



# WOFIRE NEWS

Saving Lives • Protecting the Environment • Restoring Dignity

VOLUME 7 | EDITION 3 | JUNE 2018



Working on Fire



Working on Fire - WOF TV News Channel



@wo\_fire

## Socio-economic empowerment programmes for participants launched

Working on Fire marked Youth Day on 16 June with activities that included talks given by WOF alumni, former participants who have exited the programme by securing permanent employment.

Government role players included the Department of Trade and Industry, Department of Small Business Development (DSBD), Small Enterprise Finance Agency (SEFA), National Empowerment Fund (NEF), the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) and the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA).

These organisations addressed our participants and provided them with the necessary knowledge that would assist them to sustain themselves socio-economically through entrepreneurship. They provided participants who have business ambitions with information that would help them in starting up businesses or expanding their current businesses.

These activities were in support of this year's theme as announced by the Presidency - 'Live the legacy towards a socio-economically empowered youth'. WOF aims to motivate current participants through mentorship and entrepreneurship programmes that will encourage a positive attitude towards accessing opportunities of employment outside the programme.

More Youth Day stories on page 6.

## The Knysna Fires - one year later

**On 7 June 2017, the Knysna Fire erupted and caused devastation and destruction on a scale that had never been experienced within a local municipality in this country and sadly led to loss of life and the destruction of properties and bulk service infrastructure worth millions of Rands.**

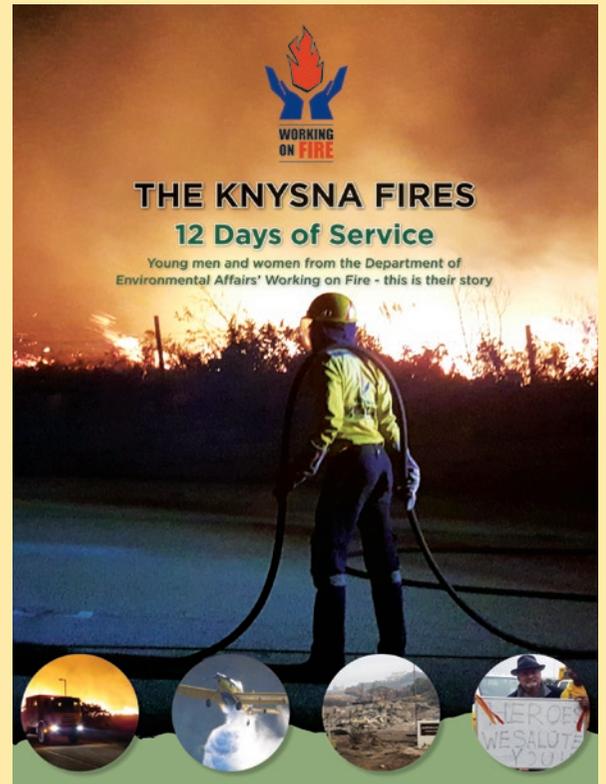
The deployment of Working on Fire ground and aerial personnel, together with local, district and provincial firefighting resources and volunteers from the Volunteer Wildfire Services, became one of the largest deployments to a single fire incident in South African history. The speed of deployment undoubtedly made a significant contribution to saving lives and property in this battle.

Working on Fire has produced a commemorative publication - 'The Knysna Fires - 12 Days of Service' - telling the story of the valiant contributions of the firefighters from one of the South African government's most successful Expanded Public Works Programmes (EPWP).

The 'Knysna - 12 Days of Service' publication recalls this event through the eyes of the Working on Fire management who went to Knysna and set up a temporary command centre, the firefighters on the ground who faced the flames every day and the pilots who supported them in the air throughout the battle. The publication also records the gratitude of all who witnessed their courage, from the Cabinet of the national government to the residents of Knysna.

