

DAILY MAVERICK

168

YES
top



yes
YOUTH
EMPLOYMENT
SERVICE



under
thirty five

IMPACT MULTIPLIED

200K

FUTURES UNLOCKED

Meet the YES Top 35 Under 35 –
the next generation of impact
makers redefining opportunity
and growth in South Africa.

Unlocking SA's youth potential is the key to sustainable growth

The future is not what we once imagined. This is both a challenge and an opportunity for South Africa, and at its centre is the need to see young people as a national asset.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the world is already in or on the cusp of changes that, cumulatively, are unprecedented. Technological, biomedical, artificial intelligence (AI), climate change and geopolitical changes are reshaping the world and the life paths of billions of people.

In South Africa, more than 63% of our population is under the age of 35, yet we have one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the world. Nearly 8.7 million young people are not in employment, education or training.

However, within this crisis lies a unique opportunity. Our youth represent the single most powerful lever for long-term, sustainable economic growth. Unlocking their potential, currently trapped by structural barriers rather than a lack of ability, could transform the trajectory of South Africa's economy.

History shows that periods of rapid growth are almost always driven by demographic and human capital transitions. The so-called East Asian miracle – from South Korea to Vietnam – was not fuelled solely by industrial policy, but by large-scale investment in human capability and youth employment.

Similarly, for South Africa, the key to future competitiveness lies in mobilising the energy and ingenuity of our youth. When young people are given meaningful opportunities, whether in corporate placements, small enterprise support or digital innovation hubs, the effects are exponential. Each young person employed or trained multiplies value across their community through income generation, household spending and skill diffusion.

The Youth Employment Service (YES), launched in partnership with business and government, has demonstrated the power of this catalytic model. To date, more than 200,000 youth have been placed in first-time work experiences, funded by nearly 1,900 corporates that have invested R12.5-billion in youth salaries.

The programme has achieved an average 28% annual growth rate since 2021, making it the largest corporate-funded youth jobs initiative in the world.

Moreover, more than 28,000 YES alumni have started their own small businesses – an example of employment translating into entrepreneurship.

This is not charity or even corporate social investment; it is a strategic investment in the future workforce and the country's ability to cope with, and even exceed the requirements of, an unpredictable future.

It is worth asking why, decades after democracy, our unemployment rate remains such a global anomaly. In 2025, South Africa's overall unemployment rate stood at roughly 32.6% compared with an emerging-market average of under 8%.

There are at least three interrelated reasons:

- First, apartheid's legacy created deep



Ravi Naidoo
YES CEO

spatial and educational distortions. Generations of black South Africans were deliberately excluded from high-quality education, skilled employment and urban economic participation. These patterns persist in today's infrastructure, transport costs and unequal access to networks of opportunity.

- Second, South Africa's formal economy has not expanded fast enough to absorb new labour market entrants. Over the past decade, GDP growth has averaged under 1.2% per year – below population growth and far below the 3% to 5% threshold typically required to meaningfully reduce unemployment.
- Third, our labour statistics may understate the full spectrum of work being done. Millions of South Africans participate in what economists call 'informal, survivalist or subsistence economies' – activities such as informal trade, small-scale services and micro-manufacturing. They are often excluded from formal employment measures, leading to an underestimation of the country's entrepreneurial activity.

To achieve sustainable, job-creating growth, South Africa must adopt a dual investment strategy. The first pillar is revitalising the formal economy, and the second is massively scaling up entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Industrialisation remains the most reliable route to broad-based employment. Manufacturing's share of GDP has fallen from 21% in 1994 to under 13% in 2024. Reversing this decline requires coordinated investment in energy stability, logistics and industrial policy, especially in the green and digital sectors, where new comparative advantages can emerge.

The South African Renewable Energy Masterplan and Automotive Industry Transformation Fund are early examples of such targeted industrial efforts. These initiatives show how private investment, when aligned with public incentives, can unlock value chains that employ thousands of young people – in roles from solar panel assembly to manufacturing electric vehicle components.

A focus on manufacturing alone will not

suffice, at least not in its traditional mode. The digital economy offers an equally powerful growth frontier, one that will fundamentally transform the manufacturing sector. South Africa's ICT sector contributes more than R160-billion annually and is expanding at roughly twice the national growth rate.

Yet, the digital divide remains stark. Scaling up youth participation in coding, AI, data analytics and e-commerce is essential for building globally competitive sectors.

Programmes like the Microsoft x YES AI Skills Initiative are already bridging this gap, aiming to prepare 50,000 young South Africans per year for roles in both the public and private digital transformation agendas.

At the same time, the reality is that most future jobs will not come from large corporates or the state, but from small and growing enterprises. The National Development Plan (Vision 2030) projects that 90% of new jobs must come from small business.

This is why South Africa needs initiatives such as YES that can operate as a 'youth talent bank' – a platform connecting corporates with qualified youth and young entrepreneurs, underpinned by verified data and measurable impact.

Building a generation of digitally fluent, resilient young South Africans is not the problem to be solved; they are the solution we have been overlooking. Every year, thousands upon thousands of talented YES Youth are added to a transformed and merit-based economic foundation.

How many of them will go on to be the gamechangers that the country needs?

The YES Top 35 Under 35 event aims to provide a real sample of the sort of young talent that is getting a chance to show what they can do, if they are given a fair chance.

The good news is that YES struggled to choose the 'top' 35 given the large number of YES-sponsored youth who are doing quite remarkable things.

Looking ahead, we need to unlock the youth dividend even further. This requires structural reform across several fronts:

- If YES is given recognition in legislation as an internship programme, then many more companies would join YES under the skills development element of the B-BBEE Codes. This single regulatory shift could incentivise an additional 200,000 youth jobs annually through corporate participation.
- Targeted investment incentives for companies expanding youth-intensive sectors such as digital services, green manufacturing and agro-processing will substantially increase job opportunities for young people.
- Blended finance models must be encouraged or mandated by the government and pension funds to crowd in private and philanthropic capital for youth entrepreneurship funds, leveraging instruments such as first-loss guarantees and outcome-based financing.
- 4. Public procurement reform must ensure that youth-owned businesses are embedded in national value chains. Such a practice

should also be adopted independently by large corporates.

Collectively, these interventions would transform youth employment from a social concern into a core driver of industrial and fiscal development.

The task before us is not merely to create jobs, but to create pathways – from education to work, from employment to enterprise, and from exclusion to inclusion. Each successful youth placement, each new enterprise, each corporate partnership is a small step in building a resilient and future-fit South African economy.

In a world going through unpredictable changes, South Africa's greatest asset is not its minerals, but its people. The best endowment the country can make towards a successful future is to unlock the full potential of its youth.

Ravi Naidoo
YES CEO

Daily Maverick has long believed that journalism must do more than expose what's broken; it must illuminate where hope is being built. One of our core editorial objectives is to make a positive impact on learning and job creation. This is why we are so proud to support and partner with the YES Top 35 Under 35. These remarkable young South Africans are proof that when talent is met with opportunity, the future starts to shift.



Kahlil Gibran once wrote: "Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself." Standing in a room of YES Youth, you feel this longing, not as something abstract, but as energy, ingenuity, grit and possibility made visible. If we truly value life in South Africa, then we should be investing far more in the young people who will build what comes next.

To the Top 35, you are extraordinary. Your courage, creativity and determination remind us why this work matters, and why partnerships like YES are essential to the country we are trying to grow. Congratulations.

Heather Robertson
DM168 Editor and
Daily Maverick Online Day Editor



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Bonga Chemba

The fashion-savvy founder of Material 501, Bonga Chemba, turned YES training into a successful clothing brand. His exceptional creativity and entrepreneurial spirit have fuelled job creation, provided mentorship and uplifted local suppliers.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?
The biggest lesson I took from YES is that entrepreneurship is about resilience. Even when resources are limited, creativity and consistency can turn small beginnings into opportunities.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?
At the start of my clothing brand, Material 501, I had no funding and little experience. I overcame this by using the knowledge I gained from YES Entrepreneurship modules, building partnerships and reinvesting every small profit back into growth.

