



**WORKING
ON FIRE**

The Department of Environmental Affairs, Working on Fire:
Creating career opportunities for our youth



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EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME

Creating career opportunities for our youth

The Working on Fire programme was launched in September 2003 as part of the South African government's initiative to create jobs and 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. Working on Fire is widely regarded as one of the South African government's most successful EPWP (Expanded Public Works) programmes.

And there is no doubt that the biggest success stories of the Working on Fire programme are the many former participants who have found work outside of the programme in the formal employment sectors such as the police, the army and nature conservation agencies across South Africa.

This publication is about the personal testimonies of these former participants who, through Working on Fire, have found gainful employment in the public and private sector. Their testimonies clearly make a mockery of all who decry the government's public employment initiatives as inconsequential and meaningless in the fight against poverty.



Since 2013, 520 firefighters have moved into formal employment in these sectors:

Self-Employed:	2%
Agriculture:	2%
Studying:	4%
Eskom:	4%
SAPS:	5%
Mining:	6%
Municipalities:	13%
Conservation:	23%
Retail:	41%

President amazed by Working on Fire firefighters

President Cyril Ramaphosa has always been passionate about Expanded Public Works Programmes. In May 2016, he paid a surprise visit to the Working on Fire Newlands Base in Cape Town, where he found the base abuzz with activities. The President was amazed as firefighters were busy completing their fitness training, which includes pull-ups, push-ups, sit-ups and the 2,4 km run. "Thank you, Working on Fire, for a sterling job in protecting the country's environment and saving lives. I am very impressed by the high team spirit, discipline and respect and most importantly your excellent fitness level," he said to the firefighters.



President Cyril Ramaphosa engages Working on Fire participants during his visit to the Newlands Base in 2016.

President re-enforces government's commitment to EPWPs

When he made his first speech as the President of the country during the State of the Nation Address (SONA) on Friday, 16 February, President Ramaphosa reaffirmed government's commitment to youth development. He stated that, since the start of the current Parliament, government's public employment programmes have created more than 3.2 million work opportunities. In the midst of widespread unemployment, these programmes continue to provide much-needed income, work experience and training. Working on Fire is part of the government's public employment programme, which resorts under the national Department of Environmental Affairs.

Working on Fire an Environmental Affairs success story

Working on Fire is part of the Department of Environmental Affairs Natural Resource Management programmes. Working on Fire has enhanced participants' insight into their responsibility towards themselves and others. Today they are well known and respected in their own communities. With their bright yellow outfits, which they wear proudly, they are active through their fire awareness and social development drives, such as cleaning an elderly resident's garden or performing a drama on issues like sexual abuse and drug abuse.

Many participants become aware of the positive value of discipline in one's own life. With the stipend earned, some were able to study further. Most participants mentioned that they had been struggling to get food on the table and to furnish their homes. Today they can afford the basic material things in life.

The Working on Fire programme enables them to support their family members and to reach their own personal dreams for the future, like being able to finish their school education to increase their chances of finding permanent employment.



Minister of Environmental Affairs, Dr. Edna, Molewa and her Deputy Minister Barbara Thomson, with firefighters at Parliament after her 2016 Budget Vote.

Former WOF participant Joins SAPS

Hanolizia Geduld completed a basic police training course at the South African Police Service (SAPS) Academy in Bishop Lavis, Cape Town, before relocating to SAPS in Riversdale in December 2017.

Geduld, a single parent to six-year-old daughter, Shamishia Geduld, and one-year-old son, Keithan-Leigh, has worked hard to support her children and family since joining the Working on Fire (WOF) programme in August 2011.

During her time in WOF, Geduld strived to learn as much as she could and with the support of her family and motivation from the Riversdale crew leaders and team, she completed courses in Advanced Structural Firefighting, First Aid, Hazmat and Accident Scene Management.

When asked about her journey within WOF says "I really enjoyed working at WOF as I had a lot of opportunities to learn more. Due to all the training and the stipend I received at WOF it made it easier to apply to SAPS as I had many qualifications, discipline and the knowledge they required. Thank you WOF for moulding me into the person I am today."

