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# 100 SOUTH AFRICAN SHINING STARS





## BY MATUMA LETSOALO

**I**t gives the Inside Education Foundation immense pleasure to present the 100 South African Shining Stars for 2025. Now in its 8th edition, the 100 SA Shining Stars Awards honour young people from all spheres of society who make a positive impact on the lives of their communities and the wider public. It celebrates the

vibrant energy and passion of youth to improve the lives of all South Africans.

The young people that we celebrate here and in a special ceremony are thinkers and doers, activists and athletes, as well as mavericks and trailblazers, who are role models for their peers and contemporaries.

As South Africa looks forward to celebrating 30 years of the adoption of the constitution and later this year holding the local government elections, the Shining Stars we are celebrating remind us that young people are central to a thriving democracy.

According to the Independent Electoral Commission, ahead of the 2024 national and provincial elections, there were 11,7 million young people between the ages of 18 and 34 who were registered to vote out of a total of 27,79 million registered voters, or 42%.

Although there is a notable decline in actual voter participation, young people still represent a sizeable portion of the electorate. The Shining Stars can be instrumental in helping to mobilise young people to vote.

Another way that young people can help advance democracy is by standing for public office to improve the quality of our politics and advance policies that improve the quality of young people's lives. Some of these Shining Stars would be perfectly suited to the task.

The 2024 elections saw a record

70 parties registered to participate provincially and nationally; there was also a record number of young and female candidates. We expect this trend to accelerate at the upcoming local government elections.

A key challenge that faces South Africa is that of youth unemployment. Four out of ten young people are unemployed, and what is worse is that they are also not in education or training, the so-called NEETs. They function with no prospects and contemplate a bleak future.

Some of the Shining Stars help address these challenges and help organise skills training for community members who need them, while some either establish small businesses or offer services that help small businesses to help them create and sustain jobs.

The Shining Stars take their cue from former American President Theodore Roosevelt and do what they can, with what they have, where they are. But they cannot solve the challenge, like youth unemployment, on their own. They need to be complemented by efforts from the government and the private sector.

An example of such complementary effort is the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative, which, since its inception in 2020, is estimated to have created 1,5 million earning opportunities for young people and, between April and June last year, created over 235, 000 opportunities.

As South Africa heads towards 2030, one of the targets of the National Development Plan is the creation of 2 million job opportunities for young people through technical and vocational training, among a range of other measures.

It is not just South Africa, through the NDP, but the rest of the world through the United Nations's Sustainable Development Goals, that calls on young people to be agents of change and active participants in shaping the current environment, their futures and destiny. That is why we laud these young people.

Over the years of celebrating South Africa's Shining Stars, we have noted that, given the areas they come from, which are often previously disadvantaged, one

of the biggest challenges they face is gaps caused by service delivery failures.

This could be through a lack of good schools or well-functioning clinics, poor roads, infrastructure and lack of safety features such as street lighting or poor food security.

The Shining Stars take it upon themselves to organise communities to help youngsters study and be part of social clubs, or teach them specialised skills such as performing arts, offer legal services and civic education and organise communities to organise food gardens and clean their surroundings to improve health and mitigate against climate change.

The 100 SA Shining Stars are, above all, problem solvers who take initiative to improve the lives of those around them. And for that, we are grateful to have them in our midst.

Congratulations to all of them.

*Matuma Letsoalo is the Chairman of the Inside Education Foundation*

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SOUTH AFRICA

A stack of several books is shown, with a circular graphic overlay in the foreground. The graphic is a light blue circle with a thin red border, containing the text '01 EDUCATION'. The background is a blurred stack of books with various colored spines (yellow, red, blue, brown).

01

**EDUCATION**



## BONTLE NDABA

Literacy advocate and early childhood champion

**B**ontle Ndaba has been nominated for her unwavering commitment to tackling South Africa's literacy crisis, where 81% of Grade 4 learners cannot read for meaning. Her passion for early literacy was born from a powerful moment: watching a township ECD learner struggle with basic instructions during her brother's pre-Grade 1 test. Determined to close this gap, Bontle focused her efforts on early childhood development centres in underserved communities. Rooted in her upbringing with her grandmother in Soweto, Bontle's work is grounded in understanding and connection. A lifelong reader herself, she knows how books can transform futures. In 2023, she collected books, readers, dictionaries, and posters for Soweto pre-schools and launched weekly phonics, writing, and storytelling programmes at two schools. She also helped teachers establish reading corners to create engaging, literacy-rich classrooms. Bontle's holistic approach builds foundational skills, ensuring young learners enter primary school confident, expressive, and ready to thrive.



# THANDEKILE KHUMALO

Founder & Principal, Paràdemics Edu Centre

**T**handekile Zanele Khumalo is a powerful voice in South Africa’s movement toward inclusive education. Her nomination for the Shining Star Awards 2025 is a bold declaration — not for personal acclaim, but on behalf of the many children with disabilities whose potential is too often unseen and whose stories rarely reach the mainstream. Paràdemics Edu Centre was created from Thandekile’s deep commitment to early intervention and accessible, nurturing education for children with disabilities. Under her leadership, the centre has grown into a compassionate learning environment and a catalyst for social change. Its mission is simple yet profound: to ensure that every child, regardless of ability, is equipped with the tools, support, and love needed to thrive. Through relentless advocacy, creative learning programmes, and community-driven initiatives, Thandekile has positioned Paràdemics as a beacon of hope. She has witnessed extraordinary transformations — children once excluded now stepping forward with confidence, expression, and capability. Her work affirms that representation and visibility are not just ideals, but powerful drivers of opportunity. Thandekile stands as a vessel for change and a champion for the overlooked. Her message is unwavering: with vision, compassion, and action, no child should ever be left behind.



# FLORANCE VERMEULEN

Educator, youth developer and founder

**F**lorance Vermeulen’s life’s work is rooted in a powerful belief: education is not merely the delivery of content, but the restoration of hope and dignity. Growing up feeling unseen, one teacher’s affirmation, “You belong here”, reshaped her purpose. For the past seven years in the classroom and over 14 years in youth development across six provinces, she has carried that message into every space she enters, especially in communities where hope feels fragile. Florance’s classroom blends rhythm, movement, music, and dialogue to create a safe, engaging environment where mistakes are embraced as learning opportunities. Beyond teaching, she founded the STEP-UP and SWAG programmes, nurturing learner confidence, discipline, and leadership. She collaborates with organisations to secure scholarships, digital access, and life-skills training, while mentoring new teachers to strengthen whole-school culture. Although honoured with awards such as the Mayor’s Award and the National Teaching Awards, her greatest achievement remains the moment a learner says, “I can”. She teaches, inspires, uplifts, and never gives up on any child.



# LEBAKENG MOTSEKEDI

Community builder and youth empowerment leader

**L**ebakeng Motsekedi is a shining example of community-driven leadership. His commitment to youth empowerment is lived out every week through two educational support programmes he runs each Saturday in Alexandra township, assisting more than 200 learners to strengthen their academic performance. His compassion extends beyond the classroom. Each year, Lebakeng supports over 100 child- and youth-headed families with groceries and emotional care, ensuring vulnerable young people feel supported, valued, and seen. His impact across Gauteng schools is remarkable. He has facilitated mentorship programmes in more than 500 schools and led leadership development training for over 300 representatives of the Representative Council of Leaders in partnership with the education department, equipping young leaders with the confidence and skills to lead with integrity and purpose. Recognised as one of News24’s Young Mandelas in 2023 and featured on Metro FM’s Mid-day Link Up, Lebakeng is not just doing good work; he is transforming lives through service and example.



## DR CERENE RATHILAL

Mathematician, STEM advocate and mentor

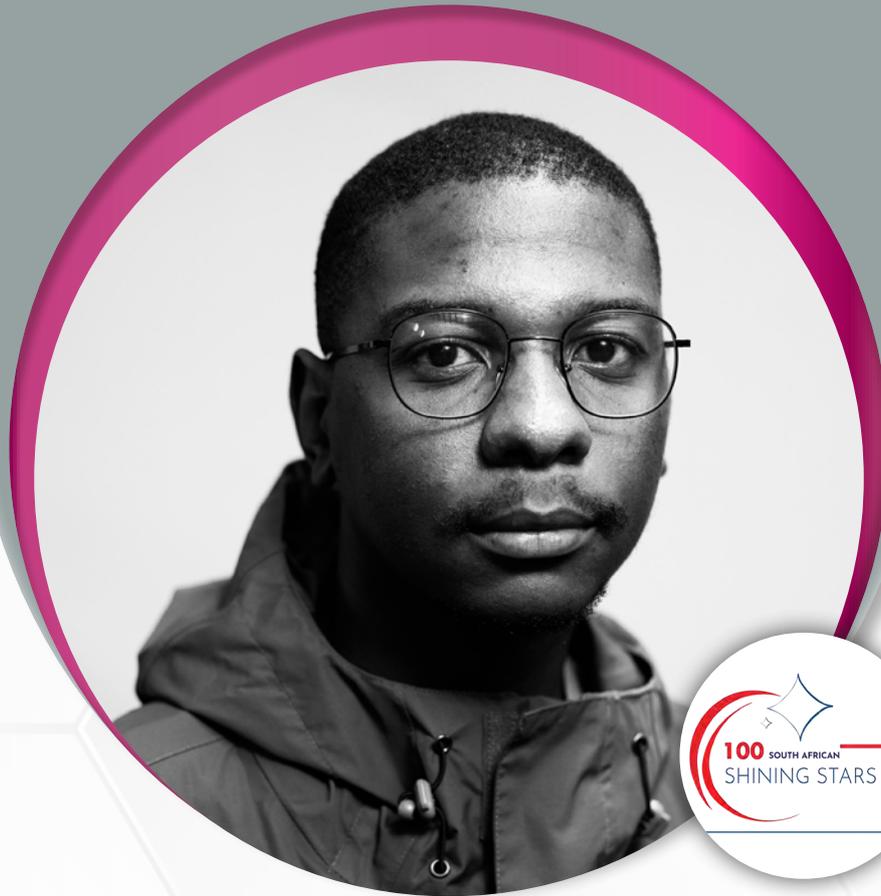
**D**r Cerene Rathilal has made exceptional contributions to mathematics, education, and the advancement of women in STEM. A pioneering researcher in pointfree topology and topological data analysis, Dr Rathilal is among the very few South African women to hold a PhD in this specialised field, making her a highly visible role model in an underrepresented discipline. In 2022, she founded STEM MentHER, a national mentorship programme now active at seven universities and supporting over 150 female learners pursuing STEM careers. By pairing schoolgirls with women academics and industry professionals, the programme strengthens confidence, builds belonging, and bridges the gap between school and university. Dr Rathilal's broader outreach includes leading career festivals, teacher-training programmes, science communication workshops, and creative initiatives like Math Tales and Meet a Mathematician. She also serves as an international judge for FameLab, showcasing South African science globally. A Mandela Rhodes Scholar, Canon Collins Scholar, and one of the Mail & Guardian's Top 200 Young South Africans in 2022, Dr Rathilal is a true shining star inspiring the next generation of women scientists.



# KUTLWANO MOLOI

Visionary for developing African youth

**K**utlwano Moloi is a transformative young leader whose impact on education and youth development extends across the African continent. At just 23, he was named African Youth of the Week in March 2025 by Africa Youth Awards, reflecting his far-reaching influence through the Moloi Business Leadership Firm. His initiatives have touched more than 800,000 young Africans, with a strong focus on equipping learners with skills for academic and professional success. Through the Youth Empowerment Tour, run in partnership with the Department of Education, Kutlwano has directly trained over 500,000 students and indirectly reached more than 600,000. The programme delivers leadership, entrepreneurship, and critical-thinking training, supported by mentorship, practical tools, and exposure to real-world opportunities. Kutlwano's commitment to lifelong learning is evident in his Readers Are Leaders platform, created with SA Books Online to promote literacy and personal development. His African Business Masterclasses, Annual Networking Event, and widely followed weekly podcast, reaching over 50,000 listeners, further strengthen youth capabilities. His advisory role to the United Nations on youth and education policy underscores his influence and makes him a compelling nominee for this award.



# MAKATU MASHANYU

Advocate for linking education and development

**M**akatu Mashanyu is an inspiring young leader whose dedication to education and community upliftment is reshaping opportunities for learners in underserved communities. As Chair of the Habitable Planet Workshop Schools Programme, he has driven a six-month mentorship and science engagement initiative at Boitshoko High School since 2024. Each year, the programme selects 25 Grade 9 learners and immerses them in science clubs, practical experiments, and educational field trips. With over 100 learners reached so far, Makatu is cultivating a new generation of confident, curious “Plane-teers”. His work stands out for its deeply Afrocentric and inclusive approach. Makatu ensures that learners’ cultural identities and socio-economic realities enrich, rather than hinder, their learning journey. His mentorship empowers young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to envision themselves as scientists, innovators, and community problem-solvers. By integrating his academic research in mineral processing and sustainable mining with high-impact outreach, Makatu bridges the gap between higher education and grassroots development. He represents the essence of a Shining Star: using education as a powerful tool for equity, empowerment, and transformation.



## ISAAC MONGALI

Educator, innovator and founder of CareerKit

Isaac Mongali is the founder of CareerKit, a pioneering social enterprise reshaping career guidance in South Africa. Motivated by his own experience of financial exclusion at university, Isaac has dedicated his career to ensuring young people never miss opportunities due to a lack of information. Through innovative tools such as the RIASEC Board Game and specialised Career Kits, he has empowered more than 15,000 learners to understand their strengths, explore career pathways, and make informed decisions about their futures. CareerKit brings engaging, hands-on resources directly into schools, community organisations, and youth programmes, addressing both youth unemployment and inequality in access to guidance. Isaac's work spans rural and urban communities, proving adaptable and scalable across the continent. A nationally recognised youth developer, he is building a generation of confident, skilled and future-ready young people. Isaac embodies innovation, service, and transformation in education.