One piece of advice for your younger self?
Don't rush the process. Growth takes time, but every small step matters.

One word that sums up your YES journey?
Transformative.

What's next for you?
To expand my businesses, Material 501 and the transport business, while launching an apprenticeship programme that trains young people on how to start and run their own businesses. I also want to write a book about my journey. My goal is to pass down the lessons I've learned, inspire others and give young people a chance to create opportunities for themselves.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?
My work creates employment opportunities, promotes local fashion and inspires young people in my community to believe that entrepreneurship is possible, even without large starting capital.

Who inspires you and why?
My mentor inspires me because he has shown me the power of guidance, discipline and giving back. His belief in me kept me going when I doubted myself.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?
I represent the thousands of young South Africans who start with very little but push forward with determination and innovation. My journey is proof that when young people are supported, they can transform their lives and their communities.



Camilla Ndhlovu

Agribusiness owner Camilla Ndhlovu founded Oak Farm to create jobs, expand crops and champion sustainable systems. With Land Bank support, she has secured 29.9 hectares, produces 40,000 broilers per cycle and is scaling to 140,000+ birds per cycle.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?
Growth doesn't happen in comfort zones. The resilience, confidence and adaptability I gained continue to guide me as I expand Oak Farm. Consistency and faith open doors where resources are limited.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?
When funding doors kept closing, I almost gave up. But I chose persistence. I walked farms, built networks, refined proposals and shared my vision until I secured Land Bank and Nedbank support. This challenge taught me the value of perseverance and preparation.



One piece of advice for your younger self?
Be patient with the process. You don't need to have everything figured out at once. The small, faithful steps, whether they're long walks to find opportunities or days of unseen hard work, will one day reveal the bigger picture.

What's next for you?
I am building Oak Farm into a model of regenerative agriculture. This means integrating poultry, mushrooms and bees to create sustainable food systems. My biggest dream is to establish a hatchery, com-

plete with parent and grandparent breeding stock, to strengthen food security and supply quality chicks to my current customers and other farmers across the region.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?
I create jobs, contribute to food security and inspire youth and women to view agriculture as a pathway to dignity and success. By practising sustainability, I'm feeding people while restoring land and hope.

Who inspires you and why?
My late father inspires me deeply. His hard work, wisdom and quiet sacrifices taught me discipline and resilience. He showed me that true leadership begins at home and that building a legacy matters more than personal gain.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?
My journey shows that a rural woman farmer can rise above limitations, create lasting impact and build opportunities that reach far beyond herself. My work represents resilience, community upliftment and meaningful change.

Chantel Hlongwane

BI developer and AI Indaba Hackathon winner Chantel Hlongwane applies data, machine learning and business intelligence (BI) to streamline technical planning, and contributed to launching the BMW X3 G45. She's building expertise in artificial intelligence, automation and BI, and is an active member of BMW's Lean In Circle for Women, which advances leadership and peer mentorship.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?
The YES programme showed me that opportunities are doors that open and spaces to be owned. I learned to take up these spaces unapologetically, to show up daily and boldly, even when it felt difficult. Looking back, I've realised that these moments of courage are the ones that define growth and success.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?
Being the youngest in my team meant I constantly had to prove that I deserved a seat at the table in tech. At first, it was difficult to have my ideas heard and trusted by more experienced colleagues. I overcame this by

showing up consistently, building credibility through the quality of my work and communicating with confidence. Over time, I earned respect not just for my technical skills but also for my ability to collaborate and lead.

One piece of advice for your younger self?
I would tell my younger self: do not shrink your goals or apologise for your ambitions. Own them with confidence, because they will take you further than you can imagine.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?
My impact extends beyond my own career. I use my experience to mentor and coach young people who want to enter the tech industry, helping to build a more inclusive and diverse future in technology.

Who inspires you and why?
Steven Engelbrecht inspires me. He was the manager who hired me during my YES internship and later placed me in a department slightly different from what I was used to, which stretched my skills and built my confidence. His leadership is affirming and supportive, and he's unapologetically clear in driving goals. Without realising it, he became an indirect mentor who taught me to believe in myself, embrace innovation and lead with conviction.



Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?
I use my experiences, skills and voice to create opportunities for others while pushing the boundaries of what is possible for young professionals in tech. I believe in showing up boldly, leading with purpose and inspiring the next generation to do the same.



Crowley Kunene

Crowley Kunene is a creative entrepreneur and social media specialist who works at Momint, Africa’s leading Web3 platform. He runs CouchBuild and The Market, designs statement capes under Imagine Crowley, and builds culture-tech projects such as the Curious Crowley podcast.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?

Mentorship can change your entire trajectory. Under the guidance of my late mentor, Shaun Naidoo, I learned to push beyond what I thought possible. His belief in me became my belief in myself – a lesson I carry into every venture.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?

The biggest challenge was confidence. Entering new industries like blockchain and fashion was intimidating, but I overcame it by choosing courage over fear. Each time I acted despite doubt, I grew stronger. Confidence is built through courage, not the absence of fear.

One piece of advice for your younger self?

Don’t wait to feel ready, start now. Imagination plus action is enough to begin, and you will figure out the rest along the way.

One word that sums up your YES journey? Catalyst.

What’s next for you?

I’m building Imagine Crowley into a global design and fashion house rooted in courage and creativity, and expanding CouchBuild as a platform for African stories and experiences. Alongside that, I’m growing Crisp Co, a creative studio dedicated to bringing life back into branding and helping businesses to connect more meaningfully with people.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?

Through design, fashion, branding and curation, I create spaces where young Africans see themselves as innovators and dreamers. Whether through a cape, campaign or marketplace, my work inspires people to imagine more and believe their ideas matter.

Who inspires you and why?

I’m inspired by anyone who dares to dream loudly, and people who turn imagination into movements. They remind me that curiosity and courage are timeless tools of change.



Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?

Because I’m building spaces where others can dream. My journey is proof that courage and imagination can change lives, and I want to use this energy to lift others higher.

Emihle Majeke

Emihle Majeke progressed from development and operations (DevOps) learner to technical instructor, now designing curricula, mentoring talent and bridging AI, e-commerce and automation. She’s an accomplished cloud educator with AWS solutions architect professional, developer associate and AI practitioner certifications.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?

Life happens to all of us. It poses challenges to everyone. It is how you dust yourself off and keep your eyes on the prize that matters.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?

Learning a new programming framework was a challenge. I dedicated myself to mastering it, using multiple resources like AI and seeking guidance from programming communities.

One piece of advice for your younger self?

It is okay to pivot, and no skill is useless. Take every lesson with you as you navigate.

One word that sums up your YES journey? Transformative.

What’s next for you?

I aim to deepen my expertise as a technical trainer, pursue advanced certifications and build scalable initiatives that open doors for more young people in cloud and DevOps.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?

Through training and mentorship, I help aspiring tech professionals to develop practical cloud skills. This supports career mobility for individuals and strengthens the local tech-cloud ecosystem, making it more inclusive and future-ready.

Who inspires you and why?

I am inspired by leaders who use their success to uplift others. They remind me that real impact comes from opening doors, not just walking through them.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?

I took the opportunity to learn, grow and give back, proving that giving a platform to youth can truly transform the future. My achievements since completing the programme attest to that.



Elsie Masemola

Elsie Masemola is a senior specialist driving B-BBEE strategy as department lead and mentor. Climbing the ranks from consultant, she delivered 93% of revenue target, bought her first property and now mentors and coaches rising professionals.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?

