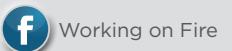




WOFIRE NEWS

Saving Lives • Protecting the Environment • Restoring Dignity

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Working on Fire



Working on Fire - WOF TV News Channel



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WELCOME HOME



WORKING ON FIRE WOLFPACK HOTSHOTS

The Minister of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries, Ms Barbara Creecy, was on hand at OR Tambo International on 30 July to welcome back a group of 40 Working on Fire (WOF) firefighters and five senior managers who had spent almost 30 days fighting the huge Chuckegg Creek fire in the province of Alberta in Western Canada. High Commissioner of Canada in South Africa, Sandra McCardell was also part of the welcoming committee of the Working on Fire group on their return from Canada said: "On behalf of Canada but also as a proud Albertan thank you very much for the hard work that you've done over the past weeks in coming to the assistance of Canadians and responding to them in their time of need. We are very grateful and thanks to your efforts this fire is now contained."

The deployment followed a request by the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre (CIFFC), made in terms of an existing memorandum of understanding between the South African government and the Canadian Department of Natural Resource which allowed either country to request urgent support from the other with regard to wildfire management.

The 40 firefighters, including 12 women (30%), came from all nine provinces in South Africa. The team



Minister Creecy at OR Tambo International welcoming firefighters back home



had left South Africa on 24 June to join firefighters from Canada, the USA and Mexico in the mammoth operation to combat the raging wildland fires.

Minister Creecy said: "What is most heartening to hear is that because of your efforts, the boundary line remained unbreached by the fire. You stood with 1 180 firefighters from all over Canada, Mexico and the USA and said 'this far and no further'. The camaraderie built through your morning Working on Fire parade will stand you in good stead in years to come. Almost all of you have reported benefitting greatly from the exposure to new techniques, approaches, equipment and the novelty of fighting underground fires."

This was the third successful WOF deployment to Canada, reflecting the importance of heightened cooperation and resource-sharing agreements put in place by the international firefighting community.



Minister Creecy (centre), Canadian High Commissioner Sandra McCardell (right) and Director General Nosipho Ngcaba (second from left)

SA WOLFPACK HOTSHOTS DEPLOYED TO CANADA

CANADA FIRE RAGES OUT OF CONTROL

Alberta has been experiencing an extreme fire season this year. More than 880 000 ha have burnt in these fires, compared to the annual average loss to wildland fires of 147 000 ha.

In early May, the Canadian Inter-agency Forest Fire Centre (CIFFC) realised that the extent of the fire burning in Canada this season threatened to outstrip their fire-fighting capacity. By the beginning of June, their daily National Fire Situation Report indicated that a significant mobilisation of provincial and international resources was required to assist active provincial agencies. During these extreme fire conditions, the CIFFC coordinates skilled firefighting teams, equipment and aerial resources to push back the ravaging spread of these fires. The CIFFC mobilised support from other Canadian provinces and called for support from a number of international partners.

South Africa answered Canada's call to action.

FIREFIGHTERS DEPLOYED TO CANADA

40 firefighters from the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries' Working on Fire (WOF) programme was requested to assist the Canadian province of Alberta in combatting its wildland fires. WOF selected 2 x 20-person Type 1 firefighting teams based on skills and experience, fitness and an exemplary track record of integrity and discipline, hailing from across the nine provinces in South Africa. 30% of the selected firefighters were female, a unique characteristic of the WOF firefighting force. As part of our WOF learning culture, the team was a blend of highly experienced firefighters with previous deployment experience and participants experiencing their first opportunity to serve on an overseas assignment. The WOF Wolfpack Hotshots Team was led by:

- The MD of WOF, Trevor Abrahams, who served as the Senior Agency Representative (SREP) in Canada.
- WOF's National General Operations Manager, Martin Bolton, who served as the International Agency Representative at the CIFFC in Winnipeg.
- WOF's Acting General Manager in KwaZulu-Natal, Bongani Nhla-



bathi, who served as the Agency Representative at the Chuckegg Creek fire.

- Regional Manager, Bongani Mashiane (from Mpumalanga), and Ground Operations Manager, Antoinette Jini (from Eastern Cape), served as leaders of the WOF teams.

The WOF hotshots team assembled at the WOF Academy in Nelspruit for a team briefing on the mission ahead, to complete all required administrative, medical and governance procedures and for training on all new Canadian equipment and systems in preparation for their deployment to Canada.

