

# ALUMNI

## 2020



A publication celebrating  
the development of  
former participants into  
the management team  
of Working on Fire



environment, forestry  
& fisheries

Department:  
Environment, Forestry and Fisheries  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME



Bongani Nhlabathi is now the Assistant General Manager at the Mpumalanga Provincial Office

## Assistant General Manager Bongani Nhlabathi

The Working on Fire Programme continues to live by its objectives of restoring dignity and making a difference by creating jobs for South African youth. WOF prides itself in nurturing and developing its participants, with a large number of participants now in management positions.

Bongani Nhlabathi, the Assistant General Manager (AGM) in Mpumalanga, epitomises these objectives as he has gone through the ranks to become AGM.

One of the longest-serving members in the organisation, Nhlabathi was recruited as a firefighter at the Piet Retief Base in 2004.

His journey has seen him progress to becoming a Type 2 and Type 1 Crew Leader at his base before he moved on from base level to be an instructor in what was an old department within WOF.

"After my stint as an instructor, I applied for a Regional Manager position and was appointed," Nhlabathi says.

He managed many teams as a Regional Manager in the North West and Gauteng. His trajectory within WOF continued upward and he was appointed a Ground Operations Manager (GOM) in his home province of Mpumalanga.

Nhlabathi's stellar work performance was later recognised when he was appointed Assistant General Manager in KwaZulu-Natal and he served as Acting General Manager in that province.

When presented with the chance, Nhlabathi took the opportunity to return to his home province.

"Home is where the heart is and I am back to be AGM in my home province," says Nhlabathi, who began his new role in May 2020 and has settled in well at the provincial office.

"I wish to further my studies and I am currently doing so, because the ultimate goal is financial freedom," Nhlabathi says.

# Former firefighter pursues career in WOF management



Phumza Dyantyi has come a long way from her humble beginnings in a small village in Keiskammashoek. The former firefighter was appointed the General Manager of Working on Fire in the Eastern Cape in 2019.

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

She attended the WOF recruitment drive in Stutterheim in 2004 and passed all the physical tests and the interview.

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

Dyantyi says the work that she and her team did to protect the environment, save lives and educate the

communities on how to be firesafe was hard and dangerous.

“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,” she says.

Dyantyi completed the Type 1 Crew Leader course in 2005 and passed very well. She progressed very fast from Crew Leader to becoming the first Regional Manager in the province and later the Assistant General Manager.

Dyantyi says, “I never climbed the ladder. I worked hard, step by step, with discipline, respect and dedication to be where I am today. I succeeded to get my diploma using the money from WOF to pay my fees.

“WOF 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.”



# Shaped through **WOF skills development**



Noluvuyo Mpande joined Working on Fire in 2011 as a firefighter. She has moved steadily up the ranks through the years. In 2012, she was nominated as a SHE Rep and a First Aider for the Fisantekraal Team in the Western Cape.

“In 2013, I applied for the position of Assistant Health and Safety Officer. Four years later, I was promoted to Junior Health and Safety Officer,” she says.

She says WOF ensured she was skilled and compatible with the position by sending her to do a health and safety course.

“Even if I can one day leave Working on Fire I will never forget how WOF hired me when I was raw and had never worked before. They skilled me, shaping who I am today. I will forever be grateful to WOF for changing my life for the better,” says Mpande.

# Participant discovered his capabilities through WOF

“Allow me to start by saying I love WOF. I couldn’t have gained a chance for a life change and capabilities to care for others if it wasn’t for WOF,” says Kgwadi Kgamane, the Fire Awareness Training Officer for Limpopo since 2018.

Kgamane was just staying at home and depended entirely on his family’s support in terms of his everyday life, until he joined the WOF family in June 2010 as a firefighter at Lepelle-Nkumpi Base.

