**Challenge accepted! Fundi traces homeless student to enable his learning dreams**

*When homeless student Sakhile Freedom Nsibande was interviewed on eNCA recently about his Covid-19 lockdown experience and how he wished he could continue his studies, he never imagined how those three minutes would change his life. A Fundi employee watching the story alerted the team – and they launched a massive social media search to find him. Three weeks later and Sakhile has just moved into his new student accommodation, with his food, airtime and data all sponsored by Fundi. He is now ready – and able – to pursue his full-time study dream.*

Sakhile Nsibande’s story is one of both determination and resilience. It resonates with learners and students across the country whose lives – and destinies – have already been rocked by the ongoing challenge of accessing tertiary education, and are now reeling from the impact of Covid-19.

The son of a single mom in rural Kwanibela (located in Hluhluwe, KwaZulu-Natal), Nsibande has always dreamed of studying economics. After matriculating in 2011, he wanted to apply at Unisa, but discovered he couldn’t register because he didn’t have an ID document. There was also no money to support his studies. Not wanting to burden his family, Nsibande tried to support himself whilst saving to register for the course. Over the next five years he worked as a petrol attendant; on construction sites and doing whatever piece-jobs he could find. Throughout this period, he kept applying to study – and wasn’t successful. At the end of 2015, he decided to go home.

In 2016 he returned to Durban and applied at Unisa again. The course was full, so he started looking for a job. He began vending at taxi ranks and saved whatever he could. Two years later, he tried at Unisa again – and was accepted in 2019! Nsibande immediately applied for NSFAS funding, and used his savings to pay for the first two modules of his qualification: business management and economics. He soon found himself struggling – unable to study and support himself at the same time. After defaulting on his rent, his landlord evicted him.

Nsibande was determined to write his exams, however. He started living on the street and sleeping in a local park at night. Despite not managing to study, he passed the two modules he had registered for. He called his mom and asked her to send him money so that he could come home.

When Nsibande’s NSFAS funding finally came through in January this year, he was able to pay off his outstanding balance and register for eight new Unisa modules. He told his mom he’d be staying with a friend in Durban and came back to the city. He knew she wouldn’t let him return if he didn’t have a place to stay. That first night he slept at a petrol station. The second, in the park – hiding his things in a drain. A homeless friend invited him to start staying at a shelter, saying it would be safer for him, especially if he wanted to study during the day. When the Covid-19 lockdown started, Nsibande moved to the municipal shelter – extremely worried about what this meant for his studies. After persisting with his enquiries about how the shelter could assist him not to fall behind, his story was heard by one of the shelter managers who arranged the interview on eNCA. It started a chain of events he could never have imagined…

“When we heard about Sakhile and how he has continued to pursue his dream of studying despite everything, we immediately wanted to help,” says Mala Suriah, the CMO of Fundi. “We were all so touched and inspired by his resilience and determination. His story also speaks directly to our own internal response to Covid-19, namely a campaign we’ve entitled ‘challenge accepted’. This is an invitation to all of our team members and stakeholders to step-up and make an extraordinary contribution during this time.”

Finding Nsibande became the next immediate challenge for the team. Without a cellphone or regular internet access, Fundi launched a social media search to make contact. “We were finally able to trace him to the shelter and offer him a bursary for accommodation, food and data and airtime for the duration of his studies,” explains Suriah.

With Nsibande moving into his accommodation this past weekend, this young man’s life has been transformed. He is now stepping into his next chapter and will be able to pursue what he has always dreamed of doing. “I remain very grateful to everyone who has played a part in making all of this possible,” he says. “I am determined to make the most of this opportunity, and will be working hard to achieve the results I know I am capable of. I want to be part of the generation that helps rebuild our country and economy – and my studies will help to make this possible.”

Ends

**About Fundi**

Fundi is South Africa’s leading education finance and education fund management solution specialist. The company’s purpose is to help others realize their purpose. It is positioning its brand as Africa’s single source for all services that enable the education and learning journey.

Fundi’s innovative solutions span finance and education loans; end-to-end bursary administration; and cashless digital devices for students. They include a full range of supportive educational services that reduce administration and increase productivity for students, parents, bursars and institutions. A seamless customer experience is the company’s intended strategy.

Fundi is passionate about making a tangible difference in the life of every African through education. Know More. Be More. For more information about Fundi, visit [www.fundi.co.za](http://www.fundi.co.za).

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