

STATEMENT BY EWB (CANADA) WITH RESPECT TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

BACKGROUND

On March 7th 2020, South Africa announced its first case of the corona virus. That announcement has since been followed by numerous measures to curb the spread, which included an implementation of a 21 Day Lockdown Period (“LD”) which started on Friday 26th March 2020. As is the case around the world, it is not business as usual. The fear is that South Africa, and less developed nations, will be impacted more severely due to a lack of health and other infrastructure.

On the back of that, the South African economy is also going through its toughest time yet, amplified by a downgrade of South Africa’s investment grading to junk status by Moody’s, the American Credit rating agency. All the above points to an uncertain future.

IMPACT ON EWB PROGRAMMING & OPERATIONS

- Schools and EwB programming ceased on 18 March 2020 and between that date and the start of the LD, the EwB (SA) Management Committee (“Manco”) put in place systems to allow for remote working. This included ensuring all Manco members had access to internet, were assigned tasks and were adhering to Manco expectations and meeting times. The Manco members are the Program Lead, Organization Lead and the four site coordinators.
- In spite of challenges with internet, Manco continues to engage frequently online. The most recent meeting included discussions on how EwB (SA) can and should respond to the existing challenges both with regard to its obligation to its learners as well as a broader community engagement.

RESPONDING TO THE LD IMPLICATIONS

EwB is concerned for the health and well-being of its staff, tutors, volunteers and learners as well as with the learning gap that the LD will create. However, there is consideration that, given the unprecedented impact of this virus, there exists a responsibility for a broader community engagement

The following actions were approved by the Canadian Board on April 3rd based on recommendations from EwB (SA):

1. All tutors will be contacted by the site coordinators to check on their physical and psychological well being and their ability to continue working remotely. EwB (SA)’s Manco team of six will continue to receive their salaries over the LD period. All tutors will continue to receive their stipends during the LD period.

2. The site coordinators will also contact learners and their families and assess their needs.
3. The Manco will prioritise and dedicate time to 'catch-up' on administrative tasks and, most importantly, on developing the EwB curriculum and testing procedures and ensuring that a strategy is in place for both long- and short-term curriculum planning.
4. The budget will be adjusted to support the distribution of food, masks, hand sanitizer, soap and the like to the local communities by partnering with other organizations such as Rotary or Doctors Without Borders.
5. The Manco has investigated the feasibility of online learning for their learners but was unable to implement any program currently due to the lack of access to appropriate technology. However, research on the future possibility of doing such a pilot program in online education (with a group of 20-30 learners) will continue.
6. The South African Film Festivals in Sydney and Vancouver have been postponed. Toronto is watching events closely with regards to the viability of holding its festival in October and, in the meantime, is looking at contingency options, should they be required.
7. However, the EwB (Australia) committee is examining the feasibility of creating an online virtual Film Festival which will stream the films to supporters. This could possibly be extended to Toronto and Vancouver.
8. The Vancouver South African Film Festival Committee (VSAFF) is also considering other options.
9. As far as local BC indigenous projects are concerned, the Seabird Island Youth Camp is still planning to occur in the summer and the development of *Storybooks Canada for English language learners: Teacher Guidelines* has progressed.

10. Our partner organization, Surf without Borders or SwB, has completed two surf workshops (in conjunction with the 9Miles project) at Strandfontein beach in Cape Town, but with the LD has put on hold any further workshops with EwB learners. Currently, SwB has initiated a second fund raising campaign in Los Angeles to assist the 9Miles project with a feeding scheme in Strandfontein.

If you have any questions, suggestions, ideas contact us at information.ewb@gmail.com.