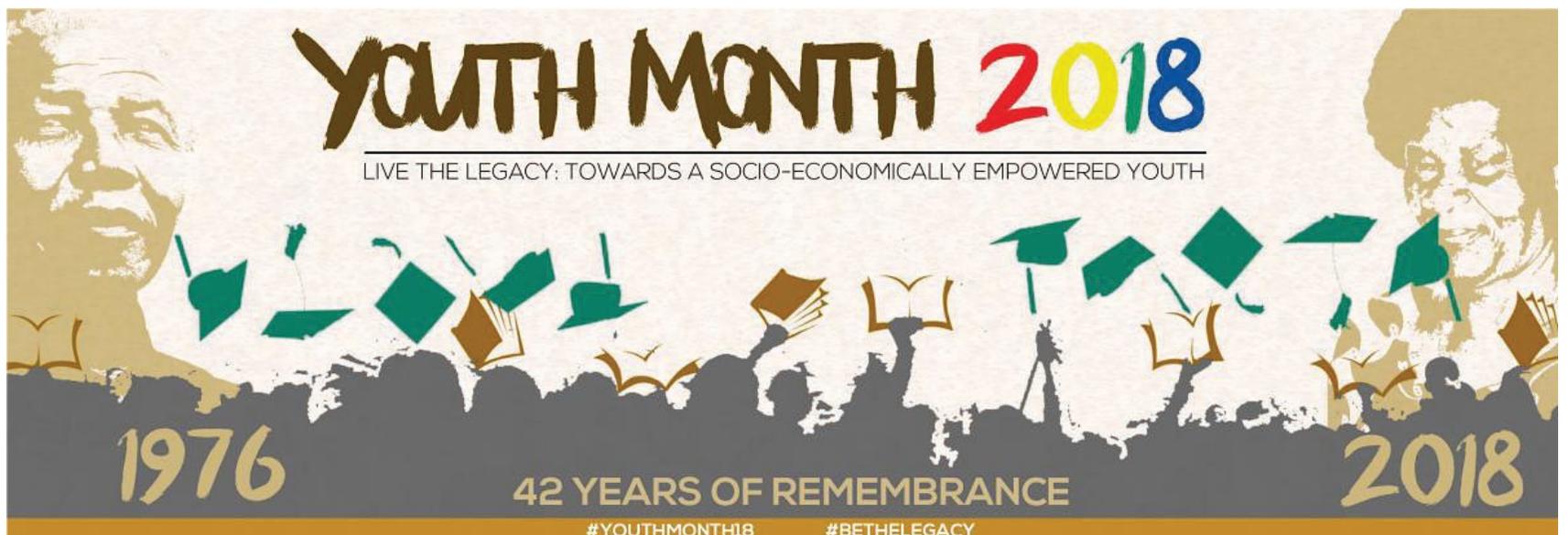
You can order your copy of 'The Knysna Fires - 12 Days of Service' booklet online at [https://workingonfire.org/knysna\\_fires-june-2017-we-remember-one-year-later/](https://workingonfire.org/knysna_fires-june-2017-we-remember-one-year-later/) or via an email to [comms@wofire.co.za](mailto:comms@wofire.co.za), for a donation of just R50.

Your kind donation will be contributed to our Working on Fire Scholarship Fund which provides resources for our young firefighters to continually develop and improve their skills and qualifications.



### Banking details for donations and to order a copy:

Account Holder: Working on Fire  
Bank: ABSA  
Account Number: 4068161119  
Branch code: 632005  
Reference: Knysna



Dear Readers

Welcome to our June Newsletter.

This issue celebrates Youth Month. We share with you Working on Fire's launch of socio-economic empowerment programmes that aim to motivate participants and assist in creating a positive attitude to accessing employment opportunities outside the programme.

We also share with you the Working on Fire teams' efforts to restrict the economic damage that wildfires cause as they battled several fires across the country. We have launched our **'Knysna - 12 Days of Service'** publication which commemorates the Knysna Fires of June 2017 through the eyewitness accounts of the Working on Fire management and firefighters who participated in the battle.

You can also read about the Fire Awareness Campaign launches which are aimed at getting communities ready for the upcoming winter fire season and the fuel load reduction and fire awareness activities that teams are doing in high-fire-risk areas.

We are always pleased to share the stories of participants who land permanent employment outside the programme after furthering their education and using the skills development training offered by Working on Fire to improve their employability.

Happy Reading!!!

## South Africa's Expanded Public Works Programmes

Since WOF is an environmental Expanded Public Works Programme of the Department of Environmental Affairs, it is instructive to reflect on what the EPWP is and why it plays a crucial role in combatting poverty in South Africa.

According to Stats SA, the official current unemployment rate is 26.7%, which translates to 5.98 million persons. The youth unemployment rate is 38.2%, but the youth constitute 68% of the total unemployed population. **That's 3.3 million young people without work.**

The main effect of massive unemployment is poverty. Stats SA figures show that already in 2011, 45.5% of South Africans were living below the poverty line with poverty highest among black Africans (54.0%), women (47.1%) and youth aged 18 to 24 (50.7%).

The fact that the poverty rate among adults with no formal education is 66.0% shows that education and employment are the keys to fighting poverty. Thanks to the continuing effects of apartheid, black Africans have the worst educational attainment and constitute 80.2% of the unemployed.

The South African National Development Plan 2030 (NDP) supports

stronger labour market participation to tackle youth unemployment. Prior to the NDP, the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) was set up in 2003. Its purpose was to provide 'income relief through temporary work for the unemployed to carry out socially useful activities'. The EPWP has generated over eight million employment opportunities.

Government and state-owned enterprises use the EPWP to provide temporary, labour-intensive employment through the delivery of public infrastructure and the provision of socially useful services.

The national government, provinces and municipalities procure services via the EPWP framework. Work opportunities in EPWP projects are created within four service areas:

- Infrastructure – construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of roads, schools, clinics;
- Non-state – non-profit and community organisations delivering communal programmes and services;
- Environment and Culture – the public environment management sector (water, parks, fire, wetlands, waste) and through cultural programmes (tourism, arts, crafts); and
- Social programmes including early childhood development, community-based care, community safety.

