

Y-Talk

April 2022

Empowering Young People for Life, Leadership & Service



Cape Flats YMCA Cup Winners



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A final word from the outgoing NGS



“The greatest strength of a leader is being able to identify their weaknesses, and the biggest weakness of any leader is thinking that they can do everything on their own”.

After seventeen years serving as the National General Secretary of SAYMCA, Reverend Siphso Sokhela finally brings an end to his tenure at the national office. The SAYMCA communications team sat down with the long serving secretary to take a trip down memory lane and reflect on his journey over the years. Amongst many other things, Reverend Sokhela reflected on where it all began for him in his journey with the YMCA, his lows and highlights over the years, what he feels he could have done better given the opportunity and most importantly he shared a message directed at the youth of the movement.

Reverend Sokhela started out with the YMCA Toti as a coordinator all the way back in 1991. He held this position until 1992 working as an assistant to Mike Cuthbert. Together, they successfully ran a supplementary education program focused on helping young people from the Toti area with Maths and Science tuition.

By 1993, Reverend Sokhela was serving as the General Secretary of the Toti YMCA. He would hold this position until the end of 1995 when he left to link up with the Kwazulu - Natal Christian Council where he served as the Provincial Executive Officer. It wasn't until 2006 that he made his official return to the YMCA of South Africa when he was appointed as the National General Secretary. His return coincided with the World Alliance of YMCAs World Council being hosted in South Africa.

That was the only upside to his appointment at the time. He alluded to the fact that when he officially started he found the national office in a rather depressing state. At the time the national office was based in Johannesburg, on the third floor of a building in Braamfontein. He recalls that upon his appointment, his son Mpumelele who was 11 years at the time, had come to visit the office. Such was the state of the national office at the time, his son's comments about his new place of employment were “Dad, these people do not take you seriously”. He found the office with no staff members. The only

people at the national office at that time were a German volunteer Sabina and Swazi Mabuza from Soweto YMCA. From the get-go he knew that he had his work cut out for him and his first move into reshaping and restructuring the national office was appointing Petro Bantjies into the national office.

Reflecting on the chaos that he found at the national office, he recalls how 4 months down the line he had already had enough,



so much so that he called a meeting with Vezi Mncwango and Bonga Chileza, two volunteers who were instrumental in his appointment as NGS and told them that he had an honest reflection and this was not going to work. Through their advice and the advice of his father that **“to move forward, you have to burn down the bridges, so you never turn back, rather they keep you moving forward in life”**, he decided he was not going to quit but rather soldier on because he was there now, and there was no turning back. This was the decision that changed everything, as he knew he had to roll up his sleeves and put in the amount of work that was required to change the YMCA of South Africa for the better.

Speaking on his highs and lows during his tenure as the National General secretary, he passionately remarks that “the YMCA does not celebrate successes that are not monetary”. This aspect of YMCA work was one of his lows right through his tenure. From walking into a national office that was at Another low was the extent of distrust between national office and local associations that he and his team had to work to repair. Over the years this became one of the biggest highlights during his tenure, as the working relationship, for the most part, between local associations and the national office grew stronger and for the better. He also pointed out the successful hosting in South Africa of the World Council in 2006, as one of his biggest highlights.

He particularly spoke of the Youth Leadership Development program that he piloted as one of the best examples that illustrate the YMCAs lack of appreciation for non-monetary/ invisible successes. It was this intentional investment in young people that directly produced young up and coming leaders of the YMCA which include amongst others Thandeka Zungu and Yolande Ntsele. He also highlighted the development of the Youth Justice program as one of the successes that stood out during his tenure. Siphos passionately about Mike Cuthbert's contribution to the development of Youth Justice and the amount of work he put into the process of restoring the national office.

