

MD Message: *Working on Fire - A good story to tell*

Trevor Abrahams



As we are busy wrapping up our current 2017-2018 financial year, we take this opportunity to reflect on the success of Working on Fire.

This has been in many aspects a difficult but rewarding twelve months for Working on Fire, which started off with a moderate winter fire season. Our participants played a significant role in providing a much-needed firefighting and fire prevention service to landowners throughout the season.

The stand-out event of 2017 was of course the disastrous Knysna fire in June, which was the biggest single disaster a local municipality had faced in this country. We had fires in the Eastern Cape at the same time and at one point we had close to 800 firefighters from Working on Fire fighting the flames.



WOF provided the bulk of the firefighting resources at the June 2017 Knysna and Tsitsikamma fires

Without a doubt our biggest success remains our tireless contributions during the Knysna and Tsitsikamma fires of June 2017. Our firefighters on the ground and air support played a significant role in helping to put out these fires and to protect lives and properties.

MD Message continued on page 3

High Altitude Team rescue tourist

Working on Fire High Altitude Teams (HAT) are back at work after the excitement of rescuing a tourist from a very difficult situation.

The Crew Leader of the Katberg Team, Sibusiso Matya, says that a family of three was walking towards the Swallowtail waterfall in Hogsback taking photographs.

"It seems as if the man wanted to look down the cliff when he tripped and fell, hitting rocks and breaking his leg," says Matya. "When we arrived he was trapped on some rocks and we rescued him," says Matya. The man's female companion and a child were unhurt.

He says the Katberg HAT firefighters carried the man on a stretcher for two kilometres to the nearest road so that they could get help.

When they arrived at the road, the Base Manager of the Hogsback Team called the ambulance which took the victim to the nearest hospital.

Working on Fire applauds these young men and women for always extending a helping hand when needed.



Nthabiseng Mokone, Provincial Communication Officer, Eastern Cape



Working on Fire High Altitude Team participants carried the injured tourist on a stretcher for 2 km to get to an ambulance

Alien invasive trees cleared to improve water supply

Over the past two weeks, Working on Fire's High Altitude Team (HAT) has worked with CapeNature to launch a pilot project in the Drakenstein Mountains to clear a number of pine trees that have dampened the flow of water into the Berg River Dam catchment area. This is one of many projects implemented to improve the water supply in the Western Cape.

Continued on page 4



Team gearing up for winter fire season

With the winter fire season fast approaching, Working on Fire teams across the country are preparing to commence advanced firefighting refresher training in the coming months, in preparation of the season.

However, for the Wilgeboom Team in Mpumalanga, the old saying that 'time waits for no man' is the watchword as already in February, the team participated in a five-day base refresher training exercise aimed at assessing the firefighters' mental and physical fitness.

"This was done to ensure that firefighters are fit and ready to be deployed during this upcoming fire season," says Regional Manager Vincent Lubisi.

Lubisi says that about 30 firefighters were equipped and are gearing up for the season.

Working on Fire remains committed to providing integrated fire management services, to help reduce the dire effects of wildfires.



Lebogang Maseko, Provincial Communication Officer, Mpumalanga



The Wilgeboom Team walking through a fire, in preparation for the fire season. Pictures supplied by Tlangelani Lekhuwane, Base Communications Representative for the Wilgeboom Team.

**FIRE
EDUCATION
A VITAL TOOL**



▶ PAGE 4

**PROGRAMME
HELPS TO EDUCATE
STOREPERSON
CHILDREN**



▶ PAGE 6

**ALLEVIATING
POVERTY
THROUGH
JOB CREATION**



▶ PAGE 8



Jacob with his first born daughter, Mpho

A passion for workplace safety

Jacob Singo. Executive: Occupational Health and Safety

Jacob Singo is the Working on Fire Executive for Occupational Health and Safety. The eldest of five brothers, he grew up in Makgoareng, a village in Limpopo located between Ohrigstad and Burgersfort.

He attended Dipitsi Primary and Maokeng High School and matriculated in 2004. Although he wanted to attend university, due to lack of finances this was not possible. Singo had the good fortune to be appointed as a Safety Administrator at Fraser Alexander Construction in 2005, which marked the start of his career in Occupational Health and Safety (OHS).

Until he joined Working on Fire, Singo spent his entire career working at major engineering and construction companies. After rising through the ranks at Fraser Alexander he was a fully fledged Safety Officer by the time he left to join RSV Enco Consulting at Sasol Mining Impumelelo Project in 2010. RSV Enco Consulting had been awarded the engineering, procurement and construction management contract of a new underground coal mine and Singo's main function there was the management of contractors and the implementation of OHS policies and procedures.

"This is where I was introduced to ISO standards, the systematic and international standards for the management of safety, health and environment," says Singo, who also picked up valuable project management experience.

