



# THE POWER TRIP

THE MAMANDLA  
FELLOWSHIP

2022/ 2023





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# WELCOME TO THE POWER TRIP





It brings me great joy to share this first Mamandla publication with you.

Our team has had the privilege to bear witness to three cohorts of exceptional women who embarked on the Mamandla journey, and we knew we needed a platform to share and amplify their collective brilliance.

The Mamandla Fellowship was founded in 2019. The vision percolated with the team for some time before we launched as we strategised the best way to translate what makes a traditional fellowship model so powerful with what will also serve the needs of a group of busy mothers.

We are calling our first edition of this publication, The Power Trip. This is the name of the first immersion each cohort gathers at. It is time away from the fellows' homes - for many it involves a trip by plane across the country, and it symbolises the elevation of the individual fellow, the collective, and the position of motherhood in South Africa to one of great power and influence.

Motherhood and power have a complex and nuanced relationship in the context of South Africa. In many homes, mothers fulfill the role of primary caregiver, bearing the weight of responsibility to raise and nurture their children well. This responsibility holds great power and potential, but when unsupported, it often becomes disempowering. Motherhood was never meant to be journeyed in isolation. Mothers rely on deep-rooted community and societal connections to access the support, services and care they need to thrive. A mother who thrives is empowered to help her family do the same.

As I reflect on what I've learnt observing and interacting with three cohorts of Mamandla Fellows, there are three examples of power at the forefront of my mind:



## The power of time

When we started planning for Cohort 1, we spent so much time deliberating the programme the Fellows would follow. How much knowledge could be imparted each weekend we gathered? What were the fundamental skills we needed to transfer in order to see our model as a success? It took only a few hours in-person to see the magic of Mamandla first-hand. The fellows needed time. Time away from heavy family responsibilities. Time for uninterrupted conversations, time for uninterrupted sleep. Time for brainstorming and laughter and tears around the firepit late into the night. Mothers have a scarcity of time for themselves. When given it, they know how to use it well.

## The power of connection

Half-way through the first journey, the Covid pandemic hit, shaking up so many of our calculated plans. We had to cancel our last immersion and move to virtual conversations and it was disappointing for everyone. And yet, connections didn't fizzle away. We bore witness to fellows encouraging each other, supporting work on the ground, skills and resource sharing, and being intentional to stay connected. Tragically, we lost a much-loved fellow, Gillian Bird, in 2020 and experienced the deep connection of grief too. Cross-country connections are the anchor of our Fellowship. They represent the power of networking, the power of friendship and the power of belonging for our Mamandla community.

## The power of common purpose

Mamandla Fellows apply to join this fellowship because they believe mothers deserve better. They also believe that mothers have a powerful role to play in driving the change they want to see. The power of common purpose is an indomitable force. Fellows are community leaders and activists, stepping into the power of collective knowledge, deeply-held motherhood wisdoms, traditions and a desire for social progress now! "Nothing about us without us" encapsulates the power of Mamandla so well.

This publication showcases stories of our 2022/2023 Mamandla Fellowship cohort. You will also see updates from our engaged and growing alumni. The Mamandla journey doesn't end, it just evolves and expands. We are so proud of this impressive community of leaders. Leadership and Activism doesn't have to take on one particular style. Mamandla Fellows demonstrate powerful leadership and civic duty in so many different ways. Being vulnerable, making a brave life choice, holding space for other mothers, sacrificing your personal comforts for something bigger than yourself is leadership in action. Reading these stories has made me incredibly proud and inspired to do more and show up better. May the spirit of the Mamandla Fellowship move you as you read this too.

**Julie Mentor**

**Embrace Movement Leader**

THE POWER TRIP





# INTRODUCING MAMANDLA

Rumbi Goredema Görgens

Embrace Operations Manager

People do not survive racism,  
xenophobia, gender discrimination,  
and poverty without developing  
extraordinary skills, systems, and  
practices of support. And in doing so,  
they carve a path for everyone else.

Mia Birdsong, *How We Show Up*



When one is pregnant, and literally carrying this new role in your individual being, it is easy to forget that you are one of millions and millions of people around the world walking this same sacred, steady path. Once the baby arrives, you may - at first - continue along this seemingly solitary path. If you're fortunate, you may slowly begin to emerge into a new community filled with others on this path. Together, you will cry, laugh, trade jokes and information about the texture and frequency of infants' poo, swap memes, and baby food recipes, and carry each other over the hardest patches of this path.

For me, this completely unexpected and inevitable community of other mothers was one of the sweetest, most valuable gifts early motherhood brought me. Motherhood instructed me on what it means to be part

of community - to give and hold others, and more critically, to allow others to give to and hold me.

Embrace is an exercise in harnessing the game-changing strength of this community-in-practice to improve the social, economic, political contexts in which mothers mother. Mamandla is the central part of this social experiment. It is based in Embrace's core belief that lasting positive change can and should be driven by the lived experiences of the individuals at whom change initiatives are directed. If we want to improve the lives and experiences of mothers in South Africa, we must allow these mothers to lead the charge.

And so, we introduce Mamandla - a platform uniquely designed to bring together and nurture communities of practice and communities in practice centered on mothers and the motherhood experience.

In this first edition of our yearbook, you will meet a group of women connected by and to the common aim of building and mobilising communities of support for mothers across the country. You will meet women who have taken the difficult steps into single motherhood, and who are drawing on their experiences to bring other single mothers into spaces of support, where they can challenge and escape the stigma that often

forces them into isolation. You will meet women whose career-paths were forever changed when they became mothers, and witness how they have resisted the so-called 'mommy gap' by building social enterprises, businesses and media platforms by mothers, for mothers. You will learn that mothers are made and moulded by their communities, not by pregnancy and birth alone.

And accordingly, you will hear from what we call 'social' mothers, who care for mothers so they can care for their children.

You won't hear about singular ways to parent. You won't be exposed to feeding, discipline, diapering doctrines. But you will have a front row seat to what a community in action can achieve when it brings together like-minded and energetic people, and allows them to build a network focused on an often-ignored but powerfully positioned social grouping.

At our annual Power Trip (™), I like to screen a years-old TED Talk (I know, I know) delivered by writer and activist Mia Birdsong. In it, she talks about the need for incubators and venture funds and fellowships for overlooked people who are finding ways to tackle some of the most pervasive social problems caused by inequality and poverty. Instead of designing interventions

aimed at and for people ‘on the ground’, she argues, we need more spaces that allow people to build from their experiences. This is what Mamandla is about: making time, space and place to bring women who are embedded in motherhood communities together so they can talk about, and plan for the work of making South Africa the best place in which to mother.

We know from our work with mothers in South Africa that they are doers: they will make a plan, keep their head down and forge ahead, even if it means ignoring their own needs and aspirations. Mamandla is a community built from the deep desire to give those dedicated to collective action for mothers a break from the doing, and time to work together on systemic change for their own communities.

Ross Gay writes about the concept of rhizomatic care. The rhizome is a social node that is of interconnected and interdependent nature. Think of a knot tied to a lattice of other knots. To unravel one, you must unravel all of them. If you tug to strengthen one, you tighten all. Gay writes:

*Despite every single lie to the contrary, despite every single action born of that lie—we are in the midst of rhizomatic care that extends in every direction, spatially, temporally, spiritually, you name it. It’s*

*certainly not the only thing we’re in the midst of, but it’s the truest thing. By far.*

What a wonderful way in which to see one another. I am tied to you. If you’re healthy, I will be healthy. Mamandla is, for us, a window into what that could look like, and what infrastructure we need to make rhizomatic care work, and to keep it alive. It is a space where mothers and their supporters model communities of care, and build them outwards, into broader society.

We hope you see your own patterns of care and communities in these pages. And, if you think you might belong here, we hope you’ll consider joining Mamandla.





# A DECADE OF LEVERAGING RELATIONSHIPS OF INFLUENCE IN THE INTERESTS OF MOTHERS

Carol-Ann Foulis

For me, the Mamandla Fellowship represents movement building achieved through nurturing and building three intersecting communities: a community of care, a community of learning, and a community of action.

The community of care is the foundation of the Fellowship. Mamandla Fellows experience being cared for and in turn care for others. Mamandla Fellows are chosen because they care. And they listen – and learn to listen – to one another. This creates an environment of trust and openness, which encourages risk-taking, sharing and vulnerability. It is out of these caring values and behaviours that the Fellows are able to embark on a journey of learning. They are able to have difficult conversations with each other, talk about issues that are not easily spoken about and learn from each other's experiences. Out of this, they find the courage to take action – and can return to the circle of care to support them when they encounter the inevitable challenges and setbacks that come from trying to make change in the interests of mothers in South Africa.



The power of this model lies in its rootedness in the experiences of mothers and mother-supporters. And a recognition that it takes more than skills and techniques and methods to lead on action and change. From the outset, Embrace has championed issues in the field of maternal and child health and well being that many would prefer to avoid or that rarely have a light shone on them. Obstetric violence is one such issue, maternal hunger another. The burden of care carried by mothers during – and post-Covid yet another. How, as a small but passionate team, do you start to turn the tide on deeply entrenched views of women (and mothers) and the institutional behaviours that accompany them?

You know that your power lies in relationships – of influence, of support, and of trust – and you look for every opportunity to build them.

This is what Embrace has spent the last 10 years doing, in ever-expanding circles of mothers and mother-supporters across the country. Always starting from the experiences of mothers, always listening and valuing what they have to say, and always recognising the reciprocity in these relationships. The Mamandla Fellowship is deeply rooted in these values and principles and beliefs, and each Fellow is in turn connected to one another through them.

Many times, I heard Mamandla Fellows speaking about a burden, an issue, a challenge collectively shared and collectively held, about journeys taken together to arrive at a place of new and different understanding. Many of these journeys – of learning, of action, of leading on change – have not been easy but they have been made more possible because of the courage that comes when you know you aren't alone.

This is a model that has resonance with, and inspires, our own fellowship, which seeks to nurture and support young leaders and innovators in civil society organisations. Our work surely, as designers and facilitators of Fellowships, is to keep getting better at building this kind of solidarity, of growing connected and ever-expanding communities of care, learning, and action?

## About Carol-Ann Foulis



Carol-Ann Foulis is an independent organisational development consultant. She consults to a range of NGOs around issues of strategy, programme development, fundraising, leadership transition and organisational strengthening. Prior to this, she worked at the DG Murray Trust in various programme leadership roles, and left the organisation as Innovation Director of the strategy to 'Nurture an Innovative and Inclusive Society'. Carol-Ann has a Master's Degree in Development Studies. She sits on the board of the Western Cape Liquor Authority (WCLA). Carol-Ann is a guest facilitator for the Mamandla Fellowship





# NOT JUST SOMEBODY'S MOTHER

**Qaanita Rossier**

Seven years into her journey as a mother, philanthropist and volunteer counsellor Qaanita Rossier is making significant strides towards empowering other mothers in South Africa.

Motherhood was a binding agent for mom of two Qaanita Rossier. Having struggled postpartum, especially with breastfeeding and feelings of loneliness and isolation, she became heightened to the needs of other new mothers. Early on in her mothering journey, this included offering to wet nurse for an acquaintance when her own baby was just four months old.

A friend of a friend, who had had a breast reduction years before, opened up to Qaanita about not being able to breastfeed, as much as she yearned to. As a fellow devoted Muslim, Qaanita understood what this meant for the acquaintance. Breastfeeding is strongly recommended in the Muslim community, and women of faith are urged to pursue it for their baby's benefit.

Moved by her friend's story, Qaanita offered to wet nurse the baby and, as per Islamic tradition, he became her milk son. Qaanita was intentional about this work, which she saw as a labour of love

for a fellow mother. She was careful not to bond with the child in the months that followed, cognisant of the mother's feelings and aware of her role as a provider.

### No stranger to philanthropy

Becoming a milk mother was not Qaanita's first foray into advocacy work. Having just experienced the identity shift herself, she was leaning in to her natural feelings of empathy and understanding for all new mothers.

"When you become a mother, you suddenly see yourself in other mothers. Whether they are richer or poorer than you, or come from different circumstances, it's like you're all the same person and your desire to keep your child alive and healthy is universal. Those things still exist no matter where you come from," she says.

Qaanita is no stranger to philanthropy, as one of a group of women who started the Friends in Giving Network (FIG) in 2010. FIG is a nonprofit organisation that runs social outreach projects in underserved communities.

However, it was five years into running FIG that Qaanita became a mother. And

while she describes her initiation into matrescence as beautiful and well-supported, it was not without its dark moments. This triggered a worldview change in Qaanita that got her thinking about what new motherhood might look like for under-resourced mothers with little to no support.

"I am an extremely privileged person with an established support system, food in my fridge and a roof over my head, and even I struggled as a new mother. I gave birth in a private hospital, I had access to a lactation consultant and antenatal classes, and even I struggled with my mental health.

"After becoming a mother, I couldn't see the child who suffers abandonment and neglect without also seeing a mother who has been severely abandoned and neglected by the socioeconomic systems in South Africa," she says.



### Relief work has an expiry date

Now a mother of two small boys, Qaanita was seven years into her motherhood journey when her passion for working with mothers came to a head. At the same time that she applied for Embrace's Mamandla Fellowship, Qaanita started volunteering at The Counselling Hub and, more recently, with the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (Sadag).

