Case Study 19

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

UMZI WETHU TRAINING ACADEMY FOR VULNERABLE YOUTH

www.oxfam.org.au
UMZI WETHU
TRAINING ACADEMY FOR VULNERABLE YOUTH
“Umzi Wethu gives its graduates not just another certificate, but it opens up a whole new life to them. The vision of Umzi Wethu is to allow vulnerable youths to make a fundamental change to their lives. We don’t just spoon feed, but will explain a concept a million times until it is properly understood. Our students live and breathe what they learn.”

LINCOLN MEYER, UMZI WETHU GRADUATE AND SOMERSET EAST FACILITATOR

“I believe this is the best intervention that has been created for youth – nature, learning, work, residential, supportive, all routed within our sustainability context.”

EVE ANNECKE, SUSTAINABILITY INSTITUTE DIRECTOR

“This is a solution for vulnerable youth, a holistic solution that gives hope, skills, and livelihoods. Umzi Wethu is an investment in a person’s future. There are hundreds of feeding schemes out there, what Umzi Wethu offers is for the individual to be able to fish for himself, to become truly self-sufficient. They are given the skills and the courage to work, and to continue working, years after graduating. The alternative for these vulnerable youths? For most, there is none. They would become part of the lost generation.”

ANDREW MUIR, UMZI WETHU FOUNDER

“Umzi changes the way you see youth development. It is much more holistic. It actually gives them the space to find out who they are.”

TRACY WARD, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH ACADEMY MANAGER

“Umzi Wethu acknowledges that you might have grown up in difficult circumstances but that doesn’t have to stop you from being the best you could be. You just need that bridge.”

LEE MARINAKI, SPIER WINE FARM HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER
The Umzi Wethu Training Academy for Vulnerable Youth is a multifaceted and dynamic intervention programme aimed at young people who simply need a break in life to allow them to reach their full potential. There are many young people in South Africa who, due to circumstances beyond their control, have been left vulnerable – either because they live in households with no formal income, they are orphaned, their lives have been affected by HIV and AIDS, or they come from child-headed households. As a result, they cannot afford to further their education or obtain gainful employment. These young people have demonstrated resilience in the face of hardship but, trapped in an environment of poverty and unemployment, their future is bleak.

Created by the Wilderness Foundation executive director Andrew Muir, Umzi Wethu, which means ‘our home’ in Africa’s Xhosa language, is a year-long programme that not only provides comprehensive vocational skills training, but also incorporates health and wellness training, extensive counselling and wilderness excursions, all within a nurturing residential environment. Its focus is to provide a ‘hand up’ rather than a ‘handout’, to develop young adults who are capable of attaining financial independence that is sustainable and stable.

As well as a year of training, Umzi Wethu provides guaranteed job placement with transitional support. As the costs of any programme like Umzi Wethu are substantial, Andrew and his team have a stringent selection process to ensure only young people who have the aptitude and potential to see the programme through enter the academy. “We need to be confident that our Umzi Wethu students will be able to stay in the jobs we secure for them – only then will the programme be successful from a socio-economic perspective. Essentially we are creating ambassadors for other vulnerable youths and orphans to look up to, and see a brighter outlook. Graduates from Umzi Wethu will serve as examples of opportunity and hope to both their own families and to the communities from which they come.”

Umzi Wethu was piloted in 2006 in Port Elizabeth, in the Eastern Cape. In its first year the academy successfully graduated and placed 13 students within the hospitality industry. In 2008 a second academy was opened in Somerset East, training field guides and field rangers, and in 2012 a third, partner-run academy opened its doors in the Western Cape’s Stellenbosch wine-growing region. By mid-2014, the Umzi Wethu academies had seen 233 vulnerable youths graduate and enter employment. More than 200 graduates are today still working or studying further, and about 20 per cent are working in junior management positions.

“The Umzi Wethu impact, even when I reflect on it now, is impressive,” says Andrew Muir, Umzi Wethu Founder. “Despite economic recessions and global downturns, Umzi Wethu has stood the test of time. Seven years down the line we still have more than 85 per cent of our graduates working, and this in industries which have been severely impacted by the recession. It is because we don’t just deal with the vocational skills but have an holistic approach to education that our graduates are able to confidently navigate their way through difficult times. We prepare our graduates mentally for the job, dealing with psychological hurt and pain, and we help them gain a level of maturity that builds on their own existing resilience.”
EXPANDING
UMZI WETHU'S REACH
“We want youth to get the best possible outlook they can, personally, financially and career wise. If you want to get your 85 per cent outcome, the Umzi Wethu model is the only way you can do it. There is no compromise on the fundamentals of the programme.”

ANDREW MUIR, UMZI WETHU FOUNDER

“The key reasons we are doing what we are doing is to fundamentally improve the quality of human life – targeting youth – to create an awareness and advocacy of nature and the environment rather than just being another skills training programme. Ultimately, we don’t just want to produce graduates who are economically active, but who [also] understand how they fit into the environment, and the universe.”

PINKY KONDLO, UMZI WETHU PROGRAMME DIRECTOR

“The successful students are fine youngsters, and this has shown us that this kind of investment in youth, in this special kind of way, is worth every iota of energy, money and love. This is the kind of work that changes the country, one young person at a time.”

EVE ANNECKE, SUSTAINABILITY INSTITUTE DIRECTOR

“I really want to encourage people who are thinking of where they could invest to really look at Umzi with wider spectacles. They are not just training at a surface level, they are really working in a particularly profound systemic way that takes everything around that moulds people, that moulds society, and that influences us, to another level. They are very considered in their approach, and their holistic view.”

LEE MARINAKI, SPIER WINE FARM HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER

“Funders generally go for big turnout. Umzi Wethu has a small impact, but the impact is deep, it is profound. It gets results and allows kids to be something they never would have been able to be before. Suddenly they are something.”

TRACY WARD, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH ACADEMY MANAGER

“I wish Umzi could be everywhere, to help young people who have lost all hope.”

KHANYISWA WEM, 20, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH GRADUATE 2013
In line with Umzi Wethu’s vision to “create a world where all vulnerable youth have the opportunity to realise their dreams of earning a livelihood with dignity and becoming caring citizens, within their communities and of the natural environment,” the Wilderness Foundation seeks to expand the successes of Umzi Wethu. This involves finding organisations that can support Umzi Wethu either as a sponsoring partner – supporting a vulnerable youth for a year at the academy; as a placement partner – employing graduates or providing on-the-job work experience during the training year; or as an implementing partner – setting up its own Umzi Wethu Academy.

Like all facets of Umzi Wethu, the model for replicating and expanding the programme has evolved over the years, as Pinky Kondlo, Umzi Wethu Programme Director, explains: “Initially our replication approach was internally motivated. Umzi Wethu was about us, and how we could extend and maximize our reach. But over the last while our strategic thinking has changed. We don’t go out now with the intention to run the academy ourselves, but to find partners to help expand and run the programme. Ultimately, we envision Umzi Wethu’s Port Elizabeth office being used as an Academy of Excellence, where we can host students from other regions, and even other countries.”

The idea of using the Port Elizabeth facility as an Academy of Excellence also addresses the issue of the capital injection needed to start a new academy, which, Umzi Wethu Founder Andrew Muir admits, is prohibitive. “This is where our rollout has become a bit stuck,” reflects Andrew. “Not in the scholarships but in the money it requires to build a residence, and even at times, a teaching facility. There is the option to rent a space or to partner with another organisation that has access to a residential and/or a teaching facility, but even so it is the need to have access to resources – the physical space to implement Umzi Wethu – which has been the biggest constraint to replicating the model.

