

Working on Fire

FORMER FIREFIGHTERS RISE TO MANAGEMENT POSITIONS WITHIN WORKING ON FIRE

Celebrating 17 years
of partnership for
success in empowering
young South Africans

SPECIAL EDITION 2020

A JOURNAL OF FORMER FIREFIGHTERS - DEVELOPING OUR YOUTH



environmental affairs

Department:
Environmental Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME



WOF facilitated the graduation of 51 Working on Fire employees mostly former firefighters who graduated from the University of Cape Town after completing online management courses

WOF ALUMNI JOURNEY FROM FIREFIGHTING TO MANAGEMENT

Since its establishment in September 2003, the Working on Fire programme has made great strides in creating jobs and alleviating poverty in impoverished communities in fire-prone areas. The programme funded by the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries and run by Working on Fire (Pty) Ltd and the Kishugu Group is celebrating 17 years of partnership for success by showcasing the incredible work it has done and continues to do.

In this Special Alumni Edition, WOF profiles the participants who have swelled the ranks of management throughout the country.

WOF recruits, trains and deploys 5 000 firefighters to various communities. Armed with their highly valued skills training and work experience, participants regularly exit the programme and find permanent employment in the police, military, airports, nature conservation agencies, private companies, municipalities and government departments. Others leave to run their own businesses, thus creating much-needed jobs.

However, some participants have grown in the programme to become managers holding different positions throughout the organisation, including Ground Operations Managers and General Managers.

Over the years WOF has initiated various projects aimed at empowering employees with skills, orientation and aptitude required to manage more responsible positions. One of these projects includes the Management Development Programme

which focuses on empowering employees with both practical and theoretical knowledge. This project saw 51 WOF employees who are former firefighters graduated from the University of Cape Town after completing various online courses in line with their field of work.

Their stories emphasise the success WOF has achieved as an Expanded Public Works Programme that is committed to changing the lives of the vulnerable and restoring

their dignity by creating opportunities for employment and reducing the high levels of poverty.

Please enjoy the journey of the firefighters now in management positions as part of our celebration of 17 years of partnership for success.

Thank you to the WOF Communications teams for this inspiring read.

Happy reading.



185 former firefighters have climbed the corporate ladder to join the management staff of the Working on Fire programme

A steep climb from humble beginnings



Former firefighter, General Manager
Phumza Dyantyi

Phumza Dyantyi's journey from a small village in Keiskammahoek to General Manager of Working on Fire in the Eastern Cape is a testimony to the value of hard work and education.

"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 the SANDF. I always had dreams that I will be where I want to be one day," says Dyantyi.

In 2004, when WOF was recruiting in Stutterheim, she joined the recruitment and passed all the physical tests and the interview.

"I then got the job as a firefighter and, within the same year, I was taken

to the Crew Leader Type 2 course at 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.

Dyantyi says that when she came back from training she led a team that worked very 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 teamwork, we always did a wonderful job," says Dyantyi.

Phumza says she attended the Crew Leader Type 1 Course in 2005 and she passed very well. Her career progressed steadily from Crew

Leader to becoming 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 a wonderful job in empowering me and I would like to advise everyone to use the little they get to better their lives," says Dyantyi, who says her promotion to General Manager of WOF Eastern Cape in 2019 made her "the happiest person".



Nthabiseng Mokone, Eastern Cape
Provincial Communication Officer

A veteran founding firefighter

Khomotso Moagi, who has served as Ground Operations Manager in Gauteng since 2012, is a Working on Fire programme veteran happy to share notable memories from the early days of the programme.

On 6 October 2003, Moagi, who hails from Bushbuckridge, was recruited into the second established Graskop Base. They attended firefighting training at the base which lasted for two days. "We used to be trained by ex-troops to do drilling and basic fitness exercises."

The GOM recalls how her team used taxis to attend fire calls in the beginning. "I can assure you that there were no fatalities though," she notes.

