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**NPOwer**

Supporting the mental health of South African NPOs

Tshikululu SADAG NPO Support Helpline:

**0800 515 515**

SMS number 43010



**Press Release - 27 October 2020**

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## **Supporting the Mental Health of South African NPO's**

### **Empowering NPO's through the NPOwer Mental Health Support Programme**

A first-of-its kind Non-Profit Organisation (NPO) Mental Health Support Programme and 24-hour toll-free Helpline to offer mental health care and support to all NPO's has been launched in South Africa.

Called NPOwer, this initiative sees Tshikululu Social Investments partnering with SADAG (South African Depression and Anxiety Group) to provide psychological first aid to NPO leaders, staff and volunteers, many of whom are experiencing unprecedented strain and burnout caused by COVID-19.

"Our minds became shut down". This is just one of many responses received in a recent survey conducted by Tshikululu Social Investments to assess the effect that COVID-19 has had on this crucial sector, with many NPO's experiencing the twin burden of financial survival in the midst of increasing and overwhelming need.

While the pandemic has had a significant impact on NPOs from an operations and funding perspective, it is the mental health of those involved within the NPO sector that is particularly concerning, which has resulted in the launch of this NPO specific mental health support programme.

"The pandemic has resulted in various pervasive fears and negative psychological effects on individuals, resulting in a need for more psychosocial support to affected communities. This, of course, applies not only to individuals and communities being served by NPOs, but to the employees and volunteers of these organisations themselves. Our research has shown that NPO's are struggling with a myriad of issues including instability and uncertainty

around financial support, challenges in retaining staff , as well as having to navigate the devastating impact of COVID on the communities that they serve. ,” says Dipalesa Mpye, a social investment specialist at Tshikululu Social Investments.

“While many corporates have Employee Assistance Programmes in place for their employees, and relief funding has been provided for specific responses such as food relief and health system strengthening, the wellbeing of NPOs, who are at the front-line in serving communities throughout lockdown has largely been forgotten. The need for this type of integrated psychological support programme is very clear,” Mpye says.

“Many NPO’s have been left in the dark. Teams are overworked, they are facing trauma and lack of resources every day. With so many pandemic-related issues, some NPO’s have been forced to close their doors and stop the valuable work they have been providing when communities need it the most. NPO’s have always provided help, resources and support to others, but never before has the mental health of our NPOs been prioritised,” says Operations Director at SADAG, Cassey Chambers.

Kelly du Plessis, CEO and Lead Patient Advocate of Rare Diseases South Africa, an NPO established in 2013, says that it is well known that NPO staff are often impacted by compassion fatigue, due to the emotionally giving dynamic of the sector, compounded by the often personal nature of the services provided.

“During COVID19, our mental health was further impacted due to the continuous financial stress of a downturned economy, coupled with many additional services needing to be provided to assist the most vulnerable members of society,” she says. du Plessis believes that mental health is one of those things that is all too often overlooked or ignored, until it is too late. “Mental health support needs to be implemented throughout the sector to build resilience, avoid burnout, and ensure that the sector can continue to provide the much-needed services,” she says.

With the launch of this much needed psychological support programme taking place within Mental Health Awareness Month, Chambers says that highlighting the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on our collective mental health needs to remain a priority.

“SADAG has been receiving more calls since the start of lockdown from people feeling anxious, lonely, worried and depressed. Many callers are stressed about a combination of issues including the spread of COVID-19, finances, relationship problems, job security, grief, gender-based violence and trauma,” she says.

“While our Tshikululu NPO Partner Survey showed promising levels of resilience and optimism, we need to assist NPO’s to remain as strong as possible as they go about their invaluable work, as the impact of the pandemic is far from over.,” says Mpye. “We are excited and humbled by this partnership with SADAG and value enormously the work they do, being at the forefront of patient advocacy, education and destigmatisation of mental illness in South Africa”.

The NPOwer programme will include a dedicated 24-hour NPO Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Helpline manned by a team of dedicated counsellors, capacity workshops on NPO related issues, a dedicated website to house multiple resources and the implementation of a Support Network between NPOs.

The tollfree NPOwer Helpline will be open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year with counselling available in all 11 official languages and is now live on 0800 515 515. Messages can also be sent to a dedicated SMS line on 43010 or to [info@npowersa.org](mailto:info@npowersa.org). More details about NPOwer can be found on <https://www.npowersa.org/>.

“There are so many aspects to the health of NPOs which we hope to assist with this initiative. This includes reducing the burnout and stress experienced by NPO’s and providing key mental health skills to NPO leaders to ensure that they are able to look after the mental health of their staff and build mental wellness going forward,” Chambers says.. “Strengthening advocacy and capacity amongst the NPO sector, providing capacity building skills and knowledge and helping NPOs to network and develop regional NPO groups are just some of the goals that we see Tshikululu and SADAG achieving with NPOwer.”

### **Ends.**

For more interviews, case studies and expert comments:

Kayla on 083 333 7750 [media@anxiety.org.za](mailto:media@anxiety.org.za)

Petri 079 453 8780 [help@sadag.org](mailto:help@sadag.org).

Cassey 082 835 7650 [office@anxiety.org.za](mailto:office@anxiety.org.za)

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For more than 22 years they have partnered with investors to achieve sustainable social impact for today and for generations to come. Tshikululu views social investment as any financial commitment, be it grant making or impact investing, that seeks to drive, enable and measure social impact, which it does by partnering with clients, developmental agencies and other collaborative partners.

Go to [www.tshikululu.org.za](http://www.tshikululu.org.za) for more information.

### SADAG

The South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) is at the forefront of patient advocacy, education and destigmatisation of mental illness in the country. Its expertise lies in assisting patients and callers throughout South Africa with mental health queries.

SADAG is a Non-Profit Organisation, a Registered Section 21 Company, with an 18a tax exemption. It has on its board a powerful team of Patients, Psychiatrists, Psychologists, and General Practitioners. SADAG was established 26 years ago to serve as a support network for the thousands of South Africans who live with mental health problems. Currently, it is estimated that 1 in 3 people will, or do, suffer from a mental illness. SADAG manages a 22-line counselling-and-referral call centre, and is the voice of patient advocacy, working in urban, peri-urban, and the most rural communities across South Africa.

Go to [www.sadag.org](http://www.sadag.org) for more information.



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