“There is great flexibility in regard to whom we can partner with,” continues Andrew. “While we have only tested Umzi Wethu in two industries – hospitality and conservation – the vocational element is open to any regulated industry. Ideally, it should be a service-oriented or practically-oriented industry, to deal with the level of skills that can realistically be taught in one year. Mechanics, call centre agents, receptionists, shop assistants, even farmers, can be accommodated using the Umzi Wethu approach to training.”
KHAYISWA WEM
UMZI WETHU GRADUATE AND COMMIS CHEF AT SPIER
Partnering organisations need to share the Wilderness Foundation’s environmental and conservation values and its holistic approach to community outreach. An intensive due diligence process is initiated with any potential partner to ascertain the compatibility of both organisations, and to ensure the financial capacity of the partnering organisation, both in terms of funding and in being able to access residential and training facilities. “We need to be confident that our partner organisation shares our fundamental values, but it is also imperative that the roles and expectations surrounding the technical side of the project – accounting, monitoring, reporting, fund raising, etc – are also established at the outset to ensure the integrity of the partners and the success of the academy,” explains Paul Longe, Umzi Wethu Academy Manager. “In terms of financial support, the idea is for the implementing partner to bring a large percentage of the required funding to the partnership, with Wilderness Foundation supplementing a small portion of the new project costs, if necessary. The implementing partner’s ability to generate and sustain the funding required would be part of the due diligence process.”

By 2014, the Umzi Wethu model had been successfully replicated within the Wilderness Foundation itself and with a partner organisation, and also within urban and rural contexts. It has demonstrated that it is not only workable but replicable as well. The Sustainability Institute, an international living and learning centre focused on sustainable living, was the first partner organisation to take the Umzi Wethu blueprint and implement the programme in the Western Cape’s Stellenbosch wine region, training its students for careers within the hospitality industry.

“In the Sustainability Institute we found an organisation that on the one hand was so different from the Wilderness Foundation but on the other shared many of our core values. This common ground ensured that we were able to influence each other positively to ensure a positive outcome for the project,” reflects Paul.

Paul adds that partnering with an external organisation has allowed the Wilderness Foundation to further reflect on the Umzi Wethu model and to refine it. “The Umzi Wethu model is by no means a static model and is constantly being evaluated and modified as a result of input we receive from our students, our employing partners and our implementing partners. For example, partnering with the Sustainability Institute made us realise that more support was required during the first 18 months of the project as new staff grappled with the challenges of delivering such a highly integrated and holistic intervention. The Programme Manager from our Umzi Wethu head office team spent time at the Sustainability Institute every month to review the progress and explore the upcoming activities and possible challenges.”
IMPLEMENTING THE UMZI WETHU MODEL
“There is no way around the fact that Umzi Wethu is an expensive programme to implement. But if we think it costs about R150,000 a year to keep a youngster in jail, or R100,000 to send a child to a private school for one year, the fact that it costs about R86,000 to fundamentally transform a person’s life is well worth the return. Since its inception, we have strived to refine the model, and I believe we have made the programme as efficient as we can without compromising on the quality of our graduates.”

ANDREW MUIR, UMZI WETHU FOUNDER

“It is the holistic approach that Umzi Wethu takes to educating vulnerable youths that makes this programme so unique, and so successful. Yes, replicating the Umzi Wethu model is a costly exercise, but the benefits are so far reaching and long lasting, that the effort is worth it. It is the entire process that works.”

LINCOLN MEYER, UMZI WETHU GRADUATE AND SOMERSET EAST FACILITATOR

“If you are not properly invested in the programme, if you are not working from the heart, then you will find implementing the Umzi Wethu programme difficult. Youth development really has to matter to you.”

TRACY WARD, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH ACADEMY MANAGER

“Our country’s shortage in qualified chefs is huge and leaves a gap in the market for young people wanting to have a career in hospitality. Umzi Wethu gives the disadvantaged youth a fighting chance to better not only their own lives but those of their families and communities. We should have so many more of these projects in the Cape and surrounding areas as we are one of the biggest tourist destinations in the world.”

LORIANNE HEYNS, SPIER WINE FARM EXECUTIVE CHEF
The Umzi Wethu Training Academy for Vulnerable Youth provides a model of training which addresses a range of social challenges. It comprises four impact areas: wellness – to improve the overall health and wellness of the individual; conservation – to improve knowledge and build respect for the environment through active engagement in conservation; social responsibility – to ensure graduates contribute meaningfully to improve the communities they live in; and economic wellbeing – to ensure graduates attain a level of sustainable financial independence and stability.

For organisations wanting to implement the Umzi Wethu model, and to ensure that the quality and calibre of students who graduate is not compromised, it is essential that the holistic nature of the programme, inclusive of all its core components – residence, wilderness trails (the social benefits of nature), wellness, and vocational training – be embraced. Pinky Kondlo, Umzi Wethu Programme Director, stresses that the following are non-negotiable elements that have been independently evaluated, and which define what Umzi Wethu is about.

1. A potential partner can’t just tick the box to say they have a residence. This residence has to be the hub for a wide range of activities and growth, run by a competent and caring housemother.

2. The nature/wilderness component of Umzi Wethu is a fundamental element of the Umzi Wethu philosophy, facilitating personal and social transformation through its healing powers.

3. The wellness element cannot be diluted. Young people need to be given the skills to ensure they can cope with the issues they will experience in the working world. They need to be able to draw on their life skills – confidence, self-belief, assertiveness – when Umzi Wethu is no longer there to support them.

4. The vocational training element is fundamental to the programme as Umzi Wethu is not only a soft-skills/life-skills programme. Graduates need the accredited vocational skills to enable them to be motivated, to be confident and, most importantly, to become economically independent.
LORIANNE HEYNS
EXECUTIVE CHEF AT SPIER
Just as the four elements of Circle of Courage® – a model of positive youth development that integrates the cultural wisdom of indigenous cultures with the findings of professional pioneers and modern positive youth development research – cannot work in isolation, neither can the core pillars of the Umzi Wethu model be separated. The training provided by Umzi Wethu gives students a sense of mastery. The residential component of the programme, together with the wilderness trails, gives the students a sense of belonging. Students gain a sense of independence by having the parent/child balance restored through the residence, as well as through the guaranteed job placement. And a spirit of generosity is nurtured in all graduates through the awareness that they have been helped up at a time when they were despairing of ever making anything of their lives.

While it appears that the Umzi Wethu model is inflexible, there is space for the implementing partner to create an academy that reflects its own ethos. As Lincoln Meyer, Umzi Wethu Somerset East Facilitator, explains: “The Umzi recipe just needs to be trusted. An implementing partner can’t take any of the ingredients out, but they can have their own distinctive flavour by adding salt to suit their taste.” Both the Somerset East and Stellenbosch academies have their own distinctive feel, with activities and structures that make each unique. The Sustainability Institute has incorporated yoga, meditation, and gardening to its daily schedule, while at Somerset East, the atmosphere is a lot more relaxed, with plenty of campfire chats and hikes into the neighbouring Boschberg Mountain nature reserve.

Paul Longe, Umzi Wethu Academy Manager, adds that a comprehensive implementation manual has been developed to capture both the technical details of the model and, equally as importantly, its ethos. “It is important that the implementation guide conveys the nuanced approach which we have developed over the years as a result of our experience in working with vulnerable youth. However, capturing this has been no easy task, and we are revising the current edition of the manual to take into account new learnings. The learning approach we’ve taken to this project is a fundamental element of its success; learning to adapt to the shifting patterns and needs of vulnerable youth is always a challenge which requires constant new thinking.” Paul believes the manual is an important tool for the implementing partner, but the one-on-one training and support that the Wilderness Foundation provides its partners is equally as valuable.
FOUR CORE PILLARS

TRAINING
ACCREDITED VOCATIONAL SKILLS
• motivating
• developing mastery

WELLNESS
COMPREHENSIVE LIFE SKILLS TRAINING
• providing internalised life-long support
• building confidence

RESIDENCE
NURTURING HOME ENVIRONMENT
• creating sense of belonging
• instilling independence

WILDERNESS
OVERNIGHT NATURE TRAILS
• harnessing healing powers of nature
• fostering a spirit of generosity
• conservation awareness
CORE PILLAR #1
TRAINING
LUTHANDO SITHOLE
UMZI WETHU GRADUATE AND COMMIS CHEF AT SPIER
“On the outside it looks like we are just training chefs. But we are not training for the sake of training chefs, but for the sake of developing mastery. We are taking young people who never thought of being a chef, but who, through the Umzi Wethu process, are now passionate and committed to the industry.”

