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STAYING FREE

I've worked with Zonke for a few years now, but as I said to her, I always enjoy doing staff interviews for the newsletter as I find out so much more about people and it's always inspiring and makes me feel privileged to be working alongside them. This interview was a joy to do.

JRHF: Zonke, can you tell me a bit about your circumstances before you joined Jabulani?

Zonke: In 2011, I was staying at Mthatha after passing Grade 12 at Seaview [school] in Zithulele. I wanted to study social work or psychology but I couldn't afford it. My uncle was going to pay for me to study but he passed away when I was in grade 11. I applied at the FET [Further Education and Training College] to do electrical engineering but I stopped after one semester as that wasn't my strength. I got a one year learnership from LoveLife to do HIV/AIDS counselling where I was doing pre-test counselling with the teenagers, outreach to schools for teenage pregnancy, and creating small groups. But in 2013, my grandmother passed away and I came back to Zithulele – I felt I should just come home even though I didn't know what I was going to do – I felt that once I was home, I would know what to do. One day I went to meet Liaan in the library and spoke to him about wanting to do something and he said to go and see the advert at the hospital gate. I applied straightaway. I got called the next day for an interview, and after my interview I was called to say I was hired. I started with Jabulani in September 2013 as a translator.

JRHF: And you're obviously now working as an ARV Counsellor.

Zonke: The post came up and I really wanted it. I always wanted to work more with people. I was happy translating in OPD but when this post came up, this is what I was doing at LoveLife, so I tried my luck. I was obviously nervous as that's normal when you're competing but I told myself that even if I didn't get it there would be another chance another time. I couldn't help myself, I was crying when I got the job – I got something that I always wanted to do! I always wanted to do psychology, so doing the counselling, I could start to focus on what I wanted.

JRHF: How do you find the work that you do?

Zonke: At first it was very hard. I couldn't sleep because when seeing people, testing someone and finding out that

they're positive and they're crying, seeing people who don't want to take their pills...I remember speaking with one of the doctors who told me "you can take a horse to water but you can't make them drink; you can't force them to take their treatment" which helped me to understand but it didn't make me feel better. The other thing that was hurting me, was starting someone on treatment and then six months down the line you don't see them anymore. I was feeling like I wasn't doing my work properly. But I remember when I was called by one of the therapists for a patient who was HIV positive and wanted to commit suicide and I talked to him even though I didn't think I could. He was crying. After three months he called me; he was working, he thanked me. I was happy. You can't help everyone, but if you can make a change with some, if there is someone who is appreciative, then I can appreciate myself. There are also challenges in the wards; seeing people getting sick every day, the kids in paed [paediatric ward]...still now, the problem that I have is with the teenagers who don't want to take their treatment and they are dying, I'm still fighting that. The teenagers just don't want to take their treatment. I'm always thinking about what we can do that's new to help.

JRHF: I know you have a real heart for teens.

Zonke: I really like working with them. I love these kids. I like chatting with them. I was always thinking about what I could do and then I saw an article on Facebook for sanitary



pads with someone wanting to change the government from giving out free condoms to giving out free sanitary towels instead. I decided to start something. The other thing that made me to start, is that there are girls not going to school every month for 5 days and their studies are suffering because they are left behind. I didn't want something big, I wanted a small thing and really just be with the girls. I wanted to buy pads myself but I didn't have the money, so I asked for support. I started writing letters. The first package I got had two packs of pads but I kept going. Then Jabulani donated 20 packs and I bought a few more myself. I needed a lot more before I could go to the schools but I wanted to start somewhere so I spoke with Axiom [Education] and asked if I could start with their small groups. I went with Zandile and Jen [from the hospital] and we did some education and we gave the pads. I had another session with them later, speaking with them, asking how they found the experience using the pads. People told me that they used to use old socks and toilet paper, and when they were telling me, I could identify - I grew up with my grandmother, I started my period and I didn't tell anyone, I didn't know what to do.

JRHF: So after meeting with them this time, what did you do?

