



YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES SOUTH AFRICA

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### **YOSA brief background**

YOSA was founded in 2015 and registered on 20 January 2016 through an inspiration to turn the tide for the many vulnerable children in deprived communities. Its founder, Astonishment Mapurisa, experienced extremely difficult childhood, enduring excruciating poverty as an orphan working for his livelihood from the tender age of six years. At some point in his life, he was taken for a child slave before the age 12. He earned reprieve from poverty after working for well-to-do families to pay for his high school education – that he passed and qualified for a place at university to train as a social worker. Astonishment's experience of overcoming poverty through education inspired him to start YOSA to help disadvantaged young people to rise above their socioeconomic limitations. A holder of PHD from Wits University in Johannesburg, Astonishment is currently researching on models of positive youth development to address learning barriers such as teenage pregnancy, violence and substance use. YOSA alignment to academia and research inspires evidence-based programming hence the organization serves as knowledge site and service provider for youth in disadvantaged communities.

### **Problem**

The marginalization of youth in underserved township communities manifest in lack of access to quality education, unemployment, and poor living conditions. These challenges expose adolescents to drugs, violence, and teenage pregnancy. Youths are trapped in poverty cycles and abuse. Statistics show that 35000 teenagers gave birth in 2020 and 90037 girls delivered babies from March 2021 to April 2022 nationwide. Substance use is increasing even among the 8-10 age group and reports of deaths through violence in township schools are daily. Township youths suffer poor mental and physical health, high rates of HIV infections, and school dropouts resulting in youth disempowerment. Schools are under resourced. Parents and teachers are disconnected.

### **Approach**

A Positive Youth Development program provides learning support, life skills, and community development. The program runs during afterschool, weekends, and school holidays occupying youths' time and empowering them with productive activities that include tutoring/curriculum coaching, subject choices/career guidance, sports and recreation, digital training, scouts, essay writing competitions, work readiness training, music, drama, dancing, public speaking coaching and competitions, sexual and reproductive health education. Our teacher support, parental involvement, and whole community engagement activities raise academic pass rates and increase moral regeneration and in turn, raise the status of youth.

### **Our People**

The primary project beneficiaries are learners enrolled in schools, their parents, and educators. We mainly focus on underserved township and rural school communities in Gauteng Province of South Africa. With the availability of resources, we envisage providing our services nationally. We recruit and train volunteers among the local community youths to run psychosocial support programs in school communities. That way we create an ecosystem of youths that are familiar with their

struggles to alleviate learning barriers through curriculum coaching/learning support and life skills training for the children in schools. Conducting educator support meetings and empowering School Based Support Teams to identify and address social learning barriers promote safe teaching and learning environments. Parents' training and promotion of engagement in the education of their children build social cohesion and promote cooperation with teachers.

### **Our Impact**

The program improves social cohesion towards promoting and supporting children's education. With protracted facilitation, parent-teacher cooperation will grow community-wide and yield positive parenting practices that empower youths to focus on education. Participation in afterschool programs will promote academic competencies and will leave little or no room for children to engage in drugs, violence, and teenage pregnancies. Youth graduate from high school, pursue tertiary training and escape poverty through education. Education has the capacity to liberate youths from poverty, decrease crime and give them agency for economic participation. Community cohesion will foster vigilance and address the supply and demand sides for drugs.

### **Sustainability**

The ultimate impact of the project is to improve community safety, educational participation, and socioeconomic conditions for youths by building connections and changing the adults, organizations (institutions like schools, community centers, health providers, youth-serving organizations, etc.), and the community itself. Adolescents' competencies and positive values are subject to their upbringing. Positive adolescents are nurtured by positive families, positive peer groups, positive schools, supportive neighborhoods, and realistic societies that are self-correcting. Such is the reason why our intervention targets schools, families, and the whole community enlisting voluntarism among those who have triumphed through the structural challenges imposed by under-resourced schools, negligent parenting, and skewed allocation of state resources. Informed community social cohesion will exercise agency in demanding and directing allocation of state resources to improve education.

### **Addressing the root cause**

The traditional pedagogic education treated learners as receptacles and not cocreators of knowledge. Large class sizes and curriculum demands do not permit educators to address the social needs of learners. Much of the educators' work is focused on curriculum content delivery neglecting the well-being of adolescents. Yet, children learn best when they like their teacher, and they think their teacher likes them. Parents, educators, and learners operate in siloes. There is segregation between and among these subgroups. Youths are regarded as problems to be solved. The emphasis for my intervention is on building connections between and among children, educators, and parents. Programming is around mobilizing community to strengthen resilience of adolescents and nurturing their capacity for contribution to their communities. It is about changing schools and communities to nurture positive physical and social environments conducive for success in education and socioeconomic participation.

