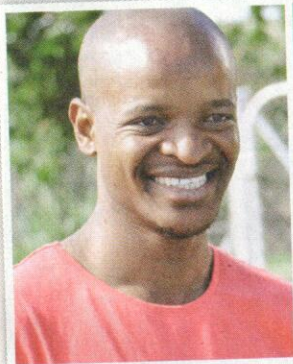
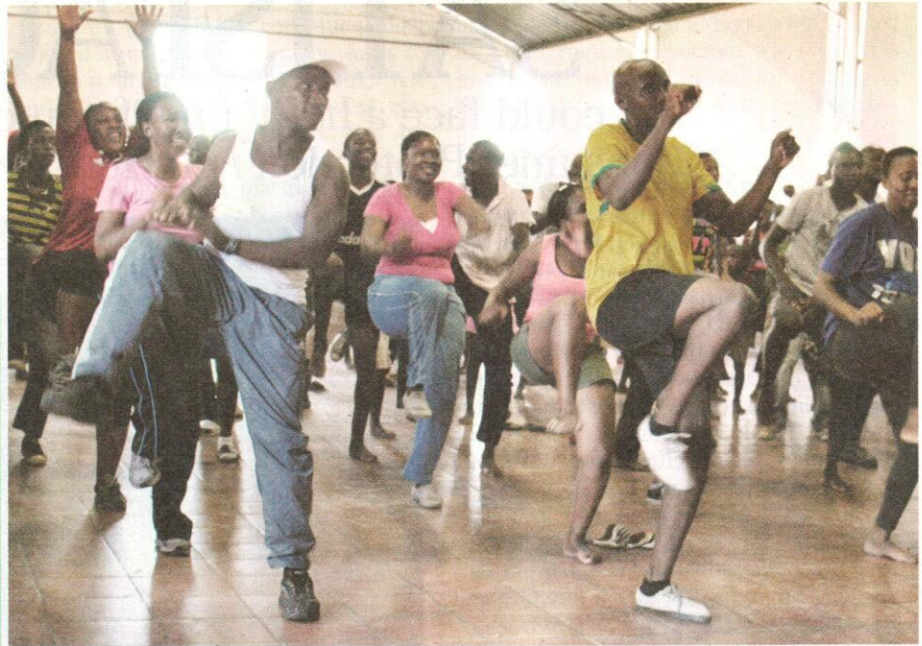


GIVING KIDS HOPE

Vusi Mahlaba started exercise classes in his community in an effort to keep young people out of trouble



LEFT: Vusi Mahlaba believes sport can help keep young people off the streets. RIGHT: Young people from Clarens sweat it out in one of Vusi's aerobics classes.



WALKING barefoot to school because you can't afford school shoes, dropping out of school because you don't have funds to go to varsity, and turning to crime to escape poverty – these are things 28-year-old Vusi Mahlaba hopes the youth from his hometown, Clarens in the Free State, will eventually not have to go through.

Raised by his now 76-year-old granny, Vusi grew up on a farm and used to walk barefoot to school because his family couldn't afford to buy shoes.

"It didn't bother me at all because I wasn't aware of class distinction. Until one day when I realised me and my best friend were from different social classes. His parents were well off and could afford to buy him a pair of school shoes and a school uniform."

Seeing his friend with all those things made Vusi question if he was loved by his family because he didn't understand that his circumstances were different.

Vusi says there are still many young people in Clarens growing up in similar circumstances.

"Sometimes when I encourage some of the young people to study further, the response I get is that education won't get them out of poverty. Especially if they

are raised by a single parent who earns R1 000 a month and can't afford to send their child to university."

Vusi adds it's easy for young people to turn to crime to make a quick buck – or to just lose hope.

What saved Vusi from mischief while he was growing up was sport and ballroom dancing. "My peers made fun of me when they saw me going to dance lessons, but that's what kept me busy and what I enjoyed."

IN 2011 he decided to start the Vusi Mahlaba Clarens Community Foundation, which organises soccer tournaments and aerobics classes.

"Exercise keeps kids off the streets and helps them maintain a healthy lifestyle," Vusi explains. He put up banners around town to inform the community about the aerobics classes and about 15 people did the first one.

"There were a lot of people there but most of them just wanted to see what aerobics was. The number tripled in the next session," Vusi says proudly.

He says the response has been great and both young and old people attend. However, it's a challenge to keep the classes running on a regular basis as Vusi is now based in Johannesburg where he runs a project management company

with three other business partners. He'd like to appoint a professional aerobics instructor to do the classes but needs to raise money to do so.

"I want to use sport and education to encourage young people to aspire to have a better life that does not include crime. My wish is that this foundation will have its own office in Clarens. And I'd like to open a dance centre and grow the soccer tournaments.

"The foundation has a soccer team called December United because it was formed in December and two of its former players are already part of the Jomo Cosmos Football Club's development programme.

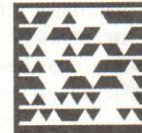
Aerobics is just the beginning for Vusi because he believes he can give a lot more to his community.

"I desperately need this foundation to work out because it will give hope to so many young people."

Vusi hopes to have his video clip shown on TV as it might help him get the funding he needs.

Visit Vusi's page at www.youcanhelp.co.za for more information. □

Use the tag reader on your phone to watch Vusi giving an aerobics class.



Get the tag reader app at <http://gettag.mobi> for details on how to download the tag reader app go to www.drum.co.za