



WOFIRE NEWS

SAVING LIVES • PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT • RESTORING DIGNITY

THANK YOU TO OUR FIREFIGHTERS



MORE THAN A THOUSAND FLYING HOURS



1000 FIREFIGHTERS, 133 FIRES



Heroes of the Cape war on fires

Minister thanks brave firefighting heroes

The Minister of Environmental Affairs, Edna Molewa, has applauded the hard work of the 1000 firefighters from the Working on Fire programme and various fire authorities who played a crucial role in providing firefighting resources on the ground and in the air in the Western Cape during the past two months.

Multiple fires have ravaged the Western Cape and Working on Fire was asked to provide firefighting resources at 133 fires throughout the Western Cape (1/12/16-20/01/17). The firefighters on the ground and in the air worked closely with fire authorities throughout the province in limiting the damage to the destruction of just under 150 000 hectares.

"Our 1000-odd firefighters, which included pilots and management, have played a significant role in bringing these fires under control. The fact that we were able to deploy firefighters from the Eastern Cape and the Free State in a relative short space of time is testimony to the strength of Working on Fire to provide a national firefighting resource anywhere in the country," Minister Molewa said.

"To put our firefighting efforts in perspective, this deployment amounted to more than 5000 person days on the fires in the Western Cape between 1 December 2016 and 17 January 2017 alone.

"On behalf of our government I want to extend our gratitude and thanks to these brave firefighting warriors. They are certainly great ambassadors for our department's Working on Fire programme," Minister Molewa said.



"Thank you to our firefighting teams on the ground and in the air for saving lives and protecting our environment"

Vryheid Team help to save supermarket

The KwaZulu-Natal Vryheid Team recently assisted the Abaqulusi Fire and Rescue Department to contain a fire that broke out at a local supermarket. The team responded after a security company employee noticed smoke coming from the supermarket and alerted the neighbourhood watch, which initially attempted to extinguish the fire along with community members.

Working on Fire was applauded for responding within 30 minutes of being alerted to the fire and worked quickly to help contain it. "We were very happy to assist. Even though it wasn't a veld or forest fire we were lending a helping hand as we are also part of this community," says Vryheid Base Communications Representative, Siphamandla Manyayi.

The building's owners were very grateful for the support they received from WOF.



Vryheid Team firefighters ready with a hose at the garage door



WOF vehicle parked outside

 Nompilo Zondi, Provincial Communication Officer, KwaZulu-Natal

Editorial

Dear Readers

A big welcome back to you, our loyal readers. The editorial team wishes you all the best for 2017!

In this edition we focus on the fire suppression efforts of our participants in the Western Cape and as usual, carry features on how Working on Fire is changing the lives of the young people in the programme.

Over the course of the next few months we will undertake a revamp of our newsletter and will engage with our readers on what they would like to see and read in this newsletter.

We hope and trust that you will all contribute to helping us to produce better quality news.

Happy reading!

MD Message

Llewellyn Pillay



A warm welcome back to all our participants in the northern provinces who had a short break over the December holiday period. I trust that you all had a good break and are already working hard in your provinces.

In the same breath let me also thank our participants in the Western Cape for their sterling work during the current summer fire season.

From all accounts this has been the worst start to the summer fire season as you were kept busy throughout December and January fighting multiple fires across the province.

We have received good feedback from our various partners and stakeholders about the great work our participants are doing in the Western Cape. We must also thank our firefighters from the Eastern Cape and Free State who were deployed to assist with the multiple fires – your help was appreciated.

I urge you to remain vigilant on the fire lines as the hot month of February is upon us.

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Working on Fire is an Expanded Public Works Programme which resides within the Department of Environmental Affairs.



Working on Fire gets endorsement from South African National Defence Force (SANDF)

Working on Fire's provincial office in Mpumalanga received an endorsement from the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) for its outstanding work in integrated fire management and community fire awareness activities.