### **Innovation**

YOSA intervention represents a paradigm shift from traditional youth services that focused on problem alleviation towards a strategy that develops youths' agency. Youths are empowered and nurtured to care for one another thereby driving cultural transformation through social marketing and building a shared vision for the youth. The involvement of the whole community including schools awakens policymakers to the reality that teenage pregnancy, violence, and substance use among learners constitute a pandemic worthy of statutory attention. Youth-adult relationship building, promoting youth voice, decision-making, and a focus on personal development address learning barriers. The program occupies learners' idle time with productive after-school activities. It builds developmental relationships among educators, learners, and parents. It engages those best positioned to influence the development and are the natural actors in youths' lives — family, peers, neighbors, and schools.



Education is in a state of crisis in most school communities of South Africa. Many young people have lost their dreams resorting to substance use, high-risk behaviours and even becoming suicidal. There is a lack of parental involvement in the education of their children. This is because some parents in township communities are unemployed and struggle to put food on the table occupy all the parents' time. A significant number of children have lost their parents altogether due to chronic illnesses and live in child headed households, further imposing the burden of care on minors. Others live in grandparents headed households and grannies are too tired to keep up with the needs of young children. Our research in one of the high schools has established that of the total school enrolment of 1011 learners, only 101 live with both biological parents. The rest live in single parents' households or secondary families where they experience parenting shortfalls or outright neglect. Because of parenting shortfalls teenage pregnancy, violence and substance use are rife in school communities. This leads to the general deterioration of discipline, poor academic performance, and high dropout rates.

To address these specific issues, YOSA engages young people, along with their families, communities, and schools to empower them to reach their full potential. Through building healthy relationships and strengthening their social environment, YOSA employs a positive youth development approach to build young people who are mentally and physically healthy, skilled, resilient, and competent.



**YOSA Vision**

We work to establish a socially cohesive society in which all young people succeed and actively participate in the economy.

**YOSA Purpose**

We grow a movement of ethical and moral young leaders who influence youth thriving in poverty to learn and partake in skills development by instilling in them discipline, vision, innovation, and entrepreneurial mindsets.

**The YOSA programme**

YOSA is grounded in the belief that 'opportunities and failure are on the same road', just that opportunities are further down. If young people are nurtured to keep focusing on opportunities, they embrace them. Young people's strengths come from inspired beliefs that no matter how long darkness/failure lasts, it is temporary. Life should, therefore, be regarded as an opportunity to create



meaning – an opportunity to become. That way, facing problems and working through them, make one strong. Yet, through this life journey, all children need communities of significant adults who make them feel valued, supported, relevant and cared for to lead purpose-driven lives.

YOSA is a community-based agency that believes in the liberating role of education. Its natural inclination is working with schools to support teaching and learning with emphasis in developing learners’ character, reading and writing skills, maths, and science subjects.

The YOSA programme runs alongside and outside of the school environment, supporting children after school, on weekends and during the school holidays avoiding interference with teaching times. We noted that learners who participate in our out-of-school time (OST) activities experience positive development. YOSA OST activities provide adolescents with positive growing opportunities for building supportive relationships with sometimes unrelated adults, peers and programme staff who give them opportunities for community-level contribution. Our OST activities are regular and commence with learners in primary school. The activities include academic coaching in critical subjects like mathematics and science, Boys & Girls Club, after-school clubs (scouts and chess clubs), team and individual sports, the performing arts (e.g., music and drama), arts and crafts, and service activities like volunteering.

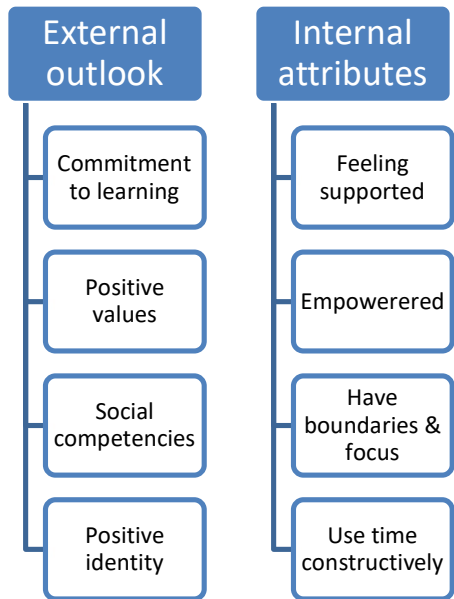
The activities are designed to develop specific positive traits of adolescents. These include improvements in social and academic competency. Operating from a Positive Youth Development approach, our programmes are diversionary: The more our young people participate in positive development programmes, the less they engage in self-destructive activities such as substance use, violence, and teenage pregnancy. The following are some of our interventions and the measurable outcomes of our implementation:

Intervention	Expected Outcomes	Stats.
<b>Digital literacy training:</b> Learners  Educators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth will gain computer knowledge and skills.</li> <li>Youth learn to do web search and to communicate on emails.</li> <li>Adult mentors will understand elements of positive youth development.</li> </ul>	
Academic support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academic competency</li> <li>Higher pass rates</li> </ul>	
Reading clubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academic competency</li> <li>Confidence building</li> </ul>	
Public Speaking clubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth will develop confidence, reading, writing presentation skills.</li> <li>Youth learn skills to communicate with others.</li> <li>Youth learn and develop life skills through generating speeches on current affairs.</li> <li>Youth learn steps into goal setting and developing a plan of action.</li> </ul>	
Prize-giving ceremonies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learner motivation</li> <li>Inspiration to succeed</li> </ul>	
Class-based interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learner motivation</li> <li>behavioural modification.</li> </ul>	
Scouts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth will gain knowledge and skills in leadership and decision-making process.</li> <li>Youth learn skills to communicate with others.</li> </ul>	



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth learn steps into goal setting and developing a plan of action.</li> </ul>	
Sports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical fitness,</li> <li>productive use of time</li> </ul>	
Computer and indoor games	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth learn critical thinking.</li> <li>Learn steps into goal setting and developing a plan of action.</li> </ul>	
Individual interventions (casework)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resolution of individual challenges affecting learning</li> </ul>	
Family interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resolution of family factors affecting learning</li> </ul>	
Group Therapy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empowerment of learners against substance use, violence and teenage pregnancy</li> </ul>	
Parenting workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improvement of parental involvement in the education of their children</li> </ul>	

Your character development is key to our programming. Success in social factors is thus, qualitatively assessed when young people exhibit the elements in the following diagram:



Our interventions cover three broad categories:

- Addressing the challenges confronting the children on a daily basis**
  - such as trauma from the fast-changing life circumstances, grief from losses of loved ones, lack of nutritious meals, no parental support; lack of positive role models in their immediate communities, violence, low moral values, high dropout rates, HIV/AIDS, teenage pregnancies, late coming, absenteeism, truancy, learners' attitudes, and lack of motivation to achieve.
- Supporting the educators who play a key role in the lives of our young people**
  - such as trauma from the fast-changing socioeconomic circumstances, difficulty in adapting to the changes in school circumstances, fear of being infected by life-threatening viruses like Covid-19, overwhelmed with large class sizes, inadequate training to deal with learners' psychosocial challenges, inability to identify and appropriately support struggling learners.
- Supporting the parents and parental figures that play a significant role in the children's lives.**



- that include grief and trauma, unemployment, substance abuse, gender-based violence, single parenthood, child headed families, and grandparents headed households, poverty, and lack of community collaboration in education, among others.

YOSA's emphasis is on harnessing young people's resilience, positive energy, and initiative rather than emphasizing their problems and / perceived deficiencies. Building character strengths such as social intelligence, morality, self-control, and spirituality constitute the goals of our youth development programmes. Through our Positive Youth Development approach, problems are resolved as young people build on their strengths.

### **Programmes and Activities**

The following is a summary of some of YOSA's education support services that are provided through the resource centre:

#### **a. Peer Mentorship programme**

The cornerstone of the YOSA programme involves training and supporting unemployed young people to provide Peer-Mentorship for learners to support them physically, mentally and socially to improve academic competence as well as discipline and motivation to succeed.

These young people are put through a youth employability training programme while working alongside our professional social workers supporting teaching and learning. They assist in identifying children in need, and where necessary, involve the social workers to provide therapeutic interventions.

Their services were much needed during the time of Covid-19 when schools were experiencing serious shortages of teaching staff.

#### **Project Wishlist**

1. A donation of R2000 will pay transport allowance for one unemployed young person to train on YOSA work readiness programme.
2. Stationery

#### **b. After school tutoring**

We have noticed that some of the learners are left behind by the school system, which is completely overwhelmed by large enrolment figures. Learners lack individualised attention. The children are not properly prepared for reading and writing, and they require individual attention.