There were no crew leaders at first. She attended a Type 2 Crew Leader course in February 2004 and a three-week-long Type 1 Crew Leader course in 2005. "I remember we were four ladies and 11 males at that course," says Moagi.

Initially, the only teams were in Mpumalanga and Limpopo. She never thought that it was going to be a national programme one day.

Rising through the ranks, she was promoted to become a training manager at the academy, training new recruits to become firefighters and crew leaders.

"I have seen this programme touching and changing the lives of young people positively, including myself," says Moagi, explaining that firefighting was her first formal job.

An initiative that is quite close to her heart is the recruitment of female parolees into the programme. Moagi says working with ex-offenders helps to fulfil the mandate of the programme of poverty alleviation.

"I have been overseas through this flagship government programme



Khomotso Moagi GOM in Gauteng
Province

and I am privileged to have been part of it," she says.



Parapara Makgahlela, Gauteng
Provincial Communication Officer



Financial controller Nolutshanyo
Babalaza has been with WOF for
16 years

WOF developed matriculant's potential

A 16-year veteran of Working on Fire, provincial financial controller Nolutshanyo Babalaza started as a firefighter at the Newlands Base straight from high school in 2003.

After two years, she attended a Type 2 Crew Leader course and in 2008, passed the Type 1 Crew Leader course. "While I was a crew leader, I pushed myself hard and studied computers. I also got a driver's licence. I was later promoted

to do administration for the advocacy department," she says.

Since her matric subjects were more inclined to the finance side, she was encouraged to pursue a career in finance and the company sent her to study bookkeeping through Damelin. Nine years after joining the programme, she was appointed as the first provincial finance controller in the Western Cape in 2012. "I am grateful to Working on Fire because

they gave me my first working experience, they saw the potential in me and groomed me to be where I am today," she says.

"I always wanted to be a teacher but could not study further due to financial constraints. Given a chance to re-do how my life turned out, I wouldn't change a thing," says Babalaza.



Limakatso Khalianyane, WC
Provincial Communication Officer

Former firefighter now Ground Operation Manager

Working on Fire continues to grow its own talent by developing the skills of its personnel, with 40 percent of the management staff being former firefighters.

A typical example is Walter Khoza, a former firefighter and regional manager who is now Ground Operations Manager (GOM) in Mpumalanga. Khoza was recruited as a participant in Graskop in 2003. He worked his way through the ranks to Type 2 Crew Leader and Type 1 Crew Leader positions at the Graskop Base. He then worked as a driver at Lydenburg before being seconded to the LEFPA base in Nelspruit as a shadow

base manager and Fire Awareness Coordinator. He became an assistant regional manager in 2010 and did a stint at Kishugu Academy in that year as a project coordinator in the Structural Division. In 2011, he was appointed as a regional manager in Mpumalanga.

Originally from Bushbuckridge, Khoza is a married father of two daughters who enjoys fishing, spending time with his family and watching soccer.



Amanda Mthembu, Mpumalanga
Provincial Communication Officer



Walter Khoza is the new Ground Operations
Manager in Mpumalanga

Gender was not an obstacle for this manager

“Unemployment and poverty are the biggest stumbling blocks to success for many young people in the rural areas of the Eastern Cape,” says Ongezwa Nonjiji, the regional manager of the Rolihlahla region in the Eastern Cape.

Nonjiji grew up in Mpasane Location near Mthatha. “I passed my matric in 2000 and I did two years of Electrical Engineering at King Sabatha Dalindyebo FET but could not find any job after that,” says Nonjiji. “In 2006, I got an opportunity to join the Working on Fire programme as a firefighter at Langeni Base.”

She says that people believed then that women could not survive

being firefighters but she proved them wrong by working very hard on the fire line.

“The following year I was sent on the type 2 Crew Leader course where I passed very well and I became the crew leader.”

Nonjiji’s passion and commitment to her work were rewarded when the province sent her on the Type 1 Crew Leader course in 2008. “Tears of happiness could not stop rolling on the face of my mother when I told her that I got another chance to become better within the programme,” she says, noting that she was then able to support her mother and her children could attend better schools.