Zonke: I realised that I needed to help them with education, even if I couldn't help with sanitary towels. Through speaking with them, I tried to give them the confidence to speak with their mothers, or older sisters and cousins. I couldn't sit, knowing I could help. Then I was in paediatrics once, and one of the doctors called me and told me that SHAWCO [Student's Health and Welfare Centres Organisation, run by University of Cape Town students] had donated 82 packs. Then Jabulani passed on 99 packs of reusable sanitary pads [that had been donated by Days for Girls, Perth, Australia], and then the Mbashe ward councillor called and told me that he had 50 packs of pads for me. I thought "this is happening now". I had to tell myself to calm down!

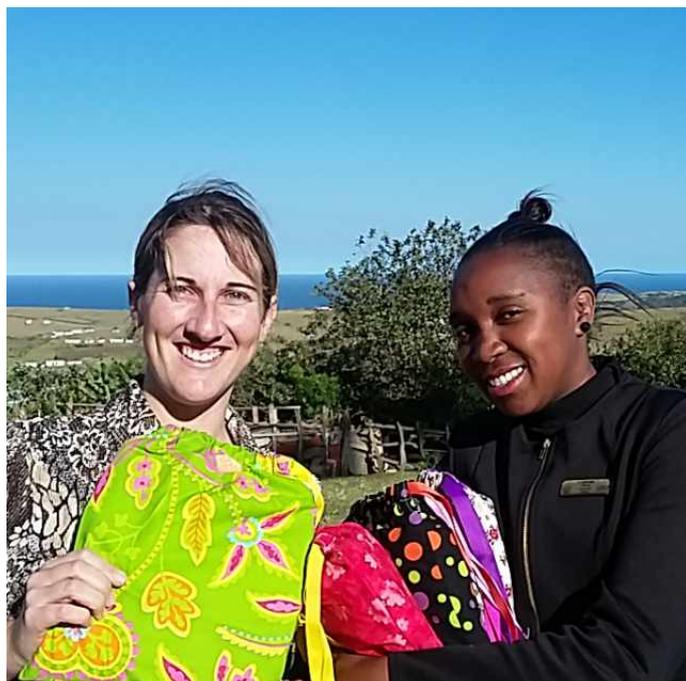


JRHF: What did you do with all those pads?

Zonke: I met with local teachers and spoke to them about the washable ones and the disposable ones, and they advised washable ones for the older girls. I then arranged to visit the schools. I went to Seaview Senior Secondary with the washable ones; they were so grateful, they were amazed that the pads could last for three years! I went to Lubanzi Junior, with the smaller girls, where the teachers have been trying to talk to them but felt they hadn't had much success, but they thought the girls would speak to me as I'm not their teacher. I even had to show the girls how to put the pad in their panties. I also encouraged them, I educated them, I explained some myths. I will keep meeting with them over time.

JRHF: You are certainly initiating some exciting things. Can you tell me a bit about your plans and dreams for the future?

Zonke: I'm saving up to do the HIV management programme. It's a college/Unisa course. What makes me want to do that is that there are hospitals where they need help to improve their HIV services. I want to work in places that need help. I want to know everything that there is to know about HIV and its reality.



I told Zonke that I'd love her to do that course but then we'd lose her and I'd hate that, but she laughingly told me that there are places that need her more, that we must spread the good work of the HIV programme we have here; and after working on the ARV/TB programme at Zithulele for seven years myself, I couldn't deny the good point she made!

INCREASING POTENTIAL FOR TRANSFORMATION

Despite untimely torrential rainfall, that has a very real impact on people's ability to get places when you live out here, we recently held training that was attended by 25 motivated and passionate people – a group made up of Jabulani's own Rural Ability Programme (RAP) and Education Programme staff, as well as Department of Education teachers and officials, and staff from Zithulele Hospital, Axium Education, and Philani Nutrition Centre Trust.

But what was worth enduring the rain and cold for? Fantastic training from Diketo Inclusive Education, that's what. Diketo Inclusive Education provides inclusive education services, products and training in order to bring about their vision of building inclusive learning environments. Their desire is to see all children participating optimally together in play, early learning, schooling and social spaces within their communities.



