



## FORMER FIREFIGHTERS SHARE THEIR STORY

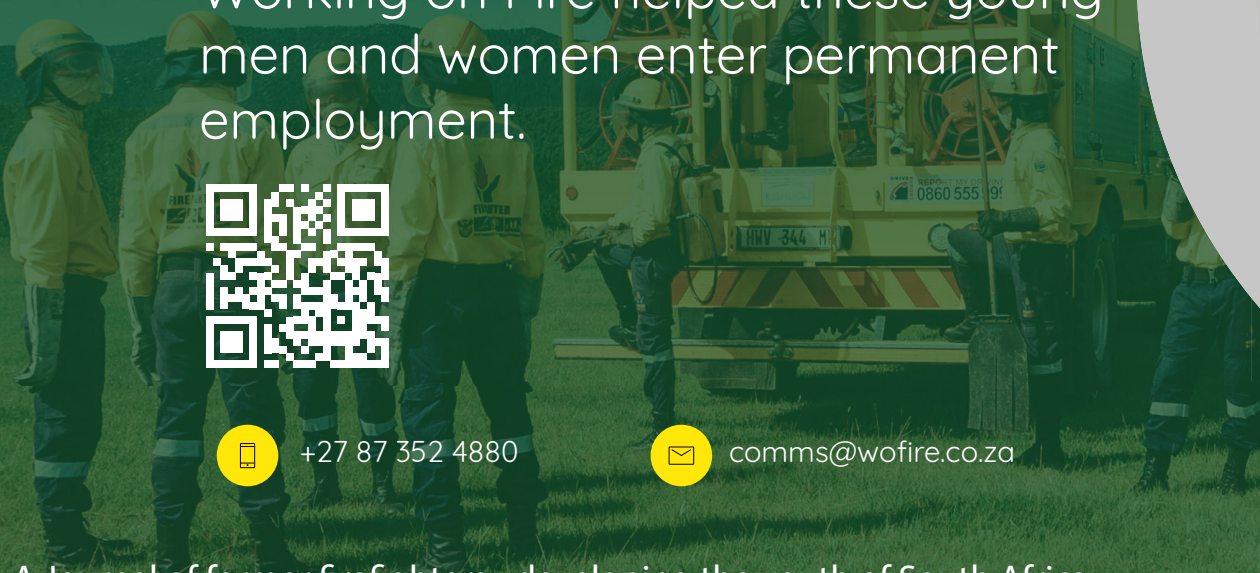
Working on Fire helped these young men and women enter permanent employment.



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A Journal of former firefighters - developing the youth of South Africa



