



WOFIRE NEWS

SAVING LIVES • PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT • RESTORING DIGNITY

Our Facebook and Twitter accounts have reached more than 21 000 followers and likes!

Your insight into what is happening at Working on Fire daily across South Africa

Follow us to stay informed

Working on Fire takes this opportunity to thank our audience for their loyal following and support of this platform which made it possible to reach the milestone of over 21 000 followers and likes in December 2017!

Our Facebook and Twitter presence have ensured that:



- We are the only national news source about wildland firefighting and prevention throughout South Africa.
- We are communicating more accurately about our implementation of integrated fire management products and services.



This platform informs and educates our audience about who WOF is and what we do to educate South Africans and prevent environmental risks such as fires.

We encourage all management members and participants to join our Facebook page and follow us on Twitter.

Welcome Home Miss Universe



Showcasing her down-to-earth personality, Miss Universe, Demi-Leigh Nel-Peters, took time to pose for a picture with the Working on Fire firefighters

Working on Fire firefighters joined thousands of visitors in welcoming home Demi-Leigh Nel-Peters, Miss Universe 2017. Miss Universe was honoured with a street parade starting at the Sedgefield Primary School, attended by people who have supported her through her incredible journey to becoming Miss Universe. Nel-Peters had returned home after winning the prestigious Miss Universe crown about two months ago. The Knysna Fire Department and Working on Fire, as well as local NGOs, also participated in the parade and contributed to the festive carnival atmosphere.

Former firefighters spread their wings at East London Airport

Working on Fire is a Department of Environmental Affairs-funded job creation programme focusing on implementing integrated fire management in South Africa. Many of our participants are able to land jobs outside the programme in the government and private sectors, thanks to the skills and work experience gained while in the programme. Recently two former firefighters from the Eastern Cape Stutterheim Base were employed as firefighters at East London Airport.



Former Working on Fire firefighter, Ayanda Seyibokwe, in his new uniform

Ayanda Seyibokwe's journey in the programme started in 2009 while Seithati Elephant joined in 2012. Their hard work led to their being selected for the Crew Leader course.

Seyibokwe didn't pass the Crew Leader course but says, "I never gave up and in 2014 I was taken for structural firefighting in Cape Town where I worked for a year. When the contract expired I went back to my team in Stutterheim."

These passionate young people were determined to turn their lives around and to further their studies.

Seyibokwe went back to school part-time to finish his matric and acquired his driver's licence, paying for both with part of his monthly stipend from the programme.

Elephant says, "I also decided to use the stipend to further my studies and I registered at Unisa where I did a financial accounting certificate." She also obtained a qualification at Impact Emergency Technology last year.

Seyibokwe says, "In 2016 I was taken back to be a structural firefighter in Cape Town and this brought me hope again. Last year I applied for a firefighter's post at East London Airport, and because of the experience I got at Working on Fire, I got the job and started working in December 2017."



Seithati Elephant, the former firefighter recently employed at East London Airport

"I would like to thank the programme for being my stepping stone, for opening opportunities for me and for supporting me during my studies," adds Elephant.

"To all firefighters in the programme, know what you want, work hard, be passionate and improve your qualifications," she advises.

THE SKY
IS THE
LIMIT

► PAGE 3



FIRST FIRE
OF THE
YEAR

► PAGE 5



UNISA
GRADUATE

► PAGE 7



Editorial

Dear Reader,

Welcome to our first 2018 edition and compliments of the new season. We welcome back our teams throughout the country who reported back for duty earlier this month after having been on their break for the holiday season.

Let us recognise the hard work of the Western Cape teams who have been battling raging fires across the province since the start of their summer fire season. Your hard work is recognised and we thank you. We also thank the Working on Fire Eastern Cape and Free State teams that have been assisting the Western Cape teams.

In this issue we report on the strategies the Working on Fire teams from various provinces are putting in place in order to ensure fire safe communities and reduce the number of veld and forest fires.

Several participants relate how they are using the monthly stipends they get from the programme to empower themselves to improve their chances of finding employment outside the programme while supporting their families.

We also celebrate participants who have exited the programme to take up new positions in the public and private sectors. Read their inspiring stories and find out what role Working on Fire played in these young people's lives.

We are proud of you, past and present participants, and wish you all the best in your journeys.

MD Message: 'Making Working on Fire great again'

Trevor Abrahams



A warm welcome back to all our firefighters and management who enjoyed a 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 firefighters in the Western Cape for their sterling work during the current summer fire season. From all accounts this has been a much quieter start to the summer fire season than expected and we had fewer fires than during the same period last year. I urge you to remain vigilant on the firelines as the hot month of February is approaching.

Last year upon my return to Working on Fire as Managing Director, I had the opportunity to meet some of you during various roadshows which we undertook and the thing that struck me most was the passion and commitment that our firefighters have towards the programme.

The year of focus on our children

The WOF programme has significantly changed the lives of thousands of young men and women and this has obviously had a downstream benefit on the families whom they support.

This year we will be focus much of our attention on our Working on Fire families by recognising the need to help and support our participants and management in the development of their children.

We have tasked our Social Development Department to implement more programmes and activities that will focus on helping our children in their developmental needs.

