

REFLECTIONS FROM THE QUARTER

As we step into a new chapter at Mqhele Yezizwe Foundation, we find ourselves pausing not only to reflect on the work we have done, but to recognise the influence we are steadily building within the communities we serve. What began as intentional, and at times modest, acts of support has grown into something far greater than we could have imagined a movement rooted in guidance, access, opportunity, and transformation.



From classrooms in rural communities to career expo halls filled with possibility, from mentorship circles that nurture confidence to literacy initiatives that ignite imagination each touchpoint represents more than a programme. It represents a seed planted. And in this season, we are beginning to see those seeds take root and flourish.

This quarter has reminded us that impact is not defined by numbers alone. It is not just in how many programmes we have delivered, how many schools we have reached, or how many resources we have distributed.

True impact lives in the stories – in the learner who now raises their hand with confidence, in the young girl who dares to see herself in spaces she once felt excluded from, and in the matriculant who begins to believe that their future is not limited by their circumstances.

Through initiatives such as our mentorship programmes, career exposure platforms like MY Future Fest, and our ongoing literacy drives, we are witnessing a powerful shift.

Young people are not only receiving support they are stepping into their potential. They are asking better questions, making informed decisions, and most importantly, taking ownership of their journeys.

At Mqhele Yezizwe Foundation, our work continues to evolve as we listen, learn, and respond to the needs of our communities. Yet, at the core of everything we do lies an unwavering commitment: to show up consistently, to serve with intention, and to create spaces that are safe, empowering, and filled with possibility. We are not just providing resources; we are building bridges bridges between dreams and reality, between uncertainty and clarity, between potential and purpose.

As you move through this edition, you will encounter stories that reflect courage, resilience, and growth. These are not just stories of achievement; they are stories of becoming. They remind us that transformation is a journey one that requires support, belief, and opportunity.

We are incredibly proud of how far we have come, but even more inspired by where we are going. Because what we are building is not temporary. It is generational. It is influence that extends beyond the present moment and into the futures of the young people we serve.

Together, with our partners, volunteers, supporters, and community, we are doing more than making an impact.

We are shaping influence the kind that empowers, uplifts, and lasts for generations to come.

FROM RESPONSIBILITY TO RESILIENCE

Testimonial by Akani Lebese

In the heart of Pankop village, a young woman's story is unfolding one marked by resilience, responsibility, and the quiet strength of determination. Akani Lebese, a recent matric graduate, represents the very essence of what it means to rise above circumstances and step into possibility.

"For the first time, I felt seen, heard, and truly supported."

Akani's journey has not been an easy one. At a young age, she was faced with responsibilities far beyond her years. When her mother fell ill, Akani became more than just a learner she became a caregiver, a source of support for her siblings, and a pillar within her home. Balancing schoolwork with the emotional weight of caregiving took its toll, and like many young people in similar situations, she found herself overwhelmed and struggling to keep up.

"I was not able to balance my schoolwork and personal life," she reflects. "I was focusing more on emotional stress."

It was during Grade 11 that Akani first encountered Mqhele Yezizwe Foundation. Drawn by the opportunity for support and growth, she made a conscious decision to become part of the programme a decision that would mark the beginning of a transformative chapter in her life.



Through school-based workshops, interactive learning sessions, and mentorship, Akani found more than just academic support she found a safe space. A space where she could be heard, understood, and encouraged. The mentorship she received became a turning point, equipping her with tools to better manage her time, navigate emotional challenges, and regain control of her academic journey.

"The mentors listened to my challenges, offered advice, and motivated me to balance school and personal life," she shares. "They created a space where I felt valued."

With this support, Akani began to experience a shift. Her academic performance improved, but more importantly, her confidence grew. She developed essential life skills time management, leadership, resilience, and self-belief. These were not just skills for school, but for life.

One of her most cherished memories reflects the warmth and authenticity of the relationships built through the programme. "Meeting my mentor for the first time felt like we had known each other for years," she says. "It was so heartwarming." Moments like these became anchors in her journey reminders that she was not alone.

Today, Akani stands on the threshold of her next chapter. Inspired by her personal experiences, particularly caring for her mother, she aspires to pursue a career in nursing and contribute meaningfully to the healthcare sector. She also holds a deep interest in human sciences, with aspirations in fields such as archaeology or anthropology a testament to her curiosity and drive to understand the world around her.