“I started defining and redefining what I wanted to do with my life and it all started happening at once. My motherhood advocacy took off at the same time as my volunteer counselling, which prompted me to go back and study. So, by the end of the year, I’ll be a registered counsellor with the HPCSA,” she says.

Qaanita felt fulfilled with the meaningful and purpose-driven work she was doing at The Counselling Hub. This gave her the motivation she needed to further her studies after seven years at a desk job. Looking back, the mother of two acknowledges that she’d been struggling with feelings of identity loss with respect to her career. She had dedicated much of the last seven years raising her two small boys while working in human resources at her family’s welding company. And while she is grateful for the flexibility and privilege that her job afforded her, allowing her to be present for her children, she did not feel fulfilled in her work.

“I was feeling super low when I applied for the fellowship and I kept thinking, ‘What have I amounted to these last seven years?’ I didn’t think I was going to get in. It felt impossible. What did I have? What could I contribute?”

At the same time, Qaanita realised that she wanted to add an element of sustainability to her work with FIG. She

believes her work with Mamandla has given her a better idea of how to accomplish that.

Once she is a registered counsellor, Qaanita’s focus will be on perinatal mental health, to be the person she needed when she was struggling with her mental health after becoming a mother.

“Registered counsellors are kind of the middle ground for people who can’t get to psychologists, either because the waiting list is so long, or because the clinic focuses on more severe psychological disorders and serious mental health issues. As a result, mothers who are giving birth are overlooked in these contexts,” Qaanita explains.

“I’m hoping to focus on that constituency of moms who are desperate just to talk to someone and figure out what they’re going through.”

Qaanita says she also wants to develop FIG as an organisation that offers solutions beyond relief work.

“Relief work has an expiry date. When you keep pumping food and resources into a community and you’re not building on the resources that they have, like upskilling mothers, or making sure that they’re well enough to thrive in their communities, or be the best versions of



themselves, then we're going to continue having safe houses that are bursting at the seams."

Qaanita adds that being a Mamandla fellow has helped her connect her journeys and goals as a philanthropist and budding counsellor. While being a fellow expanded her network, it also brought her one step closer to, what she believes is, her life's calling.



## “WHEN YOU BECOME A MOTHER, YOU SUDDENLY SEE YOURSELF IN OTHER MOTHERS”

“It’s all about making a mother well and making her whole. She can go out and she can do so much, and I needed to realise that for myself as well. I know I can go out and do so much, but I needed to be whole. And that was very much a part of what Mamandla has done for me. It’s helped me to see myself again, and to see my own worth. I needed to remind myself that I am not just somebody’s mother.

“Mothers are not just here to ensure the wellness of their children. Although that is still your priority, you actually have so much more to give. There is so much more to you, and I think that was a massive realisation for me,” she concludes.





# FINDING MYSELF IN MOTHERHOOD

Palesa Mphambani

Despite her ambitions to advocate for people as a lawyer, becoming a mother is what ultimately drew Palesa closer to her purpose. This includes not only her role as a homemaker and mom of two, but also her identity as an entrepreneur and motherhood advocate.

Many moms who start a business after having a baby are inspired by something they lacked in the early days of motherhood. Palesa Mphambani is no exception.

Overwhelmed by new motherhood and struggling with undiagnosed postpartum depression (PPD), Palesa turned to babywearing to deal with her first-born's four-month sleep regression.

Knowing that many buckled baby carriers could not be used for babies under a year, Palesa needed a solution – something suitable for a newborn that would free her hands while giving her baby the closeness she craved. The new mother ordered a baby wrap off a local website and saw positive results immediately.

Three years later, Palesa launched her own baby wrap business, Sondela Baby Wraps, which is focused

on strengthening the maternal bond between a mother and her baby. This was a dream that Palesa had manifested when she was still in the throes of postpartum life.

“A couple of months ago I picked up a diary from 2018, which I had totally forgotten about. On the first page – 17 April 2018 – I wrote that I wanted to start a babywearing business. I wrote down the measurements, what type of

fabric I would need, and where I would get the fabric....”

Three years, one global pandemic and a second baby later, Palesa took the plunge and pursued Sondela Baby Wraps full-time in 2021. The growing business is testament to what helped get the new mother through some of her toughest days in the first year since giving birth.

“I RE-EVALUATED WHAT ADVOCACY LOOKS LIKE AND REALISED HOW IT CAN ALSO BE GENTLE, QUIET AND SUBTLE BUT STILL VERY POWERFUL”

### Undiagnosed postpartum depression

Babywearing gave Palesa some much-needed respite from the physical labour of the first 1000 days postpartum. But still, the new mother continued to struggle with her mental health, which bled into her second pregnancy.

“I was going through PPD and I didn’t know it. I was sleep deprived and depleted and I just thought I was feeling sad. My baby would cry and I would cry with her. I was alone, depressed and helpless and I didn’t know what I was doing. I also felt a lot of guilt, and like I wasn’t good enough. I always thought I

could do more or do things better,” she admits.

Palesa gave birth to her second child in the thick of the first hard lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic. Still, she assumed things would be better this time round, because she was no longer a first-time mom.

“I thought I would be more confident because I knew things now, and I was well equipped, but that wasn’t the case,” she says.





Now in recovery for PPD, Palesa believes she was clouded by her desire to birth naturally, and that she attached her worth as a woman to the experience of a vaginal delivery, instead of just surrendering to the process.

“Depression feels like a thread that’s about to snap or break apart. It feels like a heavy head. Things like making food, getting out of bed, going out, laughing, taking a shower... It all felt too hard.”

Palesa’s second birth – an attempt at a vaginal birth after Caesarean-section, or VBAC – was particularly traumatic. After labouring for days and preparing her mind and body for the vaginal delivery she had dreamed of, she was not dilating and her baby was in distress.

Palesa recalls being wheeled into theatre and thinking that her contracting body was failing her:

“That was the most heart-breaking part for me. My body felt like it was doing what it needed to, but I would still be cut open. Why would I be going through the natural delivery process without anything coming to fruition?”

Palesa is still battling with depression, but is actively going to therapy to work on her mental health.

“It’s difficult. I feel like I’m looking at myself through a window and I can see

“I WAS GOING  
THROUGH  
POSTPARTUM  
DEPRESSION  
AND I DIDN’T  
KNOW IT”





the life that I want to live, but I'm stuck on the other side of the window. I feel like I'm battling to connect the pieces of where I am or where I'm supposed to be, like I'm lost somewhere in time and replaying the life I'm meant to live."

The mom of two adds that being depressed with children makes recovery that much harder.

"Children want you to be present, conversational and engaged. But when you're depressed you don't want to do these things. You don't want to laugh or explain things but you have to, because you're a mother."

### Lofty ambitions: #goals

Despite her struggles with mental health, Palesa is determined and ambitious. In addition to her law degree from the University of the Witwatersrand, the Mamandla fellow completed a certificate in public relations from the University of Cape Town during the 2020 lockdown, while pregnant and newly postpartum.

With plans to expand her product offering at Sondela, Palesa dreams of one day opening a mother-and-baby play studio to explore her passion for early childhood development. She's also considering doula training and opening a pregnancy clinic with her mother, who is a qualified midwife.

"I would conduct the antenatal training and offer antenatal support, while my mom offers midwifery services. I've also written a book about breastfeeding, which I hope I'll be able to publish soon. I've got big plans!" she laughs.



But Palesa recognises that she cannot realise all of her dreams and passion projects at the same time, and is trying to surrender by taking things one day at a time.

“Part of me is bursting with colour and ideas, wanting to do everything, but I’ve

### Redefining advocacy

Recognising that most of the decisions affecting mothers are made by men, and that women’s voices are stifled, Palesa applied to be a Mamandla fellow to help amplify mothers and their voices in South Africa.

“Something I lacked in new motherhood was community. I was the only mom in my friend group and I missed being in communion with other mothers. So, what attracted me to Mamandla is having that solidarity with like-minded women, and trying to advocate for mothers and our rights in South Africa.”

Palesa adds that her Mamandla journey has helped her realise that advocacy comes in many shapes and sizes. It can be bold, like changing legislation, or it can be as simple as supporting a mother in your community and lending an ear.

“I re-evaluated what advocacy looks like and realised how it can also be gentle, quiet and subtle but still very powerful.

been too hard on myself. I’m trying to do it all, but I can’t. Motherhood comes with an overwhelming sense of humbleness. You can’t do it all. I’m not superhuman, I’m just me, and that realisation has knocked me off my feet,” she says.

Yes, I studied law and I can be a legal advocate and fight in court. But I’m starting to feel that maybe my need to advocate for people looks different to what I thought it would. I found myself in motherhood, and I found a way to fight for the things that are now really close to my heart.”







# FOSTERING A SAFE SPACE FOR MOTHERS

Pamela Madonsela

Journalist and social media manager Pamela Madonsela is not blind to the judgment often faced by mothers – especially those who are unmarried, pregnant or both. This mom of two wants other women to know that times are changing, and that it's okay for mothers to subvert cultural norms that no longer serve us.

When Mamandla fellow Pamela Madonsela fell pregnant with her first child in 2018, she felt discriminated against by many, including her potential employer, because of her age and her marital status.

Pamela had been part of a postgraduate internship programme, and was gearing to take on a full-time position once the programme ended, with support and encouragement from her superiors. But once the mother-to-be revealed that she was pregnant, any hope of gainful employment was doused.

“It was a big step to even get an internship there but, once I fell pregnant, my chances at getting a full-time position were slim. I felt like I’d messed up my career,” she admits.



“CHURCH SHOULD BE  
ABOUT CREATING A  
SAFE SPACE FOR YOUNG  
WOMEN, ESPECIALLY”



Four years down the line, Pamela is in a better head space now. She realises that working women have a right to be pregnant and take up space in the workplace.

“Being pregnant doesn’t mean that you’re incapable,” she says, adding that

women should be working for companies that value the motherhood journey.

“Don’t get discouraged or feel like you’re invaluable. There are many opportunities out there and many companies that will see your value,” she encourages.

### Judgment from the faith-based community

In addition to workplace discrimination, Pamela has witnessed, first-hand, the discrimination that young, unmarried women face from the faith-based community, especially when they fall pregnant.

Early in her motherhood journey, Pamela realised how important it was for mothers from all walks of life to have a soft place to land. This is why the young mother – a journalist and social media manager by profession – is passionate about maintaining a safe and judgement-free space for women in her community.

“At church we wear uniforms, but if you fall pregnant out of wedlock, you are not permitted to wear a uniform. Being unmarried and pregnant is considered a sin. What I’ve noticed, though, is that young, unmarried women who fall pregnant stop coming to church. They just disappear.”

With this in mind, Pamela’s influence within her own community has been to encourage young women to continue coming to church, and to let young mothers know that there is nothing wrong with them – married or not.

‘Church should be a safe space for young mothers’

The Mamandla fellow has fostered a support group of women who have bonded over motherhood, and she’s made a point to include unmarried pregnant women both in the group and at church events.

“People must come to church because they want to. It’s a fact that some women are having sex and falling pregnant, and that doesn’t mean that they should be shut out,” she says.



In fostering this kind of backing for the women around her, Pamela recognises that women need support from the faith-based community, especially when they are facing motherhood alone, or for the first time.

“The church is no place to judge, and it’s this type of environment that we want to change. Our parents grew up accepting these types of rules in the church, but our generation of parents will not judge,” she asserts.

Pamela is intent on inclusivity in the motherhood community, and wants to normalise single motherhood, or being unmarried and pregnant.

“I want mothers to know that they’re still part of us, even if they are pregnant. Church should be about creating a safe space for young women, especially.”

‘Every mother should be able to share her experience’

According to the mom of two, many mothers in the black community don’t feel safe enough to speak about their struggles, like postpartum depression, issues with breastfeeding, or the fact that having a boy is typically more celebrated than having a girl.

“Being open about those things might be seen as disrespectful by some. But I wanted to be part of a community that enables mothers to support each other and share with one another. Every mother should be able to share her experience in a room with like-minded women, without fear of being shamed or judged. In the end, we all share a common goal within motherhood.”

Pamela and her support group of women gather as often as they can – sometimes with their children, and sometimes without – to make sure that their fellowship continues outside of church too.

“It’s just so important that we connect and share. And you don’t need to have a child to join us!” she says.

The Mamandla fellow's biggest takeaway from her year of learning with Embrace is that mothers need to be honest about the ups and downs of motherhood, and that mothers should feel like they have permission to look after their own mental health.

"Society is telling us that we're supposed to be superhumans, that we're not allowed to be tired. And yes, we love our kids, but being a mother is a full-time job and it can take a lot from you.

I want mothers to know that you don't need to feel guilty about wanting to have your own space."

Pamela has contributed to a host of publications over the years, including True Love Magazine, Parent24, The Citizen, BabyYumYum, and Health E-News, among many others. She believes that, through her writing, she gives voice to silenced mothers who are struggling in their corners.

"EVERY MOTHER SHOULD BE ABLE TO SHARE HER EXPERIENCE IN A ROOM WITH LIKE-MINDED WOMEN, WITHOUT FEAR OF BEING SHAMED OR JUDGED"





# A MENTOR FOR MOMS

Nqubeko Shezi

Nqubeko Shezi has a promising career in law, human rights and social justice, with several achievements and qualifications to date including her LLM degree from Wits University.