Hanolizia says that she is now fulfilling her lifelong dream of being a police officer

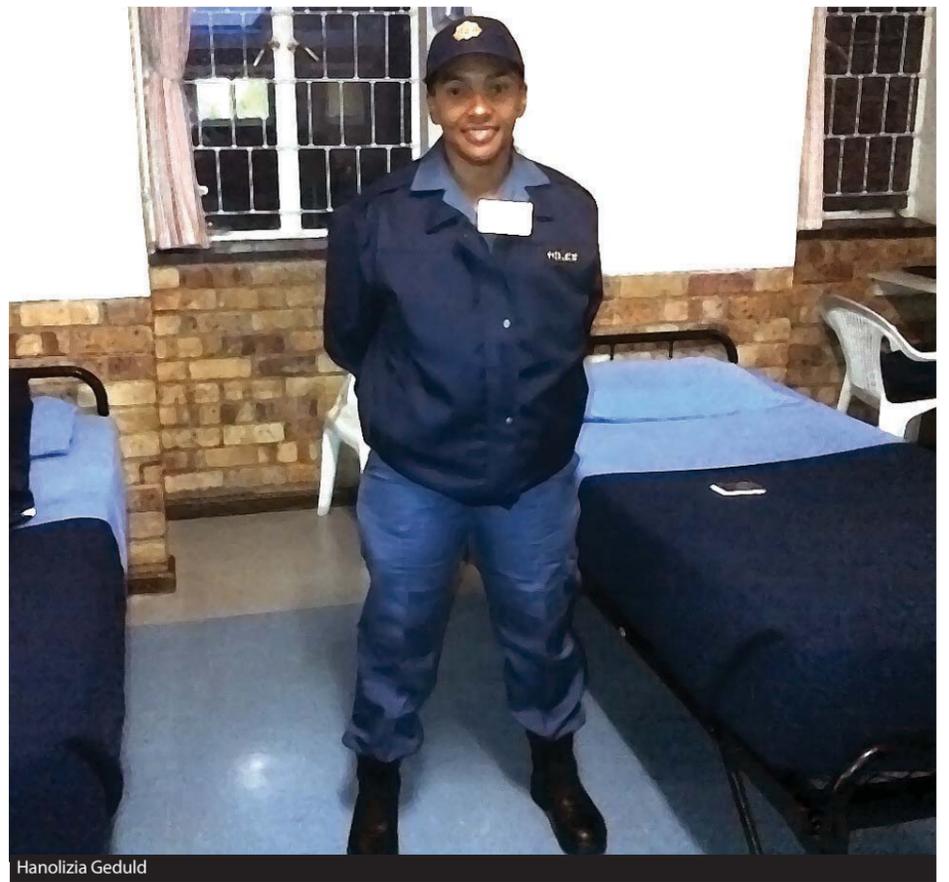
and protecting her community as best she can after completing her basic police training course.

Many people in and around George probably won't know that the national Department of Environmental Affairs' Working on Fire programme is instrumental in fighting veld and forest fires and ultimately their ground teams are active and often unseen in high up the mountains.

Working on Fire draws its firefighters from the poorest of the poor. They go through extensive training, and are known for their fitness, discipline and exceptional work ethic and bravery.

Thanks to their employment in the Working on Fire programme they have been given an opportunity to earn a living and to put food on the table.

Working on Fire is a national veld and forest firefighting resource under the auspices of the Department of Environmental Affairs and it has close to 750 firefighters based at 28 bases throughout the Western Cape. The programme provides veldfire suppression support to the provinces, Disaster Management Centres, Fire Protection Associations and landowners like South African National Parks and CapeNature.



Hanolizia Geduld

Thapelo continues to serve the community

Thapelo Ramashobane started from humble beginnings as a firefighter and is now making his career at Tlokwe Local Municipality, where he is employed as a traffic warden in the Department of Public Safety. His job includes the normal traffic warden duties, as well as compiling reports, issuing traffic fines and managing traffic wardens.

Always passionate about saving lives, Ramashobane joined the Working on Fire programme in 2013 as a firefighter at the Boskop Base. "I joined WOF because of unemployment but ended up in love with the job because of the purpose we serve within the community," he says.

Ramashobane found himself at home without work or income after Matric. He says life was difficult but he never gave up on his dreams and future plans. "I enrolled at

Tshwane University of Technology in a Road Safety Management course as I always wanted to enforce the law and loved saving people's lives.

"I started in January 2016 and my journey as a traffic warden has been rewarding so far as I graduated to being a junior supervisor within two months at the Traffic Department," says Ramashobane.