Projects such as teaching our children to save money, encouraging our participants and management to play a more interactive role in the education of our children and helping our participants to provide for the more basic needs of their children in projects such as back to school campaigns are some of the initiatives we will implement this year.

Continued on page 3

Rising from humble beginnings

WOF Finance Executive Sandiso Ntsomi rose from humble beginnings. He was born in East London and raised in Port Elizabeth by a single mother, a domestic worker, with the assistance of his grandmother and great-grandmother. Although the only child of his mother, he has seven half-siblings. After attending primary school in Walmer Location in Port Elizabeth and Tyata Location in King Williams Town, he proceeded to Zanamafa High School, where he matriculated in 2001.

He completed his BCom Accounting degree at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in 2015 and BCompt Honours at the University of South Africa in 2008. Ntsomi is a qualified chartered accountant registered with the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA).

Ntsomi started his working career at KPMG as a trainee accountant in 2008 for his SAICA articles, where he was involved in various aspects of the auditing process, including supervision of audit teams, preparation and review of annual financial statements in accordance with IFRS, the Companies Act and the King Codes, and preparation of reports to management dealing with effectiveness of internal controls.

After completion of his articles in 2011 he joined Blue IQ Investment Holdings as the Group Financial Accountant, responsible for the preparation of daily bank reconciliations, monthly general ledger reconciliations, monthly management accounts with comments, preparation of budgets and cash flow forecasts, consolidated monthly management accounts with comments, annual financial statements and consolidated annual financial statements in accordance with IFRS, GRAP, the Companies Act and the King Codes.

In 2014, he joined Working on Fire as the Senior Financial Manager responsible for management of the financial function and staff, maintaining excellent client and stakeholder relations, oversight of appropriate financial control, analysis and interpretation of financial information, oversight of financial staff development, ensuring taxation, statutory and all other relevant legislative compliance, cash flow planning and management and annual budgeting and periodic budget review processes.

When not delivering these daunting tasks, Ntsomi, who is single, enjoys tutoring, travelling, attending church, and running when he finds the time.



Working on Fire Finance Executive, Sandiso Ntsomi



Sandiso has a strong love for family



He also loves the outdoors

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.

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

Introduction of Editorial Team

Editor-in-chief:

Linton Rensburg
National Communications Manager

Deputy Editor:

Olwethu Mpeshe
Communications Coordinator
Zania Viljoen
Communication Officer: WOF Aviation

Provincial Communication Officers:

Parapara Makgahlela
Matema Gwangwa
Nomphilo Zondi
Lauren Howard
Wayne Mokheti
Lebogang Maseko
Nthabiseng Mokone

WOF TV Video Journalists:

Christalene de Kella
Rethabile Selepe

General contacts for WOFIRE NEWS

Tel: +27 21 418 2569 • Cell: +27 82 508 0990 • Email: news@wofire.co.za

Working on Fire is on Social Media | [facebook](#)

Working on Fire is on YouTube (Working on Fire TV News)



Environmental Affairs
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
Co-operative Governance
Water and Sanitation

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



EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME

The sky is the limit for Working on Fire participants

Working on Fire is proud of its Helitack and Flying Crewmen programmes. These training programmes form part of Working on Fire's mission to upskill young South Africans, while protecting people and their properties when faced with wildfires. The training programmes enable Working on Fire Aviation to fight unwanted wildfires more effectively and at the same time enhance the safety of Working on Fire's aerial firefighting operations.

Managing Director for Working on Fire, Trevor Abrahams, says that Working on Fire wanted to create a platform for firefighters to further their careers in the aviation industry. "We believe that the skills and experience they gain after training and working as helitack crew members and later as flying crewmen will enable them to someday become either aviation engineers or even pilots."

How a WOF helitack team operates



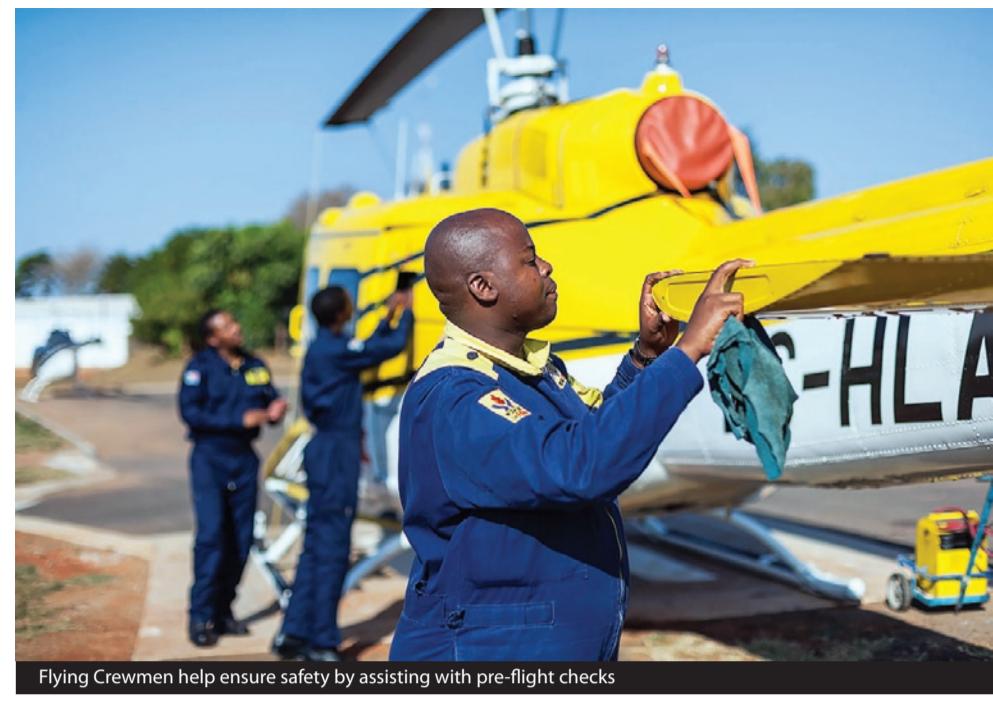
New helitack crew members undergo training in Knysna