The WOF teams left for Canada in three groups:

- An advance party of WOF executives departed on 20 June - Martin bound for the CIFFC's offices in Winnipeg and Trevor bound for Winnipeg and Edmonton to confirm the arrival logistics for the teams.
- Group 1 departed 23 June via Johannesburg-Frankfurt-Toronto-Calgary-Edmonton.
- Group 2 departed 23 June via Johannesburg-London-Vancouver-Edmonton.
- Group 3 departed 23 June via Johannesburg-Amsterdam-Calgary-Edmonton.

Barbara Creecy, Minister of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries, conveyed to the team the sentiments of the South African people:

"My very best wishes go with you on this important deploy-

ment. It is an honour to be asked to assist the Canadians in combatting their wildfires and a tribute to the skills, discipline and fitness in the Working on Fire programme."

The full WOF Hotshots team assembled in Edmonton by the evening of 24 June, ready for action.

ON THE FIRELINE

The WOF firefighters joined teams from Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba, the Yukon, North West Territories, Mexico and USA, who were all deployed to combat the huge Chuckegg Creek fire that ignited on 12 May 2019 and had already burnt over 350 134 ha (26 July), demolishing seven homes. Evacuation measures were being applied in the town of High Level and surrounding hamlets.

After a rest day in Edmonton, the team collected their Canadian-issued tents and equipment, concluded a briefing by Alberta Wildfire personnel and set off on the nine-hour-long bus ride from Edmonton to the main camp at the Chuckegg Creek fire, approximately four kilometers south of the small town of High Level.

On 27 June, the WOF firefighters eagerly started their first tour of duty on the western flank of this huge fire. The day started, like every other day would, with a WOF parade, singing of the national anthem, prayer and

announcements before bussing off to the various staging areas for joint team briefings. It took almost an hour to get from the base camp to the staging area. Teams were then dispatched in Bell 212 and Bell 205 helicopters (similar to the WOF Hueys) to a landing zone close to the fire line or transported in all-terrain Haglund vehicles to the fire site. The team was to spend the first 14 days on the fire boundary line, extinguishing the hotspots, burning ash pits and smouldering peat fires. The exposure to new techniques, approaches, equipment and the novelty of fighting underground fires have greatly enhanced the skills set of the South African WOF Hotshots team. The divisional supervisor formally assessed the work and professionalism of the WOF firefighters team to be of a high standard.

At the high point of this huge fire, over 1180 firefighters were on hand supporting Canada in this fight.

No lives were lost.

SHARING THE WOF SA FLAVOUR WITH OUR HOSTS

The team was well looked after by their Canadian hosts, always receiving a warm meal in the evenings when they returned to the base camp.

Even though the WOF team was far away from home, on 18 July, in celebration of the memory of Nelson Mandela, the WOF team spent the day with a group of local retired farmers, cleaning and restoring their barn and stables for their large herd of horses. When the hard day's work was done, the WOF firefighters gave a poignant rendition of the late Johnny Clegg's Asimbonanga, a host of other songs and gumboot dancing.

This left an indelible impression on the elderly in this farming community.

The WOF firefighters' singing quickly became widely acclaimed, with the team regularly serenading firefighters who were celebrating their birthdays on the fire line. This eventually inspired an anthem-singing competition, with our WOF firefighters' sharing our unique SA flavour.

Throughout this deployment, the WOF team remained disciplined and in high spirits, doing their duty as shining ambassadors for Working on Fire and South Africa.

Runaway fires test firefighters in Mpumalanga

The Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries' Working on Fire Mpumalanga firefighters have had a busy fire season, battling runaway veld and forest fires.

The first week of June was the busiest thus far, with various teams reporting for duty on the fire line. The Highveld teams have been hard at work, with most of the teams called out to the fire line.

The Warburton Team battled an ongoing fire throughout the week in the Highveld area and WOF aerial

resources had to be dispatched to fight the blaze.

A fire that broke out in Nelshoogte kept the Lowveld Escarpment Fire Protection Association (LEFPA), Salique, Injaka, Lefpa and Nelspruit teams busy throughout 7 and 8 July. The Piet Retief Team is constantly hard at work and was called out to assist the Mkhondo FPA in fighting numerous fires. The Dullstroom, Breyten and Sasol teams were also called in to assist Fire Protection Associations in their areas to fight fires.



Mpumalanga firefighters suppression one of many runaway veld fires that have hit the province

A total of 43 fires were recorded in Mpumalanga in June. WOF dispatched 18 teams to suppress these fires.



