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XOLISA: THE TEACHER WITH THE MILLION DOLLAR SMILE

The first word that springs to mind when you think of Xolisa, is graceful. She has the ideal pre-school teacher temperament – always calm and positive, soft spoken, with a warm and radiant smile. Although it is hard to convey this grace and her radiant smile to you in writing, we hope that by sharing our catch-up with her this month, you are able to get a little feel for what it's like working with Xolisa!

JRHF: Xolisa, please tell me a bit about your background.
Xolisa: I come from Alice [in the Eastern Cape]. I was raised with only one parent, my mom. I was staying there with my two sisters. I am the eldest in my family. I have two children of my own. One daughter and one son, they are staying with my mom. My father is in KZN so I don't have that much relationship with him. He phones sometimes, but not much.

JRHF: Can you tell me a bit about your circumstances before you joined Jabulani?
Xolisa: Before I joined Jabulani, I was working for another organisation. And then I left because I got someone in Cape Town who said I must come to him for work, but things didn't go well for me there, so I decided it is better to come back home to Alice. When I was there I thought of Jabulani. I know Jabulani because it is part of the Wild Coast NGO Forum. I wrote an e-mail to Jabulani and asked them if I could volunteer. They were keen for me to come, so I started volunteering at the pre-school.

JRHF: Well we are certainly very glad that you came as a volunteer and are now delighted that you are permanently employed in the Jabulani team. Can you please tell us about the different roles you have within Jabulani now?
Xolisa: I got employed working at Khanyisa Pre-School working with Siwe in the mornings. Then in the afternoons I work in the library for the Zithudlala programme [this is an after school programme offered by Jabulani – for more information, refer to the At a Glance section below] with children from the age of six to twelve years.

JRHF: You have quite a variety of age groups that you work with. How do you find the work that you do?
Xolisa: The work that I do is very interesting. For me, working with children is very important. I love children very much, I wish to build a foundation with them while they are still young, for them to grow in their self-esteem.

JRHF: What do you love the most about working with young children?
Xolisa: Working with children, it is nice when they come to



me and share their emotions. I have to pay attention to each and every child. They trust me.

JRHF: You are a natural with children. Have you always wanted to be a teacher?
Xolisa: No, I don't think so, but I was motivated when I was in Cape Town and this lady told me about children in the Transkei who don't go to school. They have to wait until eight years old before going to school. I went to see these children and felt so attached; the children didn't know anything about playing with toys, how to hold a pencil or scissors, they were just playing with sticks. I wanted to start something to help them. This way I started to teach children [the NGO that Xolisa previously worked for was then able to support her to gain her Early Childhood Development NQF Level 4 qualification].

JRHF: So you found your passion?
Xolisa: Yes (with a smile from ear to ear), I think I found my passion.

JRHF: What are you looking forward to in this year?
Xolisa: This year, I look forward to teaching the children more. I'm excited about the [Montessori] training. We are learning a lot about what we can do with the children. It is very interesting.

JRHF: Please tell me a bit about your plans and dreams and where do you see yourself in five years?

Xolisa: I'm now here at Zithulele. Working with Jabulani, I would like to help Jabulani to grow more pre-schools around the villages in the community, to help children be in pre-school at the right age. For me, I'm here. I'm here to stay. I love my work.

JRHF: It is great to hear that! Thank you Xolisa, you are an inspiration to many of us.

Xolisa: Thank you, it was good. Now I can eat my chocolate.

And then we shared a smile and a chocolate together for Valentine's Day.

A POSITIVE INFLUENCE

There are many of the opinion that we are getting on top of the AIDS epidemic and that the end of AIDs is near. Sure, we have made huge progress in South Africa; people are no longer dying in droves and we have more than three million people on treatment. But it is clear to those of us encountering this disease on a daily basis, that there is still a significant amount of work to be done and the journey ahead is still going to be long, complex and challenging.

One of our most challenging target groups are youth between the ages of 15-25. Most of these youth are struggling to finish school, working through the challenges of becoming a teen and then a young adult, and they are a challenge to engage in any kind of formal or informal structure. However, many are sexually active. This combination of factors can literally be deadly. Nevertheless, we set ourselves the challenge of trying to engage this group for an event to mark World Aids Day in December 2016.

We gathered the "troops". People who we thought would engage well with this age group, people who we thought they could identify and speak openly with. With a team made up of Peer Educators and counsellors from the hospital and our surrounding clinics, the ARV team at

Zithulele Hospital, staff from Pumulanga (Zithulele's gateway clinic), visiting medical students from the University of the Witwaterstrand, doctors from Zithulele and staff from Axium Education, we put together a relevant programme of activity.

