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Special Publication

# International Day of People Living with Disabilities

Celebrating Working on Fire heroes, who flourish despite many challenges.



**environment, forestry  
& fisheries**  
Department:  
Environment, Forestry and Fisheries  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



**KISHUGU**  
FOR THE GREATER GOOD



# Foreward

Nearly 3 percent of Working on Fire's staff lives with disabilities. They are mostly employed as store persons and contribute greatly to the successful functioning of their respective teams. They are valuable members of the Working on Fire family and inspire their colleagues, through

## Nothing can stop me from a brighter future

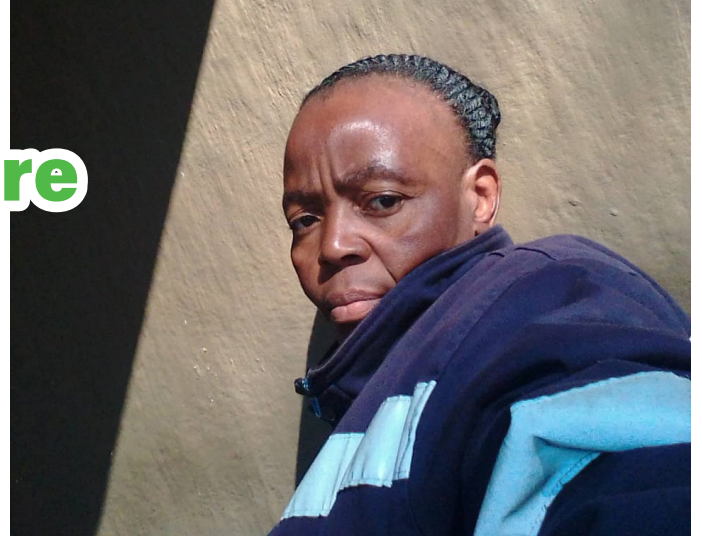
Nomumelelo Ngubo, store person for the Richmond Team in KwaZulu Natal is excited about her future. She is a go-getter and eager learner: she is even enrolled in the ABET Training programme.

**"Because of my disability, I was unable to finish my high school studies - but it has always been a goal I wanted to achieve. So, when the ABET training opportunity arose I grabbed it with both hands," Ngubo says.**

Ngubo moved from Ixopo to Richmond, in 2004, with hopes for a better life for herself. When Working on Fire "came calling" in 2010, she immediately responded.

Through WOF, Ngubo was able to obtain various certificates in computer, financial management, poultry farming and sowing.

their determination and positive outlook on life. Many of them are passionate about changing the misconception around those living with disabilities. We all believe a disability does not disqualify you in life. In Working on Fire, we ensure people living with disabilities are given equal opportunities for work, play, health and success and work towards educating our internal and external audiences on how they can be more compassionate and understanding of the challenges faced by people living with disabilities.



>> Nompumelelo Ngubo is excited to be finishing her secondary studies with the ABET programme.

The 51-year-old wants to empower herself with knowledge, which is one of the main reasons she joined the ABET programme.

Ngubo hopes to open her own business one day and put all her skills to good use.

## I do not see myself as an abnormal person. I am just living with disabilities.



>> Tsietisi More store person at Boskop base

Tsietisi More joined Working on Fire in July 2019 as a storekeeper for the Boskop Team.

"Growing up, people tended to think because I am disabled, I am unfit. However, my parents considered me to be perfectly fine - the only visible disability was my legs," More says.

Despite his childhood challenges, More completed his secondary studies and attended Boston City Campus and Business College where he successfully completed his IT Specialist Course.

**"I don't think of myself as a disabled person because I can do many things able-bodied people can do, including driving a normal car."**

More thanks WOF for giving him the opportunity to be a part of the family.





# Bethlehem storekeeper not held back by disability

>> Tshibanyane Mofokeng's visual impairment does not hold him back.

Tshibanyane Mofokeng, from Bethlehem, has achieved something that not many in his position have achieved. Tshibanyane was born with a B3 visual impairment, a visual impairment that causes people to have difficulties with normal daily activities such as driving, reading, socializing, and walking.

Although Mofokeng has struggled with his sight his entire life, this has not stopped him from reaching all the goals he has set for himself.

The Bethlehem store person obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Governance and Political Transformation, from the University of the Free State, making him and his twin brother the first in their family to do so.