He hopes to grow within the department and one day be a Superintendent. "I believe in myself and that always motivates me to push harder," says the former firefighter.

When asked to advise his former WOF colleagues and new participants he said, "I would like to encourage former colleagues and everyone to go to school and further their studies and also get a driver's licence."



Thapelo Ramashobane in his traffic officer uniform.

From firefighter to Social Auxiliary Worker

Kayda Jantjies, a former firefighter from the Ladismith Base in the Southern Cape, is optimistic about completing her Social Science studies and getting one step closer to fulfilling her lifelong dream of becoming a social worker.

Jantjies is a single mother, living with her parents and younger sister in Ladismith. She plans to complete a Social Science course through Unisa over the next few years.

Jantjies says, "I am working in Oudtshoorn for an organisation named ACVV (Afrikaanse Christelike Vrouevereniging). I love what I am doing as I meet new people almost every day and can make a difference in their lives. Working on Fire taught me a lot, and Social Development Practitioner Lusheen Britz always told us to stay motivated and complete the goals we set for ourselves."

Before joining the WOF programme in October 2014, Jantjies completed her Social Auxiliary Worker studies at CEFA in 2012 and her practical training at Child Welfare in Ladismith in 2013.

When asked what motivated her to join the WOF programme she says, "I never thought I would be a firefighter but I joined the programme to support my son and family, as well as to save up to complete my studies. I love working with people from diverse walks of life."



Kayda Jantjies

Well done Kayda. We wish her all the best in her future endeavours.

Participant's journey from health & safety to community safety

A former firefighter from the North West Mamusa Team, Makekesemose Mampe, thanks WOF for providing her and many other young women with work experience which has enabled her to find more job opportunities.

Mampe was recruited in 2010 and served as a SHE representative. "My roles were to act as a herbicide applicator, a First Aider and conduct fire awareness activities with my teams in the neighbouring communities," she says.

As WOF prioritises a high level of physical fitness to ensure firefighters' safety on the fire line, Mampe underwent regular fitness training with her team while working as a firefighter.

"Because I am physically fit – I can run 2,4 km in less than 12 minutes and can do more than 60 sit-ups in under a minute – the Metro Police training was easy for me, which gave me an edge over other candidates."

Mampe now works as a Metro police officer in Cape Town. She thanks WOF and encourages the programme to keep decreasing the number of unemployed youth.

"I thank WOF for the work experience and the skills instilled in me. WOF enabled me to provide for my family and motivated me to dream big and always find ways to uplift myself."



Makekesemose Mampe in her Metro Police uniform.

"To all firefighters, if I did it then you can too. Aim for better living and never give up because you all have what it takes. WOF has equipped us with much more than skills," she says.

Former WOF firefighter appointed Fire Chief at local municipality

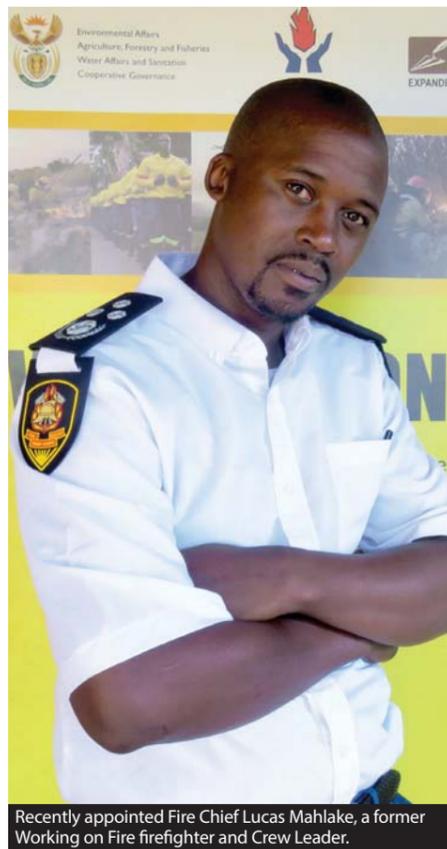
Lucas Mahlke was recently appointed as Fire Chief for the Thaba Chweu Local Municipality in Mpumalanga.

As a young man from a small town in Mpumalanga seeking employment opportunities, Mahlke found a home at Working on Fire in 2004.