# BONGIWE LEEPILOE

Advocate for autism inclusion

**B**ongwiwe Leepiloe is a dedicated advocate for autism inclusion and the founder of the Not a Disability but an Ability Foundation. Her journey began with a powerful belief: autism is not a limitation, but a unique way of experiencing the world. As a mother to an autistic child, she transformed her personal challenges into a national mission to reshape how South Africans understand neurodiversity. Through her foundation, Bongwiwe leads workshops, community engagements, and advocacy campaigns that bring vital awareness to schools, homes, and neighbourhoods. She also hosts podcasts sharing real stories and practical knowledge, giving families and young people a voice often missing in mainstream dialogue. Recognising the emotional and practical pressures parents face, she established support groups that offer guidance, encouragement, and connection. As a children's book author, she promotes empathy and inclusion from an early age. For Bongwiwe, this nomination represents every family striving to show that autism is an ability, not a disability.



# NHLANHLA MNTAMBO

Helping youth thrive through support

**N**hlanhla Lucky Mntambo, from Ntuzuma in Durban, is a dedicated teacher, mentor, youth ambassador, human rights facilitator, and community activist committed to transforming lives through education. His journey in service began in 2018 as a volunteer homework facilitator at Sisizangothando NPO, where he later became Youth Coordinator. During the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, he led critical community skills-training initiatives and continued to organise career guidance programmes, application drives, and NSFAS support across the Inanda, Ntuzuma, and KwaMashu areas, ensuring hundreds of young people accessed educational and economic opportunities. Nhlanhla mentors youth through platforms such as Harambee and SAYouth.mobi, serves as a Human Rights facilitator with Africa Unite, and leads education projects within the Inanda Youth Crime Prevention Desk. As Deputy Chairperson of the Ethekekwini Youth Sector, he champions healthy lifestyles, HIV and AIDS awareness, and skills development. In 2022, he founded Boys Corner, mentoring boys aged 7–16 on life skills and positive masculinity to address GBVF and crime. Now a remedial coordinator while pursuing his Honours in Sustainable Development, Nhlanhla remains driven by a mission to inspire, educate, and help every young person thrive.



## TLAMELO MOTLATSI

Dedicated to rural education

**T**lamele Motlatsi is the visionary behind the Motlatsi Annual Charity Play, an initiative transforming education access for rural learners in the John Taolo Gaetsewe district in the Northern Cape since 2021. Established to support matriculants with pre-registration to Post-School Education and Training (PSET) institutions, the project addresses critical barriers faced by learners in deep rural areas, including limited internet access and scarce information about tertiary pathways. During school visits, Tlamele and his team identified an additional need: many learners lacked proper school uniforms. This inspired the expansion of the initiative to include fundraising for school shoes and uniforms, supported through an annual January soccer tournament that mobilises communities and raises essential resources. The impact has been remarkable: 9,560 pairs of school shoes distributed and 1,750 learners assisted with PSET access. The initiative continues to grow through partnerships with local mines, radio stations, the Premier's office, and various organisations, all recognising Tlamele's unwavering commitment to uplifting rural youth.



# NHLAKANIPHO MAHLANGU

Curriculum innovator, trainer and LGBTQI+ campaigner

**N**hlakanipho Mahlangu is a higher education leader and inclusion specialist who has successfully transformed her early activism into a dynamic career in academic leadership and community development. As Academic Programme Convenor for the Faculty of Commerce and Law at Eduvos, she plays a key role in driving curriculum innovation, lecturer training, and student support — while ensuring that gender equity and LGBTQI+ inclusion are embedded into the core of academic delivery. Her influence reaches far beyond the campus. At the Centre for the Advancement of Non-Racialism and Democracy, Nhlakanipho co-facilitated the Herald Community Dialogues, helping advance public conversations on race, equity and social justice, while strengthening important university–community partnerships. Through Wits RHI’s Nelson Mandela Bay Schools Training Programme, she designed and delivered LGBTQI+ sensitisation sessions, capacitating teachers and school managers to build safe, affirming school environments for queer learners. She also led Safe Space Training at Nelson Mandela University, equipping staff and students to grow vibrant LGBTQI+ communities and cultures across the institution. Nhlakanipho’s work combines rigorous research, inclusive facilitation, and transformative leadership to shift attitudes and strengthen institutional practice. By bridging academic strategy with grassroots activism, she continues to champion equity and sustainable development, making her a true game changer in South Africa’s higher education and youth development landscape.

EDUCATION



# MONTSHIOAGAE DITIRO

A dedicated Physical Sciences teacher

**M**ontshioagae Ditiro is a dedicated Physical Sciences teacher whose impact on education is both measurable and transformative. Upon joining Sannieshof Tirisano High School in 2022, he encountered a school facing serious challenges in Physical Sciences, with a Grade 12 pass rate of 60% and only 11 learners enrolled in the subject. Through commitment and a deliberate shift in learner mindset towards mathematics and science, Montshioagae drove remarkable growth. By 2025, enrolment had increased to 23 matric learners, 44 Grade 11 learners and 57 Grade 10 learners taking Mathematics and Physical Sciences. Performance improved alongside participation. Teaching Grades 10 to 12, he achieved a 95.65% pass rate with an average of 42.18% in the 2024 final matric results. In 2025, before moving to another school, he again achieved a 95.65% pass rate, with averages of 58% and 52% in Terms 1 and 2, respectively. In recognition of his excellence, Montshioagae was appointed as the Departmental Head of Mathematics and Science at Maselwanyane Secondary School in Mahikeng. Beyond the classroom, he is a chess coach and a national schools chess leader in South Africa. Passionate, ambitious and learner-focused, Montshioagae continues to ensure that young people are equipped to reach their full potential — academically, strategically and beyond the classroom.



02

**SCIENCE &  
TECHNOLOGY**



# LEBO RASHIJANE

Scientist, mentor and future-builder

**L**ebo Rashijane is shaping the future of agricultural science across Southern Africa. A PhD candidate in animal production at the University of Limpopo, she specialises in animal genomics, with ground-breaking work in goat genomics and the commercialisation of goat meat across Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe. A prolific young scholar, Lebo has authored and co-authored over 25 scientific publications, and has already co-supervised eight master's and 10 honours students, many of whom collaborated with her on published research. Her work has been showcased at major national and international conferences, reinforcing her growing reputation as a rising scientific leader. Beyond academia, Lebo is the director and founder of TruCam Ultimate Support, a non-profit driving access to quality learning and mentorship. Since 2019, she has guided over 50 girls, many now serving in managerial roles. Currently part of the Agricultural Research Centre Professional Development Programme, she champions the value of science in everyday life and advocates strongly for the UN Sustainable Development Goals.



# JORDACHELIN MOODLEY

Innovator, mentor and champion of digital equity

Jordachelin Moodley stands out as a Shining Star in Education, Science and Technology, recognised for his award-winning innovation at the intersection of technology, social upliftment and youth empowerment. A transformative leader shaping the future of financial services at Old Mutual, he is equally committed to rewriting opportunities for young people across South Africa. Through Project Simunye, his pioneering grassroots initiative, Jordachelin has equipped thousands of young people with essential digital and financial literacy skills, ensuring they can thrive in a rapidly evolving digital economy. As a dedicated mentor within the STEM movement, he has inspired more than 5,000 young people to see themselves as creators, problem-solvers and future leaders. His research into AI-driven education, along with projects enhancing accessibility for learners with barriers, reflects his deep commitment to inclusive progress. Guided by Ubuntu and strengthened by personal resilience, Jordachelin is building a future where young Africans rise as confident, capable and unstoppable innovators.



# RELEBOGILE LEBITSA

A mind for the future

**R**elebogile Lebitsa is a young technologist whose dedication and purpose make her a beacon of Africa's emerging innovation landscape. At just 20 years old, she is already developing solutions that address real, everyday challenges. Her standout creation, Asambe, is modernising the township taxi industry through digital payments and commuter support, while Ubuntu Connect is transforming healthcare access with telemedicine, chatbots, and pharmacy delivery. She also spearheaded an AI-powered anti-gender-based violence app, presented at the EmpowerHer AI Conference, offering a digital lifeline to vulnerable communities. Beyond her technical achievements, Relebogile is deeply committed to mentorship and community upliftment. She actively supports learners through hackathons and grassroots initiatives, ensuring that her journey opens pathways for others. Recently nominated for the Aspiring Teen Award by Women in Tech, she exemplifies the spirit of a Shining Star: brilliant, compassionate, and determined to illuminate the future for those who follow.



## DR CHARLES TAKALANA

Astronomer and champion of African innovation

**D**r Charles Mpho Takalana is a South African astronomer and science-for-development practitioner dedicated to leveraging astronomy as a catalyst for education, innovation and inclusive growth. As Deputy Director at the International Astronomical Union's Office of Astronomy for Development, he leads global partnerships that apply space science to real-world challenges, mentors emerging researchers, and drives flagship programmes that expand skills and opportunities across Africa. From 2021 to 2024, he served as Head of Secretariat of the African Astronomical Society, strengthening continental coordination, launching public engagement and education initiatives, and helping establish the African Planetarium Association. As Co-Chair and later Vice-Chair of the National Organising Committee for the historic 2024 International Astronomical Union General Assembly, he helped ensure the participation of more than 400 African delegates and secured long-term partnerships for African astronomy. With contributions to Nature Astronomy, experience in national policy development, and active research in data analysis and observational techniques, Dr Takalana remains committed to linking South Africa's scientific strengths to community impact and building an empowered, knowledge-driven continent.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



## MARGO FARGO

Transforming the future through 3D

**M**argo Fargo's journey reflects resilience, purpose, and visionary leadership. Born into a stigmatised community, she refused to be defined by limitation, pursuing education as the foundation of her growth and building a career grounded in excellence and social impact. Today, as Managing Director of 3D Management, Margo is transforming the creative and talent landscape by championing South African voices on global platforms and fusing innovation with sustainability. A professional model, entrepreneur, and sustainability advocate, she uses her lived experience to reshape representation in the industry, nurturing talent holistically while instilling values of responsibility, education, and long-term thinking. Her approach demonstrates that commercial success and meaningful social contribution can coexist powerfully. Through her bold leadership, she continues to challenge outdated norms, create access for underrepresented talent, and prove that representation at the highest level is not only possible but essential.



## MAS'OODA VARACHIA

Tech CEO, innovator and champion of inclusive digital transformation

**M**as'ooda Varachia embodies the vision and determination of a new generation of African women shaping the technology landscape. As CEO of Raven Technologies, she leads pioneering projects that merge digital innovation with community upliftment: from deploying IoT-enabled beehives that strengthen rural beekeeping enterprises to developing digital platforms that help SMMEs access services, scale sustainably, and compete in the digital economy. Her mission is rooted in inclusion. Through strategic partnerships, Mas'ooda has supported over 700 beneficiaries with training, resources and pathways to real economic opportunity, ensuring women, youth and rural communities are active participants in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Her recognition on the Forbes Africa 30 Under 30 list and cover, alongside nominations for the Womandla Awards and Woman of Stature Awards, highlights her growing influence. With innovation, resilience and purpose at the centre of her work, Mas'ooda continues to build technologies that empower people and drive lasting societal change, a true Shining Star.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



# MOLABA GANTSHE GERMISHYS

A dynamic visionary developing the youth

**M**olaba Gantshe Germishys's work spans science, innovation, environmental stewardship, and youth development. A PhD candidate in Veterinary Technology, she combines rigorous academic research with a passion for solving real-world problems. Molaba is an award-winning innovator and researcher, as well as an aspiring entrepreneur behind ventures such as Germinnor (Pty) Ltd and Gloset (Pty) Ltd. Her commitment to sustainability is reflected in her role as founder of TUT Green Arcadia, where she advances environmental awareness and education. Beyond science and innovation, she expresses her creativity as a poet, public speaker, and fashion designer, while actively mentoring young people in personal development. In 2023, she established the Society for Postgraduate Development and Advancement, a pioneering organisation that fills a crucial gap in postgraduate training by offering six tailored programmes focused on skills development, research communication, mentorship, leadership, innovation, entrepreneurial support, and environmental advocacy. Her impact has earned her a nomination for the 2025 Bosslane Magazine Dare to Be Awards.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



# OMPHILE MATHEOLANE

Technologist, mentor and advocate for Inclusive Innovation

Omphile Matheolane represents a new generation of South African tech leaders committed to using innovation for social good. With a strong foundation in the banking and technology sectors, he applies his professional expertise far beyond the workplace. Omphile is deeply passionate about mentorship, using coaching, conference talks and knowledge-sharing platforms to make complex concepts in software development and digital transformation accessible to young people across the country. A firm advocate for diversity and representation in tech, he actively encourages and supports women entering the field. By creating inclusive spaces and amplifying underrepresented voices in corporate environments, he helps shape a tech ecosystem that reflects South Africa's full spectrum of talent. Omphile's journey is rooted in resilience, leadership and service. His blend of technical excellence and community-driven purpose positions him as a powerful example of what is possible when innovation and humanity meet; a true Shining Star in the making.



## AURELIE MSIZA

Advocate for uplifting communities through technology

**A**urelie Msiza is a candidate whose impact radiates across Amazon Web Services (AWS) and the communities she serves. A passionate advocate for inclusive technology, she recently contributed to the Tangible Africa x AWS Mandela Day #Coding4Mandela initiative, where she inspired young learners by sharing her personal journey, challenges, and tech lessons. Her involvement in the AWS Python Bootcamp further showcased her commitment to nurturing future talent, as she helped introduce Cape Town students to coding while creating a supportive environment that empowered them to see themselves thriving in the tech world. Beyond her professional contributions, Aurelie's recognition as the International Junior Miss South Africa 1st Princess reflects her leadership, confidence, and dedication to uplifting others. This platform amplifies her influence, allowing her to inspire even more young people, particularly girls, to pursue their ambitions boldly. Authentic, driven, and community-minded, Aurelie embodies the essence of a Shining Star, advancing AWS's mission while leaving a lasting, positive imprint on everyone she encounters.