To embody a growth mindset and approach every situation with humility, curiosity and courage. The YES programme taught me to view challenges as opportunities, embrace change, lean into discomfort and see failure not as a setback, but as providing valuable data that you can use to learn, grow and improve continuously.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?

One of the most significant challenges I faced was self-doubt. Despite achievements and recognition, I often questioned my abilities.

With consistent coaching from my employer, the YES programme reinforced my confidence, perspective and resilience, enabling growth and effective performance.

One piece of advice for your younger self?

To trust the process and lean into discomfort. Every challenge carries a lesson and every setback, instead of a failure, is a stepping stone towards growth and resilience. You are doing better than you think.

One word that sums up your YES journey? Transcend.

What’s next for you?

My goal is to further my studies and embrace new learning opportunities while growing in my leadership role at Transcend. I remain committed to youth empowerment and leveraging my academic and professional journey to create opportunities and drive change that is meaningful.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?

My work drives sustainable impact in our economy by empowering youth, strengthening industries and shaping sector-wide transformation through B-BBEE strategies. I equip young people with skills, mentorship and experience.

I also support companies in creating meaningful opportunities and I promote scalable best-practice models for workforce development and empowerment.

Who inspires you and why?

Indra Nooyi, former CEO of PepsiCo, inspires me as a young woman of colour; she embodies the type of woman I aspire to become. Despite immense professional success, she emphasises the importance of family, showing that strong familial bonds provide grounding, perspective and strength. Her example proves that one can excel while remaining devoted to loved ones.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?

I belong on this list of 35 changemakers because of my unwavering passion for youth empowerment.

I strive to be a voice for the voiceless, and I’m committed to creating opportunities to show that meaningful change is possible.



Galaletsang Chawane

Galaletsang Chawane is a site administrator at Enaex Africa, a leading company in the mining explosives industry. Her job involves improving workflows and customer relationship management discipline, a role that suits her knack for organising. This also led her to start Gorgonize, a professional organising venture that empowers women through jobs, mentorship and community giving.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?
Confidence grows through action. When I step up despite fear, opportunities multiply.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?
Starting Gorgonize with no capital and without a network.

One piece of advice for your younger self?
Trust the process. Every setback is shaping the leader you’re becoming.

One word that sums up your YES journey?
Catalyst.

What’s next for you?

Scaling Gorgonize to a full-time business that transforms homes and uplifts communities through donations and job creation.



How does your work impact your community, industry or society?
By decluttering homes and donating items, I create order for clients while restoring dignity and resources to those in need.

Who inspires you and why?
Women who turn adversity into strength inspire me. Their resilience fuels my drive to build platforms that give others hope.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?
I am redefining business as a tool for change. By organising spaces while empowering communities, I’m showing that impact and profit can thrive together.

Jenine Scott

Finance intern turned Bain & Company contract hire, Jenine Scott founded Dignity in Flow, a non-profit that supports girls in Klip-town with menstrual health resources and self-development programmes. She’s building partnerships, financial stability and youth volunteer pathways with purpose.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?
The YES programme taught me to be disciplined, punctual, prepared and financially responsible. I’ve learned that saving consistently, even small amounts, makes a difference. My savings go towards sanitary pads and toiletries for girls through my organisation, Dignity in Flow SA. Most importantly, YES showed me that hard work pays off. A one-year internship can grow into a contract or full-time role if you prove yourself and show how much you want the opportunity.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?
A major challenge I faced was losing motivation after being denied a US visa three times. Although it was discouraging, I shifted my focus to opportunities at home and used the experience as a lesson in resilience. Another challenge was balancing work and my personal life. I learned to prioritise self-care



through healthy habits, time with my daughter and reflection. This taught me the importance of giving myself grace so that I can show up fully for others.

One piece of advice for your younger self?
Your background does not define your future. Focus on your own journey, invest in yourself and prioritise your happiness. You cannot change your history, but you can make better decisions in the present and for your future.

One word that sums up your YES journey?
Transformation.

What’s next for you?
I plan to expand the fight against period poverty by securing donors and long-term part-

nerships. I want to build resources such as reliable transport to better serve my community. I also want to further my studies.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?
Through Dignity in Flow, I run monthly workshops that provide families with essential items such as sanitary pads and toiletries, as well as educational support. At Bain & Company, my role in the global finance space ensures smooth processes that reduce stress around payments. I’m growing professionally and using my salary to make a tangible difference in my community, providing educational resources such as stationery to those who need them most.

Who inspires you and why?
Thulani Madondo inspires me because of the opportunities he created in Kliptown through the Kliptown Youth Programme, changing countless lives through his vision and leadership.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?
Because I lead by example. The YES programme equipped me with skills that inspired me to launch Dignity in Flow. Guided by the spirit of ubuntu, I am committed to creating opportunities for others, especially young girls. My journey shows that resilience and community-driven leadership can truly transform lives.

Kgotso Matjato

A fintech quality assurance specialist turned software developer, Kgotso Matjato is passionate about building reliable, user-centered technology. From teaching Information Technology in school labs to creating hospital solutions, he now lectures in information technology, and runs a side hustle developing websites for businesses looking to grow their digital presence.



Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?
I learned not to let setbacks define me. Even though I only secured a host company in the final three months of the YES programme, I pushed through while studying part-time. Balancing both was tough, but it taught me resilience, and I am proud to be

recognised as the Best Performing Postgraduate Student in IT.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?
Balancing full-time work and postgraduate studies. My weekdays often ran from 8am to 8pm, with weekends dedicated to assignments. It was exhausting, but I stayed disciplined, leaned on small daily wins and kept my bigger goals in sight.

One piece of advice for your younger self?
Always make choices that serve your growth, not to please others. Ask yourself: “Am I doing this for me or to impress someone else?” This clarity will save you time and energy.

One word that sums up your YES journey?
Hopeful.

What’s next for you?
I’m pursuing my master’s in IT and transi-

tioning into academia as a lecturer in information systems at Eduvos, while continuing my passion for software development.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?
By teaching and mentoring future developers, I’m passing on both technical skills and the mindset needed to innovate. My aim is to help shape the next generation of problem solvers.

Who inspires you and why?
My mother. Her example of hard work, humility and respect guides how I carry myself every day.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?
I’ve never been afraid to stand out through hard work and persistence. My journey shows others that if I can achieve this, so can they. Hard work, consistency and faith truly bear fruit.

Guy Luyanda Maluleke

Guy Maluleke is a software as a service (SaaS) content specialist and founder of the *Tech Meets Creativity* podcast. He’s shaped major insurance campaigns at Telesure Investment Holdings, rose to digital content manager, mentors creatives and now drives content strategy at a UK firm.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?
It’s a simple one: your starting point doesn’t define your finish line. Coming from Ham-manskraal, where access and exposure were limited, I learned that growth happens when you step into uncomfortable spaces. Looking back, my YES journey was nothing short of a catalyst. It shifted me from feeling stuck to building a career where I now create marketing strategies for global brands while also building platforms that inspire others to dream bigger.



A professional challenge and how you overcame it?
Walking into a corporate environment for the first time felt like landing in another world, but I embraced curiosity, learning from everyone around me and turning curiosity into my biggest asset.

One piece of advice for your younger self
If I could give my younger self advice, it would be this: relax, *mfethu* (my brother). Stop comparing your journey. Walk your own lane – it will take you further than trying to run in someone else’s shoes.

One word that sums up your YES journey?
Transformational.

What’s next for you?
What’s next for me is to keep blending creativity and strategy in my work while expanding platforms like my podcast, *Tech Meets Creativity*, where young South Africans come together to share their stories, collaborate and rise together. My impact is rooted in this belief: if I move forward, I make sure someone else is moving with me.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?
Through The Millennials Corner (TMC), we create conversations that inspire and

empower young South Africans to dream bigger and pursue careers in tech and creative spaces. By sharing real stories and experiences from emerging voices as well as industry leaders, we are building a culture of curiosity, collaboration and confidence among the next generation of changemakers.

