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Ekapa Squash brings benefits to township kids in Cape Town



Ekapa Squash kids in Cape Town

Ekapa Squash uses squash to support children from the Langa township in Cape Town - and is a good example of how development programmes can also benefit the squash venues which host them.

Similar to [Egoli Squash](#) in Johannesburg or [Squash and Education Alliance](#) programmes in the United States, the [Ekapa Squash programme](#) is an opportunity for children from under-privileged communities to play squash - something they would never otherwise get to experience.

The Ekapa Squash learners are transported to the two-court [Villager Squash Club](#) in Claremont for weekly sessions, with competitions hosted by the six-court [Western Province Cricket Club in Rondebosch](#).



Former world no.28 and South African champion Siyoli Waters

The coaching team is led by former world no.28 and South African champion Siyoli Waters (*pictured above*) whose focus is on allowing all youngsters to play to their maximum level of ability and dedication. Many have gone on to represent Western Province youth teams in national events from U11 to U19 age groups.

There is an informal education element to the Ekapa programme with the broad aim of widening the children's horizons and ambitions. Some of the children are able to use it as a stepping stone to get into high schools or even universities outside of the township.

"Playing squash is one way to break out of the township and exposure them to a different world beyond their own walls," says Siyoli.

She adds: "When the kids who progress to representing Western Province go on an aeroplane for the first time, it's incredible. At one competition, the kids were given burgers. One mum was in tears - it was the first time they'd had a burger. You sometimes forget the levels of poverty."



practice session

Importantly, Ekapa employs two coaches who are from the same township community as the young beneficiaries. The coaches act as an important link between the parents and the programme, building trust and advocacy in what they're trying to achieve.

Such development programmes can also greatly benefit the squash facilities that host them. Siyoli says there's a danger that clubs "might just see it as a lot of hard work and inconvenience," but the value that hosting social development programmes can add to venues is huge - even if court time is given for free or at a discount.

"These kids could be your future members!" says Siyoli. "If you're holding tournaments or events for them, you're bringing in friends and adults and that's a way for them to connect to squash. It's advertising the club.



Ekapa Squash team

"What we have seen several times is that kids leave squash when they start studying or find work, but they start playing again as young professionals. You might lose them initially, but you may well gain them back."

Siyoli is keen to stress to clubs that there is choice in the level of time and commitment they can offer - whether it's hosting an annual or monthly tournament or weekly coaching and matchplay sessions. As well as bringing a more youthful flavour to the facility, the benefits can be wider.

Siyoli explains: "You can't force all members to be empathetic [to the needs of kids from the townships] but it's important that affluent white people see that little black kids can play squash too. It's very possible for people to go about their lives never interacting with anyone from a different side of the tracks. Everyone can tend to stay in their lane. These programmes can lead to societal change."

To read more about the Ekapa Squash programme at Villager Squash Club and Western Province Cricket Club, [click here](#).