

Covid-19: 'We are facing a humanitarian crisis like never before' - Breadline Africa

It is a sunny Tuesday afternoon. Farida Ryklief stands in front of a huge big pot of soup and a crate of bread on a table outside a kitchen in Delft, Cape Town. She is serving beetroot soup blended with soya, macaroni and mixed vegetables. She moves her hands in and out of the soup pot and passes containers of soup to volunteers who hand them to children with three slices of bread each. Ryklief's father Abduragiem is organising the children, directing them from the queue to the spot where the food is handed out.

By [Tariro Washinyira](#) 11 Jun 2020



Farida Ryklief dishes out soup to Tasmeen Baatjies for distribution to people in Delft, Cape Town. Photo: Tariro Washinyira

Along the fence are three lines of children wearing masks and holding empty containers for their soup. On the gate a sign reads, "No mask no entry." A few children are lending each other masks. Inside the fence, children who arrived earlier are sitting about 1.5 metres apart in the sand, waiting their turn.

Ryklief has a different menu each day. On Mondays she serves pasta with tinned fish, on Tuesdays she alternates soup with rice, lentils and boiled eggs, Wednesdays she serves vegetable bredie (cabbage, carrots, peas) and rice, Thursdays lentils, soya and rice, Fridays samp and beans.

The kitchen is in the building owned by the Thicers Trust, started by Ryklief's parents. They have been running the soup kitchen and distributing food since 1994. Since lockdown, they have been getting support from Breadline Africa.

Ryklief, who works for Woman Impacting the Nation, one of the trust's projects, gets help from 24 volunteers who do shift work. The soup kitchen feeds about 700 children a day, 176 elderly people and 300 other adults. They share ingredients with 34 other kitchens, also supplied by Breadline Africa, and distribute cooked meals in surrounding areas such as Voorbrug, Leiden, New Hague, N2 Gateway and The Hague.

Around the soup kitchen, people in Delft are carrying on with their lives. Some have no masks, there is little social distancing, children are playing on the roads, some people are selling uncooked meat and braaing on the pavements.

Rykief says it's difficult for families to stay indoors when they have nothing inside their houses to eat. She says most of the people in the area have lost their source of income. "There are people you would never have thought you would see standing in the queue for food, but now they do because of the need."

"People here are in deep poverty. I have stayed up at night to help them apply for the Covid-19 relief grant on my laptop. I am still staying late at night to help them apply for jobs. Most of them don't own smartphones. They got SMSes to say they qualify for the R350 Covid-19 relief grant but nothing is happening. Children who were standing in the queue hadn't eaten since morning. They don't want to move away from the centre for fear their parents will take their food. They would rather sit here and go back with empty containers. Some of them come barefoot, and I provide them with toiletries. Last week it was very cold and raining but some children came without jackets and were barefooted so I have started to appeal for old clothes donations," she said.



Children queue in the sand outside the soup kitchen in Delft. Photo: Tariro Washinyira

Volunteer Tasneem Baatjies was born in Delft. She started volunteering last year, helping to run the Safer School holiday programme and after-care programmes. Because schools are closed, she is now involved in the feeding scheme. "Seeing children hustling for food like this is heartbreaking ... that motivates me to come help here."

"We are facing a humanitarian issue like never before," says Marion Wagner of Breadline Africa, which helps fund the Delft soup kitchen and others across the country. "We are getting demands every day from feeding kitchens that have run out of stock and people who desperately need food. The queues are getting longer despite the fact that grants are coming through and some people going back to work."

Breadline Africa used to finance 14,000 meals at 27 sites, mostly in Cape Town. But since the Covid-19 lockdown started on 26 March, the organisation has been financing 59,000 meals a week, says Wagner - and it's far from enough to meet the need.

“I just came from an informal settlement near Macassar village now. There are hundreds of children with no shoes and no warm clothing. They are all standing in muddy water. There are water puddles everywhere. Two men who are running the kitchen are cooking for 200 every day, for not just the informal settlement but for all around ...”

GroundUp met Wagner at one of the soup kitchens Breadline Africa sponsors in Kuilsriver. Other Cape Town sites sponsored are in Lavender Hill, Tafelsig and Eastridge in Mitchells Plain, and Delft.

At the Kuilsriver soup kitchen, Latifa Jacobs’s day starts at 4am, unless she and her six volunteers have managed to clean vegetables the night before, in which case she gets up at 6am. Her focus areas are Kuilsriver, Happy Valley and Sophia Town informal settlement. Every day she prepares meals for up to 65 people in the kitchen of her parents’ house. People queue outside; those from Sophia Town are served at 2pm and those from Kuilsriver and Happy Valley at 4pm. In the morning she serves porridge to about 200 people in Kuilsriver and to children from Happy Valley.

Jacobs says the struggle is real in Sophia Town. There is no sanitation and many of the residents are unemployed. Some of them don’t receive social grants because they don’t have IDs.

In Kuilsriver, she says, life for the last two months has been difficult. “Opposite here there is a complex of nine units that houses immigrants. They specialise in craft work, so they lost their source of income during lockdown. They don’t qualify for [grants] and government food parcels. In the backstreet we have about three houses in which no one is working. They have always been on our feeding scheme,” she says.

Managing a soup kitchen during Covid-19 is challenging, says Jacobs. Every day she demonstrates social distancing and how to wear a mask. Volunteers manage queues outside the house, sanitising and minimising the number of people going inside. “We normally say ‘no mask, no food’ - there is a sign there. But because we don’t want to scare away hungry people, we have a bag of old clothes that I keep and if we see a person who doesn’t have a mask we make one,” she says.

Anna Links said: “I stand in this queue everyday. I stay in Happy Valley. I used to work two days a week but my boss said I should resume work on stage two of the lockdown. We are five adults and four children. My husband is not working.”



Latifa Jacobs hands out food to a child at the soup kitchen in Kuilsriver. Photo: Tariro Washinyira

Calika Bergman walked about 5km from Happy Valley to get a meal in Kuilsriver. “People from my townshi don’t get help, we have to come to this community. No parcels, nothing from the government. My husband can’t work because he is diabetic. Before lockdown, I used to make a living by selling braaied chicken fee

The soup kitchens all apply the “first come, first serve” rule, though an exception is made for elderly and disabled people.

Fourteen-year-old Aiden Elliot queued at the Delft soup kitchen. “I come here for food everyday at 3pm because there is no food at home. We are living on a child grant. Before lockdown my mother used to do piece jobs in people’s houses.”

Fifteen-year-old Aldayne Brown says at the beginning of the national lockdown he asked his cousin, who came to the kitchen, if he could also join the Delft feeding scheme. He then moved in with his grandmothe so that he could be close to the food collection point. “Ever since, I have been coming to get food here every day. I like people here, they treat us with respect. They are lovely.”

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