The mother of three was promoted to Regional Manager in 2012. “It’s been years since I joined this programme but my life has changed from nothing to something as now I’m a manager and I have got so many skills acquired from the programme,” she says.

Nonjiji, who is currently assisting in the Western Cape where the Hotshot team from the Eastern Cape has been deployed, says that WOF has played a major role in employing females in what was said to be a male-dominant environment.



Regional Manager Ongezwa Nonjiji praises WOF for employing and developing women in the programme



Nthabiseng Mokone, Eastern Cape Provincial Communication Officer

The future looks bright for Nelly

After completing matric in 2010 at Nkoshilo Secondary School in Mankweng, Nelly Diale enrolled at Tshwane University of Technology but was forced to drop out due to financial problems. She was unemployed until she joined WOF in 2012 as a firefighter at Mamabolo Base in Limpopo.

“When WOF recruited me as a firefighter, I knew that I had to work hard to reach my career goal of becoming a Supply Chain Manager,” says Diale.

In 2014, she was promoted to Type 3 Dispatcher at the Limpopo provincial office and in 2016, she was appointed as the Assistant Store Controller.

“I would like to thank WOF for giving me opportunities for career growth. The journey will never be easy, but with the support that I get from my management, I know that I will conquer and achieve my goal,” says Diale, who currently holds the position of



Nelly Diale can't stop praising WOF for giving her the opportunity to develop

Provincial Store Controller for WOF Limpopo.

She was one of the participants who were enrolled at the University of Cape Town and recently graduated with a certificate in supply chain management. She was the top achiever in her group.



Matema Gwangwa, Limpopo Provincial Communication Officer

From firefighter to Project Manager

Recruited in May 2007 at the Nelspruit Base, Height Mokoena has gone through the ranks from a firefighter to a management position as a project manager in the WOF Services department.

“I began as a firefighter at WOF, then became a personal assistant to Timothy Khoza, who was a project manager at the time.”



Height Mokoena, a former firefighter at the Nelspruit Base, is now a project manager for Working on Fire Services

Taking every opportunity that came his way, Mokoena served as a project manager intern, an assistant project manager and finally as a project manager.

His current duties entail extensive travel to identify potential clients for WOF services such as prescribed burns.

Mokoena says, “My work entails long hours on the road travelling and making sure we complete projects up to WOF standards. I am also tasked with the administrative side of any project and I stand in as Regional Manager of the Nelspruit Base, when needed.”

Mokoena hopes to further his studies in Supply Chain and Project Management and thanks Working on Fire for developing his skills.



Amanda Mthembu, Mpumalanga Provincial Communication Officer



Regional Manager Thubelihle Nkwanyana

KZN WOF empowered woman manager

One of two female Regional Managers in KwaZulu-Natal, Thubelihle Nkwanyana was recruited in 2006. The mother of two, who manages the Zululand Coastal region, talks about her journey in the programme and how much she has achieved over the years.

“To be in a male-dominated industry was a challenge in the beginning, but on the flip side, working with them motivated me to work harder and grow in my role,” says Nkwanyana.

Soon after joining the programme in 2006 she attended the Type Two Crew Leader course and later completed her Type One Crew Leader training. She was later promoted to Assistant Regional Manager and managed her own region. In 2013, she was promoted to Regional Manager and moved around the province.

“Being a woman and a parent, it was a challenge to live away from my kids. At times as a woman, people underestimate you in your position. Some even believe women

are unable to lead,” says Nkwanyana. Nkwanyana feels that since women are challenged every day, a woman must put her strength and trust in the decisions she takes at work.

Nkwanyana enjoys holding two other portfolios, as a KZN BEE representative and the province’s sports administrator. “I enjoy staying healthy and fit and I believe that is why I was entrusted with these role in my province,” she says.

