



Dear Bitou Resident,

30 April 2020

This newsletter is written to keep you updated with the latest locally pertinent information we have regarding the Covid -19 pandemic's effect on our community as well as the activities of the response team that has been convened to coordinate our local response to the threat.

Firstly, a huge thank you to our donors. We have received a total of R3 731 450 in donations, of which the Bitou Municipality contributed R200 000 towards the isolation and quarantine facilities and R1 050 000 for food parcels handed out over the Easter weekend. Our total expenditure thus far has been R1 912 355. R1 124 722 has been spent on food aid and the rest on medical and personal protective equipment.

I am happy to report that it appears the national lockdown, the strict isolation and contact tracing of positive cases and other preventative measures have reduced the spread of coronavirus in Bitou. Our total number of cases is unchanged and all 5 cases have recovered.

The Western Cape Department of Health initiated door-to-door screening and the first area they identified was Kranshoek, where screening and testing started last week. In collaboration with Hospice Plett and their community health care workers, all Kranshoek residents were screened and those with suggestive symptoms were referred for further testing. The screening program has been a great opportunity to educate the community on Covid-19 preventative measures. We donated 4000 homemade masks which were distributed to the households that were screened. The community health care workers were asked to circulate the educational video recently made by the Berning family, on how to use and look after your mask. Door-to-door screening was done in Wittedrift on 30 April and will commence in Kwanokuthula from 4 May.

We are setting up the first isolation unit at the Piesang Valley Community Hall. With the help of the Bitou Municipality, the necessary maintenance and cleaning will be done this week and hopefully the hall should be set up and partitioned next week. It is imperative that we protect the health of the staff working in the quarantine and isolation facilities. We are therefore working closely with the Department of Health (DoH) and the Plett GP's to ensure that we adhere to the appropriate guidelines. We are setting up a decontamination unit, through which staff and patients

leaving the facility will have to pass to ensure that the virus is not spread beyond the facility. We shall be able to replicate this unit at other facilities, should the need arise.

The majority of our medical and personal protective equipment has arrived and is being safely stored in a fully alarmed storeroom. We have a team of volunteers in charge of stock control and we are setting up protocols to ensure that we can manage this stock effectively.

We meet with the Western Cape DoH, the South African Police Service, the Department of Social Development, the Bitou Municipality, the Disaster Management Team, the Plett GP's and Hospice Plett regularly to ensure that we are all well informed and are as ready as we can be for a worst case scenario.

Cecily van Heerden from Hospice Plett, is collaborating with counsellors, psychologists and social workers to establish a network that will be able to provide patients and their families with psycho-social support during the pandemic. This includes establishing a communication network to enable patients and their families to access this service easily. Cecily and Hilary Gray from Knysna Sedgefield Hospice are collaborating to provide palliative care training for all healthcare worker disciplines in the coming weeks. Our Bitou Covid-19 Hotline is on standby and will be activated when the need arises. This will be manned by trained healthcare workers.

A big concern for us is the growing number of hungry people in the community. We noticed that there were many privately run feeding schemes and our concern was that not all the vulnerable groups were being identified and that some individuals may be benefiting from more than one donor. We therefore set up a centralised feeding programme and we are extremely grateful to have Rob Bokelmann as the food aid coordinator. He manages a group of volunteers in charge of the respective Bitou Wards. There is one volunteer per ward and these volunteers work closely with the ward counsellors to identify the vulnerable groups and existing feeding initiatives that need support. The ward counsellors and the volunteers collaborate and generate one recipient list to ensure the donations are fairly distributed. We have donation trolleys at various supermarkets and grocery stores which are collected daily and taken to our central food depot at the Methodist Church. Alternatively members of the community can take their food donations directly to the Methodist Church between 9h00 - 13h00, Monday to Friday. Thank you to Nadja Fredericks and her team of volunteers who are coordinating the central food depot. The food gets packed into food parcels and equally distributed to the wards where individual families have been earmarked. Food is also distributed to the soup kitchens.

It has been a long process to try and obtain permission to re-open existing and to establish new soup kitchens in Plett. At last we have a protocol on how this can be done safely. All soup kitchens need to get a certificate of compliance from the Garden Route DoH, where after permits will be issued by the Garden Route Disaster Management Team. Thank you to Louise Auersperg who is the volunteer in charge of fast tracking and facilitating this process.

Thank you to Carmen van der Westhuizen for being in communication with the soup kitchens to ascertain and communicate their needs to the central food depot. We have designed a set of guidelines for all the feeding schemes and wherever possible we are providing the recipients with homemade masks and hand sanitiser. Marius Venter is in the process of setting up very well labelled Jojo tanks at the soup kitchens containing F10 sanitizer. Members of the community will be able to collect a 500ml bottle of F10 sanitiser to take home. This is a great initiative for providing safe and affordable sanitiser to the community.

Last week, Rob Bokelmann and his incredible team delivered more than 50 000 meals to the needy people of Bitou. The Bitou Covid-19 Response Team bought 320 25kg bags of JAM (Joint Aid Management) porridge which arrived in Plett on Friday. This will provide approximately 100 000 meals. The porridge was delivered to 1252 homes in Qolweni, Pinetrees and Bossiegif on Sunday and Monday. We shall be purchasing another 640 bags of JAM in the next few weeks for distribution in the other wards. The Sabrina Love Foundation and Afrika Tikkun donated a total of 1033 food boxes containing fresh produce and dry goods. The contents of these boxes were divided up and some produce was sent to approximately 40 soup kitchens in the Bitou area and the rest was distributed as food parcels, door-to-door. All recipients of food aid have to sign a register that is collated and checked regularly by the ward counsellors and the food aid coordinators.

Masks4All Plett & Beyond, run and coordinated by Stephen Ritky, has produced and distributed 39 095 masks of which 34 876 have been given, at no cost, to the less financially able people in Plett. Donations and sales have generated R412 376, which has been paid out to the local community teams making masks. Steve works day and night to ensure that we reach our goal of 47 000 masks distributed in the Bitou area.

A number of newsletters have gone out asking for donations and there was some conflicting information in some of the letters regarding the management of funds left over in the account after this pandemic. In our first letter requesting funds we said that left-over funds will be proportionately returned to donors or donated to local NGOs. Another letter stated that leftover funds will be used towards continuing food security for Bitou residents. The Bitou Covid-19 Response Team agreed that food support is going to be needed for a considerable time after the slowing down of the pandemic and want to place it on record that any left-over funds will go towards food support.

The Bitou Covid-19 Response Team would like to thank the very generous and caring Bitou residents for your support. This is a very uncertain time and our role is constantly evolving. With the growing number of unemployed residents we feel obligated to direct more of the funds received to ensuring that our community is well fed. We are trying to establish the most sustainable way forward in this regard.