PAUL LONGE, UMZI WETHU ACADEMY MANAGER

“Umzi Wethu educates as opposed to just teaches. Education helps the learner to make a real decision to change behaviour. The way Umzi Wethu approaches education is a critical success factor to the programme.”

WENDY MCCALLUM, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANT

“The most important thing a facilitator needs is patience. When you work with vulnerable youth, things don’t always happen as quickly as you would like them to happen. A facilitator cannot get frustrated when repetition is required to get the point across.”

JUSTIN CARROLL, UMZI WETHU SOMERSET EAST ACADEMY CONSERVATION FACILITATOR

“The facilitator has to be prepared to take on the responsibility of being a role model, as the students will watch and take on everything that you do, right down to the type of deodorant you use. We need to teach by example as we will be scrutinized 24 hours a day. It is a huge responsibility.”

LINCOLN MEYER, UMZI WETHU GRADUATE AND SOMERSET EAST FACILITATOR

“Donovan was our teacher and he was great. He did not go by the book every time. He would go the extra mile. He would take us to see a real kitchen, and would use his knowledge to explain things further, in more detail. He also gave us alternatives to what the book taught. He was like a father to us.”

LUTHANDO SITHOLE, 23, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH GRADUATE 2013
“Umzi Wethu is about teaching the whole person to deal with everything that comes to them so that they can respond rather than react to a situation, and calculate how they deal with it. They are given the tools to be able to do this. These kids go home and show their family, their community, what they learn. They might implement recycling initiatives in their community, healthier eating habits in their homes, and even anti-littering campaigns. Umzi Wethu is a trigger for just so much else.”

LEE MARINAKI, SPIER WINE FARM HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER

“We were told when we started Umzi Wethu that we didn’t have to become a chef – that Umzi Wethu was giving us the foundations from which we could build on. I am going to work myself up the ranks to build a better career for myself. My community refers to me now as ‘The Chef’. It makes me feel very proud.”

RAZ-LEE HECTOR, 19, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH GRADUATE 2013

“The facilitator needs to think about whether he or she wants to produce a graduate who is ready for employment or a graduate who is ready to take on life.”

LINCOLN MEYER, UMZI WETHU GRADUATE AND SOMERSET EAST FACILITATOR

“A student came to us and was convinced that each town had its own sun. That was how isolated he was in his community. It took us a week to convince him that there was only one sun. But we had to take this belief seriously. To laugh at him would have been to destroy his confidence.”

JUSTIN CARROLL, UMZI WETHU SOMERSET EAST ACADEMY CONSERVATION FACILITATOR
Vocational training is a crucial element of the Umzi Wethu model. Not only is it important to select a vocation with ample employment opportunities, it is equally important to develop a curriculum that is both high in quality and as up-to-date and in line with industry standards as possible. All courses offered must be fully accredited.

Justin Carroll, Umzi Wethu Somerset East Academy Conservation Facilitator, is convinced that the quality of the training – and the manner in which it is taught – is key to helping the youths that go through the academy make fundamental changes to their lives. He says, “Umzi Wethu has become a brand, and our employing partners trust that what we are training our students is perfectly aligned with their requirements. We always push our students to get at least 75 per cent, and we do not compromise on the quality of work they must do to achieve this 75 per cent. Also, unlike educational institutions, we can better adapt to new requirements. Our vocational training is in direct line with the expectations of our employment partner. For example, anti-poaching units need rifle competency, a business purpose certificate and a first aid certificate, which we provide but which most educational institutions do not. Recently, SANPARKS added a new requirement to its employment specifications, namely that their employees have to be fit, to be able to run 2.2 km in 12 minutes. We have now introduced physical fitness into our training programme.”

Equally important to the vocational training element is that the facilitators remain cognisant of the fact that they are dealing with vulnerable youths, many of whom have been living in, or even heading up, child-headed households. “We are aware that the programme can’t be too formal, we can’t have too much routine,” explains Justin. “We need to teach by example and are very strong in discipline. If, for example, they don’t come to class on time I make them stay outside. Right from the start punctuality is important. I try to make them aware of what they are going to experience in the workforce. I prepare them for the real world. I do not want any of my students to come back to me after they graduate and tell me that I never prepared them for the difficult tasks ahead. I know that if they listen and absorb what I teach them, they will not struggle.”

Justin admits that some of his teaching methods may not be conventional, but he says there is always method in his madness. For example, on a rainy day he might hold his class outside, ensuring that all his students (and he himself) get soaked. At the end of the lesson, he tells his students that they must turn up to class the next morning in clean and dry uniforms. It is up to them to work out how to dry their uniforms, because this situation can, and will, arise when working in the field. On another occasion, he will have the students sit and study the landscape for an hour, and a short while later will have them return to the same spot to see what is different. He explains: “It is important that I stimulate the brain and improve their skills of observation. Out in the field they will be working with dangerous animals, even armed poachers, and noticing that two rocks are placed on top of each other just might save their lives. These rocks could be trail indicators placed by poachers.”

Finally, understanding the holistic nature of Umzi Wethu will make it easier for the course facilitators to better train the students. As Justin concludes: “This is not just another certificate, another programme, another course. This programme should be life changing.”
CORE PILLAR #2
RESIDENCE
“The housemother has to fulfil the role of mother – strong disciplinarian, strong personality, but she also needs to be somebody who is empathetic with them. Students need to whinge sometimes; they need to have a sounding board.”

LINCOLN MEYER, UMZI WETHU GRADUATE AND SOMERSET EAST FACILITATOR

“Residence gives our students a sense of belonging to a family, particularly because they are leaving their families. When they come here, they need to look after each other; they are each other’s brothers and sisters.”

JUSTIN CARROLL, UMZI WETHU SOMERSET EAST ACADEMY CONSERVATION FACILITATOR

“I think Thembi as the housemother has the toughest job. The residence is a hotbed of emotions, and it is often at night time that a lot of the frustrations and tears come out.”

TRACY WARD, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH ACADEMY MANAGER

“Many vulnerable children will look at you with an attitude which says ‘you don’t know where I come from, you don’t understand my culture’ so it is very important that the housemother either comes from the same cultural background as the kids, or has a very good understanding and knowledge of their cultural issues.”

THEMBISILE MEMELA, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH HOUSEMOTHER

“At first, all of us were different. We came from different backgrounds. There was a lot we had to adjust to. It was scary to come in to a residence. There was no more privacy. But as time went on we came to find each other. Even now I miss them, as they became a part of my life. I was tempted many times to drop out because I felt everything was too hard, and that I clashed with the other students, but I also knew that I wanted this opportunity more. I decided to stick it out. ... Because of Umzi Wethu I have Xhosa and Sotho families. I have learnt that even with all our differences we really do have so much in common. Umzi Wethu taught me to be able to adapt and to accept all our differences and personalities. ... I see everyone as the same now.”

MARILYN JACOBS, 19, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH GRADUATE 2013

“In my group there were only three Coloureds with 13 Africans. This was a new experience for me, as I knew nothing about their culture. But I discovered that no one gave up on me, and we did not give up on each other. Umzi Wethu taught me to not judge people.”

