



PHILANI

Maternal, Child Health and Nutrition Trust
Healthy mothers raising healthy children

Newsletter

JUNE 2020



Covid-19 update

Letter from the Director

Dear Friends,

As South Africa moved to Level 3 on June 1st, most of Philani's management and administrative staff returned to their offices in Khayelitsha which had been cleaned and sanitized. Rules are in place with screening at the gates, masks and social distancing. Although many are anxious, structures and rules help to create a sense of safety.

As essential workers, our mentor mothers have been on duty supporting the Department of Health with screening and testing and delivering medication to the elderly and chronically ill. They have kept in contact with their clients by telephone during the strict lock-down and have now started their home visits again.

Three of our staff members have tested positive for the Coronavirus and have all recovered and are well.

Organisations and individuals have set up soup kitchens and distributed food parcels to people in need with great generosity and the government has increased grants for vulnerable families. By being in the community on the ground, our mentor mothers are able to identify families in need of special support and facilitate that support.

Our staff members share their stories with you in this newsletter.

With warmest regards,

Ingrid le Roux



Our Covid-19 Experiences



On March 26 the President announced a shutdown in South Africa. It was strange for me to sit at home and not be able to go to work. I was scheduled to visit the Eastern Cape a week before the shutdown. The trip was postponed. On the day I was supposed to travel I fell ill and I think it was due to the anxiety of flying. I was afraid of contracting the virus at the airport as it was presented as a disease from overseas. Little did I know that it was going to affect our own communities.

Our office was shut down but mentor mothers remained at work. They moved from touching and hugging to waving and wearing face masks. I could not imagine how their lives were but I continued to communicate with them via WhatsApp and email.

I could not continue to stay home. After three weeks, I went to visit the mentor mothers. I was traumatised to see them behind masks. I could only see their smile through their eyes. I was so grateful to be able to see them and they were also happy to see me. I just wished I had given each one of them a hug the last time I saw them before Corona. Together, we tried to identify ways of working while minimizing the risk for both our clients and mentor mothers.

Everything was going smoothly until 45 of our mentor mothers were in close contact with a Covid-19 positive employee at a health facility. Anxiety from all the staff compelled me to visit the office again to see them in person and calm them down. We arranged testing for all of them and they were quarantined for 14 days. Two mentor mothers of the 45 tested positive. It was scary and we had to support them from afar. I am thankful to God that they were not sick at all and did not infect their families.

Corona has disrupted our work plans (training and trips that were planned) however we are hopeful that we will be able to find solutions soon.

Corona has taught me to be technologically flexible. I am able to help my children with online learning. We also learned to shop online which was something I was too reluctant to do previously. I have learned to know my children better, learned cooking and baking.

I reflected on my routine before Corona and found that I never gave myself anytime to be lazy and rest which shutdown had awarded me. I remained positive in that period.

I am very appreciative to our mentor mothers who have flown the Philani flag high in these difficult times. I am really proud of their hard work and honesty. I have learned to love and tell everyone what I appreciate about them. I have also learned to listen to my fears and allow myself time to rebuild courage.

I hope that Corona goes away soon so that we are able to have our month-end workshops, sing, hug, kiss and pray together without masks. I am looking forward to that time.

Nokwanele Mbewu - Senior Programme Manager



What I like most about the lockdown has been the closure of shebeens and the banning of alcohol. Now there is peace. People are not spending their money on alcohol, but rather clothes and food. Our hospitals are not full of people that have been stabbed or injured on the road due to the abuse of alcohol.

Noluro Mbolo - Mentor Mother



I am in a state of distress, troubled in my soul, when every morning the number of the infected people increases, the sting of death is felt.

What scares me most is that people ignore the guidelines and regulations. They roam up and down in the street, not worrying about social distancing.

When the government set aside money for more beds and built hospitals for infected people, my fears grew. It became evident that many people will be infected and many will die. Truly, I never thought that South Africa would be affected.

Nomazwi Zembe - Mentor Mother

Lockdown has had its ups and downs.

The malls are congested, preventing us from doing all the things we need to, the streets are crowded with children and adults, and we cannot have the funerals and burials that people deserve.

On the other hand, my son has been at home, and he has been able to gain weight. The lockdown has also resulted in the closure of many places selling alcohol which has reduced the number of accidents.

Nolusindiso Mdala - ARV facilitator



I first heard about Coronavirus on television. When it spread to other countries I became worried, not knowing if it was coming to South Africa.

