



Media Release

July 2012

Graduation marks new beginnings for vulnerable youth

On Friday July 27, 2012 the Umzi Wethu training academy for vulnerable youth celebrated the graduation of its 10th and 11th intake of students. The ceremony marked the graduation of a total of 177 students since the project's inception seven years ago in 2005. Many of the graduates are the first members of their families to achieve post-matric education.

CEO of The Uitenhage Despatch Development Initiative (UDDI), Nomkhita Mona was the keynote speaker at the event and encouraged the graduates to pursue excellence in all areas. "Life depends on how you wish to shape it from now on. Are you going to be excellent? Remember, education and training means nothing until it is used for the betterment of others. Be excellent now, help someone else now, enjoy your life now and be grateful now!"

Conservation graduate, Jonathan Bebe applied for the Umzi Wethu programme in 2010 after being inspired by his friend, (current programme manager of the Somerset East Conservation academy) Lincoln Meyer. "Umzi changed me. I didn't know how to manage my life before. Now I've learned that I need to plan before I do something and that I am responsible for what I do. I have been selected as one of five Conservation graduates to continue with Field Guide training, and in the future I definitely want to stay in the conservation field. I am the first person in my whole family to graduate and the second one to get my matric. I am grateful to my family who supported me the whole way through."

Jonathan's brother, Sidney Bebe says that Umzi Wethu has definitely changed Jonathan. "He has grown up. He is more mature and very confident. He was always outside enjoying nature and he enjoyed school trips out camping, so this is the perfect career for him."

Asanda Tamba is one of three women who graduated from the Conservation academy. "It was a challenge being a woman in conservation training. At first, the guys were saying that this is not a job for women, but on the trails we showed them that we were able to carry our own backpacks, and we were even stronger than the guys on some of the trails."

According to director of Social Programmes for the Wilderness Foundation, Pinky Kondlo, "the goal of Umzi Wethu is to fulfil the employability potential of resilient, motivated youth who have been displaced by poverty." Her advice to graduates on the day was to never stop learning. "Make every personal encounter a learning experience."

Desire Seister is a Hospitality graduate who says that Umzi Wethu helped her grow in confidence. "Now I look at my future in a different way. In the past I didn't have motivation. Now I know what I have inside of me and who I am, and I've been given a chance to explore that. I know what I want to do with my life, and I've been able to transfer my positive mind-set to my family. In the future I want to own my own restaurant."

A Voice for Wilderness

International Wilderness Leadership (WILD) Foundation • U.S.A. non-profit #23-7389749
The WILD Foundation ■ 717 Poplar Ave ■ Boulder, CO USA 80304 ■ Tel: 303-442-8811 ■ Fax: 303-442-8877 ■ www.wild.org

The Umzi Wethu graduates are all placed in jobs once they graduate. According to the programme's statistics, job retention rate is between 80 and 85%. The jobs help graduates support themselves as well as their extended families. Further research into the success of the project over the last six years has revealed that 7-10% of graduates have either advanced to junior and middle management positions in eco-tourism industries, or have been enabled to pursue tertiary education.

2005 Hospitality academy graduate, Danny Sauls is currently working full time for No5 Boutique Art Hotel (formerly Shamwari Guesthouse) in Port Elizabeth. He is coordinating the events department as well as studying towards a National Diploma in Management at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. He was also one of the guest speakers at the graduation ceremony. "The bad things that happen in life are not the end of the world. They are there for a greater purpose. What happened to us in the past, we cannot control. What happens in our future is up to us. The choices we make today will determine our tomorrows. If you make the most of what you've been given, you will become a better person. And remember, always do more than you're getting paid for!"

The graduation of this year's 19 game ranging students includes five individuals selected for additional field guide training. "This additional training includes FGASA level 1 and a driver's license to equip them to work as field guides in private game reserves," says Umzi Wethu academy manager, Paul Longe. "The field guide training is still underway, and will be completed later this year." Nine of the conservation students have already been placed in jobs or internships at various game parks in the Eastern Cape.

The graduation includes another 15 hospitality students who began their training as chefs and waitrons in July 2011. The placement for these students begins in August 2012 as they are currently assisting in the training of the latest hospitality academy intake.

Media release for the Wilderness Foundation

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About Umzi Wethu:

The brainchild of Wilderness Foundation director, Andrew Muir, the Umzi Wethu model is a holistic one year, social development and intervention programme which seeks to empower displaced and socially vulnerable youth with the vocational and life skills required to successfully enter the workplace. The project harnesses the power of the wilderness, promotes personal wellness, provides credible training, and secures sustainable job placements for graduates in the hospitality and eco-tourism industry.

The benchmark Umzi Wethu Hospitality academy was established based on a feasibility study that assessed the job qualification needs of Eastern Cape parks and game reserves. Following its success, the Umzi Wethu Conservation academy was launched in March 2008 in the rural town of Somerset East.

In order to cultivate entrepreneurial skills in selected graduates, the Wilderness Foundation has also established the Umzi Wethu Catering Unit (a private, income generating enterprise) and the Green Leaf Café located at the historical Donkin Reserve in Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape.

There are currently two Umzi Wethu academies managed under the Wilderness Foundation banner, a hospitality academy in Port Elizabeth and a conservation academy in Somerset East. A third hospitality academy (the first rollout of the model) is based in Stellenbosch and is managed by the Sustainability Institute.

Umzi Wethu is one of the most successful social intervention projects in South Africa and has been recognised through the prestigious Rolex Award for Enterprise in 2008 and the Ernst & Young World Entrepreneur Awards in the Social Entrepreneur category in 2011.

(see Umzi Wethu website for more success stories: <http://umziwethu.org/student-success-stories>)

Graduation Fact Sheet:

- Umzi Wethu is a one year, social development and intervention programme for displaced and socially vulnerable youth (those who have lost one or both parents, are child headed households or live in households with no formal income).
- Total of 35 graduates from both Hospitality and Conservation academy graduate on 27 July, 2012
 - 19 Conservation
 - 15 Hospitality
- Total of 177 students graduated since the inception of Umzi Wethu in 2005
- Umzi Wethu job retention rate is 80-85% following placement by the Umzi Wethu academy
- 7-10% of graduates have advanced to junior or middle management positions in the ecotourism industry

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