Two years ago, Kla Williams lost his job when his hometown of Monrovia, Liberia, was overwhelmed by Ebola.

He followed his impulse to help his country and is now a skilled infection prevention and control worker — one of hundreds of West Africans AmeriCares has trained in the lifesaving skills that prevent infections from spreading in hospitals, clinics and homes. “We are ready for any kind of outbreak, but before we were not ready,” says Williams.

Skilled health workers are critical to a full recovery. Before the Ebola crisis, families in Liberia and Sierra Leone had a difficult time accessing health services — rural clinics and urban hospitals were crowded and understaffed. The spread of Ebola made the situation more dire — not only did health workers die from the virus, but patients were reluctant to seek health services, as hospitals and clinics had sometimes unwittingly spread Ebola. As a result, people stayed away from health facilities: In Grand Bassa County, Liberia, people seeking care decreased by 20 percent; the number of pregnant women making clinic appointments dropped by 19 percent.

At two hospitals and a nursing school in Sierra Leone, AmeriCares is training more than 300 hospital staff and 500 nursing students in infection control, as well as supplying critical safety gear and upgrading facilities to build in safeguards against spread of infection.

In Grand Bassa County in Liberia, AmeriCares is working with the county health team to ensure that health services for mothers and newborns are expanded and improved at a clinic and district hospital. AmeriCares is giving health workers critical midwifery skills, as well as providing medicine, medical supplies and equipment and building new, separate clinic space for safe birthing.

“These programs will improve health at the community level, strengthening health systems to be resilient day-to-day as well as in times of crisis,” says Elikem Tomety Archer, AmeriCares senior director of global programs. “Women are leaders, so by focusing on them, we will help rebuild trust in the health system as well.”

AmeriCares began providing primary care in remote areas of Grand Bassa County, Liberia, in early 2015 (top). Kla Williams is one of hundreds now trained in infection prevention and control (above). With donated medicine, Tammie’s health conditions are under control (right).
When school starts in Kumasi, Ghana, students receive pencils, books and a little white pill — Vermox. The pill kills intestinal parasites that rob children of nutrients, creating weakness and even malnutrition. Treatment is simple and effective: Regular doses have been shown to increase school attendance, improve health and even boost earnings during adult years.

“Intestinal parasite infections are harmful to a child’s growth and development,” says Dr. Julie Varughese, AmeriCares medical officer. Children are infected by playing or walking barefoot in parasite-infected soil or by eating parasite eggs in contaminated soil or food.

Though treatment with a single pill once or twice a year may seem simple, real challenges exist in reaching the thousands of communities where children are most at risk. Johnson & Johnson has donated pharmaceutical and other healthcare products to AmeriCares for over 30 years because of its extensive network of global health partners. In 2014, J&J donated 24 million doses of Vermox (known generically as mebendazole) to AmeriCares to treat intestinal worms in vulnerable populations and communities. In the first year of the program, AmeriCares distributed doses to health partners in 16 countries, including Afghanistan, Armenia, Ghana, Honduras, Liberia and Nicaragua. The program will continue in the coming years.

“To promote better health of children, mebendazole is the most important drug in Afghanistan,” says Dr. Mohammad Amin, head of pediatrics at Afshar Hospital in Kabul, Afghanistan, which received 48,000 doses. “We highly appreciate those who provide this drug to Afshar Hospital.”
Partner in Profile: Bristol-Myers Squibb

Just 10 days after a magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck Nepal in April, AmeriCares airlifted critical medicine and supplies to Kathmandu, including diabetes medication and IV fluids donated by Bristol-Myers Squibb to support the immediate health needs of earthquake survivors.

Since 1986, Bristol-Myers Squibb has donated more than $43 million in medicine for emergencies like the Nepal earthquake. In all Bristol-Myers Squibb has donated $350 million in medicine to AmeriCares to help people in 116 countries access quality medicine.

In addition, the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation has provided critical funding for AmeriCares community health programs around the world. With its $50,000 donation, the foundation made the first financial commitment to AmeriCares Nepal earthquake response. Previous support includes sponsoring a diabetes diagnosis, treatment and patient education program in the Piura region of Peru and funding AmeriCares innovative health worker safety projects in Tanzania and India, which provide Hepatitis B vaccinations and training in safety techniques to medical professionals.

In June, AmeriCares presented its annual Power of Partnership Award to Bristol-Myers Squibb in recognition of its outstanding commitment to increasing access to medicine, health worker safety and improving the wellbeing of children worldwide. The award was presented in partnership with the Healthcare Distribution Management Association. “Bristol-Myers Squibb and the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation are among AmeriCares most consistent supporters,” says AmeriCares President and CEO Michael J. Nyenhuis.

“When focusing on the health of vulnerable populations in challenging geographies, no one sector can do it alone,” says John Damonti, president, Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation and head of Corporate Philanthropy. “It is only through the partnership of government, business and civil society that progress can be made. We are proud to partner with AmeriCares from India to Tanzania to Nepal to help those who are desperately in need.”

With Lifesaving Medicine, He Can Walk Again

When Dr. Jay Nielsen heard shouting outside a clinic in remote Savanette, Haiti, he found a young boy bleeding on the road: The boy’s foot had been so severely injured in a motorcycle accident that his foot was connected only by the Achilles tendon.

Nielsen was on one of his regular volunteer medical visits to the Missions International of America clinic to provide primary care and surgeries using medicine and supplies donated by AmeriCares.

“After we controlled the bleeding, we iced the foot and splinted the leg,” says Nielsen. A volunteer family practitioner packed IV solutions and needles, pain medicine and antibiotics donated by AmeriCares and accompanied the young patient to the hospital. The boy endured four surgeries and a month in the hospital — including two weeks on intravenous antibiotics supplied by AmeriCares.

Nielsen and his team return regularly and see their young patient, now able to walk with his friends, while they take care of other health crises. “Hernias that need repair, gall bladders that need removal, cancers that never got any surgery: It is horrifying how seriously ill people can be and walk into our clinic,” says Dr. Nielsen. “Without your products, I’d not be doing medical clinics.”

AmeriCares quick response to the earthquake in Nepal was a comfort to survivors (top). Quick action and quality supplies kept this boy alive after an accident (above). Drew and Liz Stackel include AmeriCares in their estate plan (top right).
Guatemala: Guatemalans face a silent emergency every day — close to half of children age 5 and younger are undernourished. AmeriCares provided more than $27 million in aid to Guatemala last year.

Burundi: As violence continues in Burundi, AmeriCares emergency supplies are helping refugees fleeing to Tanzania.

Myanmar: AmeriCares worked with community leaders after August floods in Myanmar to distribute emergency aid, including enough water purification packets to provide nearly 16,000 families with clean water for one month.