



The National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Metropolitan Atlanta Chapter, Delta Air Lines, the Atlanta West End Rotary Club, and the Rotary Club of Monrovia

Project Fistula Launched in Liberia

Over the past three-years, The National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Inc., Metropolitan Atlanta Chapter (The Metropolitan Atlanta Chapter) has been committed to providing resources and support to Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of Liberia and the John F. Kennedy Memorial Hospital in Monrovia, Liberia by supporting medical missions, medical supplies and equipment, doctors and nurses in an effort to help restore hope in this war-torn country. The Metropolitan Atlanta Chapter and its partners are appealing to the donor community to assist in raising \$200,000 to support this effort using PayPal at www.ncbw-metroatlchapter.org.

Thanks to a generous gift from Delta Air Lines in the amount of \$220,000, The Metropolitan Atlanta Chapter has been able to provide over 115 complimentary air line tickets to doctors, nurses, and friends of Liberia to include 10 medical and trade missions, in an effort to help rebuild Liberia, a country with historic ties to the United States. The Metropolitan Atlanta Chapter has also partnered with the President of Liberia's son, Dr. James Sirleaf, Chairman of the board of HEARTT, Inc., to help support their efforts at the JFK Hospital.



Brian Jordan, Virginia Harris, Dr. James Sirleaf, Scarlet Pressley-Brown and Cynthia Nash at the \$220,000 Delta Air Lines Announcement Ceremony in 2007, Atlanta, Georgia

In October 2008, The Metropolitan Atlanta Chapter launched Project Fistula, in collaboration with Delta Air Lines, the Atlanta West End Rotary Club and the Rotary Club of Monrovia to develop a campaign to help bring awareness and resources to this medical condition that affects women and girls in a debilitating and heart-wrenching way. Project Fistula's work coincided with the International Colloquium on Women's Empowerment, Leadership Development, International Peace and Security 2009, convened by the President of Liberia and the President of Finland. The Metropolitan Atlanta Chapter has been involved in health and humanitarian efforts in Liberia since 2007, with a particular focus on the John F. Kennedy Memorial Hospital Women's Hospital Annex. Project Fistula is a continuation of their commitment to the President of Liberia and to its people.

What is Fistula?

Fistula is a severe medical condition that occurs when there is an abnormal opening between two organs of the body, most commonly caused by injury sustained during child birth (obstructed labor), rape, coital injury, ritual cleansing, and sexually transmitted diseases. It became clear that we needed a call to action to help our sisters on the other side of the water – to help bring dignity back to their lives.

Fistula can be linked with socio economic problems and cultural practices and women are often ostracized by their husbands and family members due to the smell of draining urine or feces. These innocent women and girls needed medical supplies, sanitary napkins, financial and other support and Project Fistula would become the vehicle in which to support the Fistula Unit and Recovery Center in Liberia.

In March 2009, The Metropolitan Atlanta Chapter provided complimentary Delta Air Lines tickets to 3 Liberian nurses in the Diaspora to spend 2-weeks at the Fistula Center to conduct surgery, to provide training and to give "dignity bags" to the afflicted fistula patients. The Atlanta West End Rotary Club, Women's Campaign International, Women's Funding Network and other donors provided housing, food and transportation support to help offset additional costs the nurses would incur.

The John F. Kennedy Hospital Fistula Center

In March 2009, the team of Liberian nurses from the U.S., members of the Colloquium and I, as Vice President of Resource Development for the Metropolitan Atlanta Chapter, Cynthia Blandford Nash, visited the Fistula Unit at the JFK Hospital, hosted by Dr. Jallah, the Director of the Fistula Unit. It was during this visit that my life changed forever.

I had visited the JFK Hospital over the past 3-years on various medical mission trips sponsored by the Metropolitan Atlanta Chapter; however, this visit was different. Walking through the corridor of the hospital, you could witness how the hospital had received repairs, fresh paint and new hospital beds. As we arrived at the Fistula Unit, where approximately 17 women were awaiting fistula surgery, the beds were covered with mosquito nets, and the women and girls were wearing frail gowns. Immediately, it was clear to me and others that these women and girls were squatting on buckets, on the floor, with gowns on. I had read about this during my research, however, to see your sisters sitting on buckets while their bodily fluids drained out of them, without control, broke my heart.

As Dr. Jallah explained, many of these women had been awaiting surgery for years, sometimes up to 20-years.