# AMA MMAKOSHA MAHAFHA

Nurturing future advocates

**A**dvocate Ama Mmakosha Mahafha is a rising legal force from Limpopo, distinguished by her commitment to excellence, mentorship and public service. At just 31 years old, she is already shaping the future of the legal profession through both practice and teaching. Admitted as an advocate in December 2019, Ama has made a meaningful contribution to the profession in a relatively short time. From 2022 to 2024, she served as an Instructor at the Law Society of South Africa's School for Legal Practice in Polokwane. Since 2023, she has further extended her impact by mentoring junior advocates at the Limpopo Society of Advocates. In July 2025, Ama took on her first advocacy training role as a Junior Trainer under the General Council of the Bar of South Africa. Alongside her professional practice, she serves on the boards of the Limpopo Economic Development Agency and its subsidiary, Corridor Mining Resources Proprietary Limited. Within the Limpopo Society of Advocates, she is an active member of the Pro Bono Committee and the Pupilage Committee. Ama has participated in notable public speaking and panel engagements, including the "100 Years of Women" event at the Polokwane High Court, one-day sessions with the National Prosecuting Authority and the Black Lawyers Association in Polokwane, as well as engagements with universities. Ama exemplifies purpose-driven leadership and emerging excellence, positioning her as a compelling candidate for the 100 South African Shining Stars 2025.



# VERONICA MUKWEVHO

Bringing law closer to the people

Veronica Mukwevho is driven by a deep conviction that justice should be accessible, dignified and healing for all and has committed her life to bringing the law closer to the people who need it most. During her university years, Veronica distinguished herself through sustained service and advocacy. She worked with the University of the Western Cape Law Clinic and Ndifuna Ukwazi, a public interest law organisation. Her commitment to social impact also saw her volunteering with UNICEF, serving as an HIV and AIDS Peer Educator, and mentoring fellow students through the Academic Top Achievers Programme, Golden Key and Career Services. In her final year of study, she received the top award for Preparation for Legal Practice and completed a research paper on refugee rights, drawing attention to the urgent need for stronger protections for displaced persons. Now a Candidate Attorney, Veronica is gaining experience in complex legal matters while continuing her service beyond formal practice. She serves as a legal volunteer for RISE Against Domestic Violence, is a mentee at Bathuseng Legal, and is a Young AFSA member, contributing to the advancement of arbitration and mediation among young professionals. Guided by faith, academic excellence and an unwavering commitment to community, Veronica embodies purpose-driven leadership. Her vision of a South Africa where legal knowledge heals, mentorship empowers, and young people light the way positions her as a compelling contender for the 100 South African Shining Stars.



# KHOLOFELO MPHAHLELE

Advancing equality, dignity and accountability

**K**holofelo Mphahlele is a dedicated paralegal at SECTION27 whose work exemplifies legal justice in action for South Africa's most marginalised communities. Through compassion, skill and unwavering commitment, she continues to bridge the gap between the law and the people it is meant to serve. Since 2022, Kholofelo has played a pivotal role in raising awareness around the rights and healthcare needs of children with craniofacial conditions. Her work has ensured that the voices of these children and their families are heard in policy and public health spaces, bringing national attention to a group that has long been overlooked. Through her advocacy, she has contributed to efforts promoting access to treatment and protection from discrimination. In addition, Kholofelo has been instrumental in supporting Omama Bemvelo, a grassroots movement of rural women advocating for environmental justice. She has assisted the movement with legal advocacy, drafting submissions and strengthening their capacity to engage effectively with government and legal systems. Her work has empowered women to assert their constitutional rights and defend their communities against harmful environmental practices. Through her people-centred approach and commitment to social justice, Kholofelo demonstrates the transformative power of paralegal work in driving systemic change from the ground up. Her contribution to advancing equality, dignity and accountability makes her a deserving nominee for the 100 South African Shining Stars.



## PREVIN VEDAN

At the frontline of rights-based legal advocacy

**P**revin Vedan is an admitted attorney with a strong record in high-stakes constitutional, labour and human rights litigation. Appearing across forums from the High Court to the CCMA, he represents clients whose voices are too often muted by systemic inequality. His work has addressed unlawful arrests, pension disputes, housing injustices and discrimination matters, placing him at the frontline of rights-based legal advocacy. For Previn, justice extends far beyond the courtroom. He actively uses media, writing and community engagement to demystify the law and make it accessible to the public it is meant to serve. Through his leadership within the Justice Commission, he has helped build a vital bridge between ordinary citizens and complex legal systems. Grounded in a people-centred vision of the law, Previn is committed to reshaping legal practice into a tool for empowerment rather than exclusion. His work reflects a clear purpose: to ensure that justice in South Africa is not merely a right on paper, but a lived and tangible reality for all. In 2022, Previn was the victim of a violent attack that left him disabled. “The physical toll and adjustments to my new adaptive lifestyle necessitated a period of healing and reflection,” he says. “By listening more than speaking, observing more than acting, I witnessed firsthand the persistent struggles for equitable housing and land rights in South Africa. These experiences reaffirmed my belief that the fight for dignity and justice is far from over.”



# LIZIWE NOMPUMZA

A catalyst for justice and transformation

**B**orn and raised in Daveyton, 27-year-old Liziwe Nompumza is steadily emerging as one of South Africa's most dynamic young leaders. An admitted attorney of the High Court of South Africa, she is the founder and director of LA Nompumza Attorneys, a Johannesburg-based firm grounded in excellence and community-centred service. A proud University of Johannesburg alumna, she completed a BA in Law in 2018 and an LLB in 2020, and later completed the LSSA Board Director Programme. Driven by purpose, she offers free legal services to victims of domestic violence in Gauteng. With more than seven years of entrepreneurial experience, she is passionate about empowerment and mentorship. Liziwe is also the founder of the Nompumza Lighthouse Foundation and leads Queendom Hair and Beauty. Her leadership has earned both local and global recognition, including being named a 2025 Sunday World Unsung Hero, an AWE 2021 graduate, an IWF YLC-IDEAL 2023 alumna, and a finalist for the 2025 IMM Entrepreneur of the Year Award. More than a businesswoman, she is a catalyst for justice and transformation.



# LANCE MYBURGH

Expanding access to justice

**D**riven by a passion for justice and storytelling, Lance Myburgh is building a career that bridges law, advocacy, and media. A law student, tutor, and active member of the Rhodes University Law Clinic, Myburgh uses his knowledge to help expand access to justice for those too often silenced. Through his role as a mentor and student leader in Rhodes Community Engagement, he supports matric learners from Mary Waters and Ntsika schools in Makhanda, helping them believe in possibilities beyond poverty and inequality. His leadership extends beyond classrooms and courtrooms. As a filmmaker and senior videographer for Rhodes Sports Media, he uses storytelling to spotlight resilience — from cultural preservation documentaries to projects advocating for free healthcare. His impact has been recognised through selection among Rhodes University’s Top 120 students, a scholarship to the African Investigative Journalism Conference, and an invitation to speak on Deutsche Welle about inequality in South Africa. He notes that naming him a Shining Star would not celebrate him, but would amplify the causes he fights for every day.



## MYRON SEA

Dedicated to community upliftment

**M**yron Sea is a dynamic legal leader whose impact reaches far beyond the courtroom. As one of the youngest directors at Fluxmans Inc., he has built a reputation for excellence in commercial litigation, business rescue, and criminal defence. He has played a pivotal role in landmark matters, including the Phumelela Gaming & Leisure and West Pack Lifestyle business rescues — both recognised as South African Business Rescue Transactions of the Year. These interventions not only saved companies but also preserved thousands of jobs and set new industry standards. Recognised by INSOL International as a future leader of South Africa, Sea is deeply committed to mentorship and transformation, empowering young practitioners and championing access to justice regardless of background or means. His pro bono work for Simcha Tikkun and the Men's Council of South Africa reflects his dedication to community upliftment. Soon to be appointed a commissioner in the Small Claims Court, he continues expanding access to justice at the grassroots level. A cancer survivor who continues to battle the disease with courage, Sea proves that personal hardship cannot diminish professional excellence. Through thought leadership and impactful legal writing, he embodies resilience, service, and vision.



# LESEGO MAKHWENKWE

Candidate attorney & emerging labour law scholar

**L**esego Makhwenkwe is redefining what it means to be a young legal professional in South Africa. In a field often associated with pressure and hardship, he is proving that being a candidate attorney can also be a journey of excellence, leadership and remarkable growth. Since beginning his candidacy, Lesego has made an extraordinary impact both inside and outside the firm. He has presented on complex labour law topics at major platforms, including the prestigious six-day South African Law Teachers Conference, where he shared the stage with some of the country's most senior legal scholars. His academic journey continues with an LLM in Labour Law at the University of Pretoria, reflecting his drive to master his craft. In 2024, Lesego's leadership and dedication were recognised when he received a Future Leader Award and was appointed as a Peer Coach for candidate attorneys at Motsoeneng Bill Attorneys. His ability to mentor others while excelling in his own career sets him apart as a role model in the legal profession. Achieving all of this within just two years is nothing short of groundbreaking. Lesego's story sends a powerful message to aspiring legal practitioners: success, impact and purpose are possible even at the earliest stages of a career.



04

**POLITICS &  
GOVERNANCE**



# NKOSIKHONA SWAARTBOOI

Pioneering new approaches to activism

**F**or more than 15 years, Nkosikhona Swartbooï has been at the forefront of organising and building movements within South Africa's black and coloured working-class communities. His leadership has consistently connected community struggles with systemic change – whether as a founder of Reclaim the City, as a leader within the Social Justice Coalition, or through his years of work with Ndifuna Ukwazi. Beyond housing and service-delivery struggles, Nkosikhona has pioneered new approaches to activism. As the founder of Role Models NPC, he uses sport to combat GBV and support youth mental health. Through the Movement for Care, he champions municipality-level, care-centred strategies that reimagine local democracy. In 2023, he launched the Right to Play Campaign, advocating for inclusive play parks and rational standards that protect children's right to play. His work also features in the Mother City documentary, which follows Cape Town's housing struggles. A Ford Global Fellow and consultant to the Bertha Challenge Fellowship, he mentors activists confronting disinformation and the climate crisis. Swartbooï's journey reflects an unwavering belief that care, inclusion, and collaboration can transform South Africa into a truly equitable society



# TUMELO LETLOJANE

A transformative impact in local governance

**F**rom manager to chief financial officer, Tumelo Letlojane has demonstrated exceptional leadership, strategic vision, and an unwavering commitment to public service. He has served with distinction across Ratlou, Masilonyana, Rustenburg, and Lesedi Local Municipalities, where he has driven financial accountability, governance reform, and meaningful service delivery improvements. His innovative approach has streamlined financial processes, strengthened oversight, and ensured compliance with complex regulatory frameworks — delivering tangible benefits for local communities. Tumelo leads by example, mentoring emerging public-sector professionals and fostering a culture of integrity, professionalism, and ethical leadership. His career reflects a transformative impact in municipal governance, combining technical excellence with strategic leadership to advance transparency, efficiency, and sustainable development. Letlojane notes that recognition as a Young Shining Star would honour not only his achievements, but also his growing influence in shaping South Africa's next generation of public-sector leaders.



# DENISE JANSE VAN RENSBURG

Embodying the essence of servant leadership

**D**enise Janse van Rensburg embodies the essence of servant leadership. As Mrs Commonwealth South Africa Charity Queen 2025 and a PR councillor in Boksburg, she dedicates her time and energy far beyond the council chambers to address real community needs. Through ongoing clean-up drives, food and clothing support, and strong advocacy for improved service delivery, she has positively impacted hundreds of families. Her unwavering commitment to protecting the vulnerable — especially children — sets her apart. Denise has bravely intervened in sensitive child abuse cases, working closely with welfare organisations to safeguard those most at risk. A natural bridge-builder, she unites residents, NGOs, and local government to create sustainable, lasting change. Known for her integrity, transparency, and approachability, she has earned the trust of her community. Denise leads by example, showing that leadership is grounded in service, not status — and inspiring young women to use their voices boldly.



## DR BENJAMIN RAPANYANE

A powerful voice in African political studies

**D**r Benjamin Rapanyane is a senior lecturer (PhD) in Political Science at North-West University and the immediate past Head of the Department of Political Studies and International Relations. One of the youngest Political Science PhD holders in South Africa, he serves on the editorial board of the African Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies and the advisory board of the Centre for Geopolitical Security and Strategy. He was recently appointed as an advisory member to NWU's Institutional Forum. At just 29, he is also a member of the Scientific Committee of NWU's Afrocentric Governance of Public Affairs research entity. His influence is reflected in 619 Google Scholar citations (as of 14 March 2025), drawn from 80 journal articles, book chapters, and book reviews published between 2019 and 2025 — evidence of both impact and consistent academic output. A dedicated supervisor, he currently mentors eight master's students and two PhD candidates, and recently celebrated a master's graduate who completed cum laude in May 2025. Dr Rapanyane stands out as an exceptional scholar and a powerful voice in African political studies.



## LEMARCO MITCHELL

Transparent leadership and proven results

**L**emarco Mitchell is a young leader shaping the future of politics and governance in South Africa. An admitted attorney and dedicated public servant, he applies his legal and policy expertise to strengthen government services that directly impact communities. As advisor to the MMC for Human Settlements in Ekurhuleni, he supported the development and implementation of policies that improved housing and infrastructure for vulnerable residents. As chairperson of Joburg Metrobus, he spearheaded the Automated Fare Collection System and Eye on the Bus initiatives — boosting monthly revenue by R3 million and improving commuter safety. At the national level, Mitchell served as Director for Cabinet and Parliament in the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture, where he played a pivotal role in the repatriation of the bodies of South Africa’s liberation heroes – bringing closure to families and deepening national pride. Now chief of staff in Johannesburg’s Department of Roads and Transport, he oversees governance and operations that enhance infrastructure and service delivery for millions. His transparent leadership and proven results make him a standout candidate in Politics and Governance.

POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE



# ADVICE TSHIKANI CHUMA

A tireless fighter for the voiceless

**A**dvice Tshikani Chuma, 32, is an activist, philanthropist, and community leader dedicated to uplifting underprivileged communities across Gauteng. For years, he has volunteered with numerous non-profit organisations to reach as many vulnerable people as possible. As a founding member of the Swakoteka Foundation, he helps students from poor communities navigate higher education applications. At the Thusong Youth Centre in Alexandra, he taught computer skills to unemployed youth and worked with Hands of Wisdom to source and facilitate donations – work later featured on SABC2. Now the provincial chair of the ActionSA Youth Forum in Gauteng, Chuma continues championing education as a tool to tackle social ills and economic challenges. He also serves as a PR councillor in the City of Johannesburg, advocating for youth empowerment and ethical leadership. A delegate in the Y20 Young Parliament and one of 17 fellows in the Futurelect Southern Region Leadership Programme, Chuma remains deeply rooted in his community – reviving township recreational culture, mentoring young people, and fighting tirelessly for the voiceless.



