

Mhinti Pato of Sakhisizwe YDP

 By [Ilse van den Berg](#)

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A mother of three, a small business owner, and hands-on involved in uplifting the youth through the Sakhisizwe Youth Development Programme (YDP), Mhinti Pato is basically the South African version of Wonder Woman.



Mhinti Pato of Sakhisizwe YDP.

Sakhisizwe YDP is an after-school programme in Imizamo Yethu township in Hout Bay that offers young people (from grade seven up to university students) a place to learn practical life skills through sport, academics, creativity, spirituality, and, probably most importantly, through their mentee-mentor relationships. The programme aims to make sure young people stay in school and graduate, while being prepared to succeed in their next phase of life.



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“Sakhisizwe YDP is an extension of Ikhaya le Themba, a project I’ve worked for for eight years as a community worker. In 2012, Ikhaya le Themba decided that they only wanted to focus on kids from grade one to grade six. So I saw all these young people growing up and then I had to let them go after grade six. In 2014, Ikaya started a weekly youth Friday night

function which mainly gave the older kids the opportunity to explore their spiritual life. That went on for about two years and then in 2016, while I was still working at Ikhaya and assisting on Friday nights, I received mentorship to start running an after-school programme for the older kids offering homework help, extra curricular activities, and camps. So I met with the students from Monday to Friday as well as on Friday nights,” she recalls.



Sakhisizwe YDP reading programme.

That same year, Ikhaya decided to formalise the youth programme and Sakhisizwe was born, with Pato at the helm.

Gangsterism, substance abuse, crime, teen pregnancy, and HIV are some of the challenges the youth face. The programme gives these students not only a community with mentors who help them with their education and provide structure and discipline they may lack at home, but an appealing, constructive, fun alternative to hanging out on the streets.



#UnsungHeroes: Cornel Viljoen of A21

Ilse van den Berg 16 Apr 2020



We are building

The word “sakhisizwe” means “we are building” and Pato believes that together we are building our nation. “So much good can come out of us investing in our next generation. They are our future leaders,” she explains.

Pato’s mission is to develop and empower young people holistically with life skills that will help them to make wise decisions. Through Sakhisizwe YDP, they are able to unleash their potential to live life to the fullest.



Sakhisizwe YDP reading programme.

Says Pato: “I get inspired when I see some of the kids I’ve worked with since they were in grade one. Some of them are now finishing grade 12, some are studying further at college, and others are already working. It’s wonderful to see that something good is coming out of my time invested in these children. Another thing that motivates me is the appreciation I get not only from the youth, but also from the staff and parents. So I don’t ever feel like I’m just doing it for the sake of doing it, but I’m making a difference and people are appreciating it.”



#UnsungHeroes: Asanda Jonga of Grace Vision

Ilse van den Berg 8 Apr 2020



“There are so many children’s stories that inspire me. I look at a boy, for example, who we’ve known since he was in grade four... He graduated from grade seven at Ikhaya, came back to our programme as a highschooler, and is now one of our facilitators and mentoring some of our young boys. At the same time, he is studying hospitality, as well as becoming an adventure tour guide!”



Kids busy with life skill session.

What is most important for Pato is that they aren’t just “running a programme” but really building lifelong relationships with the youth. This is evident in the fact that so many of their ex-students are still involved in the programme as volunteers, even if they are university students or young working adults.

“When I see them and their intention to now give back, I feel deeply encouraged,” she says.



#UnsungHeroes: Migail and Morgan de Klerk of Rural Reach

Ilse van den Berg 1 Apr 2020



All about upskilling

One thing Pato is proud of is recently receiving her community development degree. “When I finally finished my degree, it encouraged my students because they saw that I was able to do it while being a mom, a wife, and still being involved in Sakhisizwe YDP,” Pato shares.

Apart from that, she also has her own tourism business and has managed to get funding for some of the youth to be uplifted and trained as tour guides so that they can earn an extra income as tour guides.



Netball practice

“I always tell them that you can’t just rely on one salary if you really want to break out of the poverty cycle. You have to continuously upskill yourself and use your free time wisely. I see my students doing that, constantly pushing themselves - whether that means studying in the morning, working at Sakhisizwe in the afternoon, and then doing a township tour on the weekend to earn some extra income... It’s not something they learn in school, it’s something they have to see someone model and then they strive to do the same,” she says.

Pato says that she is so thankful for all the partnerships and collaborations they have had over the years. “Partnership is what has sustained us,” she says.

For more information, go to www.sakhisizweydp.com.

ABOUT ILSE VAN DEN BERG

Ilse is a freelance journalist and editor with a passion for people & their stories (check out Passing Stories). She is also the editor of Go & Travel, a platform connecting all the stakeholders in the travel & tourism industry. You can check out her work here and here. Contact Ilse through her website here.

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