After the completion of the Impumelelo Project in 2013, he joined Strata Worldwide as a Senior Safety, Health, Environment and Quality (SHEQ) Officer. The company supplied and maintained collision avoidance systems at mines across the country but mainly in Mpumalanga. In 2015 he moved to Grindrod Intermodal as a Senior SHEQ Officer responsible for the management of occupational health and safety (OHS) at the Johannesburg Denver Terminal and a warehouse in Middelburg.

From July 2016, he worked for Kishugu Holdings as a SHEQ manager before joining Working on Fire in March 2017 as HOD for the Health and Safety Department and a member of the Executive Team.

Having never abandoned his dream of a university qualification, Singo, who has a diploma in Safety Management and professional certificates such as SAMTRAC, OHSAS 18001 and ISO 14001 Auditing, Risk Management and Train the Trainer, proudly declares, "I will be completing my Bachelor of Arts degree in 2019".

When not ensuring that WOF complies with SHEQ standards, Singo enjoys spending time with his wife and three children (two daughters and a son), jogs when he has time and attends services at the St Engenas ZCC, which he describes as "my beloved church".



Jacob with his wife Lerato



Jacob's daughter, Oreatlie and son, Phelang

Editorial

Dear Reader.

Welcome to our March Newsletter. As we wrap up our 2017-2018 financial year, Working on Fire would like to thank all our stakeholders and partners for their continued support of the programme. We hope the good relationships built in this year will continue and improve into the next financial year so that we can continue, together, to save lives, protect the environment and restore dignity.

In this issue, Managing Director Trevor Abrahams reflects on the year's highlights. Read about the sterling work done by our teams as they live the Working on Fire values and make a difference in their communities.

As the winter fire season nears WOF teams are working across the country to ensure landowners, community members and learners are ready for the coming fire season and that fire preventative measures are put up in communities to decrease the impact of wildfires.

As important as it is to prepare our communities for the winter fire season, it is also crucial that the teams that will be attending to fires are thoroughly prepared. We report on the training activities implemented to ensure the full readiness of teams and Crew Leaders.

South Africans commemorated human rights on 21 March under the theme 'The year of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela: promoting and deepening a human rights culture across society'. This newsletter issue shows how our teams and participants support human rights through living the Working on Fire values.

We beam with pride as participants who exited the programme continue to make strides outside the programme, taking up responsible positions in industry and the civil service. Read their inspiring stories of how the skills they acquired while in the programme helped them to mature, and develop the confidence and competence to broaden their horizons.

We are proud of all of you. You are living proof that the Working on Fire Expanded Public Works Programme works.

Happy reading.

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Working on Fire is on Social Media | [facebook](https://www.facebook.com/workingonfire)

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



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



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.

MD Message continued from page 1

MD Message:

Working on Fire - A good story to tell



Knysna Mayor Eleanore Bouw-Spies handing over a plaque to WOF MD Trevor Abrahams to say thank you to the firefighters for their heroic efforts in the Knysna fires

However, amidst these achievements we also tragically lost some of our colleagues during the past year and our hearts and minds continue to be with the families of our departed colleagues.

During September 2017 in Mpumalanga, Working on Fire and the Mkhondo and Umpuluzi Fire Protection Associations, through the guidance of the Mpumalanga Umbrella Fire Protection Association (MUFPA), joined forces in one of the biggest team mobilisations for the 2017 winter fire season, to minimise the negative impacts of veld fires.

We deployed 100 firefighters from the Western Cape and 50 from KwaZulu-Natal to assist with fire suppression throughout Mpumalanga.



150 firefighters from the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal were deployed in Mpumalanga in September 2017 in a standby operation on request of the Mpumalanga Umbrella Fire Protection Association

Now in the fourth year of our contract to implement the Working on Fire programme we have largely been able to deliver on the key Department of Environmental Affairs' outputs in terms of this contract.

Upon my return to Working on Fire in May 2017 and with the appointment of a new Executive Committee during that period, we soon realised that the overall morale and discipline in the programme was no longer what it once had been.



Executive Committee: I-t Shane Christian, National General Manager; Luthfia Cader, Executive: Communications; Jacob Singo, Executive: OHS; Trevor Abrahams, Managing Director; Natalie Sauls, Executive: HCM; Ancil Lee, Executive: IT; Back I-r, Tony Mancos, Risk Manager; Piet van der Merwe, Executive: Operations; and Sandiso Ntshoni, Financial Manager.

Our biggest challenge at the time was to restore the morale and discipline within the Working on Fire programme. It became abundantly clear during my engagement with participants and management that the Working on Fire programme had to an extent lost its core value of putting people first.

I also observed that we had not been able to provide the kind of working environment for our participants as we had in the past, which put them at the heart of what this programme seeks to achieve.

We had to make some important changes in the leadership of the programme to ensure the programme was sustainable and continued to excel in delivering its objectives of creating work opportunities for South Africa's unemployed youth.

