

Bridging People and Places



Annual Report 2024



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Foreword

Road infrastructure, such as the N3 Toll Route, is essential to the South African economy, connecting people and places, facilitating commerce, and promoting growth.

As the link between South Africa's industrial heartland and Africa's largest port in Durban, N3 Toll Concession (N3TC) is acutely aware of the vitally important role that the N3 Toll Route plays in the stimulation of enterprise development, economic activity, social cohesion, community resilience, and growth along the route.

Although safety, convenience and mobility encapsulates the crux of our corporate identity, N3TC recognises that no sector of society can exist in a vacuum. We recognise that we are interdependent and that cooperation and collaboration are key to achieving meaningful transformation and thus, we are equally dedicated to partnering with communities along the route to create a lasting social impact.

With this in mind, N3TC, now in its 25th year of operation, adopted a comprehensive community investment programme, called Touching Lives, which aims to make an impactful and sustainable contribution to people's lives.



Touching Lives allows us to work with qualified partners to create lasting value in the communities along the N3 Toll Route through support of early childhood development programmes for children from underprivileged communities; educational support to students and learners; aid for assisted living safe havens for people with physical or mental disabilities; improved access to quality primary healthcare for truckers and vulnerable individuals; support for sustainable environmental programmes; and assistance of various food security initiatives.

These are just some of the projects that form part of the Touching Lives programme and help N3TC to maintain connection with the people travelling or residing along the N3 Toll Route. These connections – our intangible assets – come to life in the projects and communities featured in this book. We invite you to share in their stories.

Neil Tolmie
CEO





TOUCHING LIVES



“Interdependence ought to be as much the ideal of man as self-sufficiency. Man is a social being.” - Mahatma Gandhi



N3TC

Index

Foreword

Map

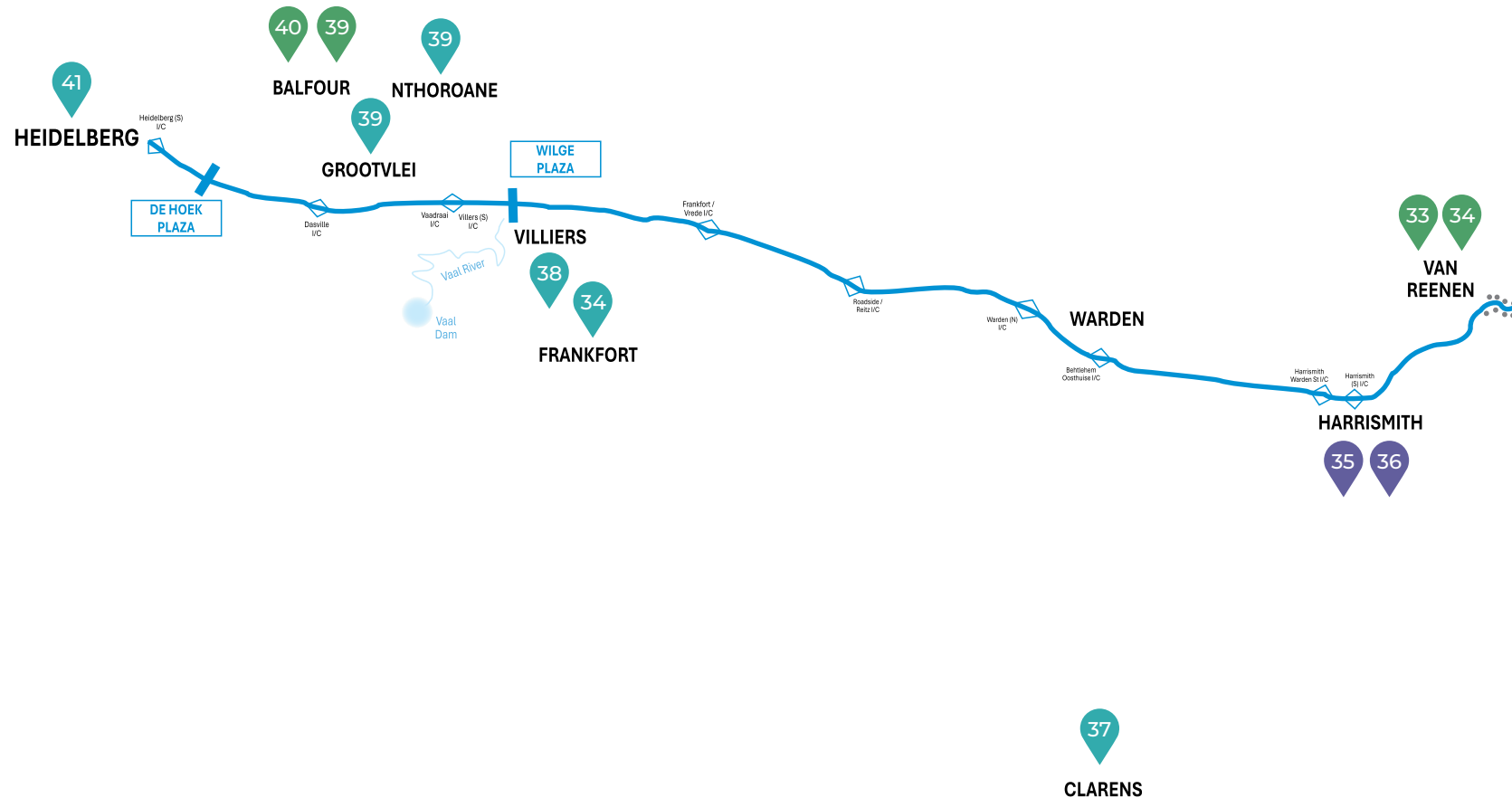
Touching Lives 2024 Overview 8

1. N3TC Tertiary Bursary Programme	12
2. N3TC Learnership Programme	13
3. St Mary's Interactive Learning Experience	14
4. Endangered Wildlife Trust	17
5. Trucking Wellness	23
6. BirdLife SA	25
7. PROTEC Pietermaritzburg Academy	29
8. Project Gateway	32
9. iThemba Projects	35
10. Singakwenza	40
11. Funda Nenja	46
12. Music Voyage	49
13. Crystal Springs Primary School	51
14. Family Literacy Project	52
15. Pevensey Place	55
16. N3TC Drak Challenge	56
17. Lions River Primary School	58
18. Curry's Post Educational Trust	59
19. Michaelhouse Community Partnership Trust	61
20. Midlands Community College	63
21. KwaZulu-Natal Crane Foundation	65
22. Midlands Meander Emerging Artist Project	69
23. Babanentse Primary Co-Operative	72
24. Senzakahle 1 Primary Co-Operative	73
25. Reel Life	74
26. 1000 Paws Walk for SPCA	77
27. EnviroLearn	79
28. Treverton College	83
29. St David's Diocesan School	84
30. Fundisisizwe	85
31. Drakensberg Boys Choir School	88
32. Royal Drakensberg Education Trust	90
33. N3TC Khanyisile Community Trust	93
34. Community Medical Services & Volunteer Rescue Teams	94
35. Free State Care in Action	96
36. Harrismith Primary School	97
37. SANParks Honorary Rangers	98
38. Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa	100
39. Topsy Foundation	103
40. Sunfield Home Fortuna	105
41. Meals on Wheels Cycle Challenge	107

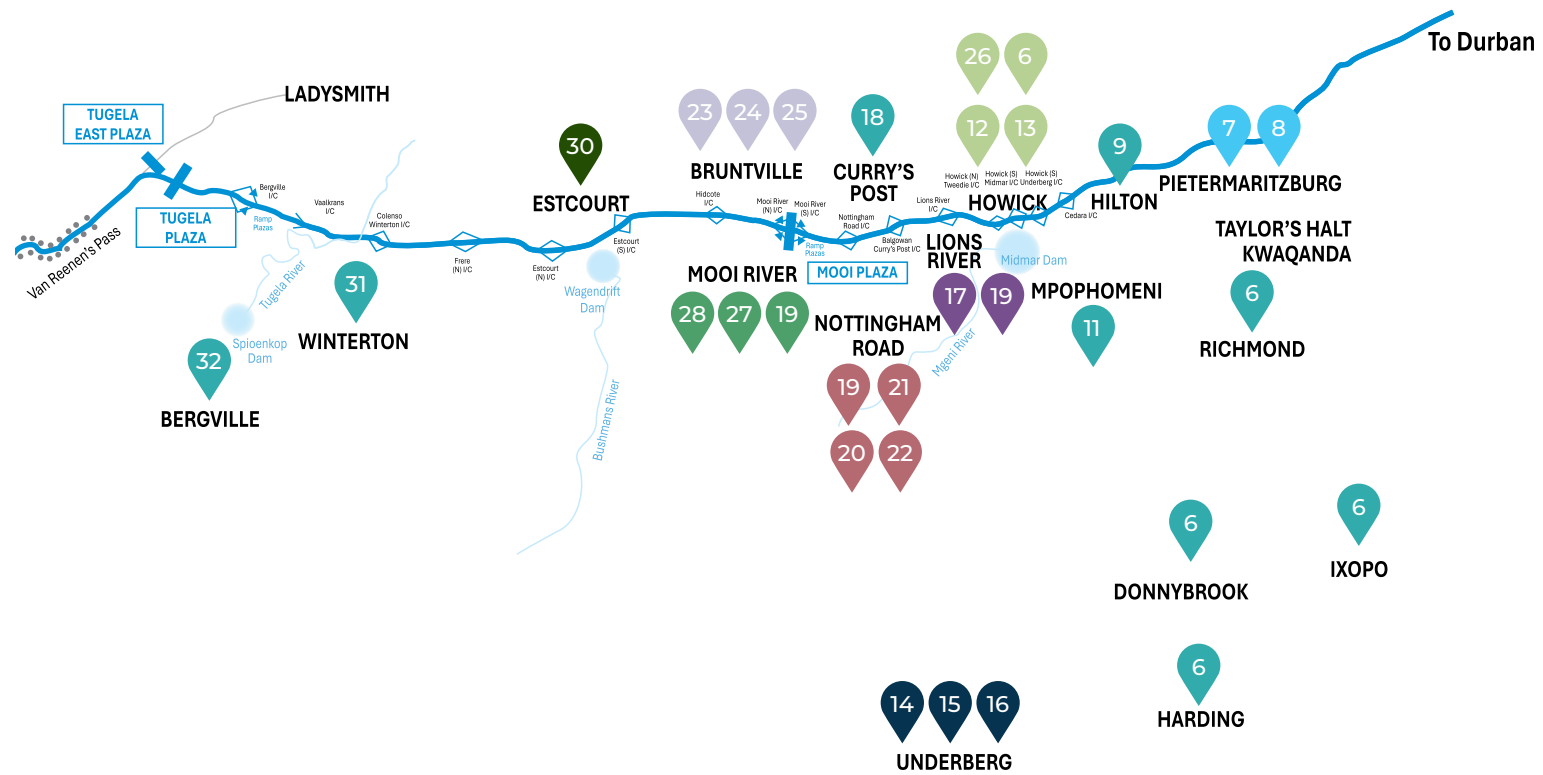
Map

N3 CORRIDOR

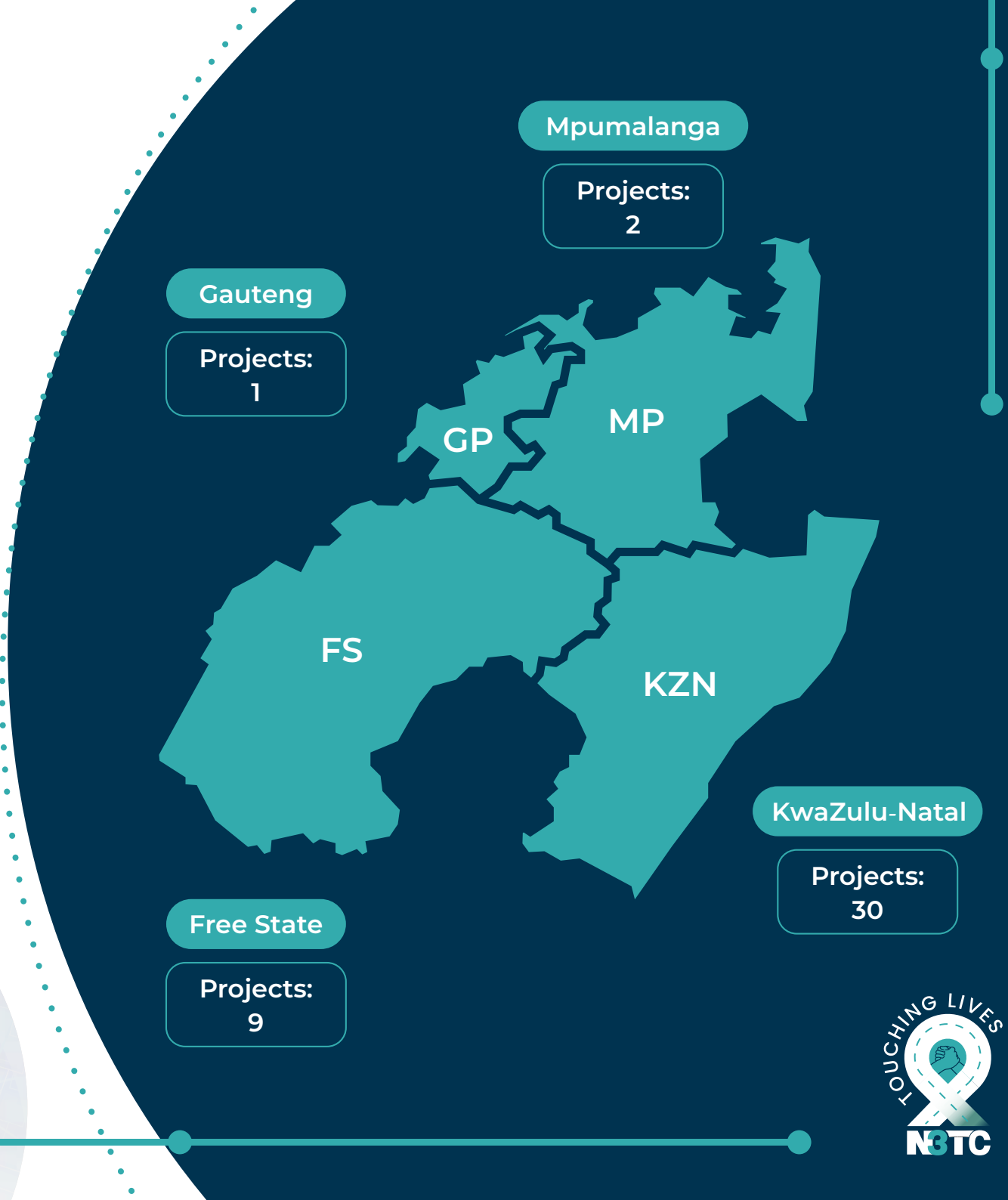
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 10



29
GREYTOWN



Project Distribution



Beneficiaries Supported

- 63 775 beneficiaries
- 16% disabled
- 50/50 gender split

■ Female
■ Male

Adults: 42%

Adults: 58%

Children: 52%

Children: 48%

Youth: 57%

Youth: 43%

Employment Opportunities Created

- 46% permanent
- 67% women
- 11% disabled
- 36% youth

Permanent

Female, 332

Volunteer

Female, 235

Male, 152

Male, 123

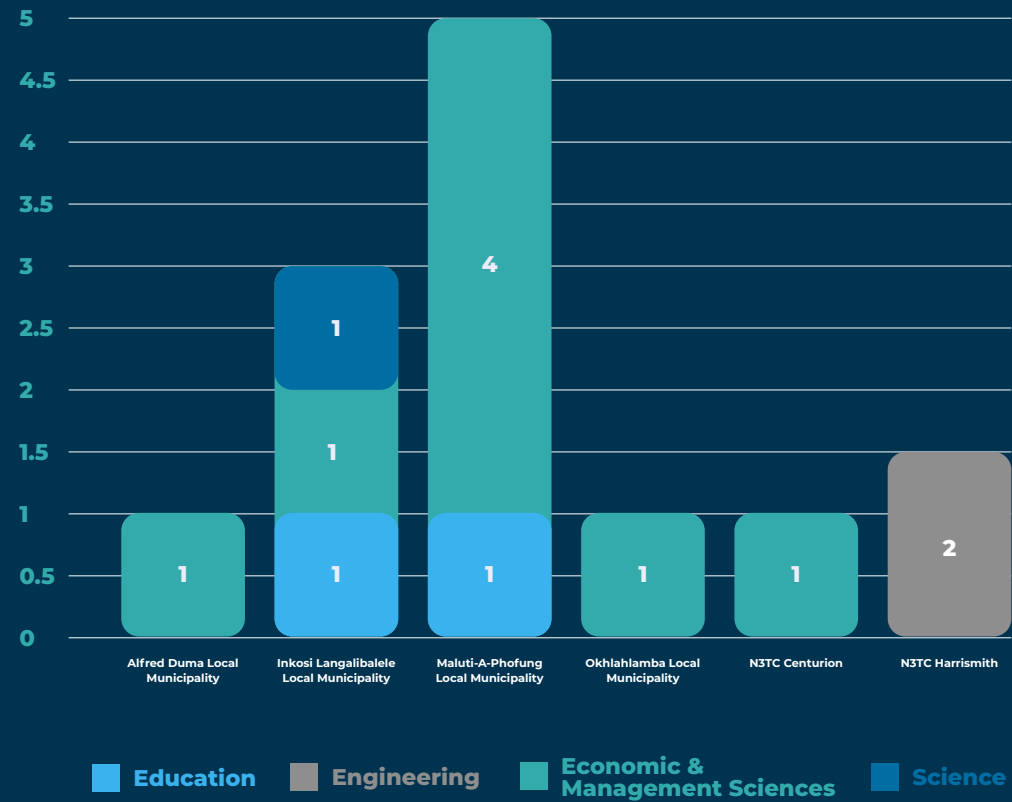
Temporary

Female, 98

Male, 56

**996
Jobs**

Tertiary Bursaries Awarded



N3TC Tertiary Bursary Programme

Education underpins South Africa's economic and political stability. A solid educational footing not only benefits individuals but also provides the spark to transform communities and societies. In response to some of the challenges and lack of opportunities often faced by rural communities, an important aspect of the N3TC's Touching Lives programme includes the provision of further education and training bursaries to qualifying recipients who have demonstrated their academic achievements, determination, and potential.