Who inspires you and why?
I’m most inspired by ordinary South Africans who hustle with dignity – the gogo selling vetkoek at the taxi rank, or the young coder teaching kids in the township. Their resilience is a daily reminder of why we keep pushing onwards.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?
I belong on this list because I’m living proof that the YES programme works. From Ham-manskraal near Pretoria to global brands, my story shows the next generation that life is indeed what you make of it.

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Masechaba Mosena, GIBS PDBA Alumni



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Life After the PDBA

Savanah Hall, GIBS PDBA Alumni



"GIBS didn't just teach me business - it taught me how to think, adapt, and lead. The PDBA exposed me to strategy, finance, innovation, and most importantly, the confidence to step into the corporate world ready to make an impact.

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Mangkgateng Seshibe

Mangkgateng Seshibe is a skilled data analyst and entrepreneur who leverages data analysis and business intelligence tools such as R, Python and Power BI to deliver actionable insights. Formerly focused on alumni analytics at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, she now channels her expertise into building ventures that create impact. As the founder of Eden Events and Pads-R-Us, she is committed to creating jobs, supporting local artisans and addressing the lack of sanitary products among schoolgirls.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?
The power of taking initiative. YES taught me that waiting for change is not enough – you must be the one to spark it. This mindset still drives my work today.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?
The YES programme exposed me to real-world workplace dynamics and I learned about workplace conflict management. Being in a junior position taught me the power of observation and asking the right questions, emotional intelligence, staying open to feedback and finding common ground. It helped me build confidence in navigating professional relationships and gave me the foundation for building collaboration with empathy and clarity.

One piece of advice for your younger self?
Don't shrink yourself to fit into spaces – create your own. Your voice matters.

One word that sums up your YES journey?
Transformative.

What's next for you?
I am completing my MCom in economics. I would also like to continue growing my events management and curated gifting business, Eden Events, which feeds my entrepreneurial spirit.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?
I founded Pads-R-Us in 2016 to reduce school absenteeism among girls, give them dignity by providing them with sanitary towels and toiletries, and make them aware of different opportunities available to them through guest talks on education, careers, etc. With my economics background and future work, I hope to influence policymaking to reduce economic inequality in South Africa.

Who inspires you and why?
My mom. Her resilience, grace and unwavering belief in possibilities continue to inspire me every day.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?
I don't just dream of change, I create it.



Lebo Monama

Lebo Monama is the founder and creative behind Isiphithiphithi Wears Fashion House. She fuses fashion and photography to heal and inspire. She has sold more than 6,500 items, supplies four schools and mentors youth through her 25 Art Peace initiative.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?
Opportunities exist only when we actively walk towards them. This truth has guided me to take bold steps even when the path wasn't clear, trusting that growth comes with action and courage.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?
One of my biggest challenges was starting my business with limited resources and no formal funding. There were days when I had to choose between investing in materials or covering personal needs. I became resourceful, learning to use what I had, reinvesting every little bit of profit back in the business, and teaching myself skills like printing and embroidery to cut costs. That season of sacrifice and persistence built my resilience and made me appreciate every milestone today.

Khensani Mnisi

Conservation-minded entrepreneur Khensani Mnisi balances back-end safari operations with youth leadership and marketing. She co-founded Lehlabile B Peanut Butter, creating jobs and sustainable sourcing while advancing digital storytelling and amplifying sustainability initiatives.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?
The power of resilience and that even small steps forward create lasting change.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?
Imposter syndrome has been a defining challenge. Transitioning from being a YES Youth to holding leadership positions, I often questioned my worth. I overcame this by grounding myself in the reality of my journey and recognising the skills, long hours and commitment that earned me these spaces.

One piece of advice for your younger self?
Trust your journey. Every skill, setback and role prepares you for something bigger.

One word that sums up your YES journey?
Transformative.

What's next for you?
Embracing every learning opportunity in my current role while continuing to grow Lehlabile B Peanut Butter, which has become a



One piece of advice for your younger self?
Don't worry, everything will work out beautifully, just as you imagine. You will impact lives in ways you never dreamed. Stay focused.

One word that sums up your YES journey?
Love.

What's next for you?
Recently, I won a Free SA Young Leaders



dream I never saw coming. We have bought a physical store with the vision of transforming it into a tourism hub in the heart of Phiring Village in Limpopo. Through our peanut butter business and the development piloted by the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere, I aim to be part of a vibrant tourism hotspot that blends local enterprise with conservation. I also serve as both a beneficiary and participant, and now brand ambassador for the Boledi Mafogo Foundation, which provides guidance and support for young girls and women in our community.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?
As head of tourism at Nourish Eco Village, I develop experiences that connect visitors to sustainable practices and local culture. As both a beneficiary and participant, and now also brand ambassador, for the Boledi Mafogo

Award in the business category. Next is building the Fashion Development Hub in Kingsway, Benoni, using containers to create a space that empowers local talent and opens doors for young creatives.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?
My work directly impacts my community by creating jobs, inspiring entrepreneurship and proving that success can come from small beginnings. Through fashion and business, I aim to uplift, mentor and build a lasting legacy.

Who inspires you and why?
I draw deep inspiration from Oprah Winfrey, a woman who embraced her mission and purpose fearlessly. Barack Obama also inspires me – his journey to becoming the first black president of America shows the power of purpose, leadership and resilience in the face of all obstacles.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?
I belong on this list because I come from Kingsway, a small community with big dreams. YES saw my potential and today I live to make an impact not just for myself, but for society at large.

go Foundation, I provide guidance and support for young girls and women in our community. As co-founder of Lehlabile B Peanut Butter, we support local farmers, promote healthy living, create growing job opportunities and foster sustainable tourism and travel in Phiring Village. Through these combined roles, I strive to uplift my community while fostering sustainable development, responsible travel and youth leadership.

Who inspires you and why?
I draw inspiration from my parents. My father, a teacher who began his career at 19 in 1984, overcame immense obstacles, paid his own fees for his qualification, and instilled in me the values of hard work, perseverance and patriotism. My mother grew up in a time when being a wife was often considered enough, yet she studied the same course and was in the same lecture halls as Dr Criselda Kananda, fighting for her education and dreams. Today, she is not only my business partner but also my confidant. Their example reminds me that I have no choice but to be great.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?
I became a YES Youth after just having buried my daughter, whom I met for only three minutes. I had no degree and no money, but had my dreams and an unwavering belief in my African roots and history as a pathway to finding myself. Through perseverance, resilience and commitment to my community, I transformed my pain into purpose.

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Mathapelo Pheko

A purpose-led banker at Nedbank, Mathapelo Pheko manages four external debt collectors across portfolios delivering fair, accountable outcomes. Recognised for teamwork and mentorship, she is also expanding her skillset and pursuing her honours degree in industrial sociology.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?
I learned to be resilient, to stay steady whenever I am faced with a challenge and to stay patient with myself. Now, I continuously show up, and I never give up.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?
Transitioning to corporate as a first-timer was a bit overwhelming. I found it tough adapting to the ways of working and the pressure to deliver good results. I overcame this by asking questions, staying open to learning and being patient with myself.

One piece of advice for your younger self?
To stop doubting yourself. Growing up, I used to question my abilities and, with time, I have learned that I am capable and stronger than I give myself credit for.

One word that sums up your YES journey?
Rewarding.

What’s next for you?
Taking all the lessons I’ve learned and applying them in my current role. Beyond my role I believe in paying it forward by encouraging those around me and being a source of support.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?
My work ensures that the legal and financial processes are done correctly. This helps maintain trust and stability for clients, the bank and the community.