A helitack team consists of six firefighters: one Helitack Crew Leader (previously known as a Helicopter Safety Leader) and five crew members. They serve as first responders to fires.

The helitack team is led by the helitack crew leader. He or she is responsible for ensuring that the team and all their equipment embark and disembark the aircraft safely. The helicopter will first drop off the helitack team at the fireline to start

fighting the fire on ground level and then proceed to the closest water source to fill its Bambi Bucket. When the fire trucks arrive on the scene with the ground resources, the firefighting teams join the helitack team in battling the flames.

Helitack crew members are recruited from among the Working on Fire Type 1 Crew Leaders. Once part of the crew, a participant may be trained to become a helitack crew leader.



Flying Crewmen help ensure safety by assisting with pre-flight checks

How the Flying Crewmen programme came about

Working on Fire's firefighting pilots often fly in confined spaces, mountainous terrain and between tall trees, which pose a huge risk to the pilots and the aircraft, especially with regard to damage to the tail rotor.

A Helicopter Flying Crewman training programme was implemented in 2014 to address this risk and enhance safety during Working on Fire aerial firefighting operations. Flying crewmen, initially called Helicopter Personal Assistants (HPAs), are trained to assist the pilot with routine tasks such as pre-flight checks and ensuring safe approaches to landing zones. They serve as an extra pair of eyes when flying with a Huey pilot.

Candidates for this training programme were all helitack crew leaders first and, in the absence of a helitack crew leader, the flying crewman (having acquired those skills and knowledge) can also manage the helitack team.



Flying Crewman, Justice Gaonwe, cleans the helicopter head

MD Message continued from page 2

A time of mourning and reflection

December 2017 and January 2018 were a sombre period for us in Working on Fire as we suffered the loss of some of our colleagues, including the sudden loss of the Ground Operations Managers in the Eastern Cape – Vuyo Poponi under tragic circumstances in December and Mxoli Cabela due to ill health in January 2018.

What made their loss more heartfelt is that both grew through the ranks of Working on Fire, having joined as firefighters and then moving on to Crew Leaders, Instructors at the Training Academy, Regional Managers and finally Ground Operation Managers.

We also spare a thought for our other participants whom we recently lost and we pray that all their families will find comfort and closure as time goes by.

Renewal and a change in behaviour

Upon my return to Working on Fire in May last year and with the appointment of a new Executive Committee during that period, I stated then that our biggest challenge was to restore the morale and discipline within the Working on Fire programme.

In the second half of 2017 we all worked tirelessly to ensure that Working on Fire once again excels in restoring the dignity of its participants, but also continues to provide an important service to its stakeholders and partners in saving lives and protecting the environment.

To a large extent we have been able to restore a sense of discipline and respect within the programme and every Executive member and their respective departments are committed to build in 2018 on the gains we achieved in 2017.

Fifteen years of service to South Africa

In September this year we will celebrate fifteen years of providing an essential integrated fire management service to South Africa through the Working on Fire programme. The accolades and achievements of the programme has been well documented in all corners of the country, whether it be praise from the highest office in the land to ordinary landowners and citizens whose lives have been impacted by the work of our firefighters.

Moreover, the contribution of the Working on Fire programme to providing jobs which are not simply temporal job opportunities but fundamental rungs on our firefighters' career climb, as they gain work experience and the skills required for jobs in the broader market or rising in the ranks of those managing the programme.

In this newsletter you can read some of the success stories of firefighters who have secured more permanent jobs in municipal fire services, environmental sectors and even the police service.

We have planned a number of activities to mark this important anniversary and will communicate more details about this project in due course.

OUR VALUES

TEAMWORK

The combined effort, focus and collaborative achievement of common goals and purpose. While respecting the need of individual members to have a life separate from the team.

"Working on Fire works with landowners, provincial and national fire authorities, fire protection associations, schools and communities and through this teamwork it provides a national resource to help reduce and fight wildfires"

Minister of Environmental Affairs, Edna Molewa (August 2017)

Programme helped participant gain confidence

Former firefighter Siphokazi Precious Sebezo, who is now a hostess at the Bidvest Premier Lounge at George International Airport, credits the Working on Fire (WOF) programme with instilling the confidence in her to handle her current responsibilities.

"I was a shy young lady and had low self-esteem. I used to turn away from challenges that seemed impossible. I never asked questions at school, afraid they might be considered too dumb by my classmates," says Sebezo.