Bursary applicants are either in the third or fourth year of their academic programme or enrolled for a post-graduate degree at any of the recognised South African tertiary institutions in one of the following fields of study: Civil Engineering; Economics and Finance; Accounting; Business Management; Marketing; Information Technology; or Maths and Science Teaching.

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."
- Nelson Mandela



Prospective bursary students apply through their local Public Liaison Committees (PLCs) which are established in the following local municipality districts: uMngeni; Mpofana; iNkosi Langalibalele; Alfred Duma; Okhahlamba; Maluti-a-Phofung; Phumelela; Mafube; or Dipaleseng. Thus, all successful applicants hail from municipalities along the N3 Toll Route.

Bursary beneficiaries are required to consistently maintain an average of 60% or above.

Various mentorship programmes are implemented to support them, including self-empowerment and mental health services, financial planning assistance, and work readiness guidance.

During 2024, N3TC funded 11 bursary students at various recognised tertiary institutions throughout South Africa. The majority of these students (7) pursued Economic and Management Sciences degrees. Two students continued their Engineering studies, while one student was enrolled for a Science qualification, and another to do an Education degree.

N3TC Learnership Programme

In 2024, N3TC funded two students with disabilities who successfully completed their NQF Level 3 qualifications. Additionally, new learnership opportunities were granted to six more students, enabling them to pursue NQF Level 4 qualifications, which are anticipated to be obtained in 2025.

N3TC's skills development learnership programmes were administered by Training Force and the Technical Training Institute of South Africa (Techtisa), offering innovative B-BBEE solutions through a tripartite partnership involving the student, the institution, and the corporate funder. This collaboration provides learners with the opportunity to gain work experience and earn an income while contributing to the B-BBEE scorecard of both the institution and the client.

N3TC's learnership programmes comply fully with all relevant Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA) requirements.



S.M.I.L.E

St Mary's Interactive Learning Experience

Extending S.M.I.L.E.(s) along the N3 Toll Route

The St Mary's Interactive Learning Experience (S.M.I.L.E) began in 1991 in response to the urgent need across South Africa to improve educators' teaching skills and develop the skills of learners where English is being taught as a Home Language subject.

English is not the mother tongue of most learners studying English as a Home Language in South African schools, and they often struggle to meet the required standard. This challenge is exacerbated by many teachers not being English home language speakers either.



Updated Grades 10 and Grade 11 English Home Language, and Updated Grade 8 English First Additional Language Piloting Programmes

3

N3 Corridor

ONE TEACHER ONE TEXTBOOK MANY LEARNERS

With the motto "One Teacher One Textbook Many Learners", S.M.I.L.E endeavours to help learners and teachers through hands-on teacher training and support in primary and high schools by:

- ✓ Developing and distributing CAPS-approved English First Additional Learning and Teaching Support Materials (e.g., learners' books, readers, and teacher guides)
- ✓ Developing and distributing CAPS-aligned English Home Language learning and teaching support materials
- ✓ Conducting skills workshops for high school teachers on Further Education and Training (FET) literature, essay writing, lesson planning, and comprehension strategies for learners

In 2024, S.M.I.L.E. expanded its English Home Language Piloting Programme to include English as a First Additional Language (FAL) at the Grade 8 level, while continuing to provide schools with relevant, social media-designed materials to stimulate Grades 7 to 12 teachers and learners across all nine provinces, including schools on the N3 Corridor.

More schools, learners and teachers

The English Home Language Piloting Programme has become increasingly popular with an unexpected surge of new high schools from communities along the N3 Toll Route joining the projects.

Thanks to the funding received from N3TC, S.M.I.L.E. onboarded a new school in Pietermaritzburg in 2024 and funded the distribution of a further 122 learner books and four teacher guides.

Teachers from an additional four new high schools (with 1 438 Grades 10 and 11 Learners, in 23 Grades 10 and 11 classes) also benefited from updated English Home Language materials. Additionally, existing N3TC-supported high schools that requested to join the Updated Grades 10 and 11 English Home Language Piloting Programme in 2024 had even more learners than initially anticipated.



"The expansion and growth of the N3TC English Language Piloting Programmes, which cover Grades 7 to 12 for English as a Home Language, and Grade 8 for English as a First Additional Language along the N3 Corridor, have been very motivating. It reinforces the value schools place on this initiative.

We are indebted to the N3TC Touching Lives Programme for contributing to S.M.I.L.E.'s One Teacher One Textbook Many Learners Initiative. Your support is making a tangible difference to thousands of learners on their educational journey," says Daniela Brown, national director of S.M.I.L.E..

N3TC English Language Piloting Programme


The N3TC English Language Piloting Programme focuses on three areas:

1. Extension of updated Grades 10 and 11 English Home Language Programme

Learners from new high schools that joined the N3TC-supported programme in 2024, and those from partner-schools who still only had older learner books at their disposal, all received the updated Grades 10 and 11 English Home Language materials. Six current N3TC-supported high schools received:

447 
updated Grade 10
English Home Language
Learner Books

1100 
updated Grade 11
English Home Language
Learner Books

27 
updated Grade 10
and 11 Teacher
Guides

2. Introduction of updated Grade 8 English First Additional Language Piloting Programme

In March 2024, S.M.I.L.E. introduced its new updated Grade 8 English First Additional Language Learners Book and Teacher Guide to high schools across South Africa. Along the N3 Corridor, the updated Grade 8 English First Additional Language materials reached:

5 
High
Schools

285 
Grade 8
Learners

8 
Grade 8
Teachers

3. Expansion of N3TC English Language Piloting Programme along the N3 Corridor

The continued expansion of N3TC's S.M.I.L.E. English Home Language Piloting Programme across all Grades of new primary and high schools along the N3 Toll Route is an exciting development.



Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT)

Drakensberg Grasslands, Wetlands and Communities Project



South Africa's Drakensberg mountains are as environmentally important as they are imposing. The partnership between the EWT and N3TC has placed the protection of this area at the top of its agenda.

4

N3 Corridor

A collaborative partnership

The Drakensberg mountains are so much more than just a beautiful vista for travellers on the N3 Toll Route.

As a World Heritage Site, it is home to an incredible range of fauna and flora, and as a major mountain range, its catchment area provides safe harbour and nourishment for humans and animals alike.

The Drakensberg Grasslands, Wetlands and Communities Project (the Project) is one of the mainstay projects for N3TC. It works closely with the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) in caring for communities and the many environmentally sensitive areas along the broader catchment area.

One of the key strengths of the partnership between N3TC and the EWT is their shared belief in long-term, sustainable and strategic projects in this wide geographical area. As such, N3TC has been a long-term funder of many EWT initiatives along the Drakensberg range.

Another strength of this partnership is their shared focus on asset-based, community-led projects. These projects take shape when a local community recognises the fragile and important interplay between humans and nature, and works with N3TC and EWT to utilise their expertise and assets in protecting the environment and their livelihoods.

In the past year, the Drakensberg Grasslands, Wetlands and Communities Project focused on land-use planning, livelihoods and water security, and the expansion of protected areas.



Land-use Planning, Livelihoods, and Water Security

Regarding land-use planning, livelihoods and water security, the Project facilitated knowledge exchanges between farmers in the KwaMkhize area near Mooi River and local villages in the Bergville and Ezibomvini areas in KwaZulu-Natal.

The Bergville community in particular has been actively protecting natural springs that provide water to households in their village. At the same time, households have been moving to organic farming techniques, such as no-till planting, and the entire community assisted in the rehabilitation of highly eroded watercourses.

The knowledge shared between farmers and neighbouring villages in the Bergville community will inform future community-led projects and farming practices in the area.



During these community exchanges, both the Project and local community leaders were able to identify new areas of communal value, including water sources and environmentally sensitive areas. The participating communities, with the support and monitoring of the Project, will now start rehabilitating and protecting these areas.

Care and Expansion of Protected Areas

The second major area of focus – the care of existing protected areas and their further expansion – was given a significant boost in the past year.

Biodiversity Stewardship sites along the catchment area were regularly visited. Particular emphasis was placed on a new wetland and grassland restoration project in the Eeram and Upper Wilge Protected Environments, near Harrismith in the Free State.

These Biodiversity Stewardship sites are protected and maintained by unemployed adults from nearby villages, which provides a significant financial incentive to the communities to support protection initiatives.

During the past year, the Project also completed its annual aerial Crane Survey to monitor the health of the Wattled Crane population. The information gathered in this survey informs local and international efforts to study and protect these birds.

In its report on the annual activities of the Drakensberg Grasslands, Wetlands and Communities Project, the EWT gave praise to the long-term and reliable support offered by the N3TC.

Through its financial support and its formal and informal efforts to showcase the hard work of the EWT and N3TC partnership, the Project and many other similar initiatives by the EWT have been given a significant boost.

The EWT reports that the partnership with the N3TC has added a level of validation to the projects and their area of focus, thereby attracting donations and support from local NGOs, such as the Paul King Foundation, and international climate-focused non-profit organisations, such as the German Internationale Klimaschutzinitiative (IKI) and the International Crane Foundation's internal Conservation Impact Fund.

With the help and support of N3TC, and the subsequent support from organisations such as those mentioned above, the EWT has achieved a sound financial footing. This bodes very well for its future projects and for the continued protection and support of the Drakensberg mountains, its biodiverse catchment area, and the communities that live there.



Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT)

N3TC Raptor Project



Protecting endangered birds of prey from becoming road casualties

The N3 Toll Route runs through grasslands, freshwater ecosystems, and wetlands and is home to numerous raptors. Farmland containing maize and other grain crops attracts rodents and draws raptors to the roadside. Raptors also feast on food dropped from passing vehicles. These birds often perch on road signs, safety barriers, boundary fences, and raised road markers while hunting prey. Unfortunately, the high raptor density and heavy traffic along parts of the route have turned some sections into roadkill hotspots.

Raptors are apex predators and scavengers, and as such, they play a crucial role in maintaining the balance of ecosystems by controlling prey populations and cleaning up carrion. Among those found along the N3 is the highly endangered African Grass Owl, of which less than 5,000 individuals are likely left.

Since 2014, EWT has worked with N3TC to gather robust data on roadkill incidents. Of the raptor species, owls are the most typically killed by vehicles, and the data shows this prevalence, as well as where these incidents most commonly occur.



Raptor perches offer safer feeding and resting zones

In response, EWT installed owl perches at the hotspot areas, but further away from the road, so that owls and other birds of prey could perch safely. Camera traps were installed to determine whether they would use the perches, and the cameras have shown a significant increase in bird-of-prey activity on the perches. Barn Owls, Black-Shouldered Kites, and some falcon species have been spotted using the perches as their feeding restaurant. Wading birds, such as the Black-Headed Heron and passerine species (Stonechats and Pied Starlings), also rest on the perches.

The camera traps are proving invaluable for increasing EWT's understanding of birds' interactions with roads. It has become clear that structures erected on roadsides are at least in some part used for resting and feeding purposes, and that by providing alternatives, the time birds spend on or near roads might be reduced. EWT expects to learn more from these camera traps and to record rare glimpses into the daily lives of raptors.



TOUCHING LIVES



“When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the world.” - John Muir



N3TC

Trucking Wellness

Driving health and wellness on the N3 Toll Route

The lives of long-distance truck drivers are incredibly challenging, with demanding hours and extended periods away from home and loved ones. Added to this is the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, high cholesterol and hypertension, which plague the trucking- and affiliated communities.

Since its inception in 1999, Trucking Wellness has provided primary healthcare education and treatment to long-distance truck drivers and community members.

5 **N3 Corridor**



N3TC funding contributes to the significant costs of essential medical supplies, including primary health medication as well as wellness consumables, which represent a substantial portion of the wellness clinics' operational costs.

As a long-term beneficiary of the N3TC Touching Lives Programme, Trucking Wellness ensures that high-risk individuals have access to quality primary healthcare. Five wellness clinics are strategically located along the N3 Toll Route. These clinics are supported by mobile clinics which provide basic health services to various outlying communities adjacent to the N3 Toll Route. Together, they help to promote community participation and the need for a non-gender-biased approach to healthcare within a broader socio-economic context.

Importantly, these clinics are open at times when government clinics are closed, and truck drivers and community members can receive treatment at no cost. HIV-positive clients are counselled and referred to the nearest healthcare facility, or an appointed HIV management programme to receive ongoing counselling and ARV treatment.



Key Outcomes at N3 Trucking Wellness Clinics

8334 Individuals accessed primary healthcare services at N3 Wellness Clinics

3850 Clients were tested for HIV

6979 People benefited from health and wellness education programmes

430265

Male
Condoms
Distributed



1990

Female
Condoms
Distributed



The partnership between Trucking Wellness and N3TC ensures that access to effective primary healthcare services is within reach of our vital trucking sector and some of the most vulnerable communities along the N3 Toll Route.

The N3 Wellness clinics have been instrumental in positively impacting the lives of thousands of drivers and vulnerable community members safely and conveniently.

The partnership between Trucking Wellness and N3TC ensures that access to effective primary healthcare services is within reach of our vital trucking sector and some of the most vulnerable communities along the N3 Toll Route. The N3 Wellness clinics have been instrumental in positively impacting the lives of thousands of drivers and vulnerable community members safely and conveniently.

N3TC funding contributed to:



Enhanced Community Participation:

The project actively involves community members, encouraging them to take ownership of their health and well-being.



Extended Healthcare Access:

Wellness Clinics operate during hours when government clinics are closed, ensuring uninterrupted access to healthcare services.



Non-Judgmental Care Environment:

Clinics provide a safe space where sex workers and individuals interacting with them can access STI treatment and other healthcare services without fear of stigma or discrimination.



Gender-Inclusive Healthcare:

The project promotes a non-gender-biased approach to health, ensuring equitable care for all community members.



Holistic Approach to Healthcare:

By addressing health within a broader socio-economic context, the project empowers individuals and communities to overcome systemic barriers to well-being.

The success of the road freight industry relies heavily on effective healthcare to ensure the well-being of truck drivers, enabling them to consistently meet the demands and tight deadlines of the freight and logistics industry, while also limiting the impact that untreated health conditions may have on truckers' careers and safe driving abilities.

"Our future goals include the expansion of our services, establishing additional clinics along the N3 Corridor, and offering more comprehensive mental healthcare support services to improve the holistic care of our trucking communities," says Tertius Wessels, managing director, Trucking Wellness.



BirdLife South Africa

KwaZulu-Natal Mistbelt Grassland and Forest Conservation Project



"We look forward to continuing our longstanding partnership to protect the Mistbelt Grasslands and Blue Swallows."

- Dr. Hanneline Smit-Robinson
*Head of Conservation
BirdLife SA*

6

Ixopo, Richmond, Donnybrook, Harding, Howick

Southern KwaZulu-Natal Midlands is home to various highly vulnerable species

In its efforts to protect the endangered and threatened bird species that inhabit the Mistbelt Grasslands and Forests of southern KwaZulu-Natal, BirdLife South Africa (SA) runs projects to protect these remaining habitats and ecosystems, their ecological functionality and services, and the threatened species within them.

In addition to several highly vulnerable and endemic plants, the region is also home to the endangered Cape Parrot and Secretarybird, the vulnerable Southern Bald Ibis, and the critically endangered White-Winged Flufftail. It is also the nesting site for the country's remaining Blue Swallow breeding pairs.

50%

The Mistbelt Grasslands and Forests also support strategic water source areas (SWSA), which provide 50% of the region's water.



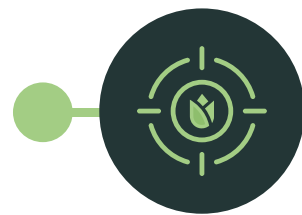
Photographs: Steve Mckean and Warwick Tarboton, BirdLife SA

Despite this, these areas are unfortunately under-represented in the protected area network and face fragmentation, substantial habitat loss, and habitat deterioration, due to timber and dairy farming, and other human activities in the area.



With the support of N3TC, BirdLife SA runs projects to actively involve communities and private landowners to monitor, manage and protect key grassland and forest patches.

The BirdLife SA-Conservation Outcomes partnership was created to continually evaluate innovative ways to work with landowners to improve the conservation management of these sensitive areas. For example, communities are educated and landowners equipped with simple technology to help record data to further conservation efforts. Through its Landscape Conservation Programme, BirdLife SA then runs various projects to protect remaining habitats and ecosystems, their ecological functionality and services, and the threatened species within them. Some of these initiatives include:



Target species and ecosystems



Biodiversity stewardship



EarthRanger Platform



Target Species & Ecosystems

The Mistbelt Grasslands support the remaining 35 breeding pairs of Blue Swallows and several highly threatened and endemic plants in South Africa; and is home to the regionally endangered Cape Parrot. Although private landowners and communities act as custodians of the grasslands, and consciously support the Blue Swallows, the sites are not currently protected from change or specifically managed for these birds. Thus, BirdLife SA's projects are crucial for monitoring species and managing habitats to ensure their survival.

“

“N3TC has been a long-term funder of the KwaZulu-Natal Mistbelt Conservation Project. BirdLife South Africa, in collaboration with Conservation Outcomes, and Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife are extremely grateful for our support.”

- Dr. Hanneline Smit-Robinson



Biodiversity Stewardship

Biodiversity stewardship is a unique framework to expand protected areas and conserve internationally recognised landscapes. It is a legislated, policy-led approach that allows the expansion of South Africa's protected and conserved areas network on privately owned land by balancing biodiversity conservation with land economic activities through carefully managed plans.

The model incentivises landowners through tax benefits and offers a sustainable solution for expanding South Africa's protected area network while respecting private property rights.

Progress made with BirdLife SA's projects include implementing the KZN Blue Swallow monitoring plan to conduct annual monitoring of Blue Swallows, assess population trends, and identify new breeding sites. The project also assists with and contributes to national efforts to monitor Cape Parrot populations, and initiate actions to secure essential habitats.



EarthRanger Platform

EarthRanger is a software solution that aids ecologists, wildlife biologists, conservation managers, and land custodians to protect wildlife with real-time data. This platform simplifies the collection, integration, and visualisation of data, to provide a unified view of wildlife, enforcement assets, and infrastructure within a protected area.

In partnership with BirdLife SA and N3TC, the EarthRanger platform for Blue Swallow monitoring was successfully launched in the southern KwaZulu-Natal Midlands in 2024, and has already proven its worth by providing high-quality, real-time data. This data enables BirdLife SA to monitor population trends, identify new breeding sites, contribute to national monitoring efforts, and to also take actions to protect critical Cape Parrot habitats.