The Minister of Labour sets the conditions of employment for EPWP participants, including defining a minimum wage, work hours, overtime rates, maternity leave, employment injury, and health and safety considerations.

A total of 10 469 EPWP projects rolled out during the 2015/16 cycle, including 2 619 in the Environmental and Culture sector in which WOF operates.

The employment opportunities created totalled 741 540 in 2015/16, with an average duration of 88.25 working days. The total wages generated amounted to R 6.1 billion. As at 2015/16, female participation in the EPWP had grown to 69%, while youth and the disabled comprised 46% and 2% respectively.

The EPWP projects that target the youth include compulsory training to enhance the participants' skills and improve their chances of gaining self or formal employment. According to Stats SA, 70% of past EPWP participants have transitioned to self or formal employment.

*This article was an extract from the International Labour Office on the EPWP Programme in South Africa.*

## MD Message:

**Trevor Abrahams**



This month we commemorated the first anniversary of the Knysna fires of June 2017 which became the biggest single disaster that a local municipality in South Africa ever had to incur.

We joined thousands of people throughout South Africa and more in particular the people of Knysna in honouring the memory of those who lost their lives, but moreover we salute the bravery of all our firefighters who helped in the biggest single deployment of firefighting resources in the history of this country.

In addition, as part of this one-year commemoration we also launched our own account of the heroic efforts of Working on Fire teams in our book, **Knysna 12 Days of Service**.

Once again, a big thank you to all our firefighters and partners who contributed to these efforts.

I want to address in this edition the issue of discipline and respect in Working on Fire which has in the past always been at heart of what we do in this programme.

When we launched our 'Back to Basics' campaign in June 2017, our management team and I took time to

engage our participants in addressing some of the challenges which was putting a huge strain on our operations.

Over the past twelve months we have also sent out communiques addressing and resolving matters raised by firefighters and employees during the roadshows, such as the public holidays payment, fire season working hours and incorrect application of our disciplinary procedures.

However, despite having addressed some of these major challenges, the issue of discipline amongst some of our firefighters is beginning to become a problem.

Discipline is a key element of what makes Working on Fire a unique programme, on the fire line it can be a matter of life or death and we will find it difficult to function without high levels of discipline.

Most of our firefighters understand the importance of discipline and I want to reiterate the fact that we will not compromise on this issue and those that find themselves behaving in an undisciplined manner will be facing the consequences of their misconduct.

In this regard, we reiterate our policy on all employees being free to join a union, but emphasize that any conduct of union activities must be within the law and misconduct under the banner of union activities will not be tolerated. Moreover, as argued at the CCMA in the NUMSA matter, an EPWP programme, WoF is not able to negotiate with unions on the issue of wages.

## Working on Fire teams respond to fires across the country



Working on Fire teams successfully contained a number of fires across the country

Working on Fire teams worked tirelessly to suppress numerous fires across the country in June in KwaZulu-Natal, Free State, North West, Gauteng and Mpumalanga.

The rapid response from 19 Department of Environmental Affairs' Working on Fire teams

helped reduce the physical, economic and environmental damage caused by unwanted wildfires. In Mpumalanga, Working on Fire aerial resources, consisting of two spotter planes, two water bombers and a helicopter, assisted in putting out three fires.

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

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



# Fire awareness launch aims to prepare communities

North West Working on Fire teams joined the Potchefstroom Fire Protection Association in a fire awareness campaign launch and parade through the streets of Potchefstroom.

The Castello, Highveld, Boskop and Wolmaransstad teams paraded through the streets with JB Marks Municipality Fire Department personnel. Also in attendance were the South African National Defence Force, ER24, the Police Mounted Academy and Tlokwe Fire Services.

The launch was aimed at raising awareness about the winter fire season and warning communities about fire risks. Prior to the launch event, the Community Fire Awareness Officer and Fire Awareness Training Officer conducted 11 fire awareness activities, which included fuel load reduction and door-to-door fire



awareness, while seven FireSafe workshops with communities and four FireSafe presentations were also conducted, along with seven school fire awareness and nine community fire awareness activities.

These activities targeted high-risk areas to reduce the risk and impact of fires this winter.

# Fire safety campaign for communities

Working on Fire in the Free State hosted its annual Fire Awareness launch in Kroonstad in the Free State on 24 May in partnership with various stakeholders who are committed to keeping community members safe this fire season. The stakeholders who partnered with WOF in this event were the Office of the Mayor of Moqhaka Local Municipality, Free State Provincial Disaster Management, Emergency Medical Services, the Departments of Environmental Affairs, Health, Education and Agriculture, Old Mutual, Moqhaka Fire and Rescue Services and the SAPS.

The campaign aimed to raise awareness of the risk of veld and forest fires and empower community members to take responsibility for reducing the risk and impact of fires. Residents who used fire to cook with and warm their homes were a special focus of the campaign.

