

Thato Kgatlhanye

"I see opportunity in the hands of young people. And it's waiting for us to take it and run with it
- Thato Kgatlhanye.



[click to enlarge](#)

Kgatlhanye has been selected for *21 Icons South Africa Season 3* as an inspiring social entrepreneur and humanitarian who stands as an example of how with tenacity and determination anyone can overcome great odds and find solutions to address South Africa's social issues.

The 22-year-old who hails from the small town of Mogwase, just outside of Rustenburg, had big dreams from a young age. She attributes her nature to serve others to her mother, who is a healthcare worker, and her entrepreneurial spirit to her father, who runs a successful taxi business.

Through the establishment of the non-profit organisation, Repurpose Schoolbags, she has made a sustainable contribution to the environment by using reinforced plastic shopping bags to create recycled school bags for disadvantaged learners thereby empowering multitudes of lesser-resourced learners across South Africa.

Aimed at children in rural communities, the bags serve to waterproof their books during the rainy seasons. The bags are fitted with retro-reflective material that improves the bag's visibility ensuring child-safety.

It also features a solar power point that enables schoolchildren living in households with limited access to electricity to use the bags as an energy source to read, study and do their homework, thereby eliminating the danger of shack fires caused by paraffin lamps.

She says, "It's a child's way of having dignity, because a lot of the children that we gift these bags to don't even have a school bag. From having to carry their schoolbooks in a plastic bag or under their jersey, they now have a school bag, and that's big."

Kgatlhanye continues, "What the bags represent for the kids is a way of looking at themselves. It might seem like I am nothing but I am something. Imagine a plastic bag. No one really looks at it and thinks, wow. But if someone else comes along, picks it up, looks at it, and sees something different...that could be you

During a portrait sitting, Kgatlhanye tells Van Wyk about the importance of innovation and the idea that shared humanity is more important than anything else. She adds, "You can't serve the community, you can

serve people according to their passport or what country you are in, if you truly want to serve, it will be to a human being."

About the portrait

For the portrait '*Entrepreneur*' which will appear digitally on the Monday after her short-film is released, Vai Wyk describes the visual elements, "Along the branches of a large, old tree located in Cape Town's Klein Constantia, multiple solar powered lights in glass jars are hung. Kgathanye stands strong at the foot of the tree, one of her innovative schoolbags in hand. The portrait is a literal representation of her work with Repurpose Schoolbags while also referencing her illumination of pressing social issues facing the rural child."

View the video

About 21 Icons Season 3

The short film-series documents the conversations between Gary Van Wyk as the photographer and filmmaker and the icons. Each short film provides insight into both the subject and photographer's creative approach to the portrait.

Behind each portrait lies a carefully planned concept that captures not only the essence of each icon visually, but also in spirit and in terms of their unique legacy.

Season three of 21 ICONS South Africa is proudly sponsored by Mercedes-Benz South Africa.

Social media:

21 Icons engages with the public through:

Twitter: [@21Icons](https://twitter.com/@21Icons)

Website: <http://www.21icons.com>

Mobisite: www.21icons.com

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/21Icons>

Pinterest: <http://www.pinterest.com/21ICONS/>

iTunes App Store: <http://tinyurl.com/lf3cfzm>

Google Play: <http://tinyurl.com/ovtcy45>

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>