**environmental affairs**

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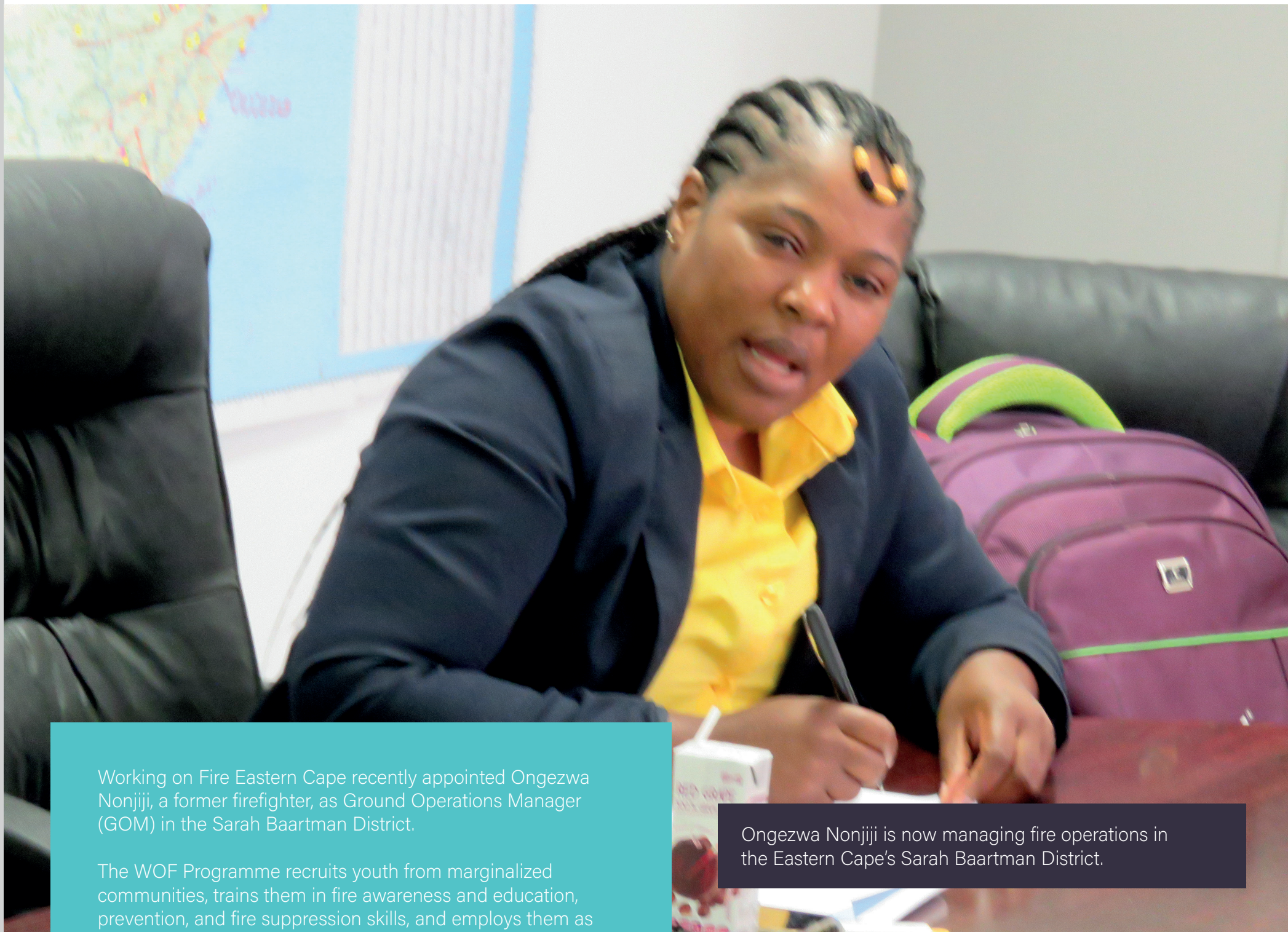


**EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME**





# GOM ONGWEZWA NONJJI CELEBRATES 16 YEARS WITHIN PROGRAMME



Working on Fire Eastern Cape recently appointed Ongezwa Nonjji, a former firefighter, as Ground Operations Manager (GOM) in the Sarah Baartman District.

The WOF Programme recruits youth from marginalized communities, trains them in fire awareness and education, prevention, and fire suppression skills, and employs them as WOF participants.

Nonjji is passionate and dedicated: attributes that enabled her over the 14 years to successfully work her way up the ranks.

"I was recruited in 2006 at the Langeni base, one of the first bases within the province," Nonjji recalls.

Her work ethic was recognized and within two years she was nominated to attend Crew leader Type 2 and Type 1 courses.

In 2012, Nonjji was promoted to Regional Manager (RM) and was the second female to be in that position in the province. It was in this position that she flourished. She held this position in the Rholihlahla region for eight years.

As a GOM she will be in charge of 12 WOF teams in the Sarah Baartman District and one Regional Office in Port Elizabeth.

"I am very happy with my appointment as GOM and thank WOF for the opportunity and the trust they have placed on me to help steer operations in the Eastern Cape," Nonjji said.