"This year's fire awareness launch was hosted in Kroonstad because it is



Kroonstad Team members march to the venue during the Fire Awareness Campaign launch

a fire-prone area and it was important for us to educate the community about fire safety, not only before the commencement of the winter fire season but on a regular basis. The Kroonstad Team assisted immensely by conducting prescribed burning and door-to-door fire awareness which assisted in ensuring that the event was a success," says Moipone Motaung, the Fire Awareness Facilitator.



Wayne Mokhehi, Free State Provincial Communication Officer

# WOF beefs up fire awareness as fire season sets in

As the winter fire season proceeds, Working on Fire firefighters in Mpumalanga are keeping up their fire awareness activities, in an effort to minimise the devastating effects of veld and forest fires this season.

On 8 June 2018, WOF fire awareness officials and firefighters, in conjunction with the City of Mbombela, launched the Provincial Fire Awareness Campaign at the Umjindi Trust Sportsground in Barberton. The event also marked their observance of World Environment Day, which is commemorated on 5 June globally.

The provincial Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Land and Environmental Affairs (DARDLEA), the South African National Biodiversity



WOF firefighters joined EPWP community workers during a clean-up campaign with the Umjindi Trust community

Institute, Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency and several other environmental stakeholders also participated in a day that saw scores of people assemble at the sportsground to undertake a clean-up activity in the small rural community.

"With temperatures expected to decline further in the coming weeks, we urge vigilance during the winter fire season," said Mbuso Siwela, Community Fire Awareness Officer. "Let us take it upon ourselves to conserve the environment, not only for us, but for future generations."



Lebogang Maseko, Mpumalanga Provincial Communication Officer

# Working on Fire assists CPFPA with fire prevention measures



Cape Peninsula Fire Protection Association stack burn.

Working on Fire firefighters assisted the Cape Peninsula Fire Protection Association and the Vergelegen Wine Estate to conduct a stack burning operation on the estate.

The CPFPA intended burning an additional 80 hectares of stacked invasive alien vegetation that resulted from Vergelegen's successful battle against invasive alien species.

Stack burns are carried out at local, provincial and national levels to create a sustainable and well balanced environment, reduce unwanted wildfire damage and promote the beneficial use of fire. Integrated Fire Management (IFM) forms the backbone of the Working on Fire teams' duties.



Lauren Howard, Western Cape Provincial Communication Officer

# Macassar community learns about safety

Community members from Macassar in the Western Cape attended a FireSafe workshop in Helderberg, hosted by Community Fire Awareness Officer, Rayganah Rhoda.

The community members were taught how to construct an evacuation plan and conduct a fire risk assessment, and were also informed about the importance of reducing fuel loads within the community.

Rhoda says, "Following the workshop, the community members went to the Helderberg Nature Reserve to observe the after-effects of a veld fire that took place in the Reserve. They easily identified the alien vegetation surrounding the Reserve. In commemoration of the World Environment Day Beat Plastic Pollution campaign, I also stressed the



Community Fire Awareness Officer, Rayganah Rhoda, and Macassar community members in the Helderberg Nature Reserve

importance of understanding the impact pollution has on fires in areas that are not maintained properly."



Lauren Howard, Western Cape Provincial Communication Officer

# All hands on deck for winter fire season



Working on Fire resources have been strategically placed across the North West

As the winter fire season is in full swing, all hands are on deck to tackle wildfires. WOF in the North West has been running a number of refresher training exercises to get everyone ready for the fire season. All resources have been strategically placed in several areas across the province to ensure that fires are responded to in good time.

Ground Operation Manager, Mpholoane Manase, says firefighters underwent the annual Yellow Card training and drivers also went through rigorous training to ensure that firefighters will get to the fire line and back safely.

# Ready to lend a hand

The winter season is proceeding as planned. Lawrence Motsepe says that his team is ready mentally and physically to battle the flames that pose a threat to lives and nature. He said his team has been busy with fire breaks and prescribed burns since the beginning of June.

“We are glad that as young people we are a critical resource in biodiversity management in the whole of this country. My crew members are looking forward to saving lives and protecting the environment.”

Usually, farmers and communities lose property due to runaway fires every winter. Firebreaks must be done on time this season before entering the no smoke period in August.

Motsepe says that it will be a very busy fire season because vegetation growth picked up tremendously during the raining season.

“300 competent firefighters, 10 competent drivers, two fire trucks and 7 TB trucks are ready to be deployed to fires. Our vehicles are strategi-



Firefighters will be doing fire breaks and prescribed burns to reduce fire risks

“We will lend a hand in ensuring the landowners prepare for the fire season by putting correct measures in place. Integrated fire management is always the key in mitigating

any disastrous fires,” says Lawrence Motsepe.



Parapara Makgahlela, Gauteng Provincial Communication Officer

cally placed in each region to allow a timely response in the time of need. Our fire awareness team reached out to communities on radio stations and

other media platforms to warn community members not to start fires and not to leave open fires unattended,” says Manase.