Together with the Executive Committee, the entire management corps and our participants, I set off on a course to reaffirm Working on Fire's commitment to its core values through the 'Back to Basics' campaign.

Throughout the past eleven months we have 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.



MD Trevor Abrahams during his provincial Talk2Trevor roadshows, pictured here with the Richmond Team in KZN

We implemented many important decisions, such as payments for overtime and working on weekends, as well as reversing an earlier decision wherein the payment for work done on public holidays was misinterpreted.

We realised that there were many instances where the proper disciplinary policies and procedures were never implemented, and this resulted in many unhappy firefighters. Hence, we held a workshop on Industrial Relations and Disciplinary Procedures which was attended by all management members at Working on Fire.

After all the earlier excitement the Western Cape had a relatively calm summer fire season and in December, a familiar summer activity returned to the WOF calendar, when we gathered in Gauteng to once again host the annual Azishe Games after a break of a few years. The Game's objective is to develop a fully-fledged sports development programme aimed at encouraging and developing WOF firefighters to participate in organised sporting activities. It also aims to identify and develop coaching, officiating and sports administrative talent which can then be utilised in general sports and youth development in the communities.



Congratulations to KwaZulu-Natal which ended up overall winners of the 2017 Azishe Games

This year marks the fifteenth anniversary of the Working on Fire programme, which was launched in September 2003 as part of the South African government's initiative to create jobs and alleviate poverty. We will be celebrating the remarkable success of one of the South African government's most successful Expanded Public Works Programmes during the latter part of 2018.

Without doubt the greatest achievement of the Working on Fire programme is that it has changed the lives of thousands of young people, including the 5 000 youth participating in the programme today, as well as the estimated 25 000 dependants who have indirectly benefited from this programme.

I want to extend our gratitude and thanks to our firefighters. All we ask is that you continue to remain vigilant and safe on the fireline.



Crew members of the Maropeng Team in Gauteng help rebuild the shacks at Orient Hills after a tornado hit the West Rand area in November, leaving many the community members homeless



Making a difference in the lives of communities where our teams are based - Participants in KZN hand over the home which they built for Gogo Gumede



WOF firefighters in Mpumalanga's Highveld Region getting ready to go to the fireline

Firefighters return after assisting with Western Cape fires

Fifty firefighters from Working on Fire Free State returned home recently after spending three months attending to wildfires across the Western Cape during the Western Cape’s summer fire season.

The firefighters, who come from various bases, say that it was difficult working in the Western Cape as the vegetation there burns at much higher temperatures and the fires are more intense due to the strong prevailing winds.

Thabo Moiloa, Working on Fire Free State Ground Operations Manager, commended



Firefighters from the Free State recently returned home after three months in the Western Cape

the firefighters for their sacrifice and the hard work they put in over the past three months. “Being away from family over the festive season is always tough but these young men and women gave up this time to serve their country, to save lives, properties and the environment.”

Fifty-five Working on Fire firefighters have replaced their colleagues and made their way to the Western Cape to assist until the end of the summer fire season.



Continued from page 1

Alien invasive trees cleared to improve water supply

According to HAT Ground Operations Manager Jason de Smidt, “Seventeen of the best HAT chainsaw operators from as far as George in the Southern Cape came together to clear a very important catchment area above the Berg River Dam. After being airlifted to their base camp they worked very effectively to clear the targeted area. There is still much more work to do but this ‘first’ for HAT operations in the Western Cape seems to have been a big success.”

Over the past few years, HAT Teams have cleared invasive plants from the following catchment areas in the province:

- Voelvlei catchment area and Tulbagh surrounds
- Berg River Dam catchment area
- Hottentots Holland Mountains
- Cape Peninsula, focusing on Chapman’s Peak drive and the section north of Constantia Nek
- Genadendal and Greyton catchments
- Outeniqua Pass and Garden Route dam
- Knysna River catchment area.

Across the Western Cape there are 14 HAT teams comprising 136 participants stationed at the sites of partners such as CapeNature, South African National Parks and the Cape Winelands Municipality. In the April 2017-2018 period, more than 3 250 hectares of invasive alien vegetation have been cleared.

Invasive alien plants have a negative impact on biodiversity which threatens indigenous plants, increases fire frequency as well as absorbs large amounts of water, impacting on water security in

South Africa. The Department of Environmental Affairs environmental programmes such as Working for Water, Working on Fire and the High Altitude Teams contribute significantly to protecting the environment while creating work opportunities under the Expanded Public Works Programme.

In 2011, the HAT project was handed over to Working on Fire to implement on behalf of the Department of Environmental Affairs with a national implementation mandate. HAT is currently working in all the strategic stressed catchments with the aim of expanding into other water-stressed catchments.

The HAT project currently provides work opportunities to more than 450 participants from previously disadvantaged communities throughout South Africa, of whom 99% are youth. There is strong representation of women – 30% – working in HAT projects. More than 8 080 hectares were cleared over the 2017-2018 financial year.