05

**ENVIRONMENT**





# MAMOSHIBUDI SEABI

Trailblazer in environmental innovation, community development

**M**amoshibudi Seabi is an exceptional nominee for the Shining Stars Awards, recognised for her innovation, leadership, and social impact. Through Green Thumb Composting — the socially responsible waste management company she founded — Mamoshibudi is tackling pressing environmental challenges while creating economic opportunities for local communities. Her leadership has been nothing short of remarkable. By building a successful business from the ground up, she has inspired others with her passion for environmental sustainability, proving that entrepreneurship can drive both profit and purpose. Seabi's work extends beyond business. Through Green Thumb Composting, she promotes food security, indigenous rights, and environmental stewardship, directly benefiting local communities. Her initiatives demonstrate how sustainable practices can create meaningful change — empowering people while protecting the planet. With her vision, determination, and tangible impact, Seabi stands out as a trailblazer in environmental innovation and community development.



# DR THEMBEKA KIM MTETWA

Safeguarding biodiversity, shaping wildlife health

**D**r Thembeke Kim Mtetwa is an inspiring scientist whose work bridges conservation, innovation, and resilience. Growing up in Soweto and attending a disadvantaged school, she overcame immense odds to become a leading wildlife physiologist. Today, as a lecturer and researcher at the University of Pretoria, she pioneers solutions to protect South Africa's iconic species, collaborating with experts from Aarhus University in Denmark. Her groundbreaking research on the white rhinoceros introduced a novel method of using the rhino's third eyelid for pulse oximeter attachment during immobilisation. This simple, life-saving innovation supports accurate oxygen monitoring during high-risk procedures such as dehorning and relocation — directly improving rhino survival and strengthening anti-poaching efforts. Dr Mtetwa's journey, from humble beginnings to PhD holder and role model for women in STEM, reflects determination, excellence, and impact. Her work safeguards biodiversity while inspiring the next generation of scientists, proving that talent thrives despite adversity. She is not only shaping wildlife health but also helping build a better society through her contributions.



## PHILADELPHIA VUTIVI NGOBENI

Pioneering innovative wastewater treatment

**P**hiladelphia Vutivi Ngobeni, 34, is a visionary young leader in climate change and environmental sustainability. With over a decade of experience in the water sector, she is committed to advancing inclusive access to water and sanitation while promoting climate resilience. A chemical engineer pursuing a PhD in civil engineering, she pioneers innovative solutions for sustainable industrial wastewater treatment. Her research on tannery effluent management supports resource recovery and strengthens the circular bioeconomy, generating both environmental and economic impact. Ngobeni serves as an executive member of the Organisation for Women in Science for the Developing World and Young Water Professionals South Africa, where she drives outreach, sector engagement, and policy influence. She actively champions young professionals and women in science, shaping national conversations on sustainability and climate action through conferences and media platforms. Her work empowers marginalised communities, promotes environmental stewardship, and has earned national and international recognition — reflecting her growing influence as a young leader.

ENVIRONMENT



# NONJABULISO DLAMINI

Inspiring a passion for effective waste management

**N**onjabuliso Dlamini is a dedicated Environmental Health Practitioner whose work at Sizwe Tropical Disease Hospital extends beyond healthcare delivery into environmental sustainability. Through innovative environmental health projects and a deep commitment to conservation, she has positively impacted the hospital, the surrounding community, and public health outcomes. In September 2024, Dlamini participated in the World Environmental Health commemoration, organised by the National Department of Health's Environmental Health Directorate, showcasing her facility's work on waste management — an important pillar in reducing emissions, adapting to climate change, and working towards net-zero landfill waste. An active member of Greenpeace Africa, she advocates for communities living in harmony with nature and for environmental and social justice. Nonjabuliso is also a committed mentor to interns and University of Johannesburg students, inspiring environmental passion and public health protection through hands-on projects. Her collaborative approach unites staff at all levels, from general workers to the CEO, promoting teamwork, a positive culture, and environmentally responsible healthcare that safeguards patients, staff, and the community.



## BULELANI NZUZO

Building a community-led model of environmental stewardship

**B**ulelani Nzuzo is the founder of Keep Mbekweni Clean, a grassroots organisation tackling illegal dumping and promoting environmental conservation in Mbekweni, Paarl. Alongside Zikho Sawula, a tourism student at CPUT, and Khanyisile Robin Magobolo, co-founder and managing director of Godfrey's Driving School, he is building a community-led model of environmental stewardship. Through clean-up campaigns, school engagement, and awareness drives, Bulelani has inspired more than 100 households to recycle at home, encouraged youth to adopt sustainable habits, and promoted waste education in partnership with the Cape Winelands District Municipality. His initiatives have transformed dumping hotspots into safe, vibrant spaces, supported by a network of over 40 active volunteers. His impact has been recognised with the Blue Ribbon Kasie Pride Hero (2023), 100 Young Mandelas of the Future (2024), and the Drakenstein Business Chamber Award for Best Community Project (2025). Next, he plans to establish Mbekweni's first in-school recycling swap shop, exchanging recyclables for essentials. Nzuzo exemplifies how grassroots action drives lasting environmental change.



## ZWIVHUYA MULAUDZI

Fostering youth empowerment in the green economy

**Z**wivhuya Mulaudzi is a distinguished leader in sustainable development and environmental stewardship. As Chief Operating Officer of the Universal Greening Organisation (UGO), he has played a pivotal role in advancing the organisation’s mission to foster innovation, skills development, and youth empowerment in the green economy. Under his leadership, UGO — accredited by UNCCD and UNEP — has grown into a respected platform over its 10-year existence. Mulaudzi has driven initiatives such as the International Green Economy Summit, the “1 Million Trees” project, and graduate fellowship and exchange programmes, exposing young people to international best practices in sustainability. His work extends beyond environmental protection, actively supporting youth in agriculture, entrepreneurship, and skills development — creating pathways for emerging leaders to contribute meaningfully to South Africa’s green transition. Mulaudzi’s dedication, innovation, and ability to mobilise diverse stakeholders reflect integrity, passion, and a commitment to excellence.

06

**BUSINESS &  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP**





## BUYISWA TWALA

Healing and restoring Southern Africa's soil

**B**uyiswa Twala is the founder of Agrigreat Soiltech and Envirocare, a business that is increasing food security in South Africa through the manufacture of organic fertilisers that reverse soil degradation. The company restores degraded soil through an advanced fermentation process that converts biowaste into crop-specific nutrients. Agrigreat Soiltech diverts waste from landfills, reduces carbon emissions, and currently operates a waste conversion site in Alexandra township, diverting approximately 10 tons of organic waste a month. The business has also developed Agribins — secure containers designed for organic waste from retail stores — supporting sustainable waste management and the circular economy. The company's soil restoration formula was awarded by the World Food Programme in 2022 and recognised by the United Nations as one of Africa's best youth-led initiatives. Buyiswa has exhibited her innovations at the BV Global Summit in Germany, and is expanding operations into Malawi, Lesotho, and Mozambique, with a nursery opening planned for January 2026. Buyiswa is also the brains behind the Agrigreat Stem Club in townships. The club's mission is to introduce youth to STEM fields and the innovative technologies that are shaping them through activities like science fairs and career fairs, which she hosts in partnership with local banks, engineering firms, and other businesses.

BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP



## NOMBULELO NOLUTHANDO VILAKAZI

Farmer & spaza shop owner

**N**oluthando Vilakazi is a vibrant young entrepreneur whose passion for the soil and commitment to community upliftment are transforming the landscape of her hometown. As both a dedicated farmer and a thriving spaza shop owner, she is building a powerful model of rural entrepreneurship rooted in hard work, resilience and purpose. Nombulelo is the co-founder of KVM Agri-Solution, a dynamic agricultural enterprise based in Phillip Farm, Newcastle, KwaZulu-Natal. With a strong foundation in both crop production and poultry farming, she has played a pivotal role in shaping KVM Agri-Solution's vision: to combat food insecurity, promote sustainability, and empower local youth through entrepreneurship. Through her agricultural work, Nombulelo not only grows food — she grows opportunity. Her fields have become spaces of learning and hope, where she inspires young people to see agriculture as a path to dignity, innovation and economic independence. By mentoring emerging farmers and encouraging youth participation in food production, she is helping cultivate a new generation of agricultural changemakers. Her spaza shop stands as another pillar of impact, providing reliable, community-driven services and demonstrating what strong, locally owned businesses can achieve. Her success has become a source of pride for her community and a reminder that meaningful change often begins with one determined individual.

BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP



## AVISHEK BUSVIAH

Vice President, offshore company

**A**vishek Busviah is a global business leader whose vision, mentorship and strategic insight are shaping international markets. As Vice President of Business Development at Business Summit, a leading offshore company, he has consistently demonstrated the ability to navigate complex business landscapes while creating opportunities that foster collaboration, growth and innovation in the investment industry. Avishek has been instrumental in forging meaningful partnerships, connecting investors, ambassadors and VIPs at high-level engagements. Notably, he played a pivotal role in hosting the Investors Summit, a global platform designed to promote entrepreneurship, collaboration and cross-border business opportunities. Avishek's influence reflects a rare blend of business acumen and visionary leadership. Through his work, he is not only driving economic impact but also inspiring future leaders to engage globally, think strategically and lead with purpose. At Business Summit, he leads a team of professionals who are dedicated to creating and executing innovative strategies for expanding the firm's global reach and impact. His mission is to help entrepreneurs and business owners achieve their goals and scale their businesses, while also creating positive social and environmental outcomes. Avishek is passionate about building something out of nothing, and is always eager to connect with people who share his vision and values.

BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP



# ZIZIPHO NTOBONGWANA

Founder, Sheba Feminine

**Z**izipho Ntobongwana is a changemaker transforming menstrual health and social impact in South Africa. As the founder of Sheba Feminine, she has created a line of organic, biodegradable menstrual products that do more than meet a need — they respect the environment and restore dignity to those who use them. What sets Sheba apart is that it is more than a product company; it is a movement. Through the “Pay for a Pal’s Pads” programme, Zizi has built a sustainable model that tackles period poverty while providing menstrual health education. By combining access with awareness, she is ensuring that young women and girls can manage their periods safely, confidently and with dignity. Beyond her innovative products, Zizi is changing the conversation around periods. Through social media, storytelling and advocacy, she is breaking taboos and encouraging open dialogue about reproductive health — a conversation that has long been silenced. Zizi’s leadership proves that African women can build businesses that are innovative, inclusive and globally competitive. She is not only scaling a successful enterprise but also creating lasting social impact, inspiring a generation, and reshaping menstrual health in South Africa and beyond.



# NOMCEBO NZIMAKWE

Founder, Sky Drop

**N**omcebo Nzimakwe, founder of Sky Drop, is a young entrepreneur whose journey embodies resilience, innovation and purpose-driven leadership. Growing up in a community where water scarcity was a daily struggle, she transformed a personal challenge into a groundbreaking solution: producing clean, safe drinking water. Through her research, she learned that there was an eco-friendly technology that can be used to produce portable water through atmospheric water generators. Through Sky Drop, based in Gamalakhe, Port Shepstone, KwaZulu-Natal, Nomcebo has built more than a business — she has built hope. Her bottled water, refill services and prepaid solar-powered water stations provide dignity and access to safe water for communities that often go without. Beyond products, she creates opportunities for youth, empowers women, and helps ensure that even remote households can access affordable, potable water. Nomcebo attended the two-day South African Future Trust summit last year and says, “the insights, inspiration and connections I gained from networking with so many passionate entrepreneurs were phenomenal”. What makes Nomcebo truly remarkable is not only her innovation but her heart. She leads with humility, courage and a steadfast belief that business should serve people. Despite challenges, she continues to rise, proving that entrepreneurship is as much about purpose as it is about profit.



## CINDY MKWANAZI

Founder, Crystal Nature

**C**indy Mkwanazi is a visionary entrepreneur transforming both business and community development in Soweto. As the founder of Crystal Nature, she produces eco-friendly, affordable cleaning products that improve everyday living while promoting sustainability and environmental responsibility. What makes Cindy especially inspiring is her dedication to empowering others. She actively trains and mentors unemployed youth and aspiring entrepreneurs, teaching practical skills in detergent manufacturing so they can create their own opportunities. Her business is more than a brand — it is a platform for community upliftment and social impact. Cindy's achievements reflect her remarkable drive. She has been recognised as Manufacturing Founder of the Year (Under 30) and listed among the Mail & Guardian's 200 Young South Africans. Yet despite her accolades, she remains grounded and committed to making a tangible difference in her community. Cindy's passion, resilience and ability to turn challenges into opportunities make her a true role model. Through her work, she is not only building a successful business but also shaping a future where young people can thrive



## PATRICIA BELENG

Driving change in the agricultural sector

**P**atricia Beleng, founder of Buhlebenkosi Agri Productions, is a passionate and ambitious young agricultural entrepreneur driving change in South Africa's farming sector. After resigning as a security officer, Patricia launched Buhlebenkosi Agri Productions in 2022, starting in her mother's garage with 100 broilers per cycle, while strictly adhering to biosecurity standards. As demand grew, she secured a 19-hectare farm equipped with 27,000 broiler houses, 5,000 layer houses, an abattoir, and a hatchery, scaling operations with support from SEDFA, the NYDA, Standard Bank, and Sasol. She later expanded into vegetable production, diversifying her impact in agriculture. Committed to mentorship, she is currently developing 15 students from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, providing hands-on agricultural training. Patricia's commitment also extends to social responsibility and supporting charity initiatives for organisations assisting blind people. Through innovation, leadership, and community engagement, she exemplifies the power of entrepreneurship in transforming agriculture and creating opportunity.