"When I joined WOF, I knew nothing about firefighting. One thing I was certain of was that I wanted a career that would enable me to protect people from the devastating effects of fire," says Mahlke.

After working as a firefighter for three years, Mahlke was appointed Crew Leader in 2007. "Through the highly specialised firefighting training and leadership skills provided by WOF, I then worked as a Senior Fire & Rescue Officer before I was appointed as Fire Chief," says Mahlke.

"My life wouldn't be the same were it not for WOF," says Mahlke, who expressed his heartfelt thanks to WOF Mpumalanga's provincial management officials for believing in him and for providing the training and skills that led to his new position.



Recently appointed Fire Chief Lucas Mahlke, a former Working on Fire firefighter and Crew Leader.

WOF opened doors for me

Thabo Lephala joined WOF in September 2012 and was one of the participants to open the Lephala Base that year. Before joining WOF he was unemployed. More than grateful for a job, Lephala believes this was the best move he ever made.

"I saw an opportunity to change my life and create a future for myself. I knew that WOF was a stepping stone for me and it lived up to my expectations as a skills development programme that suited me," says Lephala of his time as a firefighter at the Lephala Base.

In January 2013 Lephala was appointed as the safety, health & environment (SHE) representative for his base and, for the next two years, performed that role with commitment, passion and respect. His personality and hard work saw him rapidly gain knowledge and skills to be acknowledged as the best at his job.

"In WOF I learnt discipline, gained skills and learned how I can contribute in the society. I am now a respectable person and I thank WOF for that," says Lephala.

In June 2015 the SHE representative competence that he acquired at WOF secured him a similar position with the



Thabo Lephala using the skills that he gained at WOF to perform his daily duties as a SHE Representative.

HWA Engineering Company in Lephala, a large company that is responsible for the construction and refurbishment of Lephala Municipality's sewers.

Thanks to WOF and hard work the future looks bright for Thabo and we wish him all the best.

Participant joins the South African Police Service

Twenty-five-year-old former firefighter and driver, Siyabonga Vilakazi, has exited the Working on Fire programme to fulfil his childhood dream of being a policeman.

Growing up, Vilakazi says he had always dreamed of working for the South African Police Service (SAPS), but joined Working on Fire in 2012. He was trained as a firefighter and was appointed a driver for the Nkomazi Team two years later.

The Working on Fire programme is designed to enhance the employability of young people by providing skills training and work experience.

Like Vilakazi, the programme has seen many participants exit the programme and secure formal employment. But, says Vilakazi, "This is not just a job. It is a step upward to serve my country, in the same way as I did within the programme."

Vilakazi is presently undergoing training with SAPS and is expected to complete the training in December.



Siyabonga Vilakazi undergoing training at the SAPS Academy in Hammanskraal, Gauteng.

Participant is now Safety Rep at Anglo American mine

After completing her matric in 2009, Mosima enrolled for Business Management studies at Tshwane North College.

"I dropped out as I realised that business management was not my thing. It was not an easy decision to make as I didn't have the support of my family," says Mosima.

She joined WOF as a firefighter at Sondela Base in 2017. "Joining WOF was worth it. It made me stronger and enhanced my self-esteem and self-discipline," says Mosima.

While at WOF she enrolled for a course in Health and Safety with SAMTRAC at NOSA which she completed successfully thanks to the exposure and experience gained at WOF.

Mosima is currently serving her notice with WOF as she has accepted an offer of an internship at Anglo American as a mine safety representative.

"I would like to thank WOF for the opportunity and for being a stepping stone towards my career goal. I hope it doesn't end here for me. I'm looking forward to pursuing my career path," says Mosima.



Matlhomola Tabea Mosima can't stop thanking WOF for opening doors to a brighter future.

Working on Fire aims to uplifting the youth of South Africa by restoring their dignity through skills development.

Matlhomola Tabea Mosima is one of the young women who now have a bright future ahead thanks to joining the WOF programme.

Discipline unlocks success

Lebogang Mahlaela joined WOF as a firefighter in June 2010 at Lepelle-Nkumpi Base after hearing the base manager's announcement at a Youth Day presentation that WOF would be recruiting youth to be trained as firefighters.