“The programme developed me with necessary leadership skills and capabilities. Due to my love of facilitation and the passion that I have, I knew that I was in the right programme,” says Kgamane, who has empowered many participants at the bases with the skills that he has learned in his career path.

Kgamane is motivated by the improvement that he has brought to his family since being employed in the WOF Programme. He says his wife is his pillar of strength, while his children are the shining stars that look up to him as their role model.

“The capability of ensuring support to my family was earned through discipline, hard work and determination. The day-to-day motivational and inspirational support from colleagues throughout the Programme emphasises the decisive truthfulness of the WOF Programme, of saving lives, restoring the dignity of youth and protecting the environment at large,” says Kgamane.



Kgwadi Kgamane shares his journey on how WOF changed his life



Kgamane uses practical methods to engage participants during the train-the-trainer workshop at the base



Kgwadi Kgamane proved his strong leadership when his team was crowned the best in Limpopo

## Destined for greater things

Jabulile Shabalala was recruited to the WOF Programme in 2012 as a firefighter at Leeuwfontein Base.

Her reason for joining the programme was that no one at home worked



Jabulile Shabalala

and she had struggled to get a permanent job. She had worked as a salesperson at Tekkie Town for a year and was later employed at Checkers Hyper as a cashier but the contract expired.

After joining the programme, she did courses in project management, facilitation and presentation, mentoring and coaching.

In 2013, Shabalala was promoted to be a SHE Rep. Her career highlight was being promoted to a fire awareness facilitator position in 2015.

“It was a dream come true because there was no more physical fitness, which I battled to pass. It was stressful,” she says.

She became a Fire Awareness Training Officer in 2016 but had problems at first in the new position and could not complete her probation in three months.

“I had problem of driving which added to my frustrations. It made my job difficult to execute. I obtained my drivers’ licence in 2016,” says Shabalala. The delay meant her probation period was extended to six months.

She says she had to focus because she had no one to rely on but it felt good to be where she was in the Programme.

“I lost my parents at an early stage. I had to work very hard and be nimble to make a success out of misery. I had to stand up for myself,” Shabalala says.

# My fruitful life journey in the Working on Fire Programme



**Kaone Phukuntsi, Free State Regional Manager**

My name is Kaone Phukuntsi. I was recruited in August 2007 in Bultfontein as a firefighter. I never knew anything about the Programme, the company as a whole and the services it rendered. I was just happy that I got a job and would be able to look after myself and my family.

I would say my time in WOF has brought a tremendous feeling of self-worth and responsibility. I had many interesting experiences. I travelled all over the country. I met many amazing people, people with varying backgrounds, characters, races and religions, which exposed me to the broader world.

It was difficult at first but I adapted so quickly that I decided to make it my calling. For me, to understand and adjust to the culture of WOF was easy and that is how I came to love and have a passion for the Programme as I felt that what I was doing had meaning and was worthwhile.

My financial situation has changed dramatically since joining the programme as a firefighter. I was able to obtain my driver's licence and my first and second car and, in addition, I was able to assist my parents with their every need as well as my own and my two children's wants and needs.

I have grown significantly as a person while in this programme and have seen a lot of progression from being a firefighter to a crew leader and then being promoted to Assistant Regional Manager and Regional Manager. I was fortunate to be provided with the opportunity by WOF to enrol in a course at the University of Cape Town.

I recently achieved one of my short-term goals which was to become a Regional Manager. My goal for the next three to five years is to become a Ground Operations Manager.

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## Blessed with skills and opportunities



**Mojalefa Rampedi feels blessed and honoured to work for Working on Fire**

Mojalefa Rampedi was recruited as a firefighter on 24 August 2010 at Boskop Base in Potchefstroom.

He says that he feels blessed and honoured to work for WOF as the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries programme continually upskills and empowers its employees unconditionally to change their lives for the better.

In August 2013, Rampedi was appointed as the Fire Awareness Training Officer (FATO) for the North West Province and a year later, because of his dedication and hard work, he was promoted to be one of the provincial Regional Managers.