Thank you to our president for acting swiftly in closing the borders and airports. People were traveling outside of the country for work unaware that they were bringing the virus to their families and friends at home.

This virus caused a lot of damage to people's lives, the future of our children, the economy and it has left many people unemployed. It changed everything – nothing will be normal again. We need to adjust to the present and plan carefully for our lives and for the organization to be able to run smoothly. Everyone needs to work hard to assist each other at this time.

During lockdown, I felt the devastating effects of this virus to the communities we serve. In these communities, poverty and unemployment is high. I have also been worried about mothers and children.

The ban on alcohol and smoking has made me happy. Drinking mothers will now be able to take care of their children.

Many thanks to the leaders of the country for acting smartly at this difficult time. And thanks to all the front-line workers – health care workers and security and transport services.

A big thank-you to the mentor mothers and other community health workers who have done great work during this trying time and thanks to Philani management for providing support to staff and mentor mothers.

Khanyisa Peter - Digital Officer

On its arrival, Covid-19 did not sit well with me. Everything suddenly came to a stop. At the clinics, I can see not everyone is attended to. If you do not show any signs of having the virus during screening, you are told that you are not an emergency.

There is a limited number of people allowed when there is a death in the family. In the Xhosa culture, we believe that there we should be there to witness the death of a family member in order to confirm that our member is really gone. We cannot do that now.

Personally, I have found that I run out of food faster – the cupboards are empty – the children are home and are eating more than usual.

Despite the hardships, we thank Government for doing their best to ensure that people are receiving updated information in order to keep safe.

Nomasithobelane Bartman - Mentor Mother



I am constantly worried about my clients. Some of them are in the early stages of pregnancy. I keep connecting with them to check if they are experiencing any danger signs.

Mandisa Dastile - Mentor Mother

When it started I said that Covid-19 was an overseas problem and thought it would never reach us. When it arrived in South Africa, I did not believe it. Infections and deaths escalated quickly. I panicked – not knowing if I was infected or not. Since then I have been worried whether I am doing the right thing to avoid becoming infected. I do my best by always wearing a mask, staying inside when I can and practising good hygiene, but I worry that it might not be enough.

Nolusindiso Nontshinga - Mentor Mother

Testing positive for Covid-19

On 04/05/2020, I was tested for Covid-19. I was not feeling well – I was suffering from headaches and I had lost my sense of smell and taste. I went into quarantine at home. It was difficult staying alone in my room, drinking things that people in the community recommend and worrying about my results.



I kept asking myself what if the results came back positive – was I going to die and leave my family and people that I love? Even when I watched TV, all I heard and saw was people dying from Coronavirus which was very stressful.

On 14/05/2020, I received a call informing me that my results were back and they were positive. I felt like I was dreaming. I didn't know whether to tell my children or my mother but in the end I decided to tell my sister. She was so supportive.

I am a survivor of Covid-19. I'm healthy and I'm back at work

Thumeka Gxilishe - Breastfeeding Peer Counsellor

I was tested for Coronavirus after the person I share an office with at work tested positive. I was stressed because I thought I would get it too. I was very happy when my results came back negative.

A week later I started experiencing back pain and was coughing and vomiting. I visited the clinic. Because I have diabetes, they tested my blood sugar levels - it was high. They put me on a drip but my sugar levels stayed very high (over 21), so they referred me to Khayelitsha District Hospital (KDH). I stayed in the waiting room at KDH for more than 24 hours. During that time, the diarrhoea started. At KDH they tested me for Coronavirus. I was then referred to Tygerberg Hospital (TBH) where I was quarantined for one day. When my results came back as positive, I was moved to a Covid-19 ward with four other women.

During my stay in hospital, I felt strong. After sharing stories with the other women in the ward of how we were admitted and infected, I had hope. I realised I was not as bad off as the others.

I spent 11 days at TBH. I received oxygen and was on a drip. During that time, I was enrolled in a Coronavirus research study where I was tested in each nostril every second day for a week. The last day they tested me my results came back negative for Coronavirus and my x-rays and ECG were clear. I was discharged at the end of May but was told by the Doctor to self-isolate at home for 2 weeks.

Going back to work made me anxious. I was afraid. When entering the health facility, I had flashbacks of being in hospital. More and more staff at the facility are testing positive and the number of people infected in the community continues to rise.

Now, I feel tired. Even though my husband is doing all the chores at home, I am still tired and sometimes I can't sleep at night. I test my sugar regularly and it is under control.

Thankfully, I did not infect my family. But I still do not know where and how I was infected.

Anonymous

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