At an awards ceremony held on 2 December 2016 at the Bundu Lodge in Nelspruit, Mbuso Siwela received the award on behalf of WOF management in the province. "Receiving the award was not just a pat on the back, but an assurance that our work here at WOF doesn't go unnoticed," says Siwela.

"This award symbolises good partnership and the valuable support received throughout the years we have been working with WOF," says Captain Siboniso Maseko of the SANDF.

According to Siwela, the three-year relationship with the SANDF began as a result of several veld fires at military camps in the province.

"I have been partnering with the SANDF since 2014. I visited the Zonstraal Military Base in October providing procedures to military personnel on how to prevent and manage unwanted fires," he says.



Lebogang Maseko, Provincial Communication Officer, Mpumalanga



Mbuso Siwela receives the SANDF award

Our premium news products, WOFire News and WOF TV, have the single objective of being informative!

They are there to keep our participants informed about what's happening in WOF across the country.

WOF TV News and WoFire News are dedicated to the hard work of our participants and aim to focus on their stories, not only in relation to their work in WOF but also how they have grown and developed in the Programme.

Furthermore we feature many stories of participants who took responsibility for their own lives and also extended their compassion to others.

Readers are welcome to send us their stories in their home language and we will assist with translation and editing.

Email your story to news@wofire.co.za or submit them via your local Provincial Communication Officers, Regional Managers, Base Managers or Crew Leaders.



Massive firefighting efforts in the Western Cape

Thank you to our firefighters and pilots for all your hard work and dedication



Working on Fire operations during fires in perspective

- The contingent of firefighters from the Department of Environmental Affairs Working on Fire programme played an instrumental role in assisting Cape Nature and Western Cape Disaster Management officials to contain the fires.
- The fire crews, bolstered by aerial support, battled huge fires in Somerset West, Simon's Town, Tulbagh, Grabouw, Southern Cape and the West Coast.
- Over 1000 firefighters are currently in the Western Cape stationed in 31 teams – with some mobilised from as far afield as bases in the Eastern Cape and Free State.
- They were supported by Working on Fire spotter planes, fixed-wing Air Tractor water bombers and a helicopters.
- The Working on Fire programme spends about R80 million per year in the Western Cape, preventing and managing large wild fires.
- Working on Fire has twenty-five firefighting aircraft currently deployed in the Western Cape and 36 pilots, and about 70 vehicles that provide logistical and firefighting support.
- Working on Fire falls under the Department's Environmental Programmes and is implemented through the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP).
- High temperatures, no rain and especially windy conditions are forecast for February, which is usually a very dry month (2% of our annual rainfall).

Bethlehem participants save lives by donating blood

Donating a unit of blood can save up to three lives of patients in need. Becoming a regular blood donor ensures that safe levels of blood supply are maintained and makes it possible for the South African National Blood Service (SANBS) to store sufficient blood to meet the demand.

Two participants from the Bethlehem Bravo Team noted the decline in fire activity in their area and, having been informed of the shortage of blood at the start of the festive season last year, decided to save lives another way. Despite having to walk approximately four kilometres to and from the local SANBS centre, Rantho Mofokeng and Makheherie Mtimkulu became blood donors.

According to the staff members at the SANBS Bethlehem branch it is quite safe to donate blood. Their personnel use new, sterile and disposable equipment (blood bags, tubes and needles) for each donation. These are used only once for every blood donation, and then removed in a special waste container and incinerated. These safety measures ensure that donors are not exposed to transmissible

diseases when donating blood. Further safety measures include a test to ensure that the donor's haemoglobin level is within a safe range for donation purposes. In addition, the pulse rate and blood pressure will be checked. Donors must also weigh at least 50kg, be between 16 and 65 years of age and in good health. Potential donors will be permitted to donate only if these measurements are within the defined acceptable range.

"On behalf of the SANBS we would like to thank the two Working on Fire participants for coming today and donating their precious lifesaving blood," said Rochelle van der Merwe, the SANBS Public Relations Officer. "Their donation today is especially important because during the festive season we see a decline in people donating blood due to schools and businesses closing. So we would like to encourage everybody to come and donate as blood is needed on a daily basis."