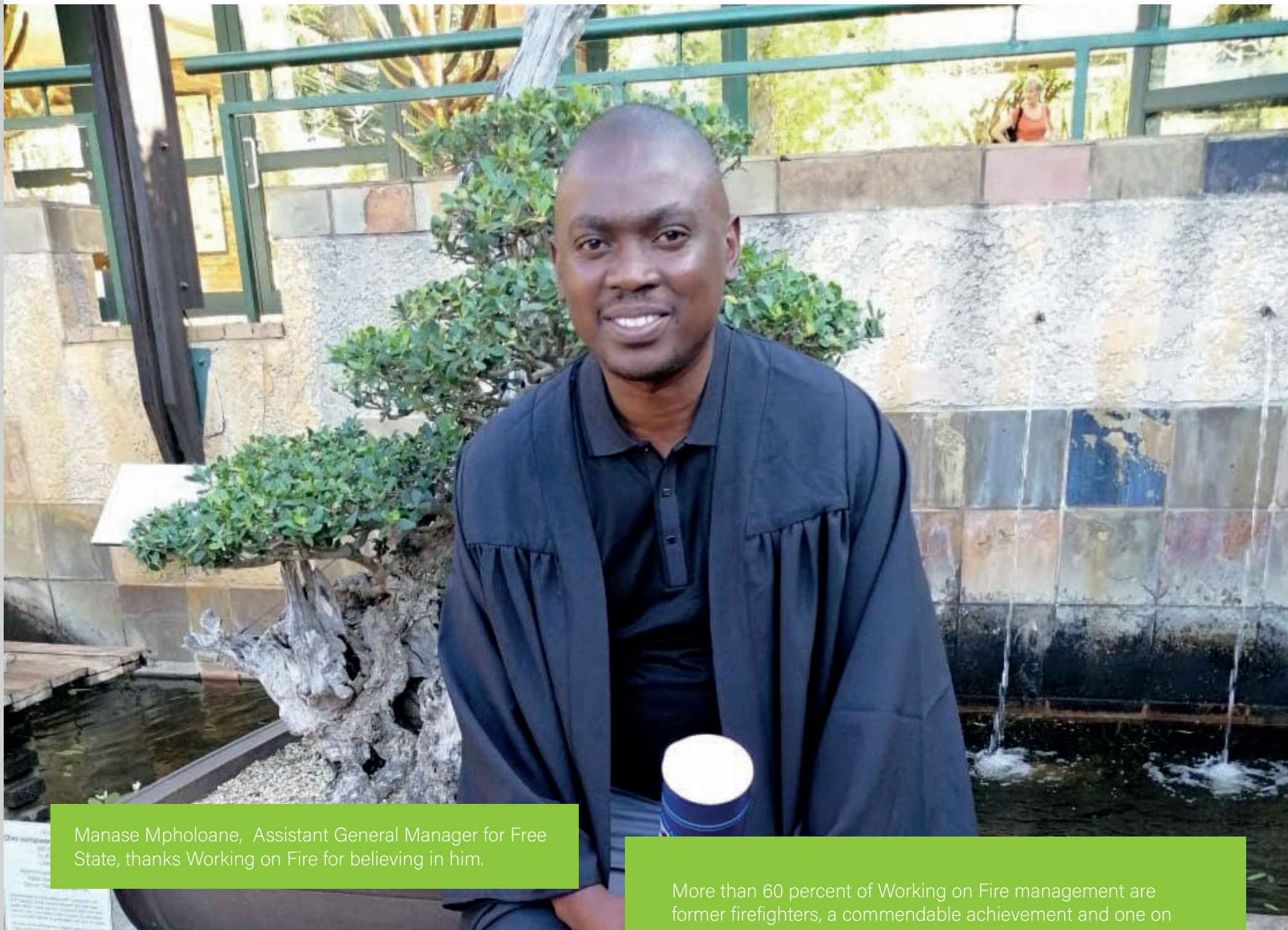
Ongezwa Nonjji is now managing fire operations in the Eastern Cape's Sarah Baartman District.







# GROUND OPERATIONS MANAGER THANKS WOF FOR BELIEVING IN HIM



Manase Mpholoane, Assistant General Manager for Free State, thanks Working on Fire for believing in him.

More than 60 percent of Working on Fire management are former firefighters, a commendable achievement and one on which the organisation prides itself.

Manase Mpholoane is one such example, and he proudly states that the WOF programme has helped him develop on a personal and professional level and has made a real difference in his life.

After five years of unemployment, Mpholoane decided to travel to Gauteng, in the hope of finding a Job.

Mpholoane was recruited into the Working on Fire programme at the Krugersdorp base in 2004, and decided to take full advantage of the skills development opportunities within the programme. He successfully completed the Crew Leader Type 2 and Type 1 courses, which set him on his way up the ranks.

The former firefighter was appointed as Regional Manager and subsequently Ground Operations Manager in the North West, he is currently serving as the AGM for Free State province..

"I thank WOF for believing in me. I am a living testimony that the programme is making a difference in previously disadvantaged youth's lives," Mpholoane concluded.







# WALTER KHOZA MOVES UP THE RANKS TO GROUND OPERATIONS MANAGER



Walter Khoza, a former firefighter, is now Ground Operations Manager of the Highveld teams in Mpumalanga.

Working on Fire continues to develop the skills of their personnel, with more than 40 percent of the management staff being former firefighters.