Amanda Mthembu, Mpumalanga Provincial Communication Officer

Sappi grateful to WOF programme for assistance



A Working on Fire team recently impressed the management of Sappi's Enstra site and waste facility in Springs during firebreak operations to prepare for the winter fire season.

Dion Schroeder, a foreman at Sappi Limited, says he really enjoyed working with such a professional team.

"Thank you very much to Sabelo and his team for completing their work very professionally without any safety issues, incidents or accidents," he says.

Schroeder commended the team for working long and hard hours in difficult conditions. He was impressed that they even cleaned the campsite and toilets before leaving.

"Thanks again, now we can rest peacefully at night," he says.

Sabelo Kubheka, the regional manager for the team, says that his team completed the project within the set timeframe which made it easier for Sappi to resume its normal operations. He says they do the project every year before the start of the winter fire season.

"Our competence in relation to our operations speaks for itself to various stakeholders. Credit should also go to the provincial team in supporting the project to happen and succeed," he says.



Parapara Makgahlala, Gauteng Provincial Communication Officer

Teams aim to decrease the number of fires in province



Firebreaks help limit the spread of fire and the economic harm caused by wildfires

As the winter fire season picks up pace with the province seeing more fires, North West teams have been putting up fire prevention measures in various parts of the province to decrease the number of fires experienced for the rest of the fire season.

These fire prevention measures have been implemented in fire-prone communities. Several teams partnered with various Fire Protection Associations to do fuel load reduction and create firebreaks to minimise the risk of fires and prevent fires spreading.

These teams included the Naledi and Molemane teams which conducted fuel load reduction and made firebreaks in the Swartfontein area in Vryburg and the Doornhoek area. Community members have been warned to be vigilant and to keep an eye on the Fire Danger Index.

Landowners must ensure that they take the necessary steps to safeguard their properties from fire. Working on Fire teams will continue with fire awareness education at schools and in communities throughout the fire season.

Written by Editorial team

WOF participants create fire barriers for landowners

Rooiberg Team participants are working around the clock in Limpopo, creating firebreaks for the landowners. With the 2019 winter fire season in full swing, Rooiberg has already started dealing with the fires that tend to flare up from late July until December.

Firebreaks are used as a barrier to prevent fires from spreading from one farm to the other. All farmers are required to have firebreaks on their farms in terms of the National Veld and Forest Act of 1998.

"The firefighters did a fantastic job. They have the ability to control and extinguish fires fast and efficiently," says



Rooiberg participants doing firebreaks for landowners in their area

Annelie Becker, the Base Manager for Rooiberg Base. "We are at the end of our firebreak season and will continue with block burns as soon as we receive

Firefighters reduce fire risks along the national roads



Firefighters suppressing a fire along the N3

Firefighters have been very busy in the second month of the winter fire season conducting various firebreak projects across KwaZulu-Natal at farms, plantations and communities to reduce risks.

Working on Fire and landowners commenced creating tracer belts from May and doing controlled burns during the months of June and July.

In July, the uMngeni and Albert Falls Teams started burning both north and south-bound along the N3 between Pietermaritzburg and Mooi River.

KZN Ground Operations Manager, Dave Kleyn, says, "Firebreaks like these are imperative, especially since there are many landowners who are at risk near the national road."

Landowners along the national road are particularly at risk of motorists or passengers who negligently throw burning cigarette butts out of their windows. In June, firefighters were called out to a total of 63 fires that burned 1033.4 hectares.

Says Kleyn, "Compared to the 40 fires experienced in June 2018, this calls for landowners and community members to also be on high alert, as we gradually see the influence of climate change."



Nompilo Zondi, KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Communication Officer

our first 25 mm of rain this forthcoming summer season," says Becker.

As Rooiberg Team firefighters continue to help the landowners to prepare themselves for the peak of the fire season, the Waterberg district is among several districts that are experiencing late wildfire breakouts. The WOF firefighters in the district are always on the alert and ready to assist.



Matema Gwangwa, Limpopo Provincial Communication Officer

Community members receive fire safety training



Free State CFAO conducted fire safety training at the Letsatsi Solar Plant

Glodinah Mofokeng, the Free State Community Fire Awareness Officer (CFAO), was extremely busy recently, presenting FireSafe training workshops aimed at equipping communities throughout the Free State with the fire safety knowledge needed to avoid fires causing harm to themselves and others.

She has also been conducting workshops for numerous organisations and government departments such as the Letsatsi Solar Plant, which invited her to facilitate fire safety training with their employees to help mitigate fire risks while they are out in the field.