TOUCHING LIVES



PROTEC

Pietermaritzburg Academy

Transforming lives and dreams with quality enrichment education

PROTEC Pietermaritzburg (PMB) Academy was established in 1990 to support deserving students from secondary schools in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands with access to quality Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) education.

“So many South African children do not have high-quality educational opportunities – especially in subjects that feed into Science, IT, Engineering and Mathematics careers,” explains PROTEC PMB Academy’s executive director, Ms Rose Smuts.

7 Pietermaritzburg



Learner Excellence Programme

PROTEC PMB, a fully registered non-profit company and public benefit organisation, provides quality enrichment education, on Saturdays and during school holidays, to deserving Grade 8 – 12 students from surrounding disadvantaged schools and communities.

Core subjects, including Mathematics, Physical - and Life Sciences, English Communication Studies, and Coding are taught, while students also benefit from exposure to the world of work in addition to personal and career guidance.

Ms Smuts continues: “We aim to provide students with expert teaching and tuition in these core subjects to empower them to pursue tertiary education in fields of their choice. Our students tend to opt for careers in Civil, Mechanical, Electrical, Aeronautical, Industrial, or Chemical Engineering. Many also choose careers in Medicine, Micro-Biology, Education, IT, Software Development, Computer Engineering, Actuarial Sciences, Accounting, and Forestry.”

World-of-Work Sessions

During PROTEC's World of Work sessions, learners with potential are identified and assisted to overcome educational barriers and other obstacles that may prevent them from successfully entering professional careers. These obstacles may include inadequate basic education, poverty, a lack of successful role models, attitudes, unrealistic expectations, different cultural values, and/or language barriers. This component of the PROTEC model equips students with leadership, interpersonal development, and career skills, and plays a vital role in preventing students from becoming career casualties due to these obstacles, or a lack of exposure.



Women in STEM Technovation Summit 2024

Another highlight for PROTEC PMB's students was the first ever Technovation Summit hosted at the Pietermaritzburg Museum during the winter school holiday last year. The Summit is open to Grade 9 - 11 high school girls interested in pursuing careers in STEM fields. Technovation inspires girls to be leaders and problem solvers by using technology and collaboration to build tech to address problems facing their communities.

Two of the Academy's students wrote compelling motivations in their quest to be selected to attend the Summit. Their efforts paid off, and Snethemba Dlamini and Asanda Makhaye represented PROTEC as delegates to the Summit. Both students highly valued this experience. Reporting back to their fellow students during PROTEC PMB Academy's annual prize-giving ceremony, they encouraged their peers to embrace every opportunity presented to them to broaden their horizons and learn more about possible career paths.

Vacation school programmes boost academic performance

Students are encouraged to attend special holiday programmes which have proven to be important in their overall academic development and preparedness for future studies and careers.

One such holiday programme, is the annual SAICE Bridge Building Competition where experts deliver insightful lectures to students on the physics of bridge construction during a weeklong programme. During the week, one of PROTEC's Grade 12 students, Simphiwe Mabaso, who excelled in the 2023 Bridge Building Competition, volunteered his time and expertise to help tutor Grade 11 students attending the course. His effort was rewarded when one of PROTEC PMB's teams achieved an overall 3rd place in KwaZulu-Natal with their design of a bridge supporting 66 kg.



Work Experience Week

This annual three-day programme assists students with the realities of the work environment, providing immersive experiences, helping students make the best career choices, where possible.

"Combined with our academic programmes, and opportunities to interact with teachers, peers, and our board of directors, PROTEC's Work Experience Week, and the input received from experienced business professionals, contribute to developing confident and positive young adults. This would not be possible without N3TC's support of students to attend Saturday and Vacation Schools, Work Experience Weeks, and Career Guidance Events," says Ms Smuts. "We hold our association with N3TC in high regard, especially when former bursary students excel in their tertiary studies and careers."



Luyanda Sokhela

N3TC bursary graduate inspires with her authenticity, wisdom, and sense of responsibility

Luyanda Sokhela was born and raised in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal.

She matriculated in 2015 as head girl of Haythorne Secondary School and achieved excellent academic results with a Bachelors Admission Pass. During her final school years, Miss Sokhela was a student at PROTEC Pietermaritzburg Academy, which required extra academic commitment from her but also enabled her to attain the understanding she required to excel at school.

It was at this point that N3TC's path crossed with that of Miss Sokhela. Through its Touching Lives Programme, N3TC funded her tuition at PROTEC, and thanks to her consistently good academic performance, she was awarded an N3TC Tertiary Bursary.

This enabled Miss Sokhela to gain admission into the University of KwaZulu-Natal where she completed a BSc Honours degree in Civil Engineering in 2020, despite the various academic disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Miss Sokhela amassed vast work experience during her time on the UKZN Campus. She worked as an online Mathematics tutor with TeachMe2; conducted tutorial services for first-year Engineering Drawing and Design students – an area fraught with difficulties, particularly for disadvantaged students who do not have ready access to computers; and worked as a research and development officer for Enactus UKZN for two years – an almost impossible load for a final year student. In recognition of her leadership skills, she received the WM de Wet Award from Enactus UKZN in her final year.

Growing up, Miss Sokhela did not have a clear idea of what she wanted to do with her life. Initially, she wanted to become a doctor but her mother, who understood her better than anyone else, discouraged the idea. "I would not have survived being a doctor," she said. "At the time, I felt unseen and unsupported by her, but I later appreciated her honesty and valuable insight," explains Miss Sokhela.



“Our success is proof of the wisdom and resilience of people who came before us. Let us continue to light the way for those who follow in our path.”

- Luyanda Sokhela
N3TC Bursary Graduate

She says she enjoys doing things outside of her comfort zone to prove to herself that nothing is beyond her reach. "My desire to see how far I can push myself continues to be one of my strongest driving forces."

While enrolled at the PROTEC Pietermaritzburg Academy, Miss Sokhela attended a work experience project where "it finally dawned on me, that I am fascinated by infrastructure projects, and how engineers empower communities with their technical skills and know-how. That's when I knew I had found my professional home."

Life, however, was not always smooth sailing. In February 2014, at the tender age of 15, Miss Sokhela lost her mother – her guiding light and anchor; and in 2017 she suffered another major loss when her close childhood friend passed away. Losing two prominent people in a short space of time affected her deeply. She was diagnosed with major depression.

"I had to put my studies on hold to focus on my health and well-being. This set me back dismally – isolating me from friends, classmates, and those around me – but it also taught me much about myself and the importance of taking care of oneself. We are our own biggest assets. We have to invest in our well-being to be best prepared to tackle challenges."

After completing her studies, Miss Sokhela entered the job market as a graduate engineer at Impumelelo Consulting Engineers. She now works at Royal HaskoningDHV as a Junior Engineer in the Water Department, while she is also building her career as a researcher and a public speaker. She presented at the WISA (Water Institute of South Africa) Biennial Conference in June 2024, and at the South African Institute of Civil Engineers (SAICE) conference in August.

"I hope to grow my technical skills to register as a professional engineer, finish my Master's degree, contribute to the engineering profession, and perhaps even join academia one day," she says.

She maintains regular contact with the PROTEC Pietermaritzburg Academy where she makes herself available to guide learners – be it on a career panel discussion, or acting as a host for a Grade 12 Work Experience Week. "If I were ever to change careers, it would be to become an educator," she says.

"Teachers have the power and responsibility to light the way for others, to help change narratives and outdated thinking patterns. Blessed are those who help fund education. This is the only way to open doors to brighter futures."





Project Gateway

Gateway to a profitable future

The Old Prison in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, where many activists including Peter Brown and a young Mahatma Gandhi were once detained, has been transformed into a place where people are nurtured, lives are rebuilt, hopes and dreams take flight, and futures are shaped.

The former prison buildings are now the home of Project Gateway, a social outreach and empowerment initiative established in 1992 by the churches in Pietermaritzburg, with the vision to provide a base and resources for education and training, socio-welfare care, and sustainable interventions in a number of communities in the district.

Project Gateway not only runs a fully-fledged school on the premises, it also operates an information technology centre, the Gateway School of Fashion, and a museum, and boasts an impressive vegetable garden project which assists hundreds of people in need.

8 Pietermaritzburg

The Gateway School of Fashion

The Gateway School of Fashion (and its parent organisation, Project Gateway) teaches out-of-school, and out-of-work young people how to generate income by harnessing their creative talents, and developing the skills they require to succeed in the fashion and business world. The project aims to provide students with fashion design skills, as well as life and business skills, through its training and development initiatives.

N3TC is a proud partner of the School, and shares Project Gateway's vision to create sustainable livelihoods and lasting change in the lives of people connected to the N3 Toll Route.

The Gateway School of Fashion, established in 2008, has consistently welcomed aspiring young individuals who, despite initially lacking skills, graduate after two years equipped with expertise in design, pattern-making, and sewing. Additionally, they acquire computer literacy and fundamental business acumen, positioning them for success in their future endeavours.

In 2024, the Gateway School of Fashion had an intake of 21 new first-year students, with a further 16 students who progressed to their second year.



"Many students from complex backgrounds find their purpose and thrive in this setting. Their creativity, often suppressed in South Africa's schooling system, truly emerges during their second year of studies," says Fashion School facilitator, Diana Milford.



By this time, many of the students can apply their design and production skills to start earning a small income, their self-esteem has improved, and they have a vision for their future.

Ms Milford continues: "Students are encouraged to sell the items they make while they are still learning. The extra funds motivate them to produce and sell more, and they begin to understand the benefits of owning a small business.

Entrepreneurship is emphasised to overcome the shortage of formal employment in the industry."

Paradigm Shift Business Training Programme

Business training is therefore an essential component of the programme. It teaches basic business skills and encourages students to start their own businesses instead of seeking employment. "As young entrepreneurs earn money, they can support their families and cover living costs. Their purpose and dignity are restored, and eventually, they can employ others, thus also benefiting their communities," explains Ms Milford.

The programme starts with a business experience course which is a very practical way of understanding business, and the difficulties that could be encountered. Students then complete two further training modules in their second year, and have a good idea of what is required to prepare a business plan at the end of the course.

Some of the other topics that are explored include pricing and selling; target marketing; advertising and promotions; income-generating investments; budgeting; business distinctives, and record keeping.

An annual highlight, however, is watching the students grow in confidence as they realise that their skills are valuable and can earn them money.



Accolades for students

A highlight for young designers is participating in the Durban July each year, a proud moment shared with their families amidst the glitz and glamour of the event. In 2024, four outfits designed by the Gateway School of Fashion were nominated for the Top Ten award, and one of the School's students won first place in the Best-Dressed Male category earning the students accolades in local and national newspapers. During the Dundee Annual horseraces event, another student was awarded the title of Best Dressed Woman and won a cash prize of R10,000.

The annual fashion show

During the fourth term, all students have the opportunity to showcase their designs at the annual Gateway Fashion Show. A flurry of activity precedes the event as students rush to complete their garments, make last-minute tweaks, or do some touch-ups.

The day is a spectacular showcase of vibrant colours and breathtaking designs, professional models strutting the catwalk, and guests oohing and aahing at the delightful creations. Tired students beam with satisfaction – their bright eyes and broad smiles tell their stories of growth, confidence, and achievement.

"Funding from N3TC goes a long way to levelling the playing field for our students as it helps fund transport, fabrics, and haberdashery for those students who cannot afford them.

Thanks to N3TC's generosity, we can offer additional help to those students whose families are struggling, and who need a leg up. We offer them funding support of about 50% of their total costs when they start up. This amount is then reduced as they begin to earn an income, and in most cases, we can stop the additional support altogether after a while," ends Ms Milford.

iThemba Projects

Building sustainable ECD in Sweetwaters

With a firm focus on sustainability, iThemba Projects partners with the people of Sweetwaters in Pietermaritzburg to help them bring about lasting change in their community. Central to this is promoting Early Childhood Development (ECD), sustainable nutrition, and youth mentoring. iThemba recognises that ECD is a key foundation for primary school, high school, and tertiary education success.



“Caregivers become ECD influencers, referring their neighbours to the programme and helping them understand the importance of early childhood development support.”

- Stu Walker
Director, iThemba Projects

9 Sweetwaters, Hilton



Asidlale

iThemba's site based programme Asidlale, utilises funding received from the N3TC Touching Lives Programme to mentor local ECD teachers, support them with curriculum and resources, and establish and maintain strong local networks so that they can continue passing on their knowledge to others, even when iThemba is no longer around.

The work of iThemba's nutrition mentors bolsters these efforts by helping the ECD sites establish food gardens to ensure good nutrition for the children in their care; while the Early Childhood Home Support Programme offered by iThemba, mentors parents and caregivers of young children to better stimulate and care for them at home.

The result is that significant changes in behaviour and an appreciation of ECD are observed in areas where iThemba has been actively operating for some time.

iThemba currently partners with 23 schools (28 classes) where the ECD site mentors regularly visit 'their' schools to provide personalised guidance and support.

Harnessing social support

A key part of this “influence strategy” relies on harnessing the power of social support. The project’s six geographically clustered Hlanganani Tea groups (social support groups for ECD practitioners) meet monthly throughout the year and are a place of encouragement and inspiration. Planning meetings are held each term, and all the partner schools get together for a sociable morning or afternoon.



Our partnership makes a world of difference

“We are passionate about seeing whole communities transformed, and with N3TC’s support, we can provide much-needed encouragement and assistance to preschools, teachers, caregivers, parents, and guardians. We are seeing growing community appreciation for quality ECD in Sweetwaters.

This positive shift is motivating teachers to improve, parents to enrol their children, and families to extend learning at home. N3TC’s support plays a vital role in driving this transformation. We greatly appreciate N3TC as a long-term partner that understands the importance of investing in the early years and supports our ECD programme,” ends Mr Walker.

2024 highlights include:

An article: ***Hoping and Caregiving in Adversity: Ithemba Hope for Parents Study*** was published in the International Journal of Applied Positive Psychology.

The matched intervention group had a statistically significant increase in reports about home learning. Where 83% of the homes initially had no books, **100% now have at least five children's books.**

609 homes were visited throughout the year.

A book development project involving **64 community members wrote 10 children's storybooks**. The books were translated, edited, and illustrated and will soon be printed and distributed.

The **new Asidlale toy library will open** at the community centre in 2025.



TOUCHING LIVES



TOUCHING LIVES



“Never underestimate the empowering effect of human connection.” - Drishti Bablani



N3TC

Singakwenza Early Childhood Education



"Stimulation during these critical years determines a child's potential for holistic development, and if these sensitive periods are not maximised, it makes it much more difficult to learn these same skills at a later stage."

- Julie Hay
Founder & Executive Director,
Singakwenza

Building Blocks For Learning

Research has shown that almost 80% of the foundation upon which all further learning is built is developed in the first four years of life. Some of the most important periods for brain development – which are critical to educational success – peak in the pre-school years, including number, language and emotional control.

Singakwenza was formed 15 years ago in Pietermaritzburg to address two issues facing many under-resourced rural communities in South Africa: Early Childhood Education and Health. With more than a decade's experience in early childhood development and primary healthcare, its founders were keenly aware of the important role of good healthcare, physical and emotional wellness, and early educational stimulation in the development of well-rounded children with a solid foundation for learning. "Knowing that education is one of the best pathways out of poverty, we wanted to bring these benefits in an easily accessible manner to children from under-resourced communities," Ms Hays explains.

"We launched Singakwenza with a peer education programme and mobile clinic in 2010. Five years later, Singakwenza changed its strategic direction to only focus on the education of preschool children, while the mobile clinic was transferred to the provincial health department to continue servicing Singakwenza's previous sites.

Today, Singakwenza offers various specialised child development programmes and services including occupational therapy, a visual motor integration programme; play and learn programmes for parents and toddlers, training and mentorship projects for educators; and Waste2Toys workshops for community members.

"Last year has proven to us we are creating something extraordinary by piling hundreds of ordinary moments together - this seems to be our Singakwenza magic," continues Ms Hays while explaining that the organisation has seen exceptional growth, transformation, and impact in 2024. "With N3TC's steadfast support, we have expanded our reach, deepened our programmes, and provided meaningful support to the communities we served."

In KwaZulu-Natal, Singakwenza now employs 16 staff members, six trainers and an occupational therapist, with another occupational therapist and three trainers employed in Gauteng. They have also expanded their training and mentorship programmes to 15 new sites that have never before been exposed to any form of early childhood education programme.

Singakwenza's lesson plans are aligned with the Department of Education's National Curriculum Framework ensuring that children meet the six Early Learning Development Areas (ELDAs) every day. This has deepened the practitioners' appreciation for Singakwenza's methodology and strengthened their confidence in delivering high-quality early education.

Soon after they are introduced to Singakwenza's lesson plans and activities, practitioners report a significant difference in the engagement level and development of the children in their care.



Connecting the dots

A Grade 1 teacher at the primary school in Taylor's Halt told Singakwenza that she had reached a point where she wanted to leave teaching because of her frustrations and struggles to get learners to a level where they could manage Grade 1 activities. "I was feeling overwhelmed and completely drained," she said, "but then my last intake of learners changed my mind. This was a group of learners who came through the Singakwenza programme. They were so well prepared and eager to learn, that I decided to stay on. If it made so much of a difference to me, one cannot even begin to imagine how much more confident and competent these young ones must feel!"

Maths is a subject that evokes fear in many people, mainly because it comes with a sense of incompetency, a lack of understanding, and an embarrassment that they "just don't get it". In Singakwenza's experience, part of this challenge comes from a poor understanding of the basics of numeracy. This is often due to a foundation that lacked sufficient and the correct exposure to these concepts right from the start.

Helping children to understand that the symbol of each numeral - for example '3' represents a certain number of items (●●●) is one of the fundamental skills required in numeracy, and one that practitioners did not know how to introduce prior to being introduced to the various activities in the Singakwenza programme which help children to grasp and practice this skill, many using everyday disposal household items such as plastic bottle caps and matchsticks.

For example, practitioners will write the numerals on a polystyrene tray and the child will poke the correct number of matchsticks under each number, or a numeral will be written at the top of a piece of paper, and a child has to match plastic bottle caps with the corresponding number of dots under each symbol.