This is evident in Mpumalanga, after former firefighter and regional manager, Walter Khoza, was promoted to Ground Operations Manager (GOM).

Walter joined Thabiso Mohale in the position, ensuring Mpumalanga is armed with two GOMs to ensure the best production in Integrated Fire Management (IFM) services.

Walter's journey at WOF began in Graskop, where he was recruited as a participant in 2003.

He worked his way through the ranks: he was first promoted to Crew Leader Type 1 at the Graskop Base and later became a driver for the

Lydenburg and LEFPA bases.

He became an assistant Regional Manager in 2010 and went on to become a Regional Manager for the Mpumalanga Lowveld teams in 2011.

Originally from Bushbuckridge, Walter is a husband and a father to two daughters and a son. He enjoys fishing, spending time with his family and watching soccer.

"Being a GOM comes with a lot of responsibility and accountability and I thank WOF for recognizing my capabilities in these areas. I enjoy this position as I will continue to make a difference in the province and in WOF as a whole," Khoza says.

His journey up the management ladder has enabled Khoza to build a home, take care of his family and further his studies.





# THE JOURNEY OF LIMPOPO'S FIRST FEMALE REGIONAL MANAGER



Barbra Seokoma is proud to be the longest serving Regional Manager for WOF Limpopo.

Born and raised in the dusty village of Ga-Sekororo, outside Tzaneen, Barbra Seokoma has always dreamt of occupying a leadership position in a reputable company such as Working on Fire.

An avid outdoor person, Seokoma fell in love with veld and forest firefighting after joining the programme, as a firefighter, at the Sekororo Base in 2004.

"We were the first team to be recruited by WOF when they opened the first base in Limpopo. I remember us running the 2,4 kilometre and I gave it my all," Seokoma recalls.

"With the support of my long legs, I sailed through and showed my

male counterparts that I meant business!" It was not an easy journey for Seokoma, who had to work hard to climb the corporate ladder.

She was equipped and developed with leadership skills through various training opportunities offered by WOF - a valuable and important aspect of the programme.

"My big break came when I was promoted to Assistant Regional Manager. In 2010, I was appointed as the first Regional Manager."

Seokoma is currently the only female Regional Manager for Limpopo where she successfully manages four bases.





# FORMER FIREFIGHTER THANKS THE PROGRAMME FOR HELPING HIM GROW

"Know your goals and always work hard to achieve them," said Khuthazo Mhletywa, a former firefighter from Elliot team.

This zealous young man joined the WOF family in 2014 at the Elliot base.

Mhletywa said that, prior to joining the programme, he did his National Diploma in Human Resource Management from 2008 to 2010.

"After my studies, getting a job was not easy and that is why I saw it as a blessing when I heard that WOF will be recruiting in Elliot."

He said that he was lucky to get an opportunity to be selected as a firefighter in that team and he worked very hard and showed commitment at all times.

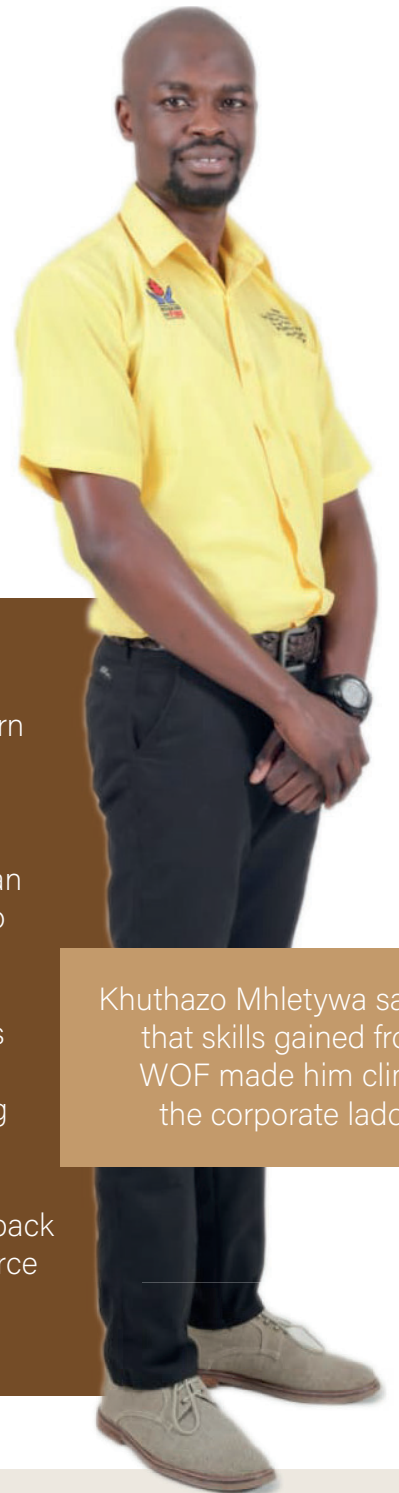
"In June 2016, I was appointed as the Human Resource Assistant in the Eastern Cape provincial office."