Traditional leaders pledge support to fire prevention



Traditional leaders from the Amashangane Tribal Authority with Working on Fire’s Community Fire Awareness Officer, Mbuso Siwela

Chapter 12 of the Constitution recognises the institution, status and roles of traditional leadership according to customary law. Government acknowledges the critical role of traditional leadership institutions in communities in South Africa, particularly in relation to the rural development strategy.

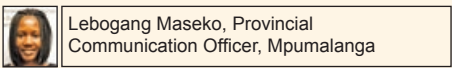
To this end, Working on Fire strives to partner and enhance relations with traditional authorities in raising fire safety awareness as this year’s winter fire season approaches.

Mbuso Siwela, the Community Fire Awareness Officer in Mpumalanga, conducted a fire awareness workshop in February for about 20 traditional leaders at the

Amashangane Tribal Authority in Bushbuckridge.

With the aim of providing fire safety tips on how to mitigate and prevent the impact of unwanted fires in communities, the workshop saw increased interest from several traditional leaders, who pledged to support Working on Fire’s fire awareness activities in the future.

“Because the workshop was a success, we plan to partner with the Tribal Authority to launch the 2018 Fire Awareness Campaign in May,” says Siwela.



Working on Fire at Public Safety Awareness Day

Working on Fire in KwaZulu-Natal participated in the Public Safety Awareness Day event hosted by the Umlalazi Local Municipality. Other stakeholders in attendance included traditional leaders and representatives of the King Cetshwayo Disaster Management Centre, the Department of Agriculture, Forestry & Fisheries, the KZN Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs and the KZN Department of Transport.

The event aimed to raise awareness in the community of Ntshidi about disasters caused by unwanted fires, floods, thunderstorms and human negligence, and the mitigating measures that the community could implement to reduce these risks.



Community Fire Awareness Officer, Makhosi Dladla explains how Working on Fire contributes to public safety

Team empowers UNISA students with fire suppression skills



UNISA students learn how to suppress a fire during the Marakele workshop in Thabazimbi

Limpopo’s Marakele Team was visited by conservation students from UNISA who wanted to learn about integrated fire management.

The UNISA students visited the Marakele National Park to learn more about nature and conservation. As part of their tour they also attended a workshop conducted by WOF Marakele firefighters where they learned about fire behaviour, fire suppression and personal fire safety.

“We had a nice session with the students and they showed interest in what our team was teaching them,” says Phillimon Setuki, Marakele’s Base Communications Representative.

Part of the training included fire suppression practicals where the students physically suppressed a live fire under the supervision of the team. They were also taught about the different tools used in firefighting.

“The session was very good and we hope that the students will share the skills and information they got here with their families and their peers,” says Setuki.



Working on Fire KZN Community Fire Awareness Officer, Makhosi Dladla, highlighted the importance of fire prevention measures before the winter fire season, and the integrated fire management services that WOF provides, such as FireSafe workshops.

The KwaZulu-Natal Eshowe Team demonstrated their great integrated relationship with the Umlalazi Fire and Rescue Team while drilling for the dignitaries, including the Mayor, Councillor Zulu.

“It is through a great stakeholder relationship that Working on Fire is able to continue to save lives by reducing the risk of fires in vulnerable communities and protecting the environment,” says Dladla.



Community prepared for winter fire season

Working on Fire KwaZulu-Natal's Community Fire Awareness Officer, Simphiwe Dlamini, visited the Lindelani community as part of the Integrated Community Awareness Day, along with the Ilembe Disaster Management Centre, KwaDukuza Local Municipality, the Department of Sports and Recreation and KwaDukuza Fire and Rescue.

As the winter fire season draws closer it is vital to educate communities on what to avoid during the winter fire season and how they can prepare for it. "It is my duty to educate community members to be aware of the risks of fire and how unwanted fires can be avoided in their area," says Dlamini.

Dlamini stressed the value of community

members knowing how to protect themselves to reduce the risk of wildfires, as emergency response units have to cover a very large ward.

Dlamini says the workshop went very well and the community members showed so much enthusiasm. Community members know their areas better than anyone and will be primarily affected by any disaster. FireSafe workshops are meant to empower them to have information that will protect their lives and prevent and reduce the risk of losing property.



Nompilo Zondi, Provincial Communication Officer, KwaZulu-Natal



Simphiwe Dlamini presenting to the Lindelani community

Early start to fire season preparations

The WOF firefighters in the Waterberg District in Limpopo are working around the clock preparing landowners and farmers for the upcoming winter fire season.

The Vingerkraal Team is one of the WOF teams busy implementing integrated fire management services for the landowners in the area where they operate. Since Waterberg is one of the districts that experience a high volume of wildfires, WOF initiated fuel load reduction activities for the landowners, communities, schools and farmers across the province.

