

**Mercy Ships Sierra Leone**



# **2006 ANNUAL REPORT**

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## 2006 statistics

<b>Obstetric fistula program</b>	
Procedures	474
Admissions	652
Patient nights	9,892
Literacy and counseling sessions	14,487
<b>Outpatient clinic</b>	
Consultations	6,436
Vaccinations	519
Clinic days	146
<b>Rehabilitation</b>	
Patients seen	2,542
Devices distributed	1,877
Value of supplies distributed	\$191,470
<b>Healthcare</b>	
Patients treated	4,691
Number of clinics	237
Number of home visits	53
<b>Personal development</b>	
Monthly average of students in school integration program	277
Number of counseling sessions	470

# welcome

February 19, 2007  
Freetown, Sierra Leone

Dear friends,

Greetings from Freetown! 2006 was a time of change and growth for Mercy Ships Sierra Leone. On behalf of our international volunteers and dedicated Sierra Leonean staff, thank you for taking an interest in the work we are doing to serve the forgotten poor in West Africa.

Sierra Leone is making progress in several key social and economic areas, but the need remains incredibly high. Our two centres, the New Steps Centre and the Aberdeen West African Fistula Centre, Sierra Leone, play important and distinct roles. Our programs work with the most disadvantaged: children, the disabled, and women.

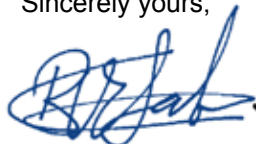
The New Steps Centre provides physical therapy and medical care for the physically disabled, and the Aberdeen West African Fistula Centre, Sierra Leone provides surgical services for women suffering with obstetric fistula, and has an outpatient clinic for children 12 years and under. The result: thousands of Sierra Leonean people are now living happier, healthier lives.

Besides building on existing programs, we are working in partnership with government, communities, and nongovernmental organizations to improve coordination and quality of services. We are also eagerly anticipating the arrival of the *Africa Mercy* in 2008 and are beginning to plan for programs to be carried out during her visit.

Founded in 2001, Mercy Ships Sierra Leone has over 90 Sierra Leonean employees, several of whom hold key management positions. We also welcomed new international volunteers from the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and the United States. I appreciate the commitment of national and international staff to serving the people of this country.

We look forward to a fruitful and inspiring 2007.

Sincerely yours,



Rene Lako  
Country Director  
Mercy Ships Sierra Leone



Sierra Leone is making slow and steady progress as it continues from more than a decade of civil conflict. While there has been social and economic improvement, the country ranks at or near the bottom of major social and quality-of-life surveys.

Peace was declared in 2002 and after two years of international emergency aid, Sierra Leone moved into a phase of development in 2004. By and large, 2006 was peaceful, and Sierra Leoneans are looking forward to national elections in the summer with cautious optimism.

Low standards of living continue to plague this country, which ranks second from the bottom of the United Nations Human Development Index. Maternal morbidity rates are high, and child mortality rates are the highest in the world.

Since 2001, Mercy Ships Sierra Leone has worked with the forgotten poor in Sierra Leone, bringing hope and healing to groups including women, children, and those with mobility disabilities.



# aberdeen west african fistula centre

## grand opening



The Aberdeen West African Fistula Centre, Sierra Leone operates two programs: the obstetric fistula program provides surgical treatment for women who have childbirth-related injuries, and the outpatient clinic provides medical consultations, basic treatments, immunizations, and referral services for children 12 years and under.

The centre is a result of a partnership between Mercy Ships, Addax & Oryx Foundation of Switzerland and its Sierra Leonean partner, National Petroleum, and the Aberdeen community.

The centre's facilities include the pediatric outpatient clinic, independent power generation and full laundry, cooking, and instrument sterilization equipment. It is capable of accommodating 69 patients: 44 in the wards and 25 in the Hostel of Hope.

