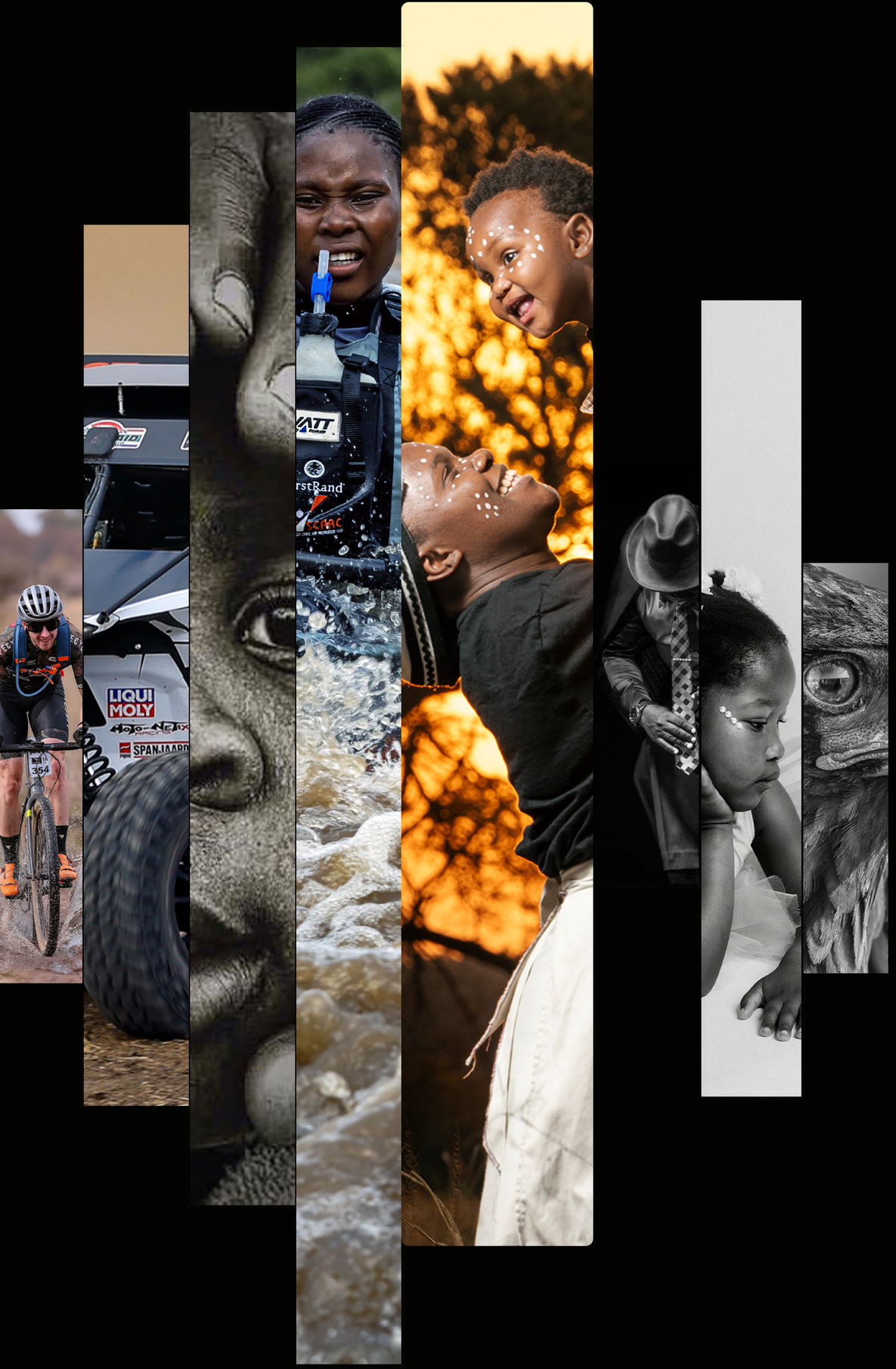


Creating Connections. Building Legacies.

Touching Lives

Annual Report 2025

N3TC

Published by N3 Toll Concession (RF) Proprietary Limited

1st Floor, Block D, Southdowns Office Park, 22 Karee Street, Irene, 0157

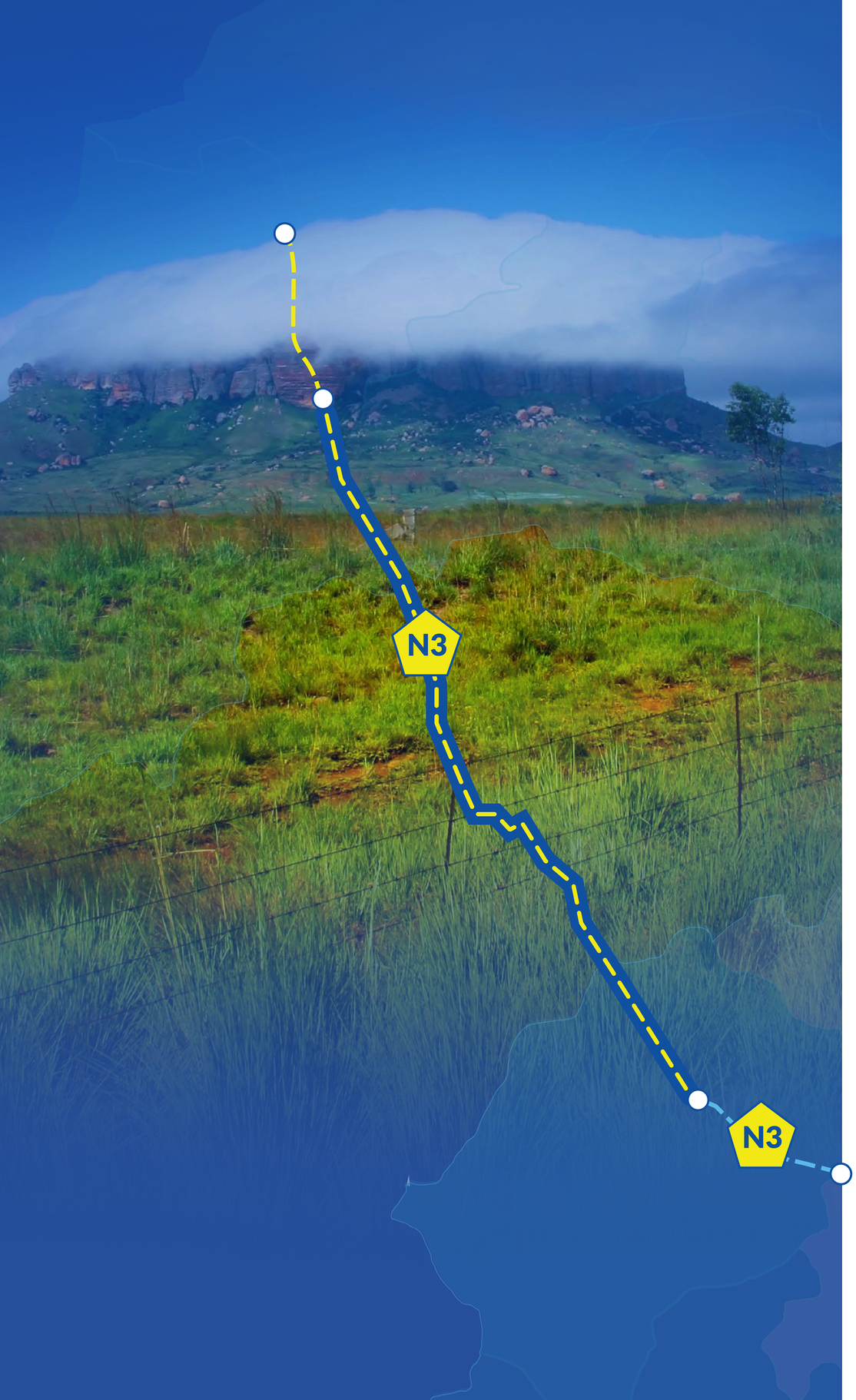
Telephone: +27 87 285 6382
Email: headoffice@n3tc.co.za
Published: March 2026 in South Africa

Copyright © N3 Toll Concession (RF) Proprietary Limited

All rights reserved. Any redistribution or reproduction of part or all of the contents in any form without the express permission of the publisher is prohibited.

© Tammy Harding, "Majestic Monteseel"

© Douglas Couperthwaite, "Pine forest at dawn"



Foreword

FUNDAMENTALLY, PEOPLE (AND THEIR JOURNEYS) ARE AT THE HEART OF WHAT WE DO.

It's impossible to witness, firsthand, the daily struggles of the women, children, and the elderly in many rural communities connected to the N3 Toll Route, and not be motivated to become a driver for change in our communities, and our country.

Through our social investment programme, N3TC aims to help transform what is often a stark picture of vulnerability and need, and make a sustainable and meaningful contribution to people's daily lives: creating connections, building legacies that nurture resilience, and help safeguard vulnerable communities against future challenges.

Our Touching Lives Programme focuses on education, primary healthcare access, food security, and environmental stewardship.

Support is provided to early childhood development, bursaries, and learnerships, alongside programmes that provide access to assisted living devices, food security, conservation education, skills development and training, animal welfare support, and many, many more, as described within these pages — all aimed at building resilient, self-sufficient communities along the N3 corridor.

It is humbling to be in the position to serve as a bridge between artistry, perseverance, tenacity, and social impact, and to watch the combined efforts of all the dedicated, passionate project champions translate into overwhelming support for local projects.

The N3 is more than a road – it's a conduit for social and economic upliftment, a vehicle through which N3TC is committed not just to safety, convenience, and mobility, but also to ensuring that those living alongside the N3 enjoy a sustainable future, long after the concession ends in 2029.

Neil Tolmie CEO

Index

Foreword

Route Map 1

Project Distribution 3

Beneficiaries 4

Employment 5

Skills Development 6

01. N3TC Bursaries & Learnerships 7

02. St Mary's Interactive Learning Experience 9

03. Endangered Wildlife Trust 12

04. Trucking Wellness 18

05. Birdlife South Africa 21

06. PROTEC Pietermaritzburg Academy 27

07. Project Gateway 29

08. iThemba Projects 31

09. Singakwenza 35

10. Funda Nenja 38

11. Music Voyage 41

12. Crystal Springs Primary School 45

13. Family Literacy Project 47

14. Pevensey Place 50

15. N3TC Drak Challenge 52

16. Curry's Post Education Trust 55

17. Michaelhouse Community Partnership Trust 58

18. Midlands Community College 61

19. KwaZulu-Natal Crane Foundation 64

20. Midlands Meander Emerging Artists Project 70

21. Babanentse Primary Co-Operative 73

22. Senzakahle 1 Primary Co-Operative 76

23. Reel Life NPC 78

24. 1000 Paws Walk for SPCA 80

25. EnviroLearn 83

26. Treverton College & Preparatory School 86

27. St David's Diocesan School 88

28. Fundisisizwe 91

29. Umtshezi Fire Protection Association 95

30. Drakensberg Boys Choir School 97

31. Royal Drakensberg Education Trust 100

32. The N3TC Khanyisile Community Trust 102

33. Community Medical Services & Volunteer Rescue Team 104

34. Free State Care in Action 107

35. Harrismith Primary School 109

36. SANParks Honorary Rangers 111

37. Wildlife & Environmental Society of South Africa 114

38. Topsy Foundation 116

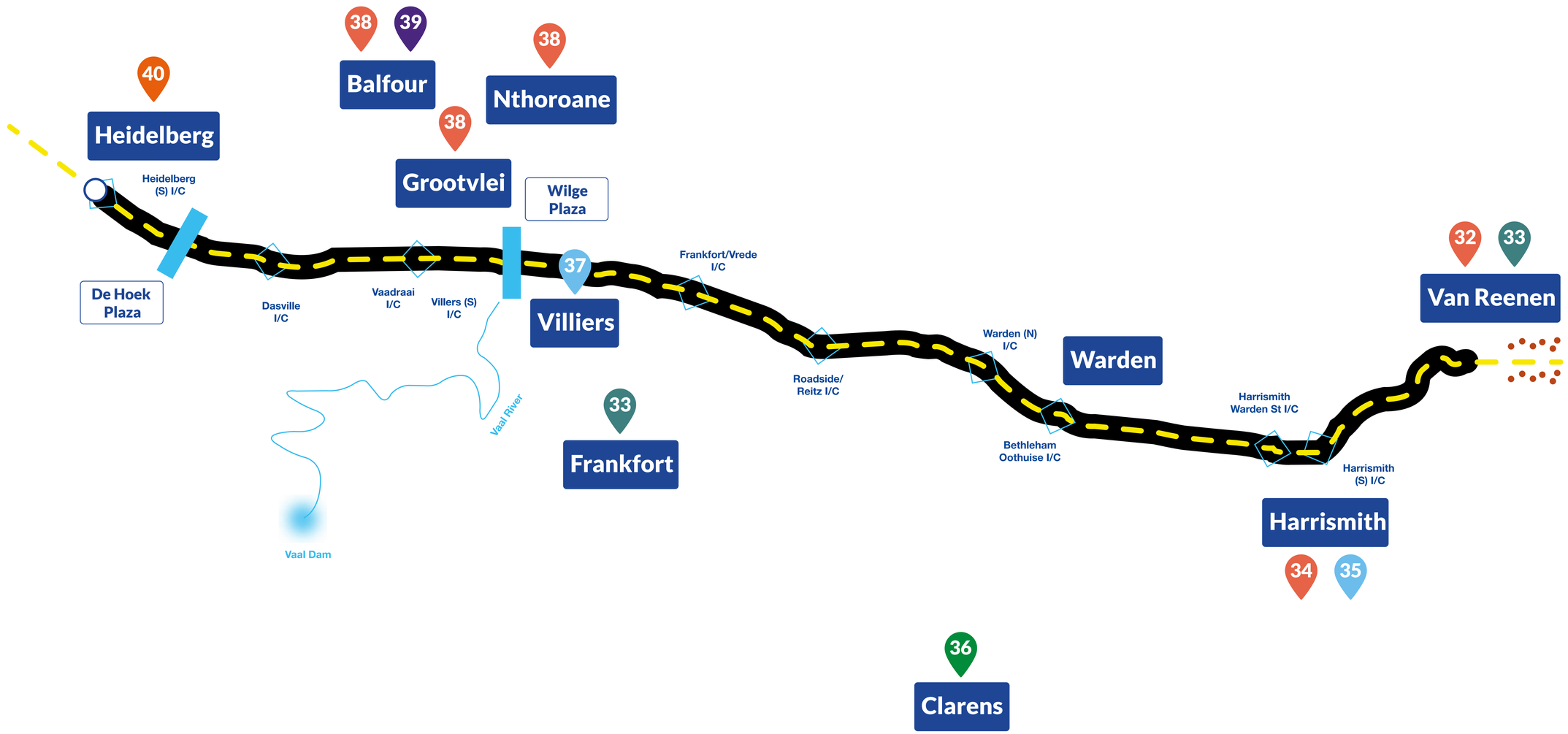
39. Sunfield Home Fortuna 118

40. N3TC Meals on Wheels Cycle Challenge 121

- Education
- Conservation
- Health & Wellness
- Enterprise Development
- Youth Development
- Disabled
- Community Event
- Child Welfare

Route Map

N3 Corridor 01 02 03 04 05 09



Route Map

Greytown
27
Corridor
N3
Pietermaritzburg
06
07
Howick (N) Tweedie I/C
Howick (N) Midmar I/C
Howick (N) Underberg I/C
Howick
08
Hilton
Lions River I/C
11
12
24
05
Cedara I/C
Taylor's Halt Kwaqanda
Ladysmith
Bergville I/C
Vaalkrans I/C
Colenso Winterton I/C
28
29
Estcourt
21
22
23
Bruntville
Hidcote I/C
16
Curry's Post
Nottingham Road I/C
Mooi River (N) I/C
Mooi River (S) I/C
Balgowan Curry's Post I/C
17
Midmar Dam
Lions River
10
Mpophomeni
05
Richmond
05
Ixopo
05
Donnybrook
05
Harding
Tugela Plaza
Ramp Plazas
Van Reenen Pass
Tugela River
Spionkop Dam
31
Bergville
Winterton
30
Frere (N) I/C
Estcourt (N) I/C
Estcourt (S) I/C
Wagendrift Dam
Bushmans River
Mooi River
17
25
26
Ramp Plazas
Mooi River
Nottingham Road
17
18
19
20
Mgeni River
13
14
15
Underberg

Project Distribution

2025

41 Projects

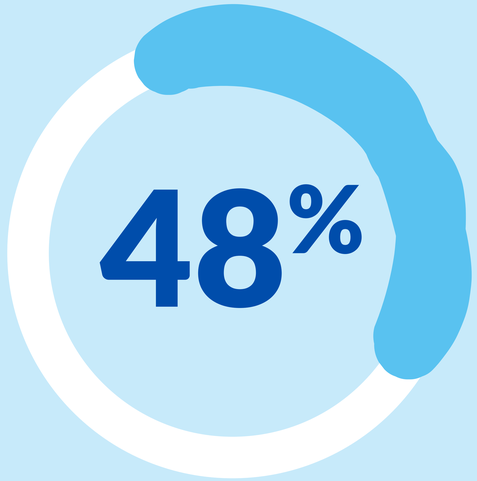
Legacy projects encompassing:

- *Child welfare*
- *Community events*
- *Youth development*
- *Disabled*
- *Enterprise development*
- *Education*
- *Health & wellness*
- *Conservation*

Beneficiaries

2025

74 523
Beneficiaries



Female

Male

Employment

2025

Jobs Created

1 900
per month

4
per km

26%
women

23%
youth

<1%
differently abled

Skills Development

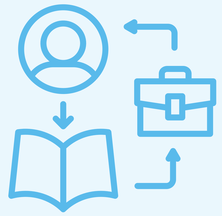
2025

Community Bursaries

9

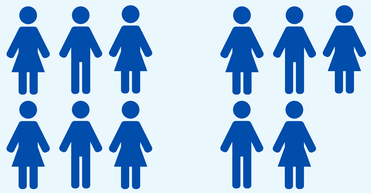
Employee Bursaries

4



Learnerships & Experiential Training

12 + 3



Education

N3TC Bursaries & Learnerships

N3TC Touching Lives

N3TC's tertiary bursaries and learnerships open pathways to opportunity

> "Education is the great engine of personal development."
>
> *– Nelson Mandela*

RECOGNISING THE VITAL ROLE EDUCATION PLAYS IN STRENGTHENING SOUTH AFRICA'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FUTURE, N3TC INVESTS IN THE POTENTIAL OF YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH ITS TERTIARY BURSARY AND LEARNERSHIP PROGRAMMES.

"No sector of society exists in a vacuum. We are all interdependent and interconnected, and it is only through cooperation, collaboration and community partnerships that South Africans will achieve meaningful transformation with a lasting social impact," says Thania Dhoogra, chief operating officer of N3TC.

Through the Touching Lives Programme, N3TC assists academically talented students from communities adjoining the N3 Toll Route who might otherwise face challenges accessing higher education opportunities. In addition to demonstrating academic prowess, qualifying recipients also show determination and promise.

N3TC's bursary holders are either in their third or fourth academic year, or are enrolled for post-graduate degrees at 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.

To participate in the programme, bursary candidates are required to maintain a minimum academic average of 60%.

Students apply for bursaries through local Public Liaison Committees in municipalities along the route, namely uMngeni, Mpofana, iNkosi Langalibalele, Alfred Duma, Okhahlamba, Maluti-a-Phofung, Phumelela, Mafube, or Dipaleseng.

IN 2025, N3TC FUNDED NINE STUDENTS REGISTERED AT VARIOUS ACCREDITED TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS ACROSS SOUTH AFRICA.

A key benefit of the bursary programme is the additional support offered to recipients, including:

- *mentorship opportunities offered to recipients*
- *financial planning guidance*
- *personal development*
- *work-readiness preparation*

IN ADDITION TO THE BURSARY PROGRAMME, N3TC SUPPORTS SKILLS DEVELOPMENT THROUGH A DEDICATED LEARNERSHIP PROGRAMME.

Two N3TC-funded learners received NQF Level 3 Business Administration training, while two others were enrolled in an experiential training programme with Durban University of Technology, and six new students received learnerships to pursue NQF Level 4 qualifications in Project Management.

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

"Education underpins South Africa's stability and growth, benefitting individuals and providing the spark to transform communities and society as whole. Through N3TC's bursaries and learnerships, and our collaborative partnerships in early childhood, primary, and secondary education, we are supporting youth development, knowledge and capacity-building, ultimately aiming to advance the country's progress and prosperity through our Touching Lives Programme," ends Ms Dhoogra.

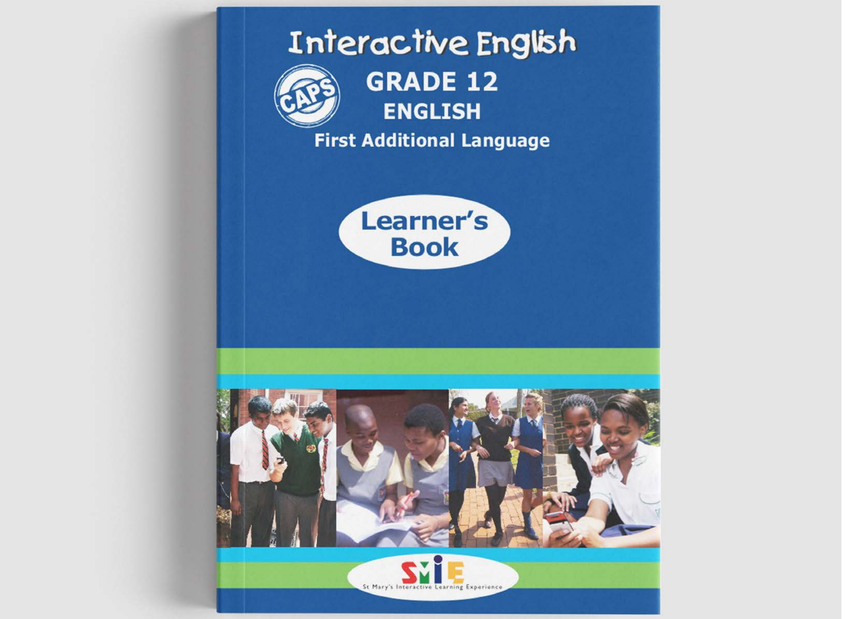
> "Wealth is a creation of the human mind properly prepared by education."
>
> *– Goodluck Jonathan*

Education

St Mary's Interactive Learning Experience

N3TC *Touching Lives*

A ripple felt all along the N3



VEHICLES MOVE UP AND DOWN THE N3 TOLL ROUTE EVERY DAY, LINKING PEOPLE AND PLACES.

In classrooms along the same corridor, a language pilot programme has been breaking down barriers, unlocking conversations, and similarly connecting people.

Since 2018, N3TC's funding through the Touching Lives programme has supported the English Home Language and First Additional Language pilot programme of the St Mary's Interactive Learning Experience (S.M.I.L.E.) in high schools along the N3 corridor between Pietermaritzburg and Harrismith.

The programme is built on a simple, compelling idea:

> **"One Teacher. One Textbook. Many Learners."**

It responds to a uniquely South African challenge. Many learners studying English Home Language are not mother-tongue English speakers. Often, neither are their teachers.

S.M.I.L.E. has worked to develop English language learning materials that look and feel current, and that speak to young people in the language of their digital world, better preparing them for their Grade 12 National Senior Certificate (Matric) exams, demonstrating that when a high-quality resorce is put in the hands of the right teacher, the ripple effect in the classroom, school, and into an entire community, can be extraordinary.

Between 2018 and 2025, the impact of the N3TC-supported S.M.I.L.E. programme has been felt in seven school districts, directly impacting 23 primary schools (English HL) and 22 high schools (English HL & FAL). 1 824 Grade 7 English Home Language learner books, and 18 422 Grades 8 –12 English Home Language learner books were distributed, while 285 Grade 8 First Additional Language learner books and hundreds of teacher guides were also delivered to classrooms.

N3TC impact

from 2018 – 2025

Districts	**7**
Total Primary Schools HL	**23**
Total High Schools HL & FAL	**22**
Total Grade 8 FAL Learner Books	**285**
Total Grade 8 FAL Teacher Guides	**8**
Total Grade 7 HL Learners Books	**1 824**
Total Grades 8 - 12 HL Learners Books	**18 422**
Total Grades 7 - 12 HL Teacher Guides	**288**

HL – English Home Language | FAL – English First Additional Language

> **"The poetry activities have been my favourite sections in the textbook as they are inclusive, the background knowledge is useful, and the questions deal with structure, themes and figures of speech."**

– Kathy Boast, Weston Agricultural College

IN 2025, THE FOCUS SHIFTED TO THE INTRODUCTION OF THE UPDATED GRADE 12 ENGLISH HOME LANGUAGE MATERIAL, ACCOMPANIED BY STRUCTURED FEEDBACK SESSIONS TO ASSESS ITS IMPACT.

A total of 1 911 updated Grade 12 learner books and 57 teacher guides were introduced into 15 N3TC-supported schools, including five newly added school beneficiaries.

In preparation for the 2026 school year, two existing N3TC-supported high schools, Carter High and Vryheid High, received updated Grade 12 English Home Language learner books and teacher guides in the fourth term of 2025, benefitting 387 Grade 12 learners.