"The sooner we start with the prevention of the wildfires the less likely the chance of

wildfires occurring. Last year, the winter fire season started as early as April and lasted until December. And this year, the amount of late rains that we experienced means that we need to double the effort that we always put into assisting the landowners and the farmers," says Sello Kobe, Limpopo South Region's Ground Operations Manager.

This year more effort will also be put into the personal safety of the firefighters as WOF values their dedication in saving lives and protecting the environment.



Matema Gwangwa, Provincial Communication Officer, Limpopo



In preparation for the upcoming winter fire season, a brush cutter from Vingerkraal cuts grass for the landowner as part of manual fuel load reduction

Fire education a vital tool



Community Fire Awareness Officer, Lerato Mokwena, addresses community members of Southpans, preparing them for the fire season

Community Fire Awareness Officer, Lerato Mokwena, says WOF is conducting fire awareness activities in communities across the province in the build up towards the winter fire season.

She says fires pose a threat to the livelihoods of people and fire awareness education is a basic tool to mitigate deadly fires in communities. She says community members are actively participating in the workshops.

"The focus of our workshops is on the fire management plan and risk assessment. I have done many workshops with communities. When I follow up with the communities, I find them implementing some of the advice given during the workshops," says Mokwena.

According to Mokwena the aim of the workshops is to empower communities with the knowledge to prevent fires.

"We are gearing up for the winter fire awareness campaign from April onwards before the fire season kicks in. Preparation for the winter fire season is quite vital for us at WOF. We lead from the front," she says.

"Saving lives and protecting the environment, it is what we love doing," says Mokwena. "We don't want any persons losing their lives due to veld or indoor fires."



Parapara Makgahlela, Provincial Communication Officer, Gauteng

Firefighters of the month



Mamre firefighter of the month for January, Logan Appolis (left), and February's winner, Emile Adams

Mamre Base Manager, Randall Arendse, says, "It is important to keep our participants motivated as they work hard in protecting the environment and saving lives, which should be recognised. This keeps the morale high within the Team and motivates them to work hard every day."

Arendse felt so strongly about this that he introduced the 'Firefighter of the Month' initiative in April 2017. After firefighters are assessed on the criteria of attendance, fitness, productivity, behaviour and attitude, a winner is chosen each month.

The firefighters of the month for January and February 2018 respectively are Logan Appolis and Emile Adams. Arendse notes that the Mamre firefighters have done sterling work over the past few months, especially during the 2017-2018 summer fire season.

#SavingLives #ProtectingTheEnvironment #RestoringDignity #KnysnaRebuild #KnysnaRises Cape Peninsula Fire Protection Association Mamre, Western Cape, South Africa



Lauren Howard, Provincial Communication Officer, Western Cape

Getting communities ready for the winter fire season

Since the beginning of this year, the North West Community Fire Awareness Officer, Sophy Dinko, has been conducting fire awareness workshops and FireSafe presentations to get communities ready for the coming winter fire season.

Dinko says the workshops and presentations target fire-prone communities and encourage community members to take ownership of their fire risks and find ways to mitigate

them. She adds that this will help minimise and prevent fires' impact in the identified communities.

The fire awareness workshops were conducted in communities such as Tshing, Witpan and Lerome. Community members committed to help mitigate fire risks in their communities following the workshops.

Written by Editorial



Community Fire Awareness Officer Sophy Dinko educates community members about fire behaviour

Crew Leader saves a life

“I was talking on the cellphone. I only recall seeing fire coming out of the cellphone after lightning struck. Next thing I was unconscious. The following morning I was on a hospital bed. A fellow intern told me it was Katlego Molapo, a firefighter, who saved my life.”

These are the words of Puseletso Masha, a student at Tshwane University of Technology who is also an intern at Roodeplaat Nature Reserve where a Working on Fire team is based.

Masha recalls that although it was raining, there had been no thunderstorm on that day so she wasn’t expecting lightning.

A fellow intern rushed to call Molapo who was in another room when the incident occurred. “I found her lying unconscious but she had a pulse. I opened her mouth, her teeth were tight and smoke came out of her


mouth. I moved her tongue gently so that she was able to breath,” said Molapo.

Molapo made a call to the base manager. “I took the lady in my car and drove to the base manager’s quarters,” says Molapo.

