

# MY LASTING ENCOUNTERS

Haseena Buckus  
Service Leader 2007

The bell had rung and school had ended, it was now time for our after school programme (ASP). I was always excited to see my grade four class again.

Being based at a school in Soweto has given me a new perspective. Although most of the learners are underprivileged and struggle to understand or speak English, they willingly stayed behind to learn, if there was a leader who was willing to lead.

Our community mapping allowed us to familiarise ourselves with the community and start other community based partnerships. During this time, I met a special 'friend'. He was a bystander at Shoprite, who is unemployed and who is always at the door. As I entered to grab a quick cold drink, he approached me for a handshake. At first I froze, but managed to shake his hand anyway and was rewarded with a 'Million Dollar Smile.' Since then, everyday that I passed, he would come for a handshake, and that always made my day.

I paid for my drink and the cashier greeted me, "Hey 'CityYear,' how's my son, Siphon, doing?" I told her that his reading

and writing had improved and she smiled and thanked me. Even though she could never make it to the parents meetings due to her working hours, she made an attempt to ask about her son's performance in our After School Programme.

At four o'clock when ASP had ended, we'd rush from Moetapele to Phefeni station to catch a train back to town. One day, while we were rushing, a lady with grey hair, stopped us. Due to time, we hesitated but decided to stop anyway. She asked us who we are and what we do. When we told her, she was so impressed that she donated reading books that were idle at her home for our learners to use. We were touched that there were people who believed in what we were doing and want to help.

A learner in my grade four class really touched my heart. One day, they were to report for choir practice as they were competing in a competition with other schools. Instead of leaving after choir practice, which ended at 3:30 pm, this girl got all the other learners together in a classroom and came to fetch me, telling me they were ready to begin the After School Programme. So I found them waiting for me, instead of bustling off home.

Our Basic Training Retreat has left me with a lot of emotions that I carry to this day. I was initially disappointed by the announcement of permanent teams because I was sure I would be teamed with my cousin. My new team did not have even one friend that I already knew and this left me resentful and bitter to the point where I would isolate myself and would only participate in group meetings if I had to. However, as the months passed, I opened up and have grown attached to my team; I have even learned to speak Zulu fluently. By the end I was always in high spirits and eager to get up in the morning.

I've come to a realisation that as difficult as it was to leave my family in Kwa-Zulu Natal, this programme was worth the effort. I've learned that to win every battle you have got to lose something; that is what makes you stronger, and it helps when you have a strong team to support you. I know that my year of service has benefited the learners I've served, and made me a better, stronger and more confident individual.

I would like to salute my fellow Service Leaders, "you have done a great job and surely made a difference in the lives of others."



## Graduates say Goodbye

196 graduates of the City Year 2007 programme, said their good-byes on the last day of November. This marked the completion of the third year that City Year South Africa has had Service Leaders working in communities around Johannesburg.

"Tonight we celebrate and honour the young idealistic leaders for their work in schools, the young people who proudly volunteered their energy and time to serve their country," said Service Leader MC, Refiloe Mpetse.

The graduation was highlighted by a comical stroll down memory lane, from 'aged' 2007 Service Leaders attending a reunion fifty years in future, and a moving tribute to Thuli Sibisi, mother of the late Service Leader Jabu Sibisi.

Executive Director of City Year South Africa, Teboho Mahuma, reminded all who were present of the importance of seeking to make a difference. "Each change made, is like the washed up starfish that has been returned into the sea", Mahuma said. The focus should be upon what difference we can make instead of

the magnitude of the problem, which often serves as an excuse not to act.

Service Leader Addressee, Pule Mokapela, summed up the accomplishments of the 2007 corps saying, "our aim was to serve, to serve with pride and passion. In this past year, we approached service with pride: pride in our appearance, pride in our presentation and pride in our product. We were passionate about working to be the change we seek in the world, and so we have served with a smile."

Serving this past year, with a Service Leader retention rate of 96%, in 18 Primary Schools working with over three thousand Primary School learners, and over 65 high school students, who attended the Heroes programme on Saturdays, this group of Service Leaders had much to celebrate.

In a final farewell to the 2007 Service Leaders, Mokapela concluded saying, "that even though we will go our separate ways, "what has brought us together will continue to keep us together: our desire to serve."



Scenes from Graduation 2007.

Left: A special thanks to the Khensani Tribe Marimba Band from Orange Farm for their inkinded performance at graduation.  
Top Right: City Year South Africa Co-chairs Rick Menell and Murphy Morobe.  
Second Right: The CYSA choir.  
Third Right: Team Lekang receives their certificates.  
Bottom Right: 'Aged' Service Leaders reminisce about their year of service. Photos: Bate



### City Year South Africa **EVENTS**

• February 2008 - the 2008 Service Year Begins

*To all of our Partners, Sponsors and Friends: We wish you Seasons Greetings and a very Happy New Year. We thank you for all of your support and look forward to staying in touch with you in 2008!*

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# Service Leaders Leave A Positive Impact

**Julia Harmer**

Deputy Principal,  
John Mitchell Primary School

Having been associated with City Year since its inception in South Africa I have been fortunate enough to witness, from a school's perspective, the fact that success is now evident.

There are two main areas of focus for the work that Service Leaders do within schools.

- Carrying out remedial assistance within the classroom, known as class coverage.
- Running an after school programme.

Service Leaders spend 2 hours or more per day in a classroom with the teacher present. They assist the weak learners in the class with either reading or math and focus fully on a smaller group, giving individual attention and the help they need, whilst the teacher continues teaching the rest of the class – which usually numbers 40 to 45 pupils.