Rampedi says, "WOF awarded me with an opportunity to enrol at the University of Cape Town in the Compliance Management and Project Management course."

After feeling motivated by WOF to pursue his academic studies, Rampedi then enrolled himself at Oxbridge Academy where he is currently studying towards a National Diploma in Public Management.

"All of this happened because of WOF and I am really blessed to work in a company that is willing to upskill their employees in all different angles," says Rampedi.



# WOF had a life-changing impact on this young graduate



Selaelo Mathokwane praises WOF for making her a person of standing in her family and the society

“All that I am today is because of WOF, and I will be forever grateful to this programme that took me in as a nobody and made me a somebody. I see WOF as a mother of the nation through its mission and vision for our youth,” says Selaelo Mathokwane, Limpopo’s Social Development Practitioner, about the impact that WOF has made in her life.

Mathokwane was one of many young South African graduates who struggle to find employment due to the lack of jobs in the country, despite formal qualifications.

“Like many other graduates, I was frustrated with not getting a job until WOF came into my life. I joined the WOF family as a firefighter in 2012 at Bekkersdal Base in Gauteng,” says Mathokwane.

She proved to be a strong leader who was clearly destined for greater heights and became a Type 2 Crew Leader a year after she joined the Programme.

Mathokwane got her break in 2015 when she was appointed as the Social Development Practitioner for WOF Limpopo.

“At WOF I was encouraged to work harder and to enrol for my honours degree with Unisa. The sky was the limit,” says Mathokwane. “I studied even harder to complete my psychology honours degree in counselling, and graduated in 2018.”

Mathokwane says, “I have had the privilege to work with the most amazing WOF family which has impacted my life in many ways and shaped my professional and personal growth.”

# Former firefighter's enthusiasm rewarded with promotion



Mpumi Ngangane says WOF transformed her life

Mpumi Ngangane was an unpaid police reservist before she was recruited as a firefighter at the Working on Fire Newlands Base in 2010.

A year after she joined WOF, her interest in and enthusiasm for fire awareness caught the eye of management.

"I did awareness at conferences and exhibitions alongside Zanele Nxumalo who was doing fire awareness for Working on Fire nationally.

"From early 2013, I started assisting in the advocacy department with clerical duties and administration," she says.

Then, when WOF Western Cape established an office in Wynberg, she was promoted to receptionist.

"Shortly after that I applied for an HR administrator position and I got the job," she says.

Ngangane says WOF sent her to UCT where she studied human resource management and labour practice.

"Early this year, I got promoted from the development position. I was so excited because this is a big change in my life. As a sole breadwinner, this has brought relief," says Ngangane.

## TRAVEL ENTHUSIAST BELIEVES THE SKY IS THE LIMIT



Christina Kalane, Human Resources Assistant

Christina Kalane grew up in Kroonstad, where she never knew the luxury of travel, for work or pleasure. Everything changed when she was recruited as a firefighter at Working on Fire.

Kalane says, "Before I joined the programme, I had not interacted with people from different races. I can now proudly say that I interact with various kinds of people on a daily basis as I have travelled across the Western Cape fighting fires. The most memorable parts of those trips were every time I realised what impact fighting fires had for the landowners and how grateful they always were."

She says some of the best moments she has experienced in her life have happened while in the employ of the Programme and her life has changed for the better.

"My short-term goal is to further my studies and my long-term goal is to climb up the ladder in the human resources field and to eventually become an HR Business Partner or HR Head," says Kalane.

"WOF enabled me to support my family with food, medical bills and general household needs and now I have peace of mind because I can take care of my family."

Kalane has been able to complete her tertiary education, not only as a result of the income she received but also the constant motivation from the WOF Programme to improve.

"I now strive to not only be a role model to my child but also to members of my community and to inspire them to be better," she says.