He said due to his hard work in that position, he was appointed as the Human Resource Practitioner for WOF Limpopo provincial office in May 2019.

"I am so proud of myself and I realize it's always good to be patient in life. Be a dreamer, aim high, and always be willing to learn."

Mhletywa got the opportunity to come back to the Eastern Cape as a Human Resource Practitioner in January this year.

Khuthazo Mhletywa says that skills gained from WOF made him climb the corporate ladder.



# MPHELA LOOKS FORWARD TO FURTHERING HIS STUDIES



Phineas Mphela, an Assistant Project Manager in Working on Fire Gauteng, was recruited as a firefighter at the Rust De Winter base, in 2010, after he completed his secondary education. He hails from Nokaneng village in Mpumalanga.

Mphela joined the programme because he did not have money to progress to a tertiary institution and he became a Crew Leader Type 2 and 1 in 2012 and Project Manager in 2016, respectively.

"I was raised by my mother, single-handedly, and she didn't have the means to provide for me any further," Mphela said.

As a result, feisty Mphela was induced to embark on a job hunt, which he confesses was not a pleasant process.

"As the firstborn son, I was expected to put food on the table and the WOF programme came to my rescue."

In 2012, Mphela was recruited into a newly opened Leeuwnfontein team. This, he said, was able to cut and sharpen his managerial skills.

One memorable moment was when he traveled with his team

to the Northern Cape in a Samil truck.

"It took us two days to arrive there and we slept on the road," Mphela recalls.

Mphela is a father of one son, who he is taking care of financially with his WOF salary.

His lowest moment came when his mother passed away, which he remembers as a tough time in his life.

"Her absence is still very real to this day and I had to do counseling sessions with social workers at home to overcome the grief."

Mphela always tries to look at the positive side though and hopes to further his career with a project management course.

Alumni Phineas Mphela.







# FROM SHE-REP TO JUNIOR SAFETY OFFICER

Back in 2011, when she was recruited as a firefighter for the LEFPA base, the young and hopeful Zanele Sedibe did not foresee that she would someday soon be a Junior Safety Officer.

The former firefighter is one of many young South Africans, who have been granted the privilege of joining the WOF Programme and being empowered with skills and qualifications to build and further careers.

"I worked as a firefighter for four years at my base before I was chosen to be a SHE-representative," Zanele says. A SHE-representative assists the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) department with matters surrounding Safety, Health and the Environment.

After being in her new position for just a month, Zanele got a lucky break when the province advertised an internal OHS administrator vacancy. She took the

chance and applied.

"I was extremely happy when I got appointed as OHS administrator for the Mpumalanga provincial office and I never looked back," Zanele says.

During that period, Working on Fire assisted Zanele to further her studies and she grabbed the opportunity with both hands. She pursued the SAMTRAC qualification at NOSA in 2018 and passed, arming herself with a much-sought after certificate in her field.

That certificate equipped her with the knowledge and skills to qualify for a promotion: Junior Safety Officer in Mpumalanga.

Zanele looks forward to continuing growing in her field and hopes to study even further. She is tremendously thankful to WOF for providing her with the foundation that kick started her career.



Zanele Sedibe is a WOF product through and through: from firefighter to Junior Safety Officer.





# YOUR DREAMS ARE VALID

"I strongly believe my action today makes my tomorrow better," KwaZulu-Natal Transport Officer, Ester Hlaki, says, a mantra the young Kwazulu Natal Transport Officer lives by.

Hlaki was recruited in 2010, at the Kokstad Base in the Eastern Cape, after having completed her matric in 2007.

The former firefighter pursued higher education by studying Human Resources at the Esayidi FET College. However, due to personal reasons, she was unable to complete her qualification.

This challenge, however, did not deter Hlaki. She fought until she got the opportunity to train and become a Type 3 Dispatcher, a position she found challenging.