Mahlaela matriculated in 2005 at Makgwading High School. She did a computer literacy course at Avuxeni in Mokopane in 2006 and then started volunteering as a cleaner at Zebediela from 2006 until 2010 when she joined WOF. "I resigned from WOF in 2013 and used the stipend that I had earned while at WOF to enrol for a Fire and Rescue Course at Karnbridge FET College in Pretoria. My father assisted me financially in following my dream of becoming a structural firefighter," says Mahlaela.

After completing her course she returned to WOF in 2014. Due to her experience she sailed through the selection process and was re-recruited as a firefighter. In May 2016 Mahlaela resigned from WOF to join Lepelle-Nkumpi Municipality as a firefighter.

"I can't forget the day I received my appointment letter, I was overwhelmed with mixed emotions. I thank WOF for building me to be the person that I am today. It was tough at WOF but that contributed to me being the strong woman I am," says Mahlaela.

During her time at WOF, Mahlaela demonstrated a high level of discipline and was always ready to assist others,



Lebogang Mahlaela is living her dream as a firefighter with the Lepelle-Nkumpi Municipality.

which helped her to become known to the municipality personnel.

"Lebogang has all the qualities of a firefighter which include discipline, passion, dedication, fitness and a good sense of humour. She is a team player and has a bright future ahead of her," says Koena Moabelo, the Divisional Officer for Emergency Management Services at Capricorn Municipality.

Leadership training lands former female firefighter job with FPA

Former Working on Fire (WOF) firefighter and Type 1 Crew Leader Queen Thabethe, has worked up the ranks and is now employed as assistant base manager at the Lowveld and Escarpment Fire Protection Association (LEFPA) in Nelspruit.

Twenty-six-year-old Thabethe says that the extensive leadership training provided by WOF has prepared her for her new role as assistant manager.

With a beautiful dimple smile on her face, Thabethe says, "I only worked as a firefighter for 10 months, just before I was taken to a leadership training course at the Nelspruit Training Academy. Only at WOF will you find such confidence in women."

Thabethe's new role came in August, when Women's Month was commemorated under the theme "The Year of OR Tambo: Women United in Moving South Africa Forward."



Queen Thabete excels in her new post as assistant base manager at LEFPA.

Former firefighter swaps beater for lens

A former firefighter at Maropeng Base, Cindy Magagula, has joined Maropeng Museum in the West Rand as a photographer. She exited after spending two years in the programme.

Magagula feels it has been a good experience to be part of the Working on Fire programme and commends the programme for being her stepping stone to a greater opportunity. She says that it is a pleasure and honour to be working at the national heritage site.

When asked about her photographic skills, she says her brother used to teach her techniques to use on a variety of cameras. "I am attending courses on Photoshop and graphic design on a part-time basis. I need to learn and gain more skills in photography. This is why I am investing in my skills," she says.

Her job is to promote and market Maropeng Museum through photographs. Magagula says that passion is her main driver to do her work. "The salary is good. I learnt to be financially disciplined and responsible as a firefighter," she says.

Regional Manager Stephens Uwane says Cindy's exit should serve to inspire other firefighters.



Cindy Magagula, a former firefighter at Maropeng Base, is now a photographer for the museum

Former firefighter graduates at SAPS

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

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

Ndlovu recently graduated and is happy and excited after his long and hard journey. "Graduating was a dream come true. I wanted to be a police officer so I can serve my community. I truly believe I passed through the grace of God," says Ndlovu.

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

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



The former firefighter in his South African Police Services uniform.

WOF shaped and sharpened my life

It's official, former firefighter from the Working on Fire programme (WOF), Mmathapelo Tshela, is a crimebuster based at her hometown Carletonville in the Far West Rand.

She recently graduated from the police training academy in Hammanskraal north of the capital city.

"It has been an honour to have been a firefighter in the programme, it prepared me well for the challenges I had encountered during my training in the police academy," she says.

Tshela says WOF offered her renewed hope after being unemployed for a long period.

Tshela says that with the stipend earned while in the programme, she was able to care for her child and family.

"The programme's positive role in my life will remain memorable in years to come. It shaped and sharpened my young life well," says Tshela.



Mmathapelo Tshela is officially a crimebuster in Carletonville.

Former participant lands job at SAPS

Mavis Mabena is now a policewoman in Mpumalanga. She says she has put what she learned in the WOF programme to good use in her employment at the South African Police Services.

