We had big plans for our education programme this year! In the first few months of the year, we were able to achieve some goals and make headway towards others. Our Librarian Stars group (a group of young learners who are passionate about reading and who have formed their own mini libraries – they choose books from our community library, to take home and read to their friends and neighbours, adhering to quite strict criteria that they have agreed to abide by) increased from 9 to 15; we held two parent meetings and a workshop; our teachers attended a workshop with the Eastern Cape Montessori Hub; and we held a promising meeting with senior representatives from the Tribal Authorities, discussing how we can better engage communities around the importance of early childhood development. But of course, the rest of the year didn’t pan out as expected. Whose did? Lockdown struck and our “normal” education programme ground to an immediate halt. How could we continue our education programmes, all of which are based on engagement and interaction with others, without being able to meet our learners in person or in a group context?

The simple answer is that much of what we do, what we hope to expose our young learners to, and what we aim to instill in them, could not be done under lockdown. As you would have read about briefly in our last newsletter, our education team took on a new mantle during the Covid-19 crisis. After training from the doctors at neighbouring Zithulele Hospital, our team set off to walk the hills, visiting our learners, provide essential healthcare information and screening while also giving out hygiene packs and educational resources to keep our young learners’ minds active. But when lockdown ended and schools re-opened, it was all systems go! Here are some highlights:

**TEACHING THANDI**

When Thandi (not her real name) first returned to Zithulele Preschool after five months of being at home, she was extremely shy and quiet. She struggled with concentration and was not able to focus for more than a few minutes at a time. Her memory was poor and she could only remember three numbers at a time. Thandi struggled to make or engage with friends and did not spontaneously talk or play with other children. She also found it difficult to follow instructions from the teachers. Over the next few months, it was wonderful to see how Thandi slowly transformed into an engaged, happy and enthusiastic child who has many friends and who enjoys chatting during snack time. Thandi is now able to count from one to ten and she freely chooses her own activities in which she becomes absorbed. She is also able to follow instructions from the teachers and enjoys playing her part in ensuring that the classroom is clean and organised. The enriching environment of the Montessori classroom and the nurturing, caring and respectful culture that the teachers facilitate has enabled this incredible transformation in Thandi. We are so proud of the teachers and Thandi!
Our Masiphakamei (Let’s Rise) programme has as its foundation a desire to create hope where perhaps there has been little to none before. Through engaging vulnerable young people with potential but a lack of opportunities, and immersing them in an environment that enables them to realise their worth, develop their character, and equip them with a broad range of basic skills to enable them to face the challenges of life both within or beyond their rural village, we aim to instill in them hope and a means for a better future.

While more than half of this year’s programme was spent sewing much-needed masks to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in our community (well done to the girls who learnt sewing skills especially to fulfil this role, and who sewed more than 1000 masks!), we managed to cram a lot into the remaining months after lockdown eased! We facilitated

It might not have been a talent show, but standing up to spell the words our Librarian had chosen, is as nerve wracking as knowing the judges can press that dreaded buzzer on whatever country’s ‘Got Talent’ show one might be performing on! Despite heavy rain, there was a buzz of excitement at our recent spelling bee, as Grade 5 learners from three surrounding primary schools gathered to pit themselves against each other. Zithulele Independent School was declared the winner and we look forward to repeating this annual event next year.

CONSCIENTIOUS CLEANING

Our Zithudlala afterschool programme facilitates learning through fun activities, and learning about our environment and how we can care for our one and only precious world, is a topic high on Jabulani’s priority list. One afternoon, 51 young learners joined us for a village clean up. Armed with black refuse bags for waste and clear bags for recyclables, the kids were divided into 4 groups and then paired up. With adult volunteers to help supervise the groups, the kids hit the street (there really is only one in Zithulele!). After filling over 100 bags of waste and recycling, the groups reconvened at the community centre to fill their minds as well.

Each group had to discuss two topics amongst themselves: how can we stop littering in Zithulele; an why is it important keep the environment clean? Then a brave member of each group stood up in front of all the other groups, to give feedback (their bravery was rewarded with a very tasty chocolate!).

HOPE FOR OUR FUTURE

It is not just about wearing masks any more, it is about being conscious of our environment and the need to keep it clean. Our Zithulele afterschool programme facilitates learning through fun activities, and learning about our environment and how we can care for our one and only precious world, is a topic high on Jabulani’s priority list. One afternoon, 51 young learners joined us for a village clean up. Armed with black refuse bags for waste and clear bags for recyclables, the kids were divided into 4 groups and then paired up. With adult volunteers to help supervise the groups, the kids hit the street (there really is only one in Zithulele!). After filling over 100 bags of waste and recycling, the groups reconvened at the community centre to fill their minds as well.

