

# Project Lungisela prepares youth for the future

According to a study done in 2011 by the National Youth Development Agency, over 70% of young people in South Africa between the ages of 18 and 24 are not in formal education or employment.



Young people who have grown up in children's homes of marginalised communities in particular, face challenges in moving positively towards adulthood. As state funding only makes provision for children up to the age of 18 (with only some exceptions), many children needing to leave care at this point face some of the toughest challenges. Many of these young people do not have family support and have limited education and are expected to turn into instant adults at the age of 18 years.

Project Lungisela, a youth leaving care programme in Khayelitsha, is one of very few programmes in the Western Cape that assists young people who have grown up in state care to transition positively towards adulthood.

## Support to reach full potential

Established in 2006 by the non-profit organisation, Mamelani Projects, the initiative offers these young men, many of whom have at some point in their lives lived on the street, the support necessary for them to reach their full potential once they have left care. This is done through a creative experiential life skills process, offering education advice and funding as well as career guidance through a programme that starts one year before turning 18.

"Children's homes simply cannot cope with the sheer volume of children in need and care workers are not trained to provide for the specific needs of children leaving state care. Basic skills like managing money, cooking or doing washing are therefore not taught. Many care-leavers also have not completed their education and without any employment prospects, turn to a life on the street supported by crime and gangsterism," said Carly Tanur founding director of Mamelani Projects.

It is therefore no surprise that youth between the ages 14 and 25 represent 35% of the total prison population in South Africa and offenders are mostly young men.

## Very few return to streets

Project Lungisela, which means "to prepare" offers boys of Elukhuselweni Children's Home in Khayelitsha life skills training, food, a place to stay while studying. It also assists them with practicalities such as getting an identity document, compiling a CV and opening a bank account. In 2011 the programme assisted more than 50 young men with skills development, individual mentoring and job placement.

Since the project's inception, less than 10% of care leavers who graduated from the programme have returned to the streets. One such care-leaver, Luvuyo, who now works at Knead bakery, acts as an inspirational mentor to other young men in the programme by sharing how he has overcome the challenges he faced. "This is the only space where my voice is heard and my experiences have value. Being able to support and mentor somebody else makes me feel good and gives me dignity," said Luvuyo.

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