“There is no such thing as ‘I can’t’ if a man can do it. As women, we must believe in ourselves. We have capabilities of doing anything we put our minds to,” says Nkwanyana.



Nompilo Zondi, KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Communication Officer



North West Ground Operations Manager, Manase Mpholoane, is one of the longest-serving employees

WOF veteran was rescued from chronic youth unemployment

Former Working on Fire firefighter, Manase Mpholoane, was unable to further his studies due to financial constraints. After journeying to Gauteng in hope of finding a job, he endured five years of unemployment before he heard Working on Fire was recruiting unemployed youth to be trained as veld and forest firefighters.

He attended the recruitment process at the Krugersdorp Base and was recruited to the Krugersdorp Team as a firefighter after completing

"I worked my way through the ranks and today I'm serving the programme as the North West Ground Operations Manager. I would like to thank WOF for making a difference in my life. If it wasn't for the programme I don't know where I would be today. The

programme is making a difference in young people's lives. I am living testimony of that. To WOF, may you continue to make a difference to the youth of South Africa," says Mpholoane.

Written by Editorial team

WOF training empowered hardworking youth



Provincial Stock Controller Pulane Kompi

Former firefighter Pulane Kompi originates from Winburg in the Free State and currently resides in Bloemfontein where she serves the Working on Fire Free State provincial office as a Provincial Stock Controller.

In 2011, she attended the recruitment of firefighters for the Winburg Base and was among the few who passed all their assessments well and were recruited.

Because Kompi had prior computer training she was deployed to the provincial office to assist with administration tasks. Her good work there was

recognised and she went on to be promoted to the Provincial Stock Controller position.

WOF has sent Kompi on many training courses and she most recently graduated from the University of the Western Cape with a qualification in supply chain management.

"I'm very thankful to the programme for developing me into the individual I am today. My life would've been very different had I not attended the recruitment drive back in 2011," says Kompi.



Wayne Mokhethi, Free State Provincial Communication Officer

Forging a career through education

KwaZulu-Natal-born Sibongiseni Zondi was recruited on 5 July 2011 as a firefighter at the Shafton Base. He underwent the advanced veld and forest firefighting induction training and also specialised training in chainsaw operation.

"In 2013, I got a promotion from firefighter to Provincial Assistant Stock Controller. This is where the new beginning, hopes and dreams started," says Zondi, who is passionate about self-improvement through education.

He successfully completed storekeeping and base manage-

ment training and an intermediate computer course, which he completed in October 2017.

In August 2018, Zondi seized an opportunity to study online at the University of Cape Town and completed a certificate course in supply chain management.

Zondi says he has learnt so much about distance learning, like being self-disciplined and able to manage your time. He learned to be strict about using his free time to read his books and to leave reminders about assignments.

"Successfully completing this course and graduating was a huge accomplishment and I'm very proud of myself. To be honest, it wasn't easy. Some of us don't have anything besides WOF, so when opportunities like these come, grab something for yourself and keep it for future benefits.

"My journey in the programme has been educative, motivating and fruitful. I am very grateful to the WOF team leaders, WOF Management and the founders for giving people like me the opportunity, the power, to open closed doors for the future, allowing us to learn to fly while we are under their wings, and for being part of their strategic plan, values and vision," says Zondi.



Provincial Assistant Stock Controller Sibongiseni Zondi



Nompilo Zondi, KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Communication Officer

Opportunities are nothing if you don't take them

Emile Mathysen is a Working on Fire employee who has worked his way to a top position from the humble beginning of being a firefighter.

He was recruited as a firefighter in 2004 in Swellendam, served as a Type 2 Crew Leader a year later and was a Type 1 Crew Leader by 2006 when he left the company.

Two years later he returned and continued to grow due to his dedication and enthusiasm. "Shortly after my return I was promoted to

base manager for the Bredasdorp Base in 2010," he says.

Continuing his rapid rise, Mathysen was promoted again that year to assistant regional manager for the Cape Winelands, where he served for a year. He was later appointed as a regional manager, a position he held until late 2018.