Wayne Mokhehi, Provincial Communication Officer, Free State



Rantho Mofokeng and Makheherie Mtimkulu from the Bethlehem Bravo Team

Business Science student fights flames with passion

During the height of the Western Cape fire season, Lucia Rantase, a Business Science student and Type 2 Crew Leader from Working on Fire Free State, took a break from her books to lead a team of firefighters deployed to battle fires in the Western Cape.

Rantase says, "It's been very difficult thus far as the terrain is very different from that in the Free State. We have faced challenges during our deployment but so far it's been a good experience and opportunity."

Rantase says that being a leader means "you're in a place where you are working with people. You have to check their safety, check your surroundings and at the same time, you're protecting the environment."

Rantase says female firefighters stand shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts. "We're a few ladies within the

programme, yet we work just as hard to show that we can handle the pressure and make wise decisions under pressure."

She joined the programme in October 2013 and has used her stipend to complete her studies in Business Science. "The programme has helped me in paying for my studies. WOF is a stepping stone for me and even though I am still studying, I aim to finish my Type 1 crew leader course as well. Being a leader is my passion."

Working on Fire recruits and trains many young men and women from across South Africa just like Lucia Rantase. There are currently more than 5 000 participants in the Programme, 94% of whom are youth and 31% women, the highest level in any comparable fire service in the world.



Lauren Howard, Provincial Communication Officer, Western Cape



Participant uses gardening to create extra income



"Growing your own vegetables improves your health and saves money," says 29-year-old Hlengiwe Diwu of the Nqadu Team. Diwu says that she has loved and enjoyed gardening since childhood.

"I was raised by a woman who loved gardening and that is how I got my gardening skills which helps me create a good vegetable garden," Diwu explains.

Diwu, who was recruited by Working on Fire as a firefighter at Nqadu Base in 2012, says that she uses one of the gardens at her base to plant vegetables in her spare time, along with other firefighters.

"I plant vegetables all the time to counteract the price of food in the country," she says, noting that her garden doesn't only help her save money but eating fresh vegetables helps people stay healthy.

Diwu says she does not only eat them but sells vegetables to villagers as well and the money she gets helps her to support her family.



Nthabiseng Mokone, Provincial Communication Officer, Eastern Cape

Pelisa passes the crew leader course

Pelisa Somya of the Addo High Altitude Team (HAT) successfully passed her crew leader course at Jimmy Rose Training academy in Bloemfontein recently.

According to the 22-year-old, qualifying for the Type 2 crew leader course is no child's play as one needs to be physically and mentally tough.

"It takes hard work, passion and dedication for a person to succeed in life," says Somya, a former Base Communications Representative (BCR) for Addo HAT.

She says that her new role will give her an opportunity to learn more in junior management.

"This will develop my skills both as a firefighter and manager on site," she says. "I am now on probation and I wish to pass my probation. That will be one of the highlights in my life."



Nthabiseng Mokone, Provincial Communication Officer, Eastern Cape

Vingerkraal Team members practice what they preach

Working on Fire Limpopo's Vingerkraal Team lives by what it preaches to the communities, landowners and learners about fire awareness and minimising fire risks by implementing integrated fire management.

Vingerkraal participants implemented integrated fire management at their base before the holidays, before going out to help landowners and communities. The participants cleared the fuel load surrounding their base by means of slashing.



Vingerkraal participants doing slashing at their base (photographs by Lesiba Matlou, Vingerkraal BCR)

"We are cleaning our base before we go on leave for the festive holidays," Lesiba Matlou, Vingerkraal Base Communications Representative, said at the time. "It makes sense that we clean now because next year when we open, the fuel would've grown again but now it won't be too much."



Matema Gwangwa, Provincial Communication Officer, Limpopo

WOF gave him a chance to change his circumstances

"I have six family members at home who depend solely on me for their survival," says Thabo Masanabo of Kwaggafontein, when asked why he joined the programme. Masanabo is a firefighter based at the Dr JS Moroka Team in Tweefontein.