# Working on Fire at the Royal Show



The children were taught the importance of crawling under smoke and had to demonstrate the lesson

Working on Fire in KwaZulu-Natal was part of the arena activities at the Royal Show in Pietermaritzburg. The KZN Fire Awareness Training Officer, Khulani Zulu says, “The aim of the arena show is to educate primary school learners about the impact of fire, getting ready in case of an outdoor fire and safety in the home and school.”

Thurlow firefighter Sfiso Hlela arrived with the Kishugu chopper and Mr Firefighter entertained and educated learners in the arena about being safe this winter fire season. Hlela taught the children the importance of crawling low under the smoke and what to do when clothes catch fire. Learners were asked to demonstrate

and answer questions about what they had learnt and won prizes.

The Thurlow and Karkloof Teams demonstrated their fantastic drill skills and also the fire wall they have to deal with during the Yellow Card Training Camp.

“We had a great reception from learners and teachers. They participated in all the activities planned. As it’s the start of the winter fire season, our topics are linked to preparing learners to be safe this fire season. Teams will continue visiting schools and educating learners,” says Zulu.



Nompilo Zondi, KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Communication Officer

# Free State Umbrella FPA Annual General Meeting



National General Manager Shane Christian provides stakeholders with WOF information

The Free State Umbrella Fire Protection Association (FSUFPA) recently held its Annual General Meeting attended by members of various Fire Protection Associations across the province as well as many stakeholders, including Working on Fire and the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

The meeting addressed issues such as the current challenges being faced in the province around wildfire management. However, it centred on rationalising the many FPAs into fewer, fully functional FPAs with good corporate governance practices that would use their combined knowledge,

technical capabilities and resources, particularly data and fire information, to hopefully provide a seamless professional service to their members.

The reasons for merging FPAs were the lack of effective governance structures and accountability. Among the objectives of the FSUFPA will be to establish and strengthen strategic partnerships with stakeholders such as DAFF and WOF to ensure the successful and sustainable provision of wildfire management services in the Free State.



Wayne Mokhethi, Free State Provincial Communication Officer

# MD engages with Free State Crew Leaders



Managing Director, Trevor Abrahams, addressing Free State Crew Leaders

Working on Fire Managing Director Trevor Abrahams recently took time out of his busy schedule to engage with Free State Crew Leaders regarding pressing issues in the province.

The MD's visit was aimed at providing clarity to Crew Leaders and participants around the functioning of the WOF programme. National General Manager Shane Christian was also present to answer questions about ground operations.

"As Crew Leaders we came to represent our respective bases and to convey messages from our team

members to national management. I feel that some of our concerns and questions were addressed sufficiently. However, there was not enough time to address every issue. Overall, it was a successful meeting but constant engagement will be needed to iron out the more complex issues raised," says Type 1 Crew Leader Monde Ndobela.

The meeting had a positive outcome with Crew Leaders being able to take back answers to their teams. Some of their questions were answered directly by a Department of Environmental Affairs representative.



Wayne Mkhethi, Free State Provincial Communication Officer

# Working on Fire attends SA Agulhas II Open Day

Working on Fire in KwaZulu-Natal attended the SA Agulhas II Open Day which took place at the Durban Harbour. The KZN Communications Cluster got the opportunity to exhibit material to raise awareness about the work the WOF programme does to save lives and protect the environment.

Fire Awareness Training Officer Khulani Zulu says, "As we were celebrating Environmental Month, we stressed the effects of pollution in their yards and in the environment."

The Shongweni and eThekweni participants attended the second day of the Agulhas Open Day event with their children. WOF children got to see their parents' unique drill with the public that were present at the event. The Department of Environmental Affairs's Director of the Natural Resource Management Programme, Mr Nceba Ngcobo, also joined participants in touring SA Agulhas II. The SA Agulhas II is an icebreaking polar supply and research ship used by scientists to conduct meaning-



Participants and their children talking with Mr Nceba Ngcobo outside the ship

ful research across the whole Indian Ocean in an attempt to understand how the dynamics of the Indian Ocean influence global change and climate, and their impact on human development. Participants enjoyed visiting the Agulhas with their children and learnt

a lot from the ship's crew about what scientists look for when they are at sea. They also got to ask about career opportunities.



Nompilo Zondi, KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Communication Officer

# Graskop Team gives back to vulnerable residents



The Graskop Team donates to the Graskop Home of Hope

In keeping up with the WOF programme's key vision of restoring the dignity of people in marginalised communities, the Graskop Team in Mpumalanga recently visited the Graskop Home of Hope, a centre that houses orphans in the Sabie and surrounding areas, to donate freshly grown carrots to the Centre.

Spearheaded by Lucas Mahlake, a former Working on Fire firefighter who is now Base Manager and Fire Chief at the Thaba Chweu Municipality, the donation came from a dedicated team of firefighters who had grown and harvested the vegetables.