Of all the successes, Rev Sokhela looks back fondly of the partnership between SA YMCA and the USA Coalition. The partnership has grown from strength

to strength, and for this Rev Sokhela insists that credit must be shared with Tom Valentine, Eric Mann and Norm Joyner. Above everything, one of the biggest lessons learnt through the partnership with the coalition is how to manage and strengthen partnerships. He points out the “spaza shop mentality”, which he says is a mentality that people have in South Africa towards how NGOs are run. In his own words **“the greatest strength of a leader is being able to identify their weaknesses, and the biggest weakness of any leader is thinking that they can do everything on their own”**. This is the biggest lesson that the SAYMCA learnt from the partnership with the coalition. This partnership also paved the way for another of the successes, which is the Y-Fit concept, which was implemented in Soweto Y, Durban Y and PMB Y, with the latter being



Siphos with Mike Cuthbert and Jack Lund, former CEO of New York YMCA during a visit to YMCAs in the USA in 2016.

the most successful of the 3 Y-Fit sites.

Of all the successes over the years, Rev Sokhela feels the Charter process was one pioneering success which opened a wide range of possibilities for the development of even better concepts or models. The charter process was developed as a direct response to the movement's challenges in learning to balance the managing of its autonomy with the more practical task of developing measures to be accountable to the broader movement. Our partners in the USA assisted a great deal in ensuring the successful development of the charter as they



Planning team for hosting of the Africa Alliance of YMCAs meeting in 2019.

already had a charter of their own. Even though at first the Charter process came under heavy scrutiny and criticism, it would go on to be very successful. The success of this process culminated in 2010, when Rev Sokhela was invited to the Africa Alliance to present the Charter as one of the successful concepts. In the same year, he was invited to the World Council to share, as a success story, the process of developing this charter. He gives huge credit to the volunteers and staff at the time (Quinton Mitchell, Babongile, Pieter Nel, Ian Booth), to mention a few, for the role they played in ensuring the successful implementation of this process.

For someone who spent close to 2 decades at the helm (17 years to be exact), one would have expected Reverend Sokhela's list of lows to be very long, but such is his character he could only point out to one moment that he felt was his ultimate low during his tenure. That moment came in 2014, which he feels was the right moment for him to bow out and leave the YMCA. He felt at the time that he had already reached his ceiling and that the YMCA needed someone to bring in a new level of energy, innovation and excitement. Yet some 8 years later, he finds himself sitting with the YMCA comms team on a sunny Tuesday morning conducting what will be his last interview as the National General Secretary of the South Africa YMCA. Asked of this moment, he said with a relieved voice that "this moment has come 8 years late" and that to this day, not leaving in 2014 continues to haunt him.

Capping off his interview, Reverend Sokhela acknowledges the role played by the Swedish YMCA in the restoration of the South Africa YMCA. Not only did they provide funding to appoint Mike Cuthbert to assist with the audit backlog all the way back in 2006 (an audit he says was a make-or-break

moment for SAYMCA, which had it not been successful the national office would not be what we know it today), but they have over the years continued to be a key partner to the SAYMCA and this partnership has grown from strength to strength. From the introduction of the Youth Justice program (Rev. Sokhela admits that at the time when it was first introduced it came under heavy criticism for not being relevant in the South African context), right through to the current partnership with Y-Global, the International arm of the Norwegian YMCA-YWCA. These collaborative efforts with International partners has been instrumental in the development of the Youth Justice program as the key program for 8 local associations.

With the new cycle of Youth Justice pushing the SAYMCA towards a direction of being more intentional in how we engage and develop youth, Rev Sokhela is excited about the prospects of the future and feels if there ever was a time for young people within the movement to seize the moment and raise their hands to be counted, it is NOW. It is with the appreciation of all those dynamics that



One of many meetings with Ruby Mathang, current National Chair, along with many others over the years. Rev Sokhela served under 5 different Chairs.

underpins his last message to the youth of the movement, and it is a very simple message. The youth of the movement need to develop an attitude of serving, have an attitude of what you can do for the YMCA rather than what the YMCA can do for you. That to serve is the best opportunity to grow and learn and be the spiritual person that you want to be. He closed off with the words that "serving is much greater than benefiting and is a much greater opportunity to learn". The YMCA of South Africa bids farewell to this icon of the movement who has selflessly served this great movement. We will miss you.

The incoming National General Secretary/ CEO of the SA YMCA

Marcus Van Wyk

Marcus Van Wyk was born in Cape Town, but has been residing in Johannesburg for the past 12 years. He has been married to Davina for 21 years and they have 3 children Mia, Michal and Corbin.