Mofokeng aims to become a political analyst in the future



and is currently saving money to do his honours degree, which will give him an upper hand when going for interviews.

"Even though I have a visual impairment, I did not allow it to stop me from obtaining my first degree and surely it will not stop me from obtaining another qualification. I would also like to thank the Department of Environmental Affairs, Forestry and Fisheries, for initiating the Working on Fire programme because it serves as a stepping stone for us to reach our goals," Mofokeng said.

# Limpopo store person won't allow her disability to disable her in life

>> Helen Kutumela embraces her disability after being diagnosed with Osteosarcoma at the age of 8.

Helen Kutumela, a proud store person at Modimolle base in Limpopo, was diagnosed with Osteosarcoma (a type of bone cancer) at the age of 8 years.

Due to a lack of education about cancer and its symptoms, her family initially thought that she had one of those rare illnesses that can be cured by traditional herbs and medicine.

"My family went all out trying to seek help and a cure for my condition. In 2001, they ended up taking me to Steve Biko hospital, where I was diagnosed with a type of cancer that affected the bones in a part of my right leg," Kutumela says.

She started undergoing cancer treatment at the Steve Biko and Kalafong Hospitals. It was a very difficult time for her family: they believed that all cancer victims "end up in the grave."

As the years passed, Kutumela's cancer became worse and started spreading throughout her entire leg. The doctors advised her family that, in order for them to save her life,



they needed to amputate her leg. As Kutumela was still a minor, her family had to make this tough decision on her behalf. They chose to prioritise her life and agreed to the amputation of her leg.

Since the amputation, and a series of follow up treatments, Kutumela has been cleared of cancer. **She wasn't born disabled, but had to adapt to life with a disability and as a result has faced many challenges. But she has learnt that through a can-do attitude, hard work and perseverance one can achieve much.** She joined Working on Fire 2019 as a store person. She has undergone training in stock management, financial skills, and computer studies. She is an eager learner and wants to continue growing professionally and make a difference in other people's lives.

# WOF gifted me with my first Job

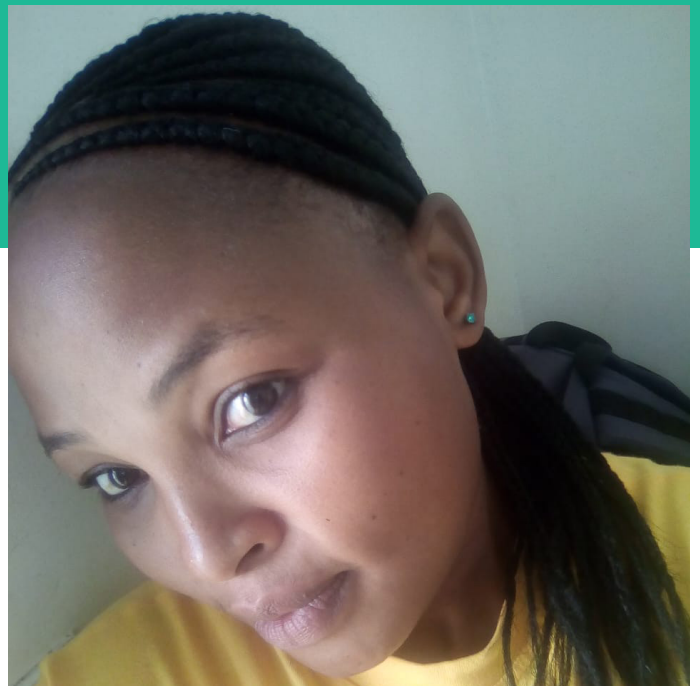
>> Xoliswa Mndaweni enjoys being a store person and Social Buddy at her base.

Since she was recruited in 2012, Xoliswa Mndaweni has been a proud Store Person for the Royal Natal Team in KwaZulu Natal.

"Before joining Working on Fire, I was unemployed. I had been job hunting for two years with my Office Administration Certificate. WOF was my first employment and I was very excited for the opportunity it gave me," Mndaweni says.

One of her most memorable moments within the programme, includes her attendance of a Stock Controller course at the Kishugu Training Academy in Nelspruit, where she achieved 99 percent for her test.