The Aberdeen West African Fistula Centre, Sierra Leone celebrated its grand opening in May of 2006. Present for the ceremonies were national and international dignitaries including the president of Sierra Leone, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, Mercy Ships founder Don Stephens, and Mercy Ships supporter and board member Ann Gloag.



The centre is a partnership between Mercy Ships, the Addax & Oryx Foundation (and its Sierra Leonean partner, National Petroleum), and the Aberdeen community.

Mercy Ships was asked to operate the centre. Recognizing the scope of the obstetric fistula problem in West Africa, Mercy Ships designated part of the facility specifically for it. An outpatient clinic for children 12 years and under was added at the request of the Aberdeen community.

The opening ceremony was followed by the opening of the Rotary-funded Aberdeen Market.

## obstetric fistula program

Surgeries for obstetric fistulas and other childbirth-related injuries were first offered by Mercy Ships through the obstetric fistula program in April of 2005. The most common injury is known as a vesico-vaginal fistula (VVF), although other procedures are also performed, including repair of recto-vaginal fistulas, prolapse, and examinations under anesthesia.

Most patients are referred by nongovernmental organizations and by former patients. They travel to Mercy Ships either on their own or are transported by Mercy Ships, Médecins Sans Frontières, and NGOs.

In 2006, the program operated with one full-time surgeon since March and performed 474 procedures with a high success rate.

### Holistic Care

Mercy Ships is committed to holistic care for patients, who are often socially marginalized and arrive feeling very vulnerable. In 2006, the program provided basic literacy classes, counseling, and arts and crafts activities. The program has a full-time counselor and a day worker who teaches literacy and arts and crafts.



Lungi Town in Sierra Leone sits on a peninsula, separated from the capital city of Freetown by several miles of water. Crossing is not simple. Transportation is available, but is expensive for the average person.

For a woman named Isatu, crossing seemed impossible. She would never have enough money to pay the fare. For 10 years, Isatu suffered from an obstetric fistula. Because of the constant drain of urine from her injury, Isatu lived a life of shame, secrecy, and embarrassment.

The pastor at Isatu's church knew about the work of Mercy Ships in Sierra Leone. Isatu learned that with surgery, her fistula could be repaired. Isatu's pastor paid for her transport to Freetown and with a friend, brought her to the Mercy Ships centre in Aberdeen.

After Isatu's successful surgery, her friend came to celebrate with her and accompany her back across the river. Isatu returned to her village and her family unashamed and excited about life once again.

Patients with successful surgeries returned to their communities happy and with a new sense of hope. Every patient is given a new dress to wear home to celebrate her new life.

### Training

The program seeks to build the capacity of its own staff and that of national and international professionals who are interested in obstetric fistula. In 2006, several internationally-recognized surgeons traveled to Sierra Leone to provide the staff with advanced training in their respective fields. The program hosted three surgeons: Matthew Aungst, David Lyth, and Brian Hancock, who was accompanied by surgeon-in-training Cath Moffatt. The obstetric fistula program is also developing plans to recruit West African surgeons for training.

### Public Awareness

Obstetric fistula is a completely avoidable injury, and knowledge can aid in prevention. Mercy Ships supports efforts to encourage appropriate medical intervention utilizing safe practices, particularly in rural areas, and advocates for better obstetric care for women. Doctors and staff take every opportunity to speak to local and national media, advocating on behalf of women. Mercy Ships has been featured in national broadcast and print media.

Mercy Ships is a founding member of the VVF Task Force in Sierra Leone. The forum includes the Ministry of Health, the UNFPA and a number of interested NGOs. The task force is working toward the goal of creating a unified national policy regarding fistula education.

## outpatient clinic for children 12 and under

The outpatient clinic serves children 12 years and younger, providing initial diagnosis, basic medical treatment, immunizations, referrals, and community health education. The clinic opens three days per week for consultation, treating an average of 50 to 60 children per day. The other days are used to focus on prevention and include immunization of children and community health.