# MASASE PRUDENCE MUTSHEKWANE

A role model for aspiring entrepreneurs

**M**asase Prudence Mutshekwane is an entrepreneur whose leadership and innovation have made a lasting impact on communities across South Africa. As the founder of the MphoD Foundation and Zion Group, she has created sustainable platforms that empower women, youth, and local communities through skills development, business training, and entrepreneurship opportunities. Her initiatives enable individuals to generate income, achieve financial independence, and contribute to local economic growth. Masase has also leveraged media, technology, and creative solutions to reach wider audiences and scale her impact — demonstrating a rare blend of business acumen and social innovation. Her achievements reflect more than entrepreneurial success: they embody a deep commitment to uplifting others and nurturing the next generation of leaders. Through creativity, dedication, and tangible impact, she has become a role model for aspiring entrepreneurs.



# ZINHLE PRECIOUS SKHOSANA

Transforming agriculture into a tool for empowerment

**Z**inhle Precious Skhosana is a passionate young farmer whose dedication to agriculture is matched by her commitment to community empowerment. With both passion and formal training in farming, Zinhle approaches her work with innovation and a clear awareness of climate change and its impact on food security. Through her farming initiatives, she has created employment opportunities in her community and actively mentors young people, inspiring them to pursue careers in agriculture. She promotes the “One Home, One Garden” initiative by donating seeds to households and encouraging self-sufficiency. Demonstrating a commitment to early education, Zinhle has adopted two crèches, teaching children how to plant and understand that food grows from the soil, not the shop. She also donates sanitary pads to a nearby high school, addressing both health and dignity challenges. Zinhle’s mix of innovation, education, and service makes her a true Shining Star — transforming agriculture into a tool for empowerment and sustainability



# ALWANDE MSWELI

Removing barriers with innovative solutions

**A**lwande Msweli is a visionary entrepreneur whose work is expanding opportunities for young people and communities in South Africa. Recognising that entrepreneurship is about impact as much as profit, he has developed innovative solutions that address pressing social and economic challenges. Through EduRoute, Alwande is building a platform to help matric learners navigate university applications, career guidance, funding opportunities, and mental health support — removing barriers that often prevent access to higher education. While the platform is still in development, he has personally assisted numerous learners, empowering them to make informed decisions about their futures. He is also developing an agricultural app that reached the top 20 in the MTN Innovation Digital Challenge, connecting farmers to broader markets and providing resources on production, financial literacy, and sustainability. This initiative supports food security, market access, and economic growth for small-scale farmers, particularly in rural communities.



07

**ARTS &  
CULTURE**



# MASHUDU RAVELE

Author, praise poet, publisher

**M**ashudu Ravele is a vibrant young leader and a rising star in the arts and culture landscape. As an author, praise poet, publisher, and cultural advocate, she has dedicated her voice and platform to building a more just, inclusive, and equitable society. Her work uplifts communities, celebrates identity, and preserves the cultural richness of indigenous languages. Mashudu is the founder of GoYouth Publishing House, committed to empowering emerging voices, and Tshisima Tsha Dora Foundation, a registered NPO devoted to promoting and teaching indigenous languages. A proud speaker of Tshivenda, Mashudu champions the importance of writing and creating in her mother tongue. Her advocacy for prioritising indigenous languages reflects her determination to protect cultural heritage and ensure its continuity for future generations. Her collaborative work with respected organisations demonstrates her ability to unite partners in pursuit of shared cultural and educational goals. These partnerships highlight her growing influence and her talent for mobilising meaningful community engagement. Mashudu's presence in the literature and arts space serves as an inspiration. She encourages others to celebrate who they are, to honour their roots, and to strive for excellence in every endeavour. Mashudu represents the promise and passion of a new generation of cultural custodians. Her advocacy, artistry, and commitment to community upliftment position her as a beacon of positive change.



# ANGELINAH KEMANE

Founder & CEO – Creatives Elevate South Africa

**A**ngelinah Kemane is a dynamic young leader reshaping South Africa's creative and cultural industries. She stands at the forefront of youth development in the arts as the founder and CEO of Creatives Elevate South Africa, a nonprofit dedicated to curating youth-focused development programmes that inspire, inform, and equip young people, particularly those from underserved communities, to build sustainable and fulfilling careers in the creative sector. In her role as programme coordinator at the Arts & Culture Trust, Angelinah leads the prestigious ACT Nyoloha Scholarship Programme, a national initiative that has trained nearly 200 emerging creatives and provided life-changing scholarships to talented young artists across the country. Her passion for community upliftment is further reflected in her grassroots work through the Rhoo Hlatshwayo Arts Centre, where her initiatives have tackled literacy challenges in Ekurhuleni schools while simultaneously creating employment opportunities for young creatives. Angelinah's impact reaches far beyond South Africa's borders. She spearheaded the inaugural BRICS+ Creatives & Cultural Forum, which reached an extraordinary audience of over 16 million global viewers. Recognised with the City of Ekurhuleni Youth Legacy Award and celebrated as a community changemaker, Angelinah embodies the transformative power of arts-driven development.



## ONALERONA SEANE

Poet and cultural changemaker

Onalerona Seane is a powerful young voice transforming poetry into a tool for justice, healing, and social action. His work fearlessly amplifies the stories of survivors and brings national attention to the urgent fight against gender-based violence in South Africa. In 2020, Onalerona launched Last Seen, a project that offers poetic expression to survivors of GBV, turning their lived experiences into narratives that demand empathy and accountability. By 2021, he was collaborating with the Uyinene Mrwetyana Foundation for the Post Office 2 Parliament petition handover, and in 2022, he performed during the United Nations' 16 Days of Activism, using his craft to ignite public consciousness. His influence expanded in 2023 through a social media campaign with Missing Children South Africa. Later that same year, he became the first Global South Contributor to Global Citizen's Emerging Creatives Program, spotlighting the transformative power of youth-led storytelling. In 2024, his artistic excellence and social impact were further recognised with a nomination at the National Arts and Culture Awards. In 2025, his leadership reached new heights when he was selected, out of 58,000 global applicants, for the prestigious Mandela Washington Fellowship. Through his words and unwavering commitment to justice, Onalerona stands as a beacon of courage and a reminder of the enduring power of art to drive social transformation.



## BOKAMOSO EDWARD NKUNYANE

Poet, writer, novelist, activist

**B**okamoso Edward Nkunyane is shaping the future of South Africa's creative landscape through poetry, writing, and activism. Born and raised in Taung, Bokamoso believes deeply in the power of poetry and writing as meaningful solutions to the challenges faced by society. A committed activist against GBV, the writer, novelist, aspiring actor, and published poet, uses his craft as a form of healing and empowerment. His work has helped many people navigate depression and anxiety, offering comfort, reflection, and solidarity. Bokamoso's growing body of work includes his books, *Shades of Emotions* and *Mavuso*, as well as his contributions to *Kgang tsa Tlhaping* and the *Bua Poetry Anthology* for North-West University students. His poem *Streets of Jozi*, included in the *Bua* anthology, was reviewed by both Stellenbosch University and UNISA, reflecting his rising recognition within academic and literary circles. Guided by a belief in heritage and community upliftment, Bokamoso is committed to giving young people platforms to express their talent and craft. Through his dedication to literature and the art of poetry, he demonstrates a powerful commitment to building a nation that reads, reflects, and grows together. Bokamoso stands as a deserving candidate for this honour, which will recognise his impact in advancing literature, heritage, and artistic expression within society.



# NOLUTHANDO NONDALANA

Creative Leader, arts advocate, community Uplifter

**N**oluthando Nondalana is noticed for the remarkable impact she makes in her community through the arts. Noluthando is a creative force whose passion and commitment uplift and empower others, especially the youth, by creating meaningful opportunities in film, radio, and community-driven projects. Her work extends well beyond her own artistic journey. Noluthando is dedicated to opening doors for others to shine. Through storytelling, training programmes, and impactful arts events, she has inspired many young people to believe in themselves and to recognise the arts as a pathway to purpose, expression, and possibility. What makes Noluthando truly exceptional is her belief in art as a catalyst for change and healing. She provides platforms where individuals can express themselves, discover their voices, and build confidence. Her unwavering commitment to community development through the arts continues to transform lives and bring hope where it is needed most. Noluthando is already a shining light in her community as a leader whose passion and dedication illuminate the potential of those around her. This recognition would honour the profound and lasting impact she continues to make through her creativity, compassion, and service.



## Dr GRANT SNYMAN

Clarinetist, conductor, educator, researcher

**D**r Grant Snyman is a dynamic young leader whose influence resonates far beyond the concert stage. A nationally and internationally acclaimed clarinetist, conductor, educator, and researcher, he is passionately shaping the future of music in South Africa. His work is dedicated to nurturing young talent, reviving ensembles, and commissioning new works that amplify the voices of Southern African composers. Through his PhD research, Grant is preserving and promoting local music heritage while providing essential pedagogical tools for future generations. Grant's leadership extends across both community and academic spheres. From lecturing at Nelson Mandela University, mentoring students, and conducting orchestras to co-founding the award-winning Cape Reeds Clarinet Quintet, he consistently brings world-class music to diverse audiences while supporting under-resourced schools. His vision, grounded in excellence, inclusivity, and innovation, is reshaping South Africa's cultural landscape. He currently serves as Head of Music at Wynberg Boys' Junior School in Cape Town, continuing to inspire the next generation of musicians. As a Shining Star, Grant embodies resilience, creativity, and service. His unwavering commitment to empowering youth through music education and his drive to elevate South African artistry on global stages mark him as an exceptional candidate, a true reflection of the spirit of a Shining Star.



## KAMOGELO RAPHADU

Cultural entrepreneur, theatre advocate, tourism innovator

**K**amogelo Raphadu is a visionary leader shaping South Africa's creative, cultural, and tourism landscapes. As co-founder of the Southern African Producers and Artistic Directors Network, Kamogelo led the organisation's first conference at the Market Theatre, in partnership with the Alex Theatre Company and Academy, fostering collaboration and professional growth for theatre leaders across the region. As founder and executive director of the Tembisa Tourism Network, Kamogelo is driving initiatives that strengthen partnerships between small and medium enterprises while positioning Tembisa as a thriving tourism hotspot. Kamogelo's leadership extends across the theatrical landscape as chairman of Project R NPO, which produces and facilitates theatre productions between South Africa and other countries in the SADC region, promoting cultural exchange and artistic collaboration. Recognised internationally, Kamogelo was a selected participant for the Atelier for Young Festival Managers, hosted by the Festival Academy as part of the European Festivals Association in Chemnitz, Germany. Locally, Kamogelo is deeply involved with the TX Theatre, a highly acclaimed theatre in Tembisa, helping to elevate its global reputation. Kamogelo demonstrates how creativity, leadership, and vision can transform communities, build networks, and shine a global spotlight on South African arts.



# MONGEZI NTSEBENZO

Morning show producer, mentor, youth advocate

**M**ongezi Ntsebenzo, a talented morning show producer at Newzroom Afrika, is transforming the future of South African journalism through his bold vision and dedication to uplifting young talent. During Youth Month, Mongezi went beyond his daily responsibilities by approaching Newzroom Afrika's management with a pioneering idea: to give aspiring young journalists the chance to host the morning show on the channel. This historic initiative marked a first for Newzroom Afrika and offered a powerful platform to celebrate and empower the youth. The broadcast was a resounding success, featuring a 21-year-old and a 14-year-old as co-hosts, both of whom carried the show with remarkable confidence and energy. Through this initiative, Mongezi showcased the capabilities of the younger generation while reinforcing Newzroom Afrika's commitment to nurturing future voices in journalism. More than a producer, Mongezi is a mentor, innovator, and advocate for youth empowerment. His creativity, leadership, and dedication have opened doors for aspiring journalists, demonstrating the impact that vision and passion can have in shaping the next generation. Mongezi stands out as a true shining star, one whose work continues to inspire, uplift, and transform lives.



# LLUYLE ARENDSE

Poet, author, community advocate

Lluyle Arendse is a poet, author, and community advocate from Great Brak River in the Western Cape, whose work fuses art, activism, and community engagement. He is best known for his debut poetry anthology, *Unspoken* (2021), which explores themes of mental health, rural identity, and the challenges facing young people in small towns. His poetry encourages introspection, empowerment, and resilience, inspiring youth to break free from limiting circumstances and embrace their potential. Lluyle has received national recognition, including nominations for the Young Writer of the Year (2022) and Most Innovative Young Artist (2023) awards from the Western Cape Department of Arts and Culture. Lluyle is deeply invested in community development. He served as e-Centre Manager at the Great Brak River Youth Café, providing digital training, entrepreneurship programmes, and life skills sessions for the youth aged. His work ensures young people have safe spaces to develop skills, pursue their dreams, and engage creatively. He also actively participates in local arts events and organises community events that promote local culture and address pressing social issues. Lluyle's work through poetry, mentorship, performances, workshops, and digital engagement addresses mental health, vulnerability, and resilience. By fusing poetry with purpose, performance with activism, and storytelling with service, Lluyle demonstrates the power of art to uplift, educate, and transform communities.



## ONDELA MLANDU

Communications specialist, multimedia strategist

Ondela Mlandu is a communications and multimedia specialist whose work bridges journalism, digital marketing, radio broadcasting, and corporate communications. She has dedicated her career to amplifying authentic African stories, ensuring they take space in boardrooms, newsrooms, and on digital platforms. She has led impactful communications at some of South Africa's most respected media outlets, including the Mail & Guardian, BONA, True Love, Women's Health, and Destiny, while bringing her voice and insight to national airwaves on Metro FM, Power FM, SAfm, 5FM, and 702. From producing digital content and hosting podcasts to managing campaigns and moderating conversations with leaders in business and culture, Ondela's work is always guided by the principle of aligning strategy with purpose. She consistently centres women, youth, and grassroots voices, using storytelling not just to reflect society but to shape it, and her leadership is recognised both locally and globally: Ondela is a Mandela Washington Fellow and a 2025 Desmond and Leah Tutu Foundation Leadership Fellow, bringing an international perspective with a deep understanding of local impact. She serves as Southern Africa Regional Champion in the World Economic Forum's Global Shapers Community. Ondela is a true Shining Star, using communication, creativity, and vision to inspire change, elevate voices, and make a lasting difference in South Africa and beyond.