Creche owners and practitioners are excited to see that numeracy development does not have to be restricted to pencil and paper or workbook tasks. Their excitement is transferred to the children in their care, and even toddlers are now benefitting from Singakwenza's various development programmes. According to Ms Hays, already from Grade RR there is a stark contrast between children who are part of the programme, even if they have joined late, and those who have had no exposure to it at all.



Parent education and involvement

When Singakwenza launched their programme at the school in August 2023, they found an enthusiastic practitioner and a magnificent Grade RR classroom – both real assets but completely under-utilised. Only four children were enrolled in the Grade RR class despite Curry's Post being situated in the heart of KwaZulu-Natal's agricultural community, and most families having both parents working on the farms.

The principal and teachers were concerned that parents did not realise the importance of the foundation phase of their children's education and were, therefore, unwilling to pay for their transport to school. To address these concerns, the school, with the help of Singakwenza's trainer in the area, hosted a parents' information day to lead a parent-education session on the importance of early childhood stimulation. Parents responded overwhelmingly positively with 14 more children being enrolled immediately after the information session.

The Grade RR class continues to grow and thrive, proving the importance of parent involvement in fostering early childhood development success. As a result, Singakwenza offers parenting workshops on an ongoing basis to all creches in its catchment areas to mirror the success of Curry's Post Primary School.

Visual Motor Integration

In 2023, Singakwenza piloted a Visual Motor Integration (VMI) Programme, developed by its occupational therapist, in creche classrooms. VMI is the ability to correctly perceive visual information, process it, and move your hands or body accordingly.

“Imagine standing in a park when you suddenly see something coming toward you. How big is it? What shape is it? How fast is it going? When it gets closer to you, do you reach your hands out to catch it, or do you cover your head to avoid being hit? In this brief moment, you have used your visual perception and visual motor skills to communicate and form an appropriate response to the object,” explains Ms Hays.

VMI activities help children to learn how to correctly process visual information and coordinate their movements accordingly. This lays the groundwork for critical pre-writing and problem-solving skills.

Within the first few weeks of the original pilot study, overwhelmingly positive feedback and valuable insights were received from the trainers regarding the children's differing capabilities when interacting with the games and materials. The impact of the programme was astounding. By using the Draw-A-Person Test, Singakwenza's occupational therapists observed significant improvements in the small group of children's developmental abilities.

This success led to the integration of VMI activities into Singakwenza's weekly lesson plans in 2024, allowing all children in the programme the opportunity to benefit from these focused activities. The activities are designed to provide the children with almost immediate visual feedback which enables them to correct themselves independently.

Sourcing recycling material and creating sufficient educational materials for the programme were quite a challenge but their dedicated Meet 'n Make volunteers from the Waste2Toys Programme came to the rescue. They worked tirelessly to produce approximately 350 items for each of the activities, and continue to build more stock.

Waste2Toys

Young children need many different opportunities to create the neural pathways and connections required for their development and learning, and future success. Most of their potential is built while they're playing and exploring, but commercial educational toys are expensive and not accessible to the majority of households in South Africa.

Realising that the unaffordability of educational toys is hugely prohibitive, Singakwenza developed simple but inspiring ideas to use recycled waste materials to craft educational toys, including essential school resources. They then developed and launched the Waste2Toys community workshops to teach parents, early childhood education practitioners, and community workers how to make these toys, and how to use them during play to develop their children's foundational skills.

“Ultimately, it's PLAY that is important in a child's development, not what educational toys look like or how much they cost” stresses Ms Hays. “Expensive equipment does not determine how well children learn. The same skills are developed when using a **skipping** rope made from bread bags or one bought from a shop. Bottles, cardboard boxes, caps, lids, cans, plastic bags, empty toilet rolls, just about anything is collected and re-purposed”.

More than a decade later these three-hour workshops where different skills (from gross to fine motor skills, stages and types of play, numeracy and language development) are taught, remain one of Singakwenza's most popular programmes.

2024 Highlights:

84

Waste2Toys workshops in 5 provinces in South Africa

1630

Adults learned how to make toys from household packaging

31280

Children benefitted from purposeful play

Inclusive support for all children

Singakwenza's Occupational Therapy (OT) programme ensures that every child, regardless of their abilities, has the opportunity to thrive. Their OTs have run training sessions with 22 practitioners in the 'red flags' in 2024, teaching them to identify signs of developmental delays and barriers to learning.

OT Programme 2024 Highlights:



In a heartwarming case, a young boy with quadriplegic Cerebral Palsy has had his creche experience transformed. Quadriplegic Cerebral Palsy means that all of the muscles in his body are affected by abnormal muscle tone. It impacts his ability to sit or stand without full support, and as a result he would spend most of his time at the creche lying on the floor. Thanks to a partnership with Timion, another NGO, he received a refurbished standing frame that has enabled him to interact with his peers at eye level. This simple yet profound change has allowed him to participate in daily activities and feel included - a testament to how tailored interventions can change lives.

Class attendance is closely monitored

Singakwenza provides register books for each of their creches to keep track of children's attendance, and the dosage of the programme they are receiving. It is equally important to show practitioners how important it is for the children to attend creche as they can now see that the children who are regularly absent are also the ones who struggle to master the skills they are being taught. These registers also form part of the ELOM Monitoring and Evaluation process to which Singakwenza subscribes.

"Singakwenza is committed to sustainability, inclusion, and innovation in Early Childhood Development, and to continue integrating new programmes and approaches to deepen our impact. We thank N3TC for being part of this journey. Your support enables us to create brighter futures for children, empower educators, and strengthen communities. Together, we are building a world where every child has the tools to succeed," ends Ms Hay.

Singakwenza milestones



N3TC supported



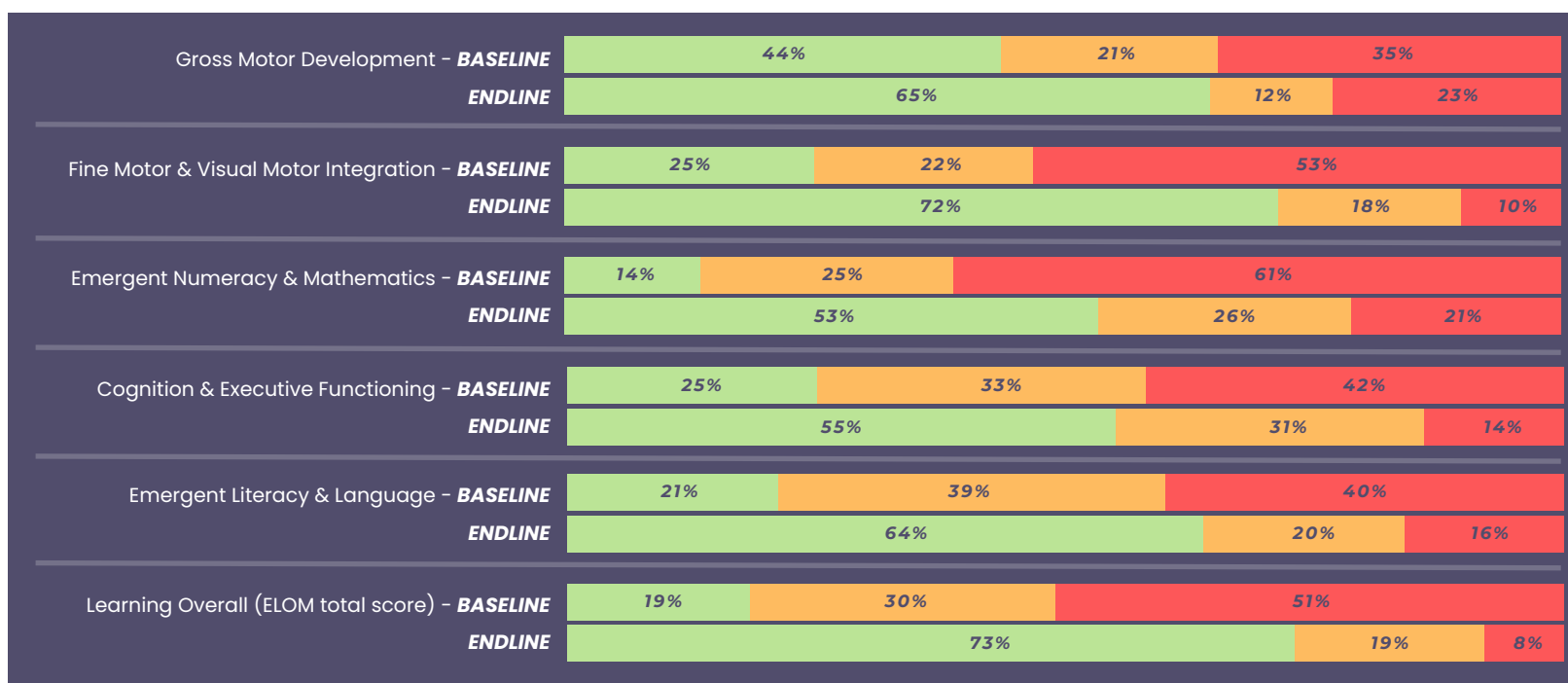
Encouraging results received from 2024 Early Learning Outcomes Measure (ELOM)

Singakwenza is proud to share the results of the independent 2024 ELOM study. The image below shows the baseline study results (February 2024) and endline results (November 2024) of children in the Singakwenza programme. This national evaluation tool, developed by DataDrive2030, measures the effectiveness of an early learning programme.

Ms Hays explains: "Looking at the results, there is no doubt that the investment that our funders are making in early education is worth every cent. When one looks at the percentage of children who are now on track, there is so much hope for their future! Thank you."

Singakwenza Results 2024

■ % On Track
 ■ % Falling Behind
 ■ % Falling Far Behind



Baseline - February 2024, Endline - November 2024
Report prepared by DataDrive - Early Learning Outcomes Measure (ELOM) - November 2024

Funda Nenja

ONE WELFARE – nurturing children and their pets

In Mpophomeni, located on the outskirts of Howick in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, Funda Nenja ('learning with a dog') is enhancing relationships between individuals and their dogs, while benefiting the community as a whole.

Through their One Welfare approach, Funda Nenja has observed significant changes within the community. These changes are reflected not only in the children and their dogs but also among extended family members.



Photograph:
Sarah Pryke

11 Mpophomeni

It started...

...with a dog school

On Friday afternoons, Funda Nenja operates its dog school – a special extracurricular activity where children are taught how to understand and care for their dogs and learn how to teach their pets basic obedience and discipline – from fitting their collars to walking on leashes, getting them to ‘sit and stay’, and handling their pets responsibly in different situations. Funda Nenja only employs humane animal handling methods.

When it was established in 2009, the Funda Nenja dog school started with 12 children. Since then it has grown in leaps and bounds. It is now in partnership with five local schools and reaches at least 2000 children on the subject of animal welfare.

Irregular attendance of classes is an issue amongst some of Mpophomeni’s young residents. Some children live far from the training venue, while others simply lack commitment. To encourage attendance, Funda Nenja offers transportation to children and their dogs from outlying areas, and periodic awards or incentive prizes, such as grocery hampers or dog food, for dedicated participants.

It also operates a pop-up shop selling dog food, collars, leashes, bowls, beds, blankets, kennels, and other items at reduced prices. This initiative encourages children to understand the financial responsibilities of proper pet care.

Funda Nenja uses force-free training methods to encourage learners to use lure and reward techniques. These exercises help to teach problem-solving without resorting to force, leading to a sense of accomplishment for both handlers and dogs. By using their dogs to emphasise love and loyalty, children learn to become more compassionate and responsible human beings. Empathetic human-animal bonds undoubtedly cultivate kindness and care towards all living beings.



Pet health is a priority

A weekly primary veterinary care clinic, operating from the dog school, provides deworming, tick and flea control, and treatment for skin conditions, and ear and eye infections. More serious conditions are referred to a veterinarian.

As a Rabies Centre for Excellence, Funda Nenja also ensures the health and safety of both dogs and families through its vaccination programme.

The clinic mostly offers free services, supported in part by funding from N3TC. Minimal payments are, however, requested when possible. Funda Nenja further insists that all dogs are sterilised before joining their dog school. This sterilisation programme is offered at no cost to owners.

It is not uncommon for between 20 – 40 dogs to be treated on a Friday afternoon as the Funda Nenja clinic is the only veterinarian service easily accessible to the Mpophomeni community. Thanks to this service, most dogs in the township are fairly healthy and in good physical condition.

Caring about people

The Funda Nenja team is not only passionate about improving the treatment of animals, but also deeply cares about the well-being of pet owners, their families, and the greater community. Having been active in Mpophomeni for over 15 years, Funda Nenja has earned a welcomed and respected presence.

Empowering children, strengthening family bonds, and fostering safer, kinder communities are core objectives of the programme. With the support of a social worker, monthly life skills lessons are provided to instil values such as love, empathy, respect, and responsibility, enhancing children's well-being and future development. The lessons contribute to positive social interactions and a deepening of emotional intelligence which extends to the benefit of Mpophomeni's animals.

As a One Welfare organisation, Funda Nenja encourages behavioural and social change in support of people and animals. The organisation further aims to promote self-sufficiency. With regular donations of vegetable seedlings, the social worker assists numerous families to establish vegetable gardens. Being diligently tended to, these gardens are bursting with crops, and families can now share in an abundance of fresh vegetables at their tables.

Home visits create sterling opportunities for engagement

Funda Nenja's home visits play a crucial role in its programme as they give staff members opportunities to engage with the families of children enrolled in the weekly dog school, and explain the services offered by Funda Nenja to the community.

During these visits, staff can also assess the home circumstances of pets and their owners to determine if additional support may be required, and assist with developing and implementing practical solutions to issues that are identified.

Funda Nenja remains committed to improving the lives of young people and animals while nurturing social change. It is heart-warming to notice that the streets of Mpophomeni now have fewer stray dogs, and there is also a noticeable increase in dogs being allowed indoors, particularly at night. A growing awareness of pet healthcare issues, the risks of diseases, the importance of vaccinations and sterilisations, as well as an overall rise in compassion and empathy towards pets are all indications that Funda Nenja remains on the right track.



Music Voyage

Entertaining opportunities through music

Music is a universal language that inspires and heals, transcending race, age, economics, and physical boundaries. Music Voyage takes this idea further by using music to empower children and youth in KwaZulu-Natal to develop transferable skills, gain confidence, become leaders, and practice tolerance, while participating in constructive, exciting, and fun activities.

They believe that music lessons and performances provide a positive distraction for young people, helping them build a sense of pride and accomplishment that is echoed throughout their communities.

12

Howick

Developing focus and discipline while learning new skills

Discipline is required to develop any new skill. Learning to play an instrument helps young people develop discipline and focus, which often impacts their approach to other subjects or fields of interest. Music also teaches teamwork, which is necessary to build a successful and cohesive ensemble. Moreover, Music Voyage teaches young people a skill that can become their livelihood, for example, by providing entertainment at local wedding venues that require musicians. As students become more proficient in their instruments and performance etiquette, their economic opportunities grow. Students can also come full circle and work at Music Voyage, teaching the next generation of learners.

In 2024, Music Voyage with the support of N3TC, provided additional violin lessons for students, and introduced a new brass specialist, S'bongumusa Majola, to the team. This caused great excitement in the Music Voyage fraternity as they can now finally offer a variety of classes to talented students using the beautiful brass instruments that were donated by the local municipality. Funding received from the N3TC Touching Lives Programme further assisted with the costs of professional tutors and teacher training, communication and accounting services, rehearsal space rental, transport and general running costs of the music school.

The crescendos of 2024

Our marimba band rub shoulders with some of the best

Music Voyage's marimba band was invited to perform at a concert in Cedara which was organised by the SJTI marimba players. The band played alongside many independent and government schools. Hundreds of marimba players from different social backgrounds performed together, which was both an exciting and deeply moving opportunity. The marimba players also joined a lineup of well-known and respected artists at a special event, hosted at the Horse Shoe Bend. The students met successful musicians, including popular Qadasi & Maqhingha, who have been touring worldwide.



Several students were entered into the SASMT Eisteddfod. The recorder groups were awarded three golds and a silver, while the violin players achieved gold all around. One recorder group and a violin student were selected to play in the Best of the Eisteddfod Concert. "This is an incredible accolade and a wonderful achievement made possible thanks to the generosity and support of our donor community," said Katherine McClelland, director of the Music Voyage Outreach Project.

Crystal Springs Primary School

Classroom tech introduces a new education approach


Crystal Springs Primary School, with nearly 400 students, is part of the rural community of Lidgetton in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands. The school has progressively transitioned to a digital teaching environment, positioning itself as a model in neighbouring communities.

"N3TC's investment in education, which includes the establishment of an information technology centre at Crystal Springs, is having a significant impact on our schooling environment" says principal, Thembi Ngubane. The accessibility of advanced teaching technology has facilitated a more engaging learning environment for students, and opportunities for teachers to upskill and develop new approaches to education.

With the support of the Keep a Child Alive-organisation, 16 educators and non-teaching staff received coding training. They now run eight after-hours coding clubs, from Mondays to Fridays, at Crystal Springs Primary School.

13

Howick



"It shows me reality instead of just imagining it, and I feel better prepared for my tests. I have also learned to code, and I really enjoy it. I hope to study robotics at university one day."

- Alwande Ngcobe,
Grade 7 Learner

"Our progressive use of technology also allows our learners to interact with a bigger world. We can participate in international events such as the World Read Aloud Day, allowing our learners to experience and celebrate the fundamental role of literacy in personal and educational development," explains Ms Ngubane.

Although the roll-out of new technology has brought about some challenges for Crystal Springs' older teaching staff, steps are being taken to support them. The school intends to offer them professional computer lessons to better equip them for this new era.

"Apart from assisting with administrative tasks, and to help manage operations and facilities, our recently appointed Eduhelper is also helping with computer and coding instruction to students, and assisting teachers to incorporate technology into their lesson plans – making a tremendous difference to our efficiencies. Now, our parents, teachers, learners, the Department of Education, and indeed the entire Lidgetton community, can take immense pride in our school. Your support helped to get us here," ends Ms Ngubane.

Family Literacy Project

Literacy – an essential base skill for all learning

“When children cannot read for meaning, our people continue to go hungry, our economy grows at a slower rate than our population, and unemployment rates among our youth continue to increase with dire circumstances. This cannot happen on our watch. All children deserve the right to learn to read efficiently from an early age.”