Who inspires you and why?
I’m inspired by leaders who make their teams feel valued and supported. I’ve worked with people who lead with professionalism and empathy, and this motivates me to bring the same approach to my professional career.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?
My journey with YES does not reflect only my personal growth, but also a dedication to uplifting others.

Matlou Mokoena

Matlou Mokoena is an award-winning plant controller at Saint-Gobain Construction Products SA, a leading sustainable construction company where she advances cost efficiency and governance across plant operations. She’s a mentor for YES Youth at her company while growing her side hustle selling moringa powder.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?
Opportunities are bridges. When you show up with commitment and curiosity, doors open far beyond what you imagined.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?
As a young professional, I often questioned my place in the room: ‘Is my voice loud enough? Am I making the right impact? Do I need to be more convincing?’ The real challenge was establishing credibility while developing my skills. I overcame this by allowing my work to speak for itself. I consistently delivered results and sought out mentorship opportunities. Over time, this built my confidence and positioned me as a trusted voice within the team.

One piece of advice for your younger self?
Trust the process. Every late-night study session and every small step forward adds up to greater milestones.

One word that sums up your YES journey?
Transformative.

What’s next for you?
My focus is on completing my CIMA designation, strengthening my leadership footprint in manufacturing and finance, and mentoring more young professionals.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?
By driving financial transparency and cost efficiency, I ensure sustainability in South Africa’s manufacturing sector. At the same time, I mentor and encourage young women in finance.

Who inspires you and why?
I’m inspired by women who break barriers.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?
Because I represent possibility. From a township school to plant controller, my journey reflects the power of YES to change lives. I am committed to multiplying this impact for others.



Matshepo Thambekwayo

A creator-economy entrepreneur, Matshepo Thambekwayo launched Thing Or Two, a media venture that provides affordable, copyright-free music to digital creators. She collaborates with influencers, is distributing an AI-generated album and is growing revenue from YouTube and Etsy.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?
The power of resilience and consistency. Sales taught me to face rejection, reset and try again until the deal closes.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?
Transitioning from healthcare to business was daunting, but I overcame it by upskilling myself through books, practical experience and building my businesses.

One piece of advice for your younger self?
Every setback is redirection, not failure.

One word that sums up your YES journey?
Transformative.

What’s next for you?
Scaling Thing Or Two into a registered media house, expanding globally and completing my RE5 qualification.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?
Through Thing Or Two, I provide affordable, copyright-free music for content creators locally and, globally, help them grow brands without barriers.

Who inspires you and why?
People who create opportunities from limited resources. They remind me that vision and persistence build legacies.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?
I embody the spirit of YES: a nurse turned entrepreneur, building businesses that uplift communities and creators. My journey proves that young South Africans can redefine industries.



Matsatsi Mpholoane

From assistant to warehouse supervisor, Matsatsi Magdeline Mpholoane optimises inventory and turnaround times while launching a complementary food venture and enabling micro-traders by supplying products and packaging.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?
Procrastination is the thief of time. Hard work always pays off, while delays only hold you back. The more effort I put into learning and growing, the more opportunities I create for myself.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?
As a leader, I had to manage different personalities and work styles. At first, it was overwhelming because everyone sees and does things differently. I learned to listen more before responding and to understand each person’s character. This built trust

and helped me manage situations calmly. Over time, I became stronger and more confident in leading diverse teams.

One piece of advice for your younger self?
Believe in your dreams and trust the process. Challenges will shape you, not break you.

One word that sums up your YES journey?
Empowered.

What’s next for you?
I plan to further my studies in logistics and supply chain management while expanding my business.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?
My work in logistics ensures goods move smoothly, while my small business supports local vendors. This creates income opportunities and uplifts my community.

Who inspires you and why?
My mother and late sister inspire me. Their experience running businesses taught me resilience, perseverance, and how to face challenges head-on.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?
I have grown from leading teams to building a business that empowers others.



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Modipadi Mokgohloa

Modipadi Mokgohloa is senior research lecturer at South Africa's private higher education institution specialising in film, television, performance and creative arts, and chairperson of Verity Productions, where she develops artists, leads tours and drives new works. An award-winning creative with a BA (Hons) and an MFA, she co-creates acclaimed productions while building platforms for young voices to thrive.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?

The importance of adaptability. YES taught me that every opportunity, no matter how small, can be a stepping stone. I still apply this by remaining open to learning and embracing new roles.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?

Breaking into the creative industry without immediate access to networks was daunting. I overcame it by producing my own work, building collaborations and leveraging festivals and residencies to create visibility for my projects.

One piece of advice for your younger self?

Your journey will not be linear. Trust the process, keep learning and know that every detour adds value to your story.

One word that sums up your YES journey?

Transformative.

What's next for you?

Strengthening the business side of my creative work by developing sustainable models that merge storytelling, education and entrepreneurship. I want to create projects that address pressing social issues and generate economic opportunities. I remain committed to mentoring young creatives, equipping them with artistic skills and the tools to thrive in the arts business.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?

I challenge stereotypes, open conversations about social issues and provide platforms for underrepresented voices through my work. As a lecturer and facilitator, I mentor young creatives.

Who inspires you and why?

Young South African businesswomen like Thando Thabethe, who balance creativity and entrepreneurship with excellence.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?

I bridge entertainment, education and empowerment. From producing award-winning theatre and film to mentoring students, I'm committed to redefining possibilities for young South Africans.



Mohloiwana Nakana

From YES data quality assistant to provincial HR officer, Mohloiwana Nakana exemplifies data rigour, people-first leadership and enterprise. She manages multiple side hustles, including a transportation business, fumigation and plumbing services, while streamlining HR operations, managing recruitment and serving as a role model for youth.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?

Never stop being hungry for growth, both professionally and financially, while staying true to my values. The YES Programme taught me that growth is a lifelong journey, not a destination.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?

One of my greatest challenges was stepping into a leadership role where eight people reported directly to me. Transitioning from being a YES Youth to becoming their leader was daunting. On top of that, I had to switch departments, moving from tracking



to HR, which pushed me far outside my comfort zone. I overcame these challenges by being resilient, working tirelessly and committing myself fully to learning.

One piece of advice for your younger self?

Everything you put your mind to is possible. You are capable, intelligent and enough.

One word that sums up your YES journey?

Roller coaster.

What's next for you?

More growth both as a professional and as an entrepreneur. I am determined to build businesses that create opportunities while excelling in my professional career.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?

Through my work in HR and recruitment, I get to play a huge role in tackling unemployment. Every single day, I contribute to changing lives by helping young people access opportunities. I see myself as a voice for the unemployed youth in my community. I carry the responsibility of inspiring hope.

Who inspires you and why?

My colleagues because they are young, determined and driven despite their different backgrounds and challenges. They embody resilience, positivity and the spirit of possibility. We often call ourselves 'miracle workers' because we find ways to make things happen against all odds.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?

I come from a background many young people can relate to, and I've shown that it's possible to rise, grow and thrive in the professional space while building a business. By sharing my journey, I aim to inspire other young people to believe they too can claim their seat at the table of 35 changemakers.

build confidence and overcome anxiety. Ask questions, explore new avenues and step into challenges, even if you're afraid.

What's next for you?

My next step is to learn project management. I want to build people's competence and confidence, especially those who think they are not good enough.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?

Many young team leads struggle with trusting themselves. Because I know what it feels like to be overwhelmed, I coach them to speak up, seek clarity and check understanding. Sometimes I tell them: "Use my voice until you find your own." It works wonders.

Who inspires you and why?

My father is my role model. A steelworker and farmer, he taught us resilience and grit, urging young farmers to "start with a bunch of spinach".

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?

Like my father, I am a changemaker, leaving my comfort zone and taking others with me on the journey.



Mualusi Nevondo

A former electrical engineer, Mualusi Nevondo entered the risk and compliance profession and excelled at audits, governance and regulatory oversight. She's become a trusted leader and mentor and is furthering her education with a compliance management certificate from the University of Cape Town, the RE5 qualification for financial representatives and a BCom Law.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?