She considers showing up and mothering her son to be one of her biggest life accomplishments.

As a licensed Flourish\* host, Soweto-based mom and corporate professional Nqubeko Shezi emphasises mental health care and awareness in her antenatal and postnatal classes. After giving birth Nqubeko experienced baby blues and mild postnatal depression, Nqubeko did not have any source of information when she was newly postpartum.

“I never want another mother to go through something like that without knowing exactly what it is,” she says. “I want mothers to know that these things happen, and that it’s normal for them to happen. I also want them to know what to do if they are ever in a similar situation.”

After giving birth, Nqubeko could not stay with her son due to her work demands and her studies. The young mother was pursuing her Master’s degree at the time and needed to get back to her studies.



“I didn’t suffer from separation anxiety, because I could go visit my son any time I wanted. But seeing my boobs leak and not having my baby with me was not easy. I felt so low, and I didn’t know what was going on with me,” she says.

It was only when Nqubeko applied to become a Flourish host to help other moms and be part of the activation for mothers and babies that she learned the name for what she was feeling.

“TRANSITIONING FROM MY  
BIRTH EXPERIENCE, AND HAVING  
TO MOVE ON FROM THAT AND  
BE A MOTHER TO HIM, HAS BEEN  
MY BIGGEST ACHIEVEMENT”



## Her birth story

Factoring in her birthing experience when giving birth to her now five-year-old son, Qhawe, it stands to reason that Nqubeko's mental health was strained postpartum. While her pregnancy was pleasant and easy-going, the young mom describes her birth as a not so pleasant experience

"There was no physical abuse, but there were a lot of emotional challenges, and I didn't understand it. I still don't. Maybe I was just unlucky that I didn't have the desired information about labour and delivery because if I did I would have

prepared myself mentally that my labour will be that painful", she laments.

While in the throes of labour, Nqubeko couldn't get pain relief, and as a result, she felt ignored and unheard. And while the mother knew her rights as a birthing person, she was afraid to stand up to the healthcare workers and, instead, remained passive and submissive.

"It was a horrific experience for me, which has somehow made me not yearn to mother more children. Possibly, in a few years, I will change my mind," she muses.

## 'A mixture of moms from all walks of life'

Nqubeko works as a Flourish host to empower expectant mothers who attend her antenatal classes and postnatal classes. She realises that she may not be able to help women at the hospital or in the delivery room, so she uses her classes to talk about her experiences. Her sessions offer new mothers insight into a public hospital delivery, arming them with information so they know what to expect from a healthcare provider.

"I want my mothers to face the reality of our public health sector. Not to scare

them, of course, but to share my experience," she says.

Nqubeko started her work as a Flourish host with a class of ten mothers in Hillbrow. It was 2020, just before the national Covid19 lockdown was enforced, and things felt like they were falling into place for her.

"The Flourish community spoke to me deeply, and I felt like I was exactly where I needed to be," she says.

But, as a result of Covid-19, Nqubeko had to start conducting her classes remotely,

though she's since realised that working virtually has enabled her to support and educate mothers from different regions and varying demographics. And she hasn't looked back.

"My community is a mixture of moms from all walks of life. From mothers who have less, to mothers who have more. A lot of the mothers I serve are still based in Hillbrow, and that's still my primary focus group, but some of the mothers I serve also work in the private sector. It's a beautiful community that keeps on growing," she adds.

The Flourish host prides herself on cultivating a culture of support among her group members, having given them a platform to share the experiences, support one another and grow together, independent of Nqubeko.

"I don't condone any kind of separation or exclusion. But I've made sure that they are able to build a community amongst themselves, because they need to be there for each other," she says.

"MY COMMUNITY IS A  
MIXTURE OF MOMS FROM  
ALL WALKS OF LIFE"

A career in law, human rights and social justice

Nqubeko's advocacy is not limited to her work as a Flourish host. After graduating LLB in 2018 – the same year Qhawe was born – she knew she wanted to focus on social justice and human rights, and has since worked with civil society organisations like the Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALS), the Foundation for Human Rights, the Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa (SERI), Right2Protest (R2P) to name a few.

Currently, Nqubeko is pursuing her career in academia, but continues to work with organisations in combating injustices. And, in addition to her role as a 2022 Mamandla Fellow, the young mother was among the top ten winners of the 2022 ACTIVATE! Active Citizen Awards, which recognise individuals and organisations driving change in their communities.



Nevertheless, Nqubeko still considers showing up and loving her son as her biggest achievement to date.

“Transitioning from my birth experience, and having to move on from that and be a mother to him, has been my biggest achievement,” she says.

As an activist in the children and motherhood space, Nqubeko was never able to compartmentalise her birth experience, or shy away from it. Instead, she has harnessed her experience to advocate for the rights of mothers, women and children.



## When everything falls into place

Applying to become a Mamandla Fellow was a no-brainer for Nqubeko, who notes that the past year has solidified what she was already doing as a Flourish host. The fellowship also dovetailed nicely with her ACTIVATE! Award, both recognising her as a change maker in her community.

“Being a Mamandla fellow has boosted my clients’ confidence in me as a Flourish host. It proves that I am passionate about what I’m doing. My clients can see that I’m purposeful in what I do and that my main goal is to make a meaningful contribution to the lives of mothers.”

Nqubeko highlights the breastfeeding masterclass as being the most impactful part of her journey. She took everything she learned that day and presented it back to the moms at Flourish.

“It feels like I have my own manual now, and that is thanks to the resources I received from Mamandla. Signing up for the fellowship helped me to broaden my contribution in the motherhood space, and complemented my passion for human rights and social justice,” she concludes.

\*A programme of the Grow Great Campaign, Flourish is a national network of pregnancy and mom and baby classes that support, celebrate and empower mothers through the first 1000 days of a child’s life.

# NURTURING HOPE FOR A NATION

Nobuntu Hlazo-Webster

South Africa faces some of the greatest challenges of our democratic dispensation. These challenges exist as social ills in our communities, as systemic failure, and as a result of economic decline which makes survival a daily battle for the average South African.

Mothers, whether biological, by inherent or circumstantial responsibility, navigate this terrain with the additional barriers imposed by systemic injustices based on gender, class and race. Carrying the primary role of caregiver and guardian, mothers in South Africa fight through a difficult system for their own survival and on behalf of their children, daily.

Mothers in South Africa need support; they need a platform for their voices to be heard and resources to enable them, their children and communities to develop and thrive. The work of the Mamandla Fellowship has created a safe space for the support and capacitation of womxn who are leading others in navigating the challenging terrains of society, education, economy, healthcare in this country.

These are womxn who are amplifying the voice of mothers and catalysing the power of motherhood in effecting social justice. My interaction with the fellowship presented to me a platform that is a recognition of neglected issues in South African society and a consolidation of often unnoticed, but powerful work across the country. Among the neglected issues is violence



that takes on forms which are a direct violation of motherhood. A widely ignored crisis is the increase in the number of girls becoming mothers as a consequence of gross violation against them in the form of statutory rape.

The complex societal and legal dynamics within which pregnant girls find themselves need for them to be in an accepting community; to be supported and protected from a society that holds judgement and punishment against them. Many of the organisations led by Mamandla Fellows provide such communities – unnoticed but powerful and necessary work.

The system fails womxn also in a long-neglected violation in the public healthcare system in the form of obstetric violence, where scores of womxn experience psychological and mental abuse when accessing reproductive health services: during family planning consultations,

antenatal visits and in the labour ward, and while womxn give birth. In advocating for the recognition of obstetric violence as gender-based violence and in telling the stories of womxn who have met physical and psychological abuse in clinics and hospitals, the Mamandla Fellowship has amplified the lone voices who have fought against this injustice, and initiated a process towards much needed systemic change. This breakthrough by the Mamandla Fellowship is an apt representation of the work of the programme, and the impact on mothers and society.

The social, economic and political injustices and violations experienced and expressed by mothers, are a reflection of the brokenness in society. When we begin to chip at these massive barriers to the prosperity of our communities, we bring pragmatic hope to a nation.

## About Nobuntu



Nobuntu Hlazo-Webster is the founder of the SA Women's Commission, which assembles women from all walks of life to collaborate in contributing to change in South Africa. She is also deputy leader of one of SA's political parties, and a thought leader and dialogue facilitator on social justice issues. Nobuntu has spent the bulk of her career as a businesswoman with ventures in media and business consulting. She is an alumni of Future-Elect, the United States International Visitor Leadership Programme and an International Women's Forum fellow. Nobuntu holds a BPhil Honours degree and a number of postgraduate business qualifications. She sits on various non-profit boards and is involved in various community initiatives. Nobuntu is a guest facilitator for the Mamandla Fellowship.





# AN ADAPTIVE APPROACH TO PARENTING

Nomgcobo Galela

What happens when you suddenly lose your village? Mom of two Nomgcobo Galela was able to land on her feet after losing a key pillar of support in her parenting journey. Much of her resilience over the past two years can be attributed to her adaptive approach to motherhood.

Life changed unexpectedly for Nomgcobo Galela when, in June 2021, her mother-in-law – her biggest supporter and pillar of strength – suffered a stroke. In the blink of an eye, she was dealing with a devastating family crisis in which the health of someone close to her was compromised. On top of that, the mom of two had to make last-minute plans to ensure that her children would be well looked after while she and her husband went to work. This was a role her mother-in-law had played until the day she suddenly fell ill.

It was a season of motherhood that left Nomgcobo feeling stretched and out of her depth. Her three-year-old son, Heru, who was only due to start preschool the following year, would have to be placed in daycare



without any warning, while her daughter, seven-year-old Zion, prepared for the transition to Grade 1.

“I was entering a new phase of motherhood and things became infinitely harder for me. I always knew that I could rely on my mother-in-law. She was an added layer of support that I suddenly didn’t have anymore, so I had to figure out a way to adapt,” she says.

Nomgcobo took to the challenge like she does parenting in general – with focus, awareness, and intention.

“Not having family support affected my motherhood journey. When my daughter started Grade 1 there was a pile of information coming in from the school and I was missing times and meetings... It was a mess. But at the same time, I managed to tap into other strengths that I didn’t know I had in me,” she says.

## Adaptive, authentic mothering

As a working mom, finding time and meaningful ways to connect with her children remains one of Nomgcobo's biggest challenges.

"My husband recently pointed out that we only spend a maximum of four hours a day with our children, with little time to connect and find out how they are really doing. So, for me, I've had to be intentional about my time with them. But balance? True balance doesn't exist."

For Nomgcobo, honesty and adaptability is key to juggling the load of being a working mom. She's gentle on herself, realising she cannot be all things to all people. She also knows she cannot give her full attention and focus to more than one thing at a time.

And the mother is careful not to feign perfection in front of her children. She is open with them when she is struggling, and manages their expectations, while also honouring her promises to them.

Likewise, Nomgcobo gives her children age-appropriate insight

when something big is happening in her life, and when she is feeling sad, or scared or anxious about something.

"Last year, I was about to start a new job, and I let my daughter know that I was anxious to meet a lot of new people. She asked relevant follow-up questions like, 'Are you scared they won't like you?' She knew that I was starting something important, and on my first day of work she asked me how my day was," says the mom, understandably proud.

Nomgcobo says her decision to employ an adaptive and respectful approach to parenting has largely eliminated the guilt that many mothers suffer from.

"As soon as I lean into my own honesty and vulnerability, the mom guilt goes away," she says.

In Nomgcobo's experience, treating her children as individuals, and choosing to be human with them, has wielded positive, happy, regulated children.

"AFFIRMATIONS BUILT  
MY CHARACTER AND  
WHO I AM TODAY"

Smart, kind and capable of anything

Nomgcobo's particular brand of parenting mirrors the way that her own mother raised her. Hailing from Duncan Village, a township in the Eastern Cape, Nomgcobo's parents were humble and hard-working, and they focused on their daughter's self-worth and education as a way out of poverty.

On the cusp of South Africa's establishment as a new democracy, her parents were both retrenched and awaiting a pay-out just as Nomgcobo was set to start Grade 1. As a result, for a few days into her first week of school, she was without a school-mandated uniform.

Nomgcobo remembers the moment as an example of how material things didn't matter in her upbringing, but that it was their belief in her worth that made all the difference.

"Affirmations built my character and who I am today. I was constantly told how beautiful and smart I was. And all of the things my mother spoke into my life happened. Everything she said I would become, I have become," she says.

As a result, Nomgcobo is conscious about building her children's characters and sense of self-worth in the same way.

"AS SOON AS I LEAN INTO MY OWN  
HONESTY AND VULNERABILITY,  
THE MOM GUILT GOES AWAY"

"But as soon as my mother received her pay-out, she bought me a full uniform. And I remember that in assembly that week, I was one of the kids that the principal called out as an example of what the school uniform should look like. I was so proud to be that girl, and so proud of my parents for coming through in that moment," she recalls.

"Speaking life over my children and making sure I affirm them and let them know they are capable of anything is one of the most important things to me as a parent."



## A judgment-free safe space for mothers

Seeing value in instilling the same sense of self-worth among her fellow women, Nomgcobo's generosity of spirit extends to her online community.