He says the violent nature of the taxi industry made him look for other job opportunities. Masanabo was forced to quit being a taxi driver out of fear for his life and family following taxi-related violence.

"I saw the advertisement in one of the local stores which mentioned that Working on Fire was going to recruit firefighters. I then prepared myself to attend the recruitment drive," he says.

Masanabo took a leap of faith because he was tired of living in fear of being killed in the



crossfire and asked his employer for a day off so that he could attend the recruitment.

"The programme took me in and I will use the opportunity as a stepping stone to advance my career going forward. Had I stayed home my family would have starved," he says.

Masanabo says he was relieved to get the opportunity and enjoys the physical fitness tests done by teams on a weekly basis.

"Working on Fire programme saves lives. My life was literally saved from a possible stray bullet from the fighting taxi lords had I stayed. I am happy that I don't have to look over my shoulder anymore," says Masanabo.



Parapara Makgahlela, Provincial Communication Officer, Gauteng

Firefighter saves to pursue his dreams

"I decided to study because I know education is a great instrument for personal development," says Sthakazelo Buthelezi, a firefighter at Mbazwana Base. Buthelezi was recruited to Working on Fire in 2012.

He decided to do a one-year diploma in Advanced Computer Literacy at Avuxeni Computer Academy.

"For several months I saved up money for my studies. It is possible if you know you are saving for your future. With this diploma I hope for better opportunities within and outside the programme," says Buthelezi.

"Wearing my graduation gown made me feel very proud and hopeful for the future. I

want to thank Working on Fire for uplifting me. This has encouraged me to do more professionally and in my community," says Buthelezi.

When given a chance by his crew leader to address the team, Buthelezi uses it to motivate his colleagues. "I talk about the importance of education, and when doing fire awareness, I tell learners to never stop learning because no one can take that away from you," he says.



Nompilo Zondi, Provincial Communication Officer, KwaZulu-Natal



Sthakazelo Buthelezi wearing his graduation gown

Ready to tackle invasive alien plants

A Training Officer in Gauteng, Happy Mpandeli, reports that alien invasive plant species like pompom and lantana are dangerous and are a threat to vegetation.

"We have trained 95 herbicide applicators to mitigate these alien plants this year as they grow a lot off-season," he says.

Mpandeli says herbicide applicators are in demand with landowners, especially during the off-season. When participants attend the 25-day programme at Mbombela Training Academy it is compulsory for them to do herbicide application as it is part of the basic firefighting course. "Landowners struggle to contain mushrooming of alien plants in



their plots, nature reserves and farms. Our teams come in to help mitigate invasive plants' growth and spread," Mpandeli says.

Alien plants pose a threat to the environment because they wipe out pasturelands in farms and that causes frustration for farmers.

Mpandeli points out Abe Bailey, Roodeplaat and Leeuwfontein nature reserves as hotspots as they are often infested with pompoms, while farmers in the Vaal Marina and De Wildt areas struggle with lantana.



Parapara Makgahlela, Provincial Communication Officer, Gauteng

Future musician in the making

Akhona Mlindazwe of Nqadu believes that every person has a dream and that it takes hard work to fulfil such a dream.

Mlindazwe joined Working on Fire as a firefighter in 2014 after she had been unemployed for six years, during which time she explored her passion for singing.

"After matriculating in 2007 I started singing at concerts and in church music competitions," Mlindazwe says. She dreams of being a successful musician one day and says WOF is helping her build towards her dream.

"Joining WOF was a blessing in disguise. It helped me a lot to get money which I used to buy my own musical instruments," she explains.

Mlindazwe says that she used her savings and a loan to buy a keyboard that cost R9 000. "When you want to fulfil your dream you can do anything in your power to make it reality," she says.

Mlindazwe has written 12 songs and has rehearsed since she bought her equipment. "During my spare time I write songs and practice for the recording of my first album," she says.