YES taught me that opportunities are seeds. With effort and resilience, they can grow into careers and create impact far beyond yourself.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?

After completing electrical engineering, I struggled to secure an apprenticeship. Instead of giving up, I pivoted, selling goods to survive, then pursuing law at Unisa.

One piece of advice for your younger self?

Never underestimate small beginnings.

One word that sums up your YES journey?

Transformative.

What's next for you?

I will be graduating with my BCom Law, starting my LLB and growing in my professional career. I aspire to become a leading authority in risk and compliance while also expanding my entrepreneurial ventures.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?

Through my ventures, I empower women with start-up perfume stock on credit. Many are now sustaining themselves. My cleaning business hires casual workers from informal settlements, supporting up to 10 families monthly. I also lead a church charity foundation in Philippi, raising funds for families in need.

Who inspires you and why?

My children inspire me most. They push me to grow, build businesses and create opportunities for others. Every achievement is for them and proof that no matter where you start, you can rise.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?

I turned one chance from YES into a career, a degree and three businesses that uplift others. My journey shows that opportunity, when embraced, can spark change and fight poverty.

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Nomawethu Ntsangani

Most recently a customer experience specialist at a South Africans leading financial institutions, specialising in asset-based financing solutions, Nomawethu Ntsangani is an award-winning customer experience (CX) and continuous improvement expert who turns insights into action across products and operations. A Forrester-certified CX professional, she elevates journeys at scale.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?

Resilience, the ability to adapt, learn quickly and keep showing up with purpose, even in unfamiliar spaces.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?

Early in my career, I often doubted my voice in rooms filled with experts. I overcame this by leaning into preparation and mentorship, and reminding myself that my perspective matters. Today, I confidently contribute to shaping customer journeys and processes.

One piece of advice for your younger self?

Trust the journey: the detours are not delays. They are part of your story.

One word that sums up your YES journey?

Transformative.

What's next for you?

I'm focused on expanding my impact in CX and business process improvement while mentoring others to confidently step into opportunities that once felt out of reach.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?

Through CX design, I create intuitive, user-friendly digital journeys that make everyday services more accessible. By simplifying complex processes, I improve customer satisfaction and also empower consultants and front-line staff to work more effectively.

Who inspires you and why?

Ntjantja Ned, a woman who selflessly paid my school fees from primary school to university without any expectations. Her generosity gave me the gift of education and the confidence to dream bigger. Her impact lives on through me, and I strive to pay it forward by creating opportunities that uplift others, just as she did for me.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?

Because I've used my skills to transform customer experiences, uplift communities and embrace innovation. My journey reflects a deep commitment to creating meaningful impact beyond myself.

Nakie Djedje

Robotics educator and Lumina Academy founder Nakie Djedje leads a team of tutors in delivering science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) and commercial subjects through after-school programmes. He builds confidence through a 'teach-to-learn' culture and has created income pathways for unemployed graduates by employing them as tutors.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?

Meaningful impact comes from consistency and vision. When you show up for your community, opportunities multiply.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?

Starting Lumina Academy with only a few STEM subjects and limited resources was a challenge. We overcame it by proving results in those subjects. Today, we have grown to serving Grade 8 to 12 learners across sciences, commercial studies, general studies and technical fields.

One piece of advice for your younger self?

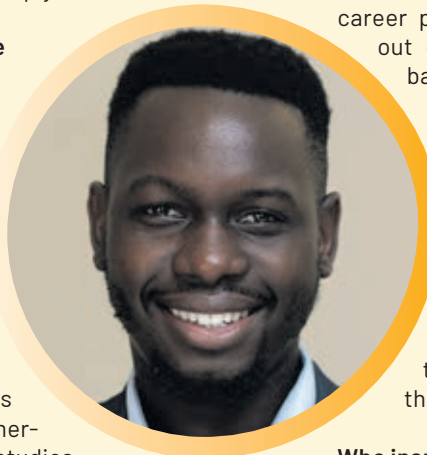
Growth doesn't need perfect conditions. Start where you are.

One word that sums up your YES journey?

Transformative.

What's next for you?

Growing Lumina Academy into one of



South Africa's most trusted education hubs and building a finishing school to support learners into higher education and careers. I am also growing my vegetable, sugar-cane and poultry projects. Through these enterprises I aim to create jobs, improve food security and inspire youth to see opportunity in agriculture.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?

Many young people face unemployment, drug addiction and discouragement because they lack support, information and opportunities. Lumina Academy is a catalyst for hope and change by helping students to master STEM, commercial and general subjects. With stronger results, learners can access university and career pathways that once felt out of reach. We also give back directly by donating food parcels, uniforms and school materials to families in need. Our mission goes beyond academics. We aim to restore belief, open doors and prove that every learner has the potential to achieve their dreams when given the right tools and support.

Who inspires you and why?

Ashling McCarthy, whose commitment to rural communities helped to shape my vision, and Langa Zulu, who proved that persistence can grow limited resources into a national movement.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?

Because I have shown that impact is not about where you start, but how many lives you uplift.

Nompumelelo Phangela

Nompumelelo Phangela is a lab facilitator who runs a high-performing computer lab, supports teachers and mentors student volunteers. Recognised with the Facilitator's Choice and Best Fixed Lab awards, she's a patient leader who makes technology accessible for learners.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?

Resilience, the ability to stay focused and keep moving forward despite challenges.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?

While working as a computer lab facilitator, I often found it challenging to manage younger learners who struggled to follow instructions. To overcome this, I broke up their tasks into smaller steps and kept the sessions interactive. This improved their focus.

One piece of advice for your younger self?

You're more capable than you think, so don't wait for permission to lead.

One word that sums up your YES journey?

Transformative.

What's next for you?

I am studying towards a teaching qualification. My goal is to become a game-changing qualified teacher who combines digital skills with classroom teaching.



How does your work impact your community, industry or society?

My work in digital education has helped young people in my community to build computer skills that prepare them for school and future job opportunities.

Who inspires you and why?

Andile Dlamini, departmental head at Iphahamiseng Primary School in Duduza, Nigel, because he shows strong leadership leading his team in the intermediate phase. I admire his multitasking skills: he is doing his doctorate in education and is an external assessor at Unisa.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?

Because of the positive impact I made while working at Iphahamiseng Primary School, where I demonstrated decisive leadership and teamwork.



Nthabeleng Khasebe

A standout sales executive in the automotive industry, Nthabeleng Khasebe leverages finance discipline, customer relationship management and social media to win awards and close deals. She upholds dealership excellence with consistency and a customer-centric ethos. She also sews custom garments.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?

The ability to learn. It has helped me to enhance my skills and enabled me to seek opportunity. It has taught me to set clear goals and continuously build and improve existing and new business relationships.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?

Adapting to change because I never knew what to expect. I took change as a learning curve to understand different people, working styles, environments and industries. This helped me achieve the company's mission, vision and overall goal.

One piece of advice for your younger self?

It's okay to make mistakes because experience is the best teacher. Mistakes lead to better learning and understanding.

One word that sums up your YES journey?

Educational.

What's next for you?

Education. I look forward to investing in my studies to fill skills gaps in the market, add more value in my career and open more doors for me.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?

It increases quality of life in terms of increased accessibility and mobility, and enhances lifestyles in terms of convenience. My work also contributes to economic growth.

Who inspires you and why?

My family, because they are the first-hand experience I have of resilience, patience, perseverance and making things happen for themselves and even for me, whether circumstances were favourable or not.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?

I belong on the list of the 35 changemakers because I foster growth, bridge perspectives and drive action. I translate ambitions and ideas into tangible results. I work to empower youth to believe in their ability to create a better future.