# Self-improvement is the key to his success

Former Nkandla Type 2 Crew Leader Khulani Zulu was recruited from 300 unemployed youth looking for a better opportunity back in November 2011. He is now the WOF KZN Fire Awareness Training Officer.

“Before joining Working on Fire, I had already started training at home, preparing for the recruitment day. I believe it’s through God’s grace that I successfully passed the fitness and interview assessments and was picked to join the 25-member Nkandla crew,” says Zulu.

Zulu then proceeded to the Kishugu Training Academy in Nelspruit for his 21-day training course in basic and advanced firefighting, computer literacy and personal financial management.

Zulu says, “In February 2012, I successfully completed the two-week videographer course held at Midrand in Gauteng. In the same year, in April, I was chosen to attend a Type 2 Crew Leader course held at the Mampuru Kishugu Training Academy which I successfully completed. The following year, I went for a Type 1 Crew Leader course.”

While still on the Type 1 Crew Leader course, Zulu applied for the Fire Awareness Training Officer vacancy

in the KwaZulu-Natal and was subsequently appointed in August 2013.

“In my seven years of service as a Fire Awareness Training Officer, I have learned so much and improved on my communications, computer literacy and typing skills,” he says.

He has also completed courses in Community Risk Reduction Fire & Life Safety and Fundamentals of Project Management Level 4, and is awaiting certification for the Facilitation course. In March 2020, Zulu negotiated with the facilitators of the Board of Chaplaincy Certification Inc. (BCCI) which provides SAQA-accredited courses, to allow the uMngeni Team to attend a five-day training course for free in Basic Firefighting Level 1, First Aider, and Health, Safety and Environmental Principles.

“These are some of my greatest achievements in the Programme, as I am more exposed to facilities such as these to assist firefighters in equipping them to be more employable,” says Zulu.

Zulu adds, “Being a Fire Awareness Training Officer has hugely impacted my life and my family. I consider myself a well-developed individual



thanks to Working on Fire and a lot of firefighters have benefited from my experience. Besides professionally, I have personally grown from my time in the organisation, growth that many other organisations wouldn’t have afforded me.”

Zulu continually shares his knowledge and assists the Base Communications Representatives with their work-related and personal capacity development through presentation and communications skills, and exposes them to online communications platforms such as Google Meet and Zoom.

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## WOF inspires participant to give back to the community



Obakeng Senosi encourages  
WOF participants

Obakeng Senosi is a former Type 1 Crew Leader at Highveld Base in the North West who is currently the NW Assistant Health and Safety Officer. Senosi was recruited on 5 June 2010 at the Pilanesberg Base.

Senosi says the discipline and patience WOF taught him have made him a better person.

“I was a joke to others for not having matric. Today I have a better future because WOF helped me to complete my matric and I am studying Health and Safety with the Oxbridge Academy,” Senosi says.

“With the WOF stipend, I have managed to renovate our family home and further my sister’s studies,” adds Senosi.

His WOF experience inspired him to start his own ‘Help a black child to chase his/her future’ project wherein he donates sanitary towels and shoe polish to schools for those who are in need.

Senosi encourages all the WOF participants to keep applying for job opportunities and to stay positive.

# Grateful for the opportunity to prove his worth, says FATO



Teko Mooki thanks the programme for changing his life

Hard work, dedication and willingness will take you far as a young person, says Teko Mooki, a former WOF North West firefighter who was recruited in October 2012 to the Boskop Team.

Teko matriculated in 2010 and could not further his studies due to financial problems. He was unemployed for a year until he heard that WOF was recruiting for Boskop base.

Mooki says, "I was a hard worker and I became the She Rep from 2013. Due to my hard work and dedication, I was appointed to be the Fire Awareness Facilitator in North West in 2016."

He worked with both the Fire Awareness Training Officer (FATO) and the Community Fire Awareness Officer to learn more in school awareness and community awareness. Mooki was appointed as the FATO of the Eastern Cape in November 2018.

