

Jobs Fund supports Cool To Be Me project



In this edition of the newsletter we share the amazing partnerships and innovations that came to life as a response to COVID-19.

Amidst the challenge of COVID-19, Columba has been very appreciative of funding through the National Treasury from the Jobs Fund.

This additional funding has allowed us to create short term jobs for 50 alumni. Never has there been a greater need to create employment or pathways into self-employment. Now more than ever we need to leverage partnerships and available funding to maximum effect.

To this end Columba has embarked on partnerships with others who can assist in this vein.

COOL TO BE ME (CTBM) is a South African company with a decade of experience in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). Columba has partnered with COOL TO BE ME to train our alumni in the principles and practices of Social and Emotional Learning.

The purpose of SEL is to develop a learner's emotional literacy (EQ) and teach them skills needed to manage stress and emotional overwhelm caused by the

pressures of their daily lives, which in the context of South Africa, is one of the primary barriers to learning. These skills of emotional self-awareness, regulation and goal or values based decision making has become even more relevant and urgent as we navigate the Covid-19 pandemic. A total of 45 of our alumni based in five provinces are completing their training as SEL facilitators and will be running a 12-week SEL programme with high school learners in 2021.

The SEL programme will focus on self-awareness, self-regulation, goal directed behavior, social awareness, communication and conflict resolution skills; responsible decision making and optimistic thinking for a growth mindset.

Anticipated outcomes include the growth and development of our alumni as positive role models with increased opportunities to find employment; transference of SEL skills and knowledge to schools and educators in addition to the development of SEL competencies within learners resulting in a reduction in behavioral issues; an increase in responsible decision making and a significant increase in overall health and happiness as well as academic progress. A further five alumni will be onboarded in January 2021.

*Servant Leadership in one picture!
From Left to Right: Katleho Malinga, alumnus mobilizing team member and event MC; Thokozile Masina, Columba alumnus; Monique Blignaut, GP Provincial Manager and co-MC of event; Tracy Hackland, Columba Head of Programmes; panelist & learner, Dimakatso Bhembe; Columba alumnus, Donald Mhlongo; panelists, Cathy Mthenjane and Reece Gallagher.*



Alumni National Connect

Through its leadership programme Columba has established a network of close to 16 000 young people with a desire to contribute to positive change in their schools and communities.

Over 4 500 of these are now out of school. COVID-19 forced people to come up with creative ways to continue living. Columba is no exception. To continue engaging and supporting young people, without flouting the pandemic regulations, Columba had to adapt and innovate. With the objective of connecting our national network of alumni, showcasing their social action, and showing learners that servant leadership can continue after school, Columba piloted its first National Alumni Connect in December 2020. Columba's Head of Programming, Tracy Hackland said, "An online event such as this can help South Africa see the calibre of youth in our country and to see the world through the eyes of these

dynamic young change agents." The Connect was targeted at Columba alumni, high school learners and other young people interested in being part of the solutions and connecting with some like-minded youth. The 2-hours Connect streamed live to over 250 young people who registered and tuned-in at home and at provincial sites set up to accommodate those who couldn't afford data. Themed "Social Action" the event focused on four of the seventeen Global Sustainable Development Goals: Zero Hunger, Good Health and Wellbeing, Quality Education as well as Sustainable Cities and Communities. Panelists included Columba alumni and a learner who are change agents actively engaged in social action in their communities. One of the education expert panellists said he was "very moved" as he listened to youth exemplifying all he believed in. Another panellist, Caroline Raphael, Chief Education Specialist at Gauteng Provincial

Department of Education, said, "It was an honour to be part of the connect. The youngsters are an example of the talent that learners have. They are real social entrepreneurs. They are all just amazing." One of attendees, Nomhlehabo Mtsweni, commenting on a presentation on Depression, said "My family still don't believe that depression exists, I'm happy there are people like IGB (It Gets Better NGO) here to help and educate our communities. Big up." The event might just have planted a seed for a burgeoning partnership between Columba alumni and the Department of Education, schools and other youth around the country. Reflecting on the event, Tracy said, "This hasn't been an easy year but using one of our core values of Creativity we have managed to engage and be more inclusive than ever before, with young people at the centre of all of it."



Engaged and ready to achieve their goals!
Above & Right: Vukuzakhe High School learners taking part in L.O sessions organized by Columba in Umlazi, Kwa Zulu Natal.

Adapting and Serving in the time of COVID

Unable to implement the usual academy based leadership programme, but seeing the negative impact of the COVID-19 restrictions on young people, Columba saw the importance of supporting learners through Life Orientation (L.O) sessions when learners returned to school.

This was to help learners to, amongst other things, maintain and achieve personal well-being, use their talents and skills to their full potential and teach them the importance of self-discipline. In partnership with all Columba schools across all provinces, three 40 minutes sessions with Grade 10s

and 11s, reaching 1 589 learners in 16 schools, were facilitated in October. Themba Nkutha, Academy Manager, says, "This was part of inspiring young people to never give up and for them to continue being positive and being intentional in improving themselves and those around them." The sessions were appreciated by both learners and educators who had been longing for human interaction and encouragement stripped away by the pandemic restrictions and regulations. Asanda Maphumulo a Grade 11 learner from Vukuzakhe High School in Umlazi, Kwa Zulu Natal, says "Being with Columba has made me value myself a bit more. I figured

it was okay to stand out, it was okay to be weird, it was okay to be myself. It helped me with just dealing with myself emotionally and spiritually." Another learner, Lindelwa Mkhize, also in Grade 11 says she has learnt to come out of her comfort zone and to set boundaries for herself so she can reach her goals, that it "has been a good experience." The L.O sessions are likely to continue next year as part of Columba's goal to elicit the greatness in young people and help them chart a successful course for themselves through school and beyond.