Her journey with Mqhele Yezizwe Foundation has not only shaped her academic path but has expanded her vision for the future. With renewed confidence and guidance, she is now focused on securing a place at university and accessing bursary opportunities that will bring her dreams within reach.

“Being part of Mqhele means having a support system that understands my struggles and pushes me to achieve more,” she says. “It’s like having a family that is invested in my success.”

Akani’s story is one of transformation from a place of overwhelming responsibility to one of resilience and hope. It is a powerful reminder that when young people are given the right support, guidance, and opportunity, they do not just overcome challenges they rise, they lead, and they inspire.

To others who may be walking a similar path, Akani offers a message of encouragement:

“Don’t hesitate to reach out. Mqhele will help you turn challenges into opportunities.”

At Mqhele Yezizwe Foundation, stories like Akani’s are the reason we continue. They are a reflection of what is possible when impact meets intention and when support becomes a stepping stone to a brighter future.

Message from mentor:

“Akani Lebeso was an absolute pleasure to mentor! She was a driven and curious student, always eager to learn and absorb new insights. Akani demonstrated exceptional dedication to her growth, regularly seeking feedback and implementing suggestions to improve. Her positive attitude and willingness to take on challenges made our mentorship sessions productive and enjoyable. Akani’s commitment to her development was evident in her consistent progress, and I’m confident she’ll excel in her future endeavours.” Phindi Sigasa



COMPLIANCE CORNER: STRENGTHENING TRUST THROUGH TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

At the heart of every impactful non-profit organisation lies a strong foundation of trust. This trust is built not only through the work we do in our communities, but also through how we govern, manage, and account for the resources entrusted to us. Transparency and accountability are therefore not just compliance requirements they are essential principles that guide our integrity and sustainability.

Non-profit organisations (NPOs) play a critical role in addressing societal needs, and with this responsibility comes the obligation to remain accountable to stakeholders, including beneficiaries, donors, partners, and the broader community. By ensuring openness in our operations and maintaining clear, accurate financial records, we reinforce confidence in our work and strengthen our credibility.



In South Africa, the **Non-profit Organisations Act 71 of 1997** provides the regulatory framework that guides how NPOs should operate. The Act is designed to promote good governance, transparency, and accountability principles that are essential for building trust and ensuring that organisations can continue to serve their communities effectively.

One of the key objectives of the Act is to encourage NPOs to uphold high standards of governance and to create an environment where the public has access to relevant information about registered organisations.

This openness not only fosters trust but also allows stakeholders to engage with and support organisations with confidence.

From a financial governance perspective, the Act places clear responsibilities on registered NPOs. Organisations are required to maintain proper accounting records, including detailed tracking of income, expenditure, assets, and liabilities. In addition, NPOs must prepare financial statements within six months after the end of their financial year.

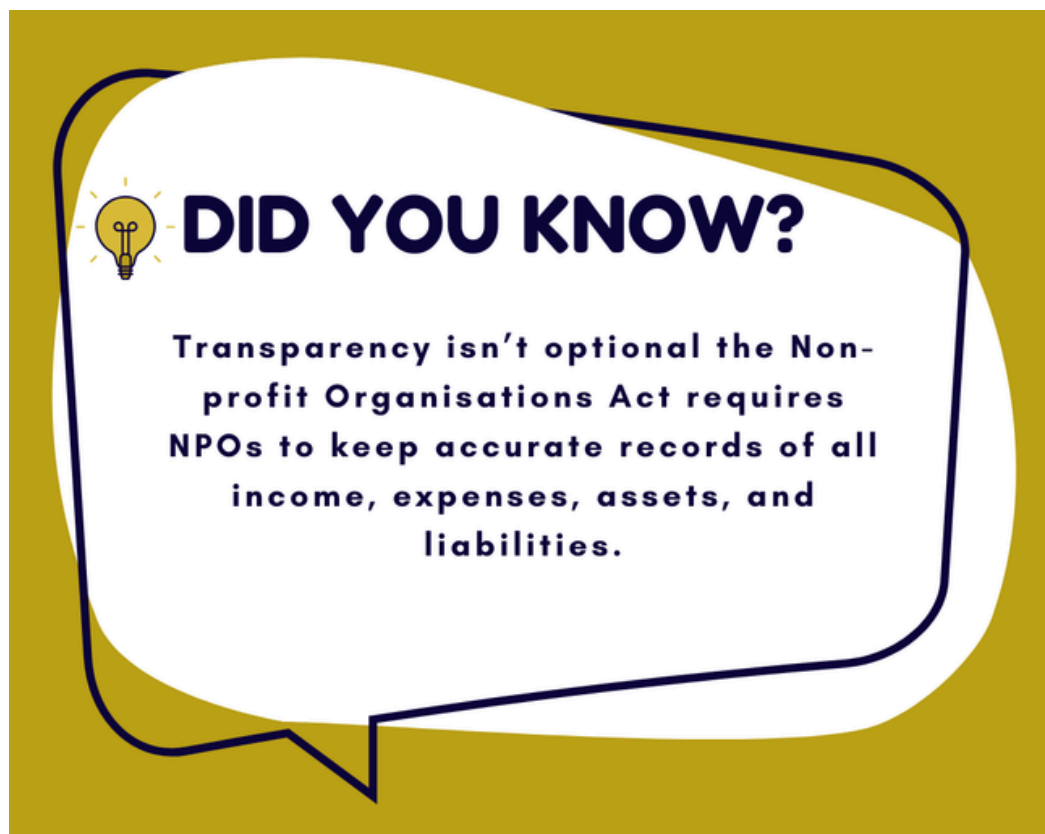
These statements must then be reviewed by an independent accounting officer, who provides a written report confirming whether the financial records are accurate, the accounting policies are appropriate, and whether the organisation has complied with its governing framework.

