

# Thuthuka: A programme that makes all the difference

By [Lia Labuschagne](#), issued by [SAICA](#)

30 Jun 2020

In the [2019 Saica Nation Building Impact Report](#), Saica CEO Freeman Nomvalo says: "As Saica celebrates its fortieth anniversary this year, we remain committed to our higher purpose of building a better world and illustrating the integral role our noble profession plays in securing the future of our country... For South Africa, our top three areas of concern remain the lack of access to quality education to all, extreme poverty and unemployment particularly in the youth demographic, and the ever-growing inequality gap that exist between our citizens."

The donor-funded programmes housed under Saica's Nation Building cluster exemplify the concept of value creation and "are specifically focused on projects that seek to grow the pipeline of future accountants, support the transformation of the profession and the country, and provide decent and meaningful opportunities and services for disenfranchised South Africans," Nomvalo adds.

"We are a profession of national value," agrees Chantyl Mulder Saica Executive Director: Nation Building. One of the best ways to minimise the impact of the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality, is to "raise the bar from school to post-graduate level in order to create avenues through which our youth can gain sustainable and meaningful employment."

It takes patience, as well as the cooperation and support of all role players in the broader national economy – government, the profession, commerce and industry, academia and individuals. "We must leverage our collective efforts and work together to fix our education system at all levels – from early childhood development to secondary and tertiary training – with particular focus on occupations in high demand." Through partnerships Saica is achieving success with its projects like Thuthuka, ISFAP, AT(SA), The Hope Factory and others.

Nowhere are the results of Saica's Nation Building efforts better illustrated than by the successes of some of those challenged individuals who have been touched by the Thuthuka programme. They come from different regions. Their stories are just a few examples of how a philosophy turned into practice touches many people's lives for the better.



*Charlton Keesh*

## Charlton Keesh

Charlton Keesh grew up in the Western Cape, studied at Stellenbosch University (SU) and qualified this year (2020) as CA(SA). He currently works as Financial Manager at Trematon Capital Investments Limited.

Growing up with his mother and stepfather on a farm, they did not have much. "Most of the times I had to walk to school as there was no bus service – until my accounting teacher offered to fetch us on the farm in the mornings between school." Because he did not have his own room, he "had to find smart ways to learn in order to not just pass, but do good."

In Grade 12 Charlton first heard of the Thuthuka Bursary Fund. "However, I did not apply in time and had just a bursary from the university and a National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NFSAS) loan. The day before I first had to go the campus, I got a call from an administrator at Stellenbosch University who asked me if I would be interested in a Thuthuka Bursary - and of course I said yes!"

His experience with Thuthuka has been magical. "At the beginning I could not understand why I had to attend so many tutorials, attend every class and sign attendance registers, or why I had to go for all the extra workshops and do community

service! Looking back, I can now see that it helped me so much to shape the person I am now.”

Besides the financial burden taken off his and his parents' shoulders, he is thankful for “the opportunity to be part of a larger community of like-minded individuals - all with one goal in mind... with Thuthuka, I immediately felt part of the family.”

“Sometimes when I wake up in the morning, I look in the mirror and I have to tell myself - you are now a CA(SA)! ... I am helping university students financially in a small way, as I know the struggle of not having money during your studies. I am also helping prospective students from my community with university applications and bursaries.”



*Pheladi Mahlakola*

## **Pheladi Mahlakola**

Pheladi Mahlakola, who hails from Gedroogte Village in Limpopo and studied at the University of Limpopo (UL), currently works for the Auditor General of South Africa (Limpopo Division).

“Growing up in a very disadvantaged background and environment is not easy, but that has never been a limiting factor to see beyond the current situation... None of my parents was working, and the only source of income was the child support grant. Later, my father opened a business selling vegetables, which helped a lot.” Watching her parents' everyday hustling in order to ensure that he and her brothers get educated, motivated Pheladi to “become something and turn around the situation.”