This brings the total number of Grade 12 English learners and teachers benefiting from N3TC support in 2025 to 16 high schools, 2 298 learners, and 67 educators.

What educators are saying: Feedback from 29 Grade 12 English Home Language educators across 13 supported high schools paints a vivid picture of classroom impact.

> **“The texts are relevant, of a high standard, age appropriate for 18-year-olds and cover up-to-date topics that engage students.”**
>
> *– Rodelle Govender, Maritzburg College*

For educators navigating overcrowded classrooms and limited departmental resources, relevant, well-designed material represents much more than a textbook.

EXPANDING ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE

In 2025, the programme also expanded its updated Grade 8 English First Additional Language material. A total of 186 updated Grade 8 English First Additional Language learner books and three teacher guides were provided to three high schools along the N3 Toll Route. For learners still building their English foundation, this early investment strengthens their entire academic journey that follows.

WHEN IMPACT TRAVELS

The true measure of the N3TC Touching Lives Programme lies not only in what stays, but also in what travels. Although N3TC’s support specifically benefits schools along the N3, educators take their S.M.I.L.E. skills and experience with them when they leave.

When Noorisha Seedat moved from Ladysmith to Mpumalanga, she carried her belief in the S.M.I.L.E. programme with her, and championed it in her new school, earning herself the 2024 National Teacher Award. She now serves as a senior curriculum specialist for English in the Nkangala District.

That is the multiplier effect of Touching Lives – one empowered individual influences another and another, and another, and soon it leads to positive change across communities, borders, and eventually, the country.

A CRITICAL MOMENT FOR KZN SCHOOLS

At the end of 2025, the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education announced a hold on the provision of learning and teaching support material for 2026 due to budget constraints.

For many schools along the N3 corridor, already navigating significant resource limitations, this development poses serious challenges. It also affects S.M.I.L.E., with no provincial orders for its course material expected in the coming year. In this context, N3TC’s continued support becomes even more significant. It ensures that high schools along the N3 corridor continue to receive current, learner-friendly English material designed to build proficiency, confidence and exam readiness.

> **“Students understand how to approach essay writing better after working through the activities. The poetry questions follow the typical NCS type of questions and help students prepare for the final exams.**
>
> **We are very grateful for this valuable resource.”**

Programme	Schools	Learners	Teachers	Books Distributed
Updated Gr 12 English Home Language	16 High Schools	2 298	67	1 911 Learner Books + 57 Teacher Guides
Updated Gr 8 English First Additional Language	3 High Schools	186	3	186 Learner Books + 3 Teacher Guides

HL – English Home Language | FAL – English First Additional Language

S.M.I.L.E.’s national director, Daniela Browne, expressed gratitude for the sustained partnership: “We are indebted to N3TC for their continued support of S.M.I.L.E.’s ‘One Teacher One Textbook Many Learners’ English Language Piloting Programmes over many years – addressing the critical challenges facing teachers and learners in English Language classrooms in KwaZulu-Natal.”

N3TC’s Touching Lives initiative was established on a simple conviction: Meaningful, sustained investment in people creates lasting change. In classrooms along the N3 corridor, that belief is tangible. In the margin notes of a teacher guide. In a Grade 12 learner, writing their heart out in an essay, and in the hallways of schools, where language has become a bridge rather than a barrier – one teacher, one textbook, many learners at a time – the impact continues to travel.

Conservation

Endangered Wildlife Trust

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Community led conservation stewardship strengthens ecosystems and protects livelihoods in the Drakensberg

In the Drakensberg region, human health and environmental well-being are closely linked. Across its sensitive ecosystems, the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) advocates for an asset-based community-led development approach to tackle environmental issues, and to harness the collective power of local communities in order to address environmental challenges in wetlands, grasslands and rivers that support both wildlife and humans.

Through their landscape-level conservation strategy, EWT takes a broad approach in their initiatives, which aligns with N3TC's philosophy of safeguarding not only isolated pockets of nature but also supporting entire ecosystems where people serve as responsible stewards.

IN 2025, N3TC SUPPORTED THE DRAKENSBERG GRASSLANDS, WETLANDS AND COMMUNITIES PROJECT IN THREE KEY AREAS:

- LIVELIHOODS AND WATER SECURITY
- LAND-USE PLANNING
- PROTECTED AREA EXPANSION AND SUPPORT

What is currently unfolding in the Drakensberg is neither a quick intervention nor a single project milestone. It is a steady re-weaving of relationships between land, water and people — guided by community insight, strengthened through partnership, and sustained by the shared understanding that environmental care and human dignity rise together.

Spring protection at KwaMkhize

Completed spring protection projects at KwaMkhize are supported by EWT's land-use planning process, Isisekelo (meaning 'foundation' in isiZulu), which connects communal areas to promote use of water resources and rangelands for the benefit of people and biodiversity.

Alien plant infestation, KwaMkhize grasslands

SAFE WATER REACHES THE MAJORITY OF KWAMKHIZE

Located in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, KwaMkhize is situated amidst the Drakensberg mountains. This scenic mountain village hosts about a quarter of South Africa's Wattled Cranes and serves as the breeding site for two out of three local crane species – the Wattled and Grey Crowned Cranes. It is also regarded as one of the country's key water sources, providing water to cities such as eThekwini and Johannesburg.

"During a situational analysis undertaken in 2020 in the community, access to clean and reliable water emerged as a primary concern," explains Simon Phakhati, EWT's senior community project officer for the Drakensberg region. Since then, efforts by KwaMkhize's leadership, the community, and EWT have delivered tangible results.

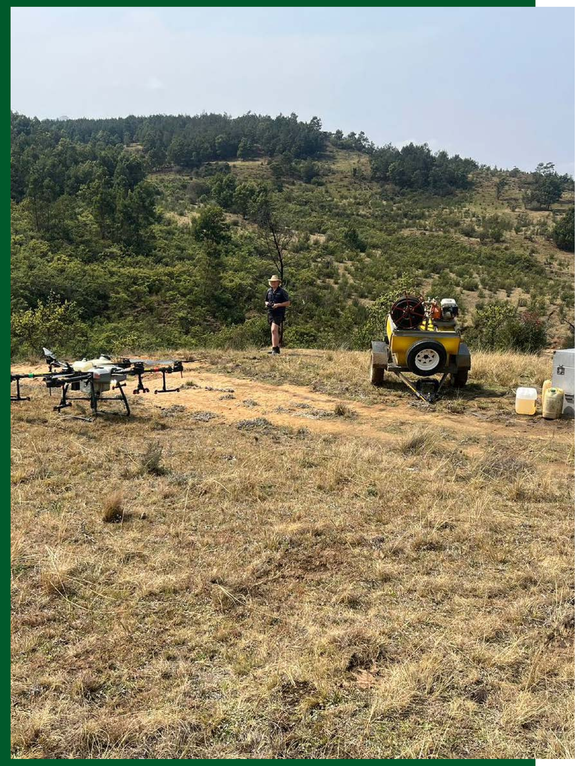
Since 2023, the Spring Protection Project, in partnership with the KwaMkhize community, has constructed five spring protection sites, directly benefiting **334** households, and an estimated **2 200** individuals.

An additional **440** people indirectly benefit from the restored springs, using them for daily household needs and large events like weddings and funerals. Traditional leaders also permit remote households, where springs have not yet been restored, to collect clean water in bulk containers with vehicles.

Overall, safe potable water is now accessible to approximately **62%** of KwaMkhize's residents.

Importantly, these infrastructure development projects are being complemented by community training and ownership initiatives. After each spring is restored, a workshop is held to facilitate residents' understanding of catchment management and their ongoing maintenance responsibilities. These sessions help to expand their knowledge around planned land use, demonstrating how landscape decisions affect water quality and supply.

Mr Phakathi is full of praise for the KwaMkhize community for taking ownership of their water supply issues and tackling issues collectively, whether it's dealing with invasive species, cattle grazing rangelands, or pollution of rivers and streams. He says projects like this "encourage dialogue and draw on local expertise to formulate actionable plans that facilitate problem-solving and long-term collaboration for the greater good, contribute to improved water quality, enhanced river flow and the restoration of indigenous vegetation."



The use of drone-assisted herbicide application has enhanced the effectiveness of invasive plant management within the Upper Wilge Protected Environment. In addition to manual clearing conducted in challenging terrain, drone technology facilitated the treatment of an extra 80 hectares over the past year.

Veld assessment at KwaMkhize

PROTECTED AREA EXPANSION AND SUPPORT

Beyond KwaMkhize, restoration work continues across protected environments linked to critical water sources:

The Upper Vaal Invasive Alien Plant Project, implemented within the Upper Wilge Protected Environment, focuses on controlling invasive alien plants to safeguard water resources, preserve biodiversity and grassland ecosystems, and strengthen ecosystem resilience. A drone-based herbicide application was launched in September to improve efficiency and reduce costs compared to manual eradication.

The 33rd KwaZulu-Natal aerial crane survey was conducted in July and August along established routes to ensure conservation planning remains guided by reliable population data. Surveys focused on breeding Wattled Cranes across five routes: Northern KwaZulu-Natal, Midlands West, Midlands East, Kokstad, and Underberg.

The Kiepersol Protected Environment second phase (391 hectares) has been signed and is pending Gazette notice. It will bring the total protected area coverage to 4 708 hectares, with further expansion under consideration.

Wattled Crane at nest
KwaMkhize is situated next to one of the largest known Crane roosting sites

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2025

POISON WORKSHOP

Following community safety concerns around the misuse of agri-chemicals, and requests from local traditional leaders, an Introduction to **Wildlife Poisoning Workshop** was convened under the auspices of the Community Policing Forum, drawing more than 50 participants from government, policing and municipal structures.

MINDFUL LEADERSHIP

In a notable incident, Chief Mkhize, KwaMkhize's traditional leader, has reinforced environmental accountability when he fined a community member the equivalent of **R12 000** of livestock for illegally dumping plastic bottles. His decisive action seems to have already discouraged the community from causing further environmental damage.

The human dimension of EWT's work was highlighted when Samson Phakathi, senior EWT project officer in the Drakensberg region, received the Community/Grassroots Leadership Award at the Development Bank of Southern Africa IAIAsa Nature Champions Awards in 2025. His recognition reflects the power of locally rooted conservation leadership across strategic water source areas in both the Drakensberg and Eastern Cape.

STORY OF RIVERS

The Story of Rivers workshops are central to EWT's community initiative for water security.

In 2025, five workshops involved 64 participants, including local indunas and members from water committees.

The workshops draw upon indigenous knowledge and provide a forum to gather community observations. Major issues included declining water volumes across landscapes, the pervasiveness of alien invasive species, concerns over the improper disposal of nappies, the placement of pit latrines, and land-use impacts on springs.

These insights lay the foundations for conservation efforts and agreements to support better water and land-use management, and infrastructure maintenance.

EWT and N3TC team up to save wildlife from becoming casualties on the N3 Toll Route

In 2014, N3TC and the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) began gathering data on wildlife vulnerability, their movement, and mortality along the N3 Toll Route. The route connects open landscapes and farm fields, teeming with crops that naturally attract wildlife, including mammals, owls, and raptors – bringing them dangerously close to this busy highway.

Birds of prey have been spotted hunting from road signs, safety barriers, boundary fences, and raised road markers, while scavengers have been seen feasting on food dropped from passing vehicles.

“Through our partnership with EWT, we aim to better protect wildlife from harm with a combination of data-driven science, engineering and design expertise, inventive mitigation strategies, and collaborative partnerships. Now, over a decade later, we are beginning to reap the results from our conservation efforts.”

– Thania Dhoogra, N3TC COO

SAFER SPACES FOR RAPTORS

Raptors are apex predators and scavengers. They are crucial to maintaining balanced and resilient ecosystems by helping to regulate populations of rodents, reptiles, and other small animals, while scavenger species, such as vultures, contribute to cleaning up carcasses and preventing the spread of diseases.

These birds, however, face significant threats when their natural hunting and feeding grounds overlap with human activity. Studies have shown that road mortality, together with habitat loss, poisoning, and electrocution from power lines, are some of the leading causes of population decline of several raptor species.

In response, EWT and N3TC have been installing raptor perches at strategic locations away from the road where birds of prey can perch more safely. Strategically located camera traps have helped EWT to monitor the effectiveness of these safety interventions.

In recent years, a significant increase has been recorded in bird of prey activity on the perches, with the highly endangered African Grass Owl (of which fewer than 5 000 individuals are estimated to remain in the wild) being one of the species making regular use of the perches.

Dr Thabo Hlatshwayo of the EWT says the camera traps are proving invaluable for increasing their understanding of bird-interactions with roads and refining their mitigation strategies.

“It has become clear that birds of prey, at least in some part, use these special structures for resting and feeding purposes, and that by providing these alternatives, they spend less time on or near roads, which reduces roadkill casualties considerably. We expect to learn even more from these camera traps, and to record rare glimpses into the daily lives of raptors.”

Protecting biodiversity while keeping the N3 moving

WILDLIFE ACTIVITY RECORDED IN 2025:

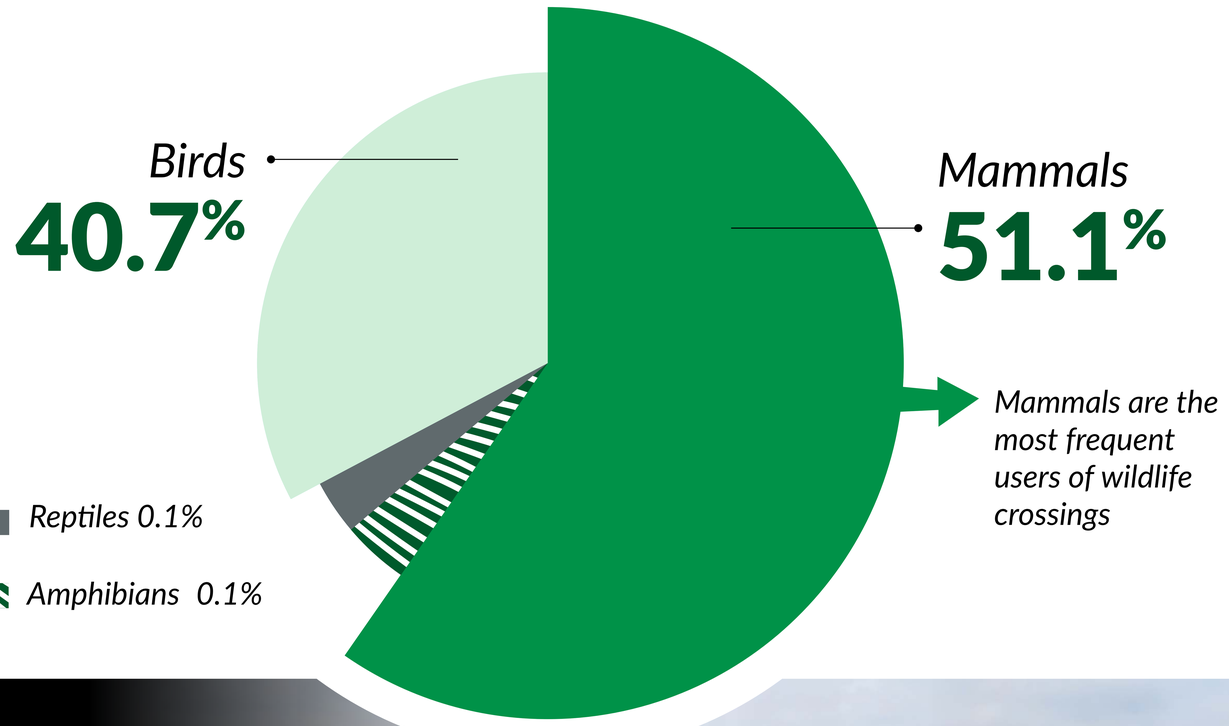
49 *Wildlife species recorded*

23 *Mammal species*

26 *Bird species*

Birds spend less time near the roadway *when alternative perching sites are available*

Species using the culverts



CONSERVATION IMPACT

Through research, monitoring, and engineering innovation, the N3TC/EWT partnership is:

- Reducing wildlife collisions
- Protecting endangered raptor species
- Creating safer habitats for raptors and wildlife
- Supporting biodiversity with infrastructure and engineering solutions

© David Mullin, "Guitar Man"

Trucking Wellness

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Taking healthcare to the road, where it matters most

Trucking Wellness has strengthened its footprint across South Africa, particularly along the N3 corridor, expanding access, deepening partnerships, and delivering consistent, primary healthcare to truck drivers, helping them to keep the wheels of our economy in motion.

Given that trucks constitute approximately 44% of all vehicles travelling on the N3 Toll Route daily, the safety, health, and wellness of truck drivers is of paramount importance. Crashes directly impact these individuals and their families, as the majority of them are breadwinners, and also have dire consequences for the logistics sector, fellow road users, and infrastructure.

In addition to demanding work hours and extended periods away from home and loved ones, the trucking community is plagued by the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria, high cholesterol, hypertension, and substance abuse. Undetected or untreated, these debilitating physical and mental health conditions may contribute to a lack of focus, drowsiness, poor judgment, and ultimately, crashes.

To help improve the health and well-being of truck drivers, N3TC has been supporting the Trucking Wellness programme, through the management of mobile healthcare clinics and driver outreach programmes on the N3 Toll Route for more than two decades.

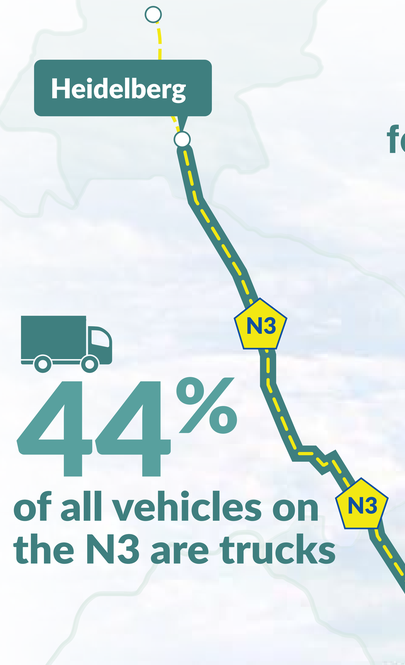
In partnership with N3TC, five Trucking Wellness Clinics are strategically located along the N3 Toll Route. These facilities allow long-distance truck drivers, sex workers, their families, and other community members to access quality treatment for primary health concerns without any related stigma.

These clinics are further supported by mobile clinics, which provide basic primary healthcare services to outlying communities adjacent to the N3 Toll Route. Together, they help to promote community participation and address the need for a non-gender-biased approach to healthcare within the broader socio-economic context.

Funding by N3TC contributes to the costs of essential medical supplies, including primary health medication, test kits for HIV, cholesterol, and glucose screening, and wellness consumables at the five clinics on the N3 Toll Route.

Most important, the wellness clinics along the N3 are strategically positioned to offer essential healthcare services to truck drivers and surrounding communities during hours when government healthcare facilities are closed. In addition to offering free services, the clinics provide counselling and refer clients to nearby healthcare facilities for further support.

For members of the National Bargaining Council for the Road Freight and Logistics Industry (NBCRFLI), continuous counselling and antiretroviral (ARV) treatment are offered through the HIV Management Programme to ensure long-term health and wellness outcomes.



44%
of all vehicles on the N3 are trucks

> **We are very proud of these initiatives to deliver primary health services to the trucking industry. It offers a convenient and safe way for truck drivers to know and manage their health risks, and to limit the impact an untreated health condition may have on their careers and safe driving abilities.**
>
> *– Tertius Wessels, Trucking Wellness, MD*

During 2025, the Trucking Wellness Clinics linked to the N3 Toll Route have:

STRENGTHENED COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

by empowering and encouraging individuals to become more proactive in their own health management.

IMPROVED HEALTHCARE ACCESS

by aligning clinic operating hours to typical trucking schedules, or to the needs and requirements of particular vulnerable communities.

PROMOTED INCLUSIVE, NON-STIGMATISED CARE

by providing welcoming clinic spaces where all community members – including sex workers and their clients – feel safe to access healthcare without being judged or discriminated against.

ADVANCED GENDER EQUITY

in health services through a non-gender-biased approach, ensuring fairness and respectful treatment of everyone.

CONTRIBUTED TO HOLISTIC COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

and sustainable improvements in the quality of life of truckers and communities associated with the industry, through ongoing initiatives to address health and socio-economic challenges.

Fit and healthy truckers are productive and safe drivers. This is where N3TC's commitment lies:

- **Practical healthcare**
- **Real access**
- **Measurable impact**

On the road, where it matters most

Conservation

BirdLife South Africa

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Blue Swallow numbers in KwaZulu-Natal face steep decline

URGENT CONSERVATION EFFORTS UNDERWAY TO PREVENT POPULATION COLLAPSE

The Blue Swallow (Hirundo atrocaerulea), one of South Africa's most striking and endangered birds, is facing a worrying decline in KwaZulu-Natal, according to the latest 2024/25 status assessment by BirdLife South Africa, Conservation Outcomes, and Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife.

Once considered rare, this migratory species, known for its deep blue plumage and agile flight, has recently been uplisted to Endangered globally and Critically Endangered nationally. In KZN, the species depends on the province's Mistbelt Grasslands for breeding – a habitat increasingly threatened by farming, human settlement, invasive plant species, and severe weather conditions.

Brent Coverdale, animal scientist at Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, reported that Blue Swallow monitors recorded only nine active nests during the 2024/25 breeding season, compared to 12 in the previous year. Of these, only six successfully produced fledglings, resulting in a total of 20 young birds – a notable decrease from 27 chicks in the previous season. Significantly, 88% of the nests were located on private or communal land, underscoring the critical role of landowner cooperation in conservation initiatives.

Project partner and director of Conservation Outcomes, Steve McKean noted that even historic strongholds, like the Impendle Nature Reserve, are showing concerning downward trends. "Once a bastion for the species, it produced fledglings from only one nest site this last season, raising urgent questions about habitat quality, extreme rainfall, and other external pressures," he said.

> **"Our Blue Swallow monitors reported several factors impacting breeding success.**
>
> **Heavy rainfall led to flooded nests, resulting in the loss of eggs or chicks. Illegal hunting with dogs likely damaged nest cups within burrows, while human settlement, farming, overgrazing, and invasive plants contributed to some habitat loss."**

© Steve McKean, BirdLife SA, Blue Swallows at Ixopo

"Monitoring itself was also not without its challenges," explained Mr Coverdale. "While 218 site visits were conducted across KwaZulu-Natal, some nests were visited less than twice a month (14 visits per site are recommended to fully track breeding success).

But, despite these setbacks, our conservation team is working hard to safeguard the species, and reverse the decline through the declaration of protected areas and the establishment of new reserves such as the iNkonjane Nature Reserve and Bush Hill, landowner and community engagement to support breeding and safe foraging, active monitoring and data collection, full-time tracking and consistent efforts to monitor nest sites, and support fledgling success.

The Blue Swallow is not just a beautiful bird, it is an indicator of healthy grassland ecosystems and the stewardship of our natural heritage," explained Mr McKean. "Protecting them, our heritage, and their future well-being requires collaborative efforts between scientists, communities, and landowners. Ultimately, every successful fledgling is a sign of hope, and a nod to a better tomorrow."

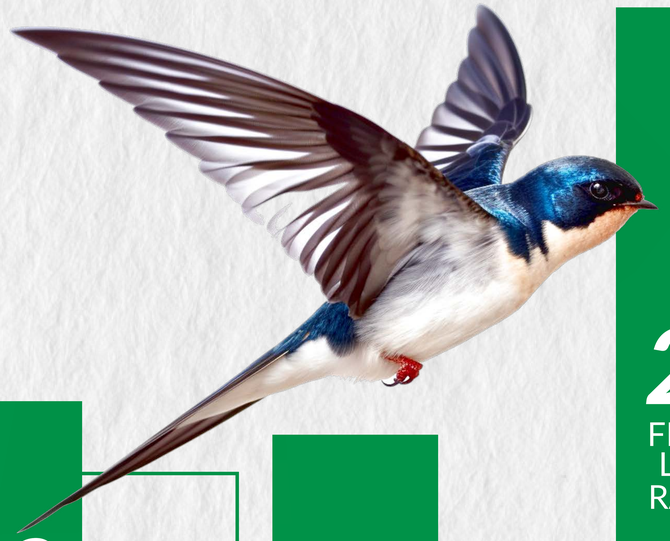
© Steve McKean, Mistbelt Grasslands

THE BLUE SWALLOW

(Hirundo atrocaerulea)

in KwaZulu-Natal

2024/2025 ANNUAL SUMMARY



12 ACTIVE NESTS

9 ACTIVE NESTS

11 NESTS PRODUCED

6 NESTS PRODUCED

27 FLEDG-LINGS RAISED

20 FLEDG-LINGS RAISED

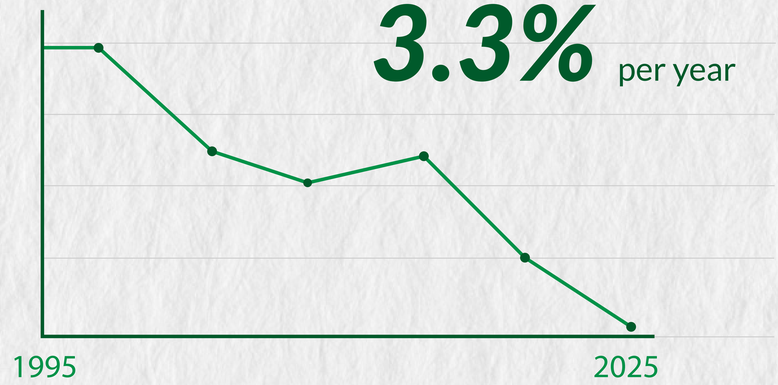
66% NEST SUCCESS

2024

2025

Declining trend

30 Year decline in active nests



Major threats

- **Habitat Loss**
- **Severe Weather**
- **Invasive Plants**
- **Illegal Hunting**

Conservation actions

Biodiversity Stewardship | Protected Areas | Monitoring
Data Collection | Research | Engagement

Support

Full-time Monitors • Real-time Tracking • Expanded Habitats

Reconnecting fragmented Mistbelt Grasslands and Forests

IN THE ROLLING LANDSCAPES OF KWAZULU-NATAL'S SOUTHERN MIDLANDS, A VITAL CONSERVATION EFFORT IS UNDERWAY.