Though she works in banking full time, motherhood taught Nomgcobo how important community is, which is why she runs an online profile, called Authentically Gee (@authentically\_gee), as a digital creator. This platform offers a judgment-free space for self-reflection and support.

It was through this online platform that Nomgcobo came to learn about Embrace and the Mamandla Fellowship. Author and social worker Joey Dlamini, an online friend and Mamandla alumna,

told Nomgcobo about Embrace and its commitment to motherhood advocacy and upliftment. It didn't take long before Nomgcobo was sold on applying to become a fellow herself.

"I just realised that this is the work – and these are the kinds of queens – that I want to associate myself with," she laughs.

Nomgcobo highlights knowledge, information and connection as some of the biggest advantages of being a 2022/23 Mamandla fellow. As someone with influence over both her immediate and online community, Nomgcobo feels confident enough to offer advice and



make referrals, thanks to the backing of her Mamandla community.

“I now have a network of people that I can refer others to. Mamandla has been an amazing tool to connect and improve the lives of mothers in the community, when it comes to both information and support,” she says.

### Community outreach and making connections

As someone who hails from an under-resourced area in the Eastern Cape, and with family living in Capricorn (or Vrygrond), an informal settlement in Muizenberg, Nomgcobo donates food or sanitary supplies when she can. She also recognises the importance of making donations in person, to witness the impact that it has on the beneficiary.

But without the resources offered by Mamandla over the last year, Nomgcobo often felt overwhelmed and helpless, wanting to make more of a difference for people in the underserved areas around her.

“Often, those who are struggling with poverty in under-resourced areas do not know their rights. And, besides not knowing their rights, they don’t know who to talk to or which channels to follow for help. But I realise that I have privilege, resources, and access to infor-



mation, which puts me in a position to help and connect mothers in need.”

In addition to her experience as a Mamandla fellow, Nomgcobo recently took part in the Top Tech Tools for Women in Business, presented by the Cape Innovation and Technology Initiative. Via the initiative, she filters information about work vacancies to her various communities, making connections on behalf of those without access to opportunities.

“It’s those types of connections that I’m always trying to maintain with other women, and with the fellows,” she says.



# TEEN MOM TURNED ANTENATAL EDUCATOR

Noloyiso Williams

Having faced obstetric violence as a teenage mom, Noloyiso Williams has spent the last decade fighting for other mothers. As a doula and antenatal educator, she informs and empowers pregnant women to take control of their birthing experience.

It was a traumatic first birth that prompted mother of three Noloyiso Williams to become a doula and antenatal educator. After being dismissed, shut down and shouted at during her first labour, Noloyiso's anaesthesia wore off prematurely during her emergency C-section and, at one point, she could feel everything as her doctor sewed her up. Noloyiso's baby, who had been in foetal distress, was rushed to the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU).

The next thing the young mother remembers is waking up in recovery, where the anaesthesiologist apologised to Noloyiso for miscalculating the correct dosage of anaesthesia needed for a seamless surgery.

"He told me that they were rushing because my baby was in distress. They had underestimated my weight,



which is why the anaesthesia wore off,” she recalls.

Had Noloyiso received patient-centred care when she first arrived at the hospital – instead of being shouted at and chastised for arriving at “the wrong” facility, and being told not to sit down because she would not be giving birth there – it’s possible that this particular domino course of events might have transpired differently.

But Noloyiso was 14 at the time, a teenager who only had her own mother to fight for her. It was in such a moment of advocacy that she was finally admitted to the hospital she had arrived at. While her mother pleaded with staff to help her labouring daughter, nurses argued (and shouted) that Noloyiso needed to give birth at the facility she was initially registered with, which was across the city near the family’s former home address. It was only when a nurse noticed blood trickling down the young girl’s legs that Noloyiso was rushed to the labour ward.

“I was so young. And I don’t know whether they were judging me for my age... But at the time I didn’t know how I was supposed to be treated, or whether it was wrong,” she says.

Noloyiso’s treatment while recovering in hospital was no better. She was permitted to see and feed her baby for only one hour in the day, during which time the nurses would slap her or her breasts as she tried to feed him, and struggled.

One nurse even told her that if she knew how to open her legs, she should know how to breastfeed.

“It was hell,” says Noloyiso. “I was a teenager and a first-time mom. I hadn’t gone for antenatal classes, and I knew nothing.”







“I WAS A TEENAGER AND A  
FIRST-TIME MOM. I HADN'T GONE  
FOR ANTENATAL CLASSES,  
AND I KNEW NOTHING”

'If my mother wasn't there, I don't know what would have happened'

Considering her birthing experience, it stands to reason that Noloyiso suffered from postpartum depression, which was diagnosed one month after her son, Xolani, was born.

Breastfeeding didn't become any easier once Noloyiso was discharged, and at four weeks she had mastitis so severe that she needed to be hospitalised. The new mother was emotionless on admission, unconcerned about parting from her baby for the week that she'd be admitted. In fact, she volunteered that Xolani stay with her mother for the duration of her stay. After a mental

health screening, Noloyiso tested positive for postpartum depression and her mother was told to monitor her closely once she was discharged, as there was a possibility she could harm herself or her baby.

"I had so much support from my family, but it was still so difficult for me to mother my baby... If I hadn't had my own mother there, I don't know what would have happened."

Four years later, Noloyiso found out she was expecting her second baby. Understandably, she was distraught.



"It was supposed to be happy news, but it wasn't. The memories of my first birth came flooding back and I cried my eyes out," she says.

Thankfully, with help, counselling and advocacy from a new birthing team – including Ruth, a Kommetjie-based midwife, and Caryn, a doula – Noloyiso was loved, held, and supported during her second birth.

"Caryn was there to guide me through the birthing process and to be my advocate. I felt like I was in control. Afterwards, all I could think was that I wanted other women to experience this."

By 2018, Noloyiso was practising as a doula and offering antenatal and mom-and-baby classes to new mothers in her community.

### Paying it forward

At any given time, Noloyiso supports up to 60 pregnant and postpartum mothers in Red Hill, Ocean View and Masiphumelele, which are all situated near Kommetjie, in the Western Cape. As part of her doula work, Noloyiso visits clients for up to two weeks after birth, supporting them with the baby and doing some housework to lighten the load.

Most of Noloyiso's clients are teenage mothers, and around 50% are foreign nationals with no family to support them.

"I recently helped a 17-year-old mom from Zimbabwe who had just given birth. She didn't have anyone to take care of her. She didn't know how to take care of the umbilical cord, she didn't know about latching... But the antenatal classes helped with that," she says.

Noloyiso mentioned that the mothers in her support groups grow together as units, creating their own villages



within the larger community. Post-birth, her clients support one another, share advice and bring food to one another, making sure that no mother feels alone in her new role.

"The mothers in my groups definitely grow together. I even have moms from 2018/9 who I'm still in contact with. Some come back when they fall pregnant again, wanting to join the mom-and-baby classes. It takes a village, and the women in our community are becoming a unit. They are building something. They are there for one another," says Noloyiso.



‘This is my thing! This is my jam!’

Before becoming a Mamandla fellow, the Embrace network helped Nloyiso source sponsorship for a few of her mothers, which is how she became familiar with the ins and outs of the movement. When the next call came out for Mamandla applicants, Nloyiso jumped at the opportunity without hesitation.

“All I could think was, ‘This is my thing! This is my jam! I know this!’,” she laughs.

As someone who provides informal counselling to women on a daily basis, Nloyiso says the psychology masterclass was one of the highlights of her year as a fellow.

“I am not trained in psychology, but now I know that when other mothers are faced with an issue, I shouldn’t rush to offer a solution. The training taught me to guide the mom as she finds her own way to a solution. I feel like that training was the best gift that I could get,” she concludes.







# THE COMMUNITY'S COACH

Nodumo Makaza

As part of her work as a host of pre- and postpartum support groups, Nodumo teaches new moms to put themselves first for the wellbeing of their children. But when this single mom was forced to take her own advice and spend time away from her only child, her overwhelming guilt was a bitter pill to swallow.

For as long as she's been a single working mother, Nodumo Makaza has been burning the candle at both ends. While pursuing her MSc in Development Studies, she is a business coach for women entrepreneurs, as well as a \*Flourish host, conducting weekly antenatal and baby stimulation classes for pregnant and postpartum mothers. Nodumo spends a significant part of her week supporting women on their journey into matrescence.

Nodumo became a licensed Flourish host in March 2019, starting her franchise in Crown Gardens, in the south of Johannesburg. She has since expanded and now runs antenatal and postnatal classes both online and at Bez Valley Clinic, near the Johannesburg CBD; Balfour Mall, near Alexandra; and at Wannenburg

Clinic and Fire of God Ministries in the suburb of Primrose, close to Makause settlement.

But Nodumo's workload, in addition to her studies and women in business coaching, left little time and resources for her to offer her five-year-old son, Kevin, what she felt he needed at the time.

"On weekdays, he was always the last child out of creche. And on weekends I was working. I was in pilot mode all the time," she says.

Nodumo felt guilty for not having the capacity to be a more present mother,

*'I'm at peace now'*

With English being Kevin's home language while he lived with Nodumo in Johannesburg, she was worried that he would struggle to adjust to speaking a new language, and that he'd find it difficult to socialise with his peers. But Kevin rose to the challenge and is adapting well to his new environment, enjoying a quieter way of life.

Nodumo had returned to her home town during the Christmas holidays to visit her mother and reunite with Kevin – a trip that affirmed her decision to send him to live with his grandmother.

and equally guilty when she made the decision for him to live with her mother in another city so he could get the care he needed.

"Looking at what he needed as a five-year-old child, I wasn't in the right space. And I had to remind myself what I always tell my Flourish moms, that you need to take care of yourself emotionally and not drain yourself. I preach this because I know what it feels like. Kids can sense when you're not present. But it's not easy being a single parent without additional support. You have to be 'on' all the time."

"He's learning so fast and I'm happy for him, and happy for my mom. She's no longer lonely and they're both enjoying their bond. I'm also at peace now," she says.

Going back to Johannesburg without Kevin was another adjustment for Nodumo, though she's still confident that she has made the right decision for her boy. She also recognises the positive influence that her own mother has had on Kevin.

"I never appreciated the way I was raised but, now, when I reflect on my



“WHEN  
I GAVE  
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EXPECT”



childhood, I recognise what a great job my mom did. I have no doubt that, with her help, I’m instilling the same values and morals in my own child.”

Nodumo admits to feeling lonely when she first arrived home from Bulawayo, but once the year got under way she fell back into her busy schedule.

“I’m still trying to work on giving myself time to rest,” she laughs. Still, she understands how necessary it is for her to meet her own needs so she can give back to others.



## Looking for answers to Africa's development issues

The busy mom will continue her MSc degree in Development Studies this year, after which she hopes to register for her doctorate, with a view of entering into the academic space.

"I'm drawn to development economics and the public health sector, always

looking for answers and solutions to the lack of development in African countries, and how that impacts women in particular. Here in South Africa, the public health sector is in shambles. So what do we do about it?"

## Passionate about women empowerment

Dovetailing with her studies and entrepreneurial endeavours, Nodumo is part of the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women's Mentoring Women in Business Programme. She is one of ten mentees who have received personalised online mentoring from an international businessperson who counsels and advises women entrepreneurs on fulfilling their business potential. "It's been a beautiful experience and has offered me some great exposure," she adds.

With the mentorship programme and her studies under way, applying to be a Mamandla Fellow seemed to be a logical next step for Nodumo, especially because of the networking opportunities that the fellowship offers.

"As a woman who is passionate about women empowerment and providing safe spaces for mothers, I saw the Mamandla Fellowship as an opportu-

nity to meet like-minded women who are working with mothers, but in different spaces," she says.

Nodumo adds that her work with pregnant mothers over the years has highlighted the myriad challenges birthing people face. The poor treatment of migrant mothers at the hands of health-care workers has been a focal point for the Mamandla Fellow, which is why she hopes to raise awareness about obstetric violence and ways to eradicate it.

"My journey with Embrace and the Mamandla Fellowship has unleashed a confidence in me that I never thought I had, and it's contributed significantly to the work that I do as a Flourish host. This has truly been a life-changing and extraordinary journey," she says.



## Creating the community she needed

Inspired by her own birthing experience, which left her feeling lost and without support, Nodumo works tirelessly to create the type of community that she needed in her early postpartum days.

“When I gave birth, I had no idea what to expect. I didn’t even know what to pack in my hospital bag! I didn’t have a community of mothers around me, and it was a tough journey. And though it got better with time, it made me realise that all mothers need a supportive community.”

Nodumo was hospitalised after her birth due complications during her Caesarean-section (the details of which have still not been disclosed to her). As a result, she was separated from her baby for ten days after giving birth. Luckily, her mother could make the journey from her home town to care for Kevin while she recovered, even encouraging Nodumo to stimulate her breastmilk again once she was discharged. With her mother’s help, Nodumo went on to breast-feed her son for 21 months.

The value of her mother’s support and encouragement was not lost on the new mom, and Nodumo hopes to emulate that in her own work, though she admits to feeling like she is never doing enough.