Seja Makgato

A cloud-first information and communication technology (ICT) trainer, Seja Makgato designs and delivers training in cloud computing, IT support and cybersecurity. She's advancing her specialisation in cloud infrastructure and bridging the digital divide by mentoring learners to become confident technologists.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?
Learning never stops. You must constantly adapt, think differently and ensure that the work you do leaves a positive mark.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?
There was a time when I felt stagnant in my career and stuck in one place without growth. Instead of giving up, I enrolled in courses to learn new skills. This decision reignited my confidence and opened doors I never imagined possible.

One piece of advice for your younger self?
When opportunity comes, grab it with both



hands, as it could be the beginning of some-thing life-changing.

One word that sums up your YES journey?
Transformative.

What's next for you?
I want to continue growing in my career, upskilling in areas like artificial intelligence

and, most importantly, empowering the youth.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?
As an ICT trainer, I equip people with digital skills that bridge the gap between unemploy-ment and employability. This transforms individual lives, strengthens communities and contributes to a more inclusive economy.

Who inspires you and why?
My sister, Emma Mantome Makgato, is my big-gest inspiration. After setbacks with her matric results, she boldly took a learnership that opened doors for her. Through determi-nation and continuous learning, she worked her way up from call centre agent to custom-er credentialling analyst, while earning multi-ple qualifications. Her resilience reminds me that it's not about how you start, but how you finish.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?
As a young woman from Alexandra township in Johannesburg, my story proves that back-ground does not determine destiny. I strive to inspire others and show that real change begins when we commit to lifting others as we rise.

Samkele Xaba

Samkele Xaba is head of development at the Imbeleko Foundation, where she leads fundraising and stakeholder engagement, and amplifies impact through campaigns. She is pursuing an MPhil in development finance at Stellenbosch University and was selected for the prestigious Traversing Liminality fellowship.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?
Sustainable impact comes from empow-ering people, not just from providing solutions. I apply this daily in building the Imbeleko Foundation's education programmes.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?
When we launched our after-school programme in rural KwaZulu-Natal, there was

poor attendance, because learners walked long distances and often lacked food. By integrating daily meals and arranging local transport, attendance stabilised, and today more than 1,200 learners across 15 schools benefit consistently.

One piece of advice for your younger self?
Don't underestimate your rural background – it's your greatest strength. The challenges you grew up with will one day shape solutions for others.

One word that sums up your YES journey?
Groundbreaking.

What's next for you?
We're scaling our blended after-school model to reach 2,000 learners by 2026, while expanding the

Imbeleko Foundation to provide accredited pathways into careers in agriculture, data science and entrepreneurship.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?
Through the Imbeleko Foundation, we pro-vide academic support, nutrition and career coaching to rural learners. This year alone, 600 learners in grades 4 to 6, 400 learners in grades 8 and 9, and 175 senior high school learners received structured learning and mentorship. Beyond improved marks, learn-ers are gaining confidence, resilience and career direction.

Who inspires you and why?
I am inspired by rural learners who show up despite hunger, poverty or lack of resources. Their courage to keep learning reminds me why I cannot stop creating opportunities for them.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?
Because my work demonstrates that innova-tion is not limited to cities. From a rural valley in KwaZulu-Natal, we are proving that quality education, skills and opportunity can be created at scale anywhere. We are showing that rural youth can thrive as South Africa's future leaders.

Robyn Forbay

Robyn Forbay is a junior communications consultant who crafts high-impact com-munications across energy, finance, real estate and cybersecurity. She previously built an in-house PR engine delivering R500,000+ media coverage and position-ing its solar financing venture with the skills she gained as editor-in-chief at Her Campus Media.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?
Say YES to opportunities or work you may feel you are not ready for. In future you will be ready, capable and worthy.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?
Being scammed online. It was a nightmare, which I overcame through honest com-munication, a solution-oriented mindset and literally hundreds of persistent emails to the Meta support team.

One piece of advice for your younger self?
Take up space and silence your inner crit-ic. Don't be shy to share your ideas and ask for the tools you need to succeed.

One word that sums up your YES journey?
Transformative.

What's next for you?
Continuing to pave my career path in PR and strategic communications. To keep writing, and finding ways to make small – or large – impacts in my community.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?
We help clients to communicate their narrative with clarity, ensuring their messages reach and resonate with diverse audiences, ultimately support-ing development goals and Saudi Ara-bia's global positioning.

Who inspires you and why?
My family. Seeing how hard they work each day while still being a parent, a sister, a dad, a wife, and caring for themselves.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?
Because someone on your team saw my potential. Making the list is a privilege and honour and, most importantly, an oppor-tunity for me to extend my impact and inspire young women of colour.



Since its inception, the **Youth Employment Service (YES)** has reached a remarkable milestone, creating **200,000 work opportunities** for young people across South Africa. As the country's **most successful youth employment programme**, YES continues to drive meaningful change by transforming communities.

ByDesign Communications proudly partners with YES crafting stories of impact, amplifying success, and positioning YES as a leader in youth employment. Together, we've showcased how YES is not only changing lives, but shaping a more **inclusive and sustainable future for South Africa**.



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ByDesign Communications is a full-service communications, content, public relations and digital firm built to deliver real business results. Services include **strategy, media relations, social media, content creation, crisis communications and media training**.

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Senamile Mzobe

A genetics and microbiology graduate turned laboratory analyst, Senamile Mzobe is bridging science, tech and entrepreneurship. She ensures quality and compliance, holds Azure developer credentials and is growing her craft business, Mamalu Crochet.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?
The blessedness of chance. I’ve learned that every opportunity, no matter how small, is a gift from God and can become the foundation for growth and transformation.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?
Managing quality control across multiple production lines at Safal Steel was overwhelming at first. But by asking questions

and seeking mentorship from my manager and supervisor, I turned the challenge into a strength of multitasking.

One piece of advice for your younger self?
Your education, skills and prayers will open doors greater than you can imagine!

One word that sums up your YES journey?
Assurance.

What’s next for you?
I have a BSc in genetics and microbiology and my plan is to pursue a postgraduate degree in computational biology/bioinformatics. I’ve already acquired a few certifications in software development and I am looking at a career that intersects science and technology.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?
Currently in industrial quality control, as a quality lab assistant, I safeguard steel

quality that our communities buy for a variety of uses. I apply my chemistry knowledge in various chemical and mechanical lab tests to make sure that we release prime-quality steel products which are not harmful to the environment.

Who inspires you and why?
My mother inspires me. Her resilience, strength and care have shaped who I am. She has also inspired the name of my crochet brand, Mamalu Crochet. ‘Ma’ meaning mother in IsiZulu and ‘Malu’, which we call her by, from her name, Malusi.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?
I believe my journey reflects adaptability. From science and technology to creativity, I am committed to fulfilling my purpose through different avenues. I want to be of service to others and leave a lasting impact on those who come after me.



Sibusiso Keswa

From being evicted to becoming an entrepreneur, Sibusiso Keswa is the founder of LaVeeDaLoka Entertainment and Thrift Phoenix. He creates studio access for township artists and provides affordable fashion. He is also studying radio production and is directing his first film.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?
Consistency is everything. YES taught me that real impact is built quietly through showing up, staying committed and doing the work even when no one’s watching.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?
Starting my own film and music production company, along with launching a radio show, was daunting, especially with no financial backing. I overcame the fear of failure by learning the business, seeking mentorship and surrounding myself with people who believed in the vision. Their guidance helped me turn uncertainty into momentum.

One piece of advice for your younger self?
Speak up. Your ideas have value. Don’t wait for permission to be bold.

One word that sums up your YES journey?
Transformative.

What’s next for you?
I’m learning shoe manufacturing and continuing to build a creative hub that includes my production com-

pany and radio show. I hope these platforms empower youth, amplify local stories and spark entrepreneurship.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?
Through media and storytelling, I give a voice to the unheard, create space for dialogue and open doors for others to grow.