BirdLife SA, in partnership with Conservation Outcomes, is working to protect the highly fragmented Mistbelt Grasslands and Forests, critical habitats for some of the country's most threatened birds, including the Blue Swallow, Cape Parrot, Secretarybird, White-winged Flufftail, and the Southern Bald Ibis.

These ecosystems aren't just vital for wildlife – they are essential for people, too.

Located within some of South Africa's Strategic Water Source Areas, they deliver half the country's water supply from just **8%** of the land. Protecting them safeguards both biodiversity and long-term water security.

BIODIVERSITY STEWARDSHIP CENTRAL TO SUCCESSFUL CONSERVATION

With pressures from agriculture, commercial forestry, invasive plants, and habitat fragmentation, private and communal landowners play a key role in conservation. The average annual loss rate of grasslands and natural forests in KwaZulu-Natal is approximately **1.2%**. However, BirdLife SA estimates that the Mistbelt Grasslands in the Midlands are shrinking at a rate of approximately **6%** annually, underscoring the critical need for intensified conservation efforts in this region.

Collaboration with landowners is essential to help restore the ecological balance through the development of habitat connectivity and biodiversity, which will benefit both people and wildlife.

Through the ongoing **Biodiversity Stewardship (BDS) programme,** landowners are encouraged to voluntarily declare their land as Nature Reserves or Protected Areas while retaining ownership. The incentives of the programme include tax incentives, and technical guidance to manage their land sustainably for at least **30 years.**

A cornerstone of the BDS programme is the Blue Swallow monitoring initiative, which tracks one of the world's rarest birds. According to BirdLife SA, fewer than **35 breeding pairs** remain in the Mistbelt Grasslands region of the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands.

By the end of 2025, preparations were already underway for the next breeding season with field teams conducting pre-season nest inspections, clearing invasive plants from nests to optimise the likelihood of Blue Swallow occupancy, and conducting training for volunteers to use modern Earth Ranger™ data collection and real-time monitoring assessment tools.

With the support of N3TC, dedicated young wildlife monitors from local communities are identified, trained, upskilled, and employed.

Other than Mr Shelembe and the wildlife monitors, BirdLife SA and Conservation Outcomes co-employ two more project officers in KwaZulu-Natal. Deren Coetzer manages and coordinates support to the custodians of the five existing protected areas in the region, while Cilla Hilcove facilitates the declaration of new protected areas and coordinates the Biodiversity Stewardship Programme. Dr Mfundo Maseko, a longstanding member of this crucial research and conservation project, forms the backbone of this small, dedicated team, fulfilling a key mentorship role as well as helping to expand the monitoring team's skills and knowledge base.

> **"In this way, we are protecting nature, while also nurturing the next generation of conservationists. When people learn to care for wildlife and land, it gives them skills, income, and hope for the future."**
>
> *– Nhlanhla Shelembe, Blue Swallow Project, Coordinator*

2025 MILESTONES

included the identification of new stewardship sites and progress toward formal Nature Reserve declarations:

The Forest

a 230-hectare Mistbelt Grasslands and Forest area in the Karkloof region was approved for declaration as a Nature Reserve.

Stainton

a 130-hectare Midlands Mistbelt Grassland site, home to actively breeding Blue Swallows, and several highly threatened and endemic plants, was approved for declaration as a Nature Reserve.

Minerva Private Nature

has completed the verification and validation process under the Biodiversity Stewardship Programme – a first for KwaZulu-Natal, and a significant milestone for the project, and future conservation work.

EarthRanger™

A real-time digital tool for tracking species, monitoring habitats, and coordinating conservation actions efficiently. It allows field teams to record sightings of threatened species, track nest sites, map habitats, improving data quality, responsiveness, and long-term ecological management.

BIODIVERSITY STEWARDSHIP PROGRAMME:

The programme enables private and communal landowners to voluntarily declare their qualifying properties protected areas, while retaining ownership and benefiting from legal protection, management assistance, and other incentives. This approach cost-effectively expands protected areas, focusing on sensitive habitats for threatened species, enhancing ecological corridors, supporting national biodiversity goals, and safeguarding critical resources such as water supplies.

EXPANSION OF PROTECTED AREAS

Beyond protecting birds and their habitats, the KwaZulu-Natal Mistbelt Grasslands and Forest Conservation Project strengthens community capacity, creates jobs, and fosters sustainable land management practices. In a landscape where conservation resources are limited, a partnership like this – involving local business, community members, corporates, government departments, NGOs, and individual landowners – demonstrates that targeted, grassroots action can deliver tangible results for both people and nature.

As the Blue Swallows, hopefully, begin to return to their nesting grounds, the project offers a reminder that conservation creates places where nature and communities can thrive in harmony.

“The KwaZulu-Natal Mistbelt Grassland and Forest Conservation Project relies on the support of our committed partners. We appreciate the dedicated commitment of N3 Toll Concession, and other valued partner organisations to our conservation efforts. Your backing enables the employment of monitors, the provision of equipment, and operational support across multiple reserves for which we are extremely grateful,” concludes Dr Maseko.

> **“Protecting birds and their habitats isn’t just about wildlife — it’s about people, communities, and the skills that create lasting change.”**

– Dr Mfundo Maseko, University of KwaZulu-Natal, School of Biological Sciences and Research Affiliate, BirdLife South Africa

© Warwick Tarbotan, Southern Bald Ibis

“Protecting birds and their habitats isn’t just about wildlife — it’s about people, communities, and the skills that create lasting change.”

© Maxi Holder, "Dahlia Bud"

Education

PROTEC Pietermaritzburg Academy

N3TC *Touching Lives*

100% Bachelor admission pass rate demonstrates excellence in developing future leaders

PROTEC PIETERMARITZBURG (PMB) ACADEMY, FOUNDED IN 1990, IS A HIGHLY RESPECTED INSTITUTION within the greater Pietermaritzburg area and the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands region, standing out for its commitment to quality and integrity in education.

Unlike many less effective education initiatives, **PROTEC PMB provides access** to a highly organised, disciplined academic programme, maintaining rigorous standards and a comprehensive curriculum, with a focus on mathematics, physical science, and life sciences, subjects critical for success in a career in one of the STEM faculties.

"The Academy's success is driven by a combination of student focus, commitment, excellent planning, and outstanding teaching. Our approach has consistently yielded positive outcomes, with a steady stream of graduates leaving our campus to pursue careers in medicine, engineering, IT, business science, forestry, and teaching," says PROTEC PMB Academy's executive director, Ms Rose Smuts.

In 2025, PROTEC PMB celebrated not only a 100% pass rate, but also a 100% Bachelor admission pass rate. This exceptional result stands in stark contrast to broader trends, where national statistics show mixed outcomes in mathematics and physical science, with fewer students writing these key gateway subject examinations.

Local schools have been offering fewer places in core mathematics, a shift tied to external pressure to increase pass rates. Despite these challenges, PROTEC PMB students consistently receive conditional offers from top universities, making critical decisions about their futures even before final results are published.

The ongoing success of PROTEC PMB is made possible by its team of well-qualified, highly experienced tutors and the incredible generosity of its donors, such as N3TC. Their dedication ensures the continued survival and prosperity of the academy, allowing it to fulfil its mission of empowering the next generation of leaders, innovators, and professionals.

Spotlight on Excellence

TOP STUDENT
Sanele Khumalo

Sanele Khumalo, one of PROTEC PMB's top students, exemplifies the spirit and achievement of the Academy. Born and raised in Edendale Valley, Sanele attended Edendale Combined Technical High School and the Academy.

He graduated with full Bachelor's admission and an **impressive seven subject distinctions, including 79% in physical science.**

His passion for mechanics and outstanding academic performance have paved the way for his enrollment in Mechanical Engineering at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2026.

ALUMNI SUCCESS
Dr Nkangiso Vilakazi

Dr Nkanyiso Vilakazi, a 2017 graduate, attended Emzamweni High School and recently completed his medical degree. **He is currently serving his internship at Empangeni Hospital** in rural Zululand, rotating through various departments, including Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

Dr Vilakazi's journey from an under-resourced school in the Midlands to a career in medicine stands as **a testament to the Academy's commitment to empowering determined, hardworking students from all backgrounds.** But ultimately, it is his perseverance, positive attitude, and dedication that have propelled him to success.

"Raise your hats to Dr Vilakazi! He is now making a meaningful impact on the communities he serves. PROTEC Pietermaritzburg Academy could not be prouder," ends Ms Smuts.

Enterprise Development

Project Gateway

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Gateway School of Fashion celebrates student achievements and creativity

The Gateway School of Fashion, operating under the umbrella of Project Gateway, a non-profit community development organisation based in Pietermaritzburg uplifts vulnerable and low-income individuals through skills training and empowerment programmes.

Project Gateway's mission is rooted in equipping people with practical skills like woodworking, metalwork, electrical work, and fashion design, enabling them to build income generating capabilities and pursue sustainable livelihoods.

With N3TC's support, the Gateway School of Fashion offers structured academic programmes where students learn principles of fashion design, sewing, garment construction, and illustration. The curriculum is delivered by qualified professionals and includes business skills training to help graduates turn their talents into income-generating opportunities. The school's activities are embedded in community upliftment and self-sustainability, targeting Pietermaritzburg's poorest communities.

Students gain practical experience by showcasing their creations at community events and fashion shows. These platforms, such as Arts in the Park and the "Lights, Camera, Fashion!" event held at The Old Prison in May 2025, offer exposure and confidence-building opportunities.

The year concluded with a celebratory showcase, marking students' achievements and progress.

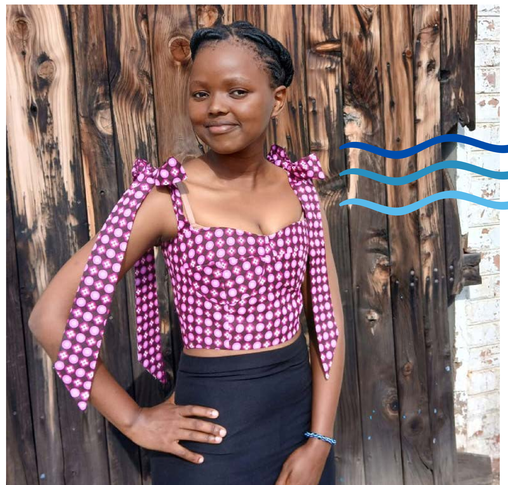
Second- and third-year students had the opportunity to work on outfits for the Durban July Race Day Fashion Show. Their efforts paid off, with second-year students winning first place in the men's category. Students also showcased their work at an event at the Golden Horse Casino & Hotel in Pietermaritzburg, and participated in workshops alongside local artists, expanding their creative horizons.

Principal Brenda Waring completed the facilitator, moderator, and assessor course during the final term, marking another step in the school's arduous journey toward full SETA accreditation.

This milestone highlights the ongoing commitment to quality education and professional standards.

The Gateway School of Fashion remains a beacon of hope and opportunity in Pietermaritzburg, providing platforms for emerging designers to step forward through structured training, public showcases, and community collaboration.

The programme's holistic approach ensures that fashion is not taught in isolation but as part of a broader network of arts, entrepreneurship, and community development. The achievements and enthusiasm witnessed in 2025 underscore the school's role in empowering individuals and building brighter futures.



Enterprise Development

iThemba Projects

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Growing hope from the ground up in Sweetwaters

In Mpumuza, better known as Sweetwaters, just outside Pietermaritzburg, change is taking shape in classrooms filled with song and stories, in vegetable gardens behind preschools, and in the steady confidence of teachers who are learning to believe in their own ability to shape young minds.

This is where iThemba Projects continues to work alongside the community, focusing on Early Childhood Development (ECD), sustainable nutrition, and youth mentorship. With long-term support from N3TC's Touching Lives Programme, iThemba's approach remains rooted in one simple idea: lasting change begins early, and it grows best when it is owned by the community itself.

BUILDING QUALITY ECD, TOGETHER

At the heart of iThemba's work is Asidlale, a site-based ECD programme that partners with teachers and parents. Rather than offering one-off workshops, the programme centres on an ongoing mentorship programme. Local ECD teachers are supported with curriculum guidance, resources, and strong peer networks, equipping them to pass knowledge on to others long after iThemba steps back.

This layered support is reinforced by iThemba's Nutrition and Early Childhood Home Support Programmes. Nutrition mentors help ECD sites establish food gardens, ensuring children receive healthy meals during the day.

At termly planning meetings, learning extends beyond the classroom. Nutrition mentors guide teachers through food labels, unpacking what the numbers mean and why they matter.

As daily decision-makers for the children in their care, teachers influence not only meals at school, but also conversations at home.

Simultaneously, home support mentors regularly visit caregivers at their homes to guide them on how to stimulate, play with, and best care for the children they are responsible for. Together, these efforts create a saturation effect – good practices consistently repeated and shared become the norm.

ITHEMBA HELPS TO BUILD CENTRES WHERE PEOPLE CAN FLOURISH

One Sweetwaters preschool tells this story particularly well. Founded by a principal concerned about young mothers in her community, the school was created as a place of support, not only for children, but for families navigating early parenthood. Over time, it became known as a preschool that welcomes all children, including those with special needs.

Last year, a four-year-old child who could not walk was enrolled. His grandmother brought him, believing that being "with other children" might help. Teachers worked patiently with him, strengthening his muscles day by day. When the grandmother saw him walk for the first time, she wept:

> **"I've been praying for this every day. God heard me."**

Today, former learners who are now in matric still return to greet the teachers who once nurtured them. **"More than anything, these lasting connections serve as a measure of our success, and a reminder that ECD is not only about school readiness, but also about belonging, self-worth, and possibility,"** says Stu Walker, director of iThemba Projects.

HARNESSING THE POWER OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

Another form of growth unfolds among teachers themselves. Educators from different schools connect through iThemba's professional development network.

They attend regular meetings where they deepen their skills and knowledge, and become peer mentors. Often, the enthusiasm of some group members spills over into friendly competition, shared ideas, and classroom innovation. When one tries a new activity, others soon follow, and their shared energy lifts everyone's spirits and motivation.

Peer-driven learning is further nurtured through the Hlanganani social support groups for educators. The Hlanganani Tea gatherings take place monthly across five geographic clusters, offering social circles of encouragement, reflection, and collective problem-solving, strengthening bonds between teachers, and reducing reliance on external support over time.

AIMING FOR THE TIPPING POINT

This combination of practical knowledge and confidence-building reflects iThemba's long-term goal: not to run programmes indefinitely, but to reach a community tipping point.

When 65 - 70% of families expect quality ECD, teachers deliver it, and children are read to, played with, and stimulated at home, quality becomes the shared standard rather than the exception.

INVESTING IN LONGEVITY

2025 was unfortunately not without challenges. Attendance at some meetings declined in the latter half of the year, often linked to financial strain and inconsistent teacher salaries.

Rapid school growth required careful balancing to protect quality, and high staff turnover in some centres meant relationships and training had to be rebuilt. Succession planning also emerged as a priority, with experienced teachers nearing retirement.

Through ongoing dialogue with principals, mentoring support, and a continued focus on relationships, these challenges are being addressed.

N3TC's long-term funding has enabled iThemba to prioritise depth over quick wins. Consistent one-on-one mentoring, peer networks, and a district-by-district saturation approach are proving far more effective than short-term interventions.

On behalf of the children, teachers, and families of Sweetwaters, iThemba Projects extends its sincere gratitude to N3TC and its shareholders for years of committed partnership.

> **"Together, we are growing a future where quality early childhood development is expected, valued, and sustained by the community itself."**
>
> *– Stu Walker*

2025 IN FOCUS:

ITHEMBA PARTNERED WITH:

20 *ECD Centres* & **29** *teachers*

PERSONAL MENTORING VISITS CONTINUED, MEETING TEACHERS AT THEIR:

ECD *centres, and encouraging steady improvements*

HLANGANANI TEA GATHERINGS WERE FACILITATED IN:

20 *geographic areas alongside a dedicated Hlgananani Tea for teachers of baby-classes*

BROUGHT PARTNER SCHOOLS TOGETHER:

4 *termly planning sessions*

NUTRITION AND HOME SUPPORT TEAMS MENTORED:

306 *families in early childhood stimulation*

© Dries Fourie, "Woman collecting wood"

Enterprise Development

Singakwenza

N3TC *Touching Lives*

The data keeps confirming what we see every day: Our work matters

SINGAKWENZA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION MONITORING AND EVALUATION WORK, USING THE EARLY LEARNING OUTCOMES MEASURE (ELOM), CONTINUES TO DEMONSTRATE A REAL IMPACT ON CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT.

The latest results revealed a striking comparison: 30.6% of children in KwaZulu-Natal were on track for learning, compared to 42% nationally, and 73% of children supported by Singakwenza.

When the Thrive by Five Index was released in October last year, it provided South Africa with a wide-angle view of preschool child outcomes, using the same ELOM tool adopted by Singakwenza. "It was incredibly encouraging to see that our children significantly outranked the national average across every domain measured, and at the same time, the Index reminded us how urgent early childhood work remains," says Julie Hay, founder and executive director of Singakwenza.

Singakwenza was established more than 15 years ago to address two issues facing many under-resourced rural communities in South Africa: early childhood education and health. "Good healthcare, physical and emotional wellness, and early educational stimulation are key to laying the groundwork for developing well-rounded children who are able and eager to learn," continues Ms Hay.

Some of the organisation's biggest milestones in 2025 included the opening of its 107th crèche, training an additional 80 early childhood education practitioners, and reaching 1 414 children with its fun, hands-on educational programme. Singakwenza's Occupational Therapy (OT) assistant also received training to conduct vision screening and performed eye screening tests for 194 children.

'MEET 'N MAKE' VOLUNTEER GROUPS

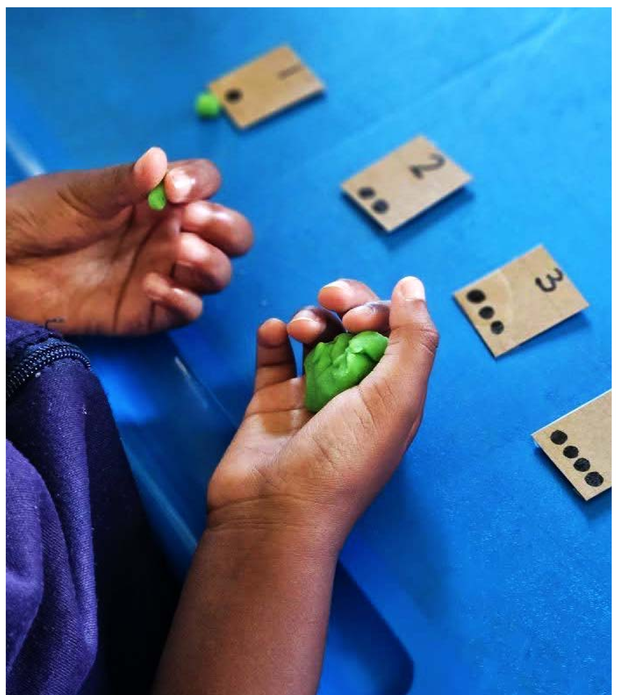
Five 'Meet 'n Make' volunteer groups gathered to create hundreds of educational items from recyclable waste. Among these 120 volunteers were Mary South (95) and Theresa Mokoena (89) from Hilton and Edendale, respectively. "These two gogos are legends!" says Ms Hay. "The scale of learning materials required is hard to comprehend until you realise that the volunteers often make more than 300 educational toys from scratch for each activity every week. We are deeply grateful to all these amazing volunteers."

Through the Waste2Toys workshops, caregivers are taught how to provide learning through play opportunities for the children in their care. Workshop attendees are always amazed and appreciative once they discover what they can achieve through play and by putting recyclable waste materials to good use. As one individual explains: "I never realised children were learning so much while they were playing, but now that I know, and have these new skills to create toys for them, I am going to make their playtime even better."

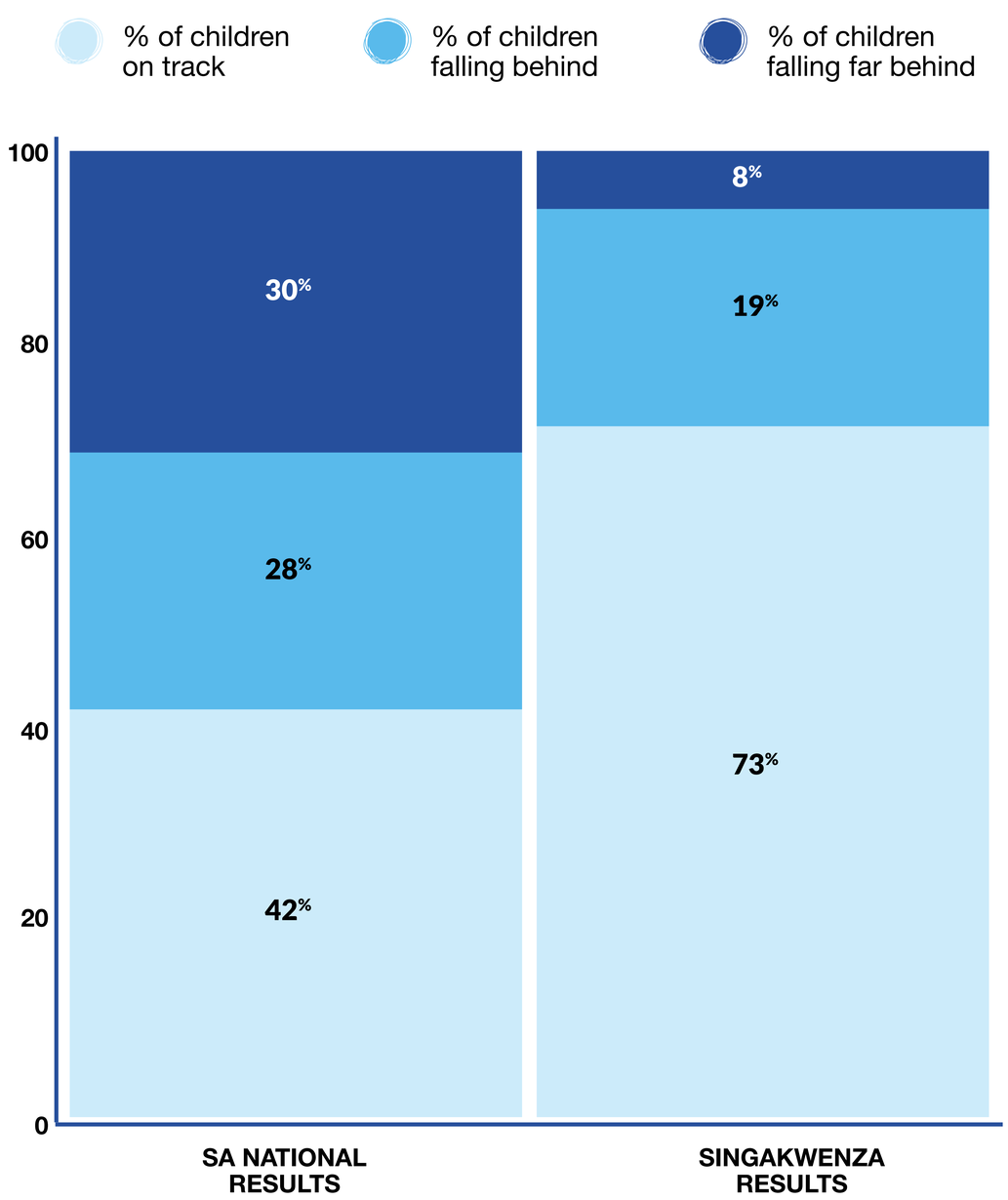
Another participant said she appreciated learning about gross motor skills, proprioception, and how easy it is to make simple but effective resources like skipping ropes. All Singakwenza's educational materials are made from recyclable household packaging. No educational toys are store-bought.