“Some moms need more than just classes. I know mothers who bring their babies home after birth to a settlement with no running water or electricity. Women in these communities need more than me telling



# “I KNOW MOTHERS WHO BRING THEIR BABIES HOME AFTER BIRTH TO A SETTLEMENT WITH NO RUNNING WATER OR ELECTRICITY”

them about their babies’ future when they don’t have a present.”

This year, Nodumo will continue with her studies and her work as a Flourish host, supporting expectant mothers in underresourced communities. She also hopes to increase awareness about the plight of women migrants in South Africa through her writing, and will continue to seek out partnerships and sponsorships for her Flourish franchises.

Nodumo was honoured as the Flourish Franchisee of the Year in 2021 and 2022, and was named the Flourish Businesswoman of the Year in 2022.

\*A programme of the Grow Great Campaign, Flourish is a national network of pregnancy and mom and baby classes that support, celebrate and empower mothers through the first 1000 days of a child’s life.





# THE VILLAGE GOGO

Mildred Hlatshwayo

People say that it takes a village to raise a child, but many mothers don't have one, and no-one understands this better than Mildred Hlatshwayo.

As a mother, grandmother and teacher, Mildred does what she can to offer a support structure to those who need it most.

Officially, Mildred Hlatshwayo is mother to her 32-year-old daughter, Yolanda, and a granny to her two grandbabies. Unofficially, parents and children across Cosmo City – Mildred's home base – call her 'mom', or Teacher Gogo, for the role she plays as a cornerstone in their parenting village.

In addition to a day job as a teacher's assistant at a pre-school in Johannesburg North, Mildred runs an early childhood development (ECD) centre, in Cosmo City. During the day, Mildred trusts Yolanda to oversee the ECD centre, which Yolanda does with the help of an all-women team.

Early each morning, Mildred ensures that the centre has everything it needs to run for the day before she departs for her 08:00 to 16:00 job. Then, when she returns at about 17:00, she makes sure she's available for parents who are arriving to fetch their children.

“At the centre, we embrace people from all walks of life and try to take care of everyone in the community. What I’ve realised is that Cosmo City is a mixed community of people with different backgrounds and social statuses. Some parents are struggling financially and might need childcare while they look for jobs or go to interviews. I am always there to help,” assures Mildred.

She identifies when parents need to be subsidised and always makes a plan for parents who are struggling financially. However, as more than just a childcare services provider, Mildred’s unofficial portfolio includes emotional support for mothers who are otherwise unsupported or, worse, abused at home.

“WHAT I’M ADVISING  
MOTHERS TO DO IS WHAT  
I DO – I PRIORITISE THE  
TIME I HAVE AVAILABLE TO  
TAKE CARE OF MYSELF”

#### ‘Women are not robots’

Since establishing the ECD centre in 2019, Mildred has realised that mothers’ needs extend to so much more than food security and financial stability. She highlights verbal and emotional abuse as a largely overlooked form of gender-based violence, and notes how prevalent it is in her community.

“We see a lot in the media about sexual and physical abuse, but verbal abuse happens behind closed doors. Women are called lazy, stupid, and useless, or

their partners say they are bad mothers. Some women’s husbands don’t allow them to work,” says Mildred, who hopes to one day equip women to know their worth and stand up for themselves when they need to.

Mildred believes that verbal abuse has been so normalised among men that they underestimate the damage they are doing.





it comes to harsh words or silent treatment, they don't seem to know the damage they're inflicting. We need to start with campaigns that educate men about verbal abuse so they know that it's off limits."

Mildred adds that society expects a lot from women, especially mothers.

"Women are not robots. They need to learn that it's okay to put their feet up, and they need to be equipped with words that

"It starts with the abuser," she says. "If you hit or slap someone, you know you're inflicting pain on that person. But when

affirm who they are: 'You are beautiful. You can do this. You're a great mother,'" she says.

### Addressing child hunger in Cosmo City

Mildred dons several hats daily with the help of Yolanda, who she describes as her 'go-to' person.

"Yolanda is at the forefront of everything that I do, and I'm also there supporting her," she says.

Together, the mom-and-daughter duo have big plans for the future, including establishing a soup kitchen to address child hunger in the community.

"We have recognised the need for proper nutrition among our kids. We often notice that the porridge we serve at the ECD centre looks like the only wholesome meal the children eat in a day. By the time we offer breakfast, the children are starving. It's clear that many don't have enough food in their homes," says Mildred.

She hopes to start the soup kitchen this year to benefit all people in the commu-



nity and, with the help of connections made through the Mamandla Fellowship, she has already secured a food sponsor who will help with supply for the year.

“I know the logistics will fall into place. Embrace is a community that connects and, with their backing, I am not worried. I’m grateful to the fellowship for supporting me, and for entertaining all my crazy ideas,” she laughs.

“I’m willing to go all the way, because I know I have their support. If I fall, there are ladies who are there to pick me up and walk with me through the journey.”

‘It’s okay to be ‘selfish’

With her passion, experience and drive for change, Mildred has a lot to offer her community. However, she’s become aware of her own limitations and knows that she runs the risk of burning out if she isn’t cognisant about filling her own cup.



“Thanks to Embrace and Mamandla, I’ve learnt that it’s okay to be selfish. I used to be a person who couldn’t say no to anyone, and I often burnt out or became resentful. So now, what I’m advising mothers to do is what I do – I prioritise the time I have available to take care of myself. I make sure I’m there to lend an ear to parents and mothers in need, but once it’s 19:00, that’s my time. And that’s how I manage to do all that I need to do,” she says.

Still, in what little spare time she has, Mildred’s door is always open to single and working mothers who need help with their little ones. Parents bring their children to Mildred for overnight – or sometimes week-long – stays, as well as on weekends and holidays. Over

“WE OFTEN NOTICE THAT THE PORRIDGE WE SERVE AT THE ECD CENTRE LOOKS LIKE THE ONLY WHOLESOME MEAL THE CHILDREN EAT IN A DAY”

December, she made herself available to help mothers who needed to work.

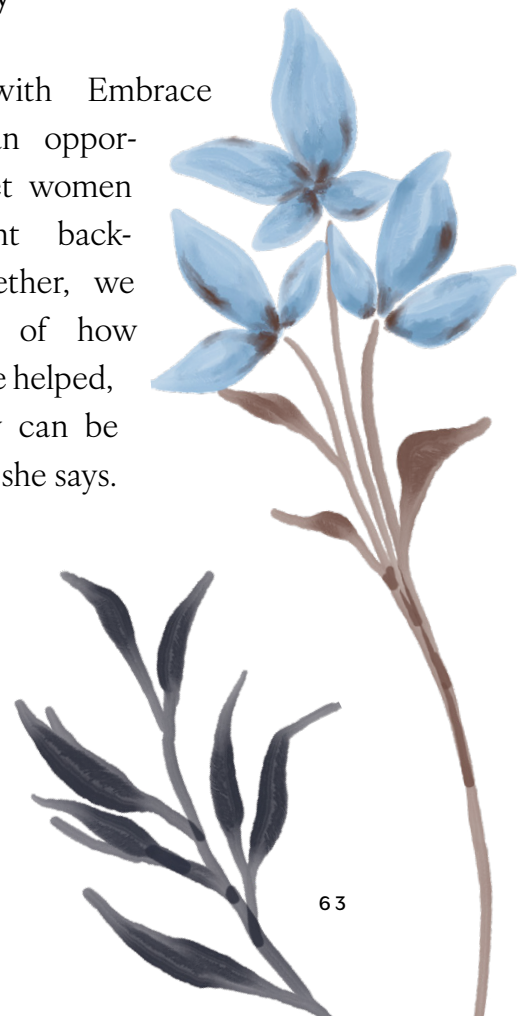
“Something we’ve realised at the ECD centre is that we need to help take the burden off our parents. Mothers also

need ‘me’ time, and if someone doesn’t have a strong support system, they’ll see their child as a burden. All a mother needs sometimes is a helping hand to watch over their child so they can take a break,” she says.

*Better equipped to continue the advocacy journey*

Mildred will continue to support mothers in her community but, following her year as a Mamandla Fellow, she believes she’s now much better equipped to counsel mothers and offer informed advice. Before, Mildred would rely on her own experience or things she had heard or read to advise the mothers around her, whereas now she has better resources to continue her work as a motherhood advocate.

“My time with Embrace offered me an opportunity to meet women from different backgrounds. Together, we shared ideas of how mothers can be helped, and how they can be taken care of,” she says.





# A REFLECTION ON HOW WE CAN PROTECT MOTHERS’ DIGNITY AND AUTONOMY IN OUR SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS

**Wanga Zembe-Mkabile**

When I first started my work with low-income mothers in the mid-2000s, the prevailing narrative was that women were falling pregnant to get the Child Support Grant – a cash transfer so small it is unable to meet the nutritional needs of the children it targets. This narrative painted low-income mothers as irresponsible and neglectful; only concerned about getting their hair done and drinking alcohol, as women who did not know or care about appropriate feeding and raising of their children. In this narrative, low-income women were perceived as gullible consumers of social media and marketing messaging that teaches them to make wrong choices about how to feed and raise their children, possessing no personal agency.

More than a decade later, this narrative persists, and I have made it my life’s work to change it. This is because of the hundreds of women I have interviewed and surveyed for my studies who have shown over and over again they are nothing like the “Welfare Queen”





stereotype projected by social and mainstream media when talking about low-income mothers. The women I've met are not powerless or weak, even as they are sometimes beaten down by the overwhelming, unrelenting mental and physical stress of trying to provide for and care for their children, often with little social and economic support.

They are articulate about the unfair hand they've been dealt by the most unequal society in the world; and they understand the collusion of racism, gender inequality, misogyny, poverty and economic inequality which make the daily navigation of mothering and parenting difficult and painful. And yet they live for their children, even as they yearn for a little relief from the daily toll of trying to make ends meet with the small income they receive from social grants; and the daily trade-offs they are forced to make between buying food or paying rent or electricity or schoolbooks and school transport or fixing the leaking roof of their 1-room shack. Trade-offs that no human being should have to make. They make rational decisions about how to feed and raise their children, even when some of their choices are considered poor judgment. They make something out of nothing, badib-

anisa amathe nenyembezi to ensure their children are fed, loved and cared for.

Our social protection systems need to be more responsive to mothers. We need to center their voices and experiences when formulating policies and guidelines meant to improve child health because a healthy, happy and supported mother results in a happy, thriving child. We need to recognise that we cannot achieve child health and wellbeing without maternal health and wellbeing; the one precedes and is a prerequisite for the other. It does not make sense to only have a social grant for children if we do not have social assistance for primary caregivers tasked with raising those children. We need women-centered health and social services where women are treated with dignity and are presumed as capable human beings with agency to make the best decisions about their lives and their children.

Social fellowships such as Mamandla play an important role in actualising responsive social protection systems for mothers, through the work they do in centering and amplifying the voices of mothers so that they are able to use their voices for change.

## About Wanga



Wanga Zembe-Mkabile is a Senior Specialist Scientist at the South African Medical Research Council. Her work focuses on social determinants of health in the context of maternal and child health and wellbeing, and utilises a social policy perspective. Her main interests are research and teaching in social policy, specifically as this relates to poverty, inequality, health and wellbeing. Wanga is also a mother and loves cooking, music and reading. She is passionate about social justice and equality, and supporting and amplifying the voices of mothers from low-income settings. Wanga is a guest facilitator for the Mamandla Fellowship.



# SMALL-TOWN GIRL, BIG AMBITIONS

**Mahlatse Kgatle**

A small-town girl with big ambitions, mom Mahlatse Kgatle refuses to settle for less. And whatever rewards the oral health major reaps, she's bringing back to the community that helped raised her.

Single mom and university student Mahlatse Kgatle has always been altruistic and ambitious, perpetually shooting for the stars. And while the young mother continues to face several challenges in her journey – including being separated from her three-year-old son, Hlompho, while she completes her studies – she remains steadfast in her approach to success, both in motherhood and her career in dentistry.

Mahlatse hails from Lenyene, a township in Greater Tzaneen (which also happens to be the hometown of Miss South Africa 2022, Ndavi Nokeri). Throughout her childhood, she was encouraged and supported by hardworking parents, who prioritised their daughter's education. While most parents would urge their children to go outdoors and play, Mahlatse's mother encouraged her daughter to concentrate on her studies.

“I was one of those children who was always indoors. The outside community was not safe for a girl. So I

went to school, to church, to university. I needed to make sure that I didn't sell myself short for the sake of survival," she says.

According to Mahlatse, her Limpopo hometown faces elevated school drop-out rates and rising teen pregnancies, which comes with a core sentiment that young women who fall pregnant don't have a future.

### Improving the community 'one step at a time'

Thankfully, the young mother refuses to subscribe to this belief and, with the continued support of her parents, who look after Hlompho during the school term, Mahlatse is finalising her studies in dentistry at the University of the Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg.

Here, her struggle with gender inequality continues, as she fights to pave her way in the male-dominated oral health sector. Mahlatse is passionate about dentistry, and aims to specialise in orthodontics. Nursing a passion to serve and educate underserved communities, she especially wants to help patients with congenital dental disorders.

Until then, the future orthodontist aims to promote oral healthcare and educa-

"The minute a woman falls pregnant, especially if she is young, she's not perceived as a priority within our community. Young women in Lenyene are not empowered, protected, or cared for, and if you don't have a partner to help you, the belief is that you will amount to nothing," says Mahlatse.

tion in her hometown, starting with children in school.