Nthabiseng Mokone, Provincial Communication Officer, Eastern Cape

Career development a priority for participants



With 23 base teams and 603 firefighters in the Mpumalanga province, Social Development Practitioner Condricck Mukhudwani says career development tops the list of things to achieve in 2017.

"As WOF continues to assist in poverty alleviation and job creation across the country through the programme, my priority for this year is to ensure our participants progress through the ranks from firefighter level," says Mukhudwani.

Mukhudwani adds, "Because most of our participants come from marginalised communities, my aim this year is to encourage

them to study further in order to secure a better future.

"As part of the social development programme, I will also facilitate knowledge skills workshops covering workplace conflict resolution, relationship problems as well as family-related topics," he says. The WOF programme is founded on providing extensive, high-level fire skills training, various specialised training and life skills training, and Mukhudwani says life skills training is his top priority in 2017.



Lebogang Maseko, Provincial Communication Officer, Mpumalanga

Discipline helped me to progress



Working on Fire (WOF) participant Mmeli Manyisa from Pienaar in Mpumalanga celebrated four years in the WOF programme recently and shared his journey with WOFire News.

"I joined WOF in 2012 after my dream of studying further was left stranded due to financial constraints," says Manyisa, who is thirty years old.

Manyisa says that although he had only hoped to work for WOF for a short period, being a participant in the programme has provided him with "opportunities money cannot buy".

"I was once deployed to the Kruger National Park where I had an opportunity to learn about

different animals and to experience the beauty of nature," he says. "WOF has also contributed to my personal development because of the principles of discipline, health and fitness they instil in us."

During his time at WOF, Manyisa was also trained as a chainsaw operator. He looks ahead to the future with confidence. "This year I am planning to save up enough money so I can do a driver's licence," he says.



Lebogang Maseko, Provincial Communication Officer, Mpumalanga

Programme helping me to finish studies

Thabo Makola's dream of becoming a sound engineer was cut short when he could not pay his tuition fees.

"I did not have R2 000 to pay my tuition fee for the final two modules to complete my National Diploma in Sound Engineering at the University of South Africa," says 23-year-old Makola, of Leeuwfontein Team.

Makola was unable to secure assistance from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme but, while working in a temporary job in Leeuwfontein nature reserve, he heard that Working on Fire was recruiting

firefighters. For him, this was an opportunity to raise money to complete his course.

"I had invested lot of time and energy in my studies and didn't like not completing my final year," Makola says. "This year I am registering those modules and I must complete them."

His parents were happy to hear that he will finish his qualification.

"Working on Fire saved my dream career through the work opportunity it provided," says Makola.



Thabo Makola of Leeuwfontein team is final year student at UNISA studying Sound Engineering



Parapara Makgahlela, Provincial Communication Officer, Gauteng

Driver passionate about Safety

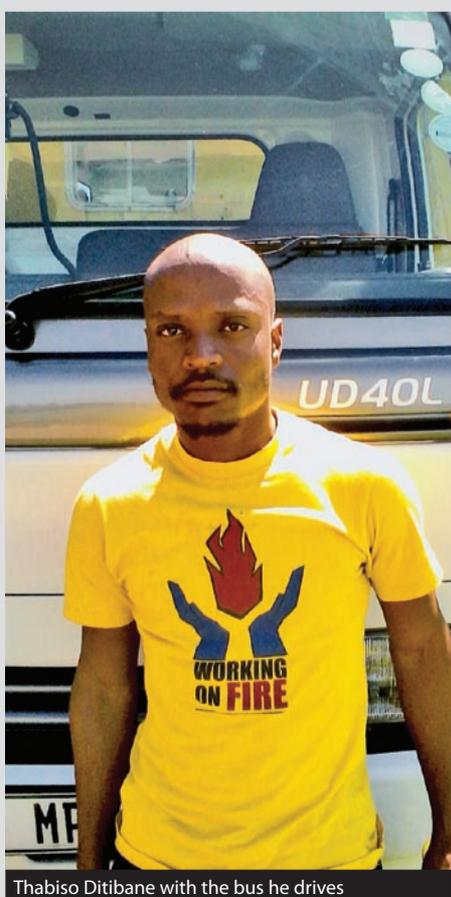
Many of our Working On Fire participants strive to become the best they can be. Thabiso Ditibane is one of our participants who has not only managed to be promoted as a WOF driver but is also doing his utmost to further his studies.

