Campaign to protect community care workers

**Masked Heroes**

**SUPPORTING COMMUNITY CARE WORKERS**

Masked Heroes, a national campaign to protect and support community care workers (CCWs) during the Covid-19 pandemic, was officially launched at the end of July 2020, and has started delivering personal protective equipment (PPE) to community-based organisations across the country.

Coordinated by the DG Murray Trust (DGMT) in partnership with REDISA and the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results at the University of the Witwatersrand, the campaign will be providing PPE, psychosocial support, information and communication to tens of thousands of CCWs across the country in the coming months. This effort is in response to a bottom-up demand, and complements the Government’s distribution of PPE to health facilities.

CCWs include community health workers, emergency services personnel, social workers and social auxiliary workers, child and youth care workers, as well as food and other relief workers. As the Covid-19 epidemic continues to unfold, protection of frontline CCWs is crucial in preventing them from becoming both victims and vectors of infection. Keeping CCWs healthy will also help ensure that support, relief and counselling systems are in place as communities experience extreme duress and rising mortality.

Lorrie Allen from the Charlize Theron Africa Outreach project said, ‘The age of Covid has drawn into sharp clarity how crucial it is for all communities to be within reach and have access to healthcare – whether it be through the distribution of much-needed PPE, or the support of women and children experiencing gender-based violence at home during lockdown.’

The efforts of CCWs often go unseen, says Dr Jonathan Broomberg, Health Response Lead for the Solidarity Fund. ‘We salute community care workers for the critical role they play in the country’s efforts to keep our communities functioning. We pay tribute to them for their courage and dedication.’

Executive Director of ELMA Philanthropies, Bernadette Moffat shared this sentiment, adding that, ‘we cannot let these heroes provide such service unprotected.’

Wherever possible, the procurement team have worked with local providers of PPE, including the Stellenbosch Nanofiber Company (SNC). ‘When we saw the pandemic was leading to a global shortage of PPE, we decided to refocus our efforts on helping to solve this problem locally,’ said Dr Eugene Smit, Business Development Manager and CEO. ‘SNC set out to develop a nanofiber-based surgical mask that would meet medical device requirements.’

Distribution of the much-needed PPE, as well as Covid-19 educational content is coordinated through a bespoke logistics system developed and managed by REDISA. Coca-Cola in South Africa, which comprises of its bottling partners Coca-Cola Beverages South Africa and Coca-Cola Peninsula Beverages, has to date provided distribution support of PPE to community-based organisation (CBOs) supporting CCWs across Gauteng and the Western Cape.

In turn these CBOs will manage and distribute stock to registered CCWs in their communities. Additionally, many of them will undergo training through the Masked Heroes campaign’s team of psychologists to provide much needed psychological first aid support to CCWs.

Masked Heroes project manager, Sinazo Nkwelo, shared that ‘the successful delivery of PPE and other forms of support to CCWs is also testament to the power of great collaboration, how the private and NGO sectors can together, efficiently and effectively, meet social needs. This project could not be possible without the uniquely important contributions of everyone involved. Thank you to our funders who responded very quickly and with great compassion toward this urgent need and thank you also to all our partners, without whom we would not be able to reach and serve community care workers.’

To the tens of thousands of community care workers across the country, our unsung heroes, we appreciate the contributions and sacrifices you make daily – thank you.’

The Masked Heroes campaign is supported by The Solidarity Fund, The ELMA South Africa Foundation, Coca-Cola in South Africa, which comprises its bottling partners Coca-Cola Beverages South Africa and Coca-Cola Peninsula Beverages, The Johnson & Johnson Foundation, The Entertainment Industry Foundation, The Charlize Theron Africa Outreach Project (CTAOP) and The Horace W Goldsmith Foundation.

For more information, visit maskedheroes.org.za, find them at @MaskedHeroesSA, or email info@maskedheroes.org.za.

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