"The programme prepared me well for the tough labour market. It helped build my confidence," she says. Mabena also appreciates the skills in financial management and industrial relations she acquired at WOF and the work ethic and importance of team work that were stressed at WOF.

The former SHE representative at Leeuwfontein Base says safety in the work environment is still important. "As a firefighter I sometimes thought safety rules were a futile exercise. They matter most now," she says.

"I put on a bulletproof vest like firefighters dress up in their personal protective clothing for safety reasons. I can't compromise my safety."

Mabena says firefighters in the WOF programme should not underestimate the impact and value of the skills the programme offers them.



Mavis Mabena applauds the programme for having prepared her well for the labour market.

Former firefighter goes for gold

A Thirty-one-year-old Matshediso Sello, a former firefighter who joined the programme in 2013 at Wedela Team has joined Anglo Ashanti's Savuka gold mine in Carletonville as a reef checker.

"I did the course relating to mining at the training centre in Carletonville years back. I always wished to get a better opportunity," says Sello.

When asked what her new job entails, she says she checks the belt that conveys ore out of the mine. She thanked Working on Fire for training her especially in the area of safety in the workplace.

"Safety is very important in mines. I am able to articulate and share occupational health and safety tips with my colleagues. When I was working as a firefighter I thought it was futile to have safety talks meetings but now it matters most," she says.

Sello was scared of going underground on her first day on duty. "But I had to overcome my fears and explore to enjoy my job," she says.

Sello hails from Welkom in the Free State province.



Matshediso Sello at her new employer's Savuka gold mine.

From fighting fires to fighting crime

Poulos Molwantwa is now a police officer. The former firefighter at the Dinokeng Team successfully completed his police training course recently. Molwantwa will be deployed at a police station in Pretoria.

He says that the weekly fitness training he did while working as a firefighter in the programme helped him succeed at the police training academy in Hammanskraal, north of Pretoria.

Molwantwa, who comes from Mamehlakeng in Mpumalanga, joined the Working on Fire programme in 2012 as a firefighter. "I am thankful for having been part of Working on Fire. As a police officer in training, discipline is very important throughout, and that is something WOF instilled in me," he says.

Molwantwa believes that patience and focus helped him reach this stage in his life. He says that he recognises that he will now be saving lives in a different capacity and is ready to tackle violent crimes head on.



Poulos Molwantwa, a former firefighter, is now a policeman

Free State participant exits the programme

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

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

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

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



From protecting the environment to protecting civilians

Nokwanda Milane has exited from the Working on Fire programme to working at the South African Police Service (SAPS) in a space of four years. Twenty-nine-year-old Milane from Makhaza in Khayelitsha started working for WOF on 18 March 2010 as a firefighter at the Fisantekraal Base in Durbanville. She worked there until the team was moved to False Bay Base in Mitchell's Plain in 2013.

During the same year she came across an advertisement for an Administration Assistant and Receptionist at the WOF provincial office in Wynberg. After applying for the post and going through the interview process, she was successfully appointed as an Administrator/

Receptionist in 2013. As the months went by staff would call her "the face of the company" and the nickname has stuck until today.

"Working on Fire really came through for me. I passed my Matric in 2003 and had no funds to finish my studies. For six years I was looking for a job and there was no luck until a friend of mine told me about WOF. I went to WOF and did the physical fitness test and passed.

I actually went there looking for a job to support my family, but instead I found a home. At WOF we were told that it is also a learning curve for us so that you can take the skills that you have learnt and use them to your advantage."

As time progressed at WOF, she searched for more opportunities and applied for a post at SAPS. In September 2014 she was selected to join the SAPS training programme. Milane says, "I am currently at the training academy and will complete the course in September and move on to working at Bellville Police Station as a policewoman."

"I would like to give a word of thanks to the management and the crew of Working on Fire for the opportunity and the skills that they provided me with. If it wasn't for you I wouldn't have been where I am today. The fitness that I gained from WOF really helped me get this job at SAPS."



Nokwanda Milane.

Free State Harrismith participants exit WOF Programme

Two former participants from the Harrismith Team exited the programme to join the full-time staff at Loutrans, a dedicated long-haul road freight operation based in Trompsburg and Harrismith that has built its reputation on the power and reliability of its Freightliner trucks. It has been in operation since 1998 and employs 125 people.

Sebafu Mpoka and Patrick Masoeu, who were both stationed at the Working on Fire Harrismith Base, applied for vacancies that were advertised for drivers and they were both offered jobs after being interviewed.