Marcus has a BA in Human Movement Studies and Psychology from the University of the Western Cape, but a deep sense of humanity has seen him engage in a myriad of societal sectors as he strives to apply his unique and varied skills set.

Marcus boasts further qualifications in Educational Design Programming, Integrated Solid Waste Management Planning, Planning and Management of Special Events, Management Programme for NPOs, Project Planning, Corporate Social Investment Programmes, Diplomacy, Health and Safety and Labour Relations amongst others.

His most recent positions were as Executive Chairperson of Mthunzi Network NPC and the Chief Operating Officer for Youth for Christ South Africa. He has served as Project Lead for the UNHCR Social Cohesion Project in SA, being Coordinator and co-founder of IAMAFRICA which involves Ordinary People Transforming Africa, as well as Coordinator of the We Will Speak Out South Africa Coalition of faith communities working to end Sexual and Gender Based Violence.

As Consultant to the South African Council of Churches (SACC), Marcus provided protocol and logistical support for the 2013 State funeral of former President Nelson Mandela.

He has also served as Advisor to the Chairman of the



South Africa Dutch Chamber of Commerce and has extensive interaction as a Relationship Manager for various enterprises in liaising with all three tiers of Government, Political Parties, Private Sector and Civil Society.

His varied commitments have seen him facilitate Waste Management infrastructure for the 2010 Football World Cup in South Africa, to being the Liaison Officer for the State visit by the Indian Prime Minister, to a volunteer Fire Fighter with the Table Mountain National Park.

His extensive experience and networks make's him ideally suited to engage across sectors and to bring key role players together in search of mutually beneficial projects which have the advancement and betterment of young people in their communities at its heart.

The members of the YMCA extend a warm, friendly welcome to Marcus as it enters a new phase of development and growth.

WELCOME!

YMCA Photography Project

The YMCA has been fortunate to participate in a small project with the Sweden YWCA-YMCA over the past few months. 3 Local YMCAs were invited to contract a young photographer to take a portfolio of pictures depicting their YMCAs work with young people. These are some of the results.



PMB YMCA Youth Justice participants and worker.



NMB YMCA young people being trained in the food industry



NMB YMCA Youth Justice participants receiving some advice from a professional chef.



Youth Justice participants in PMB tending a food garden that supplies vegetables to the pot each day.

YMCA Photography Project



A photo wall in the Cultural museum at the Cape Flats YMCA campsite.

PMB Youth Justice participant provided with opportunity to wash clothes at the YMCA.



Cape Flats YMCA Youth Justice participants on an outing

HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

21 March 2022 is a highly celebrated day in South Africa as the day South Africans are made aware of their rights. In 1960, 69 people died and 180 individuals were wounded when police opened fire on a peaceful crowd that had gathered in protest against the Pass laws. It paints an iconic image in our minds about the struggles and oppression generations before us fought for so that we can have access to all of our basic rights and necessities.

The YMCA Athlone looked to the SDGs as according to the World Food Programme, 135 million suffer from acute hunger. This is largely due to man-made conflicts, climate change and economic downturns. The COVID-19 pandemic could now double that number, putting an additional 130 million people at risk of suffering acute hunger by the end of 2020.

We partnered with other NPOs in an endeavor to address this fundamental human right. The Lakay Foundation in Athlone continues to partner with the Athlone YMCA as we address other challenges in our community. We delivered food packs to our most vulnerable members in the district.

The experience was truly heart wrenching for myself as local coordinator, seeing human beings not able to provide a basic meal. However, to see the gratitude of our

most vulnerable was an enlightening experience, as I have been part of other projects where beneficiaries were not receptive. These individuals are in dire need of restoration and hope in their lives.

The response of my team as well as the Lakay Foundations team was amazing. "This really makes me feel at home and I feel like I'm doing something impactful with this one deed. I really feel like we are addressing the needs of our community" said Ashieq Hartog (One of our youth members).

This is what Youth Justice stands for and we aim to do much more in the future of this project. We are here to make a change to our community and be Impactful.