RAZ-LEE HECTOR, 19, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH GRADUATE 2013
An entrenched legacy of apartheid is that the people of South Africa view each other according to racial groupings. Under apartheid people were classified as White, Coloured, Indian or Black and these classifications remain in common usage to this day, informing people’s views of each other.

According to a South African Institute of Race Relations report, titled *First Steps to Healing the South African Family* (March 2011), single-parent households have become the norm in South Africa, while nearly 100 000 children live in child-headed households.\(^1\) The authors cited figures from the 2001 South African census which indicated that only 43 per cent of children aged 0-4 years had both parents in the household, as did 42 per cent of children aged 5-13 years, and 42 per cent aged 14-19 years. The census also indicated significant differences between racial groups. For example, in the age group 0-4 years, 38 per cent of African, 56 per cent of Coloured, 85 per cent of Indian, and 86 per cent of White children had both parents in the household. Similar trends were evident in the age groups 5-13 years, and 14-19 years.

By the time the 2011 South African census was conducted, the number of children in South Africa who, by the time they were 17, reported having lost one or both parents had more than doubled during that decade, representing a total of 3 374 971 children.\(^2\)

Umzi Wethu is a programme which targets vulnerable youths and, as is reflected in the statistics above, many of the students entering the programme come from homes with sick or absent parents – circumstances that force them into the “world of adulthood” at a very young age. They have had to become tough to deal with the realities of their world. Creating emotionally healthy and secure bonds with other individuals helps prepare them to develop nurturing, positive attachments in the future.

While it is the residential aspect of the Umzi Wethu model which creates the biggest financial challenge for implementing partners, its importance cannot be overstated, as Justin Carroll, Umzi Wethu Somerset East Academy Conservation Facilitator, affirms: “Residence is a big building block for life and the way forward. The students need to bond, to become a family, to treat each other like brother and sister. We always sit and eat meals as a family to create a sense of unity, a sense of belonging.”

---


Residence takes the students out of their comfort zone. Suddenly living with people of different cultural beliefs and values, from different races, with different coping mechanisms, teaches the students in a much deeper, more profound way that everybody is human. It teaches them empathy, as they are taught to help each other out, and not to laugh at another’s misfortune. Says Thembisile Memela, Umzi Wethu Stellenbosch housemother: “Initially they did not respond well to me as a housemother. They said I was too old, and as most had been on their own for so long, they did not see the need for a mother now. Particularly with the African men, they told me I was bullying them, and that in their culture men did not do dishes.”

But it is the chores and learning to live with and accept people of different cultures and beliefs that ultimately helps the students to become responsible, confident and independent adults.

Trial and error has led Umzi Wethu to set the ideal number of students per intake at 18, as Paul Longe, Umzi Wethu Academy Manager, explains: “Fixed costs [such as] salaries, rentals, vehicles, etc. are high on a project like this so the number of students will affect the cost per student dramatically ... There are variable costs, such as uniforms, food, training equipment and a few other things, which will increase but most of the big costs are fixed on a per group or per month basis and therefore not affected by increasing numbers. Naturally it does depend on the capacity of the accommodation, and the capacity of the training facilities.”

At one stage, Umzi Wethu had 20 students, but Paul discovered this number was impractical for logistical reasons: “Only nine students can fit into a kombi and we quickly discovered that with 20 students there were transportation difficulties. With 18 we have two kombi loads, which is manageable.”

---

3. A “kombi” is a minibus that is used to transport passengers.
Thembisile Memela
UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH HOUSEMOTHER
CORE PILLAR #3
WILDERNESS
“You can’t have the same transformation without the trails. Nature changes you, and it is in understanding how nature operates that you as a human being can understand yourself better.”

LINCOLN MEYER, UMZI WETHU GRADUATE AND SOMERSET EAST FACILITATOR

“We believe in the healing power of nature: being in this setting helps the healing process. Nature unleashes magic in everybody.”

CLAIRE JACOBS, USIKO HEAD OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION

“On the trail, the facilitators were getting us to open our feelings. I am not a person to talk about feelings. I usually laugh it off.”

RAZ-LEE HECTOR, 19, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH GRADUATE 2013

“I will never forget one trail, it was in the mountains, and on the second day we had to go off by ourselves and spend the day alone, and sleep alone that night. It was a great experience. I think of it as a way of teaching us to survive. In life we will face a lot of challenges, and we will not always have somebody to fight our battles for us. By surviving a day and a night by myself in the mountains, I knew that I could survive on my own.”

LUTHANDO SITHOLE, 23, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH GRADUATE 2013

“The trails allowed me to speak my mind.”

MARILYN JACOBS, 19, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH GRADUATE 2013

“With boys in particular there are a lot of things that have been suppressed, things that just by voicing them brings some type of relief. We see a big difference between the first day and last.”

GABRIEL RHODA, USIKO HEAD SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAMMES
Umzi Wethu’s holistic approach to producing graduates who are self-confident, independent individuals, is based on providing them with diverse elements that, together, ensure the students are rounded and able to cope in the work environment they must enter. Just as natural eco-systems are delicately held in balance, so too is the Umzi Wethu model – its structure ensuring that every element builds on each other to produce an environment that is supportive of the individuals within it. And nature itself is one of the core elements of the Umzi approach. Without the healing power of the wilderness, the other elements would not be nearly as effective in achieving the outcomes Umzi Wethu has consistently achieved.

Lincoln Meyer, Umzi Wethu graduate and Somerset East Facilitator, explains the power nature has to heal: “Adolescents often feel very lost, that nobody understands them, that they are the only person in the world to be going through what they are going through. Nature helps show them that they are not the only ones going through this. Nature also helps put life into perspective. The wilderness takes our students out of their comfort zone, it gives them a certain level of exposure to the elements. For example, sleeping on the ground, sitting by yourself in the dark, and uncertainty as to whether it will rain or not. Students are put in situations where they have to confront their fears, and most importantly, realise that they can overcome their fears.”

Lincoln reflects on his first trail: “I was 18, standing next to the uMfolozi River. I was doing night watch, and in every lightning flash I saw an elephant, a rhino, a crocodile, all the tricks that our minds can play on us. But eventually I became calm. That is when self-realisation comes; when all our senses become alive, you can become complete. You come alive as a person. It was an incredible experience.”

Tracy Ward, Umzi Wethu Stellenbosch Academy Manager, believes there is another important element to the trails; not only does participating in a trail help to break down the students’ defences, but it also allows their deeper, more hidden personality traits to emerge: “I remember at one selection interview there was a young girl who was very shy and nervous. I was not sure she had the fortitude to get the most out of the Umzi Wethu Academy, but we decided to invite her on to the selection trail. It was there that I was able to see how determined she was to succeed, to witness her inner strength of character. She was tiny, and had very little physical strength. I did not think she would finish the trail, but she broke the hike down into little chunks, she was so determined to succeed, and she did. She went on to complete the course and is working today. The nature trails allow the students to conquer something within.”
CORE PILLAR #4
WELLNESS
“As the students start learning to live together and work together and to be more accepting of one another’s cultures, they become more open minded and interested about what is going on around them. With new experiences daily they become more inquisitive, determined and focused on what they are doing, not only in the kitchen but also at home. They realise that they are now in charge of their own lives and that the decisions they make today are what determine their future.”

LORIANNE HEYNs, SPIER WINE FARM EXECUTIVE CHEF

“The past does catch up with you, so the kids need to learn how to deal with the anger that has built up inside them.”

THEMBISILE MEMELA, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH HOUSEMOTHER

“Wellness just takes the time to listen, to give the students a sense of belonging, of self worth, and at times, even a reason to live.”

JUSTIN CARROLL, UMZI WETHU SOMERSET EAST ACADEMY CONSERVATION FACILITATOR

“Youths coming from poorer communities generally do not have a strong sense of self. They are unable to make up their own mind about what they like or dislike, but rather it is what they perceive as being allowed to like or dislike.”