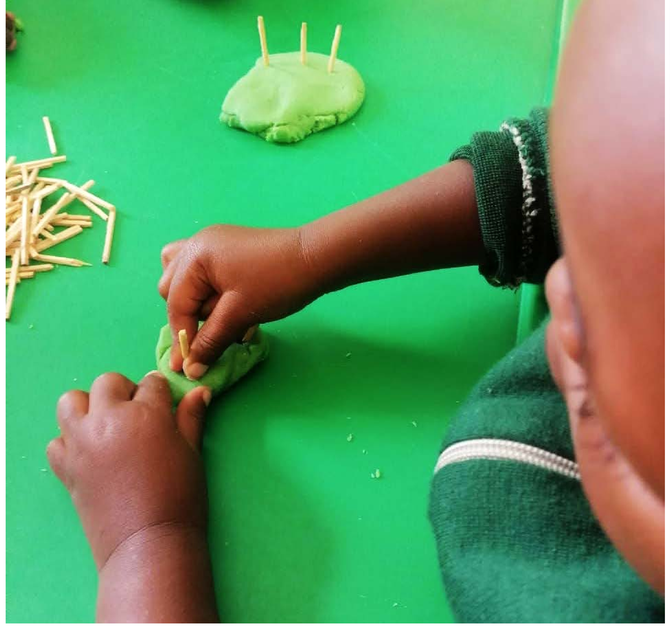
"Thanks to all the people who collect recycling for us, we have managed to turn hundreds of thousands of bread bags into skipping ropes, dolls, pull toys for toddlers, or laces to teach children how to tie their shoes. Hundreds of kilograms of cereal boxes have been converted into colour-matching activities, letters, numbers, shapes, books, and charts, while many thousands of bottle lids have been put to good use to teach colour matching, sequencing, number recognition, letter matching, and threading activities," explains Ms Hay. "Egg cups, lids, butternut pocket bags, polystyrene trays, and more are used to help develop reading and writing skills, improve visual discrimination, eye-hand coordination, pincer grasp, sequencing, visual-motor integration, and, of course, perseverance—the list is endless."

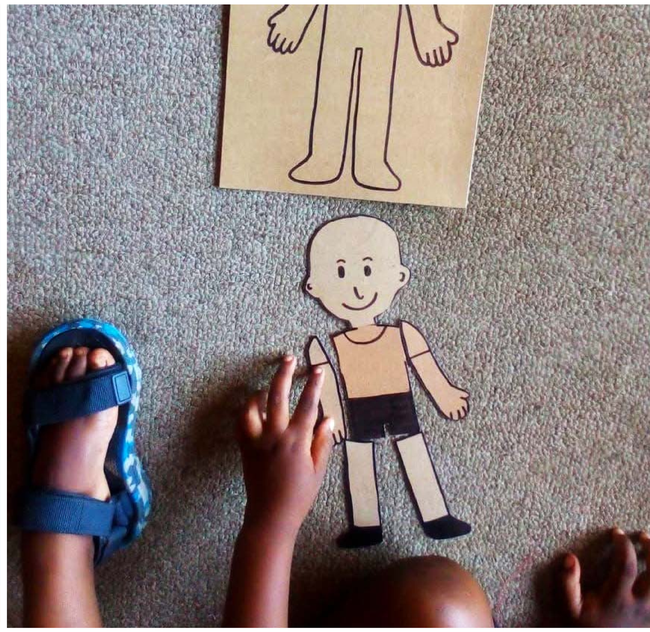
> **"Looking towards the future, Singakwenza has identified a need to work more directly with parents, not just with practitioners, if we truly want to change the early childhood landscape in South Africa.**
>
> **We are hoping to pilot a parent training programme using ECD centres as a starting base in 2026."**
>
> *– Julie Hay*

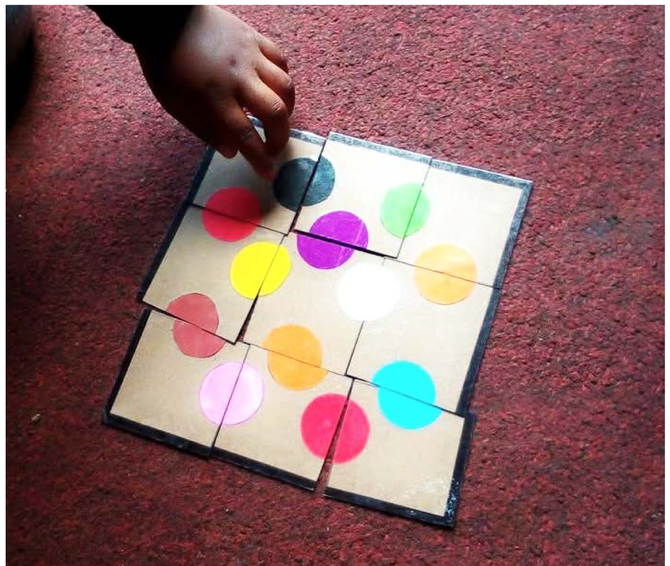


Overall learning (ELOM total score)









Youth Development

Funda Nenja

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Let your heart do the talking

says Bongiwa Nyoka, a Durban-based teen author and blogger in his ode to township pets, *"The Truth About Township Dogs: Why Every Animal Deserves Love"*

These words are echoed in the streets of Mpophomeni, a township on the outskirts of Howick in the uMngeni Municipality of KwaZulu-Natal. Here, Funda Nenja, a non-profit organisation and the people associated with it, are reshaping the relationships between children, their families, their dogs and other pets in the community.

Every Friday afternoon, children stream towards the local sports stadium, dogs trotting at their heels. They are making their way to the heart of Funda Nenja: the weekly dog training school.

Some arrive shyly, others come bursting with excitement, but all are eager to learn. Children and their pets adore the time spent at the afternoon dog school, even if they get off to a slow or bumpy start.

Force-free training methods are the norm, and positive reinforcement replaces punishment. Using lure-and-reward techniques, young handlers guide their dogs through basic obedience skills, building patience, consistency and trust along the way. Classes are structured into three groups: Puppy 1, Puppy 2 and Adult 1, allowing dogs and children to progress at their own pace.

Once a month, theory sessions deepen understanding of animal welfare, helping young voices grasp why humane treatment matters.

The programme began modestly in 2009 after founder Adrienne Olivier, a registered dog trainer and former teacher, attended an SPCA dog show in Mpophomeni.

"It started as a winter school holiday programme with two volunteers offering basic lessons to a small group of children," recalls project administrator Lisa Button.

"But the children kept bringing more friends, and by the end of the holiday, they begged us to continue, and 16 years later, we're still here!"

Today, Funda Nenja's training sessions are led by former Funda Nenja students who have advanced through the ranks to mentor the next generation – young people who also once stood nervously beside their own dogs on Day 1 not knowing what to expect next.

> **Funda Nenja is creating a ripple effect in Mpophomeni. They're spreading kindness, solidarity, fellowship, and social cohesion with gentle hands, big smiles, wagging tails, and steady paws.**
> *– N3TC*

Beyond the training grounds, Funda Nenja's weekly pop-up shop offers practical support. Donated collars, leads, harnesses, grooming tools and dog food are sold at greatly reduced prices.

"Our philosophy is deliberate," explains Ms Button. "Rather than free handouts, we encourage responsible ownership through affordable access. When families invest in pet care, even modestly, they take great pride in providing for their animals."

The impact is visible. More dog owners are bringing their pets to the on-site veterinary clinic, signalling growing awareness of preventative care.

The veterinary clinic provides free rabies vaccinations, deworming, tick and flea treatments, and 5-in-1 vaccines, while the monthly sterilisation service helps reduce unwanted litters and supports animal welfare. Ms Button notes that: "each stamped vaccination card reflects more than a medical record – it is evidence of shifting attitudes towards animal care".

ONE WELFARE – AN INTERCONNECTED APPROACH

Funda Nenja has evolved into an internationally recognised organisation built on the One Welfare approach, understanding that the wellbeing of people and animals is deeply intertwined.

> **We can see the way children are treated by the way they treat their dogs.**
>
> *– Funda Nenja*

Funda Nenja's home visits illustrate this connection clearly. "While our animal welfare officers check the living conditions of pets, and provide practical advice on pet care, our full-time social worker, Zinhle Msimango, goes to great lengths to meet the pet owners and their families, and to provide them with psycho-social and socio-welfare support, if required," explains Ms Button.

"She assists them with anything from counselling to accessing social grants or healthcare, securing identity documents, administrative or educational support, obtaining school uniforms, or, where necessary, providing food parcels. In some cases, she has assisted with conflict resolution, and has facilitated reconciliation between family members, and even neighbours. Structured counselling sessions have rebuilt trust, restored communication, strengthened households, and eased tensions in the community."

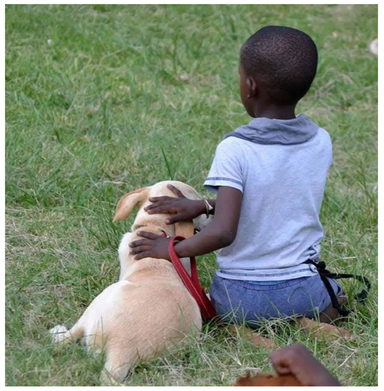
ADDICTION RECOVERY PROGRAMME

Towards the end of 2024, the organisation introduced a weekly substance abuse recovery programme through a trained consultant. Participants in the Addiction Recovery Programme receive one-on-one guidance, and have shown remarkable progress and commitment to the programme, and rebuilding their lives in the past year. For many of them, recovery is no longer only an abstract hope, but a daily, determined choice.

THE MOTHERS' GROUP

Funda Nenja's 'The Mothers' Group' adds another thread to this tapestry of care. They are a skilled group of unemployed women who meet regularly to pool their resources and craft items for sale.

Their circle fosters more than economic opportunities, it builds friendship, trust, and mutual support to help them overcome challenges, and build solidarity and resilience.

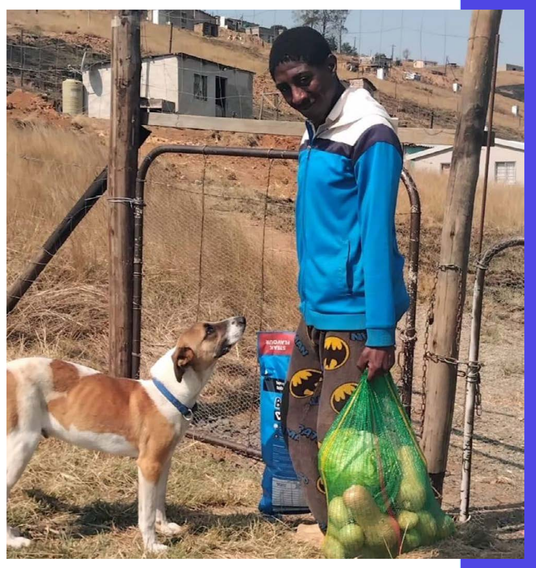


BREAKING THE CHAINS OF CONSTRAINT

Many township dogs are kept on chains to stop them from wandering off from properties without fences, or escaping through broken fences.

Funda Nenja is working to improve household animals' lives by installing or repairing fences for responsible pet owners, allowing animals to roam safely within secure areas instead of being restricted to short chains.

Angel is one of the dogs who benefited from this intervention last year. Previously tethered because of a damaged fence, she is now able to roam freely within her yard. Her owner describes her as a loyal guardian, alerting the household when strangers approach.



LOVE IN ACTION

From its humble beginnings with only two volunteers and a handful of children, to the movement it is today – where children are building confidence, families are accessing support, and dogs are treated with increasing kindness – Funda Nenja continues to inspire with its acts of love and care.

Funda Nenja is talking to our hearts, and Mpophomeni is listening.

– Community Member

FUNDA NENJA EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES:

43 JOBS CREATED

PERMANENT
7

FEMALE

MALE

TEMPORARY
22

FEMALE

MALE

VOLUNTEER
14

FEMALE

MALE

Youth Development

Music Voyage

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Journey to harmony

MUSIC IS A POWERFUL CATALYST TO RELEASE CREATIVITY, EASE ANXIETY, SUPPORT WELL-BEING, AND FOSTER COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT.

It prepares the mind for learning and enhances focus, attention, memory, and concentration. With exposure from an early age, music can also help nurture discipline, confidence, leadership skills, and improve overall quality of life.

With this knowledge, and with the support of N3TC, the Music Voyage team has dedicated itself to providing music lessons and performance opportunities to children living in rural areas in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands.

During art and culture periods at partner schools, Music Voyage facilitators introduce learners to basic lessons in music theory, rhythm and singing.

From these group sessions, promising young talent is identified and invited to join Music Voyage's more advanced music ensembles or to receive individual, structured music instruction. For many, it is their first opportunity to hold or play an instrument.

As learners progress, they develop transferable skills that extend far beyond the rehearsal room. When invited to perform at events, eisteddfods or competitions, they experience a powerful sense of accomplishment that reverberates through their families and communities.

THE IMPACT REACHES ACROSS MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF COMMUNITY LIFE:

- Learners gain practical skills in mastering an instrument.
- The discipline and focus required to practise consistently often translate into improved approaches to other academic subjects.
- Ensemble participation cultivates teamwork and cooperation.
- As students refine their musical and performance skills, economic pathways begin to open.
- Some learners have the opportunity to come full circle, returning to Music Voyage as facilitators and mentors for the next generation.
- Belonging to a recognised, successful group, affirmed through certification and awards, strengthens accountability, time management and organisational skills.
- Families take immense pride in their children's achievements. Playing an instrument brings confidence and social recognition within their communities.
- Learners benefit from mentoring relationships with their music teachers, creating spaces for encouragement and personal guidance.

"Music is providing constructive, healing opportunities in our communities, offering our young people a purposeful alternative to the negative influences that are often prevalent in rural and informal settings.

Participation in a constructive and creative movement such as our marimba bands and violin groups, fosters a sense of belonging and self-belief."

– Katherine McClelland, Music Voyage, Programme Director

S'bongumusa Majola, a brass and recorder teacher, shares how Music Voyage has transformed his teaching approach, extending its impact beyond academics into meaningful social change. "This has been a pivotal experience for me as I've noticed subtle but significant improvements in the children's behaviour as their music lessons advanced. Students became calmer, helped to maintain order, communicated better, and were more aware of time and manners. In group classes, they worked as a team and tried their best, even when mistakes were made. Mastering new skills and learning songs builds confidence and a sense of achievement, fostering personal growth and a desire to make positive contributions."

A SHOWCASE OF PERFORMANCES DELIGHTS MUSICIANS AND AUDIENCES ALIKE

Music Voyage's 2025 performance calendar was filled to the brim with jam-packed performances, each event another stepping stone for young musicians finding their feet and their voices.

One unforgettable afternoon at Piggly Wiggly in the Midlands, the junior marimba band was in full rhythm when a familiar face in the audience began to sway. It was renowned South African trumpeter Ayanda Mtshali. Before long, he lifted his trumpet and joined in. The marimba players' eyes widened, then sparkled.

They listened closely, adjusting to his soaring lines, following his patterns. Conversations stopped mid-sentence, shoppers paused browsing, and for a few luminous minutes, a casual afternoon became a shared celebration. No rehearsal. No score. Just music building a bridge. A Music Voyage in its purest form.

From rural rehearsal rooms to national stages, the journey continued. Two high school musicians from the Lions River Violin Project travelled to Cape Town to participate in the Suzuki International Violin Competition.

For these young players, it was more than a competition. It was a glimpse of what might be possible beyond the valleys and hills they call home.

An educational tour to Ballito saw students participate in the Manic Marimba competition at Ashton College. There were nerves, laughter, late-night polishing of tricky passages, and the kind of teamwork that only forms when young people travel and perform together.

Back in Cedara, at St Joseph's Theological Institution, hundreds of marimba players from independent and government schools gathered for a mass concert led by the SJTI Marimba players. Permission slips from schools were signed, and uniforms hurriedly packed. The hall pulsed with rhythm. At the end of the day, Nosipho Vilikazi from Mpophomeni summed it up simply: "Playing with so many others made my heart happy!" It is hard to find a more honest measure of impact.

Violin student Vuyo Gcaleka was selected to perform in the "Best of the Eisteddfod" Concert in Pietermaritzburg, an accolade that filled his school and family with pride.

Several students also participated in the SASMT Eisteddfod. Recorder groups brought home three golds and a silver, while violinists achieved golds across the board. One of the recorder ensembles was also selected for the "Best of the Eisteddfod" concert.

At Horse Shoe Bend, the marimba band found themselves sharing a lineup with respected artists, including Qadasi & Maqhinga, whose music has carried them onto international platforms. The young performers watched in awe, imagining their own futures stretching ahead.

That same day, a small boy stood transfixed by the band's drummer. After the performance, his mother brought the young man to meet the drummer, who gently guided his hands, letting him feel the drum's heartbeat beneath his palms - inspiration passing from one set of young hands to another.

GROWING THE DREAM

Beind the applause lies steady growth. In 2025, new music teachers joined the programme, expanding access and allowing violin classes to reach larger groups. Quality music education is no longer reserved for a few. Thanks to N3TC's investment, the project's impact is tangible. Some participants are now earning an income through public performances.

Many have grown in confidence, discipline, and accountability. And as the young musicians step into the light, families and communities beam from the sidelines, deeply invested in every new skill mastered and every stage conquered. Music is harmony.

© Nikki Brighton, "This music makes me happy"

Education

Crystal Springs Primary School

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Tech is a gamechanger at Crystal Springs Primary

Nestled in a rural corner of the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands near Lidgetton, Crystal Springs Primary School is quietly revolutionising education, transforming challenges into opportunities, and preparing its learners for a rapidly changing world.

"Our school has benefited greatly from the support received through N3TC's Touching Lives Programme, and its network of business and community partners, for over a decade.

Their support has improved our learning environment and helped us to equip both our learners and educators with essential skills that encourage innovation and inspire them to dream, even when resources are limited," says principal Thembi Ngubane.

EDUCATORS ARE THRIVING

Technology has been integrated through every part of the school's learning experience, from the use of document cameras, laptops, and interactive apps like CAMI and E-Academy to the visual presentation of lessons, recording of classes for revision, and the use of interactive resources and tailor-made learning experiences to keep learners engaged.

Thanks to funding from N3TC, coding and robotics kits provide hands-on STEM education from the Foundation Phase to Grade 7. As educators already skilled in coding now train their peers, every classroom is geared to fully embrace digital learning in 2026.

BEYOND ACADEMIC PURSUITS

Beyond academic pursuits, Crystal Springs Primary is proactively addressing socio-economic challenges within its community. The school employs local youth as Eduhelpers, who assist educators, guide learners in coding activities, and acquire valuable workplace experience. Nutrition programmes, sustained by contributions from local community organisations, guarantee that learners receive healthy meals. Additionally, infrastructure improvements funded by SANRAL, including classroom expansions and road improvements, have enhanced safety and accessibility "Our school's achievements in 2025 reflect our broader vision – empowering our learners to succeed in a digital world while strengthening our community. With N3TC's support, we are a community where every child, regardless of background, can thrive. Your support has fortified our programmes, fostered hope, and enabled many of our learners and staff to realise their potential. May their confidence keep growing, and their futures be limitless." *– Ms Ngubane, Principal.*

FROM RURAL CLASSROOM TO ROBOTICS GLORY

For Grade 6 learner Lwandle Hlongwane, the school's digital and robotics programme has been life-changing. He used to struggle academically. His motivation was lacking, and he often advanced to the next grade without much achievement. But then he was introduced to coding and robotics classes in 2025 and discovered a talent and passion that would redefine his learning journey. Working with classmates, Lwandle helped to design a robotic arm to assist workers in the local timber industry in lifting and transporting poles safely, reducing both injuries and fatigue. The project earned second place at the Coolest Project competition in Durban, outshining teams from numerous urban schools! "I was thrilled to build a moving robot and to do so well in the competition," Lwandle said. "It inspired me to explore more about coding and robotics, and to try new things. Now, I even help my uncle with electrical repairs in the community."

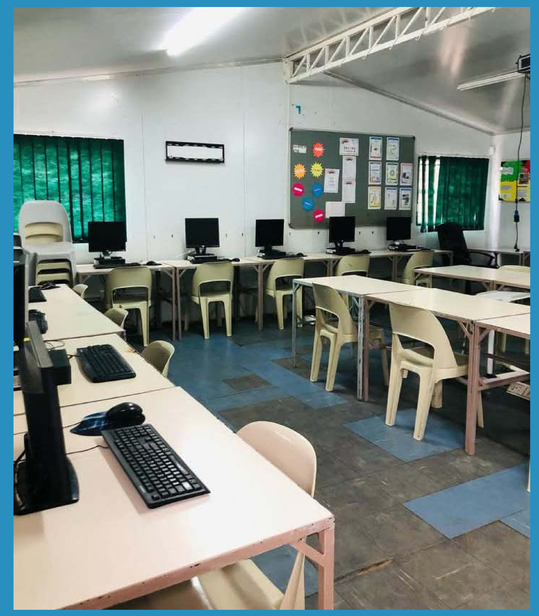
His story shows how Crystal Springs leverages technology to empower learners with skills that extend beyond the classroom. Together with the infrastructure, reliable internet funded by N3TC, other partners and local providers enables uninterrupted digital lessons, boosts attendance of morning coding classes, strengthens remedial work, and improves educator access to supportive online resources.

> **"I'm a better teacher thanks to technology."**
>
> *– Ms Khumalo, Educator*
>
> Ms Khumalo, an educator who joined Crystal Springs Primary School from another rural education facility with limited access to technology, now considers herself more efficient and effective in the classroom thanks to her training and use of digital tools. She also noted better attention and retention among her learners, improved classroom management, and support for learners with learning difficulties. "My experience is completely positive. I can teach my learners in ways that were impossible before."

MY YEAR OF TRANSFORMATION AND ACHIEVEMENT

Eduhelper Fisani Ndlela writes:
2025 was a phenomenal year at Crystal Springs Primary School. It was like having a front row seat to the creation of something new and truly inspiring.

This was the year our school's IT programme got its wings. We began the year by setting goals and accomplished nearly all of them with the introduction of coding and robotics, being the best part, hands down. So well did this programme take off that by November, our school was ready to take part in The Coolest Project competition organised by Keep A Child Alive (KCA) in Durban. Ten learners between Grades 5 and 7 participated in the competition, securing second place with the robotic arm entry, and eighth place for the boom gate project. This experience provided valuable learning opportunities and strengthened learners' enthusiasm for coding and robotics.



While AI is a hot topic in tech conversations around education, simple tools like document cameras, for example, are often overlooked. These devices are more advanced and portable than overhead projectors, and allow teachers much more freedom and creativity in class – they can quickly display physical materials instantly without copying or scanning – streamlining teaching and learning. Implementing these straightforward improvements has resulted in major strides for our learners, educators, and school management team.

Education

Family Literacy Project

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Literacy takes root in the Southern Drakensberg

> **All children deserve the right to learn and to read efficiently from an early age.**
>
> *— Reach Out to Read*

In the deep rural communities of the Southern Drakensberg, where books are scarce and daily survival often takes precedence, the seeds of a new reading culture are steadily taking root.

Across villages in the Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma and Impendle municipalities of KwaZulu-Natal, families, educators, and young children are discovering the power of reading together.

The Family Literacy Project (FLP), established in 2000, has spent more than two decades working to ensure that children in rural areas learn not only to read but also to love reading and writing.

These communities are often described as print-poor, with limited or no access to books, newspapers, or writing materials, where few adults have completed their schooling, and where most parents and carers also lack basic literacy skills.

> **Literacy cannot be left to classrooms alone. It must live in homes, in conversations, and in shared moments between generations.**
>
> *— Cheryl Taylor, Family Literacy Project*

This belief is at the heart of Reach Out to Read, FLP's holistic literacy initiative that engages entire communities across all age groups, focusing on the same skills and stories and thereby equipping parents and caregivers to support children's early learning while building confidence and connection within families.

MEASURABLE PROGRESS IN 2025

2025 has brought encouraging evidence that this community-wide approach is working.

Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) results across participating schools and communities show clear growth in foundational reading skills. Learners strengthened their understanding of the alphabetical principles, moved more confidently from recognising sounds to reading whole words, and demonstrated improved ability to decode connected text.

Gains in comprehension, often the most complex stage of early reading, are also emerging steadily across grades.

> **Literacy does not stand alone. It's a community movement – that thrives on collective action – to open the doors to dignity and to create a pathway to a better life.**

Most striking is the proportion of learners now reading at or above the benchmark associated with potential reading proficiency:

Grade 1 → **58.3%**

Grade 2 → **67%**

Grade 3 → **50%**

These figures stand in stark contrast to the national benchmark of 15%, highlighting the depth of progress taking place in communities where educational resources are typically limited.

For FLP's Reach Out to Read team coordinator and trainer, Xoloni Mofokeng, the numbers represent real change. He says, "Each number tells the story of a child bucking the literacy statistics, and climbing the ladder to a more hopeful future." He speaks of learners receiving awards for excellent reading, and of parents stopping him in the community to express their gratitude, and to enquire whether their other children might also join the programme during school holidays.

OTHER REACH OUT TO READ JOURNEYS ALSO ECHO THE BROADER DATA

Reading champion, Zinhle Ntshiza, recalls a young learner who struggled at school and who was disinterested in learning, reading, and visiting the local library despite the gentle encouragement of her mother. This pattern, however, shifted over time when she started to attend the weekly library reading sessions. "Gradually, she progressed from a reluctant reader to borrowing several books per week, and soon her teachers noticed improvements in both her behaviour and classroom participation at school," he says.

Volunteer worker, Joy Brander, describes the programme as both effective and deeply supportive, reaching teachers, parents, and learners alike. "I wish that all our children may get opportunities to discover reading in this way," she says.