**Mndaweni is also a Social Development Buddy at her base through which she coordinates outreach programmes in her community and creates health**



**awareness posters on certain calendar days. Her efforts and commitment gained her a recognition award from the Social Development department.**

"I hope to move up the ranks, if ever the opportunity presents itself because I love meeting new people and making a difference," Mndaweni concluded.

## Store lady thanks WOF programme for the skills she acquired

>> Nohlelo Ntlatywa says living with a disability does not stop you from being the best.

"Hard work, dedication and patience will take you very far in life."

Those are the words of Nohlelo Ntlatywa, a former store person from Post St John's team, which was closed last year.

Ntlatywa had enrolled with Esayidini TVET College, doing business management, but could not finish her studies due to financial problems.

She joined the Working on Fire programme, as a store person, where she gained skills in storekeeping and with the little money she earned, she was able to do a computer course.

Ntlatywa left WOF in 2017, to join a business learnership programme at Skills Africa Empowerment, however, she rejoined the programme recently, working as a store person for the Libode team.



# Suikerbosrand Store Keeper loves the “teamwork culture” in WOF

>> Olwethu Mogosi of the Suikerbosrand team in Gauteng.

**Olwethu Mogosi, a storekeeper for the Suikerbosrand team, says that being a part of the Working on Fire programme really makes her feel special - she had never before thought of herself as “employable”.**

Mogosi has a leg-length discrepancy. This means that her limbs are not of equal length. This has made moving around difficult and has made her feel depressed a lot of the time. Mogosi was excited when a work opportunity in the WOF programme became available - this was her first formal job after matriculating.



“This is my first job. I am a store keeper and the stipend I earn really makes a difference in my family,” Mogosi says.

Mogosi says that her team has made her feel like a part of the family and does not treat her any differently from the rest. This inclusive treatment has helped her grow in confidence and make her feel more comfortable socialising and being herself.

“Working at WOF has brought me a sense of belonging; I love our culture of teamwork.”

## Breyten store person pursues finance qualification

>> Doris Sibande, the storekeeper at Breyten base, is pursuing a financial management qualification.

Doris Sibande lives with a disability but is determined to live a full life. Sibande was diagnosed with Spina bifida, a birth defect that occurs when the spine and spinal cord do not form properly.

She was recruited into the Working on Fire Programme in 2014 and serves as a store person at the Mpumalanga Breyten base, located at the Msukaligwa Local Municipality Fire Department.

As a breadwinner, she has a lot of responsibility, but she could not allow her circumstances or disability to deter her from achieving her dreams.

Sibande has managed to get herself through school, is



studying financial management, and has registered her own business.

**“Being part of the WOF organisation has really boosted my confidence. I feel like a part of a family. My team is great and has contributed towards my positive outlook on life,”** Sibande says.



# Living with a disability is not the end of your life

>> Puleng Mtimkulu from Parys base, in the Free State.

Puleng Mtimkulu currently serves as a store person in the Parys base, where some of her duties are to ensure the personal protective equipment and personal protective clothing, which are vital to every firefighter, are well maintained, accounted for, and replaced timeously.

Mtimkulu was not always employed and went through a long period of unemployment and hopelessness. She currently lives with a disability caused by a severe stroke she had before joining the Working on Fire programme.

Before joining WOF, Mtimkulu was unemployed and pregnant, with no means of caring for a baby. She was under an immense amount of stress and consequently suffered a stroke, while pregnant. She lost all mobility on the



left side of her body and she attributes the stroke to the stress of being unemployed.

**“WOF gave me a second chance. I feel better than I did before and my confidence has returned. After I had the stroke I didn’t socialise, however, I now have the confidence to socialise with my colleagues, friends and neighbours. My message to those living with a disability is to be confident about yourself because this is not the end,”** Mtimkulu says.

## Thanks to WOF, I can provide for myself again



Simon Eyssen was unemployed for 10 years before he joined WOF. <<

was even a real struggle for Eyssen: not just did he live with a disability, circumstances had also forced him to quit school while doing standard 4 (Gr. 6).

“I was very happy when Working on Fire hired me. My entire life changed for the better: It allowed me to be independent and provide for myself,” Eyssen says.

After leaving school, Eyssen taught himself English in the hope that it would increase his chances of getting employed.