# BONGANI NICHOLAS NGOMANE

Communications specialist, multimedia strategist

**B**ongani Nicholas Ngomane is a visionary theatre practitioner, researcher, and cultural leader whose work demonstrates the transformative power of arts, education, and activism in South Africa. Through performance and public ethnography, Bongani challenges social inequalities, amplifies marginalised voices, and fosters dialogue within township communities. His acclaimed projects, Mr President and Mr President II, earned seven Naledi Awards nominations and national recognition, creating spaces for unemployed youth, women, and people with disabilities to participate in the arts. By blending indigenous practices with contemporary performance, Bongani has shown how theatre can be both socially engaged and artistically innovative. As the founder of Stage Wizard, he has developed children's edutainment programmes, heritage projects, and theatre reviews that inspire new audiences and promote cultural literacy. His academic contributions, including award-winning research and publications, bridge the gap between scholarship and community empowerment, ensuring that knowledge serves social justice. Recognised nationally with the HSRC Emerging Researcher Award (2023) and featured widely in the media, Bongani continues to mentor young creatives and influence policy conversations in arts and culture. Bongani is a true Shining Star, an innovator whose vision and dedication continue to transform the cultural landscape and empower the next generation of South African creatives.



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**PHILANTHROPY**



## HALALI IMEDI

Youth leader, changemaker, community advocate

**H**alali Imedi, a 19-year-old from Ficksburg, Free State, is a remarkable young leader whose vision and compassion are transforming lives in her community. At just 15, Halali started an initiative to support underprivileged children, which has since grown to reach 40 children aged 1 to 16. She not only secures food and clothing donations but also teaches basic literacy and numeracy, offers motivation and emotional support, and creates safe, fun spaces through aerobics and sports like soccer and netball. Her leadership goes far beyond meeting basic needs; Halali is nurturing potential, building confidence, and proving that young women can be powerful changemakers in their communities. What sets her apart is her personal commitment: every weekend and during school holidays, she cooks meals not only for children but also for homeless people, ensuring the most vulnerable are cared for. Even though she does not personally celebrate Christmas, she prepares a festive meal every December 25th to bring joy and togetherness to those she serves. Guided by her principle, “Nurturing Potential, Unlocking Joy,” Halali has already transformed lives, inspiring children, young women, and the homeless alike. Her compassion, vision, and action at such a young age make her a deserving candidate to be recognised as one of South Africa’s Shining Stars.



## BONTLE AMANDA CHAUKE

Youth advocate, philanthropist, community leader

**B**ontle Amanda Chauke, 24, from Soshanguve, Pretoria, is a phenomenal young woman whose compassion, vision, and action are transforming the lives of children and youth. In 2019, during her matric year, Bontle founded Bontle Ke Botho, inspired by her own experiences with bullying and a desire to ensure future generations are motivated, supported, and empowered. The organisation now serves over 400 children and youth annually from underprivileged families, abusive homes, and child-headed households. Bontle's work spans feeding schemes, nutrition and health education, psychological support, arts and culture, sports, coaching, mentorship, skills development, and entrepreneurship programmes. She runs community outreaches, including soup kitchens, provides daily homework support and has adopted 20 families since 2022, providing them with monthly food parcels. Bontle promotes reading through two community book clubs, school visits, a "Gift a Child a Book" campaign, and reading and spelling competitions in indigenous languages, fostering a culture of literacy and love for reading among youth. She also hosts free youth camps, empowerment sessions, and mentorship programmes, guiding young women to start their own initiatives and supporting organisations in her community. Through Hope Hub Magazine, Bontle shares inspiring stories from her community, igniting hope and highlighting local changemakers. Her dedication, resourcefulness, and unwavering commitment to service make Bontle a true shining star.



## JESSICA MALEKA

Youth Leader, innovator, advocate for skills and mental health

Jessica Maleka is the National Director of the African Emerging Leaders Network in South Africa, where she mentors and manages 63 young leaders while serving as Director of Partnerships, sourcing experts and funding to expand the organisation's reach. Through her work at Pathfyndr, Jessica champions mental health and skills development. In 2025, the academy trained 169 young people in digital skills through free community workshops spanning six weeks. She secured a grant from the African Leadership Academy to establish a computer lab in Germiston, creating more opportunities for youth, and now partners with the Department of Social Development to further expand these initiatives. Jessica also runs a job seekers network of over 1,000 youth, actively connecting candidates to employment opportunities. Her ability to inspire and communicate has built an online following of more than 14,000 across social media platforms, amplifying her mission and engaging young South Africans nationwide. Her recent achievements include winning the Trace Academia Bootcamp, being a regional finalist in the EDHE Competition, being a Top 20 finalist in the 2025 EDHE & Absa Innovation Challenge, and being a Top 5 winner in the TCS Sustainathon. Jessica's leadership, innovation, and dedication are empowering youth, creating opportunities, and inspiring a generation to thrive.



## RETANG MAPHOTHOMA

Youth advocate, community Leader, STEM champion

**R**etang Maphothoma is the founder of Divine Community Association (DCA), a registered non-profit established in August 2019, and a passionate advocate for education and youth empowerment. She holds a BTech in Civil Engineering and is currently pursuing her master's in engineering at the Tshwane University of Technology. Growing up in a small, under-resourced village in Zebediela, Retang witnessed firsthand the challenges faced by vulnerable families and young people. Motivated to make a difference, she launched DCA to empower, encourage, and educate her community. Through DCA, Retang leads initiatives that create real impact: school visits and career expos expose learners to STEM opportunities, helping them make informed decisions about their futures. The organisation runs drives providing essential items such as sanitary towels and school shoes, including a campaign that donated over 70 pairs of shoes to Dipofung Primary School learners. Beyond education and welfare, DCA promotes community spirit through beauty pageants, talent shows, and modelling training, offering youth platforms to build confidence and showcase their talents. Retang's dedication, vision, and hands-on leadership continue to change lives, making her a true shining star whose work inspires hope, opportunity, and empowerment in her community.



# NOKUZOLA KAKAZA

Disability advocate, community leader, mentor

**N**okuzola Kakaza is a shining example of courage, resilience, and leadership, living with scoliosis and navigating life in a wheelchair. She has shattered stereotypes in pageantry, education, and community leadership, proving that disability is not inability. As the founder of the UniAfrica NPO and the face of the Khunwana & Tlathlageng Beauty communities. Her programmes tackle critical social issues, including teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, school dropout, and women's empowerment, equipping young women with the guidance, skills, and confidence to reach their full potential. Her work has earned national recognition, including Miss Congeniality & Public Choice 2023, the NYDA Trailblazer Free State Award 2023, and media features on SABC 2, Metro FM, and Tru FM. Beyond accolades, Nokuzola uses her platform to advocate for inclusivity and accessibility, inspiring others to challenge limitations and believe in their possibilities. For her unwavering commitment to disability advocacy, women's empowerment, and community upliftment, Nokuzola embodies the spirit of a true South African shining star.



## THEMBEKA JIYANE

Data professional, community leader, STEM advocate

**T**hembeke Jiyane is a young data professional and community leader whose journey is defined by resilience, vision, and impact. Recognised as a finalist for Young Data Professional of the Year 2025, she continues to represent South Africa on global platforms, speaking at international conferences such as Data Modelling Zone and DataFest. Her career in data has established her as a thought leader and a role model for young South Africans aspiring to excel in STEM and leadership. In 2018, Thembeke founded the Back2School programme under Blessed Child Empowerment Projects. What began as a small initiative supporting a handful of learners has grown into a structured annual programme, producing graduates and young professionals now thriving in the workforce. The programme goes beyond school resources, offering mentorship and support with university applications, bridging opportunities for learners who might otherwise be left behind. Thembeke's commitment to youth development extends to the Eskom Expo for Young Scientists, where she serves on the Johannesburg regional committee, judges projects, and mentors learners. In 2025 alone, five of her mentees progressed to the regional stage, a clear testament to her dedication to shaping South Africa's next generation of innovators.



## SIMILO SIYENGA

Youth leader, community advocate, changemaker

**S**imilo Siyenga is a passionate young leader whose work is transforming communities and empowering youth across South Africa. As the founder of M-Powerment Care and M-Powerment Recruitment, he has led initiatives that provide mentorship, educational support, and essential community services, including food relief programmes, reflecting a deep commitment to the people he serves. Over the past three years, his work has impacted over 15,000 lives, creating tangible and lasting change. Balancing his studies in quantity surveying and civil engineering, Similo demonstrates exceptional youthful leadership by running multiple organisations that tackle pressing social needs. His approach goes beyond immediate relief, incorporating sustainable solutions such as community gardens and skills development programmes, ensuring ongoing benefits for communities. Similo's dedication, creativity, and resilience mark him as a true nation builder. Recognising him as a Shining Star celebrates his outstanding contribution to society and inspires others to follow in his footsteps, using their talents to make a meaningful difference.



# LEBOHANG DAVID MOLAPO

Founder and executive chairman, Molapo Foundation

From a childhood in Khutsong, Carletonville, Lebohang David Molapo has turned hardship into a platform for hope. Raised by his grandmother in a small mining township, Molapo is now Executive Chairman of the multi-award-winning Molapo Foundation, where he leads a social enterprise dedicated to equitable education, youth and women's empowerment, and humanitarian relief. Under his stewardship, the foundation supports child-headed homes, old-age homes and disability centres, while taking Career Guidance Youth Expo roadshows into townships and rural communities across the country. Here, he meets learners where they are, connecting them to information, opportunities and tools to shape their own futures. The Molapo Foundation has grown into a nationally recognised youth-development public benefit organisation, with its impact reflected in accolades such as Mail & Guardian's 200 Young South Africans and Sunday World Unsung Heroes 2024, among others. At its core is a simple but powerful mandate: to open the doors of learning and work to those who are too often shut out, through mentorship, career guidance, academic support and bursary placement for hardworking students and unemployed youth. Molapo extends his influence onto the global stage as a member of the South African BRICS Youth Association, where he champions collaboration, strengthens international partnerships, amplifies youth voices, and confronts shared global challenges.



## DR PHOPHI RAMABULANA

Social activist & tech inclusion champion

**A** proud Venda princess and survivor of GBV and depression, Dr Phophi Ramabulana has turned personal pain into purposeful service. Holding an honorary PhD in Philosophy, she devotes her work to empowering women, children, youth and the elderly, with a special focus on GBV survivors, whom she equips with income-generating skills in sewing, pottery and ICT. Within South Africa's Department of Social Development, she helped shape national interventions, including the Victim Empowerment Programme and the National Integrated Social Information System. In 2020, she was named a Champion of CaseLines South Africa for helping to keep the High Courts in Pretoria and Johannesburg functioning through digital evidence management during the pandemic. Her passion for grassroots change runs through every initiative she leads. She drove an ICT skills transfer programme that donated 90 laptops to unemployed youth in Limpopo, oversees Yahweh Educare Center for 170 young learners, and through the Vhathanuni Foundation Community Centre offers children meals, homework support and safety, while empowering women with sewing, sanitary products and tech skills. As co-founder of Singo Network, she is advancing digital inclusion by providing free internet access to communities in the Vhembe District. A Director of the African Women Achievers Forum South Africa, she is also a caregiver to her father living with vascular dementia — an experience that fuels her mental health advocacy and her bold vision of an Africa defined by dignity, collaboration and opportunity.



# SHONTELLE RABOTHATA

Founder and director, I'm Frésko

For the past five years, Shontelle Rabothata has quietly lived out her faith through action. As the dynamic founder and director of I'm Frésko, a Christian NGO, she has become a lifeline for high school learners and families who often feel forgotten on the margins. Her work starts with dignity. Through I'm Frésko, she supplies essential toiletries, school stationery and pre-loved clothing to disadvantaged learners, easing daily pressures so they can focus on their education and their dreams. Her compassion-driven leadership has made the organisation a trusted, familiar presence in her community. Shontelle's programmes are as practical as they are heartfelt. Every two months, she leads an outreach serving warm soup and bread to community members, ensuring that hunger is not the final word on anyone's day. Her annual youth symposiums tackle vital themes like mental health and entrepreneurship, equipping young people with tools to cope, create and chart their own futures. Her empathy is especially evident in the way she honours single mothers, gifting them thoughtfully curated goody bags on Mother's Day — a small but powerful reminder that their sacrifices are seen and valued. Beyond meeting immediate needs, Shontelle is building resilience, possibility and hope. Her ability to mobilise resources, rally support and deliver consistent grassroots impact marks her as one of South Africa's quietly formidable young changemakers.



# PFARELO MAPHANGULA

Founder, Youth Leadership Organisation

**A** dynamic and visionary young leader, Pfarelo Maphangula, 22, founded the Youth Leadership Organisation while in high school, driven by a deep commitment to uplift under-resourced communities in Ivory Park, Midrand, and Tembisa. He imagined a future where township youth could access opportunities that empower, inspire and transform their lives. Under his leadership, the organisation has delivered food parcels to hundreds of families and launched youth-driven initiatives focused on reading, leadership development, coding, chess and school shoe drives. In January 2023, Pfarelo partnered with CodeJIKA to donate 18 computers to Thuto ke Maatla Comprehensive School, opening the door for learners to acquire coding skills and future-fit digital competencies. His work directly bridges the digital divide and expands the horizons of township youth, positioning them for success in a rapidly evolving world. He is a recipient of the 2023 Sunday World Unsung Hero Award in the Community, Sports, Arts and Culture category. Most recently, he was honoured with the 2024 Philanthropist of the Year Award at the Ekurhuleni Youth Excellency Awards, presented by the Mayor's Office — recognition of his relentless commitment to youth empowerment and service. Pfarelo exemplifies what it means to lead with purpose and heart. His work continues to ignite change, uplift communities, and inspire a new generation of young leaders.