"This is something that we do on a daily basis here in Gauteng, and it doesn't make sense that my home community doesn't reap the benefits of my work. Something as simple as handing out toothpaste and promoting oral healthcare will open doors to improve the community one step at a time," she says.

But Mahlatse acknowledges that she needs a network to lean on if she wants to achieve this goal. While the goal might be simple, liaising with schools and communities, accessing education packages and acquiring additional resources – not to mention the work on the ground – can only be achieved with the help of others.





“MY YEAR WITH MAMANDLA HAS  
CONNECTED ME WITH LIKE-MINDED  
PEOPLE WHO HAVE THE SAME  
HUNGER AND PASSION AS ME”



### Life as a single mom: Am I enough?

As a single parent, a similar feeling of isolation pervades Mahlatse's personal life from time to time, with doubt often creeping in.

"I'm not sure if it's because I've been conditioned to think that it's a problem, but I have questioned if I will be able to be the full person that my son needs me to be. It's been a constant worry for me, and one of my biggest challenges as a mother," she says.

Having grown up with both parents in her life, Mahlatse has feared raising Hlompho without a father, and often

feels pressured to find a male partner to co-parent with. However, equally as often, the young mother reminds herself that she made the right decision for her and her son.

"I saved myself from a toxic environment. If I had stayed in that relationship, I would have had to compromise myself to meet the standards of a society that doesn't know where to draw the line in terms of norms and acceptance. As much as I feel like I denied my child a father figure, I must acknowledge that I saved myself and him in the process."

# “I NEEDED TO MAKE SURE THAT I DIDN'T SELL MYSELF SHORT FOR THE SAKE OF SURVIVAL”

‘Really, small-town girl?’

Mahlatse recognises that self-doubt and imposter syndrome rear their patriarchal heads when she starts second-guessing her ambitions. “I feel like I’m being over-zealous, and I think to myself, ‘Really, small-town girl? You really think you can do that?’”

But the young mother has broken patterns and transcended accepted ideals and ideologies that don’t serve her altruism or her ambitions. Time and again, she’s proved that she can do it, and will continue to do so.

Mahlatse first came to know about Embrace and the Mamandla Fellowship through a Mother’s Day Connect event in 2019. Drawn to outreach and community work, her first impression of Embrace as a movement inspired her to challenge herself a couple of years later.

However, Mahlatse admits that relying on a network of people was an initial

hurdle she had to overcome when applying to become a fellow.

“I always do things solo, because I’ve got trust issues. People never do what they’re supposed to do and I get angry or feel let down. But my year with Mamandla has connected me with like-minded people who have the same hunger and passion as me.”

Being a fellow has also shown Mahlatse that a community-driven mindset reaps far-reaching rewards.

“I would love to create a network where women can speak openly with one another and find ways to better ourselves together. There are so many educated people within our communities, but everyone is so isolated. We need to come together, educate and empower one another,” she says.





# MOTHER ON THE MOVE

Lyndall Moodley

Mom of four Lyndall Moodley is a decorated entrepreneur as owner of South Africa's No 1 online maternity store, Hannah Grace. She has been recognised as one of KwaZulu-Natal's Top Business Women in 2022 and Hannah Grace was a runner up in the KZN Top Business Awards in the innovation category. She also serves on the Board of Trustees of Khanyisa Developmental Centre, and is the Sunday School lead at the church she attended as a girl – and now brings her family to – in Phoenix, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). The juggle is no doubt real for this self-starter. Here is how, and why, she does it.

As a fifth-generation member of her Phoenix-based church in KwaZulu-Natal, mom of four Lyndall Moodley is passionate about giving back to the community that raised her. Even though the mother of four is settled with her family in Umhlanga, she is still very involved in the community and is passionate about challenging societal views and patriarchal expectations of women.



“I feel called to work with the younger generation in my community, to help mould their perceptions differently about what you can be as a woman and what you can accomplish. As girls we were always taught that we could take leadership roles, but there was always a ceiling, even in the corporate world”.

Lyndall felt this discrimination firsthand and, especially when she became a mother working in the corporate world, she grew to resent it.

“The corporate world doesn’t understand motherhood, and yet men write the policies for maternity leave, sick days, family responsibility leave...

Unfortunately, it’s not the same for a man, and the level of guilt a father feels is different,” she says.

“Every woman has a skill that she can use to bring in income. And, if you’re in an abusive home, you can gain your independence. It might not be overnight, but you can get out. And if you’re a young girl in a male-dominated world telling you that you’re going to stop at a certain level, that’s not your reality. You can define your own reality,” says the advocate.

After facing several instances of tragedy within her community, Lyndall and her fellow church leaders identified a need



for more practical assistance, especially post-Covid. The church leaders are therefore undergoing training in professional counselling to better equip themselves in the areas of trauma, sexual abuse and depression, among other mental health struggles.

### Empowering children who are differently abled

Lyndall is a woman with the capacity to see each individual's potential beyond their limitations. It's a special skill she's honed over the years, and one that's proved especially useful as a mother of four.

However, Lyndall's foray into motherhood was not without its challenges. Having experienced asphyxia at birth, her eldest son faced several developmental delays, which remained undiagnosed for the first six years of his life.

In search of answers after years of misdiagnoses in South Africa, Lyndall, her husband and her son travelled to Bangkok for stem cell treatment, where a team of doctors – paediatricians, speech therapists and occupational therapists (OTs) – were finally able to conclude that Lyndall's son had low-level cerebral palsy.

“That was a journey in motherhood! By the time the diagnosis was picked up we had had two other children already. It was a very difficult thing to be able to hear and deal with as a family, but we were also relieved that we knew what we were dealing with. We could

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tackle what was in front of us to pave a way forward for our son,” she says.

It’s as a result of this journey that Lyndall serves on the Board of Trustees at Khanyisa Developmental Centre, a school in Umhlanga that caters to children with different needs. Even though Lyndall’s son no longer attends Khanyisa, she has chosen to remain a part of the school to help create aware-

ness about children with special needs and drive legislative change.

ambassador for the South African branch of the World Fitness Federation (WFF)

“He’s been very fortunate that he’s been in physio and OT from a young age, so he’s got immense upper body strength and, as a result, he showcased for the WFF, who named him their sports ambassador,” she says.

## “I WANTED TO BE PART OF A MOVEMENT THAT REACHES BEYOND JUST MY DEMOGRAPHIC”

Lyndall is hoping to use this platform to raise awareness and educate people about the sports that children can take part in.

“I believe in Khanyisa’s vision of inclusiveness and its mandate to change the perception of children with different abilities in sport and education,” she says.

Lyndall’s son is testament to this. Last year he was selected to be a brand

“They need to know that they can represent their province, or their country. They can achieve their goals as well,” says the mom.



### When one door opens

Lyndall had been working as a marketing manager for a multinational consumer goods corporation when she decided to venture into entrepreneurship and opened the Gateway branch of mom and baby store Kids Emporium. Then a mom of three, Lyndall wanted to manage her own time and be free to pursue her philanthropy.

But Lyndall had not anticipated that she would receive her son's diagnosis at around the same time, which made it difficult to give her business the attention that it needed.





“It was a hard time for our family, and for me to be available for my retail store was proving difficult, so I ended up selling my franchise.”

But, as a parent company, Kids Emporium recognised a good thing when they saw it, and offered Lyndall the opportunity to manufacture maternity wear that the parent company could stock. Lyndall accepted the challenge and her feeding and maternity clothing brand, Hannah Grace, was born.

“After launching Hannah Grace with Kids Emporium, the brand grew to a place where we needed an online presence, something that existed outside of a retail environment. So, I built a Wix website overnight and managed it myself, with the little knowledge I

have!” laughs Lyndall. But the timing was right and this mother’s work ethic was unparalleled.

“We tried to be on the forefront of all things digital so that we could grow the Hannah Grace e-commerce platform. Sizing can be such a tricky thing with pregnant women, so we started investing in artificial intelligence on the site to help women get their sizing right.”

When Covid hit in 2020, Lyndall and her team were well versed in online retail and Hannah Grace was a sustainable business. This prompted Lyndall to pursue in-house manufacturing and today the mom-owned business boasts 6 permanent employees, and a fully fitted CMT (Cut make and trim factory).

## Impact across demographics

Lyndall’s journey with Embrace started in her capacity as a business owner. She wanted somewhere meaningful to donate factory overruns to and asked Embrace to point her in the right direction.

But, soon enough, Lyndall became drawn to the work Embrace was doing in South Africa’s mothering community, which is what prompted her to apply for the Mamandla Fellowship.

“I wanted to be part of a movement that reaches beyond just my demographic. I want to reach more than that. So getting in and signing up as a Mamandla fellow has given me inroads with other moms and young ladies that are involved in different areas of women and mother mentorship,” she says.

Through her work with Embrace and other Mamandla fellows, Lyndall has partnered with Flourish, a support network for mothers, and actively spon-

“EVEN THOUGH I DO A LOT, IT ALWAYS FEELS LIKE I CAN DO MORE, WHICH IS SOMETHING THAT I THINK A LOT OF WOMEN STRUGGLE WITH, THAT WE AREN'T DOING ENOUGH”

sors a Johannesburg-based franchise through Hannah Grace.

“I feel like that’s one way that my business can give back. And for me to be able to network with moms that are doing good work is so much more fulfilling rather than doing random giveaways on Instagram. Mamandla has enabled me to network with other moms in the maternity space,” she says.

True to form, Lyndall doesn’t intend to slow down anytime soon. With plans in the works to establish a movement for competitive sport for differently abled children ( with her son as the spearhead of this), as well as a community-based entrepreneurship education programme for women, Lyndall’s philanthropy and drive to make a difference is open-ended.

“Even though I do a lot, it always feels like I can do more, which is something that I think a lot of women struggle with, that we aren’t doing enough. But at the end of the day, I’m first and foremost a mom to my four children. And if I’m able to leave behind a legacy for my sons, and for my daughters to see what they can be in life, then that would be a success for me,” she concludes.





# STRIVING FOR MOTHER- CENTRED CARE

Jolene Hollenbach

Realising how deep the issues in South Africa's healthcare sector ran, nurse and midwife Jolene Hollenbach felt impelled to use her knowledge, experience, and drive where it would have more of an impact for South African mothers.

Nurse and midwife Jolene Hollenbach had been working in private health care for 16 years when, in 2021, she resigned from formal employment to pursue her calling as a private midwife and motherhood advocate.

Over the years, Jolene had become increasingly passionate about the rights of pregnant and labouring mothers, having noticed how, all too often, those rights are not upheld by healthcare providers.

“Having a baby is one of the hardest things a woman can do and, as a nurse and midwife, I will do whatever it takes to make you comfortable. But unfortunately, that’s not how it works in the rest of the world, even though all midwives and nurses undergo the same training,” she says.





“IT’S NOT THE RESPONSIBILITY  
OF THE BIRTHING MOTHER  
TO MAKE SURE THAT SHE  
DOESN’T GET ABUSED”





The mistreatment of mothers at the hands of doctors, nurses and midwives hit Jolene's radar in a big way. Pregnant women and mothers reached out to her on social media and she started hearing stories from women all over South Africa – especially in public healthcare – who did not receive the care they needed while giving birth.

During her studies, Jolene was briefly exposed to public midwife and obstetrics units and was shocked to discover how mothers were treated in government hospitals.

“I get angry when I think that it's my colleagues in nursing and midwifery

who are perpetuating violence against pregnant and labouring mothers. Where does it come from? We can all acknowledge that public healthcare workers are under-resourced and underpaid – these things are real and true – but what do we do to get us back to where we are supposed to be?”

Obstetric abuse in South Africa is rampant across public and private spaces, but in Jolene's experience, there are more opportunities for abuse in the public sector due to the public sector being severely under-resourced. This is what prompted the midwife to search for alternative ways to make an impact.

### Promoting sensitive midwifery and empowered birth

Jolene started her advocacy journey by signing up for a course in sensitive midwifery, convened by renowned local midwife Sr Lilian Paramor. Jolene's intention was to use what she had learned to influence her colleagues to employ mother-centred care in their practice.

Feeling called to help women who don't have access to antenatal classes or the benefits of private healthcare, Jolene resigned from her job in the private sector to focus on antenatal preparation. For the past two years she's been working as a private midwife, helping

Flourish\* franchisees with their antenatal classes and, more recently, consulting with mothers at a gynaecologist's office.

With first-hand knowledge of what happens when women enter the labour ward unprepared, Jolene is intent on pumping the expectant mothers she meets with love, positivity and knowledge.

“If you go in there not knowing, then basically you accept anything that happens. But if you as a mother are informed, you will speak up with confi-

dence. Obviously not in a way that is disrespectful to the healthcare workers, but in a way that helps you assert your rights.”

Jolene’s aim is to be present pre-labour, to ensure that her clients feel empowered.

“If I can change the labour ward, I can change the way mothers perceive themselves. So my goal is to explain to women what happens when they go into labour, and to help them understand what is happening in their bodies. It just makes me so emotional, because I know I won’t be able to help everyone,” she laments.