MARÈTH VAN SCHALKWYK, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH LIFE SKILLS FACILITATOR

“I believe that whatever you do with young people, the most important thing you can give them is self awareness.”

BRYCE ANDERSON, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH MEDITATION INSTRUCTOR

“The selection process is vital. Because our students don’t pay for the course it is important that they feel they have earned their place, particularly because the programme is offered to them for free. Doing community service is also important, to give them a sense of giving back.”

TRACY WARD, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH ACADEMY MANAGER
“One simple activity we do is the Golden Chair Exercise, where one student sits on a chair and every body is given a chance to say something positive about that person. We then ask that student to sit for a while, to let them know that this is how they are seen by their fellow students. The reaction is very profound, and many cry, because this is not usually what they hear from their community. Instead they are usually told they will amount to nothing or that they are up to no good.”

GABRIEL RHODA, USIKO HEAD SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAMMES

Integral to preparing the Umzi Wethu youths to become truly independent citizens is the life skills and wellness element of the programme. Given their backgrounds, the students are more likely to have experienced significant trauma in their lives. Very few have role models, and are instead often surrounded by alcohol and drug abuse, crime and exploitation. According to the report, Substance Abuse Trends in the Western Cape, a review of studies conducted from 2000 to 2008, alcohol remains a significant substance of abuse in the Western Cape, (with the prevalence of lifetime alcohol use ranging from 39 per cent to 64 per cent) and the use of stimulants (such as methamphetamine and cocaine) is growing.4

Added to this is the fact that most youths from disadvantaged backgrounds have very low feelings of self worth, and to instil in them a sense of self-belief requires more than teaching them a skill. Core beliefs need to be challenged in order to set the students free from the mindsets which see them perpetuating the poverty of the generations before them. As Umzi Wethu Stellenbosch Life Skills Facilitator Marèth van Schalkwyk explains: “Corporations need to be aware that while we all like to think we are inspiring change, we can’t force them to change. We can only plant the seed, provide the role models, to encourage them to change within themselves. They need the internal desire to change because if the impetus for change doesn’t come from within it is not going to last.” While a year is not very long to undo 18 years of socialisation, it goes a long way to providing the platform of self-belief these youths need in order to change their lives.

The make-up of the wellness aspect of the programme is one area where the different academies will vary significantly according to the environment and communities within which they are being established. Marèth says that a lot of preconceived ideas, including about the differing roles of men and women, traditional practices and the treatment of women, impact upon how the wellness aspect is handled. She points out that in certain communities the incidence of sexual, verbal and alcohol abuse is particularly high [see information box on page 37]. Marèth explains that in these circumstances the wellness component would include “active discussions to dispel some of these preconceived ideas, to encourage them [the students] to behave differently, and for the students to be forced to

---

look at one another differently.” Marèth ends by saying: “We need to inspire and help grow respect for the students themselves, and for each other.” The residential nature of the programme also helps achieve this, as students need to learn how to live together with different people, including those from different cultures, and those with different religious beliefs.

Mathilda Davids, Sustainability Institute Project Coordinator, concludes: “You can really see the students grow. They become more responsible and confident, and I think it is because the Umzi Wethu programme trusts them and believes in them, and they respond to this trust.”

**THE INCIDENCE OF ABUSE IS HIGH**

A study involving 1,394 men working for three Cape Town municipalities found that 608 (43.6%) of the men abused their female partners. Of those men, 208 revealed to the researchers that the abuse included both physical and sexual violence. Noting that 26.3% of the men who had said that they did not perpetrate abuse nevertheless believed that it was acceptable to hit a woman in certain circumstances, the researchers felt that there was likely to have been a level of under-reporting and that the true prevalence of abuse was probably ‘somewhat higher’.


A Medical Research Council study of 544 adolescents in Cape Town – 191 of whom were pregnant – revealed that 32% of those who were pregnant and 18% of those who were not had experienced their first sexual encounter as forced. Those whose first sexual encounter was forced were 14 times more likely to become pregnant whilst a teenager.

CASE STUDY 1:
SOMERSET EAST ACADEMY
“I really think that every Umzi Wethu Academy needs to have its own flavour, to allow the process to evolve. We weren’t the best team at the start, but by trusting the process and allowing the process to work, we are a very strong and successful academy today.”

LINCOLN MEYER, UMZI WETHU GRADUATE AND SOMERSET EAST FACILITATOR

“In rural areas Umzi Wethu appears to be even more pioneering ... Graduates provide real role models for their family and community ... putting role models back into the community. For example, many students I spoke to did not realise they were doing anything wrong drinking [excessive amounts of] alcohol, as their role models were also drinking all the time. Their frame of reference is very different.”

WENDY MCCALLUM, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANT

“Spending time on the recruitment process is critical, to get the right people for the right job.”

JUSTIN CARROLL, UMZI WETHU SOMERSET EAST ACADEMY CONSERVATION FACILITATOR
Somerset East is a quaint little town in rural Eastern Cape, nestled in the foothills of the forested Boschberg Mountains. It is here that Umzi Wethu piloted its first replication model in 2008. Positioned close to the Boschberg Mountain Reserve and other private game reserves, the Somerset East Academy was ideally located to facilitate the training of future conservation leaders, either as field rangers or field guides. The Blue Crane Development Agency provided two unused historic buildings to house the academy. Blue Crane is responsible for economic and social upliftment projects, and with high unemployment in the area, the partnership has been a mutually beneficial one – particularly as Umzi Wethu restored the buildings which, having been left empty for nearly 10 years, were fast becoming dilapidated.

Somerset East represents The Wilderness Foundation’s first replication of the Umzi Wethu model, testing the waters to see whether the model could be replicated within a different environment (rural) and for a different vocation (conservation). Justin Carroll, a former game ranger and conservation trainer, was instrumental in setting up the academy, and was later assisted by Lincoln Meyer, an Umzi Wethu graduate.

“On a strategic level we received a lot of support from head office. They helped with the recruitment of staff, and helped project manage the implementation. But we quickly realised that, on a day-to-day level, we did not need constant intervention. If the recruitment has been done correctly, then you don’t need to have somebody looking over your shoulder all the time. Just as we trust the students, we need to trust the Umzi Wethu model and the team. Head office understood this, and withdrew at the right time, allowing us to create a unique conservation academy,” explains Justin.

Adds Lincoln: “The area in which the Umzi Wethu Academy is being established will determine what type of Umzi it is. We operate in a rural context so we are much more laid back than at Port Elizabeth. We know when it is time for us to be flexible and when it is time to be hard on the student, when it is time for tough love and when it is time for nurturing. The beauty is that both Justin and I understand the programme, and we know that it works, which allows us to be more flexible with the day-to-day running of the academy. When it is time to work boot camp style we do, when it is time for us to sit around the camp fire and listen to each other’s stories, we can.

“Recruiting a good team at implementation is incredibly important,” continues Lincoln. “When recruiting people for the core operational areas of the academy, working with the vulnerable must be a calling. He or she needs to be eager to be part of a team, to have a passion for working with vulnerable youth. For them, this must be a vocation, not simply a job. You cannot employ somebody who is just after a job to keep the house running or to teach a set curriculum.”
Fundamental to the successful running of the academy is forming key relationships with the businesses and organisations in the community, including schools which can provide additional education facilities [like science equipment] when needed, and to help with the recruitment of the team, particularly the housemother. “A lot of time needs to be spent on recruiting the housemother. You make the housemother a lot more valuable to the student – and to the management – if she can engage in cultural discussions, and has a knowledge of the ethnic cultures and norms. The sooner students identify with the housemother, the better they behave. Sometimes people respect people from their own backgrounds a lot more. A housemother who understands that the death ritual is a week long in some cultures can sympathise with the student, can share the frustrations of the student not being allowed to leave school for a week, but at the same time can reinforce the requirements of the school: that students cannot miss class for a week. They start seeing the housemother as somebody they can really trust,” explains Justin.