Sebezo joined the programme in 2014 and says, "During my time as a firefighter, I grew to be a strong woman, confident and accepting the

many challenges that came my way. I was blessed with people who inspired me and brought out the best in me. The WOF programme taught me how to work within a team. It taught me how to care for my community and country. But most importantly WOF taught me to never give up on my dreams and always aim high."

"I had a wonderful journey, as a new recruit, firefighter and base communications representative for the Witfontein Team, and today I am proud of who I am. Thanks WOF," says Sebezo.

 Lauren Howard, Provincial Communication Officer, Western Cape



Siphokazi Precious Sebezo regained her confidence through conducting fire awareness activities with her team

Exiting participant praises Working on Fire

Twenty-year-old Thabang Mampana of the Dr JS Moroka Team has exited the programme to become a structural firefighter at Thembisile Hani fire station in Mpumalanga.

He says he studied structural firefighting and a basic ambulance assistance course with Cambridge College initially.

"I was only given the theoretical part of the disciplines. When WOF was recruiting new firefighters, I took it as an opportunity to gain work experience and learn more skills. I am grateful to have joined the programme for skills development."



Thabang Mampana exited the programme after gaining the skills to become a structural firefighter

Mampana joined the Working on Fire programme in 2016 and is now skilled in combatting veld and structural fires. The experience gained in the programme improved his chances in the job market.

Mampana, who says the new job at the fire station is quite exciting, says the opportunity in the programme truly served as a stepping

stone. "Working on Fire is a reputable leader in integrated fire management, specifically veld and forest fires. The brand is much more popular even outside of our borders," he says.

 Parapara Makgahlela, Provincial Communication Officer, Gauteng

Former firefighter graduates at SAPS



The former firefighter in his South African Police Services uniform

After years of applying, former firefighter Mboneni Ndlovu was happy to get the call to undergo eight months of basic training in the South African Police Service. Mboneni believes joining Working on Fire enabled him to realise his dream of becoming a police officer.

"Being part of WOF had a great input in getting me into the SAPS, through the physical fitness tests done every week," says Ndlovu.

Ndlovu recently graduated and is happy and excited after his long and hard journey.

"Graduating was a dream come true. I wanted to be a police officer so I can serve my community. I truly believe I passed through the grace of God," says Ndlovu.

Stationed at Manguzi Police Station, Ndlovu is very happy to be working near home. He is taking each day as it comes and learning a lot from dealing with different issues and resolving them.

"I would like to thank Working on Fire for the discipline they instilled in me. The experience I gained was a great advantage in my training at the Tshwane Police Academy," says Ndlovu.

 Nompilo Zondi, Provincial Communication Officer, KwaZulu-Natal

Memel participant exits the programme

Dolly Khanye, a female participant at the Working on Fire Memel Team, recently exited the programme after spending close to a year and a half as a firefighter. Khanye applied for a field ranger position at the Seekoeivlei Nature Reserve in Memel in the Free State and after several interviews was selected for the position.

Her experience at WOF was directly responsible for her landing the job. A key factor that worked in her favour was the fact that the Memel Team conducted controlled burns inside the reserve and this gave Khanye the necessary knowledge about how the reserve operated. Luckily, Khanye was also in possession of a driver's licence, which was a requirement for the job.

"A lot of the training that Dolly received from the Working on Fire programme is applicable to how we work in the reserve and since Dolly has joined us she has shared her fire suppression knowledge with her colleagues," says Morne Pretorius, Seekoeivlei Nature Reserve Manager.

Khanye says, "I am thankful to Working on Fire for the doors it has opened for me through the experience I gained as a participant in the programme. As a field ranger for the Department of Environmental Affairs in the Seekoeivlei Nature Reserve, I am responsible for patrolling the park, ensuring the border stays secure, clearing any litter that could be harmful to the animals in the reserve as well as ensuring the overall wellbeing of the game reserve."



Former Working on Fire participant, Dolly Khanye, now works as a field ranger



Wayne Mokheti, Provincial Communication Officer, Free State

Flare up in Summer Fire Season

Working on Fire Western Cape's firefighters have been hard at work during the Western Cape summer fire season fighting multiple fires across the province.

Since the start of the fire season on 1 December 2017, more than 600 Working on Fire firefighters as well as firefighting aircraft have been actively assisting partners such as the Southern Cape FPA, CapeNature, Provincial Disaster Management Centre, South African National Parks, Cape Peninsula FPA, Greater Overberg FPA, the City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Services and the Greater Cederberg FPA, in suppressing 46 fires across the Western Cape. Our firefighting aircraft contributed just over 189 flying hours. The concerted effort limited the areas burnt to 9,300 hectares of veld.



January 2018 Hout Bay Fire

Picture by: Justin Sullivan

During January 2018, Working on Fire assisted partners in attending to 37 fires, utilising more than 500 firefighters. Firefighting aircraft were again active at these fires. The recent extensive fires took place in Villiersdorp, Ruitersbos and Albertinia in the Southern Cape. Our firefighters continue to

remain on high alert and a nationally deployed team of firefighters from the Eastern Cape is ready to be dispatched across the Western Cape.