## SANELISIWE SITHOLE

Fighting poverty, restoring dignity and hope

**S**anelisiwe Sithole is a young leader whose heart for service is changing lives in her community. She is the driving force behind the Nkopane Soup Kitchen, an initiative she launched to fight poverty and hunger, while restoring dignity and hope to those who need it most. Through this project, Sanelisiwe has shown remarkable dedication to uplifting her community by ensuring that the most vulnerable — including children and the elderly — can access a warm meal. But for her, it has never been only about food. The soup kitchen is also a platform for empowerment, where she encourages young people to step up, serve others, and recognise their own potential to lead. By teaching the youth the importance of responsibility, compassion and community service, she is helping shape a generation that understands change begins with action. Her leadership continues to inspire others to get involved and to see themselves as true agents of change. Sanelisiwe embodies resilience, generosity and vision. Her commitment to making a positive difference is exactly what makes her a true Shining Star — and a powerful role model for young South Africans.

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**CIVIL SOCIETY**





# LAZARUS KGAGENG

Founder, Thola Lesedi Foundation

**L**azarus Kgageng is the visionary founder of the Thola Lesedi Foundation, a community and youth development NPO he established at just 16 years old while in Grade 10. Based in Lephalale, Limpopo, the foundation has become a catalyst for change, producing countless success stories and inspiring young people across the province. In 2017, Lazarus initiated Lephalale's first-ever learner-led career exhibition, The Pens Up. This pioneering project brought together professionals from a wide range of fields, offering learners unprecedented access to career insights and mentorship. The initiative later went online, allowing even broader participation. As a student at Rhodes University, Lazarus launched Into Varsity, a project to help matriculants apply to higher learning institutions and secure funding opportunities — free of charge. He leveraged every resource available to open doors for others and break down barriers to higher education. Lazarus has dedicated his public speaking and creative writing skills to raising awareness about mental health and advancing advocacy for queer rights. In March 2025, he released his debut novel, *The Chords of a Hymn*, an advocacy-driven work confronting bullying, paedophilia and GBV. Lazarus has cemented himself as a fearless changemaker — leading with empathy, courage and purpose. His work continues to uplift communities, challenge harmful norms and inspire youth across Africa.



## ATLEGANG GOVUZA

Legal practitioner, mentor & youth development leader

**A**tlegang Govuza is a powerful embodiment of leadership, service and impact — both within the legal profession and the communities she serves. Her dedication to empowering young people has made her a beacon of inspiration and a rising force in youth development. Through her thriving YouTube platform, Love and Law, which boasts more than 21,000 followers, she shares insightful content about the legal profession and hosts in-depth interviews with seasoned industry experts. Her channel has become a trusted resource for law students and graduates seeking clarity, mentorship and direction. In 2023, she expanded her impact by launching the EleaThom Mentorship Programme. The initiative features monthly sessions led by experienced recruiters and legal practitioners across diverse disciplines, offering invaluable guidance, professional insight and support. Atlegang also volunteers as a mathematics tutor for Grade 8 learners at Realogile High School in Alexandra through Fun Learning for Youth. Her leadership also shines through her role at the Youth Dunamis NPO, where she serves as director, public officer and programme coordinator. Since joining in 2023, Atlegang has managed both administrative and operational functions — ensuring compliance, drafting constitutional documents, organising events and overseeing academic programmes. Through each of her initiatives, Atlegang consistently uplifts others, opens doors and ignites ambition.



# LINDOKUHLE BENSON LATHA

Activist, community leader & social entrepreneur

**L**indokuhle Benson Latha is a powerful force for change — an activist, community leader and social entrepreneur whose impact reaches far beyond his home in Hammarsdale, KwaZulu-Natal. His leadership in the #FeesMustFall and #TVETMustRise movements positioned him at the forefront of youth activism, where he fought for accessible education and the rights of marginalised students. His continued mentorship of learners, and his advocacy for refugees and other vulnerable groups, reflect his dedication to civil society and youth empowerment. Lindokuhle has served in multiple roles, including: Campus Healthcare Worker at Elangeni TVET College; Campus Health and Wellness Coordinator at Elangeni College and KZN CET College. He has championed student wellness, mental health and peer education, ensuring young people received support essential to their well-being and academic success. He continues to help youth in his community with tertiary education and NSFAS applications, CV writing, career guidance and mentorship. He also led the Pad a Girl campaign, creatively funding it through recycling initiatives to provide sanitary pads to disadvantaged learners. His company, Kayise Cleaning and Waste Collections (Pty) Ltd, is tackling illegal dumpsites and driving innovative solutions that promote community wellness and green livelihoods. His work includes recycling programmes, community clean-ups and biogas production from animal waste — initiatives that create jobs while advancing environmental responsibility. At only 30, Lindokuhle has already created lasting change — empowering students, supporting vulnerable households and inspiring communities to take action.

CIVIL SOCIETY



## TSHEPANG MKHWANAZI

Multilingual author & youth mentor

**B**orn in Bophelong, Vanderbijlpark, Gauteng, Tshepang Mkhwanazi, at just 20 years old, has already carved out a remarkable legacy as a young creative force and community champion, with his literary work appearing in outlets like MUSE Magazine and engaging in school events. The Pondoland Times community newspaper said: “Mkhwanazi’s debut book, Menokotshwai Ya Basotho, is a rich collection of poems, short stories, and folklore that delves into the history and uniqueness of the Basotho tribe. His love for his heritage is evident on every page, and the book serves as a testament to the power of storytelling in preserving cultural identity. Tshepang has also written two dramas, Lefufa La Baena and Motlalepula, as well as a forthcoming novel, Puseletso Le Molahlehi.” Deeply rooted in the Bophelong community, Tshepang has dedicated his journey to uplifting young people through the power of storytelling. He mentors aspiring youth writers, guiding them through the process of creating their own books, and actively promotes a culture of literature and self-expression. Through his work, he gives young people the courage to dream boldly — showing them that their voices matter, their stories are worthy, and their futures are within reach.



## WAYDE GROEP

Youth development leader, YearBeyond

Wayde Groep stands out as a transformative force — a visionary leader whose work continues to shift the trajectory of young people across South Africa. His journey with YearBeyond, from its modest pilot in 2014 to its evolution into a national youth service movement impacting more than 3,600 youth and 40,000 community members in 2025, is a testament to his unwavering dedication. His energy, strategic insight and expansive skill set have been central to scaling and sustaining this impact. Deeply committed to youth development, Wayde has helped shape flagship initiatives such as the @HomeLearning and Libraries programmes, and has led national campaigns and conferences that continue to inspire stakeholders across the country. His influence extends beyond programme design: he has delivered a TEDx Talk, earned multiple national award nominations, and championed curriculum innovations that build leadership, active citizenship and resilience in young people. But beyond the numbers and accolades, it is Wayde’s ability to inspire that truly sets him apart. His powerful message — “Every moment of your life is an interview” — has shifted mindsets, opened possibilities and empowered youth to imagine more for themselves. Wayde is not only shaping individual futures; he is helping weave a more engaged, hopeful and thriving South Africa.



## SIBAHLE ZUMA

CEO, Project Youth South Africa

**A**t just 25, Sibahle Zuma is redefining what it means to be a young leader in South Africa's democracy. Fearless, principled and relentlessly committed to human rights, she has built her path around one mission: ensuring that young people are not only spoken for — but are the ones speaking. Growing up acutely aware of how often youth voices are sidelined, Sibahle chose law not as a ticket to the courtroom, but as a tool to transform policy, strengthen civic participation and hold power to account. Her work bridges activism and governance with a clarity of purpose rare for her age. Her impact stretches across borders. As CEO of Project Youth South Africa, she mobilised young people nationwide to show up at the polls and step confidently into leadership spaces. At Democracy International, she curated and managed a global platform that brought together democracy practitioners from around the world — exchanging ideas, experiences and urgency. Sibahle has addressed the United Nations Human Rights Council on behalf of countries including Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan and South Africa, demanding accountability where the rights to expression, association and assembly are under threat. She has authored human rights reports for Amnesty International and published more than eight incisive op-eds, unpacking democracy protests in Kenya, repression in Zimbabwe, and the volatile intersection of climate change and conflict in the DRC.



## CANDICE LEGODI

Champion for clean water, sanitation and dignity

Candice Legodi, a 34-year-old environmental and water, sanitation, and hygiene activist from Tzaneen, is one of rural South Africa's most powerful champions for clean water, sanitation and dignity. Rooted in her community and driven by an unshakeable commitment to justice, she has dedicated her life to ensuring that every child, family and village in Limpopo (and beyond) has access to safe, sustainable water solutions. As the leader of the Stanley Candice Foundation Centre NPO, Candice has driven transformative projects across Limpopo — from river clean-ups and school hygiene education to innovative biogas solutions and solar-powered water purification systems. Her work is reshaping the environmental landscape of communities long affected by sewage contamination and failing infrastructure, bringing safer water access to vulnerable schools and households while restoring health, dignity and hope. Candice is also a mobiliser at heart. She brings together youth, university students, traditional leaders and local stakeholders, building a grassroots movement for environmental protection and sustainable living. Her leadership reflects resilience, compassion and a fierce belief that rural voices deserve to be heard and prioritised in the national conversation on water justice. Candice represents the spirit of South Africa's new wave of changemakers — courageous, community-rooted and relentless in pursuit of a better future.



## STHEMBISO MTHIMUNYE

Disability inclusion advocate & community trustee

**S**thembiso Mthimunye, a 31-year-old changemaker from Middelburg in Mpumalanga, is a powerful advocate for children living with special needs and one of the most compelling disability-inclusion voices of her generation. As a person living with a disability herself, Sthembiso speaks from lived experience — insisting that true inclusion cannot begin only in classrooms and boardrooms when many of the deepest challenges start within the communities people call home. Her community-centred approach to disability education has sparked a groundswell of support, particularly from parents of children with special needs who have long struggled with stigma, misinformation and mistreatment. Through workshops, dialogues and awareness campaigns, Sthembiso is shifting perceptions, replacing fear with understanding, and helping communities embrace inclusion as a collective responsibility. She reminds those she works with that awareness is not the job of government alone — it is the work of all of us, starting right where we live. Beyond her advocacy, Sthembiso serves as a community trustee in a Community Benefit Partnership Trust, a platform dedicated to driving socio-economic change. In this role, she continues to show people living with disabilities that their voices are powerful and necessary — and that they matter far beyond the limitations society may impose.



## ZAKHE KHUZWAYO

Founder & President, The Men Carve Organisation; Founder, Zakhe Academy of Leadership

**Z**akhe Khuzwayo is a visionary leader and social impact trailblazer whose work is transforming communities. With a deep commitment to justice, dignity and youth empowerment, he has dedicated his life to confronting some of South Africa's most urgent social challenges — from GBV and food insecurity to mental health and harmful masculinity norms. As the founder and president of The Men Carve Organisation, Zakhe champions a holistic approach to community empowerment. Through school visits, student residence engagements, practical workshops and food parcel distribution, he is reshaping narratives around masculinity while offering tangible support to vulnerable families and young people. His work is not only healing communities — it is reimagining what responsible, compassionate leadership looks like. He extends this impact through the Zakhe Academy of Leadership, equipping young leaders, student governance bodies and faith-based groups with the ethical tools and practical skills to lead with courage and integrity. His footprint spans universities, churches and civic spaces, inspiring a new generation to step into roles of purpose and accountability. His work has earned him national recognition, including as a Mail & Guardian Top 200 Young South African, News24 Top 100 Young Mandelas, and the DearSA Young Leaders Award. Currently pursuing a master's in business and information management at DUT, Zakhe embodies the spirit of lifelong learning and excellence.

A composite image featuring a white computer keyboard, a teal stethoscope, a hand holding a pen, and a circular graphic with the text "10 HEALTH". The keyboard is in the upper left, the stethoscope is in the upper right, and the hand is in the lower right. The circular graphic is in the center, containing the text "10" in a large, light blue font and "HEALTH" in a smaller, dark blue font.

# 10

## HEALTH



# KIRSHNI DALVIN RAMEN

Making hearing care a right, not a privilege

**K**irshni Dalvin Ramen is a passionate audiologist and the founder of Lifetime Audiology and Lifetime Mobile Audiology, established in 2021 in Gauteng. Guided by a powerful belief that hearing care should be a right and not a privilege, she has dedicated her career to expanding access to quality hearing healthcare for all. Her journey began in a deep rural hospital in KwaZulu-Natal, where she witnessed firsthand the barriers many South Africans face in accessing healthcare. This experience inspired her to pioneer a mobile audiology model that delivers services directly to patients in their homes, workplaces and communities. Through this innovative approach, Kirshni ensures that both private patients and underserved populations receive quality hearing care, breaking down barriers related to distance, mobility and stigma. Beyond her entrepreneurial leadership, Kirshni serves as a clinical educator at the University of the Witwatersrand, where she mentors and trains future audiologists. She also works closely with NGOs and gender-based organisations, advocating for inclusion, holistic wellbeing and meaningful support for vulnerable groups. At just 32 years old, Kirshni represents a new generation of healthcare professionals who seamlessly combine innovation, compassion and social responsibility. Her mission is both simple and powerful: to create “A World of Hearing” where no one is left unheard.



## THENDO MASHUDU

Promoting access to eye healthcare in underserved communities

**T**hendo Mashudu's journey reflects a deep commitment to advancing healthcare, education and community development through service-driven leadership and sustainable impact. A qualified Optometrist, public health advocate, entrepreneur and Master of Optometry candidate at the University of the Free State, he is dedicated to bridging the gap between clinical care, community awareness and preventive health. His work is grounded in promoting equity and addressing the systemic barriers that limit access to eye healthcare in underserved communities. Beyond academia and research, Thendo actively participates in community-focused initiatives and contributes to governance and public health policy aimed at fostering positive and lasting change. He serves on the Public Health Committee of the South African Optometric Association, where he contributes to strategies advocating for accessible eye care across the country. In addition, he is the Chairman of the Mashudu Foundation, an organisation committed to community empowerment and philanthropy, with a clear vision to fight poverty and inequality. He is also the founder of Optimal Vision Optometrists, a practice dedicated to providing accessible eye care. Through faith, resilience and vision, Thendo exemplifies servant leadership. His work empowers others, champions sustainable solutions, gives voice to the voiceless and inspires young people to dream boldly, embodying the true spirit of a shining star.



