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CONTACT DETAILS OF THE GCIS PROVINCIAL OFFICES

For more information about similar programmes that are run across the country, contact one of the following provincial offices:

EASTERN CAPE

Ndlelantle Pinyana
043 722 2602 or 076 142 8606
ndlelantle@gcis.gov.za

FREE STATE

Yolisa Blom
051 448 4506 or 072 130 9893
yolisa@gcis.gov.za

GAUTENG

Peter Gumede
011 331 0164 or 083 570 8080
peterg@gcis.gov.za

KWAZULU-NATAL

Ndala Mgadi
031 301 6787 or 082 877 9420
ndala@gcis.gov.za

PRIORITY 2: EDUCATION, SKILLS AND HEALTH.

A long road to recovery for an Eastern Cape essential worker

By Sinoxolo Gqala: GCIS, Eastern Cape



Mr Mekuto has recovered from COVID-19.

What started as a good deed for a public servant ended in a month-long road to recovery from COVID-19 for the Eastern Cape South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) Corporate Services Acting General Manager Mziwonke Mekuto from King Williams Town. When the country went to a total lockdown on 27 March 2020, it was just three days before the April social grant payment cycle, where the entire province is abuzz with activities as beneficiaries descend to towns to access their money, essential goods and services.

The national lockdown also meant that most sectors of the economy, including the informal sector were shut down to limit the spread of the coronavirus. During the declaration of the National State of Disaster, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced a variety of response measures, including the provision of the social relief of distress to deserving people – a responsibility of the SASSA and the Department Social Development (DSD). This meant that officials from the agency and the DSD would work throughout the lockdown.

Mr Mekuto was deployed to the Nelson Mandela Metro to oversee the administration and distribution of the social relief of distress in form of food parcels to destitute families. During that time, the Nelson Mandela Metro was the province's hotspot, with numbers rising sharply.

"I was deployed to monitor the distribution of food parcels in Nelson Mandela for two weeks. We interacted with families in townships and social grant beneficiaries at pay points. On my second week, the District Manager informed me that a colleague whom I had interacted with in the line of duty had contracted the virus. We called the Department of Health to test us. On 22 April 2020, results came back and I was coronavirus positive although I showed no symptoms. I told my family to prepare a room for me so that I could not interact with anyone on my arrival back from Port Elizabeth," said Mr Mekuto.

Mr Mekuto's second test after 14 days also came back positive. "I tested positive twice and I was cleared on the third test. I spent 24 days in quarantine. After the first test I adopted a positive attitude and told myself that I will defeat the virus, so when the second test came back positive, it didn't deter me



LIMPOPO

Thanyani Ravhura
015 291 4689 or 082 421 3461
thanyani@gcis.gov.za

MPUMALANGA

Jerry Nkosi
013 753 2397 or 082 316 5295
Jerry@gcis.gov.za

NORTH WEST

Boitumelo Mosadi
018 381 7071 or 073 245 0906
boitumelom@gcis.gov.za

NORTHERN CAPE

Marius Nagel
053 832 1378/9 or 083 778 9179
mariusn@gcis.gov.za

WESTERN CAPE

Geraldine Thopps
021 418 0533/2307 or
081 281 2200
Geraldine@gcis.gov.za

from fighting. My entire family tested negative and that helped a lot as I had people to care and support me. Defeating the virus requires discipline and all the support you can get," he said.

"The road to healing from this virus is not easy and you have to fight the virus and stigma at the same time. COVID-19 is not a death sentence but we should follow all regulations to avoid getting infected. I feel so lucky and blessed to have made it alive and be coronavirus free. I am on top of the world but I am careful because this virus can hit you again and again," he said.

Mr Mekuto is back at work and urges everyone to be responsible as the country is slowly opening for more activities. He has been working for the SASSA for close to 15 years.

PRIORITY 2: EDUCATION, SKILLS AND HEALTH.

COVID-19 awareness campaign and distribution drive

By Lihle Nxumalo: GCIS, KwaZulu-Natal



Mnini Thusong Service Centre Supervisor Ayanda Vezi engaging the community during the awareness and distribution drive.



GCIS official, Ms Lihle Nxumalo, explaining the COVID-19 health and safety protocols.



Health and safety precautions are taken at the Mnini Thusong Service Centre before anyone can enter the facility.

The eThekweni Municipality has been identified as a COVID-19 hotspot in KwaZulu-Natal – areas South of Durban have the highest number of infections in the province. Community members use the Isiphingo Central Business District as their nodal point where they access goods and services for their livelihood.

This results in a lot congestion in this area with some community members not adhering to health and safety protocols. Most community members use the Mnini Thusong Service Centre to access services from the South African Social Security Agency, the Department of Social Development, the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS), the Department of Labour, the Department of Home Affairs, Operation Sukuma Sakhe and the Councillor's Office.

Service providers based at the Mnini Thusong Service Centre held a COVID-19 awareness campaign and distribution drive, on 30 June 2020, to educate people and heighten awareness on the pandemic. This was also a chance for the public to engage officials on services offered at the centre. This campaign was a success as the community members were receptive of the information shared.



President Ramaphosa at Cyril Clarke Secondary School.



President Ramaphosa, Health Minister Zweli Mkhize and the delegation during a visit to Rob Ferreira Hospital.

PRIORITY 2: EDUCATION, SKILLS AND HEALTH.

President Cyril Ramaphosa visits Ehlanzeni District

By Joy Themba: GCIS, Mpumalanga

On 3 July 2020, President Cyril Ramaphosa visited Mpumalanga to assess the province's compliance with lockdown regulations and its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. He held a meeting with the Provincial Command Council where he was briefed on the strategy used by the provincial government to respond to the pandemic. He later visited Cyril Clarke Secondary School to monitor progress made in managing the impact and spread of the virus in schools and ended his visit at the Rob Ferreira Hospital.

The President said he found it impressive that the provincial government had set up coronavirus forums at ward levels and announced that he would like to see this practised in other provinces around the country. He commended the provincial government for the good strategies.

The President was further pleased with the Provincial Coronavirus Response Strategy and that it had identified key priority areas which are meant to manage the health crisis. He further advised the province not to relax as the virus is at its peak. "More effort should be made to get our people to change their behaviour," said the President.

At Cyril Clarke Secondary School, the President said he was impressed that protocols put in place by the Department of Education were being observed. He reiterated that government was not considering going back to another hard lockdown but was seeking to balance saving lives and preserving livelihoods.

PRIORITY 4: SPATIAL INTEGRATION, HUMAN SETTLEMENTS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT.

Food parcel donations to residents of Nkandla

By Masego Mollo: GCIS, Northern Cape



The delegation distributing food parcels to residents of Nkandla, in Hartswater.



Premier Saul greeting a resident of Nkandla.

On 10 June 2020, the Northern Cape Premier, Dr Zamani Saul, distributed food parcels to residents of Nkandla, in Hartswater. The food parcels were donated by international diamond company, De Beers, to assist residents in one of the poor areas in the Frances Baard District Municipality.

The Premier was accompanied by the Provincial Legislature Deputy Speaker Mangaliso Matika, representatives of De Beers and representatives of provincial and local government. He also commended the local medical team for their sterling work in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.