She recently conducted a workshop in Rouxville with home-based caregiv-

ers who will identify fire-prone areas and relay this information to the Fire Awareness Department that will then speedily organise FireSafe workshops in those areas.

Mofokeng says, "Our aim with our training sessions and workshops is for communities, organisations and various departments to take ownership of their fire risks and come up with short and long-term mitigation plans. The reception we have received is good as a result of our fire awareness campaigns and the exposure it brings. We are receiving more requests to do the workshops than ever before."

 Wayne Mokhethi, Provincial Communication Officer, Free State

Caregivers receive fire safety tips

The women of Faith Home-Based Care in Nkomazi enjoyed a Fire Awareness Workshop at the Komatipoort Police Station boardroom on 4 July.

The workshop was presented by Mpumalanga Community Fire Awareness Officer, Mbuso Siwela, and the women were joined by a social worker from the Department of Social Development, Patrick Mpanza. The women learnt about the different fires, how to prevent them

and ways to mitigate fires from spreading by doing different types of fuel load reduction.

Siwela also taught them the different methods of escaping if a fire were to break out in a house. After the official presentation, the women took part in a risk assessment and fire management plan exercise.

"I encourage all of you to go out and educate the community at large to carry out risk assessments at their homes and even as we leave here, go home and conduct the assessment to mitigate the risk of fires in your homes," Siwela said at the time.

 Amanda Mthembu, Mpumalanga Provincial Communication Officer



Nebo participants educate the communities about the impacts of fires during the door-to-door fire awareness campaign

Workshop warns residents about the risk of negligence



Ndakana Village community members were taught to be fire safe

The Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries' Working on Fire programme in the Eastern Cape, in partnership with the Amathole Forestry Company (AFC) and Amathole Disaster Management, continued to educate communities about the dangers and causes of fires as the fire season continues.

A community fire awareness activity took place in Ndakana Village near Stutterheim this July where community members were taught about the causes of veld fires and structural fires as well as ways of preventing such fires.

According to the Eastern Cape Community Fire Awareness Officer, Thulani Mkhosi, most fires are caused by human negligence.

"People must make sure that they don't throw away burning cigarettes as that can start runaway fires," says Mkhosi.

He advises drivers to always keep a bottle of water in the car so that a smoker in the car can put the cigarette

out in the bottle before throwing it away. Mkhosi also says that burning stoves should not be left unattended and candles should not be placed near curtains.

"People should also make sure that they make fire belts around their land and defensible space around their homes to prevent runaway fires," adds Mkhosi.

Stakeholder Relations Manager for the AFC, Harold Mratshula, advises people to inform the rangers or foresters to be on standby during bee hunting as that was said to be one of the causes of forest fires. Hunters use smoke from smouldering material to calm the bees at the hive before taking the honeycomb.

More than 20 community members attended this awareness event and promised to put these measures into practice.

 Nthabiseng Mokone, Eastern Cape Provincial Communication Officer



CFAO Mbuso Siwela educates the Faith Home-Based Care caregivers on fire safety

Taking fire awareness to the residents

Limpopo's Nebo Team participants embarked on a door-to-door campaign at Maserumule Park village to enlighten the villagers about the impacts of fire.

"Every year in our community, we hear of many houses that are destroyed by fires or cases that are reported of the children being rushed to local hospitals and clinics due to the injuries from fires," says Simon Mahlangu, Crew Leader Type 2 at Nebo Base.

Even though the teams focus on veld and forest firefighting, they also assist

community members to identify possible hazards that might start unwanted fires in their households that might destroy their property or even cost lives.

"The education that we take to the communities is welcomed with warm hearts and that gives us the strength to continue uplifting our society with more knowledge while saving lives and protecting the environment," says Mahlangu.

 Matema Gwangwa, Limpopo Provincial Communication Officer

Participant pursues matric

Working on Fire has embarked on a skills development drive across the country that could prove to be one of the most impactful and life-changing projects to improve the lives of Working on Fire participants.

WOF intends providing free Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) to participants who were not able to complete their schooling for whatever reason. Working on Fire hopes that the ABET programme will open many doors



Free State participants during the recent ABET training

that remain shut to these participants in the job market.

Tsietsi Ntho, a driver from Bloemfontein Base, says, "I was in Grade 11 in 2006 when my father suddenly passed away. As the oldest sibling in the house I had to drop out of school at that time and start working as my mother wasn't employed. I had to take care of my younger brother and sister as well as my mother."

After I complete the ABET programme I plan to study further and reach my dreams so that I can take better care of my mother and make her proud of me."