## DR TSHIAMO RAMALEPA

Addressing critical youth health challenges

**D**r Tshiamo Ramalepa, 35, exemplifies excellence in academia, research and community impact. He holds six university qualifications: a PhD in Nursing, a Master's in Public Health (Cum Laude), a Master's in Nursing, a Postgraduate Diploma in Public Health, a BTech in Nursing, and a Diploma in Nursing Education. This strong academic foundation has firmly positioned him as a thought leader in adolescent health and development. Tshiamo is a Senior Lecturer at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University, where his research focuses on adolescent support, sexual and reproductive health, and role modelling. He is the author of the groundbreaking book, *ASPIRE Strategies for Strengthening Adolescents' Sexual and Reproductive Health Role Modelling*, has contributed several book chapters, and has published more than 20 peer-reviewed articles addressing critical youth health challenges. Tshiamo plays a pivotal role in supervising and guiding master's and PhD students, shaping the next generation of health researchers. His research excellence is further demonstrated through his involvement in major national and international projects, including serving as a co-investigator on the NRF-Botnar-HSRC-funded R9.2 million study on climate change and adolescent mental health. As Operations Director of the Cheeky Boys Institute, Tshiamo uses football as a transformative tool to uplift young people and alleviate poverty in the North West, effectively merging sport, health and education. Through leadership that bridges research and practice, he ensures his work makes a tangible difference in the lives of adolescents, contributing meaningfully to the development of a healthier and empowered South African youth.



# RUMBIDZAI MASHELE

Helping people to lose weight naturally

**R**umbidzai Mashele is a visionary entrepreneur and community builder whose journey reflects the power of innovation rooted in purpose. Bootstrapping her wellness start-up, Lemon Belly Buster, with just R500 and using the lemons from her backyard in Hartbeesport, North West, she has generated over R104,000 in revenue within five months — creating jobs and supporting local farmers by sourcing 100% of her ingredients in South Africa. Lemon Belly Buster is an organic drink mix/tea blend with natural ingredients: lemon, cinnamon, ginger, turmeric, collagen and moringa. Marketed for weight management, reducing bloating, boosting metabolism, and curbing cravings, it is meant to be consumed on an empty stomach. Rumbidzai’s entrepreneurial excellence has been recognised through her selection as a finalist for the MAP Wellness Queenpreneur Award 2025. She continues to sharpen her impact as a participant in the SMME Incubation Programme by AlgoAtWork and BrownSense Africa, in collaboration with the Gauteng provincial government. Through determination, local sourcing and innovation, Rumbidzai Mashele is building a business that empowers communities and inspires a new generation of entrepreneurs.



## KARABO MATLALETSA

Improving quality of life for elderly people

**K**arabo Matlaletsa has already made a meaningful impact as an advocate for occupational therapy across multiple sectors. Currently practising as an occupational therapist in the geriatric field, she is deeply committed to improving the quality of life of elderly people through care, education and advocacy. Karabo actively educates the public on the importance of occupational therapy and its role in enhancing the lives of older people. She has also recently released an article advocating for the rights and well-being of the elderly, further amplifying awareness and understanding within society. With hands-on experience from clinical placements, Karabo focuses on creating personalised, client-centred treatment plans to promote functional skills and well-being. Her approach emphasises collaboration with multi-disciplinary teams and supporting clients in reaching their goals through adaptive strategies and education. Beyond her professional work, she leads an initiative that donates clothing to underprivileged children, helping protect them from illness during the winter season. This initiative addresses a critical gap for families unable to meet basic needs, ensuring dignity, warmth and care for vulnerable children.



## KGAOGELO PHOTOANE

Wellness facilitator fosters personal growth

**K**gaogelo Photoane is a powerful example of resilience and purpose-driven impact. Living with chronic depression and anxiety, she has transformed her lived experience into a stepping stone for meaningful change. As a mother and healthcare professional, she understands the importance of nurturing and care, which has inspired her to pursue a postgraduate degree in psychology to deepen her understanding of the human mind. For the past five years, Kgaogelo has been a vocal mental health advocate, sharing her story as a keynote speaker and wellness facilitator. Her courage and authenticity have sparked vital conversations, helped reduce stigma and offered hope and encouragement to those navigating mental health challenges. Her passion for empowerment extends into her work as a wellness facilitator and accredited high-performance coach. With a focus on life, performance, relationships, parenting and mental health coaching, she supports individuals in unlocking their full potential. She is also the CEO of Kgosi Life Coaching, where she delivers customised coaching experiences designed to foster personal growth and overall well-being. Kgaogelo is a co-founder of the non-profit organisation Not Alone SA, which raises awareness and provides resources for individuals facing mental health challenges. Deeply committed to holistic wellness, she integrates fitness and self-development into her daily life, embodying the balance she encourages in others.



## DR KOKETSO PULE

A champion of healthcare for women

**D**r Koketso Pule is an inspiring young South African obstetrician and gynaecologist dedicated to advancing women's health and empowering communities. Passionate about holistic care, she has led impactful initiatives focused on infertility awareness, maternal health and mental well-being, ensuring access to quality healthcare for women from all walks of life. As a former executive member of the South African Association of Trainees in Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Koketso championed initiatives aimed at strengthening medical training and advocating for improved maternal health systems. Her work consistently focuses on breaking stigmas around reproductive health, promoting self-care and nurturing the next generation of female leaders. A committed mentor and advocate, she actively engages with young women, encouraging them to pursue careers in science and healthcare. Koketso embodies excellence, compassion and visionary leadership, making a tangible difference in the lives she touches and standing as a worthy nominee for the 100 South African Shining Stars.



# GUGULETHU MASONDO

Expanding access to professional skincare

**G**ugulethu Masondo is a visionary entrepreneur whose resilience and creativity have redefined beauty and wellness in underserved communities. As the founder of The Blend Wellness, a township-based MedSpa, she has expanded access to professional skincare, trained over 100 student therapists and launched scalable initiatives including EstyNote, Dr Smoothie and Aesthetics Aid. Despite personal loss and limited funding, Gugulethu has built multiple brands under The Blend empire, with a strong focus on education, innovation and empowerment. Her ventures go beyond service delivery — they solve social challenges and create pathways for economic inclusion. Through her mentorship work with the Graça Machel Trust, she supports young entrepreneurs across Africa in finding their voice and building purpose-driven businesses. With unmatched creativity, Gugulethu transformed an old caravan into a fully operational spa van, taking wellness services directly to the people. She is a living example of what is possible when purpose meets perseverance.



## NALEDI MOHALE

A rising leader in health

**N**aledi Mohale is a rising leader in health who combines medical excellence with systemic advocacy. Despite the immense demands of medical training, she has consistently extended her influence beyond the classroom and clinic. As a member of the Federation of African Medical Students' Associations Policy Advisory Council, Naledi helped craft policy frameworks on maternal health and non-communicable diseases, empowering young professionals across Africa to become health policy advocates in their own contexts. She has represented African medical students on the global stage, presenting at the AMEE Conference in Scotland on integrating health education to foster stronger teamwork between doctors and allied health professionals. This vision speaks directly to improving patient care and building more resilient health systems. At the University of Cape Town, Naledi demonstrates health leadership in practice by mentoring academically at-risk students, supporting both their academic and personal wellbeing. Her philosophy of health is holistic: it values both systems and individuals, innovation and empathy. Naledi represents the kind of doctor the future urgently needs — one who treats patients, shapes policy, and mentors the next generation. She is undoubtedly a shining star in health.



# MAMELLO MAKHANYA

Unwavering commitment to public health

**M**amello Makhanya is a passionate public health advocate and community leader committed to advancing equity, health and empowerment. She holds a Baccalaureus Curationis degree, a Postgraduate Diploma in HIV/AIDS Management, and is currently pursuing a Master of Public Health degree. In her role as Project Officer: Health at Untold Organisation, she leads impactful health interventions in underserved communities. Mamello is also the founder of two nonprofit organisations. The Born To Stand Out Foundation focuses on mental health, motivation, meaningful associations and making a difference, while the Lerato Breast Cancer Awareness NPO — established in honour of her late mother — promotes breast cancer awareness and education. Grounded in strong academic training and deeply rooted in community work, Mamello Makhanya's contribution reflects an unwavering commitment to public health and social change, positioning her as a true South African Shining Star.



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**TRANSPORT &  
TOURISM**



# MANDLA MAGWAZA

Taking tourism in SA to new heights

**M**andla Magwaza is redefining the future of South African tourism and transport through innovation, entrepreneurship and global policy leadership. A G20–B20 Digital Transformation Task Force member, Mail & Guardian Top 200 Young South African and World Tourism Markets Africa award winner, he has positioned tourism not only as a driver of economic growth, but as a platform for youth empowerment, technology adoption and sustainable development. Mandla is the founder of a pioneering hub that integrates skills development, tourism enterprise incubation and digital transformation to empower youth and SMMEs. Through his Youth in Tourism initiative, Mandla is creating inclusive pathways for employment, STEM education, mental health support and international collaboration across AU, BRICS and G20 platforms. Mandla is also innovating in transport safety and access. He is launching a WhatsApp-based digital safety and concierge platform that integrates the Gauteng e-Panic Button, journey tracking and fraud reporting for travellers. His upcoming Tourism Bank financing initiative is designed to ensure SMEs in the sector have access to fair and sustainable finance, while his work on sustainable travel reflects a strong commitment to regenerative tourism. With a bold and future-focused vision, Mandla is working to position South Africa as a global leader in safe, sustainable and inclusive tourism and transport.

TRANSPORT AND TOURISM



## NOMATHEMBA SELESHO

Taking new routes in the logistics business

**N**omathemba Selesho exemplifies the essence of a true Shining Star. Rising from humble beginnings and living with a partial hearing disability, she courageously transformed her career path from bank employee to pioneering entrepreneur in South Africa's male-dominated transport sector. As the founder of Themba Liyeza Solutions, Nomathemba has built a business spanning transport and tourism, creating meaningful and lasting impact. Her resilience and dedication have earned her prestigious recognition, including the SAB Foundation Tholoana Award, a Rising Star nomination at the Transport Evolution Awards and the Presidential Youth in Business Awards. Beyond commercial success, Nomathemba leads with purpose. She serves as Secretary-General of International Women in Transport, mentors aspiring entrepreneurs and champions compliance and governance as essential pillars for sustainable growth. Her leadership, innovation and commitment to community upliftment set her apart as a nominee whose work continues to illuminate opportunity and possibility for others. Nomathemba secured a contract with The Courier Guy through the Commercial Transport Academy's programme, driving a Mercedes-Benz Sprinter for first and last-mile services in Johannesburg, embodying resilience and empowerment in the male-dominated transport sector.



## KWAKWA MABALA

Taking new routes in the logistics business

**K**wakwa Mabala is a visionary leader whose work reflects resilience, entrepreneurship and deep community impact. As the founder and director of the Chillers On Wheels mobile toilet hire company, he has grown the business from a local start-up in Seshego into a multi-provincial operation, creating over 70 jobs and delivering dignified sanitation solutions for a wide variety of clients — including Eskom, the De Beers Group, the Limpopo Legislature, Sun Hotels, MTN, SARS and Anglo American — across Limpopo, Gauteng and Mpumalanga. Beyond business, Kwakwa serves as President of Cricket Limpopo, where he uses sport as a powerful tool for youth development, discipline and inclusion. He is passionate about empowering others and consistently leads by example — through hands-on involvement in projects, mentoring young professionals and mobilising resources to uplift communities. His unwavering commitment to business excellence and social progress positions Kwakwa as a true Shining Star.



## MMATSHIKHIDI PHALA

Shaping discourse on SA's taxi industry

**M**matshikhidi Phala is breaking barriers and reshaping representation in South Africa's taxi industry. As the first woman and youngest spokesperson of the South African National Taxi Council (SANTACO), she actively advocates for the meaningful inclusion of women — not only behind the scenes, but in leadership, operations and public engagement. Her job sees her shaping national discourse, managing crisis communication and representing about 250,000 taxi operators. Mmatshikhidi's media journey began at the University of Limpopo, where she founded Turf Campus TV, a student-run channel still inspiring aspiring broadcasters today. Her early career included jobs as a radio presenter, news editor and print journalist, equipping her with an understanding of media and politics. In 2018, she launched #TheBigSisterConversation, an initiative encouraging education, reading and health among rural girls. Through school visits, sanitary pad drives and book donations she uplifts young women from the same communities that shaped her. Mmatshikhidi was named a 2024 Rising Star in Public Service Communications by the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa, Limpopo. Through her role, Mmatshikhidi is transforming visibility into opportunity, using her platform to challenge norms and uplift others within the industry. Her leadership reflects courage, progress and a commitment to opening doors for future generations, making her a compelling example of a Shining Star in action.



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**SPORT &  
RECREATION**



## THABO MATSEBE

Delivering health through fitness

**T**habo Matsebe, 33, from Protea Glen, Soweto, is an accredited fitness instructor, group exercise instructor and personal trainer. He trained at Trifocus Fitness Academy and currently serves as a Master Trainer for Virgin Active. His journey is one defined by resilience, reinvention and purpose-driven impact. In 2018, Thabo was recognised as one of the Top 100 Rising Stars under the Arts and Culture segment. However, in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic brought his dancing company to a halt due to the loss of bookings and lack of funding. Rather than retreat, he pivoted with intention. Between 2020 and 2021, he qualified in fitness and entered the corporate wellness space, where his leadership trajectory accelerated rapidly. Within two years at Virgin Active, Thabo rose through the ranks but eventually resigned to restructure his company into a fitness and wellness enterprise aligned with his broader vision. Thabo engages with over 1,000 individuals monthly through classes, events and workshops focused on body transformation. He hosts two annual fitness events that unite participants from multiple gyms into a single space, fostering community through movement. Since launching this chapter of his work in 2023, he has changed lives, united people and championed positive transformation—proving that fitness is not about status or skill level, but about coexistence, growth and choosing a greater life.



## THABISO KHEO

Shaping SA's sporting future

**T**habiso Kheo is a trailblazer in the sport, arts and culture sector. He is the first person from Setsoto Local Municipality to be part of a National Sport Events Local Organising Team and to be involved as an intern with the national Department of Sport, Arts and Culture. Thabiso's achievement represents a significant breakthrough for local representation on national platforms and highlights the power of inclusion, access and youth leadership in shaping South Africa's sporting future.