– Reach Out To Read



Reach Out To Read

Reading is essential to fulfilling an individual's potential and to the social development of communities. Research shows that children who acquire strong language skills are more likely to achieve academic success further down the line.

However, many children in South Africa have not acquired sufficient reading skills, which is a challenge the Family Literacy Project is attempting to tackle with its Reach Out To Read initiative.

Reach Out To Read is a holistic literacy programme that engages the community at all levels from toddlers, creches, and libraries to adult groups, schools, home-work clubs, community groups, and clinics.

The programme builds unity and confidence through inter-generational learning. Because the entire community is focused on the same concept or skill at various levels, parents and caregivers are empowered to assist their children with reading and learning the fundamental skills.



Reach Out To Read believes all families should have the tools to make shared reading a daily routine, and the books they share serve as catalysts for building healthy childhood development and family bonds.

Funding from N3TC goes a long way to train Reach Out To Read's educators and reading champions and has allowed the distribution of the following resources to schools and community centres:

- ✓ **Learner kits**
- ✓ **Educator kits**
- ✓ **Classroom kits**
- ✓ **Home-visiting teaching and learning kits**

Last year was a successful one for Reach Out to Read with the business and sustainability component of the project beginning to take shape. Some organisations now pay for the training, and there is an increased demand to purchase teaching and learning kits. This allows the project to increase its assistance and support for communities that need help.

The organisation is proud to report that the 2024 reading results have substantially improved, as indicated by the EGRA assessments conducted in the schools where the programme is currently running; and 2025 holds even more promise of new opportunities, especially in the early childhood development space. This will lead to significant changes in toddler programmes which focus on the 0-3yr age group.

According to Cheryl Taylor of the Family Literacy Project, "the support received from organisations such as N3TC is crucial to help uplift literacy – the most important base skill that underpins all other classroom learning."



TOUCHING LIVES



“When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion.” - Ethiopian Proverb



N3TC

Pevensey Place

Our home – a precious gift and a testament to community goodwill

Pevensey Place – a full-time assisted living care centre for adults with Cerebral Palsy and mental disabilities – is situated on a picturesque 84-hectare farm at the foot of the Southern Drakensberg on the outskirts of Underberg in KwaZulu-Natal.

Successfully operating since 1972, Pevensey Place is currently home to 76 adults.

Residents take part in the daily running of the facility, the upkeep of the vegetable gardens, tending to livestock, and manning the Pevensey farm store. Furthermore, they are involved in various fundraising projects, including an annual fete hosted in September each year where their handicrafts, vegetables, books, boerewors-rolls and famous pancakes are sold. More than R100 000 was raised at the last event.

Pevensey's residents also provide much-needed back-up support at large community events which help to draw outside visitors and tourists to the region. This includes the annual N3TC Drak Challenge.

15 **Underberg**



“

“Our Pevensey Fete was super, and my fellow residents, work so hard in the craft centre through-out the year, and to then see our hard work being rewarded by our goods selling out fast, feels very good. It is a pleasure to contribute to our centre in this way.”

- Resident

“While Pevensey Place is actively embraced by both the Underberg community and visitors to the area, resident participation in our activities remains of equal importance to the well-being of our residents,” explains director Mark Whitson. “Their involvement creates a general sense of belonging, ownership and social cohesion in our community; and is also in line with N3TC’s vision to improve lives and affect lasting positive change along the N3 Corridor.

Annual funding received through the N3TC Touching Lives Programme helps to ensure the smooth running of Pevensey Place. Many residents do not receive any family support. These are Pevensey’s ‘orphan residents’, whose care and residency are entirely dependent on the support of funding partners such as N3TC.

“Your support helps to reassure our ‘orphans’ that their place at Pevensey Place is secure, and that they are accepted and needed which are essential to their emotional and physical well-being,” ends Mr Whitson.



N3TC Drak Challenge

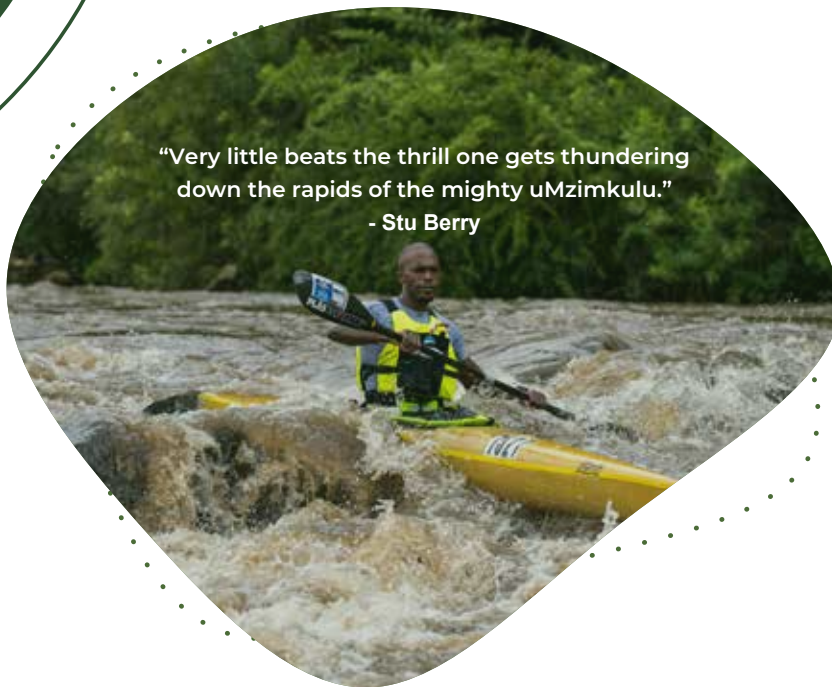
“It doesn’t get any better than this,” says race organiser, Stu Berry, when he talks about the annual N3TC Drak Challenge, one of KwaZulu-Natal’s premier paddling events.



16 Underberg

"Very little beats the thrill one gets thundering
down the rapids of the mighty uMzimkulu."

- Stu Berry



The most fun you can have canoeing

N3TC is the title sponsor of this annual canoe marathon organised by the Underberg-based Canyon Kayak Club.

The popular two-day race, which started in 1994, attracts paddlers from around South Africa, and beyond our borders. Day 1 of the race stretches over 38 kilometres with some tricky rapids in two gorges to be negotiated. Day 2's 25 kilometre-stretch is far more technical, with the final rapid, a notorious challenge.

"Competitors say the attraction does not only lie in the paddling adventure, it is also the warm hospitality of the community, the pristine environment, and the majestic beauty of the region that keeps them coming back for more."

The Drak is us

Drak Marathon pioneer, Steve Black concurs: "The beauty of the Drak Challenge is us. Winning is great, but it is us, the welcoming people of Underberg, the fantastic accommodation in the area, the uMzimkulu River, the clean water that you drink as you canoe, the supporters and funders – it's all of this, and more that makes it such a spectacular event."

The 30th N3TC Drak Challenge attracted an influx of tourists resulting in many temporary employment opportunities, and a welcome cash injection into the region.

All proceeds from the event are channelled back into the local economy, while various socio-welfare organisations also stand to benefit.

Community organisations such as Pevensey Place, the Family Literary Project, Underberg Emergency Medical Services, and the Underberg Primary School not only benefit from the proceeds of the event, but they also get the opportunity to earn money by selling food and drinks, running vehicle shuttles, and providing manpower to the race organisers.

"It is rewarding to see paddlers and spectators coming each year for the thrills and excitement of the event, to soak up the magnificence of our region, and to notice the positive impact the N3TC Drak Challenge is having on the well-being of our people, the environment, and especially our river," says Mr Berry.

On an environmental level, the proceeds from the N3TC Drak Challenge also contribute toward maintaining the health of the uMzimkulu River which includes the ongoing removal of alien vegetation such as Black Wattle.



"Remember those who plant the trees
when you are able to eat."

- Slondile Mhlongo
Principal

Lions River Primary School

Siyabonga kakhulu – We're unlocking the world

"Thank you very much for helping us to sow the seeds of a brighter future for our learners," says Lions River Primary School principal, Slondile Mhlongo.

This small farm school, with just more than a hundred learners, is an integral pillar of the educational landscape in the rural community of Lions River on the outskirts of Howick in KwaZulu-Natal.

"Though our school is small, we are committed to unlocking the world for our learners, and fostering an environment conducive to their learning, growth, and individual advancement. In this regard, N3TC is an important, longstanding partner of our school."

Ms Mhlongo continues: "Funding received from N3TC has enabled us to obtain important IT resources for our school, including internet connectivity, and has helped to bring about stability to our operations."

17 **Lions River**



Information technology opens doors and opportunities

The school was able to appoint an IT educator who is also assisting the management team with financial matters, administrative tasks, and record keeping.

Thanks to an internet connection, learners are being taught essential computer skills and are benefiting from regular e-classroom lessons. Next steps will be to install wireless internet and to add to the number of computer workstations, or laptops, for educators and learners.

"Our school is gradually growing in both learner- and educator numbers, and we are slowly able to reduce multi-grade classes. We are very proud to be 4IR compliant, and able to stand our ground in a technological future.

Follow our Facebook page, **@Lions River Primary School Supporters**, where we share the highlights of our educational journey, and acknowledge our partners. Discover what our learners get up to, and experience the growth and positivity at Lions River Primary School. We may be small, but our dreams are big, and we are working hard to reach them," ends Ms Mhlongo.



Curry's Post Educational Trust

Curry's Post Primary School is located high up in the hills of the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands. This school serves children from low-income families and stands as a successful and exemplary model of rural education in South Africa.

For over 30 years, the Curry's Post Educational Trust (CPET) has supported their local primary school. Formed by residents from the surrounding area, the CPET raises and administers funds to develop educational partnerships that enhance the school's learning environment.

The IT Room, funded by N3TC, has introduced technology to both learners and the wider community. Mondli Nomafu teaches computer skills to new learners, and helps existing learners to explore the world of technology to source information for school tasks. His dedication has transformed the IT centre into a hub of learning and discovery, providing a safe and enjoyable space.



Education partnerships to benefit rural children

Mr. Nomafu highlights that technology is creating new opportunities for young scholars from remote areas. He observes an increased interest and ownership in their learning journey, with new skills fostering confidence and enthusiasm to remain within the educational system.

"Access to this IT centre assists our learners, particularly Grade 7 students, to transition from a small, supportive farm school to the much larger classes of regional high schools. Online access to the curriculum and supplementary resources is not only invaluable to our current learners, but also to former students and the entire community." - Amanda McCarthy, chairperson of the Curry's Post Educational Trust





TOUCHING LIVES



“Sticks in a bundle are unbreakable.”
- Kenyan Proverb



N3TC

Michaelhouse Community Partnership Trust

Eduhelpers Provide back-up to under-resourced schools

Michaelhouse, an independent boys' boarding school in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, subscribes to the principles of good citizenship, and in this regard, actively participates in educational initiatives beyond the school's gates.

Through its flagship outreach initiative, the Michaelhouse Community Partnership Trust (MCPT), the school facilitates high-impact educational programmes for under-resourced schools in its catchment area. These initiatives concentrate on leadership development, enhancing teacher competence, improving learning outcomes and restoring infrastructural dignity.



Nottingham Road, Mooi River, Lions River



The MCPT is aligned with N3TC's goal to ensure that its Touching Lives Programme goes beyond mere handouts to nurturing partnerships, and developing people and opportunities that will provide long-term, sustainable outcomes for beneficiaries of economic development and social impact funding.

Part of this initiative is hiring motivated Eduhelpers - passionate, qualified, or qualifying teachers - who receive on-the-job training while improving the teacher-to-learner ratio in under-resourced schools.

They cater to diverse demands, playing various roles in the different schools, while acting as important liaisons between the MCPT and schools. Eduhelpers assist in administrative tasks, including due diligence submissions, checking resource availability, and organising workshops. By doing so, they help to alleviate a considerable burden on school principals and leaders, allowing them to concentrate more effectively on educational priorities and overall school management – ultimately enhancing the educational experience of students in rural schools.





Forging strong bonds between schools, parents and communities

The recruitment strategy for Eduhelpers was designed to align individuals with schools in their communities to primarily reduce travel costs. This approach, however, yielded additional benefits.

With Eduhelpers being locally based in their communities, parents now maintain regular contact with schools through these individuals. Their proximity helps them to address issues that learners may experience at the household level which in turn provides valuable context to teachers.



Moreover, this localised placement has proven advantageous in involving parents at the schools. Eduhelpers use community communication platforms to share notices, and emphasise the importance of attending meetings and participating in school activities. This strategy has effectively strengthened the connection between schools, Eduhelpers, and the communities they serve.

A standout feature of the Eduhelper community is its commitment to collaboration, fostering open communication, and exchanging resources and best practices to enhance the overall educational experience.

MCPT's outreach efforts are helping to bridge the gaps in 16 schools in the larger Balgovan-region. In 2024, funding from the N3TC Touching Lives Programme secured the support of 11 additional Eduhelpers in these school communities. This project not only builds skills, it also encourages critical thinking and ensures contributions are meaningful and aligned with the specific needs of its recipients.



Midlands Community College

Mobile Science Laboratory

Midlands Community College's Mobile Science Laboratory Programme was started in 2002 to inspire enthusiasm and a love of science. The project brings science to life for grades 10, 11, and 12 students at under-resourced schools, most of which do not have science laboratories. Through hands-on learning facilitated by the mobile laboratory, the project actively improves Physical Science education and promotes STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) in the uMgungundlovu and uThukela districts of KwaZulu-Natal.

Firsthand experience is crucial for learners' understanding of scientific experiments. For instance, the Grade 12 experiment emphasises the importance of accuracy and precision, where the volume of just one drop can determine the success or failure of the experiment. This practical engagement is essential for fostering a deeper comprehension of scientific concepts. Educators are also supported through workshops where they learn how to use scientific equipment and receive additional teaching and learning resources.

The project's impact on the community has significantly driven measurable change. Students gain experience conducting scientific experiments, which deepens their understanding of scientific concepts. This results in improved test scores and greater classroom engagement. The programme has also provided essential resources and training, enhancing the community's overall quality of science education.

20 Nottingham Road



YEAR IN REVIEW

In 2024, the project continued to accomplish its goals to address the critical shortage of science laboratories in resource-constrained schools by providing a fully equipped Mobile Science Laboratory service to assist grades 10, 11 and 12 learners with curriculum-aligned physical science experiments.



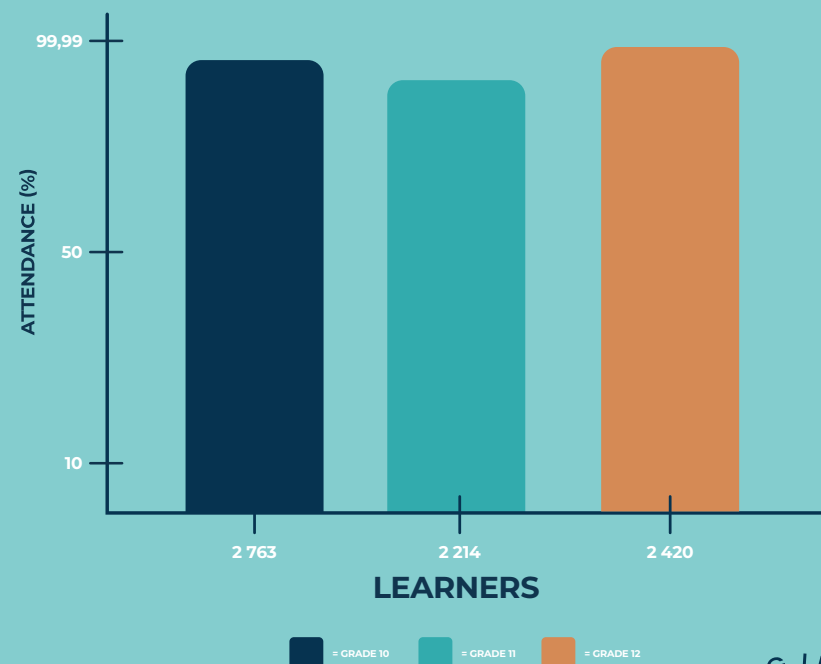
64 schools were registered for the project

Worksheets, notes, and hands-on training provided academic support to physical science educators, as well as the required equipment and resources for experiments. At the beginning of the year, 39 educators attended a workshop and received ongoing support through a WhatsApp group, which is updated with resources and answers to questions.

N3TC funding enabled the Mobile Laboratory staff to participate in in-house training, which refreshed and equipped them with the necessary skills to conduct experiments and deliver career presentations. This preparation ensured they were ready to commence activities on the first day of school. The team, known for its dedication and efficiency, benefited from enhanced collaboration and morale.

The project also employs Laboratory Technicians to engage with learners and educators with the practical demonstration of theoretical concepts. These technicians are from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, and their achievements are a remarkable source of inspiration. Their ability to share personal challenges while assisting learners adds a motivational dimension to the educational experience. This not only encourages and motivates learners but also contributes to a deeper understanding of the core concepts involved in the experiments. The Technicians' narratives effectively bridge the gap between theory and real-world application, fostering an enriching learning environment.

The Technicians receive mentorship and guidance, and the project managers actively promote and support their pursuit of further studies, providing opportunities for skills development.



KwaZulu-Natal Crane Foundation

Conservation Project

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Conservation is mostly about the little things we often take for granted

The KwaZulu-Natal Crane Foundation (KZNCF) is working very hard to get this message across to as many people as possible, particularly in the ecologically sensitive KwaZulu-Natal Midlands region.

“

Whilst the spotlight in conservation is most often shone on large iconic wildlife, conservation of biodiversities is where it begins – and it starts with caring about the the “littlies” like insects, butterflies, bees and birds, frogs, crabs, ducks and fishes, grasses, bulbs, flowers, and shrubs,” says Jon Bates, a committee member of the KZN Crane Foundation and co-founder of the Bill Barnes Nature Reserve. “They all play vital roles in our biodiverse world, and they can be found right on your doorstep.”

21 Nottingham Road



Bill Barnes Crane and Oribi Nature Reserve

The Foundation is located at the Usher Conservation Centre on the Bill Barnes Crane and Oribi Nature Reserve between the N3 Toll Route and Nottingham Road. The reserve was developed and established by three conservation-minded, and adjacent landowners – Jon Bates, the late Peter Brown, and James Berning.