Adult Basic Education and Training is available to adults who want to finish their basic education. An outcomes-based programme, ABET aims to provide basic learning tools, knowledge and skills and provides participants with nationally recognised qualifications.



Wayne Mokhethi, Provincial Communication Officer, Free State

WOF partners with local disaster centres to educate community



Mool River Disaster officer advises community members on how they can keep safe this fire season

The KwaZulu-Natal uMngeni Team conducted a door-to-door fire awareness campaign with the Impendle and Mool River Disaster Management Centre in July. This was meant to educate residents about the risks around their homes, assist them to identify risks and know how to reduce risks.

KZN Fire Awareness Training Officer, Khulani Zulu, says, "We taught community members the dangers of fires and how they can keep safe in case there is an unwanted fire. It's more effective when interacting with community members face to face so we can go around the houses together identifying dangerous fuel loads surrounding their homes."

Since the beginning of the partnership with Impendle last year, which started after a devastating fire they had

experienced, the disaster centre has organised fire awareness activities in various wards as part of the municipality's initiative to educate community members and reduce the risks of fires.

"We also showed community members that staying safe doesn't need to cost money, which they appreciated. For example, by teaching them recyclable candle safety methods with an empty two-litre bottle and added water," says Zulu.

Besides WOF firefighters assisting in veld and forest fires, WOF also want to empower community members to protect themselves from fire and the loss of property and lives.



Nomphilo Zondi, KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Communication Officer

Leadership training for crew leaders



Type 1 Crew leaders get equipped with skills to improve their work

The Working on Fire Programme in the Eastern Cape conducted a Type 1 Crew Leaders' Workshop in the first week of July aimed at equipping Crew Leaders to be better leaders and better mentors. The workshop was also meant to strengthen the relationship between the employer and employee.

This workshop took place at the Provincial Office in Stutterheim where all departments had sessions with Crew Leaders to educate them in how to improve their day-to-day work.

This is being done to ensure that Crew Leaders improve their performance at the level of base leadership and help take the province to the next level. Prior the session, Crew Leaders underwent a fitness test to check their fitness status.

The GOM of the province, Nkululeko Mlanjeni, says that Crew Leaders play a major role in leading the teams and they really are a highly valued asset of the WOF organisation.



Nthabiseng Mokone, Eastern Cape Provincial Communication Officer

Northam participants are now builders during spare time



Northam participants put their bricklaying skills to good use by building two toilets at their base

In the face of the high rate of unemployment in South Africa, Working on Fire continues to empower its participants with various skills.

Giving them a chance to make a living outside the WOF programme, the training they can access at WOF goes beyond firefighting and includes practical artisanal skills.

Thus, faced with the challenge of having limited ablution facilities, the Northam Team participants took it upon themselves to use the skills that they were taught through WOF at Kishugu Training Academy in Nelspruit to improve the situation.

"When we joined WOF we were given various skills such as bricklaying, carpentry and plumbing. We

approached our base manager to buy us the resources to build the facilities," says firefighter Lehlogonolo Ntshabele.

Having won over their base manager with their proposal to build more facilities for the base, the request was granted, they received the building material and started the project to build extra toilets.

"We are grateful for the support that we received from our partner. Our project is almost complete and soon it will be ready for use. I would like to thank WOF for equipping us with more skills," says Ntshabele.



Matema Gwangwa, Limpopo Provincial Communication Officer



Rope technicians walking up to the campsite with their horses

High Altitude Teams camp out to save water

The KwaZulu-Natal Didima and Monks Cowl High Altitude Teams are camping out for 24 days at Fern Forest in Cathedral Peak Nature Reserve. The two teams are responsible for clearing alien invasive plants in order to save river water.

Thanks to their specialised training, the High Altitude Teams can support landowners by removing alien invasive plants in rough terrain to improve the water supply. The teams are clearing 134 hectares over the 24 days.

KZN Regional Manager Henry Nene says, "The aim is to improve water run-off into community rivers at the Drakensberg's major water source.

The reason we decided to camp was to increase production time as the site is a two-hour hike from the base." Invasive species being targeted are Pinus spp (patula, Elliottii and pinaster) and less dominant species such as Acacia mearnsii (black wattle) and Eucalyptus grandis-saligna (gumtree). "Through killing these plants by cutting the stumps and ring barking we'll be protecting the environment by providing water to animals, community members and indigenous trees," says Nene.