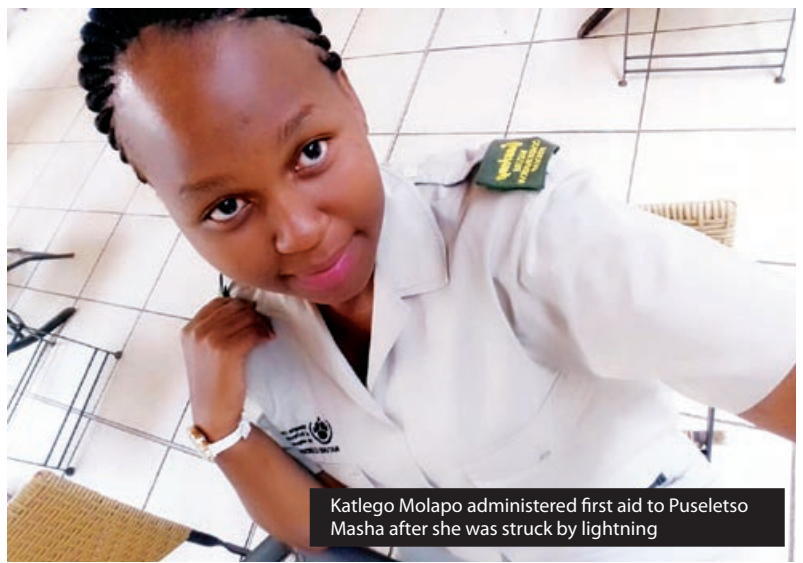
He and the base manager drove Masha to a private hospital in Monatana. After she was admitted, the head of the hospital wanted to see Molapo.

He said the first aid given to Masha saved her life. “You are a hero because you had the guts to give first aid and not many people can do what you did,” the hospital head said.

The base manager has also lauded Molapo for keeping a cool head and helping to resuscitate the victim.



Parapara Makgahlela, Provincial Communication Officer, Gauteng



Balfour Team Making a Difference




As part of Working on Fire’s Social Development outreach programmes, the Balfour Team in Mpumalanga recently converged on the home of a 79-year-old disabled resident of the Siyathemba community, living in a fire-prone area. The team cleaned the elderly man’s home and removed dry grass surrounding the yard.

One firefighter, Hans Langa, says the man’s disability restricts him from cleaning his yard, and he said he often had to pay people to clean it.

“We first met him while conducting a door-to-door fire campaign, and felt it was fitting for us to help reduce the fire risks at his home,” says Langa.

The clean-up came amid the nationwide Human Rights Day commemorations on 21 March 2018, aimed at celebrating human rights enshrined in South Africa’s constitution, which includes the right to human dignity.

By improving the resident’s home and surrounds, the team not only contributed to restoring the dignity of a member of a marginalised community, one of Working on Fire’s core priorities, but they demonstrated that they lived the WOF value of ‘Making A Difference’.



Lebogang Maseko, Provincial Communication Officer, Mpumalanga

Fuel load reduction reduces the impact of fires



In its efforts to ensure a smooth winter fire season, the North West’s Mamusa Team has started conducting fuel load reduction activities to reduce the impact of fires in the province. Fuel load is one of the factors contributing to the spread of wildfires. Therefore a community with a minimal fuel load will have fewer fires and the effects of fires will be mitigated.

The team removed dry leaves and overhanging tree branches which could

fuel wildfires in the local community. The bushy vegetation also posed a security risk for community members who alleged that criminals used it as a place to hide.

The team will also be conducting various fire awareness activities in the communities to ensure that community members mitigate their fire risks ahead of the coming winter fire season.

Written by Editorial

Team members sharpen their fire awareness skills

Fire awareness is one of the integrated fire management services that WOF is mandated to implement in its operational areas.


WOF Limpopo’s Fire Awareness Training Officer conducted fire awareness training for the participants at Sekororo Base where participants were educated about the integrated fire management services.

The objective of the training was to enlighten the participants about their role and what was expected of them as veld and forest firefighters.

“The training was informative and reminded us of our role as firefighters,” says Moses Mathiba, a firefighter at Sekororo A.

After the workshop the firefighters were eager to go out to communities and implement what they learned during the training.

“From today we will put more effort into the fire awareness activities in our area, to ensure that more people are educated and join us in reducing the number of wildfires,” says Mathiba.



Matema Gwangwa, Provincial Communication Officer, Limpopo



Programme helps to educate children of storeperson



Elwin Uithaler, a storeperson at the Eden Team in George in the Western Cape, is proud to be part of Working on Fire

Elwin Uithaler always strives to make a difference in the lives of his family and his colleagues. With the stipend he earns from WOF he provides for his six children and still manages to pay school fees for five of them.

Uithaler started at Working on Fire in 2006 as a storeperson at the Witfontein base, but left in 2010 to work as a storeperson at a training centre. He came back to Working on Fire in 2014.

A storeperson must ensure that the firefighters in the team are equipped with all the necessary personal protective clothing and equipment needed to keep them safe on the fireline and also ensures that stock can be accounted for.

Uithaler always makes sure that his team is fully kitted to tend to fires and to do so, he

works with his Crew Leader to order stock in advance. He takes pride in his work and keeps the storeroom neat and well stocked.

Uithaler says, “I am very happy that Working on Fire has helped me this far. I am doing my work well, that’s why I am still with the programme. I managed to raise my kids while earning a stipend. One of my children successfully completed matric and the others are still in school. I appreciate the work that I’m doing and I love the company, which is why I look forward to waking up every day to do my job and be with the firefighters.”



