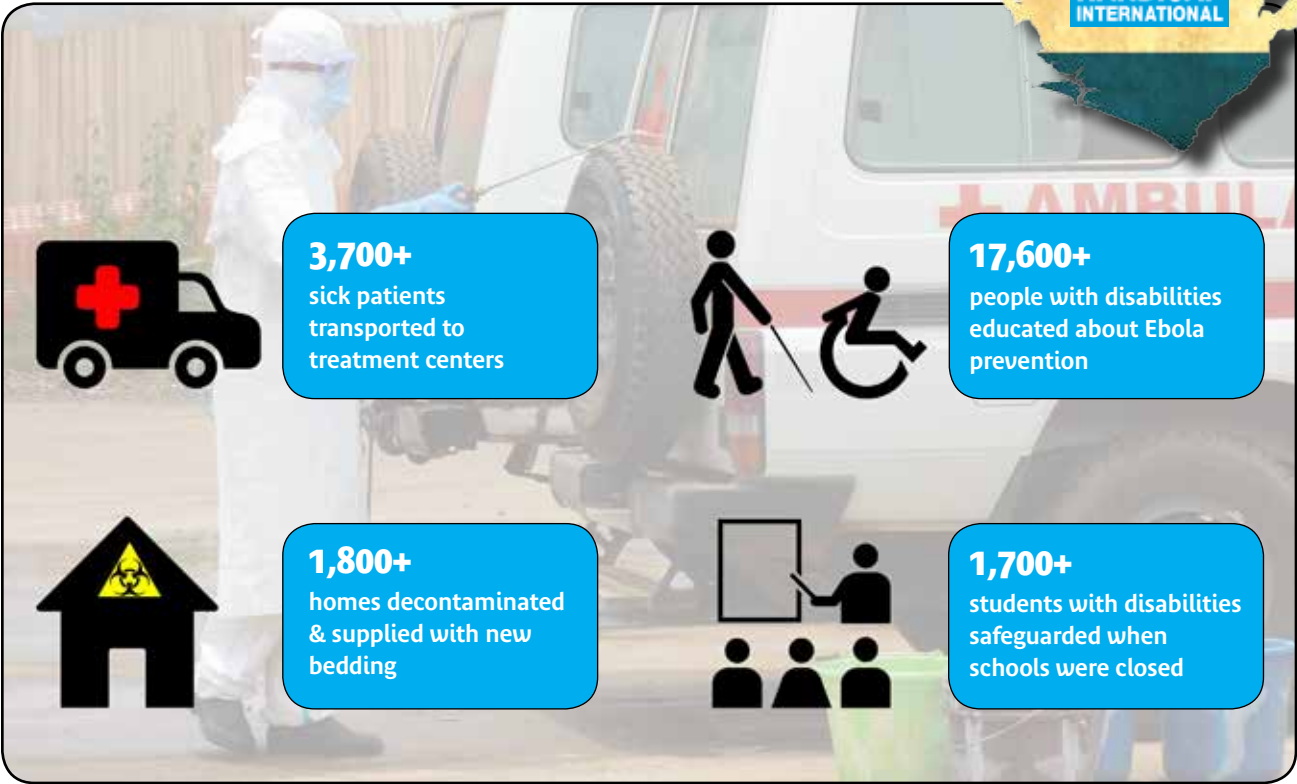
The organization started working in Sierra Leone in 1996, to help the victims of the civil war. In 2013, before Ebola,

Handicap International’s mission focused on improving maternal and child health, promoting inclusive education for children with disabilities, and supporting disabled people’s organizations.

With the outbreak of Ebola, Handicap International launched an emergency response that included the Ebola ambulance project and Ebola prevention awareness campaigns targeting people with disabilities, children, and sex workers.

When schools closed due to Ebola, we ensured children in our inclusive education program knew how to protect themselves and were able to continue learning through radio education programs. With Ebola at bay, the organization is now transitioning back to its regular activities and seeking ways to help the country rebuild systems and community structures damaged by the Ebola outbreak.

Actions against Ebola in Sierra Leone





Nacel Johnson reads from her Ebola prevention book, which was provided in Braille by Handicap international.

Protecting people with disabilities

Handicap International ensured people with disabilities in Sierra Leone knew how to protect themselves from the Ebola virus

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

When Ebola struck Sierra Leone, many people with disabilities did not know that the illness posed any threats, because public awareness campaigns didn't share information in ways they could understand. Handicap International led a nationwide campaign to

teach people with disabilities how to prevent Ebola, using disability specific awareness tools and messaging.

"I never knew about Ebola," says Nacel Johnson, a student at the Milton Maragai School for the Blind. "But then I got some information from Handicap International."

Nacel received an Ebola

prevention guide in Braille, and heard radio messages made by blind people. Handicap International also produced awareness material for the Deaf community and advised caretakers of people with intellectual disabilities.

The organization made a special effort to reach amputees—victims of the

brutal civil war in Sierra Leone—who often live in isolated villages away from other community members.

With the help of 238 community volunteers, Handicap International was able to educate 16,877 people, including adults and children with disabilities, and their caregivers and family members.

"I've served in the company of heroes"



Mike Denny, an American nurse from Gallup, NM, was the Infection Prevention & Control Manager in Sierra Leone, June-November 2015.

The 250 men and women of the Handicap International Ebola ambulance project played a vital role in stopping the outbreak and preventing further deaths. I've served in the company of heroes. I arrived in Sierra Leone as an infectious disease specialist, but they taught me how to fight Ebola.

It's the best job I ever had. I want the world and my fellow Americans to know what these people have done. Please don't forget them.

I have long understood that infectious disease does not respect political borders and, in the 21st century, geographic isolation is no guarantee of protecting our friends and families from outbreaks of disease in far-off lands. In Sierra Leone, I personally witnessed the devastating effects that a disease outbreak can have upon society. I am glad I had the skills required to do a job that needed to be done. I would never want to fight Ebola again, but if I had to I would. We know that some battles must be fought and everyone must do what they can.

Breaking the chain of Ebola transmission through action and awareness



Protection of children with disabilities↑

Community Based Rehabilitation Volunteer Sheku Kamara sits with student Karim. During the Ebola epidemic, Handicap International ensured that the 1,700 children with disabilities in our inclusive education program knew how to protect themselves from Ebola and continued to learn even when schools were closed.

Saving lives through awareness→

"I only wish we knew about Ebola sooner," says Thomas Lebbie, president of the Sierra Leone Association of the Blind. "Before we could educate the blind community about how to prevent the disease, we lost some of our members to Ebola." In coordination with the Sierra Leone Association of the Blind, Handicap International produced and distributed hundreds of copies of Ebola prevention guides in Braille.



Decontamination ↑

Handicap International Ebola decontamination workers spray the residence of a sick patient with a chlorine solution to kill the virus and enable the patient to safely return home following treatment.