Lauren Howard, Provincial Communication Officer, Western Cape

Free State teams in the Western Cape



Some of the Free State Working on Fire firefighters who have been assisting with fires in the Western Cape

Working on Fire in the Free State dispatched two teams to the Western Cape to assist with the summer fire season, namely the Harrismith Team and a mixed team consisting of 25 firefighters from across the Free State. The teams were on standby the entire time and were dispatched to numerous fires over the festive season. The Harrismith Team returned home on 3 January 2018 but the mixed team will remain in the Western Cape until the end of the summer fire season.

Mokoena Morena Jurie, Crew Leader for the mixed team says, "Being away from our families over the festive season has been tough as most of us are accustomed to spending more time with our families over this time. But it is the sacrifice that is part of the work that we do. As a team we have gained valuable experience fighting different types of vegetation fires from what we were used to, as well as fighting fires with aerial support assisting us in the mountainous terrain where it is difficult to reach the fires."



Wayne Mokhethi, Provincial Communication Officer, Free State

Firefighters suppress their first fires for the year

Limpopo Working on Fire firefighters had a very busy start to 2018 as they battled the first fires in the province outside the fire season. 2018 already looks likely to be the busiest season for WOF firefighters in the province. Just after their return from the festive break the WOF firefighters were welcomed by the breakout of wildfires across the province.

"Normally January is a quiet period for us in Limpopo and the breakout of fires was a surprise to us. This could be attributed to the fact that the province hasn't received enough rain which has led to the environment being dry. Combined with the excessive heat, that on its own could lead to wildfires," says Phanuel Nkuna, the Acting General Manager for WOF in Limpopo.

The fire awareness team is working very hard with the landowners, farmers, schools and other stakeholders to implement precautionary measures to prevent these fires and is also



Mookopong firefighters suppressing the first fire for 2018 in the province

sharing tips on how to minimise the damage that these fires can cause.



Matema Gwangwa, Provincial Communication Officer, Limpopo

North West teams commit to clearing alien plants



More than 50 firefighters have been sent to assist the Western Cape during the summer fire season

Eastern Cape firefighters lend a hand in the Western Cape

More than 50 firefighters from the Working on Fire programme in the Eastern Cape have been deployed to assist the Western Cape during the current summer fire season.

According to one of the Crew Leaders, Mzukisi Qulwana, two teams left the Eastern Cape before December 2017 as the summer fire season of the Western Cape commenced.

Qulwana says they have been hard at work suppressing fires and doing fuel load reduction in the Western Cape. He says they have suppressed fires in various places such as

Langkloof and Mossel Bay.

"The Mossel Bay fire was the most challenging fire I have ever attended. It took about five days before it could be suppressed."

He says that the fire was huge and not easy to suppress. While they worked long hours on some days, working as a team assisted them.

Qulwana says the teams will be assisting the Western Cape until the end of February.

Nthabiseng Mokone, Provincial Communication Officer, Eastern Cape



Some of the team members who took part in the project at the Wolwespruit Nature Reserve

As some were about to start the festive holidays, a combined team from North West Working on Fire started a project to clear alien invasive plants at the Wolwespruit Nature Reserve. The team worked from 11 December to 22 December, applying a chemical herbicide applicator that removes alien invasive plants.

The project was a success as the team of 12 firefighters, a Crew Leader and the Regional Manager managed to exceed the targets they had set for themselves.

The Reserve Manager, Mmole Teme, thanked Working on Fire for a job well done. In a letter of appreciation sent to the province, he writes, "The 11 days were utilised fruitfully on the targeted areas and the team members were cooperative and understood their roles. The alien infestation area comprised a total area of 52,736 hectares and was treated within two weeks. I really appreciate the management support and the team's efforts and I hope we maintain the relationship working together in future."



Firefighters in Mpumalanga will prioritise fire awareness activities this year

Teams get ready to tackle fires



The Heilbron Team is among many that are preparing for the year ahead

Working on Fire teams in the Free State have commenced with fitness and team readiness activities such as cleaning and organising the bases. The teams had been kept busy with fires well after the winter fire season ended.

The teams started off this year with a bang, with each team preparing physically and mentally for what seems to be another tough year of firefighting and fire prevention activities ahead.

Each team prepares by doing numerous fitness

exercises such as jogging, sprinting, push ups, pull-ups as well as sit-ups. These exercises help when they are out on the fireline battling relentless flames that challenge their physical capabilities. Fitness also helps when they are out in the field doing production to mitigate the risks of fires starting and spreading out of control.



Wayne Mokhethi, Provincial Communication Officer, Free State

Team aims to increase production this year

The North West teams are busy gearing up following their holiday break during the festive season. Some teams are conducting fitness training to ensure they are in good shape to tackle any fire that might occur. The Highveld Team is also focusing on production optimisation.

During a Production Optimisation workshop recently, the team was reminded of the importance of productivity which is intended to reduce fuel. Academy instructor Tshepiso Tjine facilitated the workshop and shared with the

team the importance of understanding bush and alien vegetation management. He also emphasised the importance of clearing alien invasive plants as they can fuel veld fires.

Base Communications Representative, Vuyani Setlholoeng, says the workshop was a good start to the year. "It is always good to hit the ground running to ensure a productive year ahead. Following this workshop, we understand the importance of production to reduce the number of fires in our province."