Who inspires you and why?
My family’s love and support keep me grounded. But it’s my community in Soweto, their resilience, creativity and hustle, that fuels my drive. They remind me that greatness often starts with very little.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?
I build with intention. I create platforms that serve others. I turn challenges into opportunities. I lead with heart, and I believe in the power of community-driven change.

Sibusiso Radebe

PresiDA co-founder Sibusiso Radebe champions township SMMEs with branding, signage and campaigns. As a nonprofit organisation chair and Electoral Commission deputy presiding officer, he blends certifications with hands-on impact.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?
Resilience and adaptability are the keys to progress. Even in moments of scarcity, there is always a path forward when you remain committed, resourceful and willing to learn.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?
Balancing work, business and social impact was overwhelming. I overcame it by trusting the process, delegating effectively, staying disciplined and maintaining focus.

One piece of advice for your younger self?
Trust your hard work. It’s unlocking doors you can’t see yet. And don’t be afraid to start small. Every step, no matter how small, moves you closer to your dreams.

One word that sums up your YES journey?
Catalyst.

What’s next for you?
To excel in both my IT career and entrepreneurial journey. I am committed to sharpening my business acumen, starting and managing impactful projects and positioning PresiDA as a leading force in branding, marketing and digital solutions. At the same time, I will continue expanding the reach of Healing Lives NPO, ensuring that more vulnerable children are



supported, uplifted and given the dignity they deserve.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?
Through PresiDA, I open doors for township entrepreneurs, helping them transform ideas into thriving brands. Through Healing Lives NPO, I restore dignity and hope for orphaned and vulnerable children.

Who inspires you and why?
I am inspired by young South Africans who rise above adversity to create change. They remind me that leadership is not about titles but about serving and uplifting others.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?
My journey reflects the essence of YES: using opportunities to grow, empower others and create sustainable impact. My work in business and community development shows that young people can drive transformation in South Africa. My vision is bigger than success for myself; it’s about building businesses, platforms and opportunities that inspire and empower others. That’s why I believe I am a true changemaker.



Sinoxolo Nene

A former physicist, Sinoxolo Nene used her YES Programme to become a junior developer, delivering SQL/Power BI insights and C#/.NET features. She advocates for representation in tech and nurtures her creativity through purpose-driven projects.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?
Take every opportunity that comes your way, even if you don't feel 'qualified'. Being adaptable and teachable has opened doors for me that I never imagined, and it's something I carry with me every day.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?
Becoming a back-end developer was one of the biggest challenges I've faced. I was the only woman in the team at the time, with very little programming background. It was intimidating, but I pushed through by being inquisitive, continuing to upskill myself and staying open to feedback. This mindset helps me grow.

One piece of advice for your younger self?
Dare to dream, and don't diminish small beginnings. Small, consistent steps really do add up to big changes.

One word that sums up your YES journey?
Catalyst.

What's next for you?
I'm working toward becoming a full stack developer, growing my skills and my brand, solving problems and building systems and ideas that can make a difference.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?
I believe that my journey inspires people to dream again, to believe in what they can achieve, and to become the best in their own space of influence.

Who inspires you and why?
My late mother. Her resilience, wisdom and prayers shaped me into who I am. She taught me how today's decisions impact my tomorrow, and this continues to inspire me.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?
I'm simply proof that possibility exists. With faith, resilience and willingness to learn, challenges can be turned into opportunities. With grit and God's grace, young people can shape industries, uplift communities and make an impact.



Thulisile Ntetha

Drone pilot turned security manager at a leading African drone company offering drone services and pilot training, Thulisile Ntetha oversees security policy, risk assessments and regulatory compliance across drone operations. She has a zero incident record, trains teams and partners with regulators to advance safe, responsible UAV use.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?
The importance of resilience and adaptability in the face of challenges. This experience has taught me to stay focused and motivated, even when obstacles arise.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?
A significant challenge I faced was having to learn about the aviation space. I overcame it through research and ensuring that I passed all modules on first attempt.

One piece of advice for your younger self?
Take calculated risks and trust your instincts. Growth happens outside comfort zones.



One word that sums up your YES journey?
Resilience.

What's next for you?
I'm excited about exploring my new role as a security manager, where I'll wear my wings with pride and inspire young people.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?
My work aims to break barriers in a male-dominated industry and uplift youth through inspiration and leadership. I'm committed to continuing this crucial work.

Who inspires you and why?
I'm inspired by Dale McErlean, whose unwavering support and belief in potential are truly remarkable. She consistently demonstrates a willingness to give opportunities and provide guidance –

empowering individuals to reach their full potential. Her dedication to helping others grow and succeed is a quality I deeply admire and aspire to emulate.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?
I'm driven to push boundaries and strive for excellence, and I'm proud to be part of a community that drives positive change.



Zanenhlanhla Sithole

Zanenhlanhla Sithole is an analyst at a leading financial advisory firm. She co-founded Loris Consulting to scale up black-owned businesses, advanced from administration to private equity, led women's empowerment initiatives and founded inclusive sustainability practice, supporting disadvantaged communities through business and investment.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?
The most important aspect is learning. You need to develop both soft and hard skills that will support you throughout your career and open doors to the future you envision for yourself. Cultivate a teachable spirit. Maintain your curiosity and continue to ask questions, but approach work with a mindset free of ego.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?
As I am still in the early stages of my career, there were several technical skills I lacked when I began working as a private equity analyst and, more recently, as an infrastructure and energy investment analyst. I am overcoming this challenge by dedicating myself to continuous learning.

One piece of advice for your younger self?
The path to the life you envision isn't linear; don't lose hope or give up. Grit, persistence and resilience are all that you need.

One word that sums up your YES journey?
Life-changing.

What's next for you?
I aspire to become a significant force in the industry across the continent.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?
By structuring capital for energy infrastructure, I help transform complex risks into bankable opportunities, enabling lights to stay on, industries to grow and communities to flourish.

Who inspires you and why?
The everyday woman who shows up, puts in the work and quietly rewrites the story of her lineage, not for applause, but for impact.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?
Because I took a small opportunity and turned it into momentum.



Vanecce Abrahams

Operations coordinator Vanecce Abrahams drives quality placements for thousands of young jobseekers across South Africa. She previously worked as a data quality officer, managing four teams and upholding data integrity. She juggles overseeing workflows, compliance and team performance with mentorship and a side hustle.

Biggest lesson from YES you still use today?
YES taught me resilience, adaptability and hope. It helped me navigate uncertainty and embrace new opportunities with confidence and purpose. That is what YES means to me and to so many active YES Youth and alumni. I believe that YES is a tool for God to bless countless South African youth.

A professional challenge and how you overcame it?
After losing my job and becoming the sole provider, I took the initiative, leaned on my network, prayed, and rebuilt my career through YES and Youth@WORK.

One piece of advice for your younger self?
Your current situation is not your final destination. Trust the process; breakthroughs are coming.

One word that sums up your YES journey?
Transformational.

What's next for you?
I am growing in operations and aiming for senior leadership to drive youth empowerment. Personally, I am proud to share that I am officially a new

homeowner, a dream come true. Even more special, I received the keys to my home and the email confirming I made it onto the YES 35 Under 35 list on the same day. No one can convince me that those two blessings are not a gift from God. These milestones represent growth, stability and the promise of a brighter future for my family.

How does your work impact your community, industry or society?
I help build systems that support youth employment. My journey shows young women that they can succeed, even if their path looks different.

Who inspires you and why?
My mom, Sandra Smith, and mentors Erica Kempken and Jacinta Tshidzumba for their strength, leadership and belief in me.

Why do you belong on this list of 35 changemakers?
I've turned adversity into purpose and I uplift others through mentorship, faith and action.



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