"With the winter fire season reaching its peak, we know nothing beats home-cooked vegetable soup to keep warm," says Mahlake.

"I teamed up with the WOF team to become change agents, as emphasised within the programme. It was only fitting that we play our part by giving back to the centre."

The Base Communications Representative, Wonder Mashego, said the donation was "heart-warming" and he was pleased to have been part of the team that gave it.



Lebogang Maseko, Mpumalanga Provincial Communication Officer

# Fraud and ethics refresher training



Tony Mancos engaging with Free State staff during the workshop

The Free State Working on Fire staff recently attended a Fraud and Ethics Training Refresher conducted by Group Executive, Tony Mancos. The purpose of the refresher was to remind staff members of the importance of ethical behaviour within the programme as well as how to identify possibly unethical and fraudulent behaviour or actions.

Staff members were taught about the Protected Disclosures Act (Act 26 of 2000) and that the Act introduces provisions for employees to report unlawful or irregular conduct by employers and fellow employees, while enjoying protection as whistleblowers from being victimised.

WOF's ethics hotline enables concerned employees, as well as other stakeholders in Working on Fire, to anonymously report any fraudulent, corrupt and unethical practices to an independent third party.

"The Refresher training regarding the ethics and fraud hotline was presented very well and reminded us of the importance of this tool in the WOF programme and now it is our responsibility to convey this important message to the participants in our province," says Anzari Sparkham, Human Resource Practitioner.



Wayne Mkhethi, Free State Provincial Communication Officer

## WOF played a huge role in firefighter's journey



Former WOF firefighter Mhlaliseni Dlomo

Mhlaliseni Dlomo, a former firefighter at Working on Fire's Nkandla Base, has obtained permanent employment at the uThungulu Fire and Rescue department.

"Before I was recruited in 2011 I was unemployed at home, failing to find any job as I had no qualifications," says Dlomo.

"WOF helped me a lot in my life. The programme trained me in a lot of things, such as veld and forest firefighting. I learnt team work, to work with other people from various backgrounds. I was taught discipline and it was through the certificates I obtained in the programme that I am where I am today.

"I am really enjoying my career as a fire and rescue firefighter. WOF played a huge role in my life. I am very thankful to the programme for the opportunity. I am thankful to my crew leaders and all in provincial management who played a role in my development in the programme," says Dlomo.

He says he has a five-year plan to build his family their dream home. In encouraging his former colleagues, Dlomo said he wishes they would never let go of their dreams, to always focus on how they can achieve their goals and never listen to negative people, as most success stories have challenging pasts.

The WOF programme was launched in September 2003 as part of the South African government's initiative to create jobs and to alleviate poverty. Today, Working on Fire employs more than 5000 young men and women who have been fully trained as wildland firefighters and are stationed at over 200 bases throughout South Africa. Like Dlomo, thousands more have found permanent employment after upskilling at Working on Fire.



Nompilo Zondi, KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Communication Officer

Lusheen Britz, the Western Cape Social Development Practitioner (SDP) says, "As part of Youth Month, the social development department focused on mentorship and entrepreneurship, in keeping with the theme, 'Live the Legacy: Towards A Socio-Economically Empowered Youth'.

The Witfontein WOF Team and the George High Altitude Team took part in a session conducted by the Eden SEDA in collaboration with Working on Fire. The aim was to create a positive attitude to accessing other opportunities of employment.

Youth Day in South Africa is marked annually on 16 June, to commemorate the courageous youth in Soweto who challenged the apartheid government's decision in 1976 to force black school children to be taught in Afrikaans.



Lauren Howard, Western Cape Provincial Communication Officer

## Educating our youth



SDP Lusheen Britz and the Eden SEDA speak to the team about the importance of mentorship and entrepreneurship

## Alumni return to visit former teammates

As part of the Youth Month celebrations, the Social Development Practitioner, Makoloi Tele, organised former participants to visit their ex-teammates to share their experiences and motivate participants to seek employment opportunities outside the programme.

Donald Lebitsa, a former firefighter from Mamusa Base who is now a paramedic at Buthelezi Emergency Services, visited his former teammates. He encouraged firefighters and reminded them that Working on Fire is a stepping stone to better employment opportunities. He also stressed the importance of volunteering to get more skills in the fields they would like to enter.

Sharing with his former colleagues how he had saved part of his monthly stipend to do the paramedic course which helped him get his current job, he acknowledged the programme for the training it provides to unskilled youth in South Africa.

Firefighter Eric Mgoloane said he learned a lot from Lebitsa's words but most importantly the need to have goals daily and a purpose at work. He added that as the team they had learned to invest in their education and build their families.

Thabelo Bonokwane, a former Working on Fire firefighter at the Naledi Base who now runs a family-owned funeral service business, also visited his former colleagues.



Working on Fire alumnus, Donald Lebitsa, speaks to his former teammates at the Mamusa Base

## Firefighters beat SAPS in soccer tournament

A team of Working on Fire firefighters based at Ermelo in Mpumalanga were recently crowned champions of the Siyavaya Tour interdepartmental soccer tournament, after beating the South African Police Services (SAPS) team 1 - 0.