"I was promoted to my current position of being a provincial coordinator for the southern parts of the Western Cape in 2018," he says.

He says because he had been unemployed before joining WOF, he saw the programme as a chance to open doors to a better future.

"I grabbed all the opportunities that the programme presented to me to make a success of myself. I am happy that WOF saw the potential in me," says Mathysen.



Limakatso Khalianyane, WC Provincial Communication Officer



Former firefighter Emile Mathysen says WOF open doors of opportunities for him

WOF gave former participant wings to fly

Leoni Rooy joined the Working on Fire programme in April 2004 in Clanwilliam, a small town about 200km north of Cape Town. After a few months as a firefighter at the Clanwilliam Base, her base manager nominated her to attend the Type 2 Crew Leader course in Tokai, Cape Town, and the Type 1 Crew Leader course in Nelspruit a few months later, both of which she passed well.

Soon thereafter she was recruited by Fred Favard, the Training Manager, to become the first female instructor in the WOF programme. During this time she attended a three-week course in Montana, USA, with three other candidates.

"After coming back from America, I worked until November 2007 as an



Former firefighter Leoni Rooy

instructor before I was promoted to a regional manager position in the Western Cape, managing the Limietberg, Jonkershoek, Porterville, Piketberg, Kluitjieskraal and Tulbagh

A and Tulbagh B teams. From these seven bases, I opened four more Western Cape bases which are still going strong," says Rooy.

Rooy served as a regional manager until December 2012, and then became a Senior Instructor with the role of training crew leaders, conducting induction and advanced classes for teams and also Yellow Card and driver training. In January 2016, Rooy moved to Bloemfontein to start her current job as a Training Officer in the Free State.

"Through the WOF programme, I was able to help my mother extend our home and to provide for my children as a single mother. My eldest daughter completed matric last year and this year she is furthering her studies. I was able to buy myself a car and my goal is to further my studies next year," says Rooy. Rooy says she

had been able to increase her value as an employee by completing training courses in First Aid, health and safety, human resources, ICS logistics, advanced computer skills, firefighting, and facilitator and assessor training, among others.

"If it was not for this programme, I don't think I would have been able to do all of these things because where I come from the unemployment rate is very high and the abuse of drugs is destroying the youth. I will forever be thankful and grateful to WOF for entering my life at a time I needed it the most. This programme picked me up when I was down and out and nobody wanted to give me a chance. It gave me wings to fly and made me believe in myself," says Rooy.



Wayne Mokhehi, Free State Provincial Communication Officer

Recruitment process lauded



Stephens Bokaba is now a Regional Manager

Stephen Bokaba, who hails from Mmakau north of Pretoria, started as a firefighter at the De Wildt Base in 2010 after quitting his job as a general worker at a telecommunications company in Rosslyn.

He became a Type 2 Crew Leader in 2011, Type 1 Crew Leader in 2012 and Assistant Regional Manager in 2013.

Bokaba, who is now a regional manager in Gauteng, believes WOF's physical fitness recruitment

process allows candidates an equal opportunity to fairly compete for vacant positions, irrespective of socio-economic backgrounds or education levels attained.

"I can affirm and attest that the process accommodates every person who is able-bodied. I was also subjected to this process of physical fitness when I got recruited. The process is transparent during recruitment drives," Bokaba says.

Bokaba says whenever he tops up teams people turn up in high numbers because they trust our processes of recruitment.

He says that the physical fitness tests have the added benefit of ensuring our young men and women have healthy bodies.

"My fitness plus firefighting skills are enabling me to earn a living," says Bokaba.



Parapara Makgahlela, Gauteng Provincial Communication Officer

From fighting fires to managing fire safety

Born and bred in the dusty village of Cofimvaba in the Eastern Cape, Abelo Duna completed matric in 2010 but financial challenges disrupted his plan to pursue a media, communications and culture course.