Hlaki added that dealing with different people with different personalities and working night shifts, were many of the challenges she faced as a dispatcher.

However, with these challenges came great moments and Hlaki notes her first Yellow Card Training Camp at Midmar, travelling to Cape Town in 2015 to assist the Dispatch Department during the Summer Fire Season, and given the opportunity to study further with the University Of Cape Town, as many of her favourite moments

within the programme. "I got promoted to become the KwaZulu Natal Transport Officer. This position came with its own challenges, especially being a woman in a 'man's world,'" Hlaki says.

"Learning the mechanical side of all WOF vehicles was hard, but I was fortunate enough to have my predecessor, the former Transport Officer, giving me immense support and assisting me whenever I got stuck."

Hlaki added that she has learned a lot over the years, especially in the area of financial literacy. She remembers making many mistakes at the beginning of her career which she can now manage better.

Hlaki is a single mother and lives away from her daughters. It is hard being far away from them but I find solace in that they are extremely proud of me and what I do."

"I want to go back to school in 2021, to study Fleet Management because I aspire to have my own Fleet company one day."

Hlaki believes good things do not come easily, and thanks WOF and her colleagues, especially the other drivers, for inspiring her and teaching her new things every day.



KwaZulu-Natal Transport Officer, Ester Hlaki



# WOF UPLIFTS PARTICIPANT FROM FIREFIGHTER TO TRANSPORT OFFICER



"Working on Fire has equipped me with a wealth of knowledge and experience that no one will ever take away from me. I never thought I would be counted amongst the graduates in South Africa, but WOF made it possible by investing in my education."

Those are the words of Shadrack Mafokwane, the Transport Officer (TO) for WOF Limpopo.

Mafokwane never thought that joining WOF, as a firefighter in Tzaneen, in 2005, will have such a big impact on his life.

His WOF career path took a turn for the better when he was appointed as a driver in 2007. This gave him the foundation to navigate the WOF Transport Department.

"I was appointed as the provincial TO in 2014 which changed my financial status as I was suddenly able to provide for my family and my siblings," Mafokwane

says.

Mafokwane has since built a five-room house for his wife and two children.

The programme also empowered him with skills and education: he was enrolled at the University of Cape Town, where he obtained certificates in Supply Chain Management and Introduction to Business Management.

"Being a graduate earned me the respect of my family. I became a role model and a good example to my siblings as I was the first child to graduate from a university."

"I am so thankful for all WOF has done for me. I am now achieving all that I have dreamed of: I have a house, car and I am financially stable," Mafokwane concluded.



Shadrack Mafokwane is the Transport Officer in the Limpopo province.





# WOF RESTORES THE DIGNITY OF MANY SOUTH AFRICAN YOUTH



Lefu Moloi joined the Working on Fire Programme in January 2009. Prior to that, he was part of the high statistics of unemployed youths in the country.

He was first recruited as a firefighter in Zastron, Free State. He was later, in 2010, promoted to Assistant Stock Controller, which meant that he formed part of the management staff.

Moloi notes some of his most memorable moments within the programme: when he traveled to George, as this was the first time he had traveled out of the Free State province; and the first of many flights on an airplane across the country while conducting his WOF duties.

However, the highlight in his WOF journey was traveling to Cape Town, to attend his graduation at the University of Cape Town (UCT), where he obtained two qualifications in Supply Chain Management and Foundation in Business Management. These qualifications were both done through the programme.

"My short term plan is to work hard enough to be considered for a promotion because WOF has equipped me with the necessary skills that are needed for a higher position," Moloi says.



Lefu Moloi is the Assistant Stock Controller in the Free State province.

He has additionally been able to care for his parents and ensure that his child's needs are taken care of.



# PROGRAMME GAVE ME A CHANCE TO A BETTER LIFE



Bokang Malebatso began her life journey with humble beginnings, as a member of the Community Police Forum patrol streets of her township, and is now the Gauteng Stock Controller.

She was introduced to the Working on Fire programme in 2005, during a recruitment drive at the Sebokeng fire station in the Vaal.

On that day, Malebatso was recruited as a firefighter, and weeks down the line, her base was moved to Suikerbosrand Nature Reserve.

"I was unemployed for years," Malebatso says.

Malebatso joined the programme because it was an opportunity to make a living and support her family.

She received training in firefighting, computer, and stock management.

