

Center offers hope to Ebola orphans in Sierra Leone

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The Ebola virus left thousands of children in Sierra Leone orphaned—abandoned, isolated and alone. But the Hope Center provides these children safe haven.

A [2015 study](#) reported more than 12,000 children in Sierra Leone have lost at least one primary caregiver to the disease. The average Ebola orphan is 9 years old.



The staff at the Hope Center provide safe haven for children, offering love and attention, a community of caregivers and peers that understand their situation, individual counseling sessions, schooling and exposure to the gospel. (Photo courtesy of Christian Life Commission) Restore Hope, a faith-based ministry that serves Ebola orphans in Sierra Leone, explains that children lose more than just their parents to the disease. The psychological impact of witnessing loved ones die, coupled with the stigmatization and societal ostracism that follow, frequently overtakes the drive to maintain even primary functions of life.

Marginalization, trafficking, insufficient education and failed psychological recovery often become the tragic reality for children orphaned by Ebola who have no support or care.

Hope Center focuses on well-being of children

The Hope Center, Restore Hope's interim care center created as a response to the spread of Ebola in West Africa, cares for the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of 30 children at a time.

Children typically arrive at the center malnourished and sick with malaria, typhoid fever, anemia or mumps. They receive medical care by full-time nurses and three daily vitamin-rich meals provided through the [Texas Baptist Hunger Offering](#).

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"I am seen. I have worth. I can do more, be more," is the mentality instilled in the children.

Kinship care and case management

After the program concludes, children are placed in new families.

"Some of their distant relatives who attended the reunification ceremony to witness the reintegration process were without words," commented head matron Hawa Vandi.

Familial reunification is not the final step taken by Restore Hope. The ministry provides case management services including counseling, educational support and transitional nutrition to 120 children who have completed the program and are settling into family units.

Children have the opportunity to reconnect with other children they knew at the Hope Center and meet other Ebola survivors. Additional community-based initiatives and a skills-training program are being developed to

support new family caregivers and foster the creation of healthy environments.

“Within this short-term program, we see long-term investments unfold,” said Aaron Pierce, director of international operations at Restore Hope. “Children receive restoration of mind, body and soul as they walk through the program coming out with a renewed identity of love, value and hope.”