Nompilo Zondi, KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Communication Officer

Warden Team members save lives



Mamoya Tsotetsi and Diekeseng Maduna

Mamoya Tsotetsi, a Type 1 Crew Leader, and firefighter Diekeseng Maduna from the Warden Base in the Free State, are real-life superheroes during and after working hours.

Both women are regular blood donors, donating their precious blood consistently every eight weeks.

Donating a unit of blood can save up to three patients' lives. Beneficiaries are usually victims of accidental trauma. If more people became regular blood donors it would be possible for the South African National Blood Service (SANBS) to collect sufficient safe blood to meet the demand.

"We would like to encourage everyone to go to their nearest SANBS centre and start donating today. Our country has many people

who rely on this essential supply of blood. We can all give the gift of life by just sacrificing a few minutes out of our day," says Tsotetsi.

Blood donation remains a major concern in our country as blood is in scarce supply, because there is a shortage of active blood donors to meet the need, especially during periods of increased demand. This is despite the fact that, other than the prick of a needle, there is no discomfort in the procedure and it is absolutely safe for the donor.

WOF participants like Tsotetsi and Maduna are setting a fine example of service to the community and 'making a difference'.



Wayne Mokhethi, Provincial Communication Officer, Free State

Participants enjoy CV writing and job readiness workshop



Participants from Injaka Base listen attentively as Social Development Practitioner, Selaelo Mathokwane, presents the CV writing tips

The participants at Injaka Base received much-needed job readiness education when they participated in a CV writing workshop on 9 July. The workshop was part of Working on Fire's commitment to restoring dignity by providing skills development programmes.

The workshop was hosted by the new Mpumalanga Social Development Practitioners, Selaelo Mathokwane and Makoloi Tele, who relocated to the Mpumalanga Provincial Office after Condrick Mukhuduwane moved to the Limpopo office.

The firefighters were taught how to compile a curriculum vitae that would impress a prospective employer.

"At the end of the day, you are selling yourself for that potential job, so it is imperative that your CV reflects you as a person, with all the relevant information needed," says Mathokwane.

After the workshop, the participants were asked to compile a CV, which they will send to the SDPs for perusal and corrections.

"This way, we can ensure our participants have acceptable CVs when they go job hunting," Mathokwane says.



Amanda Mthembu, Mpumalanga Provincial Communication Officer



Limpopo rope technicians take part in the search and rescue demonstration

Limpopo HAT participants build cameraderie at two-day team building session

Limpopo's High Altitude Team (HAT) participants attended a two-day team-building session at Lekgalameetse Nature Reserve to bolster team spirit.

The day started well with a motivational talk by their Regional Manager followed by a fun day in which the participants took part in various games such as an egg race, sack race and tug of war.

On Day 2, all participants took part in the fitness activities that they normally do

at their base in a good-natured battle to prove who was the fittest participant at HAT. The day was sealed with the search and rescue challenge, where participants were given a task to conduct a search for an injured person in the bushy forest. Time management was the essential skill for this task.

"I would like to thank our management for initiating an event like this for us. This is helping us to get to know each other better outside our

line of duties and it also assisted us to unwind," says Elleck Mkansi, HAT Base Communications Representative in Limpopo.

"We learned how important it is to work as a team in order to save lives. Any minute lost during the search and rescue could be fatal to the victim," adds Mkansi.



Matema Gwangwa, Limpopo Provincial Communication Officer

Career comes full circle

In 2012, Timothy Nkosi worked as a general worker at the Kishugu Training Academy. The institution saw potential in him and developed his skills by sending him on a 25-day training course in veld and forest firefighting.

He was transferred to WOF and was one of the first people to be based at the Mayflower Base. Nkosi rose through the ranks, going from a Type 2 Crew Leader to a Type 1 Crew Leader relatively quickly.

It was while serving as a Type 1 Crew Leader in Mlambongwane, that Nkosi decided to apply for a vacant instructor's

post at the Academy. The Academy once again saw his potential and appointed him in April 2019.

"I am very grateful to the Kishugu Training Academy and Working on Fire as they have constantly offered me various opportunities which have landed me where I am today," says Nkosi. "I am looking forward to the new journey and hope to study further towards my ultimate dream of completing an Occupational Health and Safety qualification."



Amanda Mthembu, Mpumalanga Provincial Communication Officer



Timothy Nkosi recently began working at Kishugu Training Academy as an instructor

Skills development pays off for Free State firefighter

Julia Semelo is a prime example of how Working on Fire has continually empowered and uplifted participants by providing them with the training and skills to thrive in various sectors and industries.