After some fun activities and lunch to sustain them, we introduced the hard but important "stuff". Small and big group discussions were held, engaging approximately 100 people, focussing on building good self-esteem, dealing with peer pressure, and identifying and belonging. But into these discussions our experienced facilitators introduced the topics of sex, sexuality, hormones, menstruation, safe circumcision, relationships, and of course HIV, allowing people to ask questions and have them answered in a non-threatening environment.

To end the day, people were offered an opportunity to receive counselling and testing. 22 brave young people took this step. The two who tested positive, were referred to the gateway clinic and the team at the hospital monitored the process of follow up and support. All in all, despite the challenge of engaging this target group, the day was a success and we are enormously grateful to all those who contributed to it.



WEAVING IDEAS INTO REALITY

You may have read in our August 2016 newsletter about our livelihoods initiative, a component of our community based rehabilitation intervention called the Rural Ability Programme (RAP). This programme promotes inclusive development for all persons with disabilities in our catchment area, and the livelihoods component includes supporting people with disabilities and their families to develop the skills needed to grow their business ideas, find employment and learn how to save and grow their money.

"Stokvels" or informal savings groups are not unfamiliar in this area, but the RAP has partnered with experts, SaveAct, an organisation that has developed a successful model for teaching individuals and communities how to save money and develop small business enterprises. Sindile is a small business entrepreneur who has recently joined one of our savings and credit groups. He explained why he decided to join the Masakhane savings group in Zithulele, saying "I have joined the group to socialise with other people and to learn how to save enough money to start my business so that I can support myself, my mother and my five siblings."

The savings and credit groups include credit facilities as well as financial education modules. Through this training, Sindile has come to appreciate that "it is no longer necessary for me to go to the bank and borrow money to start my own business". This is an important aspect due to a much lower interest rate offered by the groups, and the combination of credit facilities and financial education is often what enables poorer communities to successfully finance building houses, start small businesses and ensure education for their children.

Sindile first learnt to weave when he enrolled at Sakhingomso training centre in Mthatha. When he completed this training he decided he needed to learn more and went to King Williams Town to the Enoch Sontonga Training Centre, where he learnt how to knit. "Since I finished my training I have never had the opportunity to take my business ideas further" says Sindile, "but since I joined the Rural Ability Programme I now believe that my ideas will be nurtured and that the programme will help me establish my business. I am also hoping to begin my own workshop

where I can teach others to make and sell carpets too.”

Sindile hopes his business will grow and that the whole Zithulele community may benefit from this. “I want to create job opportunities for people with disabilities in my area. I also realised that I did not have a strong educational background but that I had skills that I could use to create employment opportunities for others and for myself. I may have a disability but I still have skills to make a life for myself as I don’t always want to depend on other people”, he says.

And skills he has, as well as drive, which is evident in the fact that he built his own loom on which to weave! Sindile will continue to be mentored by our Livelihoods Coordinator, Anathi, as they develop a business plan and start to make Sindile’s dreams of being a business owner a reality. We have a feeling that many Zithulele homes will very soon have a beautifully handmade carpet!



Sindile weaving on his loom and with a finished mat

AT A GLANCE

THE RIGHT TO PLAY AND LEARN

The Zithudlala after-school programme is about promoting play as a means in itself for children whose difficult living conditions and limited access to resources may mean that they rarely get to enjoy the basic human right of learning through play in a safe and secure environment. The long-term goal of Zithudlala is to have a play centre that provides a safe space for primary school children to play on weekday afternoons and to facilitate access to play equipment and supervised activities. In the meantime, we continue to make use of the community library and offer supported sessions in Lego building, games, puzzles, arts and crafts as well as puppet shows and outdoor games for 30-40 children at a time. The Zithudlala staff recently teamed up with Axiom Education’s Community Readers to host fun activities with the aim of instilling a love for reading in young people. They recently attended THANDA Training, a week long workshop on how to use creativity to learn through play. As a result, we are looking forward to the upcoming themed sessions, from Spiderman to The Lorax.



THANDA training with Axiom’s Community Readers

ENDING WITH A BANG

On the 9th of December we held our annual year end function for the large (60+) and diverse Jabulani team. This annual event is to celebrate work done during the year and to get to know employees who work on other projects, who staff may not interact with from one event to another, such is the widespread nature of our programmes and places of work. To aid interaction with each other and just to have fun, several games were played, such as balancing a cup of water on a plate balanced on just four pieces of string held by eight people or trying to pop the balloons of other pairs while protecting one’s own. It was a joyful and competitive party, and with the aid of the balloon game, ended the year with a bang!