The founders aimed to create a model for environmentally responsible farming in line with a biodiversity stewardship programme. The reserve is home to breeding pairs of Wattled Cranes, Grey Crowned Cranes, and the increasingly threatened Oribi.

Funding received from N3TC contributes to various KZNCF conservation projects, including the Wattled Crane rearing and release programme, the publication of a series of books on South African Cranes, The Sentinels, the development of hiking and biking trails, and support of the Foundation's Nature-based Education programme.

"N3TC has been our longest-standing and most consistent partner," says Janet Snow, KZNCF committee member. "We consider it a feather in the cap of the organisation's commitment to the protection of our biodiverse habitats, sustainable conservation, education, and responsible land stewardship."

The ongoing support from N3TC has enabled the KZN Crane Foundation to make the Bill Barnes Nature Reserve a real and viable example of the importance of conserving natural grasslands and wetlands. The Foundation has been able to erect game- and electric fencing to protect the Conservancy from unwelcome intrusions and poaching. While the fences do not seal off the entire Reserve, the boundaries that remain open connect to secure farmlands and open natural veld – which are important movement corridors for game such as Oribi and Common Reedbuck.

The KZN Crane Foundation is now planning to house pairs of captive non-releasable Wattled Cranes into enclosures at the Bill Barnes Nature Reserve. If successful, these birds will be a real visual experience for visitors, particularly for learners on education excursions.

KwaZulu-Natal Crane Foundation Project

Nature-based Education Programme





KZNCF's school excursions (supported by N3TC and the Herman Ohlthaver Trust) expose learners to the natural grassland biome, to experience appropriate curriculum-linked lessons in nature. To date, 1951 learners and teachers have had the opportunity to attend the Foundation's nature-based education programme at the Bill Barnes Nature Reserve in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, and to walk the three-kilometre Education Trail on the reserve.

"The Education Trail was laid out to include a variety of ecosystems, incorporating bridges over streams and a wetland, and examples of human impacts and also includes examples of mitigation processes to reduce the impacts, such as 'flappers' on power lines to prevent bird collisions," explains Ms Snow, environmental educator and KZNCF committee member. The impact of the excursions on the learners is often highlighted in their comments.

"This is the first time I have walked on grass, in an open area." – Grade 10 Learner

“

Unless we are willing to encourage our children to reconnect with and appreciate the natural world, we can't expect them to help protect or care for it." – David Suzuki

A teacher who attended an educational excursion with Grade 7 learners reported that one of the learners was very excited to give a presentation at school after attending the excursion because he "knew about map work, and the Grade 10's didn't". His excitement will undoubtedly transfer to his studies, schooling, and learning.

Malwande Dlalisa, a KZNCF Edu-Facilitator, who leads school groups on their visits to the reserve says she notices a "huge difference on every excursion in children from when they arrive to when they walk out in the veld. I get very interesting questions from them, and they are always buzzing with keen interest."

Educators benefit from the Professional Educator Learning Community (PELC) workshops hosted by the KZNCF, where they obtain expert guidance to gain confidence in their teaching of the required curriculum, particularly on environmental components. National studies have shown that over 80% of South Africa's teachers are not competent in teaching the environmental curriculum requirements.

"We aim to assist teachers to feel comfortable to teach these requirements through our workshops, expanding their content knowledge, including unlearning incorrect concepts, and exploring potential pedagogical processes," ends Ms Snow.

Midlands Meander Emerging Artists Project (MMEAP)

Supporting enterprise development in rural communities

The Midlands Meander was formed in 1985 by a group of artists and crafters seeking to showcase their work. Today, the Midlands Meander stretches from Pietermaritzburg to the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg National Park. It encompasses more than 80 kilometres, including at least 150 sites for exploration, and houses the largest curio and craft centre in the country.

Despite attracting numerous local and international visitors annually, the region continues to face high unemployment rates and significant poverty.

In response, N3TC and the Midlands Meander Association established the Midlands Meander Emerging Artist Project in 2014. The project aims to identify and support disadvantaged artists and crafters in the Midlands, assisting them in enhancing their skills, expanding their product ranges, accessing new markets, and earning livelihoods from their crafts.



One such cooperative of skilled seamstresses is located in a remote village 40 kilometres from Mooi River. "It was challenging for them to market their products from this remote area, but with N3TC's support, they now enjoy full membership of the Midlands Meander Association (MMA), along with the business skills training, marketing opportunities, economic benefits, and ongoing mentorship it offers," says Kate Kelly, coordinator of the MMEAP.

As part of MMEAP, N3TC annually funds full membership of the Midlands Meander Association for six emerging artists and crafter-cooperatives. "Through these efforts, we aim to transform our local economy via rural tourism development initiatives," continues Ms Kelly.

Project Highlights in 2024:

Themba Creations achieved their largest single sale to date.

Siyaphambili Basket Weavers' trays sold like hotcakes at the Nguni & Aloe Shop at Linga Lapa at the R103 interchange with the N3 Toll Route.

Senzokuhle successfully delivered their first order through the online store.

Babanentse Primary Co-operative successfully delivered an order for branded corporate gear to Indezi River Creamery.



Membership benefits include:

- ✓ *Featuring in the annual printed Midlands Meander Guide, including a QR code linking to each business's webpage, guide panel and route number, categorized fast find entry, one pin marker on the route map, and one route marker on the main map*
- ✓ *Social media exposure through likes, shares, and stories, as well as three dedicated Facebook and Instagram posts per annum*
- ✓ *Participation and referrals via WhatsApp groups*
- ✓ *Inclusion in seasonal public newsletters reaching 18,000 subscribers, and three stand-alone email campaigns*
- ✓ *Opportunities to display business brochures in the Tourism Information Office*
- ✓ *A carousel advertisement on the MMA homepage*
- ✓ *Participation in the E-Commerce Store funded by N3TC*

"Our collaborative partnership with N3TC not only contributes to community development, economic growth, and the empowerment of our artists and crafters but also strengthens our local networks and enhances our region's reputation as a hub of craftsmanship and cultural exchange," concludes Ms Kelly.



TOUCHING LIVES



“If you want to be incrementally better: Be competitive. If you want to be exponentially better: Be cooperative.” - Unknown



N3TC

"If you want to touch the past, touch a rock; If you want to touch the present touch a flower ; If you want to touch the future, touch a life." - Unknown

Babanentse Primary Co-Operative

A force for good

Enterprise development, and delivering socio-economic benefits to communities connected to the N3 Toll Route, are important components of the N3TC Touching Lives Programme.

For many rural residents, life is a daily struggle. Their lives often paint a stark picture of social inequality, unemployment, poor living conditions, and food poverty. By partnering with small enterprises and development projects, such as the Babanentse Primary Co-Operative in Mooi River, N3TC hopes to help local communities flourish, and to have a lasting social impact.

Babanentse Primary Co-Operative was established in response to the lack of access to options for quality clothing in Bruntville.

Founded by Elsie Madlala, and like-minded seamstresses, the co-operative was born out of a commitment to support local needs. Since its inception, it has empowered its members through shared skills and resources, evolving into a respected name in the garment industry.

23

Bruntville



The co-operative successfully delivers tailored garments that meet the specific needs of their clients, including:

- Custom-made school or corporate uniforms, and overalls
- Customised, branded, or personalised T-Shirts
- Tailored accessories, such as bags and scarves
- Sublimation printing on hoodies, t-shirts, overalls, etc
- Fine embroidery
- Silk screen printing

"Not a single piece of fabric goes to waste. Considering where we come from, we are very conscious of promoting sustainability," says Mrs Madlala.

"Thanks to the support and funding Babanentse receives from N3TC, we could expand our business, add more industrial equipment and machinery, and maximise our operations. In 2024, we have increased our production lines, and have fulfilled several bulk orders. We can afford to keep more stock on our shelves, and have even started to sell school shoes."

She continues: "Our partnership with N3TC is solid and rewarding. Together, we have seen people emerging from extreme poverty, earning an income, and being able to put food on their tables. They have hope, and that is a big win."

Babanentse Primary Co-operative is a member of the Midlands Meander Association



Senzakahle 1 Primary Co-Operative



Senzakahle 1 Primary Co-operative is a member of the **Midlands Meander Association**

Beating the odds to stand tall

The Senzakahle 1 Primary Co-Operative, a textile operation located in Bruntville, KwaZulu-Natal, was started by a group of industrious women to create work for themselves, and job opportunities for others. "We were tired of our everyday struggles, being hungry, and looking for help that wasn't coming," says Ntombizodwa Khoza, Senzakahle's founder and chairperson. "In 2014, we joined hands with N3TC to help scale our business. At the time, we were experiencing many challenges and uncertainty. We required more materials, fabrics, machines, and business advice to help take our operation to the next level. Since then our baby – this business – has grown up." Apart from funding some of the essential equipment Senzakahle required to maintain and expand its operations, N3TC also supported the co-operative with business training and financial management skills. "Thanks to N3TC involvement, we have gained business knowledge, and have learned to persevere to survive," says Jabu Dube, vice chairman of the co-operative. "Facing our challenges head-on, that's what N3TC taught us to do."

24

Bruntville

Ms Khoza agrees. "During 2024, our team realised that all businesses – even the big ones – have challenges, but every challenge is also an opportunity to grow. With N3TC's support, we can stand tall in our community." Senzakahle enjoys the support of their community, with orders coming in from local businesses, sports teams, schools, and church groups who place bulk orders with them.

"One of our local farmers in Mooi River even blessed us with a big donation of fabric. We've never worked with this kind of material, and had to learn to sew differently, but it was a pleasure to change the way we work, and to do new things," continues Ms Khoza. Senzakhale has come a long way. They started with almost nothing after they lost their jobs when their former employer, a large textile manufacturer, closed its doors. "Just look at as now. We can employ people, sustain ourselves, give our children a future, and dream of one day having our own large-scale factory. None of this would have been possible without the support of an organisation such as N3TC. They gave us the confidence to open doors to our futures," ends Senzakahle's treasurer, Buselaphi Khumalo.



Reel Life

Cultivating a greener South Africa
- Growing food security



25

Bruntville



Reel Life NPC (Reel Life) believes small actions can spark meaningful change, and have spent the past three years tackling food insecurity, empowering communities, and creating sustainable opportunities with innovative gardening solutions.

The World Food Programme defines food security as “availability and adequate access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life”. Unfortunately, food security is challenging for many people in South Africa, including families living adjacent to the N3 Toll Route.



In response, N3TC partnered with Reel Life to address food poverty, insecurity, and hunger. The project focused on selected sites in Bruntville, near Mooi River.

The N3TC Household Income and School Gardens project was established to improve low-income households' access to fresh, nutritious vegetables. It aims to reduce dependence on shop-bought produce, and help families grow their own vegetables to lower food costs and ensure freshness.

Cultivating a variety of crops to improve nutrition and meal options helps to increase dietary diversity. It builds resilience to economic challenges by ensuring families have access to reliable food sources.

The initiative supports 300 households and 100 income growers by enhancing their skills, and creating an environment conducive to improving food security. The goal is to establish at least 400 sustainable food gardens, with Bruntville Primary School as the project's central node and training facility.

In addition, the project helps families to supplement their income by selling surplus produce. Growers are connected to local markets and community members for effective sales, and are given gardening, business management, and marketing training to help them succeed.



The year in review

In 2024, the project employed a community champion who was tasked with managing the project on-site and ensuring its long-term sustainability. Reel Life's community champion was instrumental in providing oversight and coordination, while fostering community engagement and support. The champion was also responsible for assisting the local school to ensure that vegetables grown were added to their feeding scheme. This initiative went a long way to enhance and support learner nutrition and well-being, to build capacity, and instill a sense of ownership and responsibility within the community.

Reel Life's regional trainer also played a crucial guidance role to ensure the community champion and beneficiaries were empowered with the skills and knowledge to maintain their gardens.

These efforts underscored the project's overall success and demonstrated the substantial value of investing in local talent for the community and its institutions. Integrating the community champion's role across the broader community, including the school, highlights the project's holistic impact and long-term potential for positive change.



2024 Highlights



Gardens established:

90% of the targeted households successfully established gardens, securing a sustainable food source for the community.

Increased food security:

Beneficiaries reported a **50% reduction in household food expenses**, particularly for vegetables, reducing financial strain.

Top crops:

Spinach, carrots, beetroot, and tomatoes were the most grown crops, significantly enhancing family nutrition and food variety.

Gardening skills development:

Participants acquired skills in basic gardening, seed saving, and organic pest management, building their confidence and reducing reliance on external food sources.

Community resilience:

With locally grown produce, families experienced increased resilience against food price fluctuations and seasonal food shortages, especially during peak months when vegetables were in high demand.

Supported 100 income growers:

80% of income growers were able to reach local markets and neighbours, providing a new stream of income and reinforcing community food networks.

Market access and outreach:

Income growers used grant facilities to access markets and provide fresh produce to local vendors, clinics, and community members, strengthening local market ties.

Average earnings:

Income growers reported monthly earnings between R200 and R1000, contributing to improved household incomes, school expenses, and other family needs.

Community employment:

The project fostered additional income-generating activities, with some growers employing family or neighbours during peak harvest times, further boosting community livelihood.

Together, Reel Life and N3TC have transformed lives, allowing low-income households the opportunity to access fresh, nutritious vegetables and significantly improving their food security. Through training, the community was empowered to cultivate their own food gardens, fostering a sense of pride and self-sufficiency.

1000 Paws Walk for SPCA



26 Howick



Special fundraiser in aid of SPCA branches

Fundraising and volunteering are vitally important to keep the doors of animal welfare organisations open, and it is no different for three SPCA branches in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands.

The SPCA's core mandate is the prevention of cruelty to animals, and in pursuing their duty of care, they solely rely on the goodwill, contributions, and donations from the communities they serve. The SPCA undertakes animal welfare inspections, outreach programmes, rescue and rehoming activities, and provides kennels for the safeguarding of animals, medical care, sterilisations, as well as end-of-life support. The SPCA closely monitors their areas for outbreaks of dangerous diseases, administers vaccinations, undertakes pest prevention programmes, and immediately intervenes when high-risk situations, such as a suspected rabies outbreak, are reported.

In the Midlands region, three SPCA branches - Pietermaritzburg, Umngeni-Howick, and Mooi River & District – cover the area from the start of the N3 Toll Route at Cedara Interchange to just before the Estcourt off-ramp.

These branches provide also essential support to N3TC's Road Incident Management System (RIMS) when they are called upon to respond to situations along the N3 Toll Route involving animals in transit, reported to be in distress or involved in crashes.

The Hill's 1000 Paws Walk for the SPCA, supported by N3TC, is the most important annual fundraising event for these three SPCA branches. It also includes a raffle sale. Schools in the region support the raffle by helping with ticket sales, and competing per class to stand a chance of winning a sponsored 'Paws Party'. "Their support, and that received from the local community, businesses, shopping centres, veterinary practices, and others are our lifeline; and the 1000 Paws Walk - our saving grace," says Vicky Pollock, volunteer chairperson of the Mooi River & District SPCA.





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“Teaching the teachers: This, in simple terms, is the core of what Environmental Learning and Teaching (EnviroLearn) is all about. Our programme focuses on teacher professional development for sustainable environmental education.”

- Janet Snow,
Director, EnviroLearn

EnviroLearn

Educators' Skills Development in Environmental Learning

Learning is a journey that never ends

“Education for sustainable development (ESD) in our schooling system is crucial as we prepare to pass the baton forward to the next generation to halt indiscriminate environmental damage and the destruction of our planet. In this regard, educators are central to effecting change. But, to do so, they require a deep understanding of environmental concepts, and a commitment to shift the direction of classroom teaching to transformative learning and pedagogy.”

Established in 2009, EnviroLearn's programme equips educators with the tools to inspire sustainable and equitable futures. Grounded in the principles of learner-centeredness, inclusivity, integration, and holistic development, its curriculum promotes social cohesion, equity, and environmental awareness. Encompassing Life Orientation, Natural Sciences and Technology, and Social Sciences, EnviroLearn's courses emphasise relevance, engagement, and age-appropriate learning experiences.

EnviroLearn focuses on:

- ✓ Active learning
- ✓ Situated learning, and proximity experience
- ✓ Collaborative monitoring, evaluation, and reflection learning
- ✓ Critical, deliberative and reflexive thinking

EnviroLearn is a founding partner of the Fundisa for Change Programme, and conducts various projects around the country to incorporate:

- *Continued professional teacher development*
- *Developing teaching and education-supported learning material*
- *Training environmental education practitioners in appropriate pedagogical processes*
- *Supporting the development and design of appropriate ESD projects*
- *Developing age-appropriate projects to support teaching and learning for living planet protection*
- *Evaluation of sites, natural wonders or resources, and specific scientific interest areas for potential educational or research purposes*

South Africa ranks as the 3rd most biologically diverse country in the world, with the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands being a key area of biodiversity. It is an important water catchment area, with forests and some of the last moist mistbelt grasslands, and is home to many endangered species.

With the support of N3TC, EnviroLearn has the opportunity to inspire local educators through training courses and practical experiences linked to specific topics in the curriculums they teach.

One such course, the 'Teaching About Water' programme, was very popular amongst teachers, and well-attended in 2024.

"Although course participants always respond positively, and tremendously enjoy the workshops, EnviroLearn's greatest impact is in the actual changes that are being noticed in teachers' approach to and execution of their teaching," says Ms Snow.

Teachers, who have completed the requirements of EnviroLearn's courses, including contact session attendance, and the completion of a portfolio of evidence assignments, receive a Short-Course Certificate from Rhodes University. "This certificate is by far not the most important component of our programme, but it serves as an additional motivation to participants to attend and complete the courses," says Ms Snow.



"Teachers who have completed the courses, and have received a certificate from a prestigious university, rightfully feel proud of their achievements, and are motivated to continue on their path of professional development.

In a rural area such as ours, it is of particular significance, as access to quality, accredited and endorsed training is not readily available. With the funding received from N3TC, rural teachers now also enjoy opportunities to upgrade their qualifications, at no cost to themselves. We are excited and proud to be part of this transition in education and thank N3TC for their support and encouragement along the way," ends Ms Snow.

Learning is a lifelong journey

“It is important to dream – with our eyes wide open – so that we can see where we are going, and how to find our way.” – Thabani Mkhize

Thabani Mkhize is a young educator at Weston Agricultural College, on the outskirts of Mooi River. As a life sciences educator, with a passion for learning, Thabani was selected to attend EnviroLearn’s educator skills development programme, to advance his competency and confidence in science and environmental education.