She tells how assisting her father “made me develop a lot of love for accounting as I would assist him in writing receipts, taking orders from customers and counting cash.” She was motivated by her father calling her an “accountant”. Yet, with no phone or laptop and limited access to information, it

was hard even to find material about a possible career in a commercial field. Only in her matric year did she hear about chartered accountancy “and the only thing that was said is that it pays a lot. Even today I still feel like people lack information in terms of differentiating between an accountant and a chartered accountant.”

After her first semester studying for a bachelor of commerce degree, she “managed to obtain a national skills bursary which covered my tuition fees from my first year up to my final year.” In 2017 she registered for the BCTA and obtained funding covering all tuition. She passed and qualified to start studying for her CTA.

“In 2018 I thought about my family background and weighed my options of doing the CTA full time or part time. One of my lecturers advised me to do it full time, as there was Thuthuka funding available. Thuthuka did really play huge role as tuition fee was covered, as well as all required textbooks and I was getting a meal allowance.” However, she did not pass that year, and there was the challenge of repeating the year or not. “I managed to qualify for the Thuthuka bursary for repeat students, and because I knew that a lot of people would kill for that opportunity, I have never looked back...” She says passing the CTA was an overwhelming moment.

Pheladi is currently busy with her articles and first Board exams and adjusting to a professional work environment.

She praises Thuthuka for their assistance and understanding: “I will always be grateful for that... I have learnt that one of the most important things on earth is to let people know that they are not alone.” She adds with their support, “I will definitely make it in the upcoming ITC and I still believe in the accountancy dream and Black excellence because of Thuthuka.”

## **Chuma Njomeni**

Chuma Njomeni from the Eastern Cape studied at Walter Sisulu University (WSU) and qualified this year (2020) as a CA(SA). He now works for the Auditor General of South Africa as Assistant Audit Manager.

"I am from a small village in Dutywa, raised by a self-employed bricklayer father and a stay-at-home mother. Most of my education was funded from the bricklaying income and support from older siblings until I was awarded the Thuthuka bursary."

He first learnt about Thuthuka at WSU "while queueing for university admission. One of the people assisting with admissions saw my matric results and said I qualify for a Saica re-accreditation programme to be run at WSU and that I would be awarded a Thuthuka bursary, should I be accepted on the programme."

Chuma comments that his experience with Thuthuka has been life-changing. "On top of paying for my university expenses including meals, they sent me to work-readiness camps during the four years I was doing my undergrad at WSU, and that has played a huge role in me becoming the professional I am today."

He continues: "Being a Thuthuka student also made it easy for me to achieve my CA dream, as I always felt a connection with Saica. I am thankful for the opportunity to access higher education. I might have been one of the bright minds who did not access higher education due to the expenses that come with being a university student. My biggest challenge was access to information and I could not fully appreciate the opportunities available for hard-working individuals in South Africa."

Since qualifying recently, he is also giving back: "I am currently assisting high school learners with university admission and bursary applications, including paying for application fees for those who cannot afford it. I also help job seekers apply for jobs and if I cannot assist with their applications from my laptop, I buy them data. This is inspired by the idea of levelling the playing field in terms of access to opportunities in our beautiful South Africa."

"And," Chuma adds, "the biggest highlight of my career thus far was the e-mail confirming my acceptance as a member of Saica!"



Noluthando Banda

## Noluthando Banda

Noluthando Banda grew up in Gauteng and studied at the University of Witwatersrand (Wits). Qualifying in 2020, she currently works for Deloitte.

"I was raised by my grandmother in Tembisa who paid for my fees until I matriculated," Noluthando says. "As the old saying goes, it takes a village to raise a child, and I am testament to that: my paternal and maternal family all contributed to my upbringing."

When she got accepted as student at Wits, she did not know about Thuthuka, "so I used NFSAS up until 2015 when I could apply for Thuthuka funding. It was the year when NFSAS decided no longer to fund me. I was frustrated, and my last hope was Thuthuka." Before the next academic year started, she heard that she had been accepted and that meant that she could finally live inside a Wits residence and not have to ask her grandmother for money for essentials such as sanitary products and food.

"The support structures under Thuthuka made it possible for me to pass up to the CTA and I will forever be grateful for that, and so is my grandmother. The extra tutorials do help, as this is a tough course." She struggled to learn certain concepts and there had been the issue of finding money for food and rentals for accommodation outside the residence.