Adds Lincoln: “Most of our students are the heads of their households and they are not used to having to respond to a higher authority, to a person who disciplines them and teaches them things the hard way, yet is also caring and compassionate. The development of a mother/child relationship is an essential yet complex element of our programme. Umzi Wethu is about nurturing students and providing them with a home-away-from-home experience. For any transformation to take place a strong mother figure who both gives tough love yet has the ability to be soft and understanding can make or break the student`s experience of the programme. The course is a tough one and in most cases puts students in very challenging situations, socially and personally as well as culturally.”

Perhaps the biggest stumbling block Justin faced when setting up the academy was the selection of students. He said he quickly discovered that students selected from the immediate community tended to try and ‘escape’ on weekends and evenings to visit the local taverns or their friends. “Many teens in rural South Africa have become accustomed to the tavern culture, as this is often the only form of entertainment and social place they have access to. Taverns provide the kind of carefree environment that is very attractive to young people; they can go there to drink, to find partners and to hang out with friends. We eventually worked out that we needed to select students that already live in proximity to game reserves, but not necessarily close to the residence, as ultimately our graduates will need to commute between their work place and home. Our students are in residence for only one year, whereas their job is for a lifetime. For a better long term success rate we now search for students that live near the places of potential employment.”
CASE STUDY 2:
STELLENBOSCH ACADEMY,
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
THE SUSTAINABILITY INSTITUTE
“Our partners are not just any Joe Bloggs. They have to be very special people. Unfortunately there are not a lot of Sustainability Institutes around.”

ANDREW MUIR, UMZI WETHU FOUNDER

“The support we received from Port Elizabeth was phenomenal. They provided us with a comprehensive implementation manual. We were able to re-create their systems, and we have a very close working relationship.”

TRACY WARD, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH ACADEMY MANAGER

“In our eco-village, there was a fear that a dozen teenagers would create disturbances, but they never did. They looked after themselves. And for us, the sense of being part of something which was offering an experience for young people who are otherwise cut adrift was satisfying.”

BRYCE ANDERSON, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH MEDITATION INSTRUCTOR

“Umzi students work in the gardens for an hour, growing vegetables. It was rewarding for them to work through the whole process. For example, in the morning they could harvest the lettuce, and in the evening use the lettuce to make a salad.”

MATHILDA DAVIDS, SUSTAINABILITY INSTITUTE PROJECT COORDINATOR

“It was sometimes difficult to wake up in the morning, to go and do yoga. Initially it was very challenging, but you learn many things by doing these things. In yoga you learn about your own strengths, gardening you learn how to grow your own food.”

LUTHANDO SITHOLE, 23, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH GRADUATE 2013

“This is the first time I have been away from my family, I have a two-year-old boy, Alakhe. My mother died when I was 15, so my step mum helped look after him. In the beginning it was difficult, but I told myself I was doing it for Alakhe, I need to look after my son.”

KHANYISWA WEM, 20, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH GRADUATE 2013
“For me Umzi Wethu gave me opportunities, the chance to work in a place like Spier. I used to drive past here, and thought it was only for rich people.”

RAZ-LEE HECTOR, 19, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH GRADUATE 2013

The Umzi Wethu model was successfully replicated in Stellenbosch by the Sustainability Institute, an international living and learning centre founded in 1999. The institute forms part of the wider Lynedoch EcoVillage, an ecologically-designed, socially-mixed community. The Sustainability Institute had access to a residential space and to classrooms, as well as employment partners within the neighbouring wineries and restaurants.

Sustainability Institute Director Eve Annecke said she was originally attracted to the Umzi Wethu programme because its values reflected those of the institute, and it was doing something creative to reach out to vulnerable youth. Once she had met with the leadership of Umzi Wethu, Eve said it was very easy to make the decision to replicate Umzi Wethu within the Sustainability Institute context. “In fact, the decision to go with the project was in the end not a ‘decision’ at all. It seemed a logical step in a relationship that clearly had more to offer together than apart.”

After two years running the programme, Eve reflects: “For a new partnership, and a new project from our side, the implementation went incredibly smoothly. This does not mean ‘perfection’, it means a great partnership with excellent capacity on both sides.”

Tracy Ward, Umzi Wethu Stellenbosch Academy Manager, was tasked with implementing the programme. Her initial priority was to bring a Sustainability Institute flavour to the academy. “The ethos for both organisations was close enough,” she explains. “But what is important for us at the Sustainability Institute is that the students also start thinking about the food that they buy – that they try and eat more vegetables. It is these little ramifications that you don’t anticipate but [that] have long-reaching consequences which extend into their communities, like when they bring healthier eating practices, recycling and vegetable growing back to their homes. Better nutrition at home leads to healthier lifestyles and, hopefully, less illness, while recycling brings an awareness of, and a respect for, the environment and the importance of conservation.”

---

5. Information on the Sustainability Institute is available on its website: www.sustainabilityinstitute.net/
“Initially I was concerned how the students would react coming here to an eco-village. This would add additional pressure on them, as everybody is invested in the success of Umzi Wethu. Many of our students come from areas where gangsterism is rife, where violence and alcohol abuse are a daily occurrence, and then to come here and be immersed in a totally different environment, was a little intimidating, for both the residents and the students. But from early on I could see this was not going to be an issue.”

Instead, as Tracy explains, it was the small things that ended up being problematic: “For example food was very important, and there was also a lot of tension surrounding the TV. Some kids wanted to watch 7de Laan, while others wanted to watch Muvhango. I did not anticipate these tensions. Also, getting them to keep the residence clean was not so straightforward. The standards must be high as they are training to work in an industry where the hygiene standards are high, but we noticed, for example, that the showers were always dirty. It took us a while to realise that the showers were dirty because none of them [the students] had a shower at home so they did not know how to clean it!

“Our physical space is perhaps also not ideal. This is a challenge, as you need to give the students a place to escape. Our existing communal space is actually quite small, not big enough for the students to break away to or to socialize in. I think next time I would like to scale the academy intake back to 12, a number I believe is more manageable in the residential space available. Our first intake had 10 students, which was perhaps a bit too small, and our second 14, which was too many.”

The Umzi Wethu Academy at Stellenbosch has its own very distinct feel, with many activities introduced to fit in to the Sustainability Institute ethos. Students work in the vegetable garden, they do community work at the Lynedoch pre-school, and they do yoga and meditation in the morning. Raz-Lee Hector, a graduate from the 2013 Umzi Wethu Stellenbosch intake, describes a typical day for an Umzi student: “We had to wake up at 6.30, and at 7 we had to do meditation, then we had to do stretches and then work in the garden for half an hour. Then we had a full day of classes and after that we had to give back to the community, like for example we had to work at the aftercare. After that we still had to do our studies, and our chores. At the time I did not like it, but I can see now that it taught me to take responsibility for my life. Now that I work, I have to get up even earlier for work, but it is not a problem for me. Staying in residence taught me to be responsible for me.”
RAZ-LEE HECTOR
UMZI WETHU GRADUATE AND COMMIS CHEF AT SPIER
Over the two years that Umzi Wethu has been running at Stellenbosch, the model has so impressed the Sustainability Institute management with its effectiveness, that it now incorporates many of Umzi’s core pillars in its other programmes. Tracy explains: “At the Sustainability Institute it has been a long dream to have a learning programme for sustainable agriculture. The average age here for our farmers [in the Stellenbosch area] is 65, and that should be sending out warning bells. We noticed there was a gap in the industry, and we needed to get young people back on to the land to work on farms, not just to take on jobs in the wineries but to grow and sell their own produce. Our challenge was how to make farming appealing. So we have developed a programme pitched at South Africa’s National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level 1 and we have incorporated many of the elements of Umzi Wethu, including the philosophy that we want to raise independent young farmers. Umzi Wethu allowed us to think bigger. Unfortunately it [the NQF level 1 programme] is not residential. If we could afford to do residential we would do so in an absolute heartbeat. There is something so fundamental in taking kids out of their home environment, to have to learn to live with strangers, but to also find themselves in a safe environment. Ultimately I would love to create an academy which links farming with cheffing.”