In a hotly contested match played at the AJ Swanepoel Stadium, the team had the upper hand, with their physical fitness prominently displayed during the game. "It was not an easy win. We had to fight to win and in the end, it was all worth it," says Mabutho Ndlovu, a Type 2 Crew Leader. "We also had a great goalkeeper, Derick Nkosi, who kept his head up and his knees locked to keep those goals from coming in."

This was the second time that many of the players had experienced the thrill of lifting the trophy as they had also been in the combined Msu-



The Ermelo Team were crowned champions of the Siyavaya interdepartmental soccer tournament

kaligwa Fire Authorities team that won last year's final.



Lebogang Maseko, Mpumalanga Communication Officer

# Participant pursues personal growth at WOF

Born in the small town of Stutterheim, Nkululeko Mlanjeni joined WOF in 2007 at Stutterheim Base in the Eastern Cape. He said that prior to joining the programme, he struggled to get a job as he did not have qualifications.

"When I heard that Working on Fire would be recruiting in Stutterheim, I saw an opportunity to turn my life around and luckily I was recruited," he says.

"In 2008 I got nominated to attend the Type 2 Crew Leader course in Mpumalanga and I passed. Due to my hard work I was then selected for the Type 1 Crew Leader Course which I also passed," says Mlanjeni.

"I worked very well with my team members, stakeholders as well as the communities around our areas when conducting awareness. It was after this exposure that I was appointed as the Regional Manager in 2014," he says.

Mlanjeni said that working around the province with more than two teams created the right environment for his professional growth. In March, Mlanjeni started working at the Eastern Cape



Nkululeko Mlanjeni says Working on Fire created a conducive environment for him to grow professionally

provincial office in the capacity of Health and Safety Officer.



Nthabiseng Mokone, Eastern Cape Provincial Communication Officer

# Golden Gate Team on the road to success

The Working on Fire team located in the Golden Gate National Park in the Free State recently collectively decided to acquire their learner's licences and drivers licences as they understand the importance of having a driver's licence to secure permanent employment. Teboho Motloung, Ntebo Mabitsela, Kgadimane Mofokeng, Malefetsane Semelane, Leboela Makhanya, Motsamai Mofokeng, Daisy Mosikidi and Anacletha Mofokeng have so far all received their learner's licences. Teboho Motloung has moved on and obtained his code 10 driver's licence while the rest of his team are preparing to get tested. It is generally accepted that people who have a driver's licence have a higher chance of gaining full-time employment. Through the stipend, Working on Fire is empowering participants and enabling them to attend driving schools. WOF has



Some of the Golden Gate Team members who are trying to obtain their driver's licences

tried to break down the barriers that prevent many youth from acquiring licenses by giving them space to learn in the programme.

"We would like to be employed here in the Golden Gate National Park and when we noticed that every vacancy required a driver's license, this encouraged us to get ours. The members of the Golden Gate Team seized the opportunity when a driving school offered its services to us at a reasonable price which we could pay off on a monthly basis," says Motloung.



Wayne Mokhethi, Free State Provincial Communication Officer



Jonas Matlala

# Firefighter dedicated to nature conservation

Jonas Matlala, a Crew Leader at the Ditholo Team, says the Working on Fire programme introduced him to nature conservation and showed him how he could assist in developing that sector. He is based at Dinokeng Game Reserve in Hammanskraal, north of Pretoria.

"In 2014 we helped the game reserve team when infusing ink on the rhinos. That was when I realised how serious rhino poaching was," he says. It saddens him that poachers do not understand the negative impact of their actions to nature.

"We learn a lot about biodiversity as firefighters. I learned that every living thing or plant is vital in nature conserva-

tion. This has sparked my love for wildlife conservation as well," Matlala says.

He said that the teams always try to avoid killing reptiles and other wildlife during the prescribed burns, which enable the teams to protect wildlife from dangerous runaway fires during the fire season. "Before we burn we try to ensure the wildlife are safe at all times," he says.

As a young person, Matlala says he sees himself as an environmental protector. He wants to do a course in anti-poaching measures in the near future.



Parapara Makgahlela, Gauteng Provincial Communication Officer

# Driver's Pledge

Following the 2018 driver refresher training in Nelspruit, 23-year-old Zusiphe Mehlomakhulu, a Type 1 Driver at the False Bay Base in the Western Cape, was moved to send this pledge:

*"I am a lady who carries 25 lives in one vehicle. I am the responsible one for my vehicle and crew. I am a driver, yes I am a driver. A driver that is seen by others as nothing, but I am a driver that is thinking about the safety of her crew. I am a driver that is responsible for my vehicle."*

"I am very proud of the person I have become. I am a responsible person, a trustworthy person, a go-getter, a very strong person. My colleagues, my vehicle managers. I call you my brothers and sisters. I am what I am because of you."