"I heard about the recruitment of WOF from my uncle who I was visiting in Limpopo. I then decided to go and try my luck," he says.

Duna joined WOF on 7 July 2011 as a firefighter at Mogalakwena located at Entabeni. He was promoted to SHE Rep in November 2011. Due to his hard work and disciplined personality, he was appointed as a Type 2 Crew Leader in June 2013 and Type 1 Crew Leader in May 2014.

Working as a SHE Rep and Crew Leader fuelled his interest in occupational safety. In 2015, he used his stipend to further his education by enrolling to study OHS management online at Oxbridge Academy. He passed with flying colours and enrolled for SAMTRAC with NOSA, completing it in the same year in record time.

"It was very challenging juggling work and studies at the same time, especially during the fire season. I had to study at every chance that I got," says Duna.

In 2018, Duna enrolled with UNISA for his National Diploma in Safety Management. He hopes to complete the diploma in 2020 and to enrol for a BTech degree.



Regional Manager Abelo Duna can't wait to lead his team to a brighter future

Duna was appointed as the OHS Administrator for Limpopo on 6 January 2019 and on 1 June 2019 was appointed as the Regional Manager for Limpopo.

"My journey was not easy. I had to work hard and prove that I deserve to be in the leadership position. My dedication, hard work, passion, discipline, dedication and determination helped me excel in every task that was assigned to me," says Duna.



Matema Gwangwa, Limpopo Provincial Communication Officer

This FATO has clear priorities

Martha Tepo is one of many women who are climbing the Working on Fire corporate ladder. She



Fire Awareness Training Officer Martha Tepo enjoys facilitating workshops where she teaches firefighters how to conduct fire awareness at schools and in communities

joined the programme in 2011 as a firefighter.

Within seven years, she advanced from being a firefighter and Crew Leader to becoming a Type 3 Dispatcher before holding her current position as a Fire Awareness Training Officer. She is responsible for conducting workshops to equip firefighters with communication and presentation skills and the knowledge to deliver fire awareness activities.

"What I love about my job is the growth and development I gain everyday. Through my job I also get to educate communities through fire awareness that the teams conduct to mitigate the causes of unwanted

fires. My life has changed a lot since I joined WOF seven years ago," says Tepo.

What keeps Tepo going is her love for her daughter and her strong need to provide only the best for

her daughter and her mother. Her advice to other WOF single mothers is, "Make sure you take good care of your children and ensure they get everything you ever wanted."

Written by Editorial team

Former firefighter breaks new ground in fire awareness

Mbuso Siwela keeps breaking new ground in his position as the Community Awareness Officer (CFAO) in Mpumalanga.

The former firefighter has managed to conduct FireSafe workshops in many fire-prone communities. However, his biggest achievement has been his long-standing relationships with the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) and the Department of Correctional Services in the province.

Recruited in 2008 at the Ithala Base in KwaZulu-Natal, Siwela spent two years in that province before transferring to his hometown of Nelspruit and working at the Barberton Base.

In 2012, he successfully applied for the driver position at the Barberton Base, tasked with driving the team to the fire line and various projects.

His trajectory up the WOF ladder did not end there, as he applied for

and was appointed CFAO in 2013. It is here that Siwela has excelled, making strong connections with government organisations, communities, farmers and other stakeholders.

Siwela says, "Working on Fire has helped me in my career development and I will be forever grateful for what they have done for me."



Amanda Mthembu, Mpumalanga Provincial Communication Officer



Mbuso Siwela, the Community Fire Awareness Officer in Mpumalanga, doing a presentation at one of the FireSafe workshops

WOF helped participant's personal and professional growth



Working on Fire continues to open up opportunities for young people

Nkululeko Mlanjeni, a former firefighter from the Stutterheim Team, credits the Working on Fire programme with making him a better man. Mlanjeni was promoted to WOF Eastern Cape Ground Operations Manager early last year.

"I joined the WOF family in 2007 at Stutterheim Base in the Eastern Cape. The journey has not been easy but with hard work and dedication, I am where I am today," he says.

