

# R50 million paid to Fedgroup beneficiaries during first months of lockdown

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April and May 2020 saw Fedgroup's at-home employees handle a combined 100 calls a day, effect almost 30 000 payments, and retain their nine-second call wait time at Fedgroup's virtual Beneficiary Care call centre, despite the call centre never having been operated from home before. Photo: Pete Linforth/Pixabay

By Sizwe Dlamini 🕒 Jun 30, 2020

JOHANNESBURG – Independent financial services group Fedgroup said on Tuesday that it had paid out more than R50 million to financial beneficiaries during the first two months of the country's Covid-19 lockdown, from the comfort of their employees' homes.

Fedgroup Beneficiary Care Operations Manager for Group Products Muhammad Jogee said April and May 2020 saw at-home employees handle a combined 100 calls a day, effect almost 30 000 payments, and retain their nine-second call wait time at Fedgroup's virtual Beneficiary Care call centre, despite the call centre never having been operated from home before.

Jogee, who was faced with the task of setting up and running an off-site, virtual call centre said: "Having watched the way in which Covid-19 was affecting other countries, we started testing alternatives to our traditional call centre a full two weeks before President Cyril Ramaphosa announced South Africa would go into lockdown.

"There were a few teething problems initials, including connectivity and data issues, but our in-house team was able to equip everyone very quickly, and find ways around these challenges."

Jogee said call centre operators were moved off-site to work remotely in stages, so that the system could be stress-tested from home and still function as normal at work. "We use a variety of dashboards and management tools based on Fedgroup's fin-tech experience to keep an

overview on entire operations, and pick up any issues in real-time.”

Fedgroup’s first virtual call centre has worked seamlessly, surprising even those who set it up but remained anxious about the potential for drops in customer service levels.

Fedgroup chief executive Grant Field said the company began a concerted effort to cross-skill its administrators across departments and product lines a few months ago.

“This early decision has really made our staff and business more agile and able to quickly adapt to the new way of working lockdown has required.

“We did this for two reasons: first, upskilling and developing our staff is central to Fedgroup’s business philosophy of putting people first, and we believe that growing our people will grow our business. Second, we wanted to encourage a more flexible way of working, where we could move resources around within the business when there was a sudden spike of demand in one area, and possibly a slowdown in another,” he said.

Fedgroup’s Beneficiary Care division has recently benefitted from this resource re-allocation, citing the festive season as an example of a time when resource shifts are needed. The Beneficiary Care division is at its busiest during the festive season, while the company’s Group Benefits division is a little quieter, as most of their brokers close during this period.

Upskilling employees to work in multiple divisions means that Fedgroup is able to supplement Beneficiary Care’s resources with staff from its Group Benefits and Investments divisions temporarily, ensuring that there is no drop in service levels, despite the festive season being four times busier than other months.

## **BUSINESS REPORT**