In 2013, Semelo was without work in the small town of Brandfort in the Free State when she attended and passed the recruitment tests to join Working on Fire. She was selected to receive training in Nelspruit to become a veld and forest firefighter.

After returning to her base, Semelo was trained in Operational Health and Safety and later that year was promoted to be a SHE Rep for the team. In 2014, her aptitude and hard work were recognised with her promotion to the position of Operational Health and Safety Administrator.

In 2017, Semelo was again promoted, to her current position of Operational Health and Safety Assistant in the Free State. She recently completed a NOSA training course in Safety Management.

"I would like to thank WOF for everything this programme has done for



Julia Semelo

me and my family. I have been trained in health and safety which is something I am passionate about and I hope that I can improve the programme with all the skills and knowledge they have provided me," says Semelo.



Wayne Mokhethi, Provincial Communication Officer, Free State

Working on Fire fulfils the promise to change lives

Phumza Dyantyi came from humble beginnings in a small village in Keiskammahoek and rose through the ranks at Working on Fire to where she is today, the newly appointed General Manager of Working on Fire in Eastern Cape.

Like all participants, she knew economic hardship before finding a job and a career at WOF.

"Life was never easy for me as a married woman who never went to university due to financial problems. Prior to joining WOF I worked as a part-time commando at SANDF. I always had dreams that I will be where I want to be one day," says Dyantyi.

Dyantyi was recruited in Stutterheim in 2004, passing the usual physical tests and the interview.

"I worked as a firefighter and within the same year I was taken for the Type 2 Crew Leader course in Chrysalis in the Western Cape and it was not easy. The training at that time was so hard but with passion and hard work I succeeded," she says.

When she came back from training she led a team that worked hard to protect the environment, save lives and educate the communities on how to be fire safe.

"It was hard to leave my kids and go to the fire line. Every day I would start with a prayer to ask God for protection and through team work we always did a wonderful job," Dyantyi says.

After she was selected for the Type 1 Crew Leader Course in 2005, which she passed very well, she



A former firefighter has become the Provincial General Manager

was regularly promoted, from Crew Leader to being the first Regional Manager of the province and later the Assistant General Manager.

"I never climbed the ladder, I worked hard step by step with discipline, respect and dedication to be where I am today," she says with a smile.

"I succeeded to get my diploma using the money from WOF to pay for my fees. Working on Fire has done wonderful work in empowering me and I would like to advise everyone to use the little they get to better their lives," she says.



Nthabiseng Mokone, Eastern Cape Provincial Communication Officer

Mnune is in the process of acquiring his learner's licence and expects to obtain the driver's licence thereafter, as it will assist him to gain entry to his chosen profession.

Mnune says he sees WOF as his only hope of escaping poverty and he is confident that his job strategy will work.

"I am targeting to work in cash-in-transit security companies because the demand is so big. I stand a good chance because part of my training included firearms training," he says.



Parapara Makgahlela, Gauteng Provincial Communication Officer

Firefighter is confident of his career strategy



Bafana Mnune

Bafana Mnune, a new firefighter at the Suikerbosrand Team, joined the programme hoping to raise money to do a course in security training. Becoming a firefighter was his first formal work opportunity.

He had settled on security after discovering that his financial constraints would not allow him to study towards being a paramedic, his first career choice.

Although he has only been in the WOF programme for four months, he has begun to save money in earnest.

"I was so lucky to have found this work opportunity. I need to use it to my best advantage to grow in life. I think skills development in the programme is very exciting and challenging as well," he says.



Refurbishing tools of the trade

One of the inescapable consequences of working outdoors in rugged conditions is the extremely high incidence of damaged equipment. Assistant Regional Manager, Vusi Nkosi, knew that damaged knapsacks were expensive to replace and took the initiative to repair them himself. He has thus far refurbished about 20 knapsacks and saved the programme in Gauteng an estimated R10,000.

Nkosi says the faults he noticed on most knapsacks, chainsaws, beaters,

brush cutters, etc. were minor and he knew they could be put back into use through repair or servicing. He brought his tool box to work to voluntarily repair equipment.

"It saved the programme more money, especially during these difficult economic conditions. But I am glad I could help," says Nkosi. Nkosi has already fixed more of the stock used for fire sup-

pression in the province. General Manager Stephen Boyes says that as a province they were fully behind the project and want to see it succeed.

"With mechanical and technical experience, Vusi can actually even help other provinces in the future. This is the right step. I am grateful he can work on the project," says the GM.