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The garden they planted was prolific this year. Utilising the knowledge that our Healthy Village Project Manager, Riaan, passed on to them after he attended a Farming God's Way training course last year, they grew lots of green beans, spinach, beetroot, cabbage and green peppers. They learnt how to pickle the beetroot, sold lots of produce to ‘Zithuleleans’ and donated a very full wheelbarrow full of vegetables to the Zithulele Hospital kitchen. Over the Heritage Day long weekend, the girls also went on an outreach visit to a children’s home in Coffee Bay, where they helped them set up a vegetable garden and taught them some of the Farming God’s Way skills they had learnt.

Some other highlights of the year included: completing the BrightStar course that focuses intensely on self development, relationships and leadership; undertaking the International Computer Driving Licence programme facilitated by Zithulele NGO Sihamba Sonke (a dynamic programme which actually gives the girls the opportunity to continue at their own pace and even continue after the Masiphakameni programme has finished, if they’d like to); undertaking the Pointman leadership course that holds as its vision the creation and support of inspirational, trustworthy leaders.

Ending the year on a high, the Masiphakameni leaders, Jenny and Vuyolwethu, took the ladies on a fantastic vocational field trip. They visited various businesses and were inspired by people who had worked their way up through various different channels - a security person who is now managing a hotel, and someone who dropped out of university but is now running several businesses, including having started up a franchise. The group also visited a goat farm, gaining helpful insight into the farming industry but also getting tips on how one could start something similar in a small scale at home. As a highlight of the trip and also the year, everyone had to overcome their fears by going on a zipline tour. While at first many of the ladies were opposed to the idea and scared, they came back being super proud of themselves for having done it!

Differently Able

As soon as Covid-19 restrictions eased, our Rural Ability Programme team sprung into action. Our Community Disability Workers were back in the field, visiting our clients in their homes. Sim jumped into the arduous tasks of picking up support of our Credit and Savings Groups, ironing out the myriad of issues that had cropped up while the groups tried to continue their savings groups out of sheer need, despite lockdown. And Amanda started putting her months of planning into action. Here are a few highlights from an action packed three months!

Improving Service Provision

The RAP team facilitated two of their clients sharing their stories and experiences with Zithulele Hospital staff, ranging from security guards, to reception clerks, nursing staff and clinicians. They shared both bad and good experiences and it was really enlightening. As part of what they shared, one client stated that “I feel very important today for standing in front of you. I have never stood in front of people before. We [people with disabilities] are always asked to sit at the back in events and now I am in front of you”. It was a low-key but meaningful and necessary event both for the clients and the hospital staff, with one staff member commenting, “This was really eye opening for me. I can’t believe what people go through in the hands of professional people” and there was a general consensus that it had been really useful to have the opportunity to listen to client’s experiences.
“Indaba” (pronounced in-dah-bah) is a South African word referring to a ‘conference’ or more informally, ‘one’s own problem or concern’, and coming from Xhosa and Zulu words that mean “business” or “matter”. In our context, Indaba is a term often used to describe a gathering of stakeholders to share and discuss a pertinent topic. While we have attended other indabas, we have never hosted our own, until now. Although we could not invite everyone because of restricted numbers, our RAP team invited most of the stakeholders that we work with and those that we would love to work with. Again, some of our clients shared their different stories, including showing appreciation for all the good work the programme has done to change their lives. King Sabata Dalindyebo (the district in which we are based) chief whip said “I love what RAP is doing in these communities. I am willing to help whenever you need my assistance”. The level of engagement in the topics that we had chosen to explore with the 48 attendees was so great, that the event went over time by about two hours. Being a Friday, that alone was an indicator of success, and we left the event feeling confident that what we are doing is having a positive impact, and with a good indication of what we can still do to improve and grow.

I AM ME, YOU ARE YOU

It is so easy to take knowledge for granted and be surprised when faced with superstitions and myths perpetuated by those who have not been exposed to accurate information. After two geographic areas where specific issues were being encountered had been identified, we designed a door-to-door campaign as mass events were still not an option. In the Wilo area, accusations of witching have led to people being killed – elderly women have been killed because young people were holding the misbelief that they are being bewitched by women who are talking inappropriately while also displaying some other “strange” behaviours. Unfortunately, this all boils down to a lack of understanding of dementia as a medical condition. One young person who we spent time with said “I didn't know that there is something called dementia. We always thought that when old people start speaking to themselves, it's because they a witches”. We spoke with the young and old alike, spreading knowledge and information, and handing out our brightly coloured T-shirts that read “ndindim (I am me), unguwe (you are you), we are differently abled”. The campaign was really positively received and it was heartwarming to receive feedback like “what you guys are doing is amazing because as old people, we live in fear that one day we will develop this dementia and will be killed for being accused witches”. We then moved to the Kotyana area, where we had received reports from our clients who are epileptic, on how they are stigmatised by their families and neighbours because of the myths or beliefs people hold about epilepsy. Speaking with people elicited some very interesting stories, such as if someone is epileptic, it is because s/he was looked at by a certain kind of snake, and that “put[ting] a stinky shoe on the nose so the person can smell the shoe will stop the seizures”. It is our great hope that spreading accurate information about epilepsy in the community will result in children and adults with epilepsy being referred to services and supported appropriately.