A main issue since qualifying has been to repay the NSFAS debt, "but with the help of FASSET it is slowly being reduced." She adds that 'Black tax' is something that is the most challenging for Black kids, since "when you start articles your

parents and family think you are a permanent employee and expect a lot from you - even those who were not there for you.”

In terms of giving back, Noluthando says she used to tutor grade 11s and 12s “with my friend Nkululeko, but with being so busy at work, I have done less of that. I am currently assisting my cousin Sibongile in her initiative to educate township students about how to access funding and how to apply at universities or colleges, because if we learnt about these things earlier on, we would not have struggled.” She adds that one learns so much from working with people from different backgrounds and upbringing, and dealing with different personalities.

## Nondumiso Mwelase

Nondumiso Mwelase, who grew up in the small informal settlement Thembelihle in Lenasia, Gauteng, and studied at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) is now Trainee Accountant at Ernst & Young.

“I am one of six children. My father was the breadwinner, but unfortunately passed away in 2005, and my mom had to find means for us to survive. Life was not easy at all then. In 2013 we moved to a better developed place called Lehae, where we got a low-cost house. My siblings and I would walk about 10 km to school every day as my mom couldn't afford transport for all of us. My mother's determination to give us a better life that motivated me to study towards becoming a CA(SA).”

She learnt about Thuthuka “through my older brother who was also studying towards becoming a CA(SA) and got the Thuthuka bursary in his second year of study. I applied when I was doing grade 12 for the 2016 academic year. I unfortunately did not get the bursary then, but I took the chance again for the 2017 academic year and it was successful.”

Nondumiso says her Thuthuka experience was a good one. “There is access to so many useful resources on the Thuthuka programme to make the best of your studies. It also helps that there are some fun activities provided like camps that help you relax and take a break from studying to socialize. Through Thuthuka I was able to get the Rothschild scholarship in my postgraduate year (2019) and that was the best experience I could have asked for. I am most thankful for Thuthuka giving me a chance to have a better life.”

She comments that she struggled most with socializing. However, “through Thuthuka, I got to meet a lot of people and that helped improve my socializing skills.

Although she is not yet qualified, Nondumiso is currently part of two NPOs. “One provides tutoring to high school learners from grades 10 to 12; the other is providing necessities to struggling single mothers and children, i.e. sanitary products, school uniforms and clothes – it is all about empowering women to becoming independent. Since it's my first year of articles, this involvement is a useful learning opportunity.”



*Sapho Gwadiso*

## Sapho Gwadiso

Sapho Gwadiso travelled from the Eastern Cape to study at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and qualified as CA(SA) in 2016. He currently works as lecturer in the Department of Accounting at the University of Western Cape (UWC) and is also Thuthuka Project Manager. He says he is most proud of achieving a Masters in Accounting from the University of Pretoria.

“From grade 1 until grade 8 I, was raised by my grandmother on a government grant, plus whatever any of my parents, aunts and uncles could send back to the village. After that, I stayed with my mother as she was finishing up at nursing school and starting a career as an assistant nurse,” he recalls.

“I found out about Thuthuka when they presented maths, English and accounting classes in Butterworth in 2003. A school friend had forms and I applied. At the time we hardly had the money to send application forms by post, but it presenting me

with a chance to go to university. I applied to any and everything I would find on old newspapers and magazines, and Saica is the only place that responded.”

He adds: “I was always hopeful. I was performing at school and I always had faith that things will turn out okay.”

Sapho says his life has since been linked with Thuthuka. “I met my wife in the classroom, as we were both funded by Thuthuka. Today we have a large household and we support some family members where we can. My girlfriend (now my wife) lost her mother in 2010, and we were able to take in her two kids. One of them is in private school right now. I feel blessed to be able to send something to my mother every month.”

His path has not been without further challenges to overcome: “Late in my articles, when I had more time to look back, is when I fell into clinical depression.” Having won that battle, he looks toward further academic achievement and would like to find more time to study further despite the challenges of having a large family.

He adds: “My work as a lecturer allows me to interact with hopeful youth who want to make something of their lives. I volunteer with Fun Learning for Youth (FLY) to teach maths and English in Gugulethu.”



