

Despite Covid-19, Sunflower Fund increased donor registrations since lockdown

Despite being faced with limited fundraising and awareness opportunities due to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, The Sunflower Fund partnered by DKMS increased its stem cell donors by 9,000 since the start of the lockdown in 2020.



Alana James, CEO, The Sunflower Fund partnered by DKMS

CEO Alana James says that this ground-breaking feat in the wake of the pandemic was made possible by the generosity of members of society, the commitment of the organisation's donors and the hard work of its partners and employees. "We could not let Covid-19 stop us from recruiting donors to build our registry, so we had to find new ways to roll out our recruitment drives innovatively."

Socially distanced donors

"As our events teams could not physically engage communities, schools, corporates and other stakeholders to recruit donors, we moved our recruitment drive online by way of an online registration platform which was amplified using social media and influencers," James explains.

This way individuals who were interested in registering could do so by visiting www.sunflowerfund.org and completing the process online. "A swab kit was then couriered to the donor and the tests were completed in the safety and comfort of their homes. Following this, the kits were collected and delivered to our offices. This is a process that we are still using today," she says.



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Power of partnerships

"At the start of 2020, we launched our partnership with DKMS, a global leader in stem cell recruitment and transplant facilitation," says James. "This partnership has assisted us to achieve these record-breaking recruitment numbers in the middle of a global pandemic."

Last year, DKMS celebrated more than 10 million registered donors and facilitated 90,000 patient donor matches. "As such, we are confident that we will achieve even more as we forge ahead with expanded teams, increased investment and a global network with more muscle," she adds. "Along with this, we are particularly proud that our registry makes it possible for people of African descent to be represented in this highly collaborative and much needed effort."

Furthermore, James explains that the organisation's partnership with DKMS greatly strengthens its position to serve South African patients and those with African and mixed ancestry.

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Onwards and upwards in 2021

Looking forward, The Sunflower Fund partnered by DKMS is planning to re-energise the partnerships and collaborations it has with corporates, tertiary institutions, communities and media, as well as partner with Transplant and Collection Centres.

“Our patients and their families are at the heart of what we do and, as such, we endeavor to continue to provide them with holistic support from the point of their search request to the conclusion of their transplant journey and beyond,” explains James.

“Along with this, our work would not be made possible without our donors who are supported by a buddy system to ensure they are supported through the process, from being matched to extraction and recovery.

“In 2021 and beyond, we are confident that we will be able to continue this upward trajectory and look forward to saving more lives with the help of our fellow South Africans,” concludes James.

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