

True upliftment: A full circle story

By [Leigh Andrews](#), issued by [SAICA](#)

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Here's how the accountancy profession's Thuthuka initiatives, of which sponsorship of the South African Mathematics Olympiad is but one, changed the life of this young South African by unearthing his mathematical gift.



Musa Ndlovu's story is an inspiring one. It's the full circle story of a newly qualified chartered accountant (CA[SA]), who relocated just weeks ago to pursue an exciting career opportunity. Rewinding the hands of time, he was also the recipient of the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants' (SAICA's) Thuthuka Bursary Fund after his successful participation in the SA Maths Olympiad (SAMO), which SAICA has sponsored for a number of year. Because of the lift this gave him, Musa has founded his own upliftment circle with the Dyondzo Phambili Foundation to help other bright stars align with the right bursary opportunity. Here's how SAICA's Thuthuka initiatives, of which sponsorship of the SAMO is but one, changed the life of this young South African by unearthing his mathematical gift.

Recapping the basics since our [previous catch-up with Musa](#), when he was an aspiring accountant about to write the second SAICA board exam, he shares that the outcome was unfavourable on his first attempt in November 2017. It was Musa's first experience of failing in his academic life and he says it was almost too much to take in, as that second SAICA board exam is the last step before qualifying as a CA(SA).

But, drawing on his strength of encouraging others to keep going despite the setbacks they face, he realised this was an opportunity to practice what he preaches – giving up should never be an option. So Musa wrote the exam again a year later, in November 2018, and passed. Shortly thereafter, he signed-off his SAICA training contract with Nexia SAB&T where he had completed his articles in the audit environment and acquired his CA(SA) designation in January 2019.

Immediately after qualifying, Musa was employed as an Audit Manager at BDO Port Elizabeth, but just three months in he was offered an appealing opportunity by international company, Thales South Africa Systems. And so, Musa took the plunge and relocated across the country. He's now working as a financial engineer with Thales, enjoying the new learning curve in turning his focus to bids.

Bidding for success as a budding mathematician

Looking back over his journey thus far, Musa says taking part in SAMO was the starting block of his success, but while he knew he was good with numbers, he mainly participated as a result of peer pressure – the good kind.

"When I started Grade 10, my whole class was talking about the Maths Olympiad and how important it was to join the competition, as it was a chance to challenge yourself and compete with other learners across the country, while also building a good profile for bursary applications. I shrugged and applied when the others applied."

Thanks goodness he did, as that's when Musa's mathematical skill was first discovered. Of his school's entrants, only two – including Musa – qualified for the second round, from which he was selected to participate in the SAMO training programme. Musa used the programme and previous questions to prepare. As he lived far from school he would get in early and use those extra minutes in the mornings to either study or go through the Olympiad material.

The rest is history, but it wasn't plain sailing. Musa recalls how he enrolled at the University of Pretoria but knew that his

parents couldn't afford to pay for his fees. When he saw the statement of fees that he would need to pay, he called both parents in tears, worried about where they would get the money, especially as his brother was also studying at the time. Stuck between a metaphorical rock and a hard place, Musa knew he wouldn't qualify for NSFAS assistance as his family falls into the 'missing middle' that earns too much for assistance but too little to cover the costs themselves.

Knowing that a bursary was his only option, Musa reached out to Ellie Olivier, Operations Manager for the South African Mathematics Foundation who he met while taking part in the SAMO. It was Ellie who urged him to apply for SAICA's Thuthuka Bursary Fund.

Explaining the tangible changes the Thuthuka Bursary made to his life, Musa says, "I am who I am today because of the Thuthuka Bursary Fund. Thuthuka not only assisted with funding my studies but also with the wrap-around guidance of support programmes and mentorship programmes."

Musa has since come full circle in helping others do the same by working with a non-profit organisation aimed at offering equal opportunities to those lacking the information and resources to make those important life decisions.

Closing the education and opportunity gap

He says, "Having grown up in a rural village, with the privilege of having attended both public and private schools, I understand there's a huge information gap between rural and urban schools, which affects career choices, competitiveness in bursary interviews, competitiveness in tertiary interviews, and the rate of grade 12 learners who actually start and complete the tertiary and funding (NSFAS) application process."