Written by: Editorial team



Community members learning about fire prevention measures during the FireSafe presentation

Mpumalanga teams focus on physical and mental strengths

Just over 600 Working on Fire participants in Mpumalanga are back at work and are focusing on improving their physical and mental strength after enjoying the December holidays.

Situated at 23 base camps, the firefighters will continue to conduct fire awareness workshops across the province, aimed at providing fire safety tips to members of the community to better prepare them in case of unwanted fires in their homes.

"Between April and October 2017, we reached 90 schools, 9157 learners and 8310 community members," says Fire Awareness Training Officer Elliot Nyathi.

Responsible for providing fire awareness training to participants in the province, Nyathi says

that the participants "are excited to be back at work to continue where they left off last year."

"This year our focus is on rural communities that are situated in fire-prone areas. Firefighters will be in the field conducting fire awareness activities and preparing communities for the 2018 winter fire season," says Nyathi.

Fire awareness activities include school fire awareness, community workshops providing fire safety education and fuel load reduction activities.



Lebogang Maseko, Provincial Communication Officer, Mpumalanga

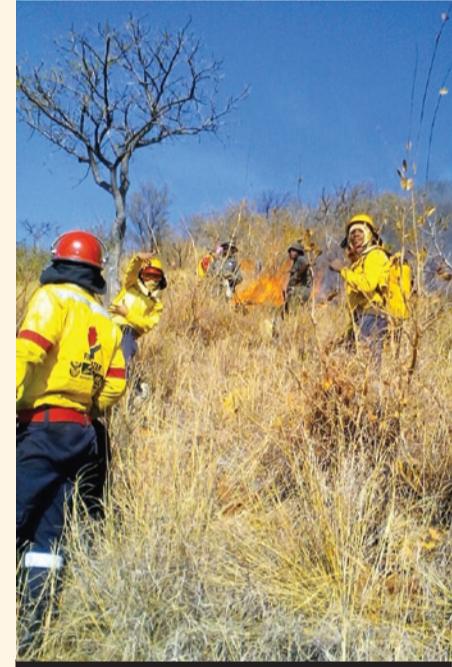
Limpopo firefighters energised for the year ahead

The Working on Fire participants in Limpopo have returned from their well-deserved rest after closing for the festive holidays. More than 600 WOF participants from 23 teams across the province have started implementing integrated fire management activities for the landowners in various municipalities. However, two teams are still on leave and will be joining the other teams in February 2018.

Apart from assisting the landowners our teams are focusing on keeping fit following their time off during the holidays by taking part in intense physical fitness exercises at their bases.



Matema Gwangwa, Provincial Communication Officer, Limpopo



Limpopo firefighters hard at work preparing landowners for the upcoming fire season



Academy instructor, Tshepiso Tjine, during the Productivity Optimisation workshop with the Highveld Team

Xhologha community equipped with fire prevention

The Working on Fire programme protects the environment through the implementation of an Integrated Fire Management strategy which includes fire prevention, suppression and fire awareness.

More than 20 people from Xhologha location in Stutterheim were taught fire prevention and management measures during the FireSafe presentation conducted by the Community Fire Awareness Officer of the Eastern Cape Working on Fire, Thulani Mkhosi.

Mkhosi says that the presentation aimed to educate community members on ways that could be used to prevent and manage fires. "Community members were advised to make defensible

spaces around their homes in order to protect their properties from being affected by runaway fires."

Community members were encouraged to go back and implement what they learnt and practice in their areas.

They were also asked to identify fire risks in their areas and ensure they mitigate such risks to prevent causing unwanted fires.

The community members were thankful for the knowledge and said that it would assist them in their areas.



Nthabiseng Mokone, Provincial Communication Officer, Eastern Cape

Former firefighter to graduate from Unisa

A former firefighter, Crew Leader and now Social Development Officer in the Free State, Selaelo Rakgabale will receive her BA honours degree in Psychology at the University of South Africa in May this year.

Rakgabale served for several years as a firefighter despite having completed her BA degree in Psychology at the University of Venda prior to joining the programme. She was based in Suikerbosrand in Gauteng.

