

RFA Member DSV's drivers armed with the PPE they need and a sense of purpose

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COVID-19 has shone a light on heroes previously taken for granted – and that includes the truck drivers who always make sure our shops and hospitals and schools are stocked with what they need. “The Road Freight Association (RFA) salutes all truck drivers for the extraordinary work they are doing,” says RFA Chief Executive Gavin Kelly.

Almost overnight, the lockdown thrust truck drivers, literally, into the frontline of the fight against a pandemic. Without food and medicine and other essential goods, South Africa would not be able to win its COVID-19 war.

For RFA member DSV and its drivers, a sense of duty to keep delivering what the country needs to overcome an element of fear for an unknown disease which was wreaking havoc around the world, plunging the global economy into a deep recession.



DSV truck driver Nqaba Mangcola

Nqaba Mangcola, 53, delivers medicine and life-saving drugs in Gauteng. He, like his colleagues Selowa Enock, 35, Ubisse Michael, 34, and Maake Phuti, 34, says the hardest aspect of the lockdown has been the disruption to family life.

In some cases, special arrangements have been made for someone to care for children and elderly relatives, and in Maake's case, he relocated his family to Limpopo. But, says Nqaba, “we don't complain, and we respect the law. We use cellphones to stay in touch with our families. There is no other way”.

Selowa comes from a “caring and loving Christian family”, and he says the family “always pray before I go to work and when I come back.” All the drivers share a belief that if, as Maake puts it, people stick together, “we will be able to conquer this virus.”

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Rodger Moffat, 57, says it's a positive feature of the virus that people have come together to help each other. "The country has united to fight the disease".

Outside of family, Rodger says the quiet roads with essential services vehicles and few other people about, and a very visible SAPS and SANDF were features of phases 5 and 4 of the lockdown. Ngaba adds: "There are some roadblocks on the road ... and sometimes we are delayed a little bit. But we have to respect it, as it is the law from the government." In many cases, drivers have been delivering to home addresses while businesses have been shut, but this is changing as the economy slowly reopens.

Rodger says DSV has ensured drivers have had gloves, masks and sanitizer, and advised to keep a safe distance from people and to wear a mask while working. Nqaba says the company keeps in touch during the day: "Are we still okay? Are we still managing?"

Truck drivers have always been a tight-knit community, and the crisis has brought them even closer together. Hygiene has become a key feature of lockdown life, and something the drivers talk to each other about. "We have to take care of our hygiene and we must make sure our trucks are clean, each and every time," says Nqaba.



Roger Moffat – truck driver with DSV

All the drivers share a concern about when things will return to "normal", but they know there is a long road ahead before we get there. Ubbisse says the most important thing he has learned is that he must keep himself and others safe.

It is a difficult time for all, but Nqaba calls for everyone to be vigilant. "If we come together as a unit, we can fight this COVID-19 – by wearing masks, wearing gloves, washing our hands and by helping where we can help, each and everyone."

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