“HEALTHCARE WORKERS SHOULD BE HELPING MOTHERS FEEL EMPOWERED, BECAUSE THE EASIEST THING TO FEEL AFTER HAVING A BABY IS USELESS”

Lasting change starts from within the sector

Nevertheless, Jolene still wanted to make a difference at healthcare worker level. But she knew that the problem was too large to tackle on her own, which is why she signed up to be a Mamandla Fellow.

“I felt like this was a good starting block to help healthcare workers get back to the sensitive, dignified and respectful way of treating women in their most vulnerable state.

I am still trying to figure out what went wrong with us. Most people will blame overcrowded and understaffed hospitals, but if every nurse and midwife tried to

do our best for our mothers, that would make the biggest difference already.”

Jolene believes that true, lasting change needs to start with doctors, midwives and nurses, who are the first point of contact for new mothers.

“It’s not the responsibility of the birthing mother to make sure that she doesn’t get abused. Healthcare workers should be helping mothers feel empowered, because the easiest thing to feel after having a baby is useless,” she says.

With that said, Jolene acknowledges that informed women who know their rights

and are confident enough to speak up against mistreatment often risk reprisal from labour ward staff.

“It’s hard for me to tell moms what they should expect, knowing that that’s probably not what they’re going to experience. It feels like I should be telling moms to play small and to do what healthcare

workers tell them to do, even though they are better informed. But that might be the only way to keep them safe and make sure they don’t get abused.”

Jolene adds, however, that mothers generally do not speak up, because most don’t know that they can. This is something she would like to change.

### Mitigating teen pregnancy rates

In the years to come, Jolene aims to broaden her reach by educating girls and young women about sexual and reproductive health, including family planning. With rising teen pregnancy rates – and girls as young as ten being expected to take responsibility for contraception – the midwife would like to help young women take control of their futures through knowledge and education.

Jolene is mother to a 12-year-old “little-big” girl, so the cause is especially close to her heart. She recognises how much responsibility our young women have to bear with little to no support, in a largely abusive healthcare sector.



“For the most part, the culture is that each girl should bump her own head and make her own mistakes. But I believe in informing them that they have a choice and should be emotionally prepared for motherhood.

‘Before I am a midwife, I am a mom’

Before applying to become a Mamandla fellow, Jolene had been championing Embrace’s work for several years. But, after some time on the sidelines, she wanted to be more directly involved in the movement’s drive for change, recognising the fellowship as her chance to do just that.

“Embrace is all about mothers and helping mothers, which is what I live and breathe. Before I am a midwife, I am a mom helping other mothers through this journey,” she says.

Jolene adds that society leaves no room for mothers to admit that they’re struggling.

“You feel so much shame when being a mother is not exactly what you thought

“I wish that more mothers and older women would take care of the younger generation, since we have been there and experienced these things, good and bad.”

it might be. Knowing that they need to feel ‘blessed’ about their ‘bundle of joy’, mothers feel shame and guilt for getting sad or overwhelmed. But Mamandla recognises this, fights for a mother’s rights and affirms her feelings, which is exactly what I want to be doing,” she says.

\*A programme of the Grow Great Campaign, Flourish is a national network of pregnancy and mom and baby classes that support, celebrate and empower mothers through the first 1000 days of a child’s life.



# INFORMAL NETWORKS AS CATALYSTS FOR SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Kentse Radebe

In 2022 I had the privilege of attending one of the Mamandla Fellowship Power Trips hosted by Embrace where Fellows who had been engaging virtually, would have the opportunity to come together in person to connect. The Embrace team had pulled together a jam-packed weekend where Fellows would engage in topics relating to nutrition, their birthing experiences, and maternal mental health alongside other topical issues affecting mothers broadly. It was a fantastic opportunity for the Fellows to reflect on their own journey into motherhood and share their experiences with others. However, spending time connecting with these amazing women highlighted that the real magic of the experience was creating a space for mothers to connect, get to know each other, and to find community.

We know more often than not mothers typically receive social support in the form of direct engagement with public health practitioners such as nurses, midwives, and community health workers where the focus is primarily on improving child outcomes and caregiver support. A significant focus is placed on providing information, advice and education and often views the mother as a conduit to the child as opposed to individuals whose own wellbeing should be priori-



tised<sup>1</sup>. This is despite the understanding that the early days of motherhood are critical and often require mothers to have a support network that goes beyond facilitating the needs of the child.

The CoCare Report released by Grow Great in 2021 illustrated that beyond improving the economic conditions of mothers we need to pay attention to psych-social wellbeing<sup>2</sup>. A key protective factor for good mental health is having access to resources and support in one's community. This often includes informal networks in one's community or online. This represents the crux of the support network and community that Embrace is seeking to build for mothers.

Every mother, regardless of their economic and social context, should have access to a community of individuals that are invested in her journey to motherhood and can provide supportive advice, connections to resources and a space where they receive non-judgemental and empathetic support. We know that income support, nutrition, a responsive healthcare system, safe communities, and progressive caregiving policies are key building blocks for ensuring that the experience of motherhood, from the earliest days, are positive. The foundation of that is providing maternal support networks that prioritise and elevate the experience of motherhood. These are also spaces that facilitate the kind of social support, at a micro-level, that can have a significant and positive impact on the challenges that mothers face whilst also providing a conduit for accessing information that ultimately benefits mothers, their children and their communities.

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1 Matlwa Mabaso K, Laurenzi C, Menyatsoe M, Gemmell K, Manda S, Tomlinson, M. Impact of COVID-19 on wellbeing of pregnant women in 7 neighbourhoods in the Western Cape. Johannesburg, Grow Great Campaign, March 2021

2 Matlwa Mabaso K, Laurenzi C, Menyatsoe M, Gemmell K, Manda S, Tomlinson, M. Impact of COVID-19 on wellbeing of pregnant women in 7 neighbourhoods in the Western Cape. Johannesburg, Grow Great Campaign, March 2021

## About Kentse



Kentse Radebe is currently the Innovation Director:

Keep All Children on Track at DGMT. Prior to joining DGMT, Kentse was based at the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation & Entrepreneurship at the Graduate School of Business at UCT. She is a member of the Wellcome Trust Ideas Hub focusing on mental health, a Tekano Health Equity Atlantic Fellow, a Fulbright Scholar, a Mail & Guardian 2019 Young 200 award recipient and an Allan Gray Orbis Foundation Fellow.



# GROWING THROUGH WHAT YOU GO THROUGH

Chimonay Masumbe

After her divorce, Chimonay Masumbe hit rock bottom before she realised that she has what it takes to make a marked difference, not in spite of being a single mom, but because of it.

Your most valuable parenting skill is learning to manage yourself first.

Dr Laura Markham

A few years into her marriage, Chimonay Masumbe noticed that her relationship wasn't turning out to be the fairytale she'd expected. These feelings first cropped up when her son, Nikolai, was about three. By the time Nikolai turned five, Chimonay and her husband were divorced.

One year later, the mom fell into a depression so dark, that she felt no connection with her son or herself. But today, Chimonay is an Honours graduate in Applied Psychology, and continues to heal within herself, while supporting others.

Still, the journey was not easy for the Mamandla Fellow. As someone who had always played by the rules, and



as a young woman who was always recognised as “the good kid” growing up, Chimonay was not prepared to be a divorcee, or a single mother.

Moreover, while taking on the role of mom and dad, Chimonay faced mounting debt, which is why she decided to accept a job offer as an English Lecturer in the Middle East. It would help her get

back on the front foot financially, but there was a catch. She would have to leave her only son behind. Nikolai went to live with his aunt and grandmother while Chimonay left to get her life and finances back on track.

This was when the wheels truly started falling off for Chimonay, who was thrust into a dark depression.

*‘I felt that I failed them as a daughter’*

“I was brought up in a home where, when life hits you with unexpected curveballs, you just take it as it comes and you move on. But that catches up with you after many years, and I think that’s what happened to me when I was in the Middle East,” says Chimonay.

Logically, she could reason that she had moved to Saudi Arabia to earn a better salary and provide for Nikolai’s needs. She recognised that her life had hit a ditch, and that she needed to leave South Africa – and everything that reminded her of her pain.

“I knew I was better off, but I still cried myself to sleep for the first six months, because I missed Nikolai so much,” says the mom.

Loneliness gripped her and, with no-one to open up to, depression set in. She

started letting herself go, staying out late and acting out of character to numb the pain of how she was feeling.

“It just wasn’t me. I wanted to be around people but at the same time I felt trapped in this hole. That’s when I realised something was not right.”

Chimonay was scared and embarrassed to open up to her parents about how she was feeling. Even though they supported her and did not judge her decisions, the shame and guilt of getting divorced and moving away kept her from disclosing how she really felt.

*“I felt that I failed them as a daughter, because I couldn’t meet the expectations of a married woman.”*



“DEPRESSION  
ISOLATES  
YOU AND  
ROBS YOU  
OF YOUR  
VOICE”

‘I felt like I’d abandoned him’

In Saudi, Chimonay was able to confide in a friend – an older woman who served as a mentor to the struggling mother. Then, one year into her tenure in the Middle East, Nikolai joined Chimonay as she changed posts and moved to Oman.

“Having him with me helped a lot. I felt like I’d abandoned him and failed him as a mom, but living together again closed many gaps between us.”

Moreover, the university that Chimonay worked at prioritised the mental health of its employees, and the single mom received the additional support she needed to heal. Even then, it took three years before she was able to see light at the end of the tunnel and, in retrospect, Chimonay wishes she had spoken up sooner.

“Depression isolates you and robs you of your voice. You are so consumed by these cognitive distortions, that you feel like there’s no hope. I wish in those

moments that I had reached out to a professional and sought counselling. If I had spoken sooner, even back when I saw things were not going right in my

marriage, I believe that I would have avoided the depth of depression I eventually found myself in.”

### ‘Leaning into my purpose’

As a parent who has battled with her mental health, Chimonay draws inspiration from a quote by clinical psychologist Dr Laura Markham: “Your most valuable parenting skill is learning to manage yourself first.”

According to Chimonay, she would not have been able to be the mother to Nikolai that she needed to be, had she not learnt to manage herself first.

“It wasn’t only about supporting him financially. It was about being a present mom and being there for him. I noticed that, when I was depressed, I was there physically, but I wasn’t there spiritually or psychologically. There was no connection, because I was in that dark pit.”

This realisation is part of what prompted Chimonay to come back home and pursue a postgraduate degree in Applied Psychology. She wanted to further her knowledge and understanding of depression and its effect on women in particular. She also wanted to explore other areas of teaching that she felt drawn to, including counselling and psychology.

“One of the reasons I decided to pursue my postgraduate studies was to help people, and not just in an educational setting as a lecturer or academic counsellor. It was also about me finding myself, exploring what I’d been through, and leaning into my purpose and what makes me happy.”



## Normalising single motherhood

Now that she has the credentials, the confidence and the experience, Chimonay would like to educate mothers about women's mental health. She also wants to normalise single motherhood in her community.

"I want to create awareness around the fact that it's okay to be a single mom, and that there's nothing wrong with it. To an extent, single parents are overlooked by the community. It's assumed that we are doing fine if we have a job and a supportive family, but that's not always the case," says Chimonay.

She adds that single mothers are largely overlooked on the basis of what they have to offer. It's taken a few years, but the Mamandla fellow now recognises that she has the educational background and work experience to present workshops and offer professional support.

"My focus is to let women who are going through this know that they are heard,



and that they are not alone. Being part of the Mamandla Fellowship has made me realise that I can't let what I've been through go to waste. There are people who need to hear my story, and I'm going to work at forming a support group for single moms who suffer with mental health issues. Mamandla has given me the confidence to do that."

"BEING PART OF THE MAMANDLA  
FELLOWSHIP HAS MADE ME REALISE  
THAT I CAN'T LET WHAT I'VE BEEN  
THROUGH GO TO WASTE"





# MORE THAN ONE WAY TO MOTHER

Bronte Davies

In her journey as a doula and childbirth supporter, Bronte Davies feels the weight of helplessness and disillusionment that so often accompanies working in an embattled healthcare sector. Nevertheless, the doula remains dogged in her approach to change the system at a grassroots level.

What started out as just another night shift for Bronte Davies, ended with a stark realisation of what is lacking in South Africa's healthcare system and how much work there is to do.

It was a chilly winter's evening in Cape Town and already dark by the time the part-time doula and motherhood advocate arrived for her usual overnight shift at a nearby maternity hospital. It was one hour before the daytime midwives were due to finish their shift when a young mother, fully dilated, arrived at the ward. She would soon be ready to push, but there was no knowing how long that would take.

Bronte noticed that the midwives were fidgety, anxious and growing increasingly restless. They had a long way to travel but, tonight, the transport strike was their

main concern. Neither the taxis nor the MyCiti buses were running. And, while the hospital had arranged transport for its staff, those buses would leave as soon as the day shift ended. This meant that, if the young mother didn't deliver her baby within the hour, the nursing staff and midwives would be stranded.

baby to pass through quicker during the second stage of labour.

Bronte was present to support the mother but, as an auxiliary birth worker, she couldn't intervene or say anything to interrupt the midwives. Still, she was shocked.