Charity Simamane

## Charity Simamane

Charity Simamane, currently Senior External Audit Manager at PwC, studied at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) and qualified as CA(SA) in 2014.

She grew up in the Umlazi Township in KwaZulu Natal and went to school at Velabahleke High School: “Thuthuka has helped to fund its learners over the years producing a number of chartered accountants from there.”

Her journey towards qualifying was tough: at the age of 16 years old and a grade 11 learner, she gave birth to a son, Qiniso. “I thank God for my mother who was and still is supportive every step of the way. She didn't give up on me. When I ask her why, she did that she says ‘I knew that you were my last hope’ – she had lost my two older sisters and my oldest brother, so she had lost so much that she felt she needed to protect me and couldn't let the potential I had go to waste.”

Charity says the pregnancy was not easy as “I had to stop going to church, which was where I was always the happiest.” With the support of her mother, Qiniso's dad and her teachers, she persevered with school work. “I chinned

up, and managed to enrol at a Saturday school for extra classes in English, mathematics and science. When I came back from giving birth, I was one of only two learners in my class who passed.” She went on to matriculate with an overall distinction score and obtained a Thuthuka bursary to pursue her studies towards becoming a chartered accountant “because accounting was my first love since I was introduced to it in grade 8.”

She comments that she is “thankful for the faith Thuthuka had in me, a learner who came from nothing and the support that went beyond financial support provided throughout my studies as well as the exposure I have received post my studies, and the friendships and networks built because of my affiliation with Thuthuka.”

“I am still in external audit, which is a field that continues to train, coach and mentor aspiring chartered accountants... Furthermore, I am a mentor to many students currently studying and those that are doing their articles even outside of PwC.”

Charity says her achievements and career highlights until now include “completing the CA(SA) journey in record time, an achievement I do not take lightly, as many are still on the journey way beyond the seven years. In addition, I made Senior

Manager in a global firm at the age of 28 years old – a position that many only see in their 30s and for that I consider myself blessed.”

She backs others to achieve their goals too: “You were created to conquer. Let no one tell you that you can't do it!”



*Sithenjwa Masuku*

## **Sithenjwa Masuku**

Sithenjwa Masuku, who grew up in Gauteng and studied at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), qualified as CA(SA) in 2019. He works for EY Dublin in Ireland as Assistant Audit Manager

“I am taking it as a discovery to find where do I fit in in the corporate space so that I can focus my attention on that and succeed in it... My biggest career highlights have been qualifying as a CA and also having the opportunity to work overseas.”

Sithenjwa grew up with his mother, a single parent. “Through the years there were cousins and an aunt who came to live with us for few years and left. I also stayed a few years with my half brother and sister. When I was in grade 9, my mother lost one eye.”

He tells how he came across Thuthuka in his grade 12 year when he was searching for bursaries on the internet. “I didn't apply, because my grade 11 maths mark was 59% and one needed 60% as one of the requirements. However, a high school friend convinced me to apply even though I didn't fully meet the requirements. During my matric year I took proactive steps to improve my marks by buying books that were not prescribed but had test questions. I downloaded past exams papers to practise when I had time and there was even this newspaper that came out that had questions to practise. That helped to improve my results at the end of the year.”

Then “when I came back from writing one of my final year exams, my mother told me a lady called looking for you.” When he called the UJ back, he was told he was awarded a Thuthuka bursary. “I was thrilled with the news - the best news of my life!”

His journey of studying for the CA degree and CTA was challenging, “but Thuthuka made it a bit easier, as they offered support with extra classes and emotional support because we would be faced with challenges at home that affected our studies at time. Through Thuthuka I also met my mentor, Robert Zwane, with whom I still keep in contact with on a regular basis because he provides good advice.”

Sithenjwa is not only thankful that he was given a chance by Thuthuka to study, but also for the friendships he developed through Thuthuka.

## **Portia Ngomane**

Portia Ngomane studied at the University of the Free State (UFS), is currently working at Deloitte as Risk Advisory Senior Consultant. “The biggest highlight of my career was passing my second Board exam and becoming eligible to register as a CA(SA) at end of December 2019 after completing my audit articles at Deloitte.”