With the help of patient retired educators and Peer-Mentors, YOSA complements the efforts in schools by creating an environment that gives all children a sure start. It includes homework support, remediation, subject support- emphasising English, maths, and sciences. Our Community Education Resource Centre is a perfect space for remediation and behavioural support programmes.

#### **Project Wishlist**

1. A donation of R2000 per month will pay transport allowance for one volunteer curriculum coach per month.
2. Curriculum books
3. Stationery: writing books, pens, rulers, erasers, coloured pencils, scissors, sharpeners, highlighters, white board markers, printing paper, manilla sheets
4. Dignity packs,
5. Motivational badges, trophies, medals, certificates



### **c. ICT Training for Learners**

YOSA is preparing learners in disadvantaged communities for the 4th Industrial Revolution. We have established computer labs in three schools. We are empowering educators to incorporate digital tools across all subjects, and facilitating the skills transfer to learners. This programme starts with giving learners basic computer skills but progresses to higher skills like coding and robotics.

The computer labs are fitted with internet connectivity, and there are IT Laboratory Assistants to help secure the equipment and facilitate learners' training.

*MOUs are sign with schools to ensure the computer labs remain live projects to enhance teaching and learning.*

#### **Project Wishlist**

1. Functional computers and printer
2. Software costs
3. Lab security cameras, alarms and burglar proof iron bars

### **d. Learner Leadership Development**

Learner leadership is a critical element of our programming to mainstream learners' participation in school management. The learner representative council members and class representatives are usually elected and function without clarification of their roles. As a result, they lack confidence and do not function effectively to positively impact the teaching and learning environment. Our learner leadership training gives agency to learners and is practice -based. It involves character building activities and helps learners to develop a deep sense of self awareness and be committed to personal development. It helps learners to adopt purpose-driven lives and effective community involvement that sets them up as agents of change. We change school communities using purpose-trained learners as catalysts.

#### **Project Wishlist**

1. Stationery: charts, white board markers, manilla sheets, notebooks, pens,
2. Refreshments for learners
3. Sponsorship for team building excursions.

### **e. Counselling and life skills development**

These include individual counselling, group work, psychosocial support, and activities to assist learners on matters of substance use, guidance and support activities specific to boys or girls to fight violence and teenage pregnancy.

We also run activities such as public speaking, debating, and sports (with outdoor and indoor games) for young people. Helping learners with productive guided play to influence their ways of thinking and behaving. We also occupy young people's time with entertaining educational games like chess and Lego giving them techniques to improve critical thinking and stay away from the streets.

#### **Project Wishlist**

1. Overhead projector to facilitate training.
2. Netball and soccer balls
3. Netball and soccer kits
4. First Aid Kits
5. Chase boards and pieces, Lego pieces, puzzles,
6. Refreshments for learners,
7. Dignity packs,





8. Motivational badges, trophies, medals, certificates

**f. Scouts**

This year we have partnered with Scouts SA to set up scouts' clubs in schools in Soweto. We are currently enrolling learners and community-based scouts' leaders for training. This project is expected to influence purpose-driven life among young people including fighting issues of violence, substance use and teenage pregnancy.

**Project Wishlist**

1. Scouts' uniforms, badges, scarfs,
2. Equipment; ropes, poles
3. Refreshments for learners

**g. Tertiary Support**

Through this programme we support learners through primary, high school and tertiary training. The idea is to make sure that learners who excel in their studies do not fall by the wayside due to lack of support. Our social workers identify learners requiring our support and we leverage our resources to meeting their support and educational needs. We are currently supporting 4 students who are at Wits, UP and Sol Plaatje universities with bursaries and living expenses.

**Project Wishlist**

1. University and college bursaries
2. Funds to meet students' upkeep in tertiary training, food, Clothes, shoes, toiletries, dignity packs, etc

**h. Parents Training Meetings**

Regular parents training meetings encourage parents to attend school meetings and events, volunteering in the school and serving on school committees. Our social workers conduct home visits, meetings with parents and creating working relationships between parents and educators. Parental involvement in the education of their children is key to cultural change within the school environment.

**Project Wishlist**

1. Stationery
2. Refreshments for parents' workshops

**i. Grandparents Support Group**

As part of our pro-poor interventions, we are aware that raising grandchildren comes with so many challenges for the under-resourced old folks in the township communities. YOSA supports grandparents who are raising grandchildren with food, clothing, and other practical material resources. This year we have planned to run support groups for grandparents to allow them to be their age while helping them to succeed at parenting the second time around.