Diketo aim to maximise a child's potential through providing teacher support and training and so RAP arranged for them to visit Zithulele in October to provide training for those involved in the education arena. The overall objective of the training was to help educators understand the barriers children face in the classroom, equip them with problem-solving tools and techniques so that they can identify children facing challenges in the class, and intervene by using specific play and teaching techniques. You may have read about some of the inclusive education work that we've been doing with schools in our May 2017 newsletter, and this training builds on the foundations that we've been laying and relationships with schools that we've been building.

It was "a well-run and professional workshop. The facilitators were knowledgeable and professional yet approachable and fun", enthused one participant, and another who joined us from the hospital, noted that it "Helped me understand where the teachers are at and what support we can provide as hospital therapists".

It really is very exciting to be focussing more on inclusion in general, led by our RAP team, but education becoming more inclusive holds such potential to be particularly transformative and it gets our hearts glowing.

For more information on Diketo Inclusive Education, contact; info@diketo.com or www.facebook.com/diketosa



PAGES OF POSSIBILITIES

Our library is much more than a building full of books. It is a well from which the wonder of possibilities that lie between the pages of these shelved books can spring forth.

After a slightly stagnant period, we realised that our approach to our library programme needed an adjustment. We needed someone with passion and drive to take the library and its programmes to their full potential. Someone who could tend the well of potential and wonder. Someone who could tailor what we do to the needs and context of the community we're here to serve. So we created the Zithufunda Promoter position and one of our employees, Ayanda Parafini, who had been working in the hospital as a translator but showing lots of potential for a role such as this, was promoted into this position.

And with her, the library has come alive again. On top of reclassifying all the books in our library to be on the Dewy System (so that children can learn a system that they will then be familiar with in libraries at other schools, colleges

and universities one day), she has been building relationships with teachers, learners and community members to invite them to the library. This has also given us first-hand information on exactly what books are needed in order to support learners and teachers better, and so new, relevant and up-to-date books will be ordered soon. Challenges that the teachers are experiencing, such as creative writing and spelling, are being addressed in literacy workshops where children can practice these skills during interactive activities.

Ayanda's storytelling during the weekly visits from our neighbouring pre-schools is so engaging, that even the adults are absorbed, as she uses characters, props, dancing and even prizes to bring the stories alive. These visits also provide the opportunity to teach the children about library rules and the value of books. To increase children's exposure to the library, Ayanda also undertakes weekly visits to the paediatric ward at Zithulele Hospital for story time.

...PAGES OF POSSIBILITIES, continued

Children are flocking to our Zithudlala after care programme that runs in the afternoons. Ayanda literally cannot get the library door open fast enough for the kids who eagerly congregate during lunchtime in eager anticipation of what the afternoon holds. We use the THANDA curriculum, facilitating activities based on story books that unlock children's potential for creativity and teaches them how to communicate their feelings in a

healthy way. We are so grateful to THANDA for the training and resources that they have provided us with – it is not unusual to see little Spidermen or kids with Lorax moustaches running around retelling the stories that they have just read.

There is a vibrant energy oozing out of the library these days, as if to say “watch this space...”.



AT A GLANCE

LEAVING BEHIND ANONYMITY

At a staff meeting earlier this year where we explored our relationship with the wider community, an interesting point was raised by some employees regarding Jabulani's public profile. They said that people in the community often aren't aware of the services we offer because we do not promote ourselves and our name, so people just assume that everything that happens around here is done by the government or the hospital. This anonymity has led to confusion about who we are and what we do. So, although our interest has always been in keeping a low profile and not trying to make a name for ourselves, we have acknowledged this feedback and taken the hard step of trying to increase understanding and awareness of Jabulani. There are some key buildings that now have Jabulani logos on them, and Jabulani staff have been issued with shirts that bear our logo, along with the Zithulele “Living the Dream” logo, for while we are increasing our profile, we still firmly acknowledge that we are part of a wider effort to make a difference here. The impact was immediately evident, when people started commenting on the sea of red shirts around the place!