Like most participants, he had struggled to find work prior to joining the programme. "When I heard that Working on Fire would be recruiting in Stutterheim I saw it as an opportunity to turn my life for the best. I went there to try my luck and fortunately I got the job. In 2008, I got nominated to attend the Type 2 Crew Leader course in Mpumalanga and I passed very well," says Mlanjeni, who also passed the Type 1 Crew Leader Course soon after.

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

Mlanjeni says that working around the province with more than two teams created a conducive environment for his professional growth. "I saw myself moving from firefighter to Crew Leader to Regional Manager, to being an Auditor for KZN, Eastern Cape, Free State and Western Cape in 2015. What a journey full of learning," says Mlanjeni with a smile.

In March 2018, Mlanjeni was appointed as the Health and Safety Officer for the Eastern Cape, paving the way to being selected as the Eastern Cape second GOM last year.



Nthabiseng Mokone, Eastern Cape Provincial Communication Officer

From leading the troops to administering safety

Isaac Setlhare is proof that hard work and vision are suitable tools for reaching greater heights.

After completing his matric in 2009, he couldn't further his dream of studying Information Technology due to financial challenges at home. However, that didn't break his determination to pursue his future goals of being independent and getting a qualification.

Setlhare joined WOF as a firefighter in March 2011 at Vaalwater Base in the Waterberg District. "In 2016 I was overwhelmed when my Regional Manager selected me to attend the Type 2 Crew Leader training at the academy in Nelspruit. I knew right there that my doors to a brighter future were opening," says Setlhare.

Immediately after he was appointed Type 2 Crew Leader at Modimolle, Setlhare enrolled in the Risk Management Course at IQ Academy.

"I used my stipend to further my education because I knew that WOF was a stepping stone to a successful life. It was not easy, especially during the fire season, but because I was determined



Isaac Setlhare has settled into his new position as the Occupational Health and Safety Administrator for Limpopo

to get my qualification, I worked twice as hard," he says.

In June 2019, Setlhare completed his Risk Management Certificate with flying colours. He was appointed as the Occupational Health and Safety Administrator in Limpopo in September 2019 and is looking forward to enrolling for a Diploma in Health and Safety soon.

"My message to fellow colleagues is that if you need something in life, you need to plan, work hard and persevere, because nothing comes easily in life. WOF is here to assist us in developing ourselves. Let's grab this opportunity with both hands," Setlhare says.

Advocate for community fire safety

Community Fire Awareness Officer in Gauteng, Lerato Mokwena, was recruited into the programme 12 years ago as a firefighter at Ditholo Base in Hammanskraal north of Pretoria.

"My task is to ensure that the lives of people are saved and our environment safeguarded at all times through fire awareness education," says Mokwena, who was one of the first crop of female Type 2 Crew Leaders to be produced by WOF in Gauteng.

Since she took up the position of Community Fire Awareness Officer she has made a positive impact in the communities in Gauteng. Mokwena says communities have labelled her the community 'fire teacher'.

"We interact with people to raise fire awareness and even visit them in their homes through door-to-door campaigns because



Lerato Mokwena is now a "fire teacher"

we care about the safety of our people," she says.

"I have been able to develop public speaking skills in the sense that I can deliver fire awareness education proficiently to communities. I now have work experience but lack formal qualifications hence I am studying to strengthen my relevance," says Mokwena, who is currently furthering her studies through distance learning.

Mokwena notes that the training courses she has undergone in the programme have added weight and value to her CV and life as well.



Parapara Makgahlela, Gauteng Provincial Communication Officer

Manager credits WOF with personal development

Quehenn Grootboom joined Working on Fire in 2008 at the False Bay Team in the Western Cape. Like many of his WOF management colleagues, he started at the bottom and worked his way up to his current position as a regional manager.

In 2008, he completed the Type 2 Crew Leader course and in 2012 also did the Type 1 Crew Leader course. He served as a Type 1 Crew Leader until he was appointed as an assistant regional manager in mid-2014.