Unfortunately, in 2014 there was insufficient funding to run a third Umzi Wethu intake but the hopes are high to accept a third intake of students in 2015.

“The Stellenbosch model is how we would like to see replication of the Umzi Wethu model going forward. The academy has been put on hold because we, together with our partners, did not raise enough resources to run the third intake of students. We are busy raising funds to resume our next intake of students. It was gratifying to see that two very powerful institutions within their own right, each led by very accomplished CEOs, could come together and realise the vision of Umzi Wethu,” concludes Pinky Kondlo, Umzi Wethu Programme Director.
A TRAINING PARTNER’S PERSPECTIVE
SPIER WINE FARM
“Umzi is not churning out graduates. It is a far more considered programme and you can see that in the types of work that get done, the consideration that has been given as to what needs to be taught, not just the vocational skills, but also the life skills.”

LEE MARINAKI, SPIER WINE FARM HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER

“I think that once they start experiencing new flavours, different cooking methods, the adrenaline rush of service, executing a dish perfectly for the first time, being part of a well-functioning team and realising how far they can push the boundaries of food, they become very focused and driven. They all have a sense of pride and healthy self-confidence that I did not see in all of them when they started this project.”

LORIANNE HEYNS, SPIER WINE FARM EXECUTIVE CHEF

“It was important that we support a programme that we could see would have far wider reaching consequences than just being a training programme. We get approached by a lot of other training institutions all the time, but Umzi Wethu spoke to us: it does things on a number of different levels which speak to our values as a business.”

LEE MARINAKI, SPIER WINE FARM HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER
Spier is one of the oldest wine farms in South Africa, and one of the country’s most awarded. Its overarching ethos is for quality and sustainability, and it constantly strives to find innovative ways to balance environmental concerns with its business practice. As Lee Marinaki, Spier Wine Farm Human Resources Manager, explains: “We have a set of sustainability goals as a business and we look very carefully at projects that blend with our values, with how we believe businesses can be run sustainably. One of the key elements we have been looking at recently is how we can help foster job creation initiatives, being very mindful of supporting our local community. Being in a semi-rural area, it is a little more difficult for young people to access jobs. Umzi fitted all our criteria, allowing us to support community growth as well as young people’s aspirations. We loved that there was an holistic approach to their learning. It just made perfect sense.”

Having experienced two intakes of Umzi Wethu, Lee said she was very impressed with the level and standard of training the students received. “The quality of training is absolutely critical. It is not just about chopping veggies; the training and the standards that people come out with is imperative. It is not about being the fastest, but it is also about presentation. There is an art to presenting food. Umzi is training cheffing as a vocation, not just as a job.

“But what really impressed me is that Umzi Wethu’s training does not just focus on how to be a chef, but covers all aspects of life, as well as all support networks. It is really important that individuals are considered in their entirety and that there is a level of care and concern. The Umzi Wethu students learn useful tools to help them cope with daily life, like learning how to breathe appropriately when they are really nervous. I noticed that when I interviewed them – a situation most had never experienced before – they were able to acknowledge their nervousness and then deal with it. Umzi Wethu allows them to do the introspection, to spend time by themselves which a lot of people never get the chance to do, to figure out where and who they are. They learn how to take responsibility for themselves, for their decisions.

“You will always have people who are problem people and who don’t know how to deal with issues. However, having experienced two intakes of Umzi Wethu students, I have no doubt the individuals that come through this programme have had a level of self-reflection that has allowed them to step out of that victim space and to actually believe that they can do anything they want to do. Of course you are going to have issues on the way, mistakes will be made – that is part of learning – but we are a learning institution. We know that the calibre of students coming through is of a standard that allows us to discuss any issues that arise, perhaps because they have had to work that little bit harder than others around them to get to where they are today.

“I think the excitement that comes with the Umzi Wethu students is that they can now see what they are capable of, and now that they are employed by Spier, they want to step up and perform at a really high standard, which works for us as a business; performing at their very best because they can, and that is the gift they can bring,” concludes Lee.
WHY PARTNER WITH UMZI WE THU?
“There is a level of energy that is quite potent in its impact. It is very seldom that an Umzi Wethu graduate doesn’t become an ambassador for the programme. There is obviously something deep, something life changing that happens when completing the Umzi Wethu process. This energy I believe has very little to do with actual training, but comes from the other elements that Umzi Wethu offers.”

ANDREW MUIR, UMZI WETHU FOUNDER

“It is one of those things that starts off small, but has a ripple effect. It goes much deeper than the surface, and has a far-reaching impact. Umzi Wethu provides resilience on so many levels and that is what pulls the graduates through. It addresses issues from the bottom up, working with the root cause rather than just putting a band-aid on it. It looks at how and why they got cut in the first place.”

LEE MARINAKI, SPIER WINE FARM HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER

“The group started off very shy but we could see their confidence grow as the year went on. It was like watching butterflies emerge from their cocoon, to see them spread their wings and show off their true colours.”

NELDA HART, LYNEDOCH HOME OWNERS ASSOCIATION ADMINISTRATOR

“Umzi Wethu doesn’t just teach, but leads by example. The multiplier effect is that the learnings go beyond the student, because they return to their community, share their knowledge and raise awareness of certain issues. Umzi Wethu students are taught a greater understanding of their actions, and the consequences of these actions ... Some graduates have been out of the programme for eight to nine years and they are still praising the programme and sharing their experiences.”

WENDY MCCALLUM, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANT

“Umzi Wethu means a lot to me, I don’t know where I would be without it. Umzi Wethu lifted my spirits, it gave me more than a job, it gave me a future. I would do anything in my power to help Umzi Wethu.”

RAZ-LEE HECTOR, 19, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH GRADUATE 2013

“...when they [the students] leave they see the world in a different way.”

THEMBISILE MEMELA, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH HOUSEMOTHER
MPENDULO QUTYELO
UMZI WETHU GRADUATE AND COMMIS CHEF
AT EIGHT RESTAURANT
“I want to do my job well, and to be proud of the work that I do. Being a chef is something new to me, but it is something I want to stick to, to build a career out of, and to study further. I was never stable but this has changed.”

**MPENDULO QUTYEOLO, 25, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH GRADUATE 2013**

“I never thought Umzi Wethu would mean so much to me.”

**MARILYN JACOBS, 19, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH GRADUATE 2013**

“My dreams were bigger than being a petrol attendant all my life.”

**MPENDULO QUTYEOLO, 25, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH GRADUATE 2013**

The full impact of Umzi Wethu is almost impossible to gauge, as the benefits are sometimes not directly apparent. The immediate results are most visible: previously vulnerable young people getting vocational training and entering employment, thereby supporting themselves and, more often than not, their families. But there is a wide range of intangible benefits that ripple outward from the programme as well: in the inspiration other young people receive from Umzi Wethu graduates; or the new-found appreciation of nature they pass on to their communities; or the assistance their siblings receive with their education.

The Umzi Wethu academies boast an exceptional job placement record. What is remarkable is that these youths, who either never had employment before, or could not hold down a job for an extended period of time, now retain their jobs, and many even advance to positions of management and responsibility within a relatively short period of time.