These stories capture what the numbers cannot show us – when hesitation gives way to curiosity, and curiosity turns into confidence with which a child sets out to discover – and embrace – a whole new world!

STRENGTHENING THE FOUNDATIONS

Support from N3TC helped to sustain and grow the Family Literacy Project in 2025, enabling community-based facilitator training, mentorship, and distribution of learning resources.

"Our partnership helps to bring learning into community homes, making reading a part of daily family life instead of a skill just confined to school hours," says Ms Taylor. "Yet our work takes place in challenging settings characterised by long travel distances between rural locations, limited connectivity, constrained resources, and mounting socio-economic pressures. Attendance, continuity, and access are never guaranteed under these conditions. Therefore, FLP is intensifying its investment in community-based facilitators who are equipped to lead literacy activities with continued guidance and mentorship, ensuring that early learning and reading remain integrated into the daily rhythm of community life."

> **Our experiences have taught us an important social truth.**
>
> *— Cheryl Taylor*

Reach out to Read — turning pages toward possibility

Reach Out to Read is a community development programme from the Family Literacy Project. It promotes literacy by teaching reading skills at home, in community libraries, and at schools, and provides teacher training and support to selected unemployed youth, called Reading Champions.

The FLP works across the Harry Gwala, Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Umzimkulu, and Impendle Municipalities in KwaZulu-Natal. The programme has been piloted in community schools in these areas since 2014 and is currently the only evidence-based, explicit phonics isiZulu reading programme in South Africa.

Reach Out to Read aims to make reading fun and interactive through the use of robust, colourful, well-structured learning resources, while providing remediation to struggling readers.

Recent summative assessments indicate the success of Reach Out to Read, as children in local schools are reading at levels up to three years above their chronological age.

Across the Southern Drakensberg, the impact of shared reading is becoming visible — in classrooms where children decode words with growing ease, in homes where stories are told aloud, and in communities where learning is no longer a solitary task but a collective journey.

Each improvement in fluency, each borrowed library book, and each confident young reader signals something larger taking shape—new futures are being birthed, one story at a time.

28

SCHOOLS SUPPORTED

1. Nsiwa Primary School
2. Qambokwethu Primary School
3. Camanga Primary School
4. Mondi Forests
5. Thukeyana Primary School
6. Goxhill Primary School
7. Noahs Ark Pre-primary
8. Underberg Community Crech,
9. Brecher Primary
10. Knoopan Primary
11. Manajalo Primary
12. Mandlana Primary
13. Nkumba Primary School
14. Thanda Community
15. Project Vusindaba Library
16. Stepmore Primary
17. Bomvini Primary
18. Malunga Primary
19. FLP Community Groups
20. Enhlanhleni
21. Mpumlwane
22. Ndodeni
23. Mathendeni
24. Mkhohlwa
25. Mzinhlanga
26. Enhlanhleni Primary School
27. Himeville Homework Club
28. Sitholinhlanhla Primary School

Disabled

Pevensey Place

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Anchoring belonging and purpose in the Southern Drakensberg

Nestled at the foot of the Southern Drakensberg, on an 86-hectare farm near Underberg, Pevensey Place has stood as a testament to inclusion since its establishment in 1972 as a care facility for adults living with cerebral palsy.

For residents and their families, Pevensey Place is far more than just a structured, supportive environment; it is home, a residential facility where adults with disabilities can enjoy fulfilling lives and actively participate in the daily management of their home.

Surrounded by open pastures, mountain air and working farmland, Pevensey offers a sense of freedom and tranquillity. Portions of the farm are leased to a neighbouring dairy farmer, generating extra income for the home, while his expanded farming activities have also become a source of interest and enjoyment for residents.

Pevensey's residents tend to their own agricultural operations, including farming with sheep and poultry, mowing lawns, preparing flower beds and helping maintain pathways, especially after the occasional winter snowfall. Produce, such as eggs, is used for residents' meals, and any surplus from Pevensey's kitchen is sold.

Work and participation are intentionally integrated into life at Pevensey. Residents help in different areas based on their abilities, from housekeeping and laundry to maintenance tasks, including cleaning the swimming pool.

In summertime, the pool becomes the centre of attraction when residents prepare for Pevensey's swimming gala, compete against Underberg School in a friendly get-together or train for participation in events such as the Midmar Mile. Residents play an active role in the wider community, with their annual fete at the Underberg School hall receiving enthusiastic participation, serving as a platform for fundraising and community engagement. Their popular pancake stall at the N3TC Drak Challenge is another staple, helping residents to raise funds while enjoying a front-row seat to one of the area's most prominent sporting events.

Community engagement extends beyond formal events. Local businesses and farmers host outings, birthday celebrations are marked with regular excursions into town, and donations from Underberg residents help to sustain daily operations. This assistance is particularly important for vulnerable residents, the orphans, who lack family support, as they rely solely on Pevensey for their ongoing care and a sense of security.

Partnerships remain essential. Support from the N3TC Touching Lives Programme has strengthened Pevensey's ability to deliver consistent, quality care for all its residents, especially the orphans.

For travellers visiting the Underberg region, Pevensey Place may not feature on their itineraries. Yet, its integration into the social fabric of the Southern Drakensberg is a testament to the community that exists beyond the scenic landscapes – a population deeply rooted in a sense of place, neighbourliness and belonging.

> **"...support from the N3TC Touching Lives Programme has strengthened Pevensey's ability to deliver consistent, quality care for all its residents."**

Community Event

N3TC
Drak Challenge

N3TC *Touching Lives*

The Drak never fails to exhilarate, uplift, and inspire

The N3TC Drak Challenge has become one of South Africa's leading multi-day canoe marathons, attracting paddlers from across the country to the Underberg District in KwaZulu-Natal. Hosted by the locally based Canyon Kayak Club at the end of January every year, the event combines competitive sport with measurable economic, social and environmental benefits for the surrounding community.

The two-day race takes place on the uMzimkulu River in the Southern Drakensberg. Day one starts at Swartberg Bridge and covers 38 kilometres, including technical sections through well-known gorges such as Glenhaven. Day two begins at Castleburn Bridge and spans 25 kilometres, culminating in the challenging Black Murray rapid before finishing again at Swartberg Bridge. The race is widely regarded as one of the most demanding canoe events on the national calendar, drawing both elite and recreational paddlers.

Beyond the competition itself, the Drak Challenge plays an important role in supporting the local economy. Hundreds of participants and spectators travel to the region over the race weekend, filling local accommodation, restaurants and retail outlets. For many businesses in Underberg and the surrounding areas, it is one of the busiest weekends of the year.

A distinguishing feature of the event is its community-driven operational model. Key aspects of race logistics, including registration, marshalling, shuttle services between start and finish points, catering and checkpoint management are provided by local volunteers and community organisations.

Schools, church groups, learning centres, and charity organisations participate in various capacities, enabling them to raise funds for their own programmes while contributing to the success of the event.

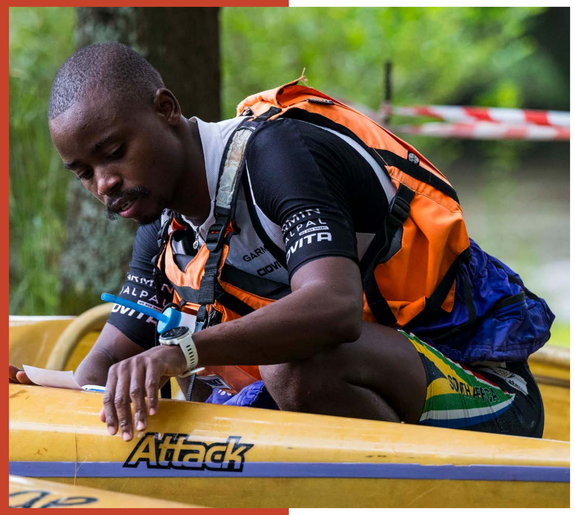
Underberg Emergency Medical Services provides medical support, ensuring that safety standards are maintained throughout the race.

One of the most popular fundraising initiatives during the weekend is the pancake stall operated by residents of Pevensey Place, a commune for persons living with cerebral palsy, and another beneficiary of the N3TC Touching Lives programme. Income generated through this initiative assists in addressing funding gaps in the ongoing care of its residents. The stall has become a well-supported and visible example of how the event creates inclusive opportunities for participation and benefit.

Proceeds from the N3TC Drak Challenge are channelled back into local organisations, including Pevensey Place, the Family Literacy Project, and the Underberg Primary School.

In addition to direct financial contributions, these and other organisations earn income through providing services such as catering, transport and event support. This integrated model ensures that the economic impact of the race extends far beyond race entries and visitor spending.

Environmental management is also a priority. A portion of race funds supports initiatives aimed at protecting the health of the uMzimkulu River system. This includes ongoing work to remove invasive alien vegetation, particularly black wattle, from sections of the riverbank in the uMzimkulu Valley. These efforts contribute to improved water quality, enhanced river flow and the restoration of indigenous vegetation.



According to race organiser Stu Berry, from Impi Concept Events:

"The event is designed to ensure that community organisations are active partners rather than passive beneficiaries. By aligning the operational needs of the race with local fundraising and development priorities, the Drak has evolved into a sustainable model for community-based sporting events."

© Rob Hart, "Front runner"

Education

Curry's Post Education Trust

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Carried by a unified community spirit

ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF HOWICK IN THE KWAZULU-NATAL MIDLANDS, IN THE SMALL COMMUNITY OF CURRY'S POST, EVERY CHILD IS KNOWN BY NAME.

Central to this community is the Curry's Post Primary School, supported by the Curry's Post Educational Trust (CPET). Through its careful management and close monitoring, this small rural school is steadily bridging gaps in education, wellbeing and opportunity.

Amanda McCarthy, chairperson of the Trust, describes 2025 as a year defined by progress, resilience, and hope for learners. She notes that growth was evident from the very beginning, with an increasing number of learners being enrolled in the early grades since the introduction of Pre-Primary to Grade RR classes. Computer lessons added even more benefits to these classrooms, offering young learners opportunities to explore new horizons from the very start of their educational journeys.

With patient support from the school's IT teacher, children aged four to six learned how to operate a mouse and keyboard, explored interactive language resources, and gained confidence through play-based digital activities.

"For many, it was their first experience with technology, and their excitement showed right away," says Ms McCarthy. Teachers noted increased enthusiasm, better vocabulary, and greater English comprehension, further supported by a group of dedicated library volunteers who foster a love of reading.

At Curry's Post Primary School, technology is not only shaping learners' futures, but it is also empowering educators. The school's digital centre is enabling staff to pursue academic studies, carry out research, and develop personally. The empowered educators are an inspiration to the young minds in their care.

Outside the classroom, the school community demonstrated exceptional unity and resilience in the face of various challenges. When the government feeding scheme was suddenly halted last winter, members rallied together, donating food and funds to ensure learners received daily meals. "It's during times like these that our collective spirit truly shines – no child in our fold will be left behind here," emphasises Ms McCarthy.

Water access, previously disrupted by power outages, has been stabilised through the installation of a new municipal water tank, guaranteeing safe hygiene and an uninterrupted supply even when the power goes out.

WITH SUSTAINABILITY IN MIND, THE SCHOOL IS PURSUING OTHER SELF-SUFFICIENT INITIATIVES

Solar panels have been donated to provide reliable and clean energy for classrooms and the IT centre. Fundraising efforts are now underway to acquire batteries and implement the end-to-end solution to bring the school closer to energy independence – a vital advancement for a rural educational environment. N3TC will be assisting the school with funding towards this endeavour in 2026.

A vegetable garden is being cultivated where learners are gaining hands-on experience in responsibility, nutrition, and environmental stewardship. "Despite wildlife, most often a troop of monkeys, posing disruptive garden challenges, and making regular attempts to feast on our crop, we have, so far, been able to outwit them." Ms McCarthy says new strategies are underway to thwart their efforts. "We believe these challenges help teach learners about the perseverance required to grow anything."

During the quiet holiday weeks, the Trust ensured the school grounds were refreshed and ready for the new year. Roofs painted in preparation for solar installation, fields trimmed, water systems cleaned, swings repaired and classrooms carefully maintained. These thoughtful acts create more than neat surroundings; they cultivate pride, respect and a sense of belonging among learners.

"With our community's support, Curry's Post Primary School is ready to face 2026 confidently and with gratitude. Each lesson, meal, repair, and planted seed reflects how collective care enables small rural schools to achieve extraordinary impact," ends Ms McCarthy.

Beneficiaries supported by the project

133 Total beneficiaries reached

Project impact: Supporting 133 children, youth, and adults with a focus on primary school children, balanced gender participation, and education.

Key insights:

44%

Greatest reach:
Children aged 6–12
(59 beneficiaries, 44% of total)

57%

Gender balance:
Slightly more male (57%) than female (43%) beneficiaries

43%

Youth and adult:
59 beneficiaries aged 18+, indicating meaningful impact beyond early childhood

Education

Michaelhouse Community Partnership Trust

N3TC *Touching Lives*

An investment in local human potential

Along the **N3 corridor,** many rural schools are stretched thin on human capital and resources, and educators carry more than their share of responsibilities. Here, an extra pair of hands and a few streamlined processes make a world of difference to an ordinary school day and educational outcomes for hundreds of learners.

Supported by N3TC, the Michaelhouse Community Partnership Trust (MCPT) is turning obstacles into opportunities by capacitating under-resourced schools in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, while also facilitating career paths for young educators.

Michaelhouse, an independent boys' boarding school, facilitates high-impact educational programmes for under-resourced schools in its catchment area through its community partnership trust, MCPT. These initiatives concentrate on leadership development, enhancing teacher competence, improving learning outcomes and restoring infrastructural dignity.

A VOCATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMME

One such initiative is the MCPT Eduhelper Project, a vocational education and training programme, that bridges the gap between structured learning and practical work experience.

Educational interns, or Eduhelpers, are placed in under-resourced schools in the Midlands with the aim to help them obtain a registered qualification by combining theoretical knowledge with hands-on workplace practice, while they in turn capacitate and support the school. The programme is designed to align with the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), ensuring that the qualification is recognised and standardised, and the internships are directly linked to specific fields of work.

4 828

learners benefitted directly from the Eduhelpers Project in their schools

"The intention of the programme is practical," explains project leader, Akhona Sikhakhane, "to strengthen classroom support, ease administrative strain, and build capacity, but its impact extends further, benefitting both the broader educational ecosystem and associated communities."

Eduhelpers are recruited from the same communities as the schools they serve. "This decision is important as it creates employment close to home, and ensures that schools, learners, and families receive support that is culturally grounded and familiar," says Ms Sikhakhane. "For many, the Eduhelper programme is a first step into formal work, and a pathway to further education and training (FET) aligned with the National Qualifications Framework.

LEARNERS ARE REAPING THE REWARDS

Inside classrooms, the difference Eduhelpers are making is visible. Their presence is alleviating pressure on school leadership, educators, and administrative personnel. Schools report increased learner engagement, improved academic performance, and greater confidence thanks to the input of Eduhelpers. At Hlanganani Primary School, a Grade 3 learner now confidently reads aloud thanks to one-on-one support from Eduhelper, Anele Zondi, whose dedication is praised by principal KT Dlomo.

And, at Asithuthuke Combined School, where learners from multiple grades are often grouped together in one class, the addition of an Eduhelper has allowed teachers to better focus on instruction, ensuring all learners receive proper attention.

After-school reading clubs led by Eduhelpers further support literacy.

FACILITATING CONNECTIONS

Eduhelpers are strengthening the ties between classrooms and communities. Because they are recruited from the areas in which they serve, they act as trusted bridges between schools and families – increasing parental involvement and reinforcing confidence in local education. As families become more engaged in their children's learning, the effect extends beyond report cards, contributing to stronger relationships and greater cohesion within the broader community.

The programme's longer-term impact is already visible. Over the past three years, three partner schools have absorbed four Eduhelpers into permanent posts. Others are pursuing further studies in education, preparing to step into classrooms as the next generation of qualified teachers.

"We do not doubt that we are strengthening entire communities by strengthening educators. It is an investment in human potential that will keep on multiplying," ends Ms Sikhakhane.

© Karen Mey, "Motherly love"

Education

Midlands Community College

N3TC *Touching Lives*

From mobile science lab to matric distinctions

Midlands Community College (MCC) is a vibrant non-profit educational centre situated in Nottingham Road, in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands. The college was established in 1981 in response to the need to provide quality education to all South Africans.

In 2002, it launched its Mobile Science Laboratory project – the first of its kind in KwaZulu-Natal – a unique project that inspires enthusiasm and a love of science amongst the many learners it serves.

The project brings science to life for learners in grades 10, 11 and 12 at under-resourced schools, most of which do not have science laboratories. Educators are supported through a series of workshops where they learn how to use the equipment and receive additional teaching and learning resources.

During the 2025 academic year, the Mobile Science Laboratory worked with more than 80 schools across Pietermaritzburg, Nottingham Road, Mooi River, Estcourt, Bergville, Ladysmith and the Howick areas, reaching more than 12 800 learners with an average attendance rate above 98%.

> **“N3TC’s backing has driven educational transformation along the N3 corridor.”**
>
> *– Thenjiwe Mswane, strategic Partnerships Manager of the Midlands Community College.*

“It has enabled MCC to sustain and expand the Mobile Science Laboratory initiative, delivering curriculum-aligned science practicals to rural schools throughout the year. Rather than providing short-term relief, it has established a platform for sustainable educational development, empowering learners and educators alike.”

Additional educational innovations implemented during 2025 included the provision of theory support notes for educators, high-achiever learner support files, and a comprehensive programme designed to introduce core mathematics concepts that are vital to physical science, particularly in relation to practical skill development.

The influence of the project is evident in the accounts of individuals connected to the Mobile Science Laboratory. Their experiences demonstrate how opportunities for hands-on science enhance motivation, foster enduring skill development, and positively affect lives.

Bongani Dlamini, project coordinator, is a retired science educator with over 35 years’ experience. He joined the project in March 2025. Under his leadership, MCC’s Mobile Lab has strengthened its relationships with principals and teachers, improving schools’ overall participation, and identifying new needs such as additional educator support, and standardised assessments. Bongani’s mentorship has enhanced quality assurance across all educational sites.

Andile Hodie, a former MCC student from Ingula High School, returned as a Mobile Lab intern after completing his mining engineering degree. His journey reflects the project’s full-circle impact: from learner, to graduate, to mentor. His story shows how MCC’s interventions produce capable, community-minded young professionals.

Nqubeko Bekwa, a learner from Emzamweni High School’s success story – achieving a perfect score in physical science – highlights the importance of access to practical demonstrations like titration and acid-base experiments, which were introduced through the Mobile Lab. His achievement inspired other learners and reinforced educators’ belief in experiential learning.

Thembelihle Buthelezi, a physical science educator at Mzimela High School, observed that her learners grasp concepts faster and with greater enthusiasm thanks to their exposure through the Mobile Lab. Lessons are interactive and dynamic, and because learners are ‘able to see and do’ experiments, their comprehension of subject matter is improved.

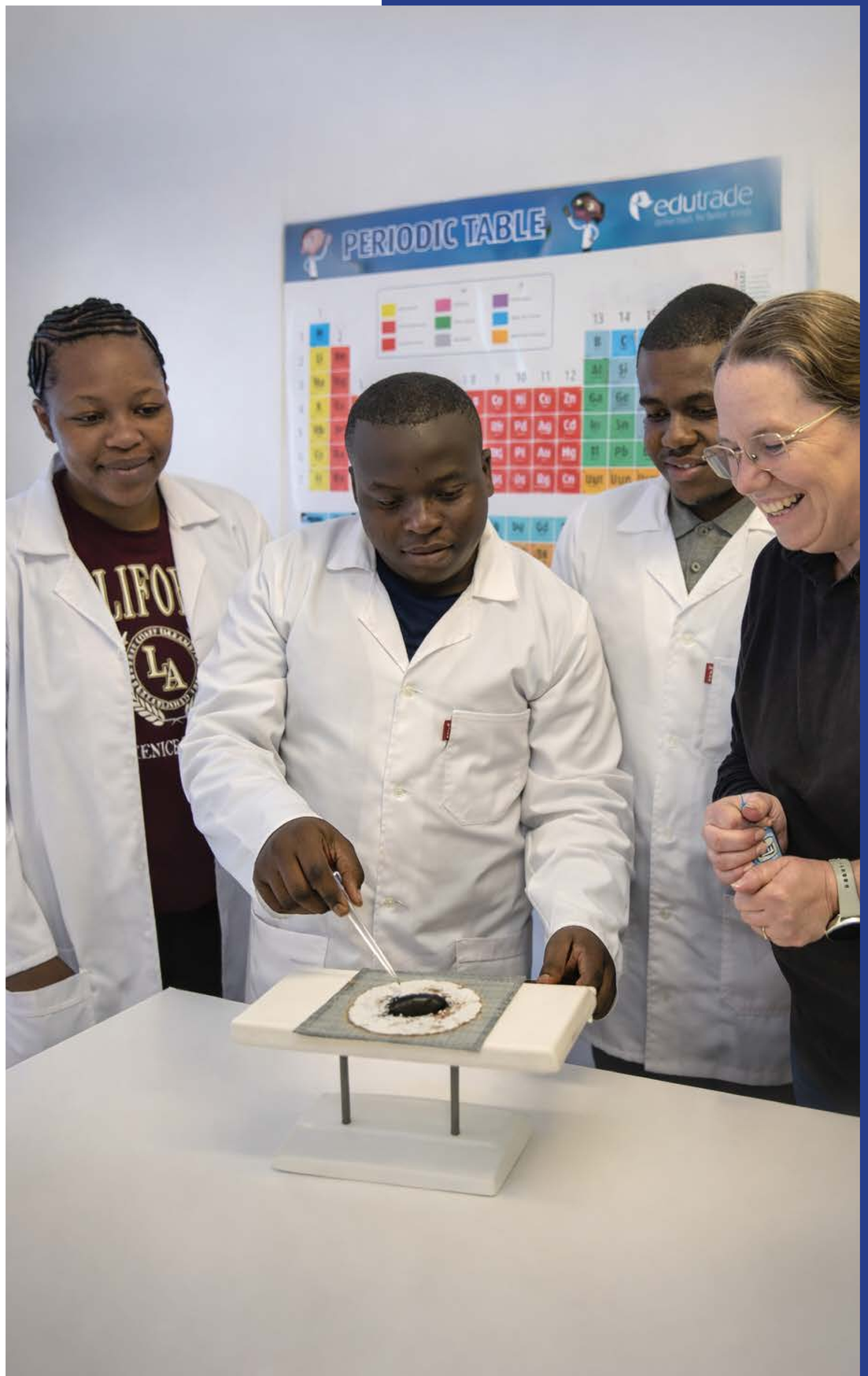
Ayanda Kunene, Grade 11 learner from Sigweje High School, shared that the practical science lessons transformed her understanding of the subject, and sparked her ambition to pursue a tertiary education.

STARS OF MCC'S MOBILE LAB

The Mobile Science Laboratory Project boasts two Science Olympiad winners. Emzamweni High School's Ntandoyenkosi Ngcobo and Asande Shange won the 2025 Physical Science Olympiad, describing it as a transformative experience that enhanced their scientific understanding and academic confidence.

The standout achievement of 2025 however, came from Elihle Sithole – a Mobile Science Lab learner from Grades 10 – 12 – who matriculated from Siyahlomula Secondary School with seven distinctions, including an impressive 89% in physical science.

"Siyahlomula, located in Edendale township in Pietermaritzburg, is a no-fee school. This context makes both Elihle's and the school's accomplishments even more remarkable. If this does not give us reason to celebrate, nothing ever will."



SCHOOLS' MOBILE SCIENCE LABORATORY PROGRAMME

12 800 Learners reached in 2025

2 *Mobile Science Laboratories*

8 *Laboratory Technicians*

80 *Partner Schools*

1 400 *Experiments each year*

Conservation

KwaZulu-Natal Crane Foundation

N3TC *Touching Lives*

A living classroom of biodiversity stewardship

WHEN THE KZN CRANE FOUNDATION (KZNCF) BEGAN 36 YEARS AGO, CRANES WERE ITS PRIMARY FOCUS.

As an indicator species, their presence (or absence) speaks volumes about the health of wetlands and grasslands. Over time, however, the Foundation realised that instruction alone does not change behaviour.

“That’s when our approach shifted from telling people what conservation looks like to showing them what it can be,” explains Jon Bates, a committee member of the KZN Crane Foundation and co-founder of the Bill Barnes and Oribi Nature Reserve, just outside Nottingham Road. This shift finds its most tangible expression in this nature reserve.

The Bill Barnes and Oribi Nature Reserve was one of the first areas proclaimed under the KZN Biodiversity Stewardship Programme.

The reserve – also a working farm - protects 450ha of Drakensberg Moist Foothill Grassland, providing a home to breeding Wattled and Grey Crowned Cranes and the increasingly threatened Oribi, demonstrating that agriculture and biodiversity can co-exist.

“People need to experience conservation,” says Mr Bates. “They need to see how it works, and understand that it starts with each of us, whether we live in a city, a village, or on a farm.”

This philosophy underpins the KZNCF’s two core programmes:
- Biodiversity Stewardship
- Environmental Education

For this purpose, the Bill Barnes and Oribi Nature Reserve also functions as a living classroom where theory is tested against soil, rain, grazing pressure, and time.