He says being part of a WOF family changed his life, as he can now support his family, especially his daughter and his younger brother who is at university, and extend his mother's house. He also plans to further his studies.

"I have grown so much in my career and with the experience I got from WOF. I even did my licence with the money I got from WOF," says Mooki.

Mooki advised everyone to always aim high and have a goal in life so that they can be somewhere better someday.

# Limpopo's face becomes the Admin Controller



Kedibone Monye is ready to tackle challenges in her new position

Kedibone Monye, who joined the Working on Fire Programme as a firefighter at Polokwane base in Limpopo in May 2014, is the newly appointed Admin Controller in the province.

"I never saw myself as a firefighter, let alone a veld and forest firefighter. But due to financial constraints, I couldn't pursue my studies in business management," Monye says.

Prior to joining WOF, Monye studied computer studies and worked as a field marketer for Edcon Limited.

In July 2015, she was promoted to the Base Communications Representative position and, in October that year, was appointed as the Admin Assistant at the Limpopo Provincial Office.

In November 2018, she began acting as the Provincial Admin Controller for Limpopo and she was appointed in the position in August 2019. She is also the appointed First Aider for the provincial office.

Monye completed a diploma in business management and a certificate course in project management with Gigimo Tourism Academy in December 2019.

"I always knew that I was destined for greater things in life, due to my ability to work hard and my eagerness to always want to learn more," says Monye.

"This is just the beginning of my career. I want to enrol for a degree in business management next year so that I can prepare for my next level in the corporate industry. I see myself as the future General Manager of a leading programme like WOF. With hard work, commitment and dedication, I will get there," she says confidently.



# Fire Awareness Training Officer thanks WOF for the opportunity

Zola Hans has come a long way from the small town of Lady Grey near the Lesotho border, where he was born.



Hans joined the WOF family in 2011 at Ukhahlamba (now Joe Gqabi) Base in the Eastern Cape. Prior to joining the Programme, he worked for Youth for Christ as a facilitator from 2005 till 2009.

“When I heard that Working on Fire was recruiting in Ukhahlamba, I saw it as a blessing in disguise as I always wanted to have a proper job where I would be part of the firefighting group,” he says.

After being selected as a firefighter for that team he worked very hard every day. “It was discipline and dedication and work ethics that shaped my career at Working on Fire,” he says.

“In 2012, I got nominated to attend the Type 2 Crew Leader course in Mpumalanga and I passed very well. I was given the best student of the course award,” says Hans.

“My passion and hard work opened good chances for me as I got appointed as the Fire Awareness Training Officer of the Eastern Cape a year later.”

Hans had to leave Lady Grey to live in East London where the provincial office was at that time.

“Working for the whole province was a challenge but I managed to do the job very well. Because I could speak all major languages in the EC, I was able to interact effectively with stakeholders and participants,” says Hans.

He has managed to start his own small business with his WOF earnings and he is now furthering his studies at Unisa.

Hans says, “The journey has been tough, rocky and exciting sometimes and, with passion and hard work, I managed to be where I am today. I want to advise my fellow firefighters to never undermine their abilities. It is always good to aim high and work hard to achieve your dreams.”

## Equipping the communities with fire safety skills

Working on Fire Limpopo’s Community Fire Awareness Officer, Sello Matlhare, joined WOF as a firefighter on 24 May 2010 at Vaalwater (now Modimolle)



Sello Matlhare is determined to be a role model to the youth in the community of Vaalwater where he was raised

Base in Limpopo, after being unable to afford studying further following his matriculation in 2009.

“When I heard that WOF was recruiting in Modimolle, I decided to take a chance and see if I could be lucky. I was young and didn’t have goals,” he says.

His hard work and ambition saw him promoted to the position of First Aider and then SHE Rep in the same year that he was recruited.