Lauren Howard, Provincial Communication Officer, Western Cape

Participant pursues dream of owning a business



Ntokozo Ndumo

Type 2 Crew Leader Ntokozo Ndumo joined the Working on Fire Bergville Team when it was established in 2014, after being unsuccessful in finding employment. Ndumo soon became a Base Communications Representative for his team.

“Becoming a Base Communications Representative gave me the courage to stand in front of a group of people, doing presentations and also gaining confidence in my writing,” says Ndumo.

He was then nominated to be the first firefighter in his team to be chosen to attend the Type 2 Crew Leader training at Nelspruit. Although difficult at first, Ndumo was grateful for the support of the instructors and for the experience.

“Before joining the programme I had completed a diploma in Electrical Engineering

at the Mnambithi FET college. I did odd jobs in my community on weekends. I plan to register my electrical and plumbing company and get my BBBEE certificate in order to bid for tenders one day,” says the entrepreneur.

Ndumo feels very fortunate to have received training and mentorship from WOF, as it has helped him gain the confidence and discipline to start his own company. In five years’ time he hopes to resign and officially open his own business.

“I would encourage my colleagues to never give up and try to think positively through all situations they encounter. Hard work and dedication go a long way,” says Ndumo.



Nompilo Zondi, Provincial Communication Officer, KwaZulu-Natal

Firefighter moves to High Altitude Team

Aim high and always work hard to achieve all your goals. These are the words of Luvuyo Bangela, a firefighter from Addo Base in the Eastern Cape.

The 24-year-old joined the Working on Fire programme in 2016 after being without a proper job for more than a year.

“I left school in 2014 and did not do my matric due to unforeseen circumstances in my family,” he says.

Bangela says that when he heard that the High Altitude Team programme (HAT) would be recruiting in Addo he decided that he would try his luck. He managed to do well in all the fitness tests and the interviews.

Bangela has just been appointed to his new job at Addo High Altitude Team, where he will start in the first week of April.


“I was very glad to get this opportunity as I will be able to get a better stipend that will assist me to further my studies and assist my family,” he says.

“I would like to thank the WOF programme for paving my way to better opportunities and giving me the necessary skills which developed me into the person I am today,” says Bangela.



Luvuyo Bangela thanks the programme for paving the way to better opportunities for him

He urges all firefighters to appreciate the opportunities provided to them by the programme and use the stipend to better their lives.



Nthabiseng Mokone, Provincial Communication Officer, Eastern Cape

Stipend helps participant further his education

Anza Nepfumbada is one of many WOF participants who used the stipend to further his education and lay a foundation for his career path.


Nepfumbada joined WOF in September 2016 at Lephalale as a firefighter. Prior to joining WOF he was studying his N2 in Civil Engineering at Lephalale FET college but couldn’t further his studies as the course was suspended and he couldn’t enrol at another institution due to financial constraints.

“Joining WOF made me see firefighting in a different way and fueled my passion to save lives. I made a decision to save towards changing my career path,” he says. “I used the stipend that WOF was giving me to study structural firefighting as I am passionate about saving lives. I believe that this is where my calling lies.”

Nepfumbada resigned from WOF in September 2017 to study structural firefighting with Impact Emergency Technologies in Gauteng and he passed with flying colours.



Anza Nepfumbada used his stipend for career growth



Matema Gwangwa, Provincial Communication Officer, Limpopo

Participant assists with obsolete stock

The Working on Fire programme remains true to its commitment to develop the skills of young people and restore their dignity.

Forty-two-year-old Mluleki Ndzantsi joined the programme in 2004 at Butterworth Base and later moved to the Ugie Team where he rose up the ranks from firefighter to Type 2 Crew Leader.

“I worked around the province suppressing fires, putting up fire prevention measures and educating communities on how to be fire safe,” says Ndzantsi.

He was recently asked to assist in repairing obsolete stock in the provincial storeroom.

“I was very excited to be given this opportunity as it will help develop my skills. I have been doing the job of a storekeeper as we didn’t have one,” Ndzantsi says.

“My work includes fixing some of the old stock. I use some parts from other old stock to fix the items that can still be used and will be assisting with other duties in the provincial stores,” he says.

His new role will save the company money as they won’t be throwing away the obsolete stock that can still be a usable resource.



Former Crew Leader uses the skills he acquired since he joined WOF in his new opportunity



Nthabiseng Mokone, Provincial Communication Officer, Eastern Cape

7 Participants from Free State join SAPS

Seven participants from the Working on Fire Programme in the Free State recently joined the South African Police Services. They had served in positions such as Crew Leader, driver, dispatcher, storekeeper and firefighter.

Sibeko Delani, who was a Type 1 Crew Leader at the WOF Memel Base says, “It was a great honour being part of the Working on Fire programme. This programme made me the disciplined person that I am today. I had many mentors during my time in the programme who taught me to commit to every task given.”