As a result, Musa serves as financial officer for the Giyani-based Dyondzo Phambili Foundation, an NPO funded by its directors and through public donations, which closes the gap and further promotes education and upgrades human development in three ways:

1. Physically visiting rural communities to give a step-by-step guide to accessing post-schooling opportunities in South Africa;
2. Running a June school holidays programme at their adopted schools once university applications have opened, to talk to learners about their different career options; and
3. Assisting learners during these visits by bringing along computer and internet facilities to assist them in applying for tertiary admission, bursaries and NSFAS, while also capturing all the necessary documents.

Shifting focus to speak to the rest of the industry, Musa says working toward meeting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and associated targets benefits the CA profession overall beyond just acting in the public's interest because as the SDGs are in turn aligned with the country's National Development Plan (NDP), if CA(SA)s are to be of national value, they must be the key human resources towards achieving the NDP and ultimately the SDGs.

Musa says SAICA is also in the process of revising entry level competencies in 'CA2025'. These competencies will now speak to CA(SA)s who naturally embrace sustainability, as the world is changing at an increasing rate so doing so helps CA(SA)s become professionally relevant and resilient in the future.

Musa also talk at schools and hopes to inspire learners that they can become anything they want to. Explaining the hard work and personal dedication needed to succeed, Musa says. "The road to realising the CA(SA) dream can either be short or long, depending on the hard work and dedication you put into achieving the dream. I always say that if such a thing exists, the equation to success equals purpose lived on will, dedication, passion and hard work."

There's no better example of this than Musa himself.

Born with a minor physical disability, which makes his success all the more inspiring, Musa steered clear of sports at school and his 'slow hands' mean that he writes and types slower than the average person, which slightly affects his work.

But he hasn't let this stand in his way and works a few extra hours to catch up and be at the same level as his peers.

Next circle – crop circles and circling success

Looking to the future, Musa wants to go full circle again, as he dreams of working on his family's land back home in Giyani, Limpopo. There are crops at the moment, which flourish during the rainy season, but he plans to make it a 'proper' farm. Further proof of Musa's determination to succeed. We look forward to watching his further career successes.

Speaking of helping others succeed, Musa concludes that obtaining financial support from third parties for the Dyondzo Phambili Foundation has proven a bit of a challenge. Contact him on 071 003 7860 or email dyondzophambili@gmail.com for further information.

Musa beats the numbers to follow accounting dream

Cherylee Hannam

REGARDLESS of the obstacles he had to overcome, Musa Ndlovu stayed focused and worked hard to achieve his goal of becoming a chartered accountant.

The 22-year-old from Ngove in Giyani loves mathematics and he enjoys working with numbers. His love and passion for numbers inspired him to start his own business, selling pre-paid electricity, airtime and cold drinks, when he was in Gr 7. His business flourished, doing so well that he was able to pay his university deposit.

Even though he had enough to pay the deposit, Ndlovu's parents did not have the money to pay for his tertiary education.

In 2012 he enrolled for an undergraduate degree at the University of Pretoria and he was accepted into the Actuarial Studies programme and into the BComm Accounting stream, unfortunately his parents could not afford to pay for his studies.

Ndlovu's Gr 12 results were good, but he did not qualify for a bursary from the National Students Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS).

"I was part of the majority of students whose parents are considered rich in terms of NSFAS, yet who cannot afford to send their children to university. In 2011 I participated in the Maths Olympiad and took second place and was awarded Best African Learner in the Maths Olympiad that year.

"It is during this time that I met Ellie Oliver, the Operations Manager of the South African Mathematics Foundation (SAMP).

"After all efforts to garner enough money to pay for my university fees failed, I called Ellie for help and he helped me apply for a Thuthuka Bursary Fund in accounting.

"My application was successful and I was able to attend university and complete my studies," Ndlovu said.

Ndlovu obtained his honours degree in accounting last year and he is currently a trainee accountant at a company in Centurion.

His next hurdle is to write his South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA) professional exam in November next year.

"I want to complete my training and build my career from there.

"I would ultimately like to return home and become a role model for the youth in the community I grew up in.

"I want to motivate the youth not to give up on their dreams because I believe you can become anything you want to as long as you are willing to work hard towards your goal.

"You must be determined, disciplined and have a positive attitude towards reaching your goal because at the end of the day it is all up to you if you are going to make it or not," Ndlovu explained.

The second born of three children says to relax he follows the news, politics and sometimes watches soccer.

"I am now looking for a school I can assist with mathematics and accounting," he said.

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Musa Ndlovu, aspiring chartered accountant.
Photo: Supplied

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