"I'm currently a bakkie driver and I know I got the job because of the experience I acquired from the WOF programme of driving various types of vehicles. I can't say thank you enough to the Department of Environmental Affairs for the Working on Fire programme. Because of this programme I am doing a job that I enjoy and with my earnings I can take better care of my family," says Mpoka.



Dewetsdorp participant secures new employment

Lerato Zumani, who was previously a firefighter at the Dewetsdorp Base, recently secured employment with the JR Security company as a security officer. The private security company provides services to the Jimmy Roos School, a special needs school situated 10 km from Dewetsdorp in the Free State.

Zumani credits getting his new job to the continual effort he put into fostering a good working relationship with his base manager who, because he saw how well he worked and how physically fit he was, recommended Zumani to the company. Robert Mehlwana, Zumani's current supervisor, says that he is very happy with Zumani's quality of work and that he has been very disciplined and always punctual since he started working there.

"I am very thankful to the Working on Fire team for providing me with someone who is very experienced. It shows that they are instilling valuable principles in the participants at the base," says Mehlwana.



Hard work pays off

"I've learnt that there is no easy way in life, you must learn to work well with your team and as an individual," says Nqobile Mangwanyana, a former Working on Fire firefighter with the Albert Falls Team. Mangwanyana was recruited in April 2014.

"Before joining WOF I was doing my in-service training for a diploma in Public Management," says Mangwanyana, adding that she learnt a lot from WOF, including the importance of being mentally and physically fit.

"I am now a firefighter at the Msinga

Local Municipality. I'm grateful for the experience gained at WOF. It really assists me in my current position, having experienced being a first-aider and doing fire awareness and outreach programmes," she says. This has given her an advantage at work as she knows how to address different target audiences.

Mangwanyana wants to pursue her dream of starting her own business one day.

"To my former colleagues I say, use every lesson you get wisely. Don't take the skills you have for granted. They can take you somewhere in life if you work hard at it."



Spreading their wings at East London Airport



Former Working on Fire firefighter, Ayanda Seyibokwe, in his new uniform. Seithati Elephant RIGHT: the former firefighter recently employed at East London Airport.

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

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

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

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

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

Seyibokwe says, "In 2016 I was taken back to be a structural firefighter in Cape Town and this brought me hope again. Last

year I applied for a firefighter's post at East London Airport, and because of the experience I got at Working on Fire, I got the job and started working in December 2017."

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

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

Former firefighter now field ranger



Working on Fire prides itself in providing unemployed youth from disadvantaged communities with skills that improve their employability. The success of the programme is proven by the regular numbers of former WOF participants who land jobs either in government service or the private sector annually.

Miranda Langaklaas joined the programme in July 2016 after struggling to get a proper job due to lack of skills. "Prior to joining WOF I got piece jobs that didn't pay much but helped me to survive," she says.

When she heard that WOF was recruiting in Baviaanskloof, she knew she had to grab the opportunity in order to better her life. "I passed all the fitness tests and was selected to the team. This was my first good job," she says with a smile.

She was sent with other recruits for firefighting training in Nelspruit. "On my return I worked hard, doing fire suppression and fire prevention which included conducting school and community fire awareness," says Langaklaas.

Almost exactly a year later, her hard work led to a better opportunity. "Early this year I applied to be a field ranger at the Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency. My application was successful due to the work experience I gained at WOF. I got the job in July," she says.

Langaklaas appreciates what the WOF programme did for her. "I would like to advise firefighters to work hard and dream big. The sky is the limit," she says.

Eastern Cape firefighter joins nature conservation agency

After dropping out of high school, Disema Leanya found it difficult to get a decent job as most jobs required a matric certificate. Leanya's life changed for the better when he was recruited by Working on Fire to be a firefighter at Ongeluksnek Base in 2010.

"I was excited as this meant I could help put food on the table for my family," he says.

He says that he performed his duties with passion knowing that his hard work would pay off.

"I always made sure that I went the extra mile in every task I was given," says Leanya. While working at WOF, he gained the skills and experience that led to him getting a new job.

"After working for six years in the programme, I was then blessed with a new job as a field ranger at the Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency (ECPTA) at Ongeluksnek Nature reserve, starting on 1 November," he says with a smile.