“I am passionate about developing people, lifelong learning, and encouraging others to believe in their abilities, and work hard in pursuit of their dreams,” says Mr Mkhize.

“I owe a debt of gratitude to my father, Mr Mandlenkosi Mkhize. He instilled good, solid life principles in me, and from a very young age taught me that success is 5% brains and 95% perseverance and consistency. From him, I learned that you don’t have to go fast to achieve success. Learning is a lifelong journey.”



After matriculating in 2011 from the James Nxumalo Agricultural High School in Ulundi, Mr Mkhize went on to graduate from the University of KwaZulu-Natal with a BSc in Agriculture (Animal and Poultry Science). He has since completed various short courses in education methods and classroom management, environmental sciences, biodiversity, protection of water resources, and agriculture to enhance his knowledge and build on his skill set. He is also looking forward to pursuing a Master’s degree.

“My passion for education was first stirred during my high school years. I was helping my fellow learners to solve maths and science problems. I experienced such a sense of achievement when their confidence and grades improved. This laid the groundwork for me to become an educator.”

He says his qualifications, profession, and further education continue to keep him focused. “It is an honour to combine my desire for lifelong learning with my interests in teaching, innovation, the environment, indigenous knowledge, and agriculture. Education is the most powerful weapon we have to change the world. It excites and motivates me to notice how young people are taking responsibility for their futures. I want to be part of their movement, and am eager to join their journey to success.”





TOUCHING LIVES



“There are no problems we cannot solve together, and very few we can solve by ourselves.” - Lyndon B. Johnson



N3TC

Treverton College

A proud member of the N3TC family

Located on a 270-hectare estate in Mooi River, Treverton College provides quality co-education as a predominantly boarding school.

According to the headmaster, Kean Broom, they strive for academic excellence in the classroom, while the formal learning process is complemented by a diverse range of sporting codes and a vibrant cultural programme. "Our College's approach to education, extracurricular, and social activities provides students with opportunities for personal growth in a safe and supportive environment. From this platform, they can step into the adult world as confident, well-adjusted members of society."

In recent years, the College has observed an economic decline in the school's immediate catchment area, reducing the number of families who can afford independent schooling. The demand for quality education, however, continues to increase as local government schools struggle to meet the overwhelming need.

28

Mooi River



Many Treverton students attend the school on social responsibility grants, supported by additional funding obtained from supporters, including friends and family members of the school, and independent donors.

"N3TC's contribution towards the educational journey of nine of our learners is highly valued. Your support helps us maintain a diverse student body, and keep the College relevant in our community. Most importantly, the impact of the Touching Lives Programme on the lives and futures of our bursary recipients is significant. These learners complete their schooling careers well-equipped to positively affect their communities and contribute to the socio-economic development of this region," continued Mr Broom.

"Whether playing in the first netball team or encouraging young and upcoming learners, showing tremendous leadership skills, and mentoring others in their circles of influence, these students made a positive impact, and made us proud.

We appreciate the opportunities they have been granted. It did not go unnoticed," ended Mr Broom.

In 2024, N3TC's bursary students performed well, with notable participation in their classrooms, on the sports fields, and in their social circles.



St. David's Diocesan School

Humanity. Community. Responsibility. are the principles upon which St David's is built

St. David's Diocesan School, a small rural primary school, located in Greytown, KwaZulu-Natal, was established in 1992 to build an inclusive, welcoming school community with a learner-centred focus to help children grow and thrive.

The school aims to instil its learners with self-discipline, a sound work ethic, and an ethical code of conduct based on courtesy and mutual respect. Good citizenship is actively promoted to give each child the best all-round start in life.

According to the Provincial Department of Education, St. David's is considered a beacon of hope and pride in the Umvoti Local Municipality. The school's excellent reputation for providing a high standard of education in a warm and supportive environment seems to be its main attraction.

Seven learners showing great potential, but whose parents or guardians could not afford to give them the education they deserve, received Top-Up Bursaries from N3TC through the Touching Lives programme in 2024.

29

Greytown



Despite many obstacles, these learners in Grades 7, 6, 5 and 3 worked diligently to produce good results. They applied themselves with determination to grasp difficult concepts in mathematics, and to improve their English reading and writing skills. Their perseverance will undoubtedly continue to stand them in good stead.

One of N3TC's top-up bursary students completed her final primary school year in 2024 and was promoted with flying colours to Grade 8

Not only did she excel academically, winning the top mathematics prize, but she was also elected as a prefect, and achieved an award for Fellowship and Service to the School.

Overall, St David's management team is proud of the school's excellent attendance record and good pass rate per grade. Learners are well supported, make good progress, and are accepted into the secondary schools of their choice where they are frequently top academic achievers.

Equally notable, many former N3TC bursary students have been elected as prefects, including to the positions of Head Girl and Head Boy, have excelled in sports, and have been nominated as Dux learners.



Fundisisizwe Bursary Fund

Turning despondency into optimism, hope and gratitude

Historically, children with disabilities have often been excluded from education, dropping out early if they attended school at all. Studies in South Africa reported that up to 70% of disabled children were not in school, facing obstacles like financial constraints, a limited number of special needs schools, inaccessible facilities, unsuitable learning materials, as well as a lack of transport, inadequate psycho-social or expert support, discrimination, and prejudice.

Breaking down the barriers to education

Fundisisizwe Bursary Fund administrator, Kirsty Flemming, expressed gratitude to N3TC for supporting 27 learners with disabilities through their Touching Lives Top-Up Bursary Programme in 2024.

30

Estcourt



Without this support, many students would be unable to complete their education.

Bursary students attend the KwaZamokuhle Special School until Grade 7 and then usually continue high school at Adelaide Tambo Special School. These learners, from deep rural areas, face many challenges, discrimination and prejudice because of their physical, intellectual, mental, or learning disabilities.

N3TC's bursaries, however, help restore their confidence. They feel seen, and as if their lives can also amount to something, and are inspired by past bursary students who have matriculated, pursued tertiary studies, and have careers. One former student is currently enrolled for a BSc in Engineering.

"With the support of N3TC, the Fundisisizwe Bursary Fund is showing disabled children and society that every child can dream of a brighter future," ends Ms Flemming.

Fundisisizwe Learner Support & Assistive Devices Project

Opening doors to a wider world

"If you don't have a proper wheelchair that is when you really feel that you are disabled. But if you have a proper wheelchair, which meets your needs and suits you, you can forget about your disability." - Faustina, World Report on Disability, 2011

Sbusiso Manyala, a 12-year-old boy from Rockslay near Wembeszi in KwaZulu-Natal, was born with Hemimelia (a condition where the tibia or fibula, or both lower limbs are absent). At just a year, he had to undergo bilateral amputations at his knees. Sbusiso also has Ectrodactyly, which causes the malformation or absence of fingers and toes. Attending the Kwazamokuhle Special School in Ephangweni near Estcourt, Sbusiso ably performs his daily tasks using a pincer grasp.



Unfortunately, Sbusiso had to endure some major challenges with ineffective prosthetics over the years until Jumping Kids, a non-profit company, supplied him with prosthetic blades in 2023. He now enjoys running and playing soccer and spends as little time as possible sitting in one place!

In partnership with the N3TC Touching Lives Programme, the Fundisisizwe Learner Support & Assistive Devices Project helps beneficiaries obtain suitable devices to assist them along their rehabilitation journey towards independence. "As therapists, we notice the vast difference these life-changing devices make and the positive effect it has on the well-being, independence, mobility, and quality of life of recipients, their families, and communities," says Fundisisizwe therapist, Katja van Dyck.

One such beneficiary is 25-year-old Mohammed Abdur Khan, with Cerebral Palsy, who relies on a wheelchair for mobility. After struggling with unsuitable wheelchairs for many years, Mohammed finally received a power wheelchair in 2018, but it required various adaptations and fixes before it was perfectly adjusted to his specific needs. Final tweaks were made in 2024, and Mohammed now moves about with a wheelchair of perfect fit which is giving him the 'luxury' of pain-free days, greater freedom, and more opportunities to enjoy outdoor activities.

With support from N3TC, Fundisisizwe also installed toilet blocks in the girls' hostels. These blocks aid children in wheelchairs to independently perform daily tasks, and to maintain the milestones they have achieved in rehabilitation sessions at their hostels.

Appropriate assistive devices improve access to education, social and economic participation, quality of life, happiness, freedom, and overall satisfaction for people with disabilities. The sad reality, however, is that access to these forms of support remains lacking.



"In our line of work, these wins make up for all the heartache, frustrations, and struggles our young charges often have to endure," says Ms van Dyck.

According to the World Health Organisation, only an estimated 10% of all people who would benefit from appropriate assistive devices, receive them; and in poverty-stricken rural areas, access these devices is even more restricted. Children with disabilities are some of the most marginalised groups in societies. Working together, caregivers and funders can help restore their rights, dignity, and abilities to meaningfully participate in society.

Drakensberg Boys Choir School

Protecting a national icon

The world-renowned Drakensberg Boys Choir School (DBCS) has been an independent education institution and boarding school for the past 57 years. As a middle school, DBCS has been supporting talented boys between Grades 4 and 9 to hone their musical talents while receiving a top-notch education amongst the majestic mountain tops of the uKhahlamba (Central) Drakensberg – a world heritage site – near Winterton in KwaZulu-Natal.

“The boys come from all corners of the country, and from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds. The only requirements for them to become part of this rich musical experience are to have some musical talents and the makings of a good voice. They also have to show interest, and possess the self-discipline to participate in a full day of academics, choir practice and rehearsals, music theory, instrumental lessons, and sporting activities.



Winterton



At least 25% of the school's student body, attend the school on bursaries

Being a little bit adventurous, and open to exploring different experiences, also stand them in good stead,” explains Hendrik Bekker, executive headmaster of Drakensberg Boys Choir School.

External support from donors is essential to help DBCS ensure that qualifying, talented boys can attend this unique school regardless of financial constraints, and to keep the school's doors open to future generations. The Drakensberg Boys Choir is internationally acclaimed, and excellent ambassadors of our country. For decades they have toured the globe, and wowed audiences at home and abroad, with a packed musical line-up ranging from classical to contemporary masterpieces as well as various African and Afro-pop hits.

Unfortunately, this award-winning choir and school have lately been battling dwindling student numbers amidst fierce economic challenges. Mr Bekker continues: “It is inconceivable to think that the Drakies – a part of our heritage – could face obscurity. We cannot let them this happen on our watch.”



Making a difference with Drakies

"Boys who graduate from DBCS are set for life. They become confident men, who have formed lasting bonds, and who continue to excel beyond their tenure at the school," says Mr Bekker.

Drakie alumni are often found in leadership positions. They make their mark in student bodies, tertiary institutions, around boardrooms, and on world stages. They walk the corridors of academia with confidence and become thought leaders, mathematicians, scientists, engineers, passionate performers, sport stars, and valuable members of society – good citizens – who have a positive impact in their sphere of influence.

In 2024, N3TC supported 12 students with top-up bursaries. Their determination and commitment – sacrificing many weekends, holidays, and quality time with their families – to make the most of the opportunities they have been given are astounding for boys so young.

All 12 bursary students have maintained excellent standards and good academic grades. They are articulate, attentive and highly intelligent young men who have a solid grasp of difficult concepts, and show a good work ethic. They meet challenges head-on, are always willing to assist, and meaningfully contribute in the classroom.

"We are proud of the benefits of choral music in our educational curriculum, and the young men our school produces. With our team of dedicated staff and talented boys we hope to continue making Drakie magic for a long time to come," ends Mr Bekker.





TOUCHING LIVES



ubuntu (n.) "I am what I am
because of who we all are."



N3TC

Royal Drakensberg Education Trust

Safe places for children to live, grow, play and learn

The Royal Drakensberg Primary School, situated in the Northern Drakensberg region, is an independent school for children from Grade 000 to Grade 4, managed by the Royal Drakensberg Education Trust. The school aims to support rural children's development from infancy to 10 years old. Teachers employ a holistic development approach, teaching children in their mother tongue while enhancing their English skills, and literacy.



32

Bergville



The Trust has developed three interlinked initiatives to facilitate educational opportunities for rural children

Besides the Royal Drakensberg Primary School, it offers early childhood development (ECD) education through the Khanyisela Project, emphasizing play and experiential learning to develop language and pre-literacy skills. Additionally, the Babyboost and Child Care programme enhances early learning foundations and language development through playful interactions.

Both the ECD and Babyboost programmes, delivered by local facilitators, were created in response to the needs of young children in preschool facilities. The programmes operate on the premise that carers, with adequate knowledge and support, can significantly impact children's early development.

Carers receive support through group coaching sessions, home visits, structured playgroups, and toy and book libraries.

"It is rewarding to see how our larger school community is positively impacting society through their investment in the emotional, cognitive, physical, and mental well-being of all our children," says Thobani Ndlovu, principal of the Royal Drakensberg Primary School.

The programmes have increased awareness of the educational opportunities offered by the Royal Drakensberg Education Trust, particularly the Primary School. Enrolment rates at the Primary School have steadily increased as a result of the success of the ECD and Babyboost programmes.

Partnering with N3TC through the Touching Lives Programme, the Royal Drakensberg Primary School provides various value-added services to its community.

Novice teachers enhance the school's resources while gaining skills and experience for future career prospects. In 2024, two interns were appointed to assist with the School's Health and Safety portfolio, contributing to a safe environment and gaining valuable experience.

Facilitators of outreach programmes receive weekly feedback from their academic mentor, Dr Marysia Nash, to evaluate and improve their classes. They also review parenting styles to assess the impact of their programmes on caretakers and the children under their guardianship.

N3TC Top-Up Bursaries provide educational opportunities for learners whose families cannot afford school fees. In 2024, an N3TC bursary recipient received the top achiever award at Royal Drakensberg Primary.

The School encourages active parent participation in their children's growth and development journey, and expects parents to be supportive of the School's vision, mission, and core values. Challenges are addressed collaboratively within the school community.



N3TC Khanyisile Community Trust

Outlying communities thankful for every small act of kindness

In the small town of Van Reenen, located on the border between the Free State and KwaZulu-Natal, the N3TC Khanyisile Community Trust supports approximately 3000 learners from 10 schools in the region. These rural schools, all located at least 60 kilometres from the nearest town or service centre, rely on the N3TC Khanyisile Community Trust for support with their infrastructure, maintenance, developmental, socio-welfare, healthcare, nutritional, and other needs.

Local municipalities, charged with the responsibility to provide these services, often face resource and financial challenges of their own, resulting in slow service delivery and further marginalisation of rural communities. Consequently, Khanyisile plays a crucial role in providing essential services in the region. As a beneficiary of the N3TC Touching Lives Programme, Khanyisile is poised to evaluate the specific needs of each rural community against available resources, their strengths, assets, and abilities to successfully address issues.

33

Van Reenen



"With N3TC at our side, we're creating positive change and noticing positive growth among the people of our region."

- Ansie Jooste
Project Co-ordinator

During this period, the ablution blocks at the Van Reenen Primary School were upgraded, and new water pipes, taps, and toilet systems were installed. Khanyisile also donated, and installed, a 2500-litre water storage tank, and fitted water pipes and taps to water the school's food garden. Furthermore, a new fence with an entrance gate was erected around the food garden, and Khanyisile donated garden tools and a hosepipe to enable sustainable upkeep of the facility.

The Van Reenen Entokozweni ladies' crochet group received wool from the Khanyisile Trust to support their income-generating projects. The Sand River Valley Primary School was supported with garden tools to maintain their grounds, and their security guard received a full new uniform. Various other communities and individuals were assisted with their urgent maintenance and repair needs, emergency medical care, and food parcel donations. According to Ansie Jooste, project co-ordinator of the Khanyisile Trust, funding awarded by N3TC Touching Lives allows the Trust to maintain a local presence in the area, and to support communities in direct need.



Community Medical Services & Volunteer Rescue

Road Safety and Rescue Volunteers: Offering a lifeline on the N3 Toll Route

Two teams of highly professional volunteer rescue groups, comprised of individuals from Pretoria, Johannesburg and Bloemfontein, have been providing free medical emergency and rescue services to road users along the N3 Toll Route for many years. The teams, comprising doctors, paramedics, rescue technicians, and trauma counsellors have been offering critical support in areas where emergency rescue resources are often stretched thin, especially at peak traffic times.

34

Van Reenen & Frankfort



Supported by N3TC, their mission is to provide assistance to people in distress to help ensure the safety and well-being of road users along one of our country's busiest transport corridors. Community Medical Services (CMS) has provided essential rescue services on Van Reenen Pass for 41 years; while their sister group, Volunteer Rescue Team (VRT) operates from their volunteer base located near Frankfort. Together, the two teams respond to emergencies along some of the most highly trafficked parts of the N3 Toll Route, i.e., along Van Reenen Pass to Harrismith, and between Warden and Villiers.

These volunteers are often the first to arrive at crash scenes. With their expertise in emergency services, including advanced life support, they ensure that crash victims receive the urgent life-saving care they need while awaiting further assistance.

Although the service provided by the team is completely free of charge, it does come with significant costs. Fuel, accommodation, and medical equipment expenses quickly add up, and the team relies on the generosity of supporters, and donors such as N3TC, to help cover some of these costs.



In addition to their emergency response efforts, volunteers are also deeply involved in several community projects to support vulnerable individuals, intervening where people are suffering from debilitating health conditions, or bringing joy and cheer to children in local rural communities.

During one such initiative, the team, with the support of local establishments and a social worker, identified some of the most vulnerable children, between the ages of 2 and 13, in the Warden area, who each received carefully pre-packaged and age-appropriate gifts which included teddy bears, colouring books, crayons, stationery, and even schoolbooks. 180 gift packs and 240 snack packs were distributed. The Van Reenen Kids Feeding Scheme received a donation of 480 sachets of porridge, organised by CMS, to support local families in need.

Despite many logistical challenges, these two volunteer teams hope to expand their community initiatives and continue providing life-saving services to the thousands of road users. Their work proves that even in the face of adversity, collaboration in community-driven initiatives makes a real difference – not only touching lives but saving them!

Free State Care in Action

Feeling safe is vital to a child's development

For 35 years, Free State Care in Action (FSCA) has been offering essential support to families in need through its After School Care Centre in Harrismith. Despite the region's challenging economic conditions, funding from N3TC along with the support of local businesses and neighbouring farmers, continues to provide critical assistance to numerous families.