Born in the small village Fernie in Mpumalanga, she was sent to boarding school in Glencoe, Kwazulu-Natal at the age of nine. There she completed her matric before going to the UFS. She completed her CTA in 2016.

“I joined Thuthuka in my second year of varsity in 2014. Life at varsity as a Thuthuka candidate was a dream for any Black child coming from humble beginnings. We were well taken care of from text books to food allowance. The kind of lifestyle that Thuthuka afforded me allowed me to focus and excel in my studies. I will forever be grateful to Thuthuka for the conducive environment they provided for its candidates.”



Portia Ngomane

Among others, the “support structure and care from our Thuthuka coordinator was out of this world. Coming from a village with no proper infrastructure and learning opportunities for young people with dreams does something to a young individual, because you have no inspirations or role models to look up to. Hence, when I got an opportunity to further my studies, I had to become my own inspiration which sometime becomes hard when you sometimes don't achieve a specific goal that you have set for yourself and you start doubting yourself. So, really before Thuthuka I had no solid support structure in place.”

Today, Portia is a mentor to aspiring students at university and “helps them by providing mental support and technical support within my field.”

She was also afforded an opportunity to go on secondment to Deloitte UK in their London office for five months and came back in March this year. “I had the time of my life there and would not mind going back.”



Brenton Booysen

## Brenton Booysen

Brenton Booysen from Oudtshoorn in the Western Cape studied at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and qualified as CA(SA) in 2019. Currently he is Audit Senior at Arthur Morris and Company, Bermuda. He is most proud of qualifying as a CA without repeating any year, module or

exam.

He received an application from a neighbouring school in his home town to attend the Thuthuka camp in Cape Town and initially applied for the Thuthuka Bursary through Stellenbosch University, but did not meet their 70% average to be accepted in to the BAcc programme. The Thuthuka coordinator at UWC then called him in for an interview and he was accepted to study at UWC.

“Thuthuka has been the best bursary any student can ask for due to the fact that the bursary does not merely provide financial assistance. It also provides workshops and events where you may meet current CAs.”

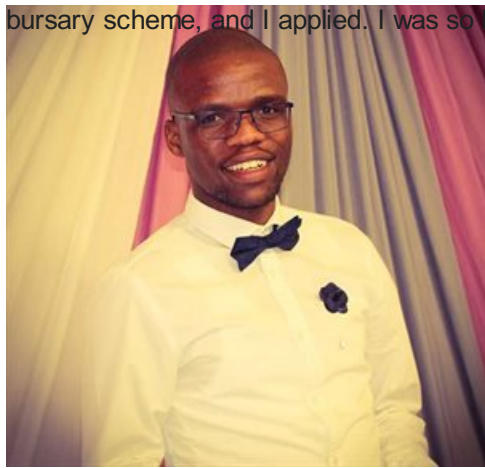
He also says: “I am most thankful for Thuthuka for the all-round assistance provided that ensured that I entered university as a young boy and left as a well-rounded young man.” He works towards his special dream: “My parents lost their house when I was 15 years old and I always wanted to buy my mom a house.”

He adds that he is silently involved in helping schools and charities by financially contributing to them. “I am also always available (as mentor) for trainees that would like to move abroad.”

## Yonela Fumba

Yonela Fumba from the Eastern Cape studied at Walter Sisulu University (WSU) and hopes to qualify as CA(SA) in 2022. At the moment, Yonela is a Trainee Auditor in the Auditor General's office.

“I have only one parent and she was working as a cleaner in a kitchen and could not afford to pay school fees. So, I did not know how would I pay university fees. As one of the learners who passed, my teacher told me about the Thuthuka



Yonela Fumba

bursary scheme, and I applied. I was so happy that I was accepted and knew that I would have a chance to study at university and pass. So, Thuthuka helped me a lot at university for paying fees and a meal allowance.”

Yonela adds: “Thuthuka gave me access to quality education. I haven't passed the ITC, so I am still trying to qualify. I do visit high schools and motivate the students sometimes.

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