Ditsha Ramatlapeng, Siyabulela Lima, Sibeko Delani, Agnes Molisana, Moipone Leeto, Thanduxolo Mawana and Lefisa Mokhele were stationed at various bases including the Rouxville, Winburg, Memel, Thaba ’Nchu, Theunissen and Bloemfontein Bases. They all started their basic police training in March 2018



Sibeko Delani from the WOF Memel Base has joined the SAPS

at the South African Police Services Academy in Bhishe in the Eastern Cape.

“We are extremely proud of our participants and are glad that the programme has served its purpose, as a stepping stone and a programme where skills are imparted in order to equip

our participants to find decent work and have sustainable livelihoods,” says Thabo Moilola, WOF Free State’s Ground Operations Manager.



Wayne Mokhethi, Provincial Communication Officer, Free State

Participant on the move

Twenty-six-year-old Steve Sereko, a former firefighter at the Krugersdorp Team, is now a security officer with the Red Ants Security Relocation and Eviction Company after exiting the programme. He is currently working in Krugersdorp on the West Rand.

He says he credits the work opportunity the programme offered him as a stepping stone, adding that the salary was much better at his current employment.

“I saved part of the stipend I got in the programme to do security training. I have been recruited with grade C and this has improved my life,” says Sereko, who did the security training on a part-time basis.

The work opportunity provided by the programme gave him hope when he had had none.

“I learned a lot in the programme including safety, human resource issues and financial management,” says Sereko. He also learned financial management skills that have helped him to shape his future.

During last year’s Yellow Card training assessment, Sereko was the best male runner in Gauteng, doing the 2,4 km run in 7 minutes and 41 seconds.



Parapara Makgahlela, Provincial Communication Officer, Gauteng



Steve Sereko of Krugersdorp is a security officer with the Red Ants

Former firefighter working at East London Airport



Andile Plaatjies is a proud product of WOF now working at East London Airport

“The Working on Fire programme has empowered me and opened doors for better opportunities,” says Andile Plaatjies, a former firefighter at Stutterheim Team.

This dedicated young man joined Working on Fire in 2010. “I passed my matric in 2002 and never had the opportunity to further my studies. Getting a job was not easy due to lack of experience and a qualification,” he says.

After joining WOF he worked hard and used the stipend to get his driver’s licence.

“In 2010, I was promoted to a driver position for the Stutterheim Team and that was one of the highlights of my life,” he says.

Plaatjies says that in 2011 he got the opportunity to work at East London Airport and he has been working there ever since.

“I would like to thank the Working on Fire programme for preparing me for the job I am currently doing,” says Plaatjies.



Nthabiseng Mokone, Provincial Communication Officer, Eastern Cape

Programme continues to alleviate poverty



Hopeful young unemployed people go through the recruitment process, which includes a fitness test

The Eastern Cape Working on Fire High Altitude Team (HAT) programme recently recruited seven young people from the western part of the province.

According to the Regional Manager of HAT in the West District, Susan Rall, two people were recruited for the Camdeboo Team, three for the Addo Team and two for the Baviaanskloof Team.

“Many young people came for the recruitment but only those who passed the fitness standard were selected,” Rall says. She says that the candidates had to take the fitness test which included timed push-ups and

sit-ups as well as running 2.4 km (in 14 minutes for females and 12 minutes for males). “These young men and women will start working in the first week of April this year,” says Rall, who adds that they will also undergo training to equip them with all the skills that are required in high altitude work. The Working on Fire High Altitude Team programme aims to reduce invasive species in catchment areas to sustain our water supply.



Nthabiseng Mokone, Provincial Communication Officer, Eastern Cape

Former participant saves lives as a paramedic

Some WOF participants are inspired by giving service, others by colleagues and managers who act as mentors and role models. For Rodney Matlhale, who is originally from Sebokeng, these influences were important, but it was the stipend he received that motivated him to work harder so that he could get a better job.

After completing matric in 2013 he studied Basic Life Support at Mokgojwa College of Emergency Care, graduating in 2014. Matlhale then joined Working on Fire as a firefighter at Molemane Base.

He found the experience at WOF tough at first but as time went by, he got to love the job and says he learned a lot, especially important skills such as self-motivation. During his spare time he volunteered at Emergency Medical Service in basic life support and later applied for an advertised paramedic vacancy.

“I was shortlisted for an interview, went for the second interview and then got the job at Ebersohn (24) Medical Rescue in September 2017. I intend to study Intermediate Life Support (ILS) so I can further my career,” he says.



Rodney Matlhale is currently a paramedic but plans to study further

Matlhale thanks his former Regional Manager, Josephine Molebatsi, Dionne Dinale and Crew Leaders Marumoagae, Bogatsu and Maela who supported his dreams. “To my former colleagues, never give up and do not look down on what you are doing,” he says.