Funded by his earnings, Ditibane completed his Occupational Health and Safety Management (OHS) Diploma at Oxbridge Academy. "I chose this course because I care about safety in the workplace. I like to live in an environment where I know people are safe and studying this course has helped me to be more alert," says Ditibane.

After completing his OHS Diploma Ditibane enrolled for the Safety Management Diploma course as he had started as a SHE representative at the base and fell in love with the health and safety field.

Ditibane joined the WOF Programme in April 2013 and he wants to see himself one day in the role of Safety Officer.

"Joining the WOF Programme was the best decision I ever made as it has helped me pay for my studies and support my child. I would like to encourage my fellow colleagues to set their own goals in life and try by all means to develop themselves," he says.



Thabiso Ditibane with the bus he drives



Patricia Maanelo, Provincial Communication Officer, North West

Firefighter has big hopes for his business

Firefighter Zamile Dlamini from Umzimkhulu, KwaZulu-Natal, recently started his own tuck shop business in his community. Dlamini, who was recruited to Working on Fire in April 2013, saved for months before he had enough capital to open his business at the end of September last year.

"There are some obstacles I face, as I have no one to assist me in running the tuck shop during the day when I am at work. Due to this, the tuck shop is not making the maximum profit as I have to close during the day," says Dlamini.

Dlamini wanted to share with other firefighters how he managed to start his

own small business. "It takes discipline and perseverance, and opportunities will open up. This year I hope to grow my business and one day help people by creating jobs," says Dlamini.

"I encourage others to utilise their stipends wisely. I'm a big believer in the saying 'the early bird catches the worm', because the earlier you start the better your chances of success," Dlamini says.



Nompilo Zondi, Provincial Communication Officer, KwaZulu-Natal



The firefighter at his tuck shop

Firefighters participate in Cherry Festival

The Ficksburg Cherry Festival has been an annual event on South Africa's tourism calendar for 50 years, having started in 1967. It takes place in late November in the beautiful Free State town every year.

Festival activities include cherry tours, a golf classic, a half marathon, cherry product competitions, classic vehicle displays, equestrian events, beer fests, a food and wine fiesta, a baking competition and, a firm crowd favourite, a demonstration of the making of cherry mampoer. Well-known South African artists provide live entertainment. The Ficksburg Cherry Festival this year took place from 17 to 19 November 2016.

Working on Fire participants from the Marquard, Clocolan, Heilbron and Ficksburg teams in the Free State participated in the half marathon proudly wearing their yellow T-shirts as a sign of unity and solidarity. All the WOF

participants in the race managed to finish the full distance of 23 kilometres.

Godfrey Seutloali from the Marquard Base walked away with a silver medal in the men's race with a time of 1 hour and 38 minutes. "This year the race was a bit tricky with the constantly changing terrain but I managed to do well and keep the WOF name high," says Seutloali.

Vangile Khombule from the Heilbron Base won the women's race with a time of 1 hour and 48 minutes despite this being the first time she ran a 23km race. "The race was very challenging because I'm used to running only 10km races and I only started running last year. Despite all the odds stacked against me I won the women's race, beating the other runners who had much more experience," says Khombule.



Wayne Mokhethi, Provincial Communication Officer, Free State



Working on Fire participants in the Cherry Festival half marathon



Given Moatshe

Given self-love and acceptance

Boifang Given Moatshe, a storekeeper at Kgaswane Base in the North West, found self-love and acceptance thanks to the Working on Fire programme and his teammates.