In 2006, 6,436 medical consultations were performed, and 519 children were immunized. The clinic was operated by a general practitioner and a support staff of community health nurses, a pharmacy nurse, receptionist/records-keeper, and a clinical laboratory technician.

Most of the illnesses encountered were readily preventable, and more severe cases were usually referred to Emergency Surgical Centre, a nongovernmental hospital in Freetown.

Over one hundred community health education sessions were conducted in 2006, in the clinic, community locations, and schools. Additionally, the clinic conducts special classes for obstetric fistula patients, focusing on maintaining their physical health after surgery and on community health.

The clinic's laboratory is operated by a full-time technician and provides basic services to support both the clinic and the obstetric fistula program. Essential drugs are prescribed and dispensed through the in-house pharmacy. The clinic charges a nominal consultation and cost-recovery fee for pharmaceuticals.

# the new steps centre

## rehabilitation



The New Steps Centre is a place for rehabilitative care in Freetown and the Western Area of Sierra Leone. Several departments work to provide care for acute needs, as well as sustainable solutions for long-term development.

The New Steps Centre works primarily with the mobility-disabled. In 2005, New Steps moved to a new facility on the Waterloo/Masiaka highway in a rapidly-growing area outside Freetown. The new facility is located near many disabled-persons communities.

The New Steps Centre works with communities, government, and civil society groups to serve the forgotten poor effectively and equitably.

The rehabilitation department at the New Steps Centre is made up of Sierra Leonean rehabilitation therapists and international volunteers including physical therapists and occupational therapists. Rehabilitation therapists conduct the bulk of treatments, with international volunteers acting in advisory and teaching roles.

The department assessed patients and distributed mobility devices such as wheelchairs, rugged, hand-driven Personal Energy Transport devices, crutches, and canes. Custom-fitted calipers and orthoses are produced in an onsite workshop.

The department treats patients in the centre, in homes, and in communities, working with specific New Steps projects such as the Mobility Matters project and the Integrate to Educate school integration program.

In 2006, the department saw 2,542 patients and conducted 32 community visits and upcountry treks. For many of these communities, this was the first time Mercy Ships visited. Communities included Kenema, in central-east Sierra Leone, and Kailahun and Koindu, in the far eastern part of the country.

The rehabilitation department works with a school integration project in the community of Lunsar, conducting evaluations and making environmental adaptations to make schools more accessible for children with mobility disabilities.

For many in Sierra Leone, Mercy Ships is the first stop when they have any medical problem. The rehabilitation department works in cooperation with non-governmental organizations as well as with the Aberdeen West African Fistula Centre, Sierra Leone to make sure those in need receive care.

The rehabilitation department is working to expand and build on the quality of its service delivery and looks forward to another year of treating Sierra Leone's forgotten poor.

## healthcare

The healthcare team is comprised of two nurses and a community health officer. In 2006, the team treated 4,691 patients. It conducted 53 home visits, treated 83 malnourished children, and immunized 403 children. The most common diagnosis the team made was malaria, and other complaints included acute respiratory infections, diarrhea, skin infections, worm infestation, sexually transmitted infections, wounds, and malnutrition.

The healthcare team typically begins the day by traveling to a community and setting up the mobile clinic. Patients are registered and serious illnesses and emergencies are treated first. Children under five years old are weighed, *Road to Health* charts are brought up-to-date, and immunizations are done if necessary.

The team also made referrals to hospitals and local clinics for more serious conditions such as hernias, lymphoma, appendicitis, and snake bite.



## personal development



Baby Ibrahim arrived at the New Steps Centre on a Monday morning in November. His uncle explained that the child was 15 days old and had been left in the jungle by his family, who, because of his cleft lip and palate, considered him to be a devil child.

Ibrahim spent nine days in the jungle before being rescued. For the next several days, he was fed only a solution of water, salt, and sugar.

The rehabilitation department at New Steps referred Ibrahim to the outpatient clinic for children that Mercy Ships operates in Aberdeen. Ibrahim arrived the next day weighing slightly less than five pounds.