Mehlomakhulu joined the WOF programme in 2014 and used her stipend to achieve her code 10 driver's licence in 2016, and to support her family. Mehlomakhulu says she was very nervous and unsure of herself when she went for her final assessment.

"I was so scared, asking myself, 'Am I ready to be responsible? Will the people trust me with their lives? Will the company trust me with their vehicle?' The answer was YES! To me, being a driver was never about the money. It is about making a change in my life, and the lives of the people in my community, so that they can see that I am a good example to the youth."



Lauren Howard, Western Cape Provincial Communication Officer





Working on Fire cleared Yonela Jikwa's path to the better future

## Participant leaves WOF for local opportunity

Yonela Jikwa, a former firefighter from the Joubertina Team in the Eastern Cape, couldn't be a better illustration of how the Working on Fire programme is supposed to benefit its participants. Jikwa has secured a job at a local filling station.

This enthusiastic young man joined the WOF programme in 2014 after dropping out of school due to financial challenges.

"I always wanted to finish school and be something better but challenges of life came my way," says Jikwa.

He says that he never gave up on his dreams and Working on Fire brought him closer to the life he always wanted.

"After joining the programme my life became better. I worked very hard, got some skills and made sure that I helped my family where necessary," Jikwa says.

He appreciates how the WOF programme empowered him even though he did not have the all-important matric certificate.

"It's not easy to get a job out there if you do not have matric, but Working on Fire accepted me and changed my life for the better," he says, adding that, had it not been for all the skills, experience and discipline he developed at WOF, he would not be where he is today.

"I can now see a bright future and it's all because of WOF. I would like to advise everyone to be patient, work hard and appreciate the programme for everything it does for young people," says Jikwa.



Nthabiseng Mokone, Eastern Cape Provincial Communication Officer

## Former firefighters inspired by the example of others

One of the aims of this newsletter is to inspire participants to empower themselves with new skills and then seek formal employment. It was pleasing to hear that Thapelo Leshaba and Sylvia Fodini have been hired by the Roodeplaat nature reserve, east of Pretoria.

Even more so when they both said that the exit stories they read about in the monthly newsletter inspired them to try to achieve more and exit the programme on a positive note.

Leshaba, who is now employed as a general worker at the reserve, says it was quite encouraging to read about the positive exits by firefighters.

"We had fears to apply for positions before because we did not realise we could grow ourselves further," he says, but after reading about the success of others he says, "I could not wait for my turn. This is an opportunity to climb the career ladder in life."

The duo, who were among those who fought the Knysna fire last year, say



Sylvia Fodini and Thapelo Leshaba

they are grateful that the base partner has employed them and that the move has boosted their morale and made them more optimistic about the future. They say the WOF programme gave them skills that were necessary and relevant to their new jobs.

"I will use this new employment to upskill myself by first writing matric and then doing a basic ambulance assistance course," says Fodini confidently.



Parapara Makgahlela, Gauteng Provincial Communication Officer

## Former firefighter moves into construction

Christine Toyi's story is a familiar one at Working on Fire. Even though she completed her matric she was unable to find work.

"After doing my matric I took a gap year [unwillingly] as during that year I did not get any job. Then I heard that WOF was recruiting at Witelsbos," says the former firefighter from Witelsbos Base in the Eastern Cape.

Toyi went to the recruitment venue to try her luck and fortunately she was one of the young men and women to be selected.

"I was so happy to get that opportunity and I worked very hard each and every day," says Toyi.

She says she soon realised that Working on Fire would empower her with the necessary skills to improve her personal and career prospects. Some of these skills are helping her a lot in her current job.

The 25-year-old Toyi, who is originally from a small town called Woodland, left WOF after getting a learnership at a construction firm in Blue Lilies near Tsitsikamma.

Thanking her WOF colleagues for all their assistance and support, Toyi



Christine Toyi thanks the WOF programme for the skills she acquired

advised the firefighters to work hard, be patient and always have a goal as that would help them progress in life.



Nthabiseng Mokone, Eastern Cape Provincial Communication Officer

## One more step towards his dream

Donald Mohlamonyane, who was based at the Roodeplaat Team, has exited the programme to take up a position as a data capturer at the South African Post Office in Dennilton in Mpumalanga.

"We are tasked with registering the South African Social Security Agency's beneficiaries. I am assigned to service the poor mass on the ground," he says.

Mohlamonyane says he is grateful for the opportunity to work that the WOF programme offered him over a number of years. "The work opportunity was my first job. The programme has prepared me well for this new job."

When asked about his highlights while in the programme, Mohlamonyane doesn't hesitate and says it's definitely being deployed to the fire rescue mission in Knysna in the Western Cape in June last year.

Last year, while still a firefighter at Roodeplaat, he completed a diploma course in police science at a private college in Brooklyn, Pretoria. His hopes are set on joining the South African Police Services.



Parapara Makgahlela, Gauteng Provincial Communication Officer



Donald Mohlamonyane