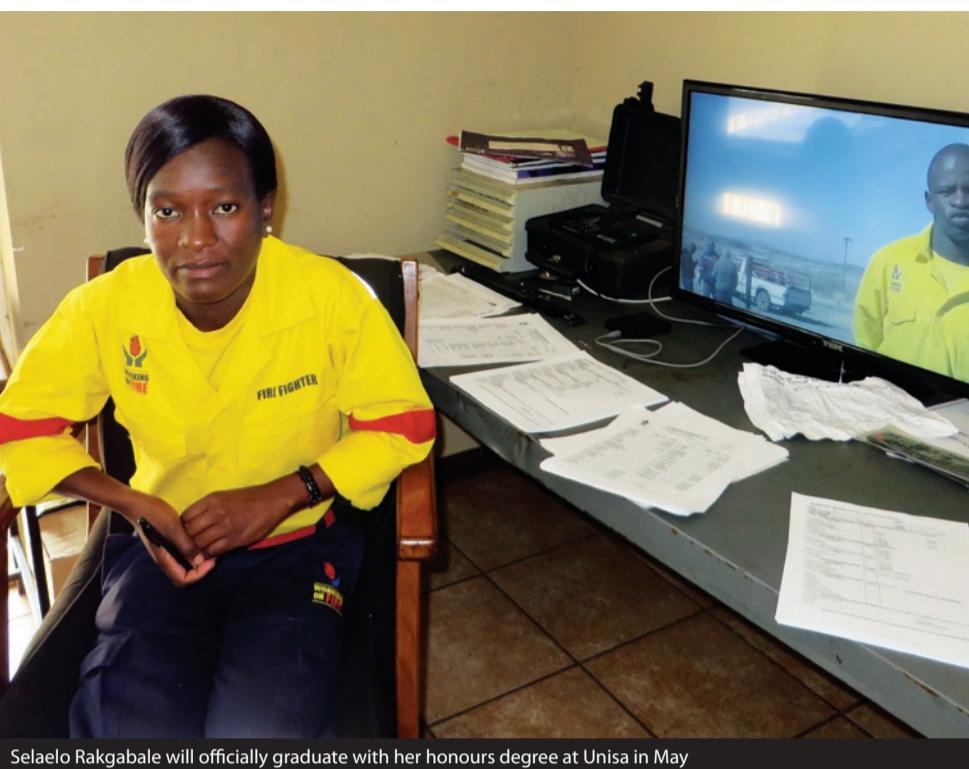
Despite the trials and tribulations on the journey, Rakgabale is intent on achieving her dream of becoming a professional social worker and intends doing her Master's degree next.

Rakgabale believes hard work will help anyone to succeed and hopes her story will inspire others in the programme.

"I had to juggle family, work and studies simultaneously," she says, happy that she will soon reap the fruits of her hard work.

Like former president Nelson Mandela, she believes education is the weapon people can use to change their lives.

"This is a dream come true for me. I also need to laud my colleagues in the social development unit in the programme for guiding and supporting me," she says, adding that the programme has been committed to supporting her to complete her studies. As a bonus, she says, "I have already



Selaelo Rakgabale will officially graduate with her honours degree at Unisa in May

gained enough professional work experience and am ready for the labour market."



Parapara Makgahlela, Provincial Communication Officer, Gauteng

Thaba 'Nchu Storeperson's dignity restored



Moipone Leeto is a 27-year-old storekeeper at the Working on Fire Thaba 'Nchu Team. Leeto was born in Thaba 'Nchu and joined the Thaba 'Nchu Team as a storeperson due to the fact that she suffered from severe asthma. Before joining Working on Fire, Leeto was part of the 63.1% unemployed youth in South Africa and had been struggling to find employment for over a year.

When she heard that Working on Fire would be recruiting she jumped at the chance. Leeto is the sole breadwinner in her family. Her mother, sister, six-year-old niece and her four-year-old son are all dependent on her and the stipend she receives from the programme.

Since joining Working on Fire Leeto, who aspires to be a teacher, was able to pursue tertiary education in teaching at Motheo College in Thaba 'Nchu. She also obtained her code 10 driver's licence through the monthly stipend she receives from the programme.

"Through the programme I was able to start a small business where I sell Tupperware after hours. This helps me to do more for myself and my family, such as paying for my education and my niece's," says a proud Leeto.



Wayne Mokhethi, Provincial Communication Officer, Free State

Thabiso joins professional soccer team

Thabiso Sangweni, a former firefighter at the KwaZulu-Natal Eshowe Team, remembers wanting to be a professional soccer player since the age of eight.

"Coming from a big family I didn't have an option of going to study further, so after matric I looked for a job," says Sangweni. Thabiso was recruited to Working on Fire in August 2016, two years after completing his matric.

After playing for the Thuthuka Football Club (FC) throughout his youth, he joined Umlalazi United at the beginning of 2017.

"While playing a Nedbank qualifier, I was approached by a Shining Stars sporting agent who wanted me to participate at the Free State Stars trials," says Sangweni.

After two days of the trials the coach was very impressed and two days after training Thabiso

was named in the squad that played Bidvest Wits.

"This was my first big game, I scored two goals which contributed to us winning the game," he says with pride.

Sangweni believes it is his dedication to training every day that got him where he is today. He trains before he goes to work daily and also after work with his team.

"Giving up is not an option in my life. I never listened to anyone that had negative comments about my dreams, I just continued to dedicate myself to improving my game," says Sangweni.



Nompilo Zondi, Provincial Communication Officer, KwaZulu-Natal



Thabiso Sangweni at his new club changing room

Former firefighter appointed provincial Transport Officer



Comfort Mavuso, the recently appointed Transport Officer in Mpumalanga

Twenty-eight-year-old former Working on Fire (WOF) participant Comfort Mavuso has worked his way up the firefighting ranks and has now been appointed provincial Transport Officer in Mpumalanga.

Mavuso only worked as a firefighter for a year before he was appointed a Type 1 Dispatcher.

When asked to what he attributes his success within the programme, Mavuso says, "I am an unstoppable force, I work hard, I am disciplined and I always keep my eyes on the ball." The same attitude has seen him earn a black belt in karate.

Growing up, Mavuso dreamed of working

in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) "because of the discipline officials of the SANDF always convey. When that didn't happen, WOF became my home."

