

Ain't no mountain high enough

By [Nicci Botha](#)

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A group of Wits medical students will be tackling the highest peak in Africa to bring smiles to the faces of some very special children.



The Kilimanjaro Challenge 2014 team at the summit

The [Wits Students' Surgical Society](#) is putting together a team of climbers to take on Mount Kilimanjaro in the hope of raising R750,000 for [The Smile Foundation](#). The money raised will go towards the costs of corrective surgery for South African children with facial abnormalities.

Hoping to make more smiles

"Most people take a friendly smile for granted, but for these children it is a daily social challenge. By challenging medical students to face something as daunting as summiting Mount Kilimanjaro in support of The Smile Foundation, we hope to show some of these children that we are willing to face a challenge in support of their daily challenges. We hope to make more smiles," says Emma Wessels, project coordinator: Kilimanjaro Challenge 2016.

This year's challenge follows in the footsteps of fundraising efforts in 2014, where a group of 17 medical students from the society raised R600,000 by climbing Mount Kilimanjaro and participating in the Momentum 94.7 Cycle Challenge.

As a result, [two children](#) who suffered from facial paralysis, due to a condition called Moebius syndrome, underwent reconstructive surgery last year.

Bigger and better

"The success of that event showed the positive effect this type of project can have. Learning from the previous project, we hope to make this project bigger and better. We would like our awareness campaign to reach further and our contribution to the community to be even bigger."

"We would like to help as many children as we can. The cost of the surgeries and all the factors that go along with it depends on the type of procedures that are needed. It is thus difficult to predict how many children will be helped," she explains.

Mental challenge

The society aims to assemble a team of 20 climbers to summit the 5,895m peak from 3 to 10 December 2016. The Kilimanjaro Challenge 2016 will be led by Heinrich Ungerer, guide and adventure professional from the Adventure Dynamics International climbing company.

“We have invited Wits medical students to be a part of the team and we will do a lot of group practice sessions. A lot of the summit is a mental challenge, so creating supportive relationships between the climbers is also extremely important,” says Wessels.

Project launch

The project was launched on 3 May, with speakers including Sean Disney, marketing director of Adventure Dynamics International, who is the first South African to complete the grand slam, which refers to summitting the seven highest mountains in the world, as well as skiing to the North and South Poles; Hedley Lewis, executive director of the Smile Foundation and Graeme Moore, project leader of the Kilimanjaro Challenge 2014, who shared his team’s experience of the challenge.

Anyone who would like to become a part of the project through donations or other means can contact the society on witssurgicalsociety@gmail.com

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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