Moatshe says on his arrival at the base he didn't know how to cook or do his own laundry.

"I didn't know how to buy groceries and cook for myself but my teammates taught me and showed me love without judgement. They made me feel like I'm one of them, and I started feeling comfortable around them and made friends," says Moatshe.

Moatshe joined the WOF programme in October 2015. He says he felt lost and being around people who do not have a disability made him angry because of his own insecurities. "I started making friends and realised they actually liked me. I just needed to make peace with my disability and accept myself."

Realising that some of his teammates were parents and managed to support their families, Moatshe learned how to manage his money and improved his social skills.

"Everything has been tough for me but I have conquered it all. I know how to love,

make friends, save, budget, cook and do my own laundry. My advice to all firefighters is that money won't buy you love. I'm living small now but I'm the happiest person I know," he says.

Moatshe's future plan is to study supply chain and procurement and be a qualified stock controller. "Being a storekeeper has helped me be in control of my own life and it's all thanks to Working On Fire," he says.



Patricia Maanelo, Provincial Communication Officer, North West

Participant takes advantage of his fitness level on the race field



Pascal Joseph and Marks Mpekula at the Hopefield Community Fun Run

Base Communications Representative, Masibulele Pascal Joseph, from the Vredenburg Base is passionate about being an ambassador in his community and keeping fit.

In April, Joseph successfully completed the 56km Two Oceans Marathon held in Cape Town in March, in 4 hours and 6 minutes. Following that, he completed the 5km Hopefield Community Fun Run race in 15 minutes and 40 seconds.

Thirty-year-old Joseph, a husband and father of two who previously resided in the Eastern Cape, started running at the age of 18 and continued cross-country running in the University SASSA games.

He started doing long-distance running in 2008, completing his first 42km Cape Town Marathon run in 2011. As he progressed over the years he completed the Two Oceans

Marathon twice in under 6 hours. This year he managed to break his personal record. When speaking about his background and goals in life he says, "At Two Oceans in 2015 there were companies such as Sanlam that motivated us to start small businesses within our community. I went home and decided to start my own gym to help men and women who want to stay fit and healthy. Today I am a facilitator at my own gym in the location of George Carriage and have 42 members."

Joseph says he enjoys working at Working on Fire as it is a disciplined organisation. His passion for running and fitness motivates him "to carry forth the many lessons I am taught at WOF to keep the community of George Carriage healthy and motivated."



Lauren Howard, Provincial Communication Officer, Western Cape

Pilanesberg Base star runners aim to compete internationally

Tshepo Tshite and Obed Kopong are both at the Pilanesberg Base, North West. They joined the Working on Fire programme in May last year. "When we heard that WOF was looking for physically fit young people to employ as firefighters, we decided to go and try out our luck," say the two young men.

Both had a passion for running since early in primary school. Tshepo and Obed met at Sedibeng Runners Club, in Moruleng in Rustenburg, which their community coach persuaded them to join as he saw their potential.

"I think he identified me because I had always been the best runner at school and competed at national level during school competitions," says Tshite, who is now part of the junior team in the club.

"I take unpaid leave to go to the marathons. Being appointed as a firefighter boosted my confidence and restored my dignity and I win all my competitions," says Kopong.

Tshite says the WOF fitness training made it easier for him to beat his opponents while competing because firefighting requires fitness.

The pair has been identified as the best among their peers as they have more than 50 medals, certificates and trophies to their names. They have been offered an opportunity by Nedbank Runners Club to train and compete with other top runners across the country, which would qualify them to compete at national level if successful.

When asked about their future dreams, they both said their wish is to compete in the biggest club in South Africa, get into the Olympic team and represent South Africa in Germany 2020.

We wish them all the best in their endeavours.



JUNIOR CHAMPION

Tshepo running the marathon



Patricia Maanelo, Provincial Communication Officer, North West

Restoring the dignity of the disabled

November is disability awareness month. It's during this month that the nation celebrates people who are living with disability. WOF Limpopo's Aganang Team lived up to the theme of this year's Casual Day, 'Up your Game'. Indeed they upped their game when they committed to hosting a disability awareness event for the disabled learners at Rethusheng special school at Mamehlabe Village.