**Project Wishlist**

1. Practical provisions like blankets, food, clothing
2. Knitting wool,
3. Ingredients for cooking and baking

**j. Social Relief of Distressed Families**

Our pro-poor interventions include provision of practical resources to improve the lives of vulnerable children and families. YOSA assists families in need while our social workers are supporting them with appropriate referrals to secure grants or maintenance. Some of the child





headed households we support have recently lost their parents while others have lost grandparents who were bread winners. Vulnerable children and families are identified by the local ward committees working alongside councillors. Some are also identified by the teachers in schools working with YOSA mentors and social workers. We encounter several cases of destitute families who lose their properties to fire in informal settlements. We serve meals during our afterschool, weekends and holiday activities.

### **Project Wishlist**

1. Food for our soup kitchen,
2. Food parcels,
3. Utensils,
4. Clothing, blankets,
5. Toiletries, dignity packs

### **Parental Consent**

YOSA is a registered legal entity working closely with our local ward councillors and community leadership. Our support to schools has been effectively supported by parents and School Governing Body members. We obtain proper written parental consent for all the minors who participate in our positive youth development programme.

### **YOSA Funding**

Astonishment's long-established friendship with Susy James provided further inspiration and funding and led them to the Qantas Airline crew who formed the supportive YOSA Friendship Circle. This was a loose grouping of employees of Qantas Airways most of whom visited YOSA to interact with our work. They provided individual support in the form of cash and donations in-kind to enhance our programming.

Simone Francis and Garth Smith (YOSA Board Chairperson at the time) provided the funding for the construction of the YOSA Resource Centre in Molapo, Soweto.

Silica Holdings Ltd, now FNZ, adopted YOSA as its Community Social Responsibility project and spearheaded YOSA Model development and roll out across several school communities in Soweto. FNZ currently provides regular monthly financial support which covers the current running costs of YOSA and some of its programmes.

### **YOSA Project Funding**

YOSA services are free to the supported communities thanks to the support given by FNZ that has adopted the organization as its community social responsibility project. The YOSA Friendship Circle in Australia; Compassion 4 Humanity and the Qantas Airline are active supporters. Statutory support has also been granted in the form of tax exemption (Section 18A Certificate) enabling the project to also seek support from local individuals and Corporate South Africa. However, our funding is far below what we require to meet our scaling up needs.

### **Staffing**

YOSA employs a staff complement of social workers and Peer-Mentors under the leadership of Miss Yonela Mboobo, the organisation's Senior Social Worker. Yonela is currently completing her master's degree in social work (part-time) at Wits University.

The YOSA youthful professional team address the psychosocial learning barriers among the disadvantaged learners. YOSA has entered into partnership with the University of the Witwatersrand and the South African College of Applied Psychology (SACAP) to provide field placements for Bachelor of Social Work interns. It is one of the largest internship sites in South Africa, hosting about



twenty university students in any one year due to its growing capacity and commitment to contribute to the training of competent social workers in the country.

YOSA also provides job-readiness training for unemployed youth in the communities it serves and employs some to work alongside its Social Work team in delivering a robust psychosocial support programme. Thus, unemployed matric graduates are trained in mentoring and curriculum coaching to improve learners' performances in maths and science subjects from elementary through grade 12.

Supported by FNZ, YOSA computer laboratories are manned by Lab Assistants who oversee, monitor and manage the computer training programme for learners, staff and the community.

### **Governance**

YOSA is presided over by a multi-disciplinary board of governors that is actively responsible for policy decisions and supports management in delivering the organizational promise.

#### ***Dr Thobeka S Nkomo***

Head of Department and Social Work Lecturer at University of the Witwatersrand

#### ***Garth Smith***

Executive Leader | Business Transformation | Technology | Financial Services

#### ***Susy James***

Former Qantas Airways staff member who is a long-time friend of YOSA

#### ***Brolin Castellino***

Qantas Airline Pilot

#### ***Jennifer van Oerle (Chairperson)***

Chief Operating Officer, Discovery Invest

#### ***Dr. Josiah Nyanda (Secretary)***

Lecturer: English and Critical Thinking. University of the Witwatersrand

#### ***Ntombi Mzalisi***

Governance, Risk and Compliance leadership- Financial Services Technology Expert

### **Project Monitoring and Evaluation**

YOSA writes monthly project reports to stakeholders and keeps attendance registers for project beneficiaries. We make use of project beneficiary feedback tools to be completed by individual beneficiaries and participating schools. The organisation also keeps daily process notes compiled by our social workers and Peer-Mentors for each case attended and intervention conducted. All staff submit process notes that detail their sessions with beneficiaries to YOSA Programme Management Team. Monthly meetings are also arranged with the implementing staff to follow up on the programmes and progress.

#### **Contact Us**

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