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Introduction

The month of July was exciting due to the engaging activities at the center including visits by YOSA friends from Australia. A dynamic learning-support programme was conducted in all the supported schools. Our psychosocial support and digital skills development programmes significantly transformed learners' participation in education. Attending to the learners' social and emotional needs has caused notable improvements in the teaching and learning environment. A YOSA strategy review session was also one of the highlights of the month.

Centre Based Activities

The YOSA Centre is a safe space for the young people. They are guided through opportunities and accessing resources including two healthy meals per day. We host at least 75 young people at YOSA Centre per day. The young people are mentored for success in education, through academic support, tutoring, and life skills development. Our health education and counselling services have significantly reduced the risk of teenage pregnancies; substance use and violence among our programme participants. Five of our ten supported schools have recorded no teenage pregnancy so far this year. Through social work interventions, our young people feel understood, and they open up to guidance by our staff. Through creating effective connections between staff and young people, YOSA programme influences positive behaviour.

Our international visitors in August included Trevor, Greg, Susy and Tatiana from Australia. They all interacted with our learners and brought effective diversity into our activities. Their interaction with our young people presented opportunities for life skills development, confidence building and the much-needed cultural intelligence. Trevor participated in our programme for 10 days and, Greg and Susy were with us for 7 days. We had intense memorable interactions that our young people cherished.



Astonishment, Tatiana and Susy with learners at the YOSA Centre



Trevor and Greg with learners at YOSA Centre

Learning support

Learning support is one of our major programmes given that a significant number of learners fail to grasp the main concepts during lesson times with teachers. Our programme staff have the time to take learners into small groups or as individuals and provide tailored support. They are also creative that they coach English reading using puzzles, maps and crosswords and other child-friendly tools. Learners are encouraged to be creative. We note that learners grasp complex materials while playing. We support at least 250 learners per month with learning support activities.



YOSA staff, Victoria and Melissa in small groups coaching



Extra-Curricular Activities

Learners enjoy extra-curricular activities during weekends, after school and school holidays. The activities provide staff with opportunities to connect with and effectively support young people. Our activities include thematic choreography, public speaking, indoor games and field sports like netball and soccer. Learners are supported to choose and participate in activities of their choice. Some learners are so innovative as to design and conduct positive behavior campaigns in their school communities. One of our grade three choreography teams came second at district level competitions.



Junior and Senior choreography teams in practice at YOSA Centre



Victoria, Susy and Greg with positive campaigners (culture keepers) and public speakers



Parental Engagement

During the month of August, we conducted three meetings that brought together parents, learners, teachers, and YOSA social workers to strengthen collaboration and support within the school communities. During the meetings, our social workers introduced and explained the range of services they provide, highlighting how these interventions promote learners' academic success, emotional well-being, and positive social development. The engagement created a valuable platform for parents to better understand the role of social workers in addressing challenges faced by learners both in and outside of the classroom. This collaborative space also encouraged open communication, reinforced mutual support among stakeholders, and strengthened partnerships between the schools, families, and social workers for the benefit of the learners' overall wellbeing. The parents were exceptionally cooperative and pledged to collaborate with the teachers in supporting learners.



Combined meetings of parents, teachers, learners and social workers

YOSA Staff Wellness

As part of promoting wellness within the YOSA team, staff and student social workers participated in an exciting hike during August. The activity was designed to encourage self-care, teamwork, and mental health awareness among those providing direct support to learners. The hike created an opportunity for relaxation, reflection, and bonding outside of the school setting, reinforcing the importance of balance between professional responsibilities and personal well-being. Engaging in nature walks and physical activity not only boosted the morale of the team but also enhanced their sense of unity and resilience. This wellness initiative highlighted the value of maintaining good mental health among practitioners, which in turn strengthens their capacity to provide meaningful and sustained support to learners.



YOSA Staff meeting with Susy and Greg solidifying the staff wellness retreat





Staff briefing sessions on mental health issues during the retreat



Staff hiking and yet another mental health discussion on the mountain

Digital Learning Centres

Access to technology has changed the lives of the young people we support. Through digital literacy, learners are exploring subjects like science, mathematics, and coding. The computer laboratories are connected to internet, so learners are oriented to research and online collaboration.



Learners in high school and primary school labs



YOSA Strategy

With support from YOSA friends, Andrea Duffin, Sue Ochse and Nthabiseng, YOSA staff and some of our board members we successfully held a strategy review session. The purpose of this initial workshop was to understand YOSA's current reality, what the future possibilities could be, and the immediate priorities.

We have a first draft of a strategy, with specific focus areas to address key risks and the opportunities to scale the work that YOSA does, in an effort to further spread the positive impact that YOSA makes.

The next step to the present this work to the full YOSA board for their input, and finalise the urgent, short- and medium-term goals. It was a truly inspiring exercise, and we are excited to finalise this, and put our strategy into action.



YOSA friends, staff, Susy and Jen going through the review process.

Acknowledgements

We will forever be grateful for the support from **FNZ**, a global financial services and fintech company supporting YOSA from their Africa headquarters in Sandton. The support provides the backbone for YOSA to run its programmes.

We also received financial donations from Karen and Trevor, Susy and Greg, and donations in kind from **Brolin, Karen and Trevor, Karen and Richard, Donna, Louise, Andrea, Kylie, Linda, Abbie, Nicole, Rachel, Sarah, Donna, Simone, Marty** and a generous supply of programme uniforms from **Barker College** in Australia.

The growing number of participants on our programmes is well supplied. We have been receiving the uniforms almost once every month this year, thanks to Karen and Trevor for organizing transportation.

Conclusion

The Department of Education is fully invested in our programmes. YOSA runs very comprehensive learner support programmes in the school communities. Our staff are fully engaged in running psychosocial and learning support programmes. Our digital learning centres host just over 600 learners per month doing research and using online educational sites to supplement their lessons. We are grateful for the support from our partners that enables us to effectively run our programmes. We are also grateful for being able to run a staff wellness programme in August.