**Lots of love...Liam...Athlone YMCA
Youth Justice Coordinator**



UPCOMING YMCA EVENTS

Y-USA Coalition. The Coalition will visit South Africa in May 2022

YMCA World Council Meeting 3-9 July 2022 in Denmark. Also online

SA YMCA National Assembly 14 October – 15 October 2022 in Durban

If Local YMCAs would like to communicate their events through Y-Talk, please contact Yolande on yolande@saymca.org.za for inclusion.

International Desk Updates

The South Africa YMCA through its partnership with Y-Glocal will send two young people to the YMCA World Council meeting that will be held in Denmark, July 2022. A selection panel has selected, as per the application process conducted in February 2022, Esona Gunwana (Soweto YMCA) and Andile Ngcongco (Greater Durban YMCA).

I'm Andile Ngcongco, 30 years of age and a proud father of a son. He's my inspiration, he keeps me focussed. We are a small family of 4 including me and my little sister, raised by our parents. I've been a volunteer in the YMCA since 2015, doing different programs like Y-Zone where we assist young pupils with home work assignments and Y-Art where we practice stage theatre and portray different stories. In 2016, I was one of the 3 artists selected to stage our show in Denmark at the Wonderful Days festival under the guidance of a strong lady Bongiwe Khumalo, former YMCA Co-ordinator of Durban YMCA.

2018 I was fortunate to be part of volunteers who initiated a program called Y-Glocal, a triangular partnership between SA YMCA, Cameroon YMCA and Denmark YMCA-YWCA.

Going to the World Council meeting means that I'm a willing person, open to learn new things and to embrace diversity.



I'm Esona Gunwana, 23 years old and I'm a volunteer at the Soweto YMCA. I come from a humble background where I didn't get whatever I wanted but I was able to get what I needed and taught to appreciate what I have and make the best out of it. I was raised by a single mother, and I'm proud to say that I'm the strong person that I am today because of tough love shown by my mother. I've been a member in the YMCA since 2017 and

through the guidance of Matshepo and Portia it has been an awesome experience, I've been part of the Y-Justice program since I got in the YMCA as not only did I feel like I belong there but I also

felt that it's my calling. My work at the YMCA was in the Y-Zone where we had homework assistance for school children when they arrive at the YMCA. I became part of Y-Glocal in 2019 through the Y-Glocal hero training and this had perks of its own like partnering with other organizations to plant trees in our neighborhood, not to mention in Nelson Mandela's house. Who knew that a few months later we'd be stuck in the pandemic (COVID-19). During the pandemic we tutored matriculants online in various subjects so that even when they went back to school they'd have vast knowledge of their subjects. The matriculants we tutored passed matric and some that I keep track of are now doing well in their chosen career paths.

Going to the World Council means that I have to be open minded in order for me to understand other people's perspective on certain things because of different backgrounds and experience.



YMCA Calender for 2022

The Annual General Meeting of the South African National Council of YMCAs will be held in the KWAZULU-NATAL region (KZN) on Friday 14 October to Saturday 15 October 2022.

Further registration details of the AGM will be communicated closer to the time. Any questions, please contact Yolande on yolande@saymca.org.za

YMCA World Council 2022 Denmark

YMCA's World Council is the highest governing body of the global YMCA Movement and also its most important shared space. Across continents and across generations YMCA comes together: it shares, it plans, it learns, it is inspired. It charts the way towards becoming the world's partner of choice as a youth empowerment organisation.

The 20th World Council takes place from Sunday 3rd to Saturday 9th July 2022. For the first time, it will be a hybrid event - with participation in-person in Aarhus, Denmark, and online. It's for YMCA staff and volunteers, managers and front-line workers, young leaders, partners and supporters.

Our world and our YMCA has been turned on its head by the Coronavirus pandemic, and we need to reconnect, respond to new learning, new imperatives, new roles and new methods in supporting young people and their

communities.

Which is why the World Council theme in 2022 is "IGNITE". Join us to provide the spark, the flame, to **ignite** and take the Movement forward, to create a better world.

The SA YMCA National Executive Committee urges young people, local associations to attend the hybrid meeting. It is further suggested for Regional Councils to host viewing meetings regionally.

<https://worldcouncil2022.ymca.int/event/5f635a74-3198-4941-a565-b99d1f0da6c2/summary>

Physical Registration \$1,300

Hybrid Registration \$100

Closing date for physical attendance registration is May 2022.

