



UN Volunteer Arinaitwe Mary Immaculate (standing) during a community sensitization on the Ebola procedures and mental health indicators at Lorinda cell Busabala, Uganda.

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## Helping patients and families recover from Ebola virus infection

Twenty UN Volunteers have been at the forefront of the World Health Organization's response to the Ebola virus outbreak in Uganda. Meet Arinaitwe and Maria, who have been providing health and psychosocial support as specialized UN Volunteers.

### **Arinaitwe Mary Immaculate, Psychosocial Support Officer with WHO Uganda**

Arinaitwe is an experienced psychologist who has been practicing in mental health and psychosocial support for over four years. Following years of building her skills, she became a national UN Volunteer, aspiring to grow professionally and network with experts from various disciplines.

“ My role is to provide mental health and psychosocial support services to Ebola survivors within the Survivor's Clinic established by WHO, the Government and partners. I raise community awareness and sensitize on the Ebola virus, while also identifying and development technical aspects of the programme. --Arinaitwe Mary Immaculate, Psychosocial Support Officer with WHO, Uganda

Volunteering with WHO has given me an opportunity to work for a cause that saved people's lives – providing support to individuals and communities has been a fulfilling experience. It has also been a learning experience for my career – I am grateful to be learning and contributing together with fellow experts.

I have been actively engaged with the Survivor's Clinic for six months and am proud my contribution has been valued. As an experienced psychologist, I have had an opportunity to support the health and wellbeing of Ebola survivors and helped them recover from the difficulties and trauma they faced. One of the survivors have to say:

*“After my husband and I checked out of the Ebola virus treatment unit, my husband started to drink alcohol heavily. He was distressed due to the collapse of his business during the*

*long period of our hospitalization. He started to develop temper issues, would come home in the mornings heavily drunk and would misbehave with me and my children. We decided to attend therapy sessions at the Survivors Clinic – a decision that helped save our marriage. I am happy to share that we both have resumed our normal lives: we are working, taking care of our children and focusing on rebuilding our family business. I am grateful for the support we received from the clinic and the psychologist – we did not know that by talking about our problems, we would be able to solve them.” –35-year-old woman who survived Ebola and used the services of the Survivor’s Clinic, Waksio, Uganda*

### **Maria Gorret Nantaayi, Nurse and Case Management Officer, WHO Uganda**

Maria is a Nurse and national UN Volunteer Case Management Officer who graduated from Mbarara University of Science and Technology in Uganda with a bachelor’s degree in Nursing. Prior to becoming a UN Volunteer, she worked in the COVID-19 response unit of the Mulago National Referral Hospital. Maria has also participated in a number of research studies.

“ Being a UN Volunteer has always been my dream. I have always wanted to bring positive change to vulnerable communities and individuals. –Maria Gorret Nantaayi, Nurse and Case Management Officer with WHO, Uganda

My responsibilities include supporting clinical management and direct nursing care of suspected and confirmed cases of Ebola. I also assist health facilities in upgrading standards and practice of infection prevention and control in the treatment centres.

I serve in the Survivor’s Clinic, along with other UN Volunteers and WHO colleagues. We work hand in hand during the follow up visits, where we conduct different tests of survivors and monitor their weight and vital signs to monitor and document their vitality and recovery. For example, Ebola can remain prevalent in the semen of male survivors. This poses a heightened threat for further spread of the virus, so we test at every check-up visit. Where male survivors have persistent Ebola virus in their semen, we conduct counselling sessions and supply condoms to prevent recurrent Ebola virus infections.

This is where the psychosocial team comes in. My fellow volunteers offer counselling and emotional support to the survivors and help in community awareness campaigns, as a way of re-integrating them in their communities. In cases where survivors need even more specialized care, timely referrals are made.

Working out of my scope of practice has been one of the challenges I have faced as a UN Volunteer, especially during sample collection when lab personnel were not available. As a

case management nurse, I have stepped in to draw blood samples and assist the lab team.

“ One of the doctors in the clinic, Dr Amanda Kisaamo, once said to me; "Your smile is therapeutic. You give people hope and positive energy with your professional and empathetic approach."

I am so proud of myself for having taken up this volunteering assignment. It has been a life-changing opportunity that involves meeting the needs of vulnerable populations and going out of my way to leave a positive impact.



<https://www.unv.org/Success-stories/enabling-contact-tracing-and-infection-control-ebola-crisis>



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