Students from the University of KwaZulu-Natal’s Life Sciences Department conduct practical grassland management studies here, and the Grassland Society of Southern Africa has visited, exploring collaboration on farmer engagement days that focus on farming for, and with, biodiversity.

“There is nothing abstract about our work,” explains Mr Bates. “It’s muddy boots, dung beetles, frost-damaged saplings, and cattle rotation charts, most of the time. Cattle on the reserve are not simply livestock; they are ‘grass managers’. Rotated between heavily grazed, lightly grazed and rested camps, they mimic the migratory patterns of antelope and zebra that once shaped these systems. Grass becomes dung. Dung feeds insects. Insects feed birds. Nutrients return to the soil. New growth follows.”

For farmers managing increasingly intensive operations, the reserve offers a working example that natural veld is not wasted space. It is an asset if managed well.

QUARRY REHABILITATION PROJECT

In early 2024, the KZNCF team took their first tentative steps towards the rehabilitation of an old quarry on the Bill Barnes and Oribi Nature Reserve. With continued support from N3TC and other conservation partners in 2025, a variety of additional indigenous trees were introduced, including Yellowwoods, Wild Olives, Buddlejas, and Tree Fuschias, which was all particularly suited to the varied aspects of the terrain – one section of the quarry is cool and south facing, while the other is exposed, rocky and hot.

“Snow fell shortly after planting them, and then black frost followed, but most of the young trees survived,” reports Mr Bates.

Succulents and aloes, including Crassulas, Scilla, and Eucomis were introduced to the rocky outcrops, and instantly drew regular visits from Malachite Sunbirds and resident bees.

A solar-powered electric fence keeps cattle out, not the oribi. In an unexpected reminder that conservation involves living systems, male oribi have ring-barked some Hilleria saplings with their horns while scent-marking them with the pre-orbital glands under their eyes.

EROSION CONTROL

Efforts to manage erosion continue along the education trail, with targeted interventions to stabilise vulnerable areas. Sand-filled potato bags are strategically placed in gullies to slow water flow and encourage soil retention. The biodegradable paper will naturally decomposeover time, but in the meantime, these measures have already yielded positive results – visible regrowth is evident in areas where water previously caused unchecked erosion.

In addition to erosion control, ongoing alien plant management is vital for the health of the indigenous grassland. Gum trees along the boundary are systematically removed, and bramble is controlled through targeted spraying. Though this work is mostly behind the scenes and may go unnoticed by visitors, it plays a crucial role in preserving the natural ecosystem.

VISION 2029

The Foundation’s next phase, Vision 2029, is currently moving through environmental assessment processes. The proposal is ambitious: rehabilitating the Usher Centre dam into a network of wetlands and walkways, with geodesic domes housing non releasable pairs of South Africa’s crane species for educational display.

Exhibits would interpret insects, soils, pollinators and aquatic life, linking grassland and wetland systems in a single, immersive experience. In a region where grasslands continue to shrink and farming pressures intensify, this reserve stands as a practical demonstration that:

> **Stewardship is possible.**
> **Not perfect.**
> **Not without setbacks.**
> **But possible.**
>
> *– KZN Crane Foundation*

Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in SA

During the reporting period, the conservation project faced one of its greatest challenges yet with the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease in KwaZulu Natal, affecting livestock and wildlife. Although not a human health risk, the disease has significant economic and agricultural impacts. The team implemented control measures such as restricting motorbike access and applying lime at farm and reserve entrances to enhance biosecurity.

Hands-on learning and unforgettable encounters with nature

> **If children don't grow up knowing about nature and appreciating it, they will not understand it, and if they don't understand it, they won't protect it. And if they don't protect it, who will?**
>
> *– Sir David Attenborough*

THROUGH ITS NATURE-BASED EDUCATION PROGRAMME, THE KZN CRANE FOUNDATION (KZNCF) IS CHAMPIONING A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION.

Environmental sciences and conservation are not lessons that should only be delivered from the front of a classroom. It is something learners should see, test, question and carry home on their shoes.

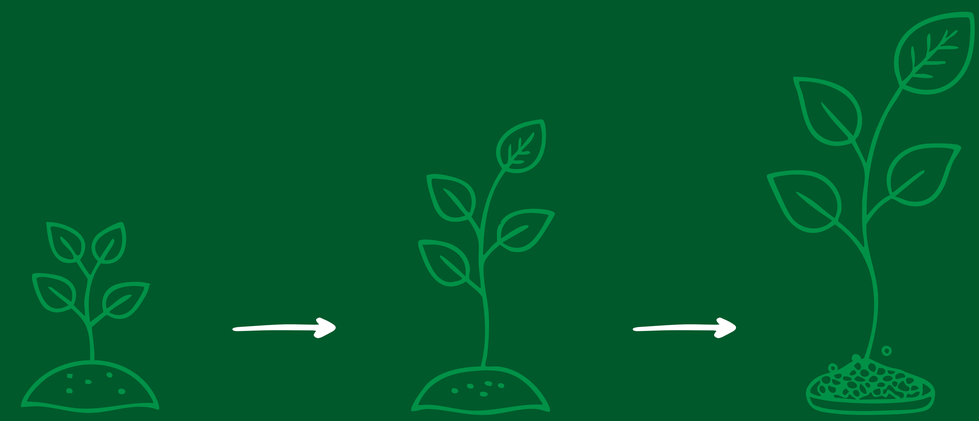
With the support and funding received from N3TC, the KZNCF has developed two education programmes focused on nature-based excursions for learners, and professional educators leading community workshops.

Since its inception, 2966 learners and educators have participated in the programme – a significant impact and vitally important for the future protection of natural environments. In 2025, the programme's education principles found a clear expression in the "simple" addition of a glass sided beehive. Educators had long tried to explain the importance of pollinators in the food chain, but watching bees return heavy with pollen and nectar to the hive has finally shifted the conversation.

Learners began drawing what they observed. As one educator explained after a school visit to the Usher Education Centre, "Bees are no longer abstract diagrams but active agents in our landscape. My learners' understanding moved from theory to recognition."

2025 Milestones

Nature-based Excursions



23	33	1 014
Schools hosted	Excursions delivered	Schools hosted

69%

Above annual target

(Target: 600 participants)

Note: 2021 was the pilot year

What the growth tells us

- **INCREASED** demand from shools
- **BETTER** coordination with schools
- **IMPROVED** support from the Department of Basic Education

Professional Educator Learning Community (PELC)

2025 PELC Snapshot

56 total teacher engagements

3 workshops

14 -15
schools represented per session

STRONG
focus on environmental learning

PRACTICAL
classroom-ready activities

GROWING
peer-led professional community

Key features of the 2025 Edu-Facilitator Development Programme

WORK SKILLS TRAINING SOLUTIONS PROGRAMME

- Ongoing skills development and mentoring of edu-facilitator

EXPANDED PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

- Edu-facilitator hosted sessions at Umgeni Valley holiday programme
- Led first full bird tour for visiting tourists

NEW INCOME POTENTIAL

- Bird guiding opens a supplementary income stream

STRENGTHENING THE PROFESSIONAL PATHWAY

- Steps underway to secure a formal learnership
- Mentorship remains central to long-term sustainability of this programme

© Muhammad Carim, “Whispers of the horizon”

Enterprise Development

Midlands Meander Emerging Artist Project

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Showcasing local talent and supporting enterprise development in the Midlands

As one of KwaZulu-Natal's key inland attractions, the Midlands region attracts a steady stream of tourists each year, particularly during peak holiday seasons. Connected to the N3 Toll Route as its main artery, the Midlands Meander stretches over 80 kilometres, winding from Pietermaritzburg to the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg National Park, linking villages, farms and small towns, as well as neighbouring rural communities such as Impendle, Ixopo and uMngeni.

Along this scenic tourism route, more than 150 sites showcase local creativity. Potters, weavers, artists, woodworkers, crafters and painters open their studios to travellers in search of something handmade and heartfelt. It is one of the country's busiest arts and craft routes, where tourism and talent meet face to face.

Yet beyond the gallery doors, cafés, and market stalls, many rural communities in the region continue to face unemployment and persistent poverty. It was against this backdrop that N3TC and the Midlands Meander Association launched the Midlands Meander Emerging Artist Project (MMEAP) in 2014, with the aim of helping artists from previously disadvantaged backgrounds to strengthen their skills, expand their product ranges, reach new markets and earn sustainable incomes from their craft.

MENTORSHIP THAT BUILDS MORE THAN PRODUCTS

Central to the project is mentorship. Through workshops, one-on-one guidance and collaborative learning experiences, emerging artists refine their techniques while also gaining practical business skills. They learn how to price their work, engage customers, understand trends, and manage stock. This blend of creativity and entrepreneurship ensures artists are producing beautiful work and simultaneously building viable micro-enterprises. In doing so, they are becoming role models in their communities, showing younger creatives that arts and crafts can be more than a pastime – it can be a profession.

Six emerging artist projects have benefited from the mentorship, support and exhibition opportunities provided through the MMEAP. The project has strengthened their financial independence, enabled them to create employment opportunities, and contributed to local economic activity along the route.

CREATIVE ENERGY IN ACTION

The impact of the initiative can be seen in the enterprising spirit of its beneficiaries.

Senzakahle 1 has collaborated with a local designer to produce a range of warm, stylish sweaters. These garments are now sold at local markets and exhibitions at accessible prices, demonstrating how confidence and collaboration can turn skill into income.

Senzokuhle partnered with a hand-crafted jewellery designer to create a distinctive range of T-shirt yarn necklaces. Made from repurposed fabric, clay beads and delicate lace details, the collection celebrates Midlands craftsmanship while responding to contemporary tastes. The pieces are sold at markets, exhibitions and through the Midlands Meander's online shop, expanding their reach beyond the region.

Themba Creations, known for their vibrant Sishweshwe quilts, recently received a generous donation of fabric offcuts from a Gauteng-based supporter who had seen their work. The contribution has reduced material costs, allowing the group to channel savings directly into supporting their families.

Siyaphambili Disabled Basket Weavers was formed to create work for people living with disabilities in the community. They make handwoven items including a wide variety of baskets, and a selection of lamps, baby cribs, and homeware. Thanks to their steady success, this group of industrious people is now supplementing their monthly income through the project and they are less reliant on government grants to stay afloat.

Near Mooi River, **Babanentse Cooperative** has brought significant changes to the community by creating employment and enabling people to support their families. They manufacture clothes, embroidered products, silkscreen items, school jerseys, and tracksuits.

Thanks to the constant inflow of orders, employees are expanding their skills set and gaining excellent experience while earning good wages.

Finally, the **Lidgetton Crafters Guild** has gained recognition within its community and secured retail space at Horseshoe Bend, one of the Midlands' established business venues. Their beadwork, knitting, sewing and pottery are now on display to a constant flow of visitors, providing visibility that was once out of reach.

STIMULATING THE WIDER ECONOMY

Exhibitions and markets featuring emerging artists draw visitors deeper into the Midlands Meander. In doing so, they encourage spending at local restaurants, farm stalls, guesthouses and tourism establishments. The ripple effect extends beyond individual beneficiaries, contributing to broader economic activity across the region.

SUSTAINED SUPPORT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Funding from N3TC has been instrumental in enabling the Midlands Meander Association to deliver on its core objectives of showcasing local talent, positioning the Midlands as a creative hub, and nurturing the next generation of artists.

© Siphiwe Mhlambi, "Umswenko"

Enterprise Development

Babanentse Primary Co-Operative

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Threading creativity into community growth

FROM A SINGLE WORKSHOP TO THOUSANDS OF COMPLETED CREATIONS, BABANENTSE PRIMARY COOPERATIVE PROVES THAT SKILLS IN THE HANDS OF A COMMUNITY CAN SHAPE OPPORTUNITY FOR GENERATIONS.

In Mooi River, a women-led co-operative is quietly demonstrating how creativity, craftsmanship and collaboration can translate into meaningful economic opportunity.

Babanentse Primary Co-Operative, known for its sewing, embroidery and printing services, continues to expand its reach while deepening its impact on families connected to the N3 Toll Route.

Founded to address limited access to quality, affordable clothing in nearby Bruntville, the co-operative has evolved into a reliable supplier of custom uniforms, branded apparel, tailored accessories and specialised printing. Beyond the products themselves, the co-operative's work represents something more enduring: skills development, shared income and renewed confidence among members of the local community.

Backed by enterprise-development support from the N3TC's Touching Lives Programme, Babanentse strengthened its production capacity, fulfilled larger orders and sustained employment for local residents in 2025. The result is a steady shift from vulnerability toward stability for the families who depend on the co-operative's work.

Thania Dhoogra, chief operating officer of N3TC, says the story of Babanentse reflects the broader power of practical, creative skills.

> **"When people learn to create with their hands – whether through sewing, embroidery or design – they gain more than an income. They gain dignity, independence and the ability to open doors that once felt closed."**

Now employing a dedicated team and operating both a production space and retail presence in Mooi River, Babanentse remains closely connected to regional craft networks through the Midlands Meander Association. Its continued growth offers a reminder that small enterprises, rooted in creativity and community purpose can deliver lasting social and economic change.

Humble beginnings → Lasting impact

2006

A dream takes shape

Babanentse Co-op is established with a vision to uplift the community, share skills, a consistent work ethic, and unfaltering determination.

2015

Crafts meet growth

Services expand to include high-quality embroidery for uniforms and branded apparel, opening new business opportunities and strengthening income streams.

2020

Embracing innovation

Advanced printing technology is introduced for clothing, mugs and banners, broadening creative production and market opportunities.

2025

Celebrating 20 000 projects completed

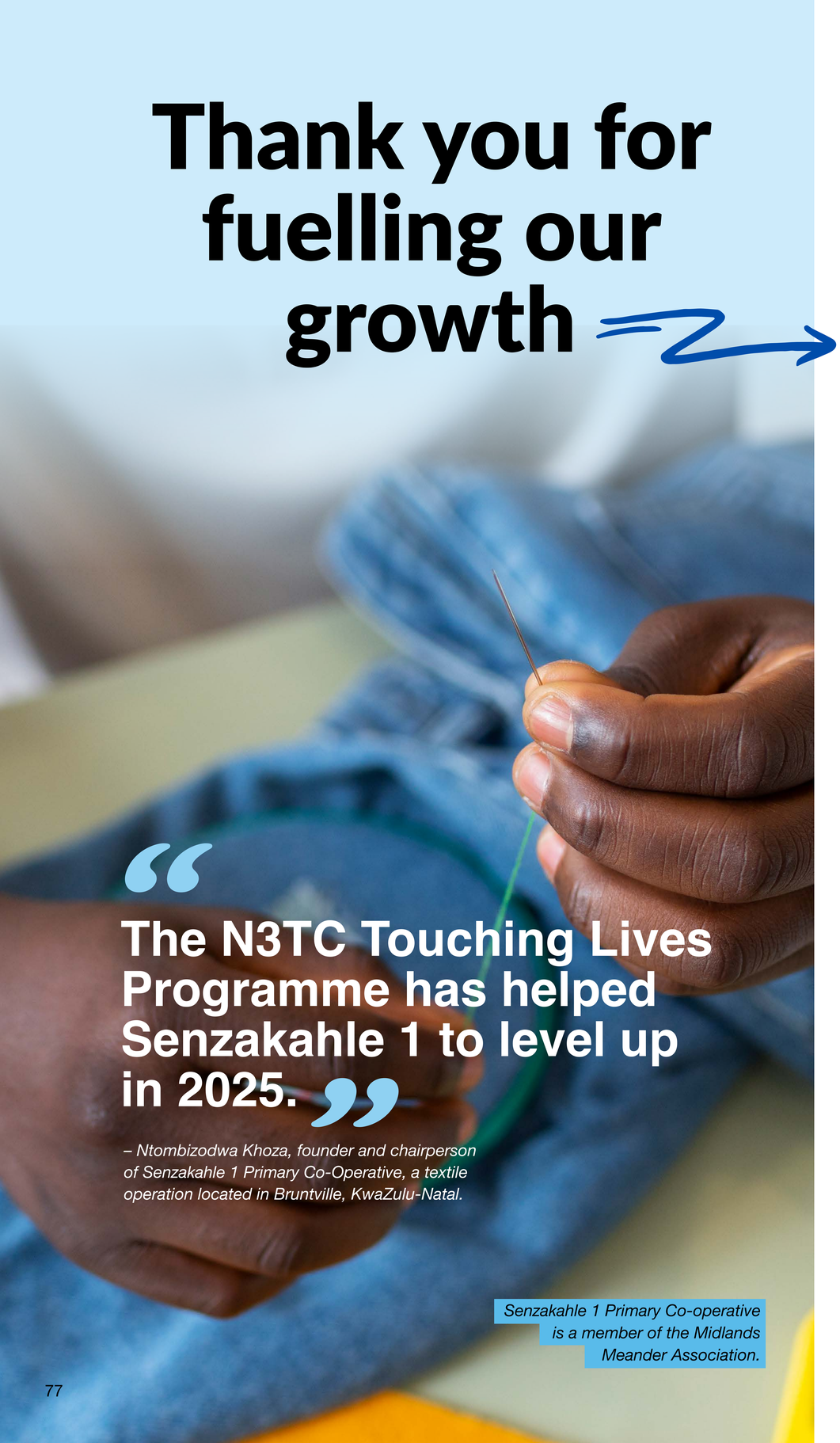
Sustained employment created, and a legacy of empowerment built through creativity, craftsmanship and community spirit.

Enterprise Development

Senzakahle 1 Primary Co-Operative

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Thank you for fuelling our growth



“The N3TC Touching Lives Programme has helped Senzakahle 1 to level up in 2025.”

– Ntombizodwa Khoza, founder and chairperson of Senzakahle 1 Primary Co-Operative, a textile operation located in Bruntville, KwaZulu-Natal.

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

Started by a group of industrious women to create work for themselves and others in this little township on the outskirts of Mooi River, Senzakahle 1 has created strong bonds among the women who are steadily advancing their dreams.

After nearly 20 years, Ms Khoza is still the backbone of the group. She says they “get up every morning, excited about the opportunities the new day will bring, and ready to contribute to our families and communities. We want to not only make our lives better, but also create more opportunities, especially for our unemployed youth.”

Senzakahle 1 welcomes everyone seeking work, regardless of age. Mduduzi Wilson Mayaba, a member since 2008, credits the project with improving his finances.

“I have extra cash in my pocket and have been able to solve many of my family’s problems. People of my age often suffer from loneliness, stress, anxiety and depression. Thankfully, I have been able to avoid these hardships because I have work and a circle of friends, thanks to the co-operative.”

STEPPING UP IN 2025

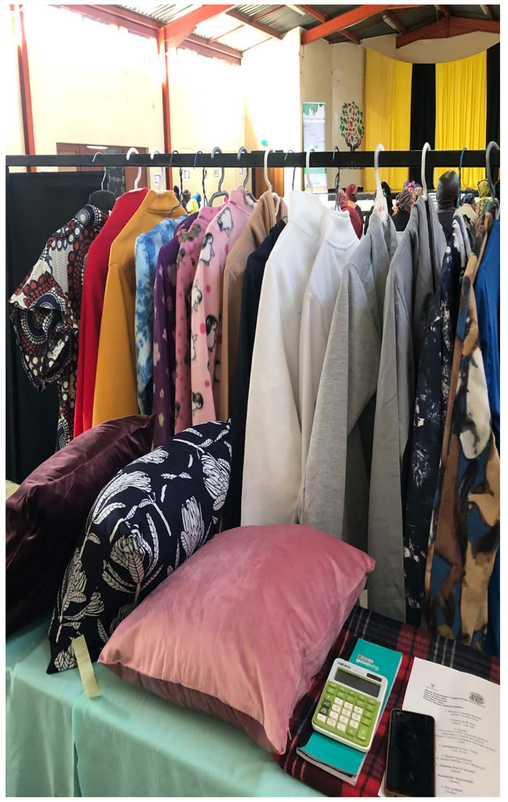
2025 was the year that Senzakahle 1 Cooperative invested in their product lines, made improvements to existing client options, and added new options that would hopefully continue to attract new business.

“We previously specialised in school uniforms and matric tracksuits, but have now expanded with a unique fabric range and innovative design methods.”

– Ntombizodwa Khoza

She explains that working with N3TC has inspired them to organise and oversee their business more effectively, while also promoting innovation. “N3TC taught me the importance of approaching our responsibilities in new ways, so we can perform to our best, and attract new clients with our fresh ideas.”

Sylvia Ntuli, a longtime member of Senzakahle 1, agrees: “The business management skills we have learned motivate us to keep on growing. For now, we’re thankful that we have enough to eat – especially in this economy - but one day, we want to stand tall as a monument for N3TC, who has supported and believed in us.”



Enterprise Development

Reel Life NPC

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Collaborative efforts strengthen sustainable nutrition and resilience in Mpofana District

IN 2023, N3TC PARTNERED WITH REEL LIFE NPC TO COMBAT FOOD POVERTY, INSECURITY, AND HUNGER IN BRUNTVILLE, A SETTLEMENT NEIGHBOURING MOOI RIVER AND THE N3 TOLL ROUTE.

The N3TC Household Income and School Gardens Project was launched to help low-income households gain access to fresh vegetables, reduce reliance on store-bought produce, and empower families to grow their own food – lowering costs and ensuring quality.

By cultivating a diverse range of crops, the project enhances dietary diversity and builds resilience to economic challenges, ensuring reliable food sources for families.

Currently, the initiative supports 300 households and 100 income growers, providing skill development and fostering an environment for improved food security, with Bruntville Primary School serving as the central hub and training facility.

The Bruntville Primary School garden supplements the school's feeding scheme and educates learners about the importance of food security. Community members receive training and resources from this central garden to establish their own plots, promoting skill-building and creating conditions for enduring food resilience. These efforts have not only improved food access for schoolchildren but also bolstered household food security across Bruntville.

By 2025, the school's 200m² garden was thriving and poised to double in size with the addition of a second agricultural tunnel. This expansion would increase food production, supporting the school's feeding scheme and generating income from surplus produce, which is reinvested into school projects and learner support.

The new tunnel was designed for durability and a larger plot, resilient against local weather conditions. As it was being cultivated, refresher courses were offered, focusing on improving garden performance and crop yields. Training included soil health, crop rotation, eco-friendly fertilisers, organic compost, mulching, watering techniques, temperature regulation, pest control, and weed reduction.

The expanded garden featured a variety of nutritious vegetables, including spinach, carrots, beetroot, cabbage, green peppers, onions, and radish – all chosen for their nutritional value and adaptability to local conditions.

Practical demonstrations covered seed spacing, transplanting, and staggered planting to ensure a steady supply throughout the school year. In July, Bruntville Primary School's expanded 400m2 garden was officially handed over, marking a milestone in the school's ability to produce nutritious meals for its feeding programme while also generating income from surplus sales.

Reel Life's regional trainer continues to monitor the project's success, offering guidance and support as needed. With strong seedlings and full use of the expanded garden, there is confidence that Bruntville Primary School's garden will remain a valuable and sustainable resource for the school and its community.

HOUSEHOLD GARDEN IN A BOX AND INCOME GROWERS BOXES

In spring, with the new planting season underway, 40 households joined the programme and received Household Garden in a Box kits. An additional 100 income growers are set to receive garden boxes and support to produce vegetables for market supply.

The Household, Income & School Garden Project aligns directly with N3TC's sustainability strategy, advancing community upliftment, reducing poverty, and promoting local economic participation. By investing in practical skills, access to nutritious food, and income generation, the initiative reinforces food sovereignty and resilience at both school and household levels.

Through collaboration with Reel Life NPC, N3TC is not only addressing immediate food needs but also laying the foundation for long-term community self-reliance in Mooi River.

Community Event

1000 Paws Walk for SPCA

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Thousands of feet walk for animals in distress

THE SPCA'S CORE MANDATE IS THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS, AND IN PURSUING THEIR DUTY OF CARE, THEY RELY SOLELY 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 also provide essential support to N3TC's Road Incident Management System (RIMS) when they respond to situations along this section of the the highway involving animals in distress.

Fundraising and volunteering are vitally important to keep the doors of animal welfare organisations open, and for the three KZN Midlands branches, the Hill's 1000 Paws Walk for SPCAs, supported by N3TC, is one of their most important annual fundraising events. The Highgate Wine Estate hosted the 2025 event on the 1st day of June. It was a festive day, with visitors being entertained by local marimba bands while browsing the market stalls, or enjoying the dog-themed show events in the arena.

A special raffle was a highlight of the fundraiser, and prizes included two-night stays for couples at three of some of the most sought-after tourist establishments in the area.

Schools in the region support the raffle by helping with ticket sales, and competing to win a sponsored 'Paws Party' for the class with the most sales.

"Their support, and that received from N3TC, the local community, businesses, shopping centres, veterinary practices, and others, are our lifeline – and the 1000 Paws Walk for SPCAs – our saving grace"

350
pooches

516
accompanying owners of all ages

4km / 8km
scenic countryside walks

© Jennifer Miller

© Hugh Watson, "Autumn in KZN"

Education

EnviroLearn

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Educators at the centre of change as EnviroLearn shows growing impact across KZN

ADJACENT TO THE N3 TOLL ROUTE IN MOOI RIVER, KWAZULU-NATAL, AN INITIATIVE IS RESHAPING ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN THE REGION.