"During my time as an assistant regional manager I also assisted in the province as an assistant project manager," he says.

In 2018, he was asked to assume the position of acting regional manager for the West Coast region. The following year he was appointed as a regional manager in the post he currently occupies.



Regional Manager Quehenn Grootboom says WOF made him come out of his shell

"I grew a passion for the work that I do and I learned a lot about being a disciplined person. Originally I was a reserved person but Working on Fire helped me to come out of my shell and enabled me to show my true potential.

"I would like to say thank you to WOF for taking me from behind the scenes to becoming a leader," says Grootboom.



Limakatso Khalianyane, WC Provincial Communication Officer

Participant breaks the transport glass ceiling

Victoria Mollo joined Working on Fire in 2005 and served diligently as a firefighter at the Harrismith Base for two years before she was promoted to being a driver in August 2007.

She was the first female driver in the province and the second female driver nationally in the programme. Victoria has been serving as the Free State Provincial Transport Officer since

2014 and thoroughly enjoys her work.

A firm believer in education and advancement, Mollo jumped at the chance to complete a tertiary-level qualification at the University of Cape Town when WOF offered this skills development opportunity to its staff members. She is currently completing her diploma in fleet management.

"I'm grateful for what Working on Fire has done for me. As a firefighter, I never thought I'd be where am today, but after being promoted to be a driver, I was motivated to push myself further and to keep applying for new positions. Throughout my time in the programme I have been provided with many training and skills development programmes and workshops," Mollo says.



Former driver, Victoria Mollo



Wayne Mokhehi, Free State Provincial Communication Officer

WOF employment led to a more comfortable life



Zingisa Komanisi is now the Western Cape Stock Controller

After daunting years of job hunting without any success even though she had a qualification, Zingisa Komanisi was recruited as a Working On Fire firefighter in 2011 at Fisantekraal in the Western Cape.

She says WOF changed her life because she had looked for a job with no success even though she had an electrical engineering certificate. "Not even a supermarket would hire me."

Not long after she was recruited she acted as provincial stock controller for a year, where she managed the company's stock

coming in and being distributed to bases. After a year of acting in the position, she was appointed permanently as the stock controller of the province.

Komanisi says, "WOF changed my life for the better. I was able to buy myself a house and move out of the informal settlement, buy a car and build my parents a house. I am also able to send my children to private schools, something I have always wished for."



Limakatso Khalianyane, WC Provincial Communication Officer

Participant finds another caring profession

Working on Fire KwaZulu-Natal Occupational Health & Safety (OHS) Administrator, Simangele Mazibuko, has journeyed from being a firefighter to discovering her true career calling in the programme.

"As a young girl I knew I wanted to take care of people. It had always been a dream of mine to become a nurse one day," she says.

After matriculating, Mazibuko joined the WOF programme at the Mbazwana Base in April 2012 as a firefighter, her first job.

"Being a SHE Representative in my team got me the opportunity to be shortlisted for OHS Assistant interviews. In 2014, I was promoted to OHS Administrator. This was very intimidating for me with zero experience.

"At first, it wasn't easy adjusting, because I'd never lived away from my family and my daughter. But with the support I receive from my supervisor, I manage better now," she says.

Mazibuko started a savings account as soon as she was employed, to hopefully be able to study one day and fulfil her dreams. She has received her SAMTRAC certificate which



OHS Administrator Simangele Mazibuko

qualifies her to facilitate the development, implementation and maintenance of health, safety and environment management systems.

Mazibuko says, "I have fallen in love with health and safety. My new motto is 'prevention is better than cure' and that's what OHS is all about; trying to prevent injuries and harmful infections of employees and, in some cases, the public.

"In encouraging other firefighters or fellow WOF women, I'd say they should not look at the stipend they are getting paid but should save and research where they can get assistance in pursuing their career or dreams."



Nompilo Zondi, KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Communication Officer