In the news, recently, there were reports of a study conducted by Boston University on Literacy Levels of primary school children throughout the world. Sadly South Africa was rated in the bottom four nations across the globe.

What more can I say? South African classrooms are overloaded – it is a human impossibility to give undivided attention to each and every pupil in one's class and thus the importance of having City Year Service Leaders assisting in this manner, speaks for itself.

In an article published in the February Issue of "Naptosa Insight", the official magazine of one of the teacher's unions, the sub-heading read, "Teachers worldwide are becoming a rare commodity as a huge shortage of teachers looms throughout the world". This, according to UNESCO, is the biggest threat to education.

According to the Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa will have a shortage of 15 090 teachers by 2008. City Year Service Leaders thus play an absolutely vital role in this picture.

Secondly, they run an After School Programme (ASP) in the afternoons. Now given the alarming statistics of single-parent families, families where parents work long hours, families with no one to care for the children when they come home from school and so forth, the Service Leaders again play an absolutely pivotal role.

The ASP begins with PT – physical exercise that is sadly lacking in the lives of many children, it then moves into homework assistance and finally the last session of the afternoon is devoted to sporting or cultural activities, grassroots soccer and the like. It is structured, beneficial, and gives the children a safe, controlled environment in which they are nurtured in a constructive and worthwhile manner.

The improvement in learner's language, reading and mathematical abilities can be measured in real terms. The marks and assessments of learners who participate in the ASP as well as those who are assisted during class coverage time, are used in a comparison – the child's results at the end of the first term are compared to those at the end of the fourth term. The Service Leaders' contribution to the children's scholastic ability can literally be seen in black and white.

On the sporting front, many more children are given opportunities to participate as there are not always sufficient teams in the schools to which they belong. This gets them out into the open air and exercising.

Likewise, culturally, learner's are trained and coached in aspects such as debating, drama, dance and public speaking to name but a few. Here too, the Service Leaders bring their innate skills

to the children.

Socially, emotionally and behaviourally, the impact made by Service Leaders is phenomenal. This, I believe, is primarily due to the fact that the Service Leader's are young and 'with it' and far more in tune with the children, understanding the life many of them lead, as well as teenage issues, relationships and basically modern day issues that many teachers may be out of tune with. The pupils relate so well to the Service Leaders and form attachments and bonds that are the essence of true support.

I have had an abuse case come to light due to the trust the pupil felt in the Service Leader, to name just one example. By the same token the Service Leaders are mature enough to think with reason and to give advice so badly needed by the children. They are often the sympathetic ear that so many pupils need.

From a community perspective the Service Leaders, based at the John Mitchell school, ran a heritage day, amongst other initiatives. A Saturday where families came together and enjoyed activities which enhanced the partnership in education that should exist between pupils, parents and the school. The City Year Service Leaders facilitated this entire event, raised funds, sourced donations, and effected improvements upon the school, leaving behind their legacy.

The team's work and contribution to the school and its teachers has been exceptional. They help share the load and allow each and every one of us to cope that much better.

At the end of the day the main beneficiaries are the children – after all they are the future, the very reason we have schools and the reason why organisations such as City Year strive in the proverbial sense to "turn the corner". Our heartfelt appreciation is extended to City Year South Africa. You have become such an integral part of John Mitchell School.

# BUILDING OUR NATION

**Teboho Mahuma**

Executive Director  
City Year South Africa

A traveller passing through a town comes across what seems to be very chaotic activity. Members of the community are going up and down amid lots of busy noise. He stops the first person to inquire what the commotion is about and the person says to him "can't you see, I'm breaking rocks". He stops another and asks the same question and gets a very bored response "can't you see, I'm earning a living". He walks on and stops a third person further along and poses the same question. This third person answers, "can't you see, we are building a cathedral".

If you asked any of us what 'this City Year commotion' is all about, you are likely to come across as many answers

as there are many of us. Indeed, we are many things to many people. For some, we are a place where youth come to learn work skills or a place where primary school learners come to have loads of fun. To others, we are a place where employers find exceptional talent for their work force. To yet others, master renovators or a place where individuals come to earn a living. The list goes on.

Despite our different interests, we must never lose sight of our greater end, we are part of building a beautiful country, of breaking the hopelessness that appears to take over many young lives today.

As we close this year I hope you have found what you were looking for from City Year. I have found inspiration, and am grateful for the opportunity to serve in this way. I look forward to the future with hope of your continued partnership.



# A CLOSER LOOK AT THE HEROES PILOT PROGRAMME

This year, one team of Service Leaders, instead of being based in a primary school, committed their year of Service to working with high school learners in a Saturday, pilot Heroes programme.

The "essence of the Heroes programme was to create a social awareness among high school learners, encourage, equip and educate them in ways they can be involved in community service, learn leadership skills and make a positive contribution," said Programme Coordinator, Busi Mhlanga.

65 High school learners from 8 different high schools took part in the programme that ran over 12 Saturdays during the year.

Through the Heroes Programme, "I have gained self-confidence. I have

learned to become a leader for myself and everybody I will be leading one day" said Antigone Geanneret, a grade 10 learner from Silver Oaks High School.

"Heroes taught me communication skills. Right now I have the confidence to speak out loud and I am not shy anymore" added Bongani Bhengu, a grade 9 Bhukulani High School learner.

The Heroes programme's curriculum focused on team work, social issues, diversity, community service and leadership training.

Beside workshops and other activities, the programme also included an opportunity for the young people to participate in a physical service day at the Johannesburg Zoo and outings to the Apartheid Museum.