Cynthia Blandford Nash, Virginia Harris, Cynthia Williams and Donna Shaw, members of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women Metropolitan Atlanta Chapter at The John F. Kennedy Women's Hospital Annex, Monrovia, Liberia, 2007



Three U.S. based Liberia nurses assisting Dr. Jallah at the Fistula Center

The Beginning of the Liberian Fistula Project

We learned that The Liberian fistula project was established and launched April 6th, 2007 by MOH, UNFPA and JFK Medical Center. The project consists of a fistula prevention program, treatment of fistula patients and rehabilitation and reintegration of rejected patients. In addition, there were many preventative activities that include training of over 200 nurses and midwives, training of 20 doctors for the management of common obstetric emergencies including Caesarian section, inclusion of fistula management in the Country Program Action Plan, inclusion of fistula prevention and management in the curriculum of medical training institutions, and the affiliation of 20 Medical students in the JFK Fistula Unit.



Dr. John K. Mulbah, MD. Msc, Program Manager of the Fistula Reintegration Center at the Ribbon Cutting Ceremony in February 2009, in Liberia.

Fistula Women Sit on Buckets – Donation of Dignity Bags

It was at the Fistula Unit at JFK that our sisters preparing for surgery, sitting on their buckets, draining fluids, sang a song of hope and praise to the Metropolitan Atlanta Chapter, the Rotary Club and friends. We all cried.

We also gave out the dignity bags full of sanitary napkins, cleansers, spray wash bottles and a \$10 bill. After shedding more tears, one young sister came up to me and said, "May all that you touch prosper...may everything you set your hands on be a blessing to others..."and then we cried again. I was trembling and my heart was full.

Records of patients operated by this program noted that 24% of the 332 patients developed fistula at age 11 – 16 years, 35% at age 17- 20 years and 17% at age 21-25 years. This report is in accordance with a Reproductive survey conducted by UNFPA and other partners in 2007 that revealed 71% teenage pregnancy with 72% of women and girls between 15-49 years of age being physically violated.



Donation of Dignity Bags to Liberian women awaiting fistula surgery at the JFK Hospital, Monrovia. Dignity Bags included sanitary napkins, soap, spray wash bottles and a \$10 bill.



The Metropolitan Atlanta Chapter's Vice President, Resource Development, Cynthia Blandford Nash and 3-U.S. based Liberian nurses making donation of medical supplies to Dr. Jallah and the JFK staff in Monrovia, Liberia.

The Fistula Recovery Center in Jallah Town, Liberia

On another day, our team attended the graduation ceremony for women graduating from the Fistula Recovery Center in Jallah Town.

Under the leadership of Dr. Mullba, the head director for the recovery center and his team, a comprehensive approach is being applied for the fight against this stigmatizing situation affecting many women and girls of Liberia. This consists of Fistula prevention through strengthening Emergency Obstetric Care services, Fistula treatment through the provision of surgical services and a Rehabilitation and Reintegration of rejected fistula victims through a capacity building program. Since the launching of the program, 332 patients have benefited from various types of fistula surgeries with more than ninety percent (90%) success rate after the first surgery and the average age was between 11-20 years old and 58.28% of the 332 women who experienced fistula reported that they were rejected by their husbands.



The Fistula Rehabilitation and Reintegration Center in Jallah Town, Liberia

The Fistula Graduation

During the ceremony, women were smiling, conversing and walking proudly with dignity. The recovery center was for women who had completed their surgery and who were now participating in a 3-6 month recovery and reintegration program where they learned how to tie-die, make soap, learned how to tailor and bake. Over 40 women had been trained in such areas to help them learn a skill they could take back into their villages in an effort to become economically self-sufficient.

These young girls were beginning to tell their stories about how fistula had impacted their lives, speaking in patwah, a broken style Liberian English, that if you are not tuned in, you might miss out on something important. I was thankful that I could at least understand most of what Evelyn Weah was about to say, after having lived in Liberia as a Rotary Scholar in 1974-75, I could also speak the language as well, yet, I was certainly unprepared for what I was about to hear.



Fistula Graduation Ceremony at Jallah Town in Liberia

Evelyn's Story

Upon listening to Evelyn's story, through the tears and pauses in her remarks, you began to visualize the sheer pain and abuse this young women, 30-years old at the time of the Liberian Civil War, must have experienced.