At its core, the programme strengthens the professional capacity of educators by deepening environmental subject knowledge, advancing learner-centred teaching approaches, and embedding meaningful assessment practices that support genuine understanding rather than rote performance.

Since 2009, EnviroLearn has supported educators with curriculum and professional development in Life Orientation, Natural Sciences, Technology, and Social Sciences. As a founding partner of the Fundisa for Change Programme it provides:

01 **Ongoing professional educator development**

02 **Development of education-supported learning materials**

03 **Training of environmental education practitioners in appropriate pedagogical processes**

04 **Support for the design of appropriate Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) projects**

05 **Development of age-appropriate initiatives to support educational programmes to protect the planet**

06 **Evaluation of sites, natural resources, and scientific interest areas for education and research potential**

The Fundisa for Change Programme is a national initiative focused on how environmental and sustainable learning is taught in schools by strengthening teacher education and professional development. It supports South Africa's efforts to deliver quality education, and not only cover academic knowledge, but also to prepare learners to understand and act on environmental issues like climate change, biodiversity and sustainable living.

EnviroLearn, Fundisa for Change's practical education and training partner, reports consistent improvements in classroom practice, growing professional confidence among educators, and rising recognition of the programme, both nationally and internationally.

According to Janet Snow, director of EnviroLearn, the organisation matured in 2025, showing measurable improvements in educators' subject knowledge, teaching methods, and assessment practices – three areas previously identified as obstacles to effective environmental learning.

"Despite some gaps remaining, the overall upward trajectory is clear," says Ms Snow.

> **"Teaching quality in participating schools is steadily being strengthened, and there is also a significant shift in morale. In communities where educators often work under sustained pressure, the programme's emphasis on meaningful professional growth, rather than compliance-driven workshops, has helped to restore their sense of professional worth."**

Central to this approach is EnviroLearn's strategic partnership with Rhodes University, particularly through the support of its Environmental Learning Research Centre. The Centre plays a pivotal role in course design, accreditation and facilitation. Although there were initial administrative hurdles associated with new application procedures at the beginning of the 2025 academic year, all approval and certification matters were successfully resolved, safeguarding the continuity and credibility of the training programme.

GROWING CONFIDENCE IN THE CLASSROOM

Feedback from educators who participated in the programme indicates that its impact extends well beyond formal coursework as more educators are shifting away from passive ‘chalk-and-talk’ or lecture-style teaching to a more practical, ‘hands-on’, learner-centred approach – a teaching approach that is now being seen in lesson planning, classroom activities, learner interactions, and assessment strategies.

One participant’s decision to enrol for a postgraduate qualification in sustainable development at Rhodes University further illustrates the ripple effect of this programme. “So inspired was she by the ‘Indigenous Knowledge’ component of the course that it sparked her interest to pursue a postgraduate degree in sustainable development at Rhodes University – underscoring our long-term goal: to foster a culture of lifelong learning among educators,” Ms Snow points out.

“With the Fundisa for Change programme, we are showing that when teachers feel valued and supported, their professional growth accelerates, which benefits learners and strengthens the entire schooling system.”

RECOGNITION BEYOND SOUTH AFRICA

The project’s expanding influence became evident when EnviroLearn’s director, Janet Snow, was invited to attend the Sub-Saharan Africa Teacher Leadership for Education for Sustainable Development (SSATL_ESD) research workshop and project launch.

This multi-national collaboration brought together academic institutions from across the African continent and Europe, highlighting the KwaZulu-Natal programme as a model of effective in-service educator development, putting local experience at the forefront of continental policy discussions, and harmonising teacher professional standards across the African Union.

EnviroLearn’s approach may even guide future training across Africa.

ALIGNING WITH CURRICULUM CHANGE

National strategy discussions also focused on embedding Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as a cross-cutting priority in the South African curriculum. Seven thematic areas, ranging from climate action and water security to sustainable food systems and energy transitions, are expected to shape future teaching.

EnviroLearn’s course design reflects this shift.

Selected modules emphasise water security, agro-biodiversity and food sustainability, while new online mini-tasks from the Fundisa for Change and Amanzi for Food platforms form part of educators’ assessment portfolios. The blended learning approach aims to deepen practical competence while expanding access to self-directed professional development.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AS A STRATEGIC INVESTMENT

As EnviroLearn’s guiding philosophy continues to evolve, it echoes the work of British author and international advisor on education, Sir Ken Robinson, whose advocacy for creativity and teacher empowerment continues to influence global reform debates.

> **Imagination is the source of every form of human achievement. And it’s the one thing that I believe we are systematically jeopardising in the way we educate our children and ourselves.**
> *– Sir Ken Robinson*

Robinson argued that investing in educator development is not a cost but a catalyst for transformation – a principle EnviroLearn sees unfolding in real time. “Our local experience reinforces this view,” explains Ms Snow.

EARLY SIGNS OF COMMUNITY IMPACT

These educational influences are increasingly filtering down to communities, with lessons in environmental science becoming part of everyday life – shaping conversations, choices, and actions regarding water conservation, food production, and ecosystem health.

“Such shifts matter,” says Ms Snow “because they shape how people understand their relationship with the environment.”

> **Confident, knowledgeable teachers do more than deliver curriculum content. They help cultivate informed citizens capable of responding to social and ecological challenges.**
> *– Janet Snow*

Researchers are formally documenting this influence. A postgraduate project at Rhodes University is investigating how the course affects teaching practice – work expected to provide deeper evidence of the long-term educational impact of the programme.

PARTNERSHIPS ACHIEVE WHAT ONCE SEEMED IMPOSSIBLE

While donor funding underpins this project, a network of collaborators extends its reach. Course facilitators provide their expertise at reduced rates, environmental organisations supply resources, and local, district, and national educational authorities offer institutional support.

Plans for expanded Education for Sustainable Development training between 2026 and 2029 signal an ambition to scale impact beyond current districts. If successful, this model – developed along the N3 corridor – could inform national educator development strategies, extending benefits to classrooms across South Africa.

For now, the project’s progress is measured in incremental changes:

- **EDUCATORS EXPERIMENTING WITH NEW LESSON PLANS**
- **CLASSROOM DISCUSSIONS USING LOCAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE**
- **A PROFESSIONAL REGAINING PURPOSE**

“While these actions may seem minor, they represent major investments in people whose work (and confidence) are shaping our nation’s environmental future,” ends Ms Snow.

Education

Treverton College & Preparatory School

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Reimagining education: Holistic learning helps students grow beyond the classroom

Education is often reduced to numbers on a report card and measuring how well learners memorise and reproduce information during exams. While assessment is an important part of schooling, educators are increasingly recognising that true learning extends far beyond test results.

A meaningful education develops the child holistically – intellectually, emotionally, socially and creatively – nurturing curiosity, resilience and the confidence to meaningfully engage with the world.

At Treverton College, a co-educational boarding school situated on a 270-hectare estate near Mooi River, this philosophy is central to the learning experience. The school embraces just such a holistic, child-centred approach, shifting the emphasis from memorising content to understanding concepts and applying knowledge in real-world contexts.

Learners are encouraged to explore ideas, ask questions, and develop their own interests. Teachers serve as guides and facilitators, helping learners connect classroom learning to the broader world while cultivating critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving skills.

This approach recognises that every learner arrives at school with their own strengths, challenges and potential. By creating an environment that supports emotional well-being, social development and ethical awareness alongside academic growth, the school aims to prepare young people for thoughtful, purposeful lives.

For many learners, the opportunity to attend Treverton College is made possible through bursary support from external funders and the broader Midlands community.

"Through our Touching Lives Programme, we contribute towards the educational journey of nine learners at College, helping to unlock their access to quality education, while also helping them to build strong academic foundations and learn valuable life skills," says Thania Dhoogra, N3TC's chief operating officer. "Bursary recipients quickly immerse themselves in school life, actively participating in academic, cultural and sporting activities."

> **"Bursary recipients quickly immerse themselves in school life, actively participating in academic, cultural and sporting activities."**

During 2025, several learners distinguished themselves beyond the classroom. Two bursary students captivated audiences through performances in traditional dance, gumboot dance, and dramatic arts, earning enthusiastic applause from their peers. A Grade 9 learner delivered a powerful piece of African protest poetry that held the audience spellbound.

On the sports field, one learner played a key role in the girls' first team netball squad, motivating teammates and encouraging younger players to develop their own abilities. Another bursary recipient demonstrated exceptional leadership skills, serving as a mentor to younger learners and being elected as a day scholar prefect.

For N3TC's bursary students, access to Treverton's wide range of opportunities represents both motivation and gratitude in their daily school life. In an economic climate where many families find independent schooling increasingly difficult to afford, bursaries play a critical role in ensuring that capable learners are not excluded from quality educational opportunities.

Education

St David's Diocesan School

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Small in size, but big in stature

Serving the Greytown catchment area, an agricultural hub of the Umvoti Municipality in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, St David's Diocesan School has long been recognised for its academic excellence and its positive impact on the local community.

One of the most significant ways the school achieves this is through its bursary programme, which provides deserving learners with access to quality education, regardless of their financial background, allowing them to participate fully in the school's vibrant academic and extracurricular life.

For many learners, these bursaries are more than just financial assistance. They are a golden ticket to new possibilities and personal growth. Learners who excel academically, on the sports field, socially and emotionally, exemplify how access to quality education can foster confidence, resilience, and ambition.

Their achievements included improved subject knowledge, literacy skills, and expanded English vocabulary. The learners are enthusiastic, well-mannered, diligent and polite.

One grade 4 student stands out as the group's star student, achieving an overall average of 86% and a whopping 90% in two of her subjects!

Her achievements highlight the potential that can be unlocked when barriers are removed and talent is nurtured.

Beyond academics, bursary recipients benefit from the school's supportive environment, dedicated teachers, and diverse opportunities for leadership and personal development. This holistic approach enhances individual learners' prospects while also contributing to the broader community by cultivating future leaders, role models, and active citizens. The positive impact of a single bursary can be felt for years, as empowered learners go on to inspire and uplift their siblings, peers, and communities.

8

learners received N3TC bursaries in 2025

GRADE 7

GRADE 6

GRADE 5

GRADE 4

© Marlou Schalkwyk, "White race car"

Education & Disabled

Fundisisizwe

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Opening doors, reclaiming possibility

> **“With the support of N3TC, barriers are being dismantled, perceptions are shifting, and possibilities are being claimed – this is our shared success.”**
>
> *– Kirsty Flemming,*
> *Fundisisizwe Bursary Fund Administrator*

IN 2025, 33 LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES MOVED ONE STEP CLOSER TO THE FUTURES THEY ONCE FEARED MIGHT BE OUT OF REACH, THANKS TO N3TC AND THEIR SUPPORT OF ITS TOUCHING LIVES BENEFICIARY, THE FUNDISISIZWE BURSARY FUND.

For many children living with disabilities in South Africa, the path to education is strewn with obstacles. Financial hardship, limited access to specialised schools, inaccessible facilities, inadequate transport, unsuitable learning materials, and a shortage of psycho-social and expert support frequently conspire to exclude them. Add to this the weight of stigma, myths, and discrimination, and it becomes clear why so many learners drop out early or never attend school at all.

The learners supported through the Fundisisizwe Bursary Fund live with physical, intellectual, learning, or multiple disabilities.

They have first-hand experience of being shunned, marginalised, alienated, and discriminated against, yet despite this, they are quietly and steadily challenging every assumption through determination and with sustained support and opportunity.

Over the years, beneficiaries have gone on to secure employment, pursue further studies, establish their own businesses, and even represent South Africa on the sports field. Parents have shared that the programme has shifted perceptions within their own communities, proving that disability does not define destiny.

FIVE BURSARY RECIPIENTS SUCCESSFULLY FINISH SCHOOL

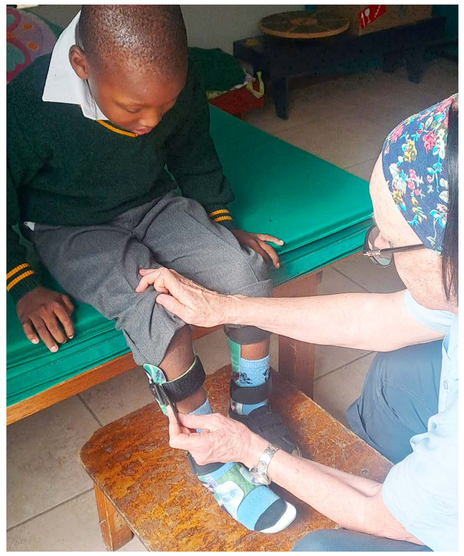
2025 marked a proud milestone for five young men who sat for their final matric exams. Aphiwe Majola, Lungelo Majola, Nkosenhle Majola, and Lwazi Mchunu graduated from Adelaide Tambo School for the Physically Challenged with diploma passes, while Ntokozo Khuzwayo finished Grade 12 at Amahlubi High School, a mainstream school, earning himself a bachelor’s pass.

Ntokozo’s journey was not without controversy. When he was moved from Adelaide Tambo Special School in Soweto to Amahlubi High School in 2024, the decision was met with resistance from numerous factions of the community and the school environment. Despite his academic abilities, he was not welcomed. It seemed his disability stood in the way of his potential. It was an inconvenience to make provision for him.

Ntokozo lives with mild Cerebral Palsy, affecting the right side of his body, making writing physically demanding. In support of his right to inclusive education, Fundisisizwe engaged the Department of Education which provided him with a laptop to ensure equal access to learning.

academic performance exceeded expectations and surpassed the outcomes of many of his peers at Amahlubi High School.

His success underscores an important lesson: when learners are given appropriate support, they often exceed perceived limitations and expectations.



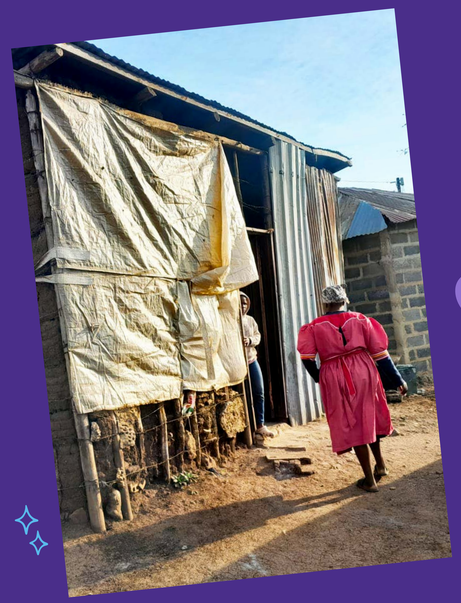
Among last year’s inspiring stories is that of Lungelo Majola, who lives wit Arthrogryposis. Lungelo overcame many challenges to matriculate in 2025. His determination has been unwavering, even as practical realities continue to present numerous hurdles. Due to his high support needs, traditional learnerships and further education and training opportunities remain complex. He requires assistance with daily living, and not all institutions are equipped to accommodate such support. His experience highlights an ongoing national challenge. While employment equity policies exist, individuals with more severe disabilities still face disproportionate barriers. Employers are often able to meet compliance targets by appointing candidates with less complex needs, leaving learners like Lungelo navigating a narrower path.

Nevertheless, Fundisisizwe remains committed to walking that path alongside him, exploring opportunities that will allow him to work from home and continue building an independent future.

While most beneficiaries receive assistance with school or training fees and transport, support does not end there. For some learners, the most critical interventions are non-financial, including counselling, career guidance, therapeutic support, and the steady presence of a community care worker who assists families when needed. It is this holistic approach that enabled 33 learners and their families to look toward the future with renewed confidence in 2025.

Impact Snapshot

Fundisisizwe Bursary Fund Beneficiaries



Beneficiaries	Total
Disabled Male (ALL)	20
Disabled Female (ALL)	13
TOTAL	**33**
Children (Birth to 18) - Male	4
Children (Birth to 8) - Female	6
Youth (18 - 35) - Male	16
Youth (18 - 35) - Female	7
Adults (35 and over) - Male	0
Adults (35 and over) - Female	0
TOTAL	**33**

Changing lives through determination, compassion, and practical assistance

BROTHERS BUHLEBUYEZA (14) AND KHAYELIHLE DLAMINI (16), LIVE WITH THEIR MOTHER AND SISTERS IN LOSKOP, NEAR ESTCOURT.

Their journey with the Fundisisizwe team started in 2016 when Khayelihle started school in Grade R at the Kwazamokuhle Special School in Ephangweni near Estcourt.

Since his enrolment at the Kwazamokuhle Special School, Khayelihle's medical condition has been under investigation. He presented with progressive weakness, especially in his hands and mouth, epilepsy, and intellectual disability. Despite repeated medical examinations, answers remained elusive.

When his younger brother, Buhlebuyeza, exhibited similar symptoms, the urgency to identify an underlying cause increased. The need for further medical testing and diagnostic evaluation became even more pressing.

By the end of last year, Fundisisizwe could arrange for a private consultation for the brothers with a compassionate physician who is also connected to a local government medical facility.

He reviewed the boys' medical histories and current health status, which then led to genetic testing and further hospital referrals.

Although definitive answers are still pending, the hope is that a diagnosis will not only help the brothers but will also protect their younger siblings and future generations from similar hardships.

INSPIRATION TAKES ALL FORMS

One of Fundisisizswe's most inspiring beneficiaries is Lungelo Majola, a young man living with Arthrogryposis, a condition that severely limits movement.

For seven years, Fundisisizwe has supported Lungelo, providing assistive devices and a bursary so he could attend school. Unable to walk or use his hands, Lungelo has taught himself adaptive techniques, like writing with his mouth. He completed matric at the end of 2025 – another testament to his determination – and has since moved back to his family home in rural KwaZulu-Natal.

Lungelo is now living in the countryside, far from towns or even other homesteads, and Fundisisizwe has procuded new batteries, a charger and a solar powered system for his motorised chair and had it fitted and serviced. "It's now good to go for another two years. We delivered his chair and the power system to his doorstep, navigating rivers and farmlands with the help of local community members. The solar power system will also enable Lungelo to keep his laptop charged, opening doors to online learning, digital connection, and greater independence," says Fundisisizwe therapist, Katja van Dyck.

"Driving away from Lungelo's homestead, we were struck by how incredible it is that he completed his matric. Many children in these deep rural areas drop out. We will continue to support Lungelo's future endeavours."

His genuine commitment underscores the project's approach: empowering beneficiaries, their families, and entire communities to see that disability does not limit potential.

Education

Umtshezi Fire Protection Association

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Frontline firefighting receives welcome boost with two bursaries from N3TC

> **“Fires can quickly cause major destruction and harm if not effectively controlled in the shortest possible time.”**

The Umtshezi Fire Protection Association (UFPA) is always ready to step in and offer help or support in the event of a fire in and around Estcourt in KwaZulu-Natal.

“Fires can quickly cause major destruction and harm if not effectively controlled in the shortest possible time,” said UFPA’s training manager, Dumisani Makhathini.

The association works closely with the local Fire Department, Working on Fire, and other organisations to support firefighting efforts, build capacity, and secure additional resources and equipment for the region.

It is against this backdrop that Umtshezi Fire and N3TC developed a special bursary programme to train two candidates to become fully qualified firefighters. The course combines theory, physical training, and practical firefighting skills to prepare students for real-world fire response.

Two local candidates from the area, both of whom previously volunteered with Working on Fire, successfully began and completed their Fire Fighter 1 and Fire Fighter 2 qualifications in 2025.

“They showed great courage, determination and resilience during their training and are now ready to commence their careers as professional firefighters, and hopefully progress through the ranks,” continues Mr Makhathini.

“As this was the inaugural year of this particular burasry programme, we learned some lessons regarding the structure of the programme and how best to support candidates, especially while they’re not earning an income during training. By and large, however, it was a resounding success, and we have established a solid foundation for ongoing youth development and skills training,” he concluded.

Sandili Ziqubu, one of the successful candidates, summed it up perfectly: “It is nice to know that people have faith in you to carry so much responsibility.”

Education

Drakensberg Boys Choir School

N3TC *Touching Lives*

A legacy of excellence, talent, and inspiration across generations

THE DRAKENSBERG BOYS CHOIR SCHOOL (DBCS), FONDLY KNOWN AS THE DRAKIES, CONTINUES TO SHAPE SOUTH AFRICA'S MUSICAL AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPE, PRODUCING WORLD-CLASS PERFORMERS WHILE FOSTERING LEADERSHIP, DISCIPLINE, AND CONFIDENCE IN YOUNG LEARNERS.

Grammy award-winning singer-songwriter Ndumiso Manana, a former learner, credited his alma mater with laying the foundation for his musical career and personal growth. "The Drakies shaped my musical roots and life direction," he said, reflecting on his five years as a member of the school's internationally acclaimed choir.

Another alumnus, Ralf Schmitt, musical director of the renowned Ndlovu Youth Choir, also acknowledges that his formative years with the Drakensberg Boys Choir instilled in him a sense of discipline, vocal excellence, and professional performance standards that guided his later choral leadership career.

Thania Dhoogra, chief operating officer of N3TC, says she has noticed how "the Drakies crosses divides and unites people with their music. They bring people together in harmony and ignite something that transcends everyday struggles and conflicts."

Set in the Champagne Valley at the foot of the Central Drakensberg mountains, the DBCS has combined academic education with intensive musical training for boys aged nine to fifteen since its founding by John Tungay in 1967.

> **"...the Drakies crosses divides and unites people with their music. They bring people together in harmony and ignite something tha ranscends everyday struggles and conflicts..."**

The school's programme fosters discipline, resilience, confidence, and artistic skill. Over the decades, it has become one of South Africa's most recognisable choral institutions, with a repertoire spanning classical, choral, jazz, pop, and traditional African music.

During the school year, the Drakies host weekly concerts, festivals, and community events in their campus auditorium, attracting local and international audiences, while international touring is another hallmark of their identity, with performances across Europe, the United States, the Far East, and even the Vatican.

The choir has played a pivotal role in South Africa's social and cultural history, evolving into a diverse, multi-lingual and multi-racial ensemble. Their concert calendar includes high-profile national and international performances, showcasing its commitment to artistic innovation, collaboration, and cultural storytelling.

IMPACT OF N3TC'S TOUCHING LIVES SUPPORT

Through its Touching Lives Programme, N3TC enabled eleven bursary students to attend the Drakensberg Boys Choir School in 2025, relieving financial strain for their families, while affording young talent the opportunity to focus on their personal and musical development.

One bursary recipient, a Grade 7 student from a rural school joined the choir through the school's outreach programme. During the past year his confidence, leadership abilities, musical knowledge and enthusiasm have developed in leaps and bounds. Six of the bursary students completed their Drakie-years (Grade 9) at the end of 2025, and are now enrolled at excellent secondary schools across South Africa.
The school maintained a 100% academic pass rate despite its tight performance schedule. Thanks to the funding received from donors such as N3TC, the DBCS management team is able to secure the school's finances, cover expenses, and continuously improve teaching, choral instruction, and learner support.

The school has also broadened its outreach and recruitment efforts, giving more boys from various backgrounds opportunities to become part of the world-renowned choir.

The Drakensberg Boys Choir School remains committed to inclusive access, and nurturing South Africa's musical talent.

THEY STAND AS A BEACON OF EXCELLENCE
in education, leadership, and global cultural representation. The Drakies is more than a choir.

They are a symbol of unity, opportunity, and national pride – at home and abroad.

© Tiana Steyn, "Before the leap"

Education

Royal Drakensberg Education

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Building blocks for inclusive education in rural settings

THE TRUST MANAGES THE ROYAL DRAKENSBERG PRIMARY SCHOOL, AN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL FOR CHILDREN FROM GRADE 000 TO GRADE 4, AND HAS ALSO DEVELOPED INTERLINKED COMMUNITY INITIATIVES TO FACILITATE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR RURAL CHILDREN.

The school supports rural children's development from infancy to age 10, employing a holistic development approach. It teaches children in their mother tongue while enhancing their English language and literacy skills, and empowers parents and caregivers to support their children's educational journeys.

Besides the Royal Drakensberg Primary School, the Trust, supported by funders such as N3TC, offers early childhood development (ECD) education through the Khanyisela Project, emphasising 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, and the Parent Power Facilitation Programme enables educators to create welcoming environments where parents can become actively engaged in their children's schooling.

The Royal Drakensberg Primary School actively invites parents to participate in their children's educational journeys and empowers neighbouring schools to do the same. "We believe educational success and broader societal transformation are only possible when a key element is present – a supportive parent or caregiver," says principal Thobani Ndlovu.

"Through ongoing educator-parent engagement and our various community outreach initiatives, we are consistently broadening our network, encouraging dialogue, exchanging ideas, and fostering collaboration within education. We hope our efforts will contribute to systemic changes across our community, ensuring that education evolves holistically and inclusively Partnering with N3TC through the Touching Lives Programme, the Royal Drakensberg Primary School provides skills training and opportunities to novice educators to gain experience for future career prospects.

Two N3TC education interns, one of whom was promoted to teacher assistant, played a key role in planning and facilitating the Parent Power Programme in 2025.

Thanks to the commitment and dedication of the three BabyBoost facilitators funded by N3TC, this early childhood development programme is flourishing.

BabyBoost operates 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.

