

Over-50s are getting on the bus and going 'round to get their vaccines

Leigh Crymble's community initiative to ferry people to get their jabs has been a godsend

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UP FOR IT Heather Waller took the trip from Craighall to join the queue for the Covid-19 vaccine at Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital in Parktown, Johannesburg.

Image: Alaister Russell

Like many other businesses, BreadCrumbs, a Johannesburg communications agency, has had to make a few changes to the way they do business in light of the pandemic.

Founder Leigh Crymble, a behavioural linguist, has pivoted her business to focus more on communications around the virus. Working with companies such as Discovery Health, Crymble said her job has been to create posters and graphics to relate the seriousness of the virus without scaring the public.

She's been particularly interested in ways in which words can encourage South Africans to get their vaccinations.

"Through research, I realised that the issue isn't all about poor communication but rather the access to the vaccines."

As a courtesy, Crymble started offering transportation to vaccine sites to those in her community via Facebook.

Two weeks ago, she hired two Uber vans to transport those who responded to her social media call-out to be ferried from Craighall, Randburg, to a local vaccination site.

Word of mouth seems to have done the rest, as she now transports those eligible on Wednesdays and Fridays.



GUARDIAN ANGEL Leigh Crymble from BreadCrumbs stands in front of the shuttles hired to transport locals to the vaccine sites.

Image: Alaister Russell

This week Tuesday saw her having to hire six transport vehicles to take 30 people to Charlotte Maxeke Academic Hospital.

BreadCrumbs had transported 130 people by Thursday at a cost of R70 per person.

“It is a bit more expensive because we don’t want to fill the vans. They can take 10 people and we don’t put more than five people in.”

The Craighall Residents’ Association (CRA) saw her offer and donated R15,000 towards the transportation.

Now Crymble hires scholar vehicles that haven’t had much business for the last two weeks.

Phenyo Silawa is one of the drivers. “I hadn’t been working as a scholar driver for long when President Cyril Ramaphosa announced school closures. Luckily I have this job now.”

Getting into the van at 12.30pm was local resident Heather Waller.

Five weeks ago, Waller, 71, fell ill with Covid. She has recovered but still feels tired and because of her illness was unable to get the vaccine earlier.

"I was ill when I got the call from medical aid to get the vaccine. I have some bad days — I don't really know what recovery is. It was hard to get out of bed today. I wouldn't have, if it wasn't for getting the vaccine today," she said, her hands shaking.

"I'm anxious about the injection but not the vaccine — it's the fear of the unknown — but I must say the government helpline has been very good in giving information about the vaccine."

Joining her in the shuttle was Gladis Lekoeneha, 55, from Soweto, and Phillia Selemela, 55, from Alexandra Township.

Both women work in the homes of Craighall residents who had seen Crymble's offer on Facebook.

Selemela said she was excited to get the job because she wanted to be healthy, so she could continue to work and provide for her family.

"I'm not nervous to get the vaccine because my grandfather got it and he's doing OK. He's 73 years old and he's just had his second jab.

"Most people at home are OK with getting the vaccine; only a few neighbours are sceptical."

"I didn't even tell my neighbours," Lekoeneha chipped in.

Lekoeneha said there were some people in her neighbourhood who thought the vaccine was unsafe and that there were still some "urban myths" surrounding the virus.

Both woman are the breadwinners in their families.

Selemela works in the home of Katie Schaefer who heard about BreadCrumbs on social media.

"I wish I could go with," Schaefer said. "I've missed my chance by three years, but I wanted Selemela to have the opportunity. She's a single mom of four — and her husband died recently.

"I read about this on Facebook and I offered to pay some money towards the transport but Crymble said I should rather use the money to 'pay-it-forward' by helping someone else, maybe with a meal."



LINING UP Residents who made use of the BreadCrumbs shuttle service stand in a queue for the Covid-19 vaccine on Wednesday at the Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital in Parktown.

Image: Alaister Russell

A quick ferry to the newly-opened hospital revealed a very busy Gate 8 entrance, which houses the community hall where the vaccines are administered.

Yellow dots painted every 1.5m guide a snaking queue — not too long on Wednesday.

Crymble said her initial goal was to work until the end of July, “but I feel responsible for taking people back for their second vaccine — I can’t just help them with the first one and then leave it. So I make sure I keep everyone’s details so I can remind them in four weeks.”

Caron Askew from the CRA said the association “believes in supporting our community during these Covid times. We challenged ourselves as a residents’ association committee to each find a project to achieve this, and provide financial and any other support.

“We didn’t have to look very far to see individual angels within our community driving their own initiatives.

“A connected community can create change through communication channels with its residents, engaging them and doing good ... and by providing financial assistance we have managed to gain traction for the BreadCrumbs initiative. The number of buses more than quadrupled in a week. This is a true example of the power of a community in action.”

Rosemary Mthiyana, 56, was the first of the group of 30 to get her vaccine. On her way back home, she said she was happy to have some protection from the virus, as she is the breadwinner for four children and five grandchildren.

“It wasn’t sore. I didn’t look at the needle, but then I didn’t even feel it.”