Evelyn's story was so vivid...she was pregnant and having difficulties delivering..... in the bush.....and the villagers let loose a cup of red ants onto Evelyn' body as she lay on the ground. She gasped, as did those of us at the ceremony....trying to visualize what this young woman had to endure. Ants biting her over and over again....trying to expel the baby.

Then the horror went on...when the baby did not come... men and women sat on her stomach, pulling, prodding in her vagina while her legs were up in the air, men sitting on her stomach, as many as 4, 5, 6 people at a time. The baby came out dead and Evelyn's intestines came out too.....she passed out..... I thought I was going to throw-up.

Even telling this story today, I have to take a deep breath as the pain of my sister on this side of the pond...is the pain I feel for her on our side of the pond..... Evelyn became my inspiration and hope...and courage that if this young woman was smiling today and looking forward to tomorrow, how could I not want to do more to help Evelyn and other young women and girls like her in Liberia who held such promise.

Miss Liberia with Fistula Patients



Yamah Kollie's Story

Yamah Kollie's story was also full of pain. While Yamah also experienced obstetric fistula as a youth and had a similar story, Yahah was draining fluids from her vagina and the villagers complained of the smell, leaving her ostracized from her community.... She tried to commit suicide. Yamah and others like her did not deserve this type of treatment and humiliation. Something had to be done.

Our Commitment to the President and the People of Liberia

In 2007, the National Coalition of 100 Black Women Metropolitan Inc., Atlanta Chapter made a commitment to Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia, to provide resources and support to the John F. Kennedy with a particular focus on women and girls. In 2008, Project Healthy Families was launched in collaboration with the Metropolitan Atlanta Chapter, the Atlanta West End Rotary Club and the Rotary Club of Monrovia and in 2009, Project Fistula became the focus of our work. In addition to the Metropolitan Atlanta Chapters fundraising appeal through PayPal, in August 2009, a proposal will be submitted to the Rotary Foundation to help fund the Fistula Unit and Recovery Center in Monrovia.

Project Fistula Resources Needed - \$254,000+/year

In 2007, seven project sites were established to carry out surgeries in Monrovia and six rural hospitals and in 2009, an additional 3 project sites will be established.

Challenges:

Poor socio-economic status of patients

- Accessibility to project sites: Road conditions
- Increasing demand of fistula services.
- Funding to maximize the rehabilitation program



Road to Harper in 2008

The bellow budget is divided into 2 parts:

- A. An expansion of the facility to include a treatment facility with a total cost of **150,803.00 USD** including a generator
- B. Running cost for the facility both for the treatment unit when completed and the rehabilitation center
 - Yearly **254,025.00**
 - 5 years **1,270,928.05**

NO	Description	Cost	Total
A	BUILDING EXPANSION		
I.	Casting of ground floor foundation (Elevation already done)	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00USD
II.	Ground floor elevation, plumbing, casting and doors	\$ 33,864.50	\$ 33,864.50 USD
III.	Upper floor elevation, plumbing, roofing, doors	\$ 24,641.30	\$24,641.30 USD
IV	Electrical	\$ 16,797.25	\$ 16,797.25 USD
V.	Tiles and painting	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 15,000.00USD
VI	Equipment: Hospital beds and mattresses, bedside cupboards, stretchers etc...	\$ 50,000.00	\$ 50,000.00USD
VII	15KVA Diesel generator		\$ 7,500.00
	SUB-TOTAL		150,803.05
B	RUNNING COST		
		Yearly	5 Years
VIII	Drugs and medical supplies: 250 patients/year at \$125/patient for 5years	\$31,250.00	156,250.00
IX	Administrative cost for	\$5,000.00	25,000.00
	-Feeding: \$5,000.00/yr x5yrs -Laundry and Janitorial services : 2,000.00/yr x 5yrs	\$2,000.00	10,000.00
X	Fuel and maintenance for generator 8,700/yr x 5yrs	\$8,700.00	43,500.00
XI	One project vehicle for post training monitoring	38,000.00	38,000.00
XII	Fuel and maintenance for vehicle	\$8,700.00	43,500.00
XIII	Stationeries & Supplies (\$1,575.00/yr x 5yrs)	\$1,575.00	7,875.00
XIV	Office Equipment & Communications (\$2,000/yr x 5yrs)	\$ 2,000.00	10,000.00
XIII	Staff incentives including doctors, nurses and supporting staff (\$133,200 x 5yrs)	133,200.00	666,000.00
XIV	Lease of Facility	24,000.00	120.000
	Grand total (A+B)	254,025.00	\$1,270,928.05