The After School Care Centre team attends to the physical and emotional well-being of learners from Grade R to Grade 7. Food is regularly supplied by local farmers, providing the children with a healthy daily meal and bi-weekly food parcels are sent home to their families.

"We are committed to offering daily the children in our care a welcoming and safe environment, nutritious daily meals, food parcels, essential school supplies, emotional support, and reliable transportation. The consistency they experience at our After School Care Centre helps to bring stability to their lives, particularly for children who come from households where parents only have casual employment or are unemployed, and lack the wherewithal to support their children," explains project coordinator, Gerda Louw.

The FSCA is also able to pay the After School Centre's caretakers a monthly salary which means that they too can support their families.

35

Harrismith



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"We are pleased to announce that the supportive environment and academic assistance provided by the ASCC made a significant difference in the children in our care's academic performance. Children perform better – academically and socially – when they feel secure and valued."

- Gerda Louw,
Project Co-ordinator

Meeting challenges with confidence

The FSCA is planning to appoint a second qualified social worker in 2025 to help with the ongoing care of vulnerable children and their families. When children first arrive at the After School Care Centre, they often present staff with several challenges including grasping their backgrounds and facilitating their integration with others, addressing mental and physical needs, and aiding in their adjustment to a new environment.

The team is currently working on the creation of a job seekers hub to assist unemployed parents and guardians find employment opportunities, while plans are afoot to obtain and allocate secure affordable housing for families facing extreme difficulties.

"With our family support initiatives, we hope to further enhance the quality of life of children in the Harrismith-district," ends Mrs Louw.

Harrismith Primary School

Communities thrive when their children are safe and supported

With the support of the N3TC Touching Lives programme, the Platberg Hostel at the Harrismith Primary School provides a stable home environment to 11 vulnerable children, allowing them to focus on their education and personal growth.

From a very young age, these children have already had to face seemingly insurmountable challenges from abject poverty to neglect, instability at home, and a lack of educational support. The stability they now enjoy is giving them the confidence to excel academically and in extra-curricular activities. They are developing leadership skills, and finding their way to brighter futures. While the children are receiving holistic developmental support in a nurturing environment, their parents are also relieved of some of their emotional and financial burdens, for which they are deeply grateful.

"The impact the Touching Lives programme is having in communities where N3TC is active, is unmistakable," says Hendro Pretorius, housemaster of the primary school's hostel. "By addressing the challenges our communities face, N3TC is helping to improve the overall well-being of children and adults, impacting the very fabric of our society."



36

Harrismith

SANParks Honorary Rangers

Volunteers for Conservation

South African National Parks (SANParks) administers 21 national parks across the country with the objective of conserving biodiversity, landscapes, and heritage, including the Golden Gate Highlands National Park. Located at the foothills of the Maluti Mountains, the Golden Gate Highlands National Park (GGHNP) is surrounded by stunning scenery featuring lush vegetation, dramatic sandstone rocks, cliffs, mountain peaks, and diverse wildlife inhabiting the open plains and mountain slopes. The Park spans over 32,000 hectares and shelters rare, indigenous flora such as Arum Lilies, Watsonias, Fire Lilies, and Red-Hot Pokers. In addition, around 140 bird species have been documented within this national park. It serves as one of the last refuges for Bearded Vultures and Bald Ibises, which breed in the Cathedral Cave. GGHNP is also renowned for its pristine Bushmen rock art, dinosaur fossils, impressive historic and cultural experiences, and scenic hiking trails.

In support of SANParks and their conservation initiatives to safeguard this sensitive biome while simultaneously promoting eco-tourism in the region, N3TC has contributed to the efforts of its NPO partner, the SANParks' Honorary Rangers (SHR).



The Honorary Rangers assist SANParks in managing and promoting the biodiversity and heritage assets of the parks for the benefit of current and future generations

Photo Credit:
Rob Southey

SHR's volunteer roles encompass a wide range of activities, from fundraising and public awareness campaigns to providing essential manpower and equipment to support various conservation, tourism, environmental education, and infrastructure development projects within the parks.

"Building on previous successful projects, N3TC once again elected to contribute towards a critical project in the GGHNP. This park experiences challenges and risks due to veld fires each winter. With a provincial main road crossing the park, steep mountainous terrain and strong winds, preventing and controlling fires requires manpower and equipment. Recurring hot fires cause biodiversity loss, and are unsustainable within the park's conservation model. The quality equipment that was purchased through the N3TC's donation has significantly improved the park's capacity to combat fires, boosting the morale of rangers tasked with fighting them. This will ultimately lead to a gradual recovery of threatened and sensitive species," said Marc Snyman, a member of the SANParks Honorary Rangers.





TOUCHING LIVES



**"No single tree can create a forest."
- African Proverb**



N3TC

Wildlife and Environmental Society of South Africa (WESSA)

N3TC Eco-Schools Project

Reducing our shared carbon footprint through education and action

The community of Qalabotjha, near Villiers in the Free State, continues to be a shining light among the many environment-focused projects funded and supported by N3TC.

In 2024, N3TC and its partner – the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA) – shifted their focus from foundational issues on environmental care and protection to the concept of carbon emissions.

Carbon emissions are a leading contributor to global warming and climate change, but as a concept, it is often misunderstood and attributed only to emissions from vehicles and industry.

Unfortunately, the subsequent changes in weather patterns have an outsized impact on economically vulnerable communities such as Qalabotjha. Here, the high levels of unemployment, low levels of food security and poor healthcare, leave families exposed to the devastating impact of floods and droughts, while a general lack of understanding of the climate issues at play leaves them desperate and frustrated.



“Environmental initiatives do not have to be difficult or costly. Small steps and innovative solutions can help poorer communities improve their quality of life.”
- WESSA

38

Villiers

Combating this, is the aim of the N3TC Eco-Schools project, which is internationally validated and professionally administered by WESSA.

The project seeks to educate and upskill community members by focusing on schools – from children at Early Childhood Development centres to high schools in the area.

In 2024, the N3TC Eco-Schools Project addressed carbon emissions through nine educational sessions at nine different schools. A further five schools have been added as part of an implementation initiative, which lays the foundation for inclusion in future campaigns, and an even greater impact.

As in previous years, the project started by training teachers, both in understanding the concept of carbon emissions and in the many cost-effective ways in which a community can limit its emissions and the subsequent impact on the environment.

The training is hosted by experienced WESSA facilitators, who approach the issue in a positive way. This includes showing teachers, children and, indirectly, community members how a more environmentally friendly approach helps to save money and keeps everyone healthier.

Thirty teachers were carefully trained in this programme, which amplified the reach to a total of 300 children across all education levels. This represented a growth of more than 10% from previous years.

Carbon Tracking

One of the unique initiatives that was introduced during the programme was carbon tracking.

Teachers collaborated in creating their own carbon footprint tracker, a simple yet effective system that tracked transportation, water usage, waste creation and management, and electricity consumption.

By visually portraying this information, teachers were able to better understand their contribution to carbon emissions, while also being able to better convey these concepts to learners.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

While discussing transport, children of all ages were educated on the topic of greenhouse gas emissions and different forms of transport.

Organic waste and methane gases were part of the topic in the discussion on waste creation and, during the discussion on electricity, children were equipped with tools – both mental and physical – that could help them reduce carbon emissions.



Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDs)

1. Ntataise Educare Centre
2. Qalabotjha Creche
3. Thuto ke Lesedi Educare Centre
4. Zenzeleni Educare Centre

Primary and High Schools

5. Mhlakeng Primary School
6. Phomello Primary School
7. Qalabotjha Secondary
8. Retshedisitswe Secondary
9. Zamaleka Primary School



Reducing energy costs with wonder bags

One of the many tools that were introduced to schools in Qalabotjha was Wonder Bags. This low-cost, low-energy consumption slow cooker put the environmental concepts into practice and showcased in real terms how schools and families could reduce their energy costs while benefiting the environment.

The donation of Wonder Bags to schools and ECD Centres is expected to help them feed children and further emphasise the lessons learned during the various N3TC Eco-Schools sessions.

Creating partnerships and opportunities to help shape lives

Later in the year, the global toy manufacturer, Fisher-Price, supported the training programme with a large donation of eco-friendly toys. Fisher-Price specifically chose the N3TC Early Childhood Centres for this donation.

"The WESSA Programmes and Projects team wishes to extend our heartfelt thanks to N3TC for its dedicated efforts that have led to the remarkable success of the WESSA-N3TC Eco-Schools project. Through these initiatives, N3TC is playing a vital role in transforming the mindsets and attitudes of both teachers and students in Villiers, Free State.

"We are truly grateful for your steadfast commitment to enhancing educational opportunities and your willingness to nurture young children while promoting environmental awareness during this crucial stage of their development," says Daniel Jackson, product coordinator of WESSA Eco-Schools.

In this growing community, N3TC and the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA) again lead the way in environmental education and community upliftment.



Topsy Foundation

Cultivating Change: N3TC is Touching Lives through the Topsy Foundation and the Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Project

Food security and nutrition remain pressing issues in vulnerable communities across South Africa. With N3TC's support, the Topsy Foundation's OVC Project is tackling food insecurity, healthcare, and social challenges, creating both immediate relief and long-term resilience.

Growing Hope: One Garden at a Time

Support from N3TC has significantly enhanced food security and nutrition for over 7000 individuals through the programme. They have benefited from the establishment of vegetable gardens in Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres, schools, community sites, and private homes. These gardens, nurtured with training and resources provided by Topsy, have become lifelines for families struggling with food insecurity.

39

Balfour, Nthoroane, Siyathemba, Grootvlei



Each household is supported with seeds, gardening tools and knowledge, allowing them to grow fresh produce. The impact extends beyond nutrition - private households can sell excess produce, providing a source of income, while community sites distribute surplus food at no cost. This initiative not only fosters self-sufficiency but encourages community sufficiency and sustainable solutions.

While food security remains a cornerstone of the OVC Project, it goes beyond nutrition, offering crucial medical, psychological and social support. Services offered include:

- Professional healthcare for OVC participants
- Nutritional supplements and food parcels for at-risk families
- Educational resources and support for ECD centres
- Assistance in obtaining essential documentation

Interventions such as these provide stability and empowerment to the most vulnerable, including single female-headed, child-headed, and elderly-headed households.



A New Lease on Life: Stories of Transformation

Tryphina's life-saving diagnosis

On Mandela Day in July 2024, 60-year-old Tryphina Thwala arrived at Topsy Foundation's health centre with severe abdominal pain. An x-ray revealed a large mass, and with Dr. Jana Oosthuizen's immediate referral, she could access urgent medical care. This diagnosis not only safeguarded her health but ensured she could continue caring for her 10-year-old grandson.

Deliwe's journey to identity

Without identification documents, Deliwe Joyce Tshabalala and her children faced countless obstacles. Together with the Topsy Foundation, they navigated a complex process involving Home Affairs and DNA testing to secure their legal identities. Their perseverance is paving the way for a future where they can finally access education and essential services.

Thabiso discovers the power of self-sufficiency

Thabiso Hlatshwayo, a 38-year-old caregiver for his three sisters, started a vegetable garden with seeds received from the Topsy Foundation in 2019. Today, it provides food for his family, helps to generate income, and supports struggling neighbours. His story showcases the impact of sustainable solutions in breaking the cycle of food insecurity.



Challenges and the Road Ahead

Despite these successes, the OVC Project faces ongoing challenges, including a lack of running water for gardens in informal settlements, limited transport for field workers, and the prolonged process of obtaining identification documents for vulnerable individuals. Addressing these issues requires continued collaboration, investment and solutions. Strategic partnerships with organisations like N3TC help to maximise impact, but continued support is vital to sustain and expand these efforts.

Investing in a Future of Possibilities

N3TC's commitment to creating lasting change along the N3 Corridor has empowered the Topsy Foundation to share in the ups and downs of thousands of lives, proving that community-driven interventions can break the cycle of poverty and vulnerability. By addressing food security, healthcare, and social services in an integrated manner, the OVC Project's community-driven initiatives will have profound, long-term benefits for individuals to thrive.

Sunfield Home Fortuna

Living with resilience and dignity

"Of course, we dream of self-sufficiency, of being able to only rely on ourselves to care for one another," says Barbara Mendes, general manager of the Sunfield Home Fortuna in Balfour, Mpumalanga, "but we have come to realise that being fully self-reliant is not always entirely possible. Our lives are intertwined, we rely on each other for nurture, care and compassion, to create sustainable livelihoods, and to help empower the most vulnerable amongst us."

These are some of the lessons that life has taught the residents, management team, and staff of Sunfield Home Fortuna. The home, established in 1991, currently provides full-time care to 59 disabled adults.

According to Ms Mendes, the majority of their residents (33) are entirely reliant on Sunfield to provide for all their physical, mental, and healthcare needs.



"This group of residents have no other support or a family structure upon which they can fall back in times of distress," says Brenda Mendes, general manager of Sunfield Home Fortuna. "Thus, the key for our management team is to balance our residents' needs with the management and upkeep of our facilities, while delivering quality care, and developing self-sustaining programmes to help create alternative revenue streams and bolster our donor funds. In this regard, N3TC's Touching Lives programme has played a pivotal role, not only supporting our people, but also assisting with the smooth running of our facility."

40

Balfour

One of Sunfield Home Fortuna's biggest challenges remains the shortfall in funds to maintain its facilities and upkeep of their home. "Running costs, including water, electricity and regular maintenance and repairs are high, and most often downright unaffordable. Unexpected costs also keep on piling up such as the structural damage that was caused to the home's main building during the previous heavy rainfall season. "But thanks to the support we receive from our partners, we keep going for the sake of our residents. We have vowed to never throw in the towel."

Resilience is a choice

No matter how difficult their circumstances, Sunfield Home Fortuna chooses to give their all to rise above everyday challenges.

Out with the old, in with the new

Sunfield Home Fortuna generates additional income from their Community Shop where they sell secondhand clothing and other pre-loved items to their local community. When the premises of their Community Shop, however, were suddenly leased to someone else, they quickly improvised and came up with an excellent Plan B – the shop would go directly to its customers. A pop-up clothing shop would now be set up on SASSA pay-out days in Balfour while other items, such as household goods, would be sold on Facebook marketplace.



Bringing our chickens home to roost

Sunfield spends on average R24 000 per month on eggs for meals and baking. When the home's previous supplier could no longer continue to provide eggs regularly, the staff decided to raise chickens for a fresh daily supply. The project started on a small scale with plans to expand once a chicken enclosure has been completed.

Saving on electricity costs

Sunfield Home's service agreement with Eskom was downgraded which immediately resulted in an approximate R 20 000 saving per month. This money can now be put towards improving the home's infrastructure, including its planned conversion to solar power. Two water pumps which supply the main building are earmarked to first be connected to the solar system where more funds will be raised to also convert the 3-phase borehole pump to solar. The final stage will be connecting the building's lighting and four geysers.

Nurturing social connections

"Our lives are, however, not only a mere struggle for survival," smiles Ms Mendes, "it also consists of moments of sheer joy and a deep sense of gratitude."

Residents enjoy a variety of social activities and opportunities to connect and share in the small pleasures that come their way. "From group outings to fun days, birthday parties, special celebrations, and sporting activities – these are the moments that keep our spirits up, and our residents fit and healthy." Bocce Ball, which is similar to bowls or boules, is a firm favourite amongst residents with practice sessions and tournaments being well supported.

Staff members have received badminton training which is now piquing the interest of residents, while Special Olympics South Africa has offered golf lessons to Sunfield's residents. They are looking forward to making use of this opportunity in 2025.

"Thank you to N3TC who always stands by us through adversity. With our community partners at our side, we feel confident that we will continue to make lemonade when life hands us lemons," ends Ms Mendes.



N3TC Meals on Wheels Cycle Challenge

Pedal power helps to fill empty stomachs

The milestone twentieth anniversary of the Meals on Wheels Cycle Challenge was held in October 2024 at the Sedaven High School in Heidelberg.

This annual Cycle Race has established itself as a significant event on the cycling calendar, attracting over 700 participants from across South Africa to compete in the challenging 50km and 100km races.

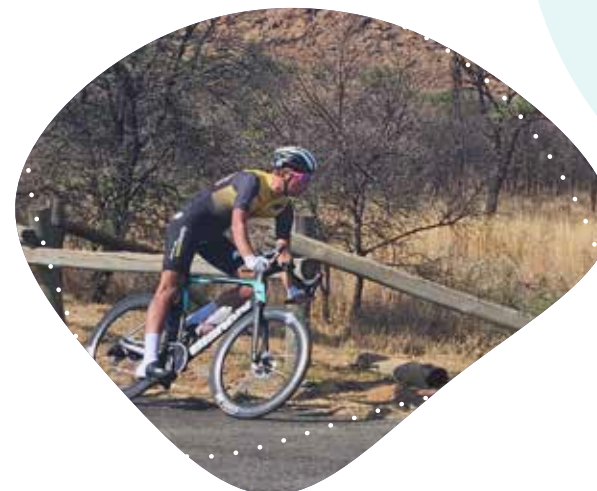
According to the organisers of the 2024 event, the highest temperatures ever experienced at this cycle race, were recorded on the day. Despite the heat, cyclists were fortunate enough to enjoy stunning views from the hilltops and verdant valleys within the Suikerbosrand Nature Reserve, with frequent sightings of diverse bird species, baboons, and other wildlife.

41 Heidelberg

The Meals on Wheels Cycle Challenge is well-regarded for its engaging atmosphere, supported by families of participants, an array of food stalls, and live music contributing to a festive environment. Veronica Cronje of Lusa Community Chest noted that the organisers were pleased with the number of tins of food donated by the cyclists to be distributed alongside meals to beneficiaries.

Revenue generated from the race enables the Heidelberg, Vereeniging, and Vanderbijlpark branches of Meals on Wheels to provide nutritious, warm meals to more than 4300 individuals.

Cooked meals were provided to 1200 toddlers and children up to 16 years old, 194 teenagers, and 729 individuals aged 21 to 45 years old. Additionally, Meals on Wheels supplied healthy meals to 2152 elderly individuals. "N3TC's funding of this event is greatly appreciated and ensures that it remains a highlight on the cycling calendar. We extend our gratitude for your continued support and presence on the day," ends Ms Cronje.







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