He thanks WOF for the work experience. "Above all I would like to thank my team mates, my Regional Manager and all the managers for their support and motivation."

Former firefighter gets a better job



Oyisi thanks the programme for paving her way to greener pastures.

After passing her matric in 2012 Namhla Oyisi could not further her studies due to financial problems that her family encountered.

Oyisi's life changed for the better when she was recruited by Working on Fire as a firefighter at Katberg Base in the Eastern Cape in 2013.

"I was so excited as I knew that I would have something that will help me put food on the table for my family and my son," she explained.

She says that she did her job with passion knowing that hard work pays.

"I always made sure that I went an extra mile in every task that I was given," Oyisi says.

She says that working for WOF gave her many skills as well as experience that led her to many opportunities.

"In 2015 I was recruited to one of the Katberg High Altitude Teams and that gave me hope that I am still going far," she says.

Oyisi says that her family always supports her and motivates her which helps maintain her positive attitude toward life.

"After working for three years for both WOF and HAT I was then blessed with a new job of being a field ranger at the Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency at Mpofu Nature Reserve starting on 1 April 2016, she says with a smile.

She says that she would like to thank WOF for making her a better person by developing her skills which have helped her get her new job.



Former firefighter Disema Leanya in his field ranger uniform.

Participants now ready to protect wildlife



From firefighters to field rangers

In 2013 Minister of Environmental Affairs, Edna Molewa, expressed her joy at knowing young people have joined the environmental sector programmes like Working on Fire and Working for Water and she encouraged them to remain within the sector and make a contribution to protecting our environment.

Indeed these words resonated again

recently when firefighters from the Thurlow Base in KwaZulu-Natal successfully completed their twelve-month-long training at Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife after which they were employed as field rangers, responsible for managing and protecting the wildlife, and rhinos in particular.

During the past 12 months Ezemvelo had

75 candidates who attended their tough year-long field ranger course and only 25 of them managed to successfully complete it.

Eleven of these 25 successful candidates are former firefighters who were recruited from Working on Fire. The former WOF firefighters learned their discipline and physical fitness as part of their life in the WOF

programme. These 11 former firefighters are now starting on a new journey employed as full-time field rangers, armed with the training they received and the experience gained in WOF. "These young men and women play an important role in ensuring that our environment is protected for future generations," Minister Molewa said in June 2013.

WOF prepared me for my new job

Twenty-three-year-old Thobile Precious Sithole, a former firefighter from the Melmoth Team, is currently employed at the South African Police Service (SAPS). Thobile was recruited to Working on Fire in 2012. "After matriculating in 2011, I wasn't working and couldn't afford to study. Fortunately I heard that WOF was hiring and I got recruited," says Sithole.

Sithole says she gained a lot from WOF, from being disciplined to being able to endure tough situations. "With all the circumstances I've faced, from route marches, being on fire lines and other tough fitness exercises, I am able to work with other people and to respect them too," she says.

She says the WOF fitness training helped her a lot with getting her new job, as did learning how she should present herself during an interview.

"With WOF being my first job, I didn't have any experience when it came to job interviews. Thanks to the communication workshop, I went to my interview with confidence and knew how to answer the questions asked," says Sithole.

Sithole is currently attending an eight-month training course at the SAPS Academy in Paarl, Western Cape, and will return home in December. "Things are going well. I'm adapting well since I have experience of camping. This sets me apart from the rest of my colleagues who sometimes complain about the fitness requirements.

"I'd like to thank Working on Fire for giving me the opportunity to be part of their family and for equipping me with the skills to be the person I am today. I am truly grateful," says Sithole.



Thobile Sithole in her SAPS uniform.

From fighting fires to fighting crime

Nolukhoyo Manyisani is no stranger to being in the line of fire. This former participant was employed as a driver at Working on Fire in Stutterheim and has since moved on to become a policewoman stationed in Peddie in the Eastern Cape.

"Swapping my yellow uniform with a blue one was all made possible through the training and discipline I received in WOF. This programme is one of the best places to improve and uplift the lives of young people," says Manyisani.

"After I passed my matric in 2005 I could not find decent work opportunities and when I joined WOF in 2011 as a driver my life changed completely. The driving courses I have done in the programme are really assisting me today in the South African Police Service and in my personal life."



Nolukhoyo Manyisa swapped her yellow uniform for blue.