Masked Heroes campaign delivers PPE to community-based organisations

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 national Masked Heroes campaign aims to protect and support community care workers (CCWs) during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Launched late last month, the campaign has started delivering personal protective equipment (PPE), and will also be providing psychosocial support, information and communication to community care workers across the country in the coming months. This effort is in response to a bottom-up demand, and complements the government's distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE) to health facilities.

Community care workers 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.

Accessing healthcare

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 community care workers 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."

Local procurement

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 PPE, as well as Covid-19 educational content is coordinated through a logistics system developed and managed by Redisa. Coca-Cola in South Africa, which comprises 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.

Great collaboration

Masked Heroes project manager Sinazo Nkwelo shared that, "The successful delivery of PPE and other forms of support to community care workers 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."

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

For more information, go to www.maskedheroes.org.za.