Royal Drak's outreach initiatives have increased awareness of the educational opportunities offered by the primary school, with enrolment rates steadily increasing as a result of the success of the Khanyisela, BabyBoost and Parent Power programmes.

N3TC Top-Up Bursaries provided educational opportunities for 10 learners whose families cannot afford school fees. "It is a pleasure to be a part of these learners' growth and development journey, and to watch them thrive," says Mr Ndlovu. "Often it is in the simplest ways where we grow the most."

"In the Northern Drakensberg, the Royal Drakensberg Education Trust is making a meaningful impact in its community by offering practical and aspirational solutions to challenges in the education system."

Child Welfare

The N3TC Khanyisile Community Trust

N3TC Touching Lives

Helping to sustain lives in rural Van Reenen

Located in Van Reenen, on the border of KwaZulu-Natal and the Free State, the N3TC Khanyisile Community Trust assists approximately 3 000 learners from 10 schools with infrastructure, maintenance, development, socio-welfare, healthcare, nutrition and other needs. Each of these rural schools is located around 60 kilometres from the nearest town.

Local municipalities are responsible for providing these services, but often face capacity and financial challenges, resulting in slow service delivery and the further marginalisation of these rural communities. As a result, Khanyisile plays a vital role in supplying essential services.

Khanyisile strives to undertake at least one significant infrastructure project per financial year at a school or within the communities it serves. These initiatives include construction and ongoing maintenance projects.

In 2025, the N3TC Khanyisile Community Trust replaced the old water infrastructure at Weleni Primary School.

N3TC's funding ensures reliable water and continued maintenance for at least 15 years, benefiting current and future students with access to clean water and meals, supporting their learning and development.

– Ansie Jooste, Project Manager

An important yet often overlooked project undertaken by the N3TC Khanyisile Trust involves clearing grass and other growth from essential infrastructure, and helps to create firebreaks around school buildings.

This work is crucial every year to protect both children and staff from dangerous veld fires, and to safeguard water storage tanks and the pipes connecting boreholes to these tanks, helping to mitigate the risks of seasonal fires.

In 2025, the N3TC Khanyisile Community Trust supported Van Reenen/Entokozweni, Sand River Valley, St Joseph's Mission, and both Van Reenen and Sand River Valley Primary Schools.

Rural areas face challenges like distance, high costs, climate shifts, and limited resources. Assessing community needs and strengths helps local leaders, partners, and members to work together to address key issues, especially for those facing the toughest circumstances.

The funding from N3TC allowed us to assist a safety officer appointed by the Department of Education at the Sand River Valley Primary School.

The newly appointed officer, a single parent, reported for duty with nothing but the clothes on his back. We could provide him with accommodation, and essentials like bedding, kitchenware, clothing, shoes, and food for a month, ensuring he was settled on his first day.

N3TC's efforts to uplift, support, and develop marginalised communities are invaluable. It is changing lives daily. A simple thank you cannot express our gratitude, but it is heartfelt and truly appreciated.

Health & Wellness

Community Medical Services & Volunteer Rescue Team

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Volunteers reinforce road safety along key sections of the N3 during peak traffic periods

Two strategically positioned volunteer medical rescue teams continued to help strengthen road safety along the N3 Toll Route during peak traffic periods in 2025, when crash risks increased sharply.

Community Medical Services (CMS) and Volunteer Rescue Team (VRT) operate in the Free State and KwaZulu-Natal along two critical sections of the route. CMS has, for more than four decades, provided emergency medical and rescue support along Van Reenen Pass through to Harrismith, while VRT deploys between Warden and Villiers from its volunteer base near Makiti, Frankfort.

High traffic volumes, freight movement, and long distances to hospitals create complex safety environments along parts of the N3 Toll Route, especially during peak periods like Easter holiday seasons. The mix of vehicle types – including trucks, buses, minibus taxis, and light motor vehicles – increased volumes, driver fatigue, speeding, drinking and driving, adverse weather and the likelihood of mechanical breakdowns, all raise the chances of serious crash incidents. During these times, accessible medical rescue services are essential, and the additional support services rendered by CMS and VRT become vital to meet these needs.

Both teams are made up of volunteer doctors, advanced life support paramedics, intermediate and basic life support practitioners, trauma counsellors and rescue technicians.

Many of the team members work full-time in emergency services in Johannesburg, Pretoria, or Bloemfontein, and generously give up their holidays and personal time to assist road users at no cost.

Strategically positioned along the route, CMS and VRT are often the first medical responders with advanced life support at incidents. Severe trauma is common on high-speed highways, and quick interventions like airway management, bleeding control, and spinal stabilisation greatly improve the survival and recovery of crash victims.

On rural highways like the N3, where hospitals are often far removed from crash scenes, rapid emergency response and advanced life support are crucial to saving lives.

The presence of CMS and VRT's volunteers plays a vital role in reducing response times and improving access to trauma care during the critical 'golden hour' following a crash.

By providing treatment and stabilisation at the scene prior to patients being transported to more suitable healthcare facilities, these teams support improved outcomes in emergencies.

Busy highways, such as the N3 Toll Route, depend on well-coordinated road incident management systems involving law enforcement agencies, medical rescue teams, traffic management professionals, fire services, hazardous material specialists, tow and recovery operators, communication centres, disaster management units, and socio-welfare and humanitarian organisations. Together, these groups help to prevent secondary collisions, and to restore safety, convenience and mobility as promptly as possible.

"Having a dedicated, well-coordinated volunteer medical rescue presence along key sections of the route strengthens the entire safety ecosystem," says chief operating officer of N3TC, Thania Dhoogra.

"Their visibility along the route also helps to improve road users' compliance with travellers being more likely to report hazards, request assistance, and cooperate during managed closures when emergency responders are clearly present."

Supported by the N3TC, funding for the two volunteer groups assists with fuel, accommodation, vehicle maintenance and insurance, as well as the upkeep of specialised rescue and medical equipment. "*The level of support we receive directly influences how many deployments and man-days our teams can commit to the N3 Toll Route each year*," explains VRT rescue officer, Nick Dollman.

Despite the unpredictable nature of the environment in which they operate, CMS and VRT continue to reinforce medical rescue capacity during the busiest travel periods of the year. In addition, both teams remain active in community outreach initiatives in some of the rural areas along the N3 corridor, assisting vulnerable families and supporting local feeding schemes.

Their work not only strengthens emergency response along the N3 Toll Route but also helps to bridge the geographic gap in advanced emergency healthcare for communities and travellers passing through rural South Africa.

TRIBUTE TO PHILIP HULL

03/09/1955 – 06/09/2025

There are those among us who, where others see danger, see only the call to help. Philip Hull was such a person – a true hero whose life was defined by ‘running toward the fire when many others would head in the opposite direction’.

For more than forty years, Philip, the founder of Community Medical Services (CMS), dedicated himself to saving lives on the N3 Toll Route, particularly along Van Reenen Pass.

Philip never sought attention or acclaim, but his legacy is impossible to overlook. Through CMS, he established what is considered the longest-standing community rescue initiative of its kind in South Africa. His decades of service as a paramedic, particularly during peak traffic periods on the N3 Toll Route, and during some of the most treacherous weather conditions on Van Reenen Pass, made him an expert in road safety, and advanced life support.

He understood that road safety requires not only swift reactions, but also careful anticipation—being prepared for what might come and having the strategies and courage to act decisively when called upon to do so.

More than just knowledge, Philip brought wisdom, intuition, and a calm resolve to every crisis.

Philip’s courage and steadfastness inspired those who worked with him. His service and compassion extended beyond the roadside to various rural communities adjacent to the N3 Toll Route. He championed projects to support vulnerable children and families, rallying donations and distributing thousands of educational gifts and essential food items to those who needed hope most.

His life was one of dedication and service. He was a caregiver, mentor and friend who acted with humility, selflessness, and an unwavering commitment to others. Philip was a true gentleman, carrying pride and passion for his work and fellow human beings. He nurtured his relationships with care, treating everyone with respect and genuine kindness, while freely sharing his knowledge, warmth, and laughter.

In his lifetime, Philip rescued countless lives. This is perhaps the highest honour that could be bestowed upon him. His legacy will endure—in the many lives he saved, the communities he uplifted, and the acts of courage and compassion he displayed, particularly along the N3 Toll Route.

Philip Hull: bringer of light, saver of lives. N3TC, and all who travel this road, salute you.

Thank you for your service.

Child Welfare

Free State Care in Action

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Harrismith rallies around children

IN MANY SMALL TOWNS ACROSS SOUTH AFRICA, SOCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES FORM THE BACKBONE THAT KEEPS VULNERABLE FAMILIES AFLOAT.

In Harrismith in the Free State, one such initiative has become a lifeline to the community – offering children safety, nourishment, and encouragement long after the school bell rings.

Since 2011, N3TC's support of the Free State Care in Action (FSCA) programme has strengthened the initiative itself, and inspired local businesses, and surrounding farmers to contribute funds and fresh produce to help restore hope and stability to vulnerable families in the area.

For more than 35 years, FSCA has provided essential support and care to vulnerable children through its After School Care Centre (ASCC). In a region facing persistent economic strain, sustained funding from N3TC (and other partners) has ensured that the project remains steady and responsive, offering practical assistance to families who need it most.

The After School Care Centre focuses on the physical and emotional well-being of learners from Grades R to Grade 7. Every child enrolled comes from a low-income household where meeting daily needs is a struggle. The centre offers a welcoming, structured environment where young minds can regroup and settle after school – receiving nutritious meals, homework support, food parcels, school supplies, emotional care, and reliable transport.

At the start of each school year, learners are provided with stationery, school bags and uniforms, with additional items supplied as the needs arise.

> **"These seemingly simple provisions make a tremendous difference in their daily lives. They arrive at school prepared, confident, and ready to participate alongside their peers."**
>
> *– Gerda Louw, Project Coordinator*

Thanks to the generosity of local businesses and N3TC's ongoing funding, the centre is also able to offer occupational therapy sessions, socio-emotional assessments, optometry services and spectacles, if required. These interventions remove hidden barriers to learning, ensuring children are not disadvantaged by challenges that can be addressed with timely support.

Community needs extend beyond the classroom, however. Unemployment is one such need, and the programme assists adult caregivers to apply for available jobs. There are also important conversations around shared responsibility.

> **"The ASCC supports families, but it does not replace them. Helping parents and caregivers understand and uphold the centre's discipline and rules, while reinforcing that children's upbringing remains primarily their responsibility, is an ongoing and essential part of the work.**
>
> **At its heart, the programme seeks to safeguard the self-worth of both children and their parents, while offering families tools to move beyond the limitations of their current socio-economic circumstances."**

Education

Harrismith Primary School

N3TC *Touching Lives*

A small school community with a big heart

AT THE HARRISMITH PRIMARY SCHOOL, THE PLATBERG HOSTEL OFFERS CHILDREN FROM CHALLENGING HOME BACKGROUNDS A SUPPORTIVE, SAFE, AND NURTURING BASE.

The stability they enjoy helps them to gain the self-assurance needed to excel in their school work and extracurricular pursuits. The support of a structured community also allows learners to concentrate on education, growth, personal development, and well-being without the constant worry of home instability.

Team activities foster communication, cooperation, and mutual respect – building social skills and preparing the learners for future opportunities.

N3TC's support helps cover essential costs of food, accommodation, education, and basic needs.

Beyond necessities, the funding provides children with stability and hope. Platberg Hostel is a welcoming and inclusive environment where learners can freely express themselves. Encouraging self-expression through art, discussions, and presentations builds confidence, and helps them develop their voices.

"With N3TC's support, we are noticing profound changes in the behaviour of the children under our care, particularly their social interactions and academicachievements. This tangible progress brings reassurance and renewed hope to both parents and children, demonstrating the far-reaching impact on the community. It's more than financial assistance, it represents a promise that the cycle of hardships can be broken, and trust that a better future awaits them," says principal, Riaan Marais.

"...we are noticing profound changes in the behaviour of the children under our care..."

Conservation

SANParks Honorary Rangers

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Discover one of SA's hidden gems

THE INAUGURAL GOLDEN GATE DINO CHALLENGE WAS HELD IN MARCH 2025, DRAWING 331 COMPETITORS AND WELCOMING NUMEROUS VISITORS TO THE BREATHTAKING GOLDEN GATE HIGHLANDS NATIONAL PARK – ONE OF SOUTH AFRICA'S HIDDEN GEMS.

The event was made possible through a collaborative effort between the SANParks Honorary Rangers and N3TC, the title sponsor.

"The impact of the Golden Gate Dino Challenge is significant for the Golden Gate Highlands National Park, the local communities, and the Honorary Rangers," said David Webster, chief sustainability officer of the SANParks Honorary Rangers.

The Golden Gate Dino Challenge is one of the few trail running and mountain biking (MTB) events hosted within any of South Africa's national parks. Participants chose from a range of routes, including 40km, 25km, or 10km trail runs, as well as 44km or 22km mountain bike options.

For those seeking a lighter challenge, a 5km fun run and a 10km cycle were also on offer. Additionally, 40 children from the local communities received complimentary entries for the fun run/ride and enjoyed free meal packs after their races.

The event offered runners and cyclists a rare chance to traverse the stunning mountain landscapes of Golden Gate Highlands National Park. While the variety of routes accommodates different skill levels, the course was challenging, featuring steep inclines and technical sections. Participants were rewarded with spectacular scenery, sweeping vistas, tranquil streams, sightings of wildlife, and distinctive rock formations.

With N3TC's support, the Honorary Rangers were able to establish and mark a permanent 22km MTB trail and enhance the trail running routes within the park. These additions will now remain as tourist attractions within the park, maintained by SANParks, with support from the Honorary Rangers.

The new infrastructure also expands the range of activities available to visitors, particularly those interested in high-altitude training.

The primary goals of the Dino Challenge are to benefit local communities, promote the Golden Gate Highlands National Park and local tourism, and raise much-needed funds for SANParks Honorary Ranger conservation initiatives. Proceeds from the event are reinvested in conservation and tourism projects within the Golden Gate Highlands National Park.

The 2026 N3TC Golden Gate Dino Challenge is scheduled for 1 – 2 May. With the recent opening of the Kgodumodumo Dinosaur Interpretive Centre, the event is expected to attract even more attention and visitors. "N3TC's support over the years has greatly influenced our conservation work, especially in advancing tourism projects within Golden Gate Highlands National Park," concludes Mr Webster.

GOLDEN GATE HIGHLANDS NATIONAL PARK

Golden Gate Highlands National Park, established on 13 September 1923, protects areas of geological and paleontological importance, scenic beauty, and grassland biome. It also forms part of South Africa's Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Conservation Area.

Kgodumodumo Dinosaur Interpretive Centre

Opened in June 2025, this state-of-the-art interactive facility offers visitors a dynamic, world-class exploration of paleontology, archaeology, and geology, sharing scientific knowledge in an engaging and creative environment.

SANPARKS HONORARY RANGERS

The SANParks Honorary Rangers are volunteers who support conservation efforts and fundraise for South Africa's national parks. With about 2 500 members across 31 regions, they work to preserve the country's natural heritage for future generations.

© Jaco de Beer, “Splash”
ABUS
ABUS
354

Education

Wildlife & Environmental Society of South Africa

N3TC *Touching Lives*

“That is so bad for the fish...”

BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH WATER CONSERVATION

In the heart of Qalabotjha, Villiers, a growing sense of environmental awareness is taking root thanks to the Wildlife and Environmental Society of South Africa (WESSA) and N3TC through its Touching Lives Programme. Their ‘Building Resilience Through Water Conservation’ initiative is motivating children, educators, and families to step up and protect their precious resources, while also helping them to upgrade and maintain their water infrastructure.

“That is so bad for the fish!” remarked one five-year-old when shown a photo of litter in a river, a simple, but striking example of how the project is shaping critical thinking and environmental awareness in young minds. Through engaging lessons and hands-on activities, local children are learning that water is the lifeblood of their community.

In an area where drought and water shortages are everyday realities, these lessons are more important than ever.

The Qalabotjha community has long struggled with limited water resources, but WESSA’s programme is bringing practical change and hope. With N3TC’s funding, early childhood development centres, primary, and high schools have received vital materials and infrastructure upgrades.

Water tanks, improved plumbing, and rainwater harvesting systems now help schools maintain hygiene and food gardens, even during water shortages.

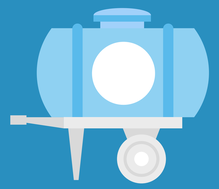
PEOPLE-DRIVEN CHANGE

Yet, the most profound impact is found in the people behind the numbers. Educators, empowered with training and resources, have become role models for environmental stewardship, while learners enthusiastically share water-saving tips at home, sparking the community’s interest and commitment to environmental sustainability.

At the heart of this transformation are local heroes like Patricia Tsira, an intermediate phase teacher at Phomello Primary School, who has emerged as a passionate advocate for change. Leading the school’s Eco Committee, she weaves sustainability into every lesson and organises recycling drives and environmental celebrations. Her dedication inspires both colleagues and learners to act as caretakers of their environment.

Community members share pride in the gardens that now flourish at their schools, and are implementing the waterwise habits their children have brought home. “We feel hopeful for the next generation,” one parent said, highlighting the power of education and collaboration in overcoming adversity.

As the greater Mafube local municipality continues to face environmental challenges, the people of Qalabotjha are proving that resilience grows stronger when communities work together, guided by dedicated partners like WESSA and N3TC. Their journey is a testament to the belief that change starts with people – and every small action counts.



WATER TANKS

IMPROVED PLUMBING

RAINWATER HARVESTING SYSTEMS

Child Welfare

Topsy Foundation

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Holistic support brings hope and opportunity to vulnerable communities in Mpumalanga

Topsy Foundation's OVC Project delivers more than food security it empowers families through sustainable solutions and community resilience

FOOD SECURITY REMAINS A PRESSING CONCERN FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA, ESPECIALLY AS ECONOMIC CHALLENGES INTENSIFY.

The Topsy Foundation, operating in Grootvlei, Siyathemba, and Balfour in Mpumalanga, is addressing this issue through its Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Project.

By implementing community and household food gardens, delivering nutrition education, and promoting sustainable farming practices, Topsy is changing lives – one initiative at a time.

Combined, these initiatives have made nutritious food more accessible, reduced hunger, and empowered families to become self-reliant. Some households are now able to supplement their diets and earn extra income by selling surplus produce, demonstrating the cascading effect of sustainable support.

The Foundation's efforts extend beyond food security. By improving the quality and reach of support services, Topsy has ensured that families receive essentials like welfare care parcels, educational supplies, and psycho-social support.

This comprehensive approach has directly contributed to the empowerment of residents. "In 2007, I first came across Topsy Foundation. I was unemployed at the time and had just started a small vegetable garden in my backyard. Two ladies from Topsy visited me, supported me with seeds and groceries, and invited me to join the Foundation's parenting programme. Since Topsy came into my life, my struggles as a single parent have been made easier. Today, I have a big garden thanks to Topsy. My children and I never go hungry, and I earn a small income to support other needs in my home. Topsy makes a real difference in our lives and in my community," says one of the beneficiaries from Siyathemba.

Thanks to funding from N3TC, Topsy has been able to provide consistent support to vulnerable people, attending to basic needs, psychological and social care, and educational resources. The Foundation has strengthened food security by establishing household and community gardens, which not only alleviate hunger but also equip families with skills to sustain themselves well into the future.

Empowerment is central to Topsy's approach. Caregivers and community volunteers receive training and mentorship in basic health care, child protection, and agriculture.

This investment in people results in more confident and capable leaders, able to support their households and communities. Strategically, the Foundation faces the ongoing challenge of balancing immediate relief with long-term empowerment. Meeting urgent needs is essential, but fostering self-reliance is vital for sustainable development. Looking ahead, Topsy aims to further strengthen mental health support for both beneficiaries and staff, addressing psychological and social challenges brought about by economic hardship.

The focus is on fostering independence through skills development and income-generating opportunities. By reducing dependency and promoting sustainable livelihoods, Topsy is paving the way for resilient communities. The N3TC Touching Lives Programme offers a blueprint for impactful investment, demonstrating how holistic support translates into tangible improvements and sustainable growth in vulnerable communities.

fostering independence through skills development

Disabled

Sunfield Home Fortuna

N3TC *Touching Lives*

Sunfield Home offers hope and structure for vulnerable adults

FOR OVER THREE DECADES, SUNFIELD HOME FORTUNA IN BALFOUR, MPUMALANGA, HAS PROVIDED A SANCTUARY FOR DISABLED ADULTS WHO ARE UNABLE TO LIVE INDEPENDENTLY.

Currently caring for 33 full-time residents, the facility has been a cornerstone of support in the region since its founding in 1991.

RESIDENTS FIND STABILITY AND PURPOSE HERE

Among the residents is Johan (36), who suffered a serious medical incident resulting in severe brain oedema and permanent cognitive impairment. Following the death of his grandmother, his last remaining relative, Johan relocated to Sunfield Home Fortuna, where staff members say he has thrived in structured, therapeutic surroundings. He now helps at the entrance gate, signs in visitors, and assists with dining hall chores, drawing a sense of pride from these daily responsibilities.

Also following her grandmother's passing, Heidi (41) arrived at the home after experiencing rapid social decline. Initially withdrawn and dependent, Heidi has, according to caregivers, made remarkable progress. She is now socially engaging, emotionally stable, and far less dependent.

Both Johan and Heidi's stories underscore the necessity of a structured and therapeutic care environment like Sunfield Home Fortuna for individuals with significant support needs.

Beyond individual care, Sunfield Home Fortuna operates a protective workshop, extending meaningful work opportunities to residents and single mothers from the surrounding community.

The initiative aims to build self-confidence and skills among participants while bolstering local economic stability by providing a means of income for families in need.

> **Routine, supervision, and encouragement have made a marked difference in Johan's life.**
> *– Barbara Mendes, General Manager*

The sustainability of these initiatives is made possible, in large part, by ongoing funding from N3TC.

> **The support allows us to sustain our protective workshop and continue providing comprehensive care to mentally and physically disabled individuals from the community.**

However, despite these positive impacts, Sunfield Home Fortuna continues to face significant hurdles. Constrained staffing and funding have, at times, threatened the facility's ability to meet the increasing demand for services while maintaining high care standards. Attracting and retaining skilled personnel remains especially difficult in rural regions, where resources are limited and competition from urban organisations is fierce.

Ms Mendes ends with a dose of reality:

> **On any given day, our home's average expenses far surpass our available financial resources. The demands for running a comprehensive, responsive programme such as ours are truly high. That's why our story is never only one of care and compassion. It's also always an account of resilience in the face of adversity, and of small, unexpected kindnesses when least expected – little miracles.**

© Paul Naude, "Dust bath day"

Community Event

N3TC Meals on Wheels Cycle Challenge

N3TC *Touching Lives*

N3TC Meals on Wheels Cycle Challenge delivers f🚲🚲d and community spirit

ON THE 19TH OF OCTOBER 2025, HUNDREDS OF CYCLISTS RALLIED TOGETHER IN HEIDELBERG TO HELP RAISE FUNDS AND COLLECT NON-PERISHABLE FOOD.

Cyclists who participate in the annual Meals on Wheels Cycle Challenge do far more than just ride for food security; they dedicate their energy and compassion to bringing hope, sharing kindness, and delivering nourishment to vulnerable families – one meal at a time. Their acts of kindness help support the growth and well-being of vulnerable families in the larger Sedibeng District.

Funds raised from the event enable the Heidelberg, Vereeniging, and Vanderbijlpark branches of Meals on Wheels to provide nutritious meals to nearly 4500 individuals, including more than 1200 toddlers and children up to 16 years old. Additionally, almost 2200 elderly individuals are supported by Meals on Wheels in these areas.

This annual Cycle Race, where hundreds of participants compete in the 53km and 108km races, is one of the programme's biggest fundraising events. "Seeing so many riders and their families come out to support the event, is heartwarming indeed," notes Thanu Padayachee, CEO of Lusa Community Chest and project co-ordinator of Meals on Wheels in the region.

"Each cyclist also donates non-perishable foods which are then later distributed alongside our meals to beneficiaries of the programme."

The 2025 event was the 21st Cycle Challenge hosted in aid of Meals on Wheels. Unfortunately, a change in the date of another major cycling event impacted the number of participants in the N3TC Meals on Wheels Cycle Challenge, but it did not dampen spirits or the festive atmosphere on race day.

"With N3TC's support and funding, a spectacular occasion was put together, with live music, an array of food stalls, and a festive atmosphere – all contributing to the continued attraction of cyclists and ensuring a future for both the race and our fundraising efforts," ends Ms Padayachee.

1 200

Toddlers and children fed

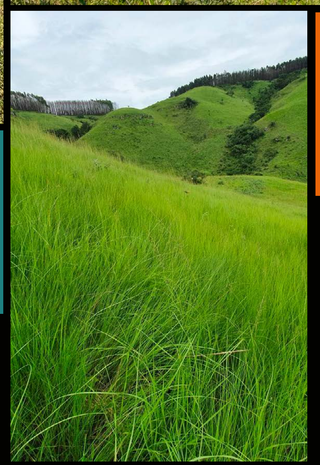
2 200

Ederly individuals fed

The 2026 N3TC Meals on Wheels Cycle Challenge is planned to take place on **16 August 2026.**

Diarise the date!

Thank you



N3TC

Safety. Convenience. Mobility