Through the programme, Mavuso is now a registered student with Lyceum College, studying towards a Fleet Management and Logistics Diploma.

The happily married father of two says he plans to open his own fleet company in the future and advises participants "to not lose focus and stay true to their dreams."

Lebogang Maseko, Provincial Communication Officer, Mpumalanga



Twenty-year-old Eudance Thethe is using his stipend to finance his studies

"I am one of the many courageous Working on Fire participants who come into contact with raging fires, protecting myself with a fire beater, covering my face with a balaclava and a fire helmet to save lives, protect properties and the environment against wildland fires," Eudance Thethe says proudly.

The 29-year-old senior Crew Leader from the Mlambongwane Team in Mpumalanga joined WOF in 2011 as a firefighter and has since worked his way up the ranks.

When he is not suppressing fires across Mpumalanga, he focuses on his studies at SA

College, where he is studying towards a skills certificate in project management.

"I am grateful for the opportunity WOF has provided to me. Acquiring my certificate will enable me to secure a good future for my children," says Thethe.

Thethe is an inquisitive young man, a self-proclaimed news junkie and a father of two, who plans to study even further and save up money towards the education of his children.

Lebogang Maseko, Provincial Communication Officer, Mpumalanga

Participants educated about effective parenting



The Salique Team in Mpumalanga has attended a social development workshop titled 'Effective Parenting', conducted by the province's Social Development Practitioner, Condrick Mukhudwani. The workshop was aimed at empowering participants to become more effective parents in the new year.

According to Mukhudwani, the workshop followed observations about social trends associated with childcare and protection.

"Most of our firefighters are aged between 18 and 35, meaning most of them are still on their journey of self-discovery. At times, parenting can be challenging for them," says Mukhudwani.

Providing tips on how to carry out their legal roles, rights and responsibilities, Mukhudwani focused on child support, visitation rights and parental care.

"I am happy this workshop was conducted. It taught me a lot about the legal rights and responsibilities I have to carry out as a father, even when I have separated from the mother of my child," says Base Communications Representative Okkie Malope.



Lebogang Maseko, Provincial Communication Officer, Mpumalanga

As a skills development programme, WOF always encourages its participants to empower themselves with education, skills and knowledge for their future.

In January 2017, nine WOF participants from Modimolle in Limpopo took it upon themselves to improve their education level by enrolling in an ABET course at Lekker Break Primary School in their area.

"We realised that not having matric put limitations on our goals and career paths. I always had a vision of achieving greater things and to have a brighter future," says Lucas Sebola, a firefighter at Modimolle.

The team was motivated by their Ground Operations Manager and their Regional Manager to enrol for ABET and start working towards achieving a senior certificate.

"It was not easy considering the nature of the service that we are in, especially during fire season where you find yourself away from home for a long period. But due to the support and our passion we always worked together and encouraged each other to achieve our goal," says Sebola.

The team started 2018 with a celebration as eight of the firefighters passed Level 4, which is equivalent to a matric certificate. Well done to the young men and women of WOF.

Matema Gwangwa, Provincial Communication Officer, Limpopo

Almost 100% pass rate for WOF Modimolle firefighters



Partner talks benefits of working partnership with WOF



Alfred Duma Fire Chief Bennie Strydom

With 23 years of experience in firefighting, Alfred Duma Fire Chief, Bennie Strydom, is no stranger to wildfires. Over the years, the Alfred Duma Fire Department has built a strong relationship with Working on Fire in KwaZulu-Natal.

"Since 2008 I've been managing WOF teams, from the structural team to the current veld and forest firefighters. Our relationship has grown through the years. I was fortunate enough to work with great teams who are dedicated to saving lives," says Strydom. Strydom says that the fire awareness activities done by the WOF teams have contributed to a significant decrease in fires in the Alfred Duma region. "Firefighters play a vital role in assisting in communities in the event of disasters, helping field workers obtain information and in the distribution of emergency relief material," says Strydom. The partnership with WOF contributed to the drop in the number of fires and risk within the area during the winter fire season. Strydom singled out Pinky Hlongwani, the Base Communications Representative from the Ladysmith Team, for the great community and school fire awareness campaigns the team conducts. Alfred Duma also has various programmes such as the removal of alien invasive plants at the Quedusizi Dam that will run throughout the summer season.



Nompilo Zondi, Provincial Communication Officer, KwaZulu-Natal

Participant paves the way to exit programme

Pressure to secure a better income and future helped Sabelo Makhombothi acquire his code 14 driver's licence using his monthly stipend from the programme.

A firefighter at the Heidelberg Team, he committed to skilling himself after joining the programme. With the monthly stipend, he says he was able to rent a room, buy groceries and save for the drivers' licence.

Makhombothi says he is paving a positive exit route and his plans were boosted financially by the fire season. "My eyes were on obtaining the code 14 driver's licence finish and klaar."

This will better his chances and give him the edge over others when contesting for positions in the transport sector. Makhombothi has applied for a passport as well, as he wants to arm himself should an opportunity arise to travel to neighbouring countries.

He says saving money is a struggle and required financial discipline. He invested money and time in acquiring the code 14 licence and says the financial management course offered in the programme helped a lot.

Parapara Makgahlela, Provincial Communication Officer, Gauteng