Beyond reporting, NPOs are also required to safely preserve all financial records and supporting documents for the prescribed period of five years. This ensures that there is a clear and traceable record of how funds have been managed over time.

At Mqhele Yezizwe Foundation, we view compliance not as a checkbox exercise, but as a commitment to excellence and responsibility. By adhering to these standards, we ensure that every contribution entrusted to us is managed with care, integrity, and purpose.

Ultimately, transparency and accountability enable us to do more than remain compliant they empower us to build lasting relationships with our stakeholders, attract sustainable funding, and maximise our impact in the communities we serve.

Because when governance is strong, trust grows and when trust grows, so does our ability to create meaningful and lasting change.



UNDERSTANDING LITERACY IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

When we talk about literacy, we often think simply of the ability to read and write. But literacy is much more than that it is a gateway to opportunity, confidence, and lifelong success. In rural communities, however, this gateway is not always easily accessible.

Mpumalanga has some of the highest levels of illiteracy in South Africa, with earlier estimates placing it at around 14.7%. Contributing factors include limited access to learning materials, overcrowded classrooms, and under-resourced schools challenges that are particularly acute in rural areas.

Only about 41.6% of people in Mpumalanga have completed matric or higher, a statistic that directly affects literacy levels and future opportunities. For many young people, literacy is not just about learning to read it is about staying in school long enough to fully develop those essential skills.

In some rural communities, literacy is influenced by factors beyond the classroom including poverty, caregiving responsibilities, and lack of access to educational support at home.



For communities like Phola and Ogies, these numbers are more than statistics they reflect real stories, real challenges, and immense potential waiting to be unlocked.

At Mqhele Yezizwe Foundation, our literacy initiatives respond directly to this need. By providing access to books, creating supportive learning environments, and fostering a culture of reading, we are bridging the gap between potential and opportunity.

When a child learns to read with confidence, they don't just improve academically they begin to see the world differently. They begin to believe in what is possible.

Literacy is not just about education it is about empowerment.

And in rural communities, every book, every lesson, and every moment of support brings us one step closer to lasting change.



WOULD YOU LIKE TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE M.Y. COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS?

Donate

Our literacy initiatives rely on the support of individuals, organisations, and partners who believe that reading is the foundation of education.

Your contribution will directly support:

- The provision of books to schools and learners
- The creation and furnishing of library and reading spaces
- Access to digital learning equipment and tools

Every donation helps us bring books closer to learners – and learners closer to opportunity.

Volunteer

We are looking for passionate individuals who want to play a hands-on role in building a culture of reading and learning in schools.

As a volunteer, you can:

- Support school-based literacy activations and reading sessions
- Assist in sorting, cataloguing, and distributing books to partner schools
- Help set up and organise reading corners, mini libraries, and learning spaces

Get in touch

Whether it's an inspiring story, a shout-out, educational books, or a personal or educational milestone you or a colleague have achieved – we'd love to hear about it and share your news to highlight the positive impact within our community

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