At the clinic, he was fed, treated, weighed, and given some new clothes. The clinic physician pronounced him very healthy given his ordeal, although underweight. When he is old enough, he will travel to Liberia where surgeons aboard a Mercy Ship will operate on him.

The personal development department at New Steps works with specific projects, providing education and counseling to help integrate the disabled and marginalized into their schools and communities.

Since 2001, the department has worked with the school integration program to increase access to mainstream schools for children with mobility disabilities. In 2006, an average of 277 mobility-disabled children per month were enrolled in schools. Many of these children were part of an integration project, sponsored by several United Nations agencies and in collaboration with the Sierra Leone government, in Lunsar.

Current teacher training includes no special needs component, and many teachers lack the skills necessary to integrate and teach disabled students. New Steps is conducting seminars on inclusive education, which is a priority of the Sierra Leone government.

West Africa has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world. New Steps conducted 96 adult basic education classes in 2006 with a total attendance of 3,830.

The church support program at New Steps continues to train pastors and community leaders as part of a sustainable, community-based program.

## community development

Much of the community development work in 2006 was carried out by the agriculture department. The department carried out several projects, including training local farmers.

The agriculturalist reported that he and his staff grew and harvested crops including peanuts, eggplant, yam, and citrus fruit. The department also undertook a pilot project to harvest and process leaves from the moringa tree. Leaves from this fast-growing tree are rich in nutrients and can be used as a valuable dietary supplement.

Harvested moringa leaf powder was distributed to individuals on a trial basis and to the New Steps medical team.

In 2006, the agriculturalist attended meetings with nongovernmental organizations, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization.

The construction department worked on several projects to improve the quality of life for disadvantaged residents of Waterloo and the surrounding area. One of these projects included installing tarp roofs for a community of polio-disabled persons, using tarps donated by the Mercy Ships Holland national office.

# partnerships

## Cooperating Organizations

Catholic Relief Services

CARE

CAUSE Canada

Christian Health Association of  
Sierra Leone

Christian Extension Services

Disability Awareness Action  
Groups

Emergency Surgical Centre

Handicap International

Health Task Force

INGO Forum

International Rescue Committee

Marie Stopes

Médecins sans Frontières  
Belgium

Médecins sans Frontières  
Holland

UBC Matru Jong Hospital

UMC (Urban Centre)

UN Country Team (headed by  
FAO)

UNHCR

UNICEF

VF Task Force

Wesleyan Hospital Kamakwie

World Food Programme

World Vision

Besides its partnership with the Addax & Oryx Foundation, Mercy Ships Sierra Leone is especially indebted to Rotary International for Britain and Ireland. In 2006, construction of the two-story Hostel of Hope was completed under the supervision of team leader Harry Nash and Sandy Wilson of Scotland, who traveled to Sierra Leone several times to monitor and evaluate progress. In total, over 100 Rotarians served in nine teams.

Mercy Ships also welcomed several Mercy Teams. Mercy Teams are made up of individuals from different churches and service organizations, and included North American and European nationals.

## 2006 primary contributors

Addax & Oryx Foundation, Switzerland

la Caixa Foundation, Spain

Chatlos Foundation, America

Covenant World Relief, America

Demaurex & Cie SA, Switzerland

Global Ministries of United Methodist Church, America

Hope Haven International, America

Herrn Gerhard Kuhlmann, Germany

Lloyds TSB Bank, United Kingdom

Pauline Allan Gill Foundation, America

The PET Project, America

Rotary International for Britain and Ireland (RIBI)

UNICEF, Sierra Leone

Women at Risk, United Kingdom







Mercy Ships Sierra Leone is honored to have served thousands of Sierra Leone's forgotten poor in 2006. We are grateful to institutions and individuals, those who give of their resources, their time, and their lives, to help the people of Sierra Leone. We appreciate the efforts of the International Operations Centre in Texas, and of the national offices around the world.

We look forward to another great year in 2007.

Mercy Ships International

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