Parapara Makgahlela, Gauteng Provincial Communication Officer

SA youth steps up through Working on Fire

The Working on Fire programme plays a major role in restoring young people's lives by giving them the skills, discipline and confidence to grab better opportunities.

A large number of WOF participants exit the programme every year to take up full-time employment in a variety of industries. Already this year, many firefighters have exited the programme to start new jobs at SAPS, ECPTA, SANParks, MTO and a number of private companies. In July, three firefighters from WOF in the Eastern Cape were recruited into formal employment.

Luthemba Kalani is one of the former participants from Tsitsikamma Base in the Eastern Cape who recently got a better job at SANParks.

Kalani matriculated in 2015 and lacked the funds to further his studies.

"That did not pull me down. I never lost hope in life and I told myself that aiming high will be my motto," he says.

Kalani joined Working on Fire as a firefighter in July 2016. He says that after



Tsitsikamma firefighter joins SANParks

joining the programme he worked hard and was motivated as he knew WOF would help him to be somewhere better.

He says he wants his former colleagues to know that he really appreciates the opportunity given to him by Working on Fire as that assisted him in getting the skills, experience and motivation he needed to progress.



Nthabiseng Mokone, Eastern Cape Provincial Communication Officer

Former firefighter lands her dream job

When Asekwa Madikiza completed her matric in 2016, she knew she wanted a job that would allow her to work outdoors and work with nature. So when she was recruited by Working on Fire in February 2017 as a firefighter at the Newlands Base, she was excited about her first job.

The 21-year-old says she joined WOF because she wanted to experience what it is like to be a firefighter while also caring for nature. "I enjoyed the training, working in communities and protecting the environment. I became more passionate about giving back to the community, animals and the environment."

Continuing, she says, "Because being a firefighter was my first job, I learned more about the environment, the importance of discipline, punctuality and teamwork. I also gained various skills in firefighting, First Aid, Helitac and doing fire awareness presentations."

The training and work experience she acquired at WOF qualified her for



Asekwa Madikiza in her new uniform

a new position at South African National Parks (SANParks) as a Tourism Monitor. She started working in June in what she says is her dream job.

"I will always be grateful for the opportunities WOF provided. I got to travel, meet people who spoke different languages and learned about nature," she says.

Madikiza's advice to her former colleagues is: "You have to keep moving forward in whatever you do. If you can't run, walk; if you can't walk, crawl; but keep moving."

Written by Editorial team

WOF creates more work opportunities for unemployed youth



Unemployed young people came in numbers to try to become firefighters

Young people from various communities came in numbers to participate in the recruitment drive held at the Limietberg Base recently. The recruitment drive was needed to top up the Limietberg Team with new firefighters to ensure that it could perform at its maximum capacity.

During the recruitment drive, young people must pass a stringent fitness test that includes a 2,4 km timed run, sit-ups, push-ups and pull-ups. Those who pass the fitness test are then interviewed and undergo medical examinations before they are sent to the Nelspruit Training Academy, where they will receive 21 days' advanced firefighting training.

After completing the training they will be deployed at the base and assume their duties as veld and forest firefighters.

One of the best-performing women, Zamasa Tukulweni from Mbekweni in Paarl, says she had seen Working on Fire firefighters on social media and when she heard WOF was recruiting she decided to come. "I always admired the fitness training done by WOF firefighters because I love fitness so when I heard they are recruiting, I had to come for this opportunity. I did my best in all the fitness tests and hope that I will be joining WOF as a firefighter soon," says Tukulweni.

Written by Editorial team

Leading the pack in positive exits

The Heidelberg Team has seen a high turnover in positive exits from firefighters transitioning to formal labour or venturing into studies, according to Thabo Kabai, a Crew Leader for the team.

He says most of his crew members apply for external positions often.

"Concerted efforts by crew members are bearing the best fruits. At least on a weekly basis, one or two firefighters will attend job interviews," says Kabai. Recently, a firefighter attended interviews at the Transnet freight rail division.

"We encourage crew members to share information on vacancies. There is a need for intervention," says Kabai, who feels that perhaps the Human Resource unit should share basic tips on interviews.

"The Social Development Practitioner has been helpful in guiding us on how best to put our CVs together. Some of the crew members don't know how they failed the interviews," he says.



Thabo Kabai

The statistics maintained in the alumni database in the province back up Kabai's comments as General Manager Stephen Boyes says there is a high exit rate from this team and he wishes the others can do as well.

"We estimate 20 positive exits of our firefighters. This is encouraging," says Kabai.



Parapara Makgahlela, Gauteng Provincial Communication Officer