Malebatso recalls how one day a fire broke out around her base, while she had an injury and the other firefighters were out.

"I was sitting at the base with new recruits and a colleague who did go out with the team, whom I had to help to suppress that fire," Malebatso recalls.

"I am a single mother, a parent of four kids and I can now fund their education, clothe and feed them."

"This programme made me who I am today and despite many challenges, I love my job," Malebatso concluded.



Bokang Malebatso



# WORKIN ON FIRE SAW POTENTIAL IN ME

Nolukhanyo Babalaza boasts having been part of the Working on Fire programme for the past 16 years. During this time, she has climbed the ladder and has reached great heights. Currently, she serves as a provincial financial controller in the Western Cape.

Babalaza began her journey in 2003, when she was recruited as a firefighter at the Newlands base - straight from high-school.

After two years she was invited to attend a Type 2 Crew Leader course and subsequently a Crew Leader Type 1 course in 2008.

"While I was a crew leader, I pushed myself and studied for a computer certificate and obtained my driver's license," Babalaza said.

Since her grade 12 subjects were more inclined to the financial side, Babalaza was encouraged to pursue a career in finance and the company sent her on a bookkeeping course at Damelin.

Nine years later, she was appointed the first provincial finance controller in the Western Cape.

"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."

"While growing up, I wanted to be a teacher, but I could not study further due to financial constraints. Now, if I were given a chance to re-do my life, I wouldn't change anything."



Western Cape Alumni  
Nolukhanyo





# WORKING ON FIRE MADE ME A LEADER

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Today, Quehenn Grootboom is a Working on Fire Regional Managers but like many of his colleagues, he began at the bottom and had to work his way up.

He joined the program in 2008 when he was recruited into the Falsebay team. In that same year, he went for a Type 2 crew leader course and was appointed in that position. In 2012, he went for a Type 1 Crew Leader course and served as Type 1 Crew Leader until his appointment as an Assistant Regional Manager (ARM) in mid-2014.

"During my time as an ARM, I also assisted in projects within the province," Grootboom says.

In 2018, Grootboom was called upon to assume the position of acting Regional Manager for the West Coast region, and the following year, he was officially appointed Regional Manager.

"I have developed a real passion for the work that I do and I learned a lot about discipline."

"I am usually a reserved person but Working on Fire has 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 making me a leader," Grootboom concluded.



Western Cape Alumni  
Quehenn





# FROM FIREFIGHTER TO PROVINCIAL ADMIN CONTROLLER

The Working on Fire programme continues to develop, promote, and support their women employees and Veronica Sereo is one such example.

Sereo is a former fighter from the North West Boskop team. She was recruited by WOF in August 2010 and has gone through the ranks to where she is today.

Her work ethic has allowed her to work as a SHE-Representative and First Aider at base level in her team. Because of her hard work and determination, she was appointed at the provincial level as the Admin Assistant.

Sereo was later promoted to her current position as an Admin Controller for the North West provincial office.

"I thank WOF for believing in me and giving me the opportunity to grow. Today, I am able to put food on the table for my children and raise them as a single parent."

"I would like to encourage other women to not give up in life: I am living proof that anything is possible," Sereo concluded.



Veronica Sereo is a former firefighter who is now Provincial Admin Controller.



# PASSIONATE ABOUT COMMUNITY WORK

Glodinah Mofokeng is the current Community Fire Awareness Training Officer (CFAO) in the Free State, but she admits that her journey up the ladder has been a hard and a long one.

Her journey began, as a firefighter, at the Frankfort base in 2007. She was later, in 2012, promoted to an Occupational Health and Safety Administrator. She was then promoted again to the position she currently holds.

While still a firefighter, Mofokeng was able to obtain a Diploma in Computer Literacy and complete various courses, which include structural firefighting 1 and 2 and Hazmat. In addition to that, she was able to get her driver's license, which opened doors for her to be



promoted into management level. Mofokeng was able to care for her family financially and purchase her first car when she was promoted to the CFAO position.

"My purpose in life is to touch people's lives in a motivational and positive way, whilst uplifting them and giving them hope," Mofokeng says.

"I have managed to live up to this when I became CFAO because working in communities is where I belong and this position serves this purpose very well."

Mofokeng plans to study further and hopefully become a Community Development Worker or a Social Worker who serves the society as a whole.

Glodinah Mofokeng is the Free State Fire Awareness Training Officer.