Lincoln Meyer is a graduate from Port Elizabeth’s first intake of students. Twelve years ago, Lincoln was being raised by his mother and grandparents, and living on the breadline. Paul Longe, Umzi Wethu Port Elizabeth Academy Manager, recalls the young man who started out on the Umzi Wethu programme: “When I first met Lincoln, halfway through his time at Umzi Wethu, he tended to revert to aggressive behaviour as a way of protecting himself from stresses in the group. This came from the survival instincts he had developed to survive the challenging circumstances he faced at home. This behaviour was no longer effective in the Umzi Wethu context. Over the course of the year, Lincoln learned to leave the aggression behind and to develop more appropriate ways of responding to threatening situations.”
Lincoln had never considered a career in conservation, but saw Umzi Wethu as an opportunity to escape the cycle of poverty he was trapped in. He was selected as one of twelve conservation students in 2007. While his anger dissipated over the year, his passion for the wilderness deepened, as did his loyalty to the Wilderness Foundation. Paul recalls a story he heard about Lincoln: “When he first arrived at Umzi Wethu he went straight to Andrew, shook his hand and said something along the lines of ‘Mr Muir, my name is Lincoln Meyer and one day I will work for the Wilderness Foundation’.”

True to his word, Lincoln, on graduating, volunteered at the Wilderness Leadership School, and became a student trainer for the second Umzi Wethu Somerset East intake. He explains: “I wanted to give back to Umzi Wethu because it had provided me with so many opportunities. The team at Umzi Wethu recognised my potential leadership qualities and nurtured them through the teaching and mentorship that I received at the conservation academy. I have a deep respect for the Umzi Wethu model, and I want to sow this into the lives of others, plant the same seed that was planted in me, and help to nurture it.”

Today Lincoln is a facilitator and the projects coordinator at the Umzi Wethu Somerset East conservation academy. Together with Somerset East Academy Conservation Facilitator Justin Carroll, Lincoln keeps the academy running. One of his responsibilities is helping select students every year. Of this task he says: “This is one of the most difficult parts of my job. It’s so hard to choose because I know that with Umzi we can help uncover the potential for success in anyone. I am living proof that given the time, tools and investment, anyone can turn out pretty well!”

Lincoln was the first Umzi Wethu graduate to be employed by the foundation but he is not the only one. Testimony to the programme’s capacity to unlock potential and to create long-lasting, life-changing impacts is the number of graduates who are employed by Umzi Wethu, or who have been able to secure junior management positions:

- Lwazi Xinwa, 24, was abandoned as a baby and spent his first five years at a children’s home in King William’s Town in the Eastern Cape. There followed many years of hardship before he was accepted into the Port Elizabeth academy. Having entered the academy a very angry and unsociable young man, he graduated top of his class in 2009. His first job was as the Head Chef for the Umzi Wethu catering academy. Within a year he was managing the kitchen. Today he facilitates his own Life Skills classes, and wants to study to become a social worker. “Umzi Wethu changed my life. Some of the guys in my gang are dead now. That is where I would be now if it weren’t for Umzi Wethu. I have a beautiful son, and I know my future is not going to be my past, but I know that my past has been great for my future,” concludes Lwazi. “I have come a long way.”

- Mantho Sehapi, 25, spent much of her teenage years raising her two younger siblings, initially helping her mother, and then, from the age of 18, caring for them solely while her mother lived in Lesotho. Mantho was accepted into the Umzi Wethu Academy and today she is a Junior Manageress at Brighton Lodge in Port Elizabeth.
• Miselwa Nogqala, 25, is another graduate from the Port Elizabeth academy who has seized the opportunities Umzi Wethu gave her and is today managing the Green Leaf Café, a social enterprise development unit of Wilderness Foundation, linked to the catering unit. Under her leadership, the Green Leaf Café is a viable business venture, continually expanding its customer base and its profits.

Umzi Wethu graduates don’t just improve their own lives. Wendy McCallum, an economic development consultant who is preparing a report on the socio-economic impacts of Umzi Wethu, comments about the multiplier effect: “From my research it appears that one Umzi Wethu graduate supports 4.5 people. Some send up to 50 per cent of their salaries home, and these are not big salaries. This money often goes towards educating siblings or relatives, but I have also heard stories where graduates are funding their own further education.”

The waves of influence produced by Umzi Wethu stretch out to distant shores. Though the intake each year at each academy is necessarily small, the impact generated by acknowledging and dealing with these young people’s vulnerability is immense. The benefits are felt by their families, their communities, and society as a whole. Umzi Wethu truly helps to make the world a better place.
NELDA HART
ADMINISTRATOR OF THE HOME OWNERS ASSOCIATION
A WORD ABOUT SIYAZENZELA
“What keeps Umzi Wethu alive is that we keep innovating, we don’t allow the programme to become static. Whether we innovate between sub programmes or at a higher level, we keep trying to improve the programme, to make it more efficient, to make it more relevant. We constantly strive to make it more relevant to our partners, funders, to other agencies and government agencies.”

ANDREW MUIR, UMZI WETHU FOUNDER

“It was so difficult to cull the list of students down to the 14 or 10 that were required. Their level of expectation was very high and it was very disheartening to turn away 66 people. It is horrible to turn them away, because every story is a story.”

TRACY WARD, UMZI WETHU STELLENBOSCH ACADEMY MANAGER

Siyazenzela, which in Xhosa means “we are doing it for ourselves”, is a shorter work readiness programme which provides youths with similar life skills and wellness interventions as Umzi Wethu, but without the vocational training and residential elements. Siyazenzela is based on the original Livelihoods programme, a five-week job readiness and life skills programme that equips a broader group of young people with the skills to find employment. While not as comprehensive as the Umzi Wethu residential programme, Siyazenzela teaches its students about professionalism and work ethic, combining a wide range of key job readiness skills with a comprehensive life skills programme.

Siyazenzela, Umzi Wethu Programme Director Pinky Kondlo explains, gives the youths a view of what is possible, and helps restore hope. It helps change the sense of entitlement, to shift the poverty mindset. “There are so many people who have great potential but they are sitting at home, despondent, not doing anything about it. The sad reality is, we can’t reach all of these people through Umzi Wethu.”
Siyazenzela has inadvertently become an intensive recruitment stage for the Umzi Wethu academies, allowing Umzi Wethu to recruit from a very promising pool of candidates. It has also helped reduce the costs of implementing Umzi Wethu as it no longer has to start from scratch. As a result, Umzi Wethu’s reach can stretch even further, without huge expense. “Siyazenzela represents the relationship-building phase of Umzi Wethu, allowing partners to understand each other, to find the middle ground to peacefully co-exist before getting in too deep with Umzi Wethu. Roles can be defined, and reporting responsibilities established,” explains Pinky.

Umzi Wethu Founder Andrew Muir adds: “The Umzi Wethu that was created in 2007 is very different to what it is now. It has morphed, and while the embryo which is the Umzi Academy is still there, exactly as we pioneered it, it has been refined, become more efficient, and is a lot more powerful, more impactful. Equally as importantly, it has spawned Siyazenzela, which I see as a natural progression in any project of this nature. Umzi Wethu is our ultimate flagship programme, but Siyazenzela in its own right helps youth achieve job readiness. The Siyazenzela programme is the Dale Carnegie course for vulnerable youth! It is initially more attractive to partners because, being a modular non-residential programme, it can fit easily into any organisation, whether it be in the private, public or social sector. For example, if an organisation wants to talk to the youth of their employees, they can implement Siyazenzela at minimal cost. There is no massive capital outlay, and we train their trainers.”

Pinky acknowledges the symbiotic relationship between Siyazenzela and Umzi Wethu, and what this means for potential Umzi Wethu partners: “Umzi Wethu represents the highest quality intervention which produces good results, but it can only target low numbers at a much higher investment. However other funders prefer an investment which results in a greater output, hence making Siyazenzela such an attractive alternative. Siyazenzela represents a light touch investment, but I am confident that partners involved in Siyazenzela, when they see the results, will want to get involved with the longer-term sustainable Umzi Wethu model. Umzi Wethu is iconic, it is the shining star of vulnerable youth solutions.”