The day started well with the team arriving at the event together with their provincial management. During his keynote address, the Limpopo GM, Mr Sam Maepa, said that WOF supports disabled people and highlighted that there are about 30 disabled people employed at different WOF bases in Limpopo in the position of store controllers. He also indicated that being disabled doesn't mean that one's life should end

there without exploring like any other people. Upon hearing that, the learners at Rethusheng gained more courage when they hit the podium where they showcased their various dance skills in ballroom, traditional and pantsula. The whole venue was filled with love, laughter and happiness.

WOF participants also entertained the audience with a special disability awareness

drama and also their melodious songs which had everyone begging for more. Sakie Lamola, our driver, was so carried by the spirit of love that he also performed a song from his album.

WOF sealed the day by donating 40 chairs and money to Rethusheng. WOF has again restored the dignity of the young learners at Rethusheng special school for now they won't be sitting on the floor.



Disabled learners from Rethusheng Special School showcased their dance talent at the disability awareness event at Mamehlabe



WOF donating 40 chairs to Rethusheng during the disability awareness event

Matema Gwangwa, Provincial Communication Officer, Limpopo

Acquired skills help former firefighter find new job

Lamla Mabe, a former firefighter from Ugie Base in the Eastern Cape advises firefighters to be passionate about what they do and to aim high in life. This self-driven young man joined Working on Fire as a firefighter in October 2012.

"Before joining the WOF programme I was not working and finding a job was a challenge as I only had matric with no university qualification," Mabe says. He said that he could not further

his studies after matriculating in 2011 due to financial problems. "That did not pull me down. I never lost hope and I told myself that aiming high will be my motto," he says.

After joining the programme he worked hard and motivated himself, knowing that WOF was a stepping stone for him to get skills which would better his chances of finding employment. "Last year in October I applied at PG Bison in Ugie and was called for an interview,

along with others," he says with a smile. Mabe did well in the interview and was employed as an operator at PG Bison.

"I was so happy to be given that opportunity and I thank Working on Fire for all the skills that I acquired while I was in the programme," he says.

Nthabiseng Mokone, Provincial Communication Officer, Eastern Cape



Rising above her disability

Restoring dignity is one of the key messages of Working on Fire, and through this key message WOF has changed a lot of lives across the country.

Twenty-five-year-old Aletta Mbabala is one of the participants whose life changed for the better since she joined the WOF family. She joined WOF as a store controller in June 2015 at Modimolle Base in the Waterberg district in Limpopo. Prior to joining WOF she was employed as a teacher at the Boitumetse Pre-School in Modimolle.

Joining WOF came as a blessing to Mbabala as her life made a turn to the better. Since being employed as a store controller, WOF equipped her with various skills and not only limited to store management.

"Growing up I used to be a shy person and I lacked confidence. I thought people judged me based on my disability and as a result I never raised my comments to any group of people. I used to feel like my suggestions will be laughed at," says Mbabala.

Through its skills development programme, WOF empowers participants with presentation, discipline, leadership and many other skills. After attending a presentation skills workshop Mbabala was asked to conduct a fire awareness presentation. Through this workshop and presentation she regained her self-confidence and hasn't looked back.

Mbabala is now doing motivational speaking at the schools within her community. She is using her experience to motivate learners to refrain from creating stumbling blocks for themselves by believing that they are incapable.

"Look at me now, who would've thought that one day I could stand in front of a crowd and speak without being afraid of being judged. My disability doesn't define the person I am. I have started a journey through WOF and far is where I'm going," says Mbabala.

Matema Gwangwa, Provincial Communication Officer, Limpopo



Aletta Mbabala at the Modimolle storeroom where she ensures that the equipment is safe and recorded. (Picture by Thabang Moremi, Modimolle BCR)