



Rebecca Richardson (back right), Research Fellow in Communication Aspects of Infectious Disease Risk Reduction at Northumbria University, Newcastle, carrying out research in Nairobi

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Researcher's role in emergency phone line recognised with Palace invite

A Disaster Management expert from Northumbria University, Newcastle who spent last summer managing a support line for people affected by the Grenfell Tower fire, has received royal recognition for her work.

Rebecca Richardson spent three months working for the [British Red Cross](#), managing an emergency support line set up to deal with a number of major incidents across the UK.

These included the Manchester Arena terrorist attack last May and the London bridge terrorist attack and Grenfell Fire tragedy in June, with thousands of calls made by people effected by all three incidents.

In recognition of her commitment, Rebecca, an expert in Disaster Management and Emergency Planning, was among the guests invited to Prince Charles' 70th birthday party at Buckingham Palace last week.

After being specifically selected by the Red Cross to manage the support line, which was set up last May following the Manchester Arena bombing, Rebecca worked to support the 70 volunteers and five members of staff manning the phone lines.

Many of the calls received were from the families of those who lost their lives in the three incidents, or those who had witnessed them take place and required support.

Rebecca said: "My area of academic expertise is Disaster Management and I had already worked for the British Red Cross in the past during the Calais Refugee Crisis Response, so after the terrible events in Manchester last May the charity asked if I would manage the emergency support line they were setting up.

"The following month the London Bridge terror attack took place, followed by the Grenfell Tower fire, so the emergency support line was made available to people affected by those incidents too.

"All three events had a huge impact on so many people and the volunteers and staff I was managing did a fantastic job providing advice and support, as well as signposting callers for additional help, all under difficult circumstances."

Rebecca was nominated by the British Red Cross to attend the garden party, which took place at the Palace on Tuesday 22 May.

She said: "It really is a huge honour, especially when I was working alongside so many amazing and selfless people during those three months. I hope this will help raise the profile of the amazing work carried out by the British Red Cross here in the UK."

Rebecca joined Northumbria University's Faculty of Engineering and Environment in September, as a Research Fellow in Communication Aspects of Infectious Disease Risk Reduction. She is working with North East charity [No Strings International](#), which uses puppets to create films for children in emergencies around the world, with the aim of raising awareness of issues around health and wellbeing.

She is currently researching the impact of the project in Kenya, where the charity is working with children in five schools in the slums of Nairobi, raising awareness of the importance of personal hygiene such as hand washing, and of clean water.

Rebecca said: “No Strings International works in very challenging environments where there are issues such as open defecation, lack of facilities in children’s homes and no running water. Using the puppets to communicate is an interactive and fun way to teach the children about the importance of hand washing for example. It’s a small change but one which can make a huge difference in terms of overall health and quality of life.”

No Strings International was set up by Rosie Waller, a Northumbria University alumnus who studied for an MSc in Community Wellbeing and Disasters and Development. She said: “We really value our relationship with Northumbria University, and have been lucky to get Becky on board. She’s an incredibly positive and thoughtful person and I know she will have made a difference to a lot of people in real distress during her time with the Red Cross.”

Northumbria University is home to the [Disaster and Development Network](#), which aims to develop through research, teaching and learning, the knowledge and skills to address hazards, disasters and complex emergencies from the perspective of different development debates and experience.

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