

Programme creates safer, compliant liquor outlets

Aware.org is committed to fight against alcohol harm, misuse

By **Ingrid Louw**

The SA alcohol industry has gone through a serious period of reflection with regards to responsible trade during Covid-19. The sector is forced to re-look and reinforce continued and consistent responsible trading.

The industry is faced with challenges that are compelling it to strengthen its trading regulations in the fight against the scourge of alcohol abuse.

More emphasis has been placed on encouraging liquor traders not to serve anyone under the age of 18, discourage binge drinking and avoid serving alcohol to intoxicated customers.

SA has a wide alcohol trading market that includes well-known taverns which have carried villages and townships for decades. This market is said to be producing billions of rand in revenue per annum.

This business market forms part of the booming township hospitality market which also plays a significant role in supporting township and village livelihoods.

These are key players that need to work closely with organisations such as the Association for Alcohol Responsibility and Education (aware.org), to ensure compliance as well as putting in place responsible practices and forms of behaviour to trade responsibly, ensuring that they protect the livelihoods of thousands of people who are dependent on the market while safeguarding their businesses.

Aware.org's Responsible Trade Facilitation (rtf) programme was implemented through strategic partnerships with the provincial liquor authorities in four provinces, namely the Eastern Cape, the Free State, Gauteng and Mpumalanga since 2018.

The programme aims to create a balance between compliance, the development of a responsible and sustainable liquor trade using pro-active interventions and support programmes. The rtf has been influential in providing developmental solutions in the rural alcohol trading market. The overall objective of the rtf is to ensure that the industry func-

tion in a more responsible and regulated manner.

It also aims to educate consumers about the dangers of alcohol use and misuse, and the risks related to underage drinking and binge drinking which is conducted through engagements with the patrons. Rtf programme further contributes to the local economy by creating job opportunities for unemployed graduates who are employed as facilitators and by using local suppliers.

The facilitators play a mentorship and coaching role to the liquor traders.

Most of the rtf outlets were not always a safe space for consumers, aware.org has managed to make these outlets operate in a much safer environment for consumers through its incentive scheme.

Outlet owners who are beneficiaries of aware.org's rtf programme receive incentives that enable them to meet the minimum requirements according to their licence conditions based on the Liquor Act, Norms and Standards and the OHS Act.

The programme Incentive Scheme consists of four tiers, namely tier 1, which provides the basic requirements such as a trading hours board, outlet file and pledge poster.

Tier 2 aims to assist outlet owners to comply with the legal requirements, its provisions include outlet safety signage, fire extinguisher, male and female toilets, drinking water and first aid.

Tier 3 upgrades are CCTV cameras and improved lighting outside the outlet, while tier 4 includes painting the outlet and installations of alarm system.

Aware.org's rtf programme does not only focus on creating safer and compliant liquor outlets. The facilitators routinely engages key stakeholders such as police, liquor board inspectors, liquor forums and/or tavern associations to provide an update on the rtf project while gathering feedback on current challenges.

It is now more than ever important for liquor traders and the industry to decisively work with aware.org to create a healthy alcohol consumption relationship with consumers.

■ Low is the CEO of aware.org, an NGO that seeks to create a culture of moderation and responsible drinking along with addressing issues instigated by irresponsible alcohol consumption.