**He says he is enjoying his time at WOF as a store person. He is grateful for all the lessons he has learned from the programme as those have helped shape him into the person he is today.**

Eyssen has big plans for the future and is determined to follow his dreams. “In the future, I would like to attend a cooking school because I love cooking and preparing meals for other people,” Eyssen concluded.

Storeperson for Vrolijkheid base in the Western Cape, Simon Eyssen, was unemployed for 10 years before he joined the Working on Fire programme in 2015.

He was born with Polio and struggled to find a job after his contract ended at his previous employment. Job hunting

# Balfour's Zinhle Vilakazi working to secure her future

>> Zinhle Vilakazi, a store person from Balfour base, believes her future is very bright.

Mpumalanga Balfour store person, Zinhle Vilakazi, is a person living with a disability, however, it has not halted her dreams of securing a bright future for herself and her child.

Vilakazi credits her Working on Fire team members, who do not discriminate against her and are always supportive in her endeavours.

"I am very lucky, in that I have made friends and consider my team as part of my family. They always want the best for me," Vilakazi says.

Vilakazi wants to further her studies to secure a bright future, not only for herself but for her four-year-old son and family as well.

Vilakazi encourages other people living with disabilities by saying: "There is nothing we cannot do in life. A disability is just a condition and it should not stand in our way of making a better future for ourselves and loved ones."



## Living with a disability but able to make a difference

>> Linda Zulu never lets his disability limit his abilities and goals.

Linda Zulu comes from Cofimvaba in the Eastern Cape. He joined Working on Fire in October 2012, and is a Store Controller at the Mogalakwena base.

Prior to joining WOF, Zulu was doing a learnership about basic computers at a vehicle manufacturer in Pretoria, Hatfield. He had completed his grade 12 certificate and studied an N2 course in Motor Mechanic, but due to financial constraints, he could not complete his course.

Zulu would not allow his unfinished studies determine his future. Instead, he enrolled with World Focus Body Massage Centre, where he learned the art of massaging people. He was motivated by the need for massage services at the old age centres around his area.

After hours, Zulu, regularly volunteers at old age centres, assists the elderly and teaches them about the importance of exercising, in order for them to keep their bodies healthy and fit.

Working on Fire, through its Skill Development mission,



empowers its participants with courses that contribute positively to their daily lives. After joining WOF, Zulu was taken to study a store controller course, to enhance his skills.

"Since I joined WOF, I learned more about how to manage the stock and hopefully, one day, I will be a Store Manager," Zulu said.

# Matiti wants to correct negative stereotypes

>> Luxulo Matiti says he never wants his disability to stop him from living his life.

Luxulo Matiti joined the Krugersdorp team, as a store person, to earn an income for his family. **He works to earn money but also to correct negative stereotypes about people leaving with disabilities.**

He completed grade 11 and has a certificate in Boiler Maker from SAT Mining in Rustenburg.

Matiti says he never wanted his disability to stop him from living his life to the fullest. He is always looking out for better opportunities.

"I struggle to walk but I don't like it when people feel pity for me because I am fine with my condition," Matiti says.

Matiti is glad that he received the opportunity to work in the Working on Fire programme and live his dream.



"My team does not discriminate or feel pity for me. They support me in everything I do, which I am extremely grateful for," Matiti said.

Matiti previously worked as a part time assistant at Global Kitchen, assisting the carpenters in making wardrobes and kitchen units.

A proud father, Matiti uses his stipend to take care of his family.

## My disability won't stop me from dreaming big

>> Lazola Zungula, a store person for the Kleinmond team, aspires to be a dispatcher.

Lazola Zungula, a store-person for the Kleinmond Team, is living with a disability but she won't allow her condition to stop her from dreaming big.

Zungula says she would like to see herself as a Dispatcher for WOF because she likes working in the office.

"I am currently a store-person for my team and I am in charge of making sure everything in the storeroom is in order, whether it is tools, PPE, and other essentials at the base," Zungula says.

The 30-year-old woman says when she was offered the position back in 2014. She was over the moon because: "It is difficult to get a job with our condition and I am of the opinion that most companies see us as not capable. I can do anything an able-bodied person can do."

Being part of WOF has taught Zungula a lot about work



because she was recruited shortly after completing an Office Administration certificate.

She says WOF has also given her great experience and has taken her to places she would never have seen otherwise.