“Every time we were dispatched to the fire line, I would motivate my colleagues and ensure that the safety of the crew was observed at all times, as the safety representative of the team,” says Matlhare.

He was promoted to Type 2 Crew Leader in 2011 and Type 1 Crew Leader in 2012. His

skills in leadership, communication, facilitation and project management saw him opening new teams in the province in Mogalakwena in 2011, Polokwane in 2013 and Leseding in 2014, and being rewarded in 2015 with his appointment to his current position as the Community Fire Awareness Officer for Limpopo.

Matlhare says, “WOF played a huge role in my life and turned me into the professional individual that I am today. The Programme helped to unleash my full potential and made me a responsible, disciplined person, not only at work but even in my community.

“With the type of skills that I have acquired through WOF, I can easily adapt to any environment at any given time, both on a personal level and in a professional space. Thank you, Working on Fire.”



# WOF made me the person that I am today



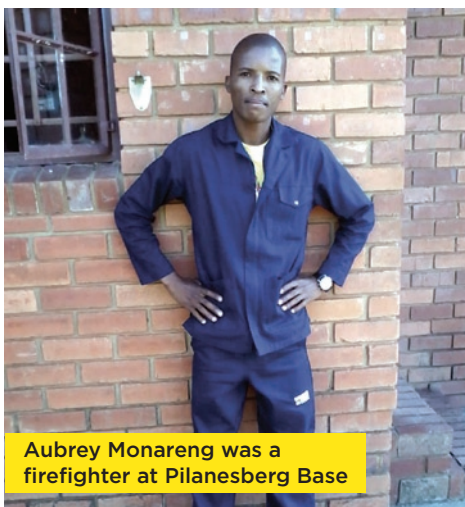
Aubrey Monareng joined the Working on Fire Programme in 2010 as a veld and forest firefighter at the Pilanesberg Base, after being unemployed since completing his matric in 2008.

“It was difficult, because there was no one working at home. My family was dependant on my uncle’s pension grant,” says Monareng. His uncle was his guardian as he never knew his father and his mother passed on when he was still in primary school. Monareng says it was the happiest moment for him and his family to be able to provide with the stipend he earned from WOF. His younger brother was his responsibility and he provided for a family of four as a breadwinner.

Monareng says WOF changed his life to become a better person and made him what he is today.

“Because I was motivated, disciplined, and physically and mentally fit, WOF gave me the opportunity to become a Type 2 Crew Leader and I became the first crew leader for the North West in 2011,” says Monareng. In 2019, Aubrey Monareng was promoted to Assistant Stock Controller for the North West.

Monareng says, “I would like to take this opportunity to thank Working on Fire for believing in me and giving me the lifetime opportunity of joining the programme.”



Aubrey Monareng was a firefighter at Pilanesberg Base



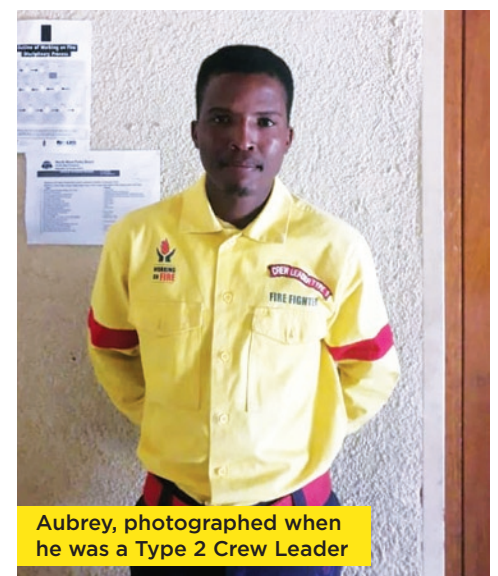
Aubrey receiving his yellow card with his base crew members



Attending the Type 1 Crew Leader course



Serving as a Type 1 Crew Leader at Kgaswane Base.



Aubrey, photographed when he was a Type 2 Crew Leader