Though she was not yet ready to push, the midwives opted to perform an episiotomy on the mother to speed up labour. Often performed without a labouring mother's consent, and typically in an emergency, an episiotomy is a surgical incision from the perineum to the posterior vaginal wall. It is deployed to enlarge the vaginal opening for the

"That team of healthcare workers, who I know and love and respect, is really good with young moms – they see so many. They know how labour progresses and that moms need to listen to what their bodies are telling them. And they know that episiotomies are not mother-centred care. This was a 17 or 18-year-old



woman, and an episiotomy is a big intervention,” she says.

According to Bronte, no-one checked with the mother if she had running water at home, or whether she had access to facilities to ensure that she could clean her incision properly to prevent infection. But she understood why the decision was taken.

“The midwives were putting themselves first in that situation, because they needed to get home, and they needed to get home safely,” she says.

A distraught Bronte arrived home that night and thought, “Where do we start? There is so much work to do.”

“WHEN I THINK ABOUT MY  
PASSION FOR SUPPORTING  
MOTHERS, I CAN TRACE IT BACK  
TO WHAT I OBSERVED FROM MY  
OWN MOTHER GROWING UP”

### A lifetime of mothering

Though the passionate doula and childbirth companion has not given birth, Bronte considers herself a mother in many ways.

For the last two years she has been volunteering at Midwife Obstetric Units (MoUs) and hospitals in Cape Town as part of The Zoe Project, a local NGO that offers counselling, birth support and psychosocial support to new mothers. The project also supplies maternity packs at MOUs, and runs antenatal classes for teenage mothers every eight

weeks to support young moms through birth and perinatal decision-making.

But Bronte’s maternal drive kicked in long before she started working with The Zoe Project. She draws much of her empathy towards mothers from her own mother, a playschool teacher who supported parents in their Stellenbosch community for the last 25 years.

“I don’t think it was a conscious decision to do what I do now. But when I think about my passion for supporting

mothers, I can trace it back to what I observed from my own mother growing up,” she says.

Bronte was raised to see birth as a beautiful and transformative thing, instead of petrifying or scary, and her natural tendency to nurture drew her to childbirth and doula work, even though it’s not her day job.

As a Master’s graduate in Public Health, Bronte works for a Cape Town-based NGO that currently trains health-care workers who treat patients with advanced HIV. But overnight and on weekends, Bronte assists and advocates for birthing mothers at a nearby MOU as a doula.

“Unless I’m processing a particularly traumatic birth, birth work is quite a

### A neutral birthing partner

Bronte is a deep-feeling empath who holds space for mothers outside of the MOU echo chamber.

Personally, the doula has grappled with the notion that women who have the lived experience of childbirth are better able to support birthing people. She worried about how she fit into that

## “THERE IS SO MUCH WORK TO DO”

meditative and transformative space for me,” she says.

For Bronte, being a doula is validating and affirming, a reminder of her ‘why’.

“When I attended my first birth, it felt illegal to be there. It felt like the oxytocin was leaking into me, like it was in the ether and I got to absorb it all. I still get that feeling when I help a mom latch her baby, especially a stressed or anxious mom.”

space, and if she still had a role, despite feeling called to do what she does.

“But a colleague recently mentioned that it’s actually an advantage and an asset for me to approach birth as a neutral party, without the experience of having birthed. That change in mindset has helped me immensely in how I show up to support moms,” she says.





'If we start now, the ball is already rolling'

a fellow doula are hoping to pilot the curriculum and eventually get it CPD certified.

"We are trying to shift the framework for maternal care. The course aims to train healthcare workers to also interpret the evidence out there of what it looks like to support physiological birth, and to put that evidence into practice."

Rolling up her sleeves as she continues to soldier ahead, Bronte is currently designing a course for healthcare workers on how to support mothers during physiological birth.

Having noticed that this kind of support work is not covered in medical or nursing school, or in midwifery training, Bronte and

Bronte's main goal is to help the system work better for moms, and to use the course as a stepping stone to address obstetric violence.

"The dream is to get this into standard practice. And, if we start now, then the ball is already rolling," she says.

## Inspired by Embrace's advocacy journey

Before signing up to become a Mamandla Fellow, Bronte had been watching Embrace's work from the side lines. She resonated with the movement's discussions and felt inspired by its advocacy for mothers. Bronte was particularly impacted by a 2021 panel discussion on decolonising doula practice.

"I loved the way Embrace facilitated that conversation. It really hit home and touched on a lot of the history of traditional birth attendants, as well as the elitism and difficulty that comes with modern doulaship. Embrace was saying all the things that I'd been telling moms, and I felt like I was totally on the same page," she says.

Recognising the synergy between Embrace and her doula work, Bronte signed up for the fellowship to harness the power of Embrace's network for the betterment of her own community.

"I feel like we're working in silos half the time and don't connect very well. So the space that Mamandla has facilitated with incredible moms and women is awesome to me. To fellowship with other women has been amazing," she says.

As a Mamandla alumna, Bronte hopes to help change the narrative around teenage pregnancy and obstetric violence in South Africa, to facilitate more dignified pregnancy, birth and postpartum experiences and ultimately, to make health systems work better for mothers.



# MAMANDLA ALUMNI UPDATES



2019 cohort





## Tasmin Bota (2019)

Prematurity, Postnatal Depression

### A WISH FOR MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

To actually be able to have that village that we often speak about - where we all actually see mothers and we show up without her ever having to ask

### ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU

To have gratitude for the relationships I have cultivated

### MAMANDLA CONNECTIONS

There have been many! Portia, Roeline, Taryn Zoë and I have collaborated for Word Prematurity Day. Portia helped me organise food sponsorships and seedling donations for our moms. I also joined Joey on her instagram live to talk about prematurity.

### HOPES/ PLANS/DREAMS FOR 2023

I have not made any formal plans for 2023. I'm kinda led by the spirit and so God usually reveals what the need is.



## Taryn Zoë Gurr (2019)

Disability activism and parent support, infant loss

### A WISH FOR MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

To have a compassionate and supportive birthing team, and an active support system after giving birth.

### ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU

To be proud of my fellow cohorts who have worked together so well to be even more effective for mums in SA.

### MAMANDLA CONNECTIONS

I knitted beanies and booties for premature babies to assist Tasmin of Premie Connect for World Prematurity Day. For almost every zoom call, my camera was off so I could knit and meet at the same time.

### HOPES/ PLANS/DREAMS FOR 2023

Watch this space!





## Christie Roberts (2019)

Maternal mental health, community support, social entrepreneurship

### A WISH FOR MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

I hope mothers in South Africa can feel valued - not just in relation to what they do for children, but as individuals with inherent worth

### ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU

Mamandla inspired the growth of the NPO, CNC4C (Cloth Nappy Collections for Change) that I help run. I know that being connected with other women, mothers and organisations has helped keep our focus, not just on what we do, but how we do it - to ensure dignity and to aim for empowerment rather than just charity

### MAMANDLA CONNECTIONS

Connecting with Rachel and Portia to expand our abilities to help mothers with referrals and resources in our respective networks.

### HOPES/ PLANS/DREAMS FOR 2023

To grow CNC4C beyond the individuals who make it work to be fully sustainable and to be in a position where we are able to take on more funders and let the project expand.



## Portia Mahlobo (2019)

Advocacy, Food Sovereignty and Skills Development

### A WISH FOR MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

To have the resources, energy and support to enjoy their motherhood journey

### ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU

Encouraged to bravely put my idea into action and help over 20,000 families, and to grow in understanding about different areas of motherhood in South Africa

### MAMANDLA CONNECTIONS

I have connected with several of the fellows on various projects helping communities with food parcels and mobilising resources for communities and schools. I worked with Somi to provide resources for schools in Protea Glen. I worked with Nolwazi, Tabea and Somi on Mandela Day to assist over 5000 families with food security and with Tasmin for the World Prematurity Day event at Rahima Moosa Mother and Child Hospital for the third year in a row.

### HOPES/ PLANS/DREAMS FOR 2023

To establish a food growers agreements and contracts for several women from the most vulnerable communities and survivors of gender-based violence.



### Tabea Mngadi (2019)

Maternal mental health, personal development in motherhood

#### A WISH FOR MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

To continue developing their holistic self and not forget that they are not limited to their role of mother.

#### ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU

My proudest moment in my Mamandla journey is certainly being given the opportunity to mentor other Mamandla fellows. Being given the opportunity to help women continue to see and awaken the best version of themselves gets my heart seriously on fire. Going on the immersions with like-minded women and mothers has been a cup-filling experience. I am always grateful for those experiences because being a mother myself, I know that we often focus a lot on filling others first before doing it for ourselves.

#### MAMANDLA CONNECTIONS

Helping Portia be a distribution channel for basic food essential parcels for people who are in need in my community. On Mandela Day, Joey and I were able to make a pragmatic impact and share these resources with 100 families.

#### HOPES/ PLANS/DREAMS FOR 2023

To publish my 90 Days Introspective Self-Discovery Journal.



### Nomfundo Msomi (2019)

Parent support, economic empowerment, personal development

#### A WISH FOR MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

I wish that every mother may lead a balanced life that allows her to work while also having enough time for herself, her children, and her loved ones. To achieve this, we must foster an environment that is supportive, and advocate for workplaces that are designed with mothers' needs in mind.

#### ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU

I am now aware of the complexities that shape motherhood in South Africa. I now have the ability to meet every mother from where they are instead of imposing my own beliefs on them.

#### MAMANDLA CONNECTIONS

Women Of Worth Movement Society worked with iThemba project, led by Portia, to distribute food parcels to 50 women-led households in Pietermaritzburg who were severely affected by the floods that took place in most parts of KZN. This campaign was supported by The Lunchbox Fund.

#### HOPES/ PLANS/DREAMS FOR 2023

To host at least four parenting workshops where we as mothers can meet to share knowledge and best practices about motherhood and discuss how we can best support each other.



## Somi Swana (2019)

Maternal mental health, personal development

### A WISH FOR MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

My greatest wish for mothers in South Africa is for each mom to have a deeper understanding of what motherhood is for themselves and what works for them so every mom can be able to build a life tailored to their healing, well-being and safety for their benefit and that of their family.

### ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU

The value of a like-minded and supportive community. The intentional get-togethers, the platform to build strong relationships with other fellows, transferable skills and knowledge we've gained through all the workshops the hub team set up for us. This journey has been so empowering and is a gift I will cherish forever.

### MAMANDLA CONNECTIONS

Together with Portia, Smangele, Tasmin and Tabea, we have been able to support the mom community in the Johannesburg CBD and Soweto through the pandemic with food parcels, childrens' clothing, referrals and support.

### HOPES/ PLANS/DREAMS FOR 2023

I would like to continue working on my NGO - African Social Service Aid and reach more communities.



## Yvette Zihhalirwa (2019)

Belonging and reducing social isolation

### A WISH FOR MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

For mothers to be seen and listened to

### ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU

I was inspired to build Tribune Connect - having been able to personally start it and connect mothers who were previously isolated in their motherhood journey and had no spaces to belong within their communities.

### MAMANDLA CONNECTIONS

Yes! I have recently connected with Bronte on a project my organisation is currently implementing in townships around Cape Town.

### HOPES/ PLANS/DREAMS FOR 2023

In January I had the incredible opportunity to live my big plan/dream for 2023 on the TEDxCapeTown Stage - The TEDxYouthCapeTown #LeadAhead Main Event



## Smangele Mathebula (2019)

Support, Self-Care

### A WISH FOR MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

For every mother to have a beautiful and well supported motherhood

### ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU

It's been inspiring to be part of an amazing community of incredible women and mothers.

### MAMANDLA CONNECTIONS

Plans for the Alumni are in ideation - watch this space!

### HOPES/ PLANS/DREAMS FOR 2023

To be an active member of the growing Mamandla alumni community.



## Dithoriso Mphuthi (2019)

Antenatal/ Postnatal care, entrepreneurship, gender-based violence advocacy

### A WISH FOR MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

I wish that mothers in South Africa can be treated equally, without discrimination and with dignity, and receive a pregnancy support grant from the government.

### ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU

One lesson Mamandla taught you: I am proud of the partnerships I have made and collaborations to support mothers in South Africa. The recent alumni gathering of Mamandla opened up more opportunities to collaborate within the fellowship.

### MAMANDLA CONNECTIONS

Mamandla connections: I have collaborated with Amanda on a devotional Sikunye piece on "Supporting Teenage Moms". I've also worked with Tana and Tasmin and the late Gillian Bird. There are many opportunities coming this year so watch this space!

### HOPES/ PLANS/DREAMS FOR 2023

My dream is to reach and support more moms in the Free State, specifically the Dealesville & Soutpan Community through Flourish.





## Duduzile Mathebula (2019)

Information, support and care

### A WISH FOR MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

To experience support and community that can empower them to dream.

### ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU

Definitely the mother connect activations for Mother's day were life changing. With support, women can access their power fully.

### MAMANDLA CONNECTIONS

Our dream as fellows continues to be one of support. Motherhood requires the presence of other mothers. We continue to champion each other with information and intention in the motherhood space. We're still in the ideation phase, but there are plans in the works.

### HOPES/ PLANS/DREAMS FOR 2023

To realise a care lab for skills development through the arts.



## Tana Makgoka (2019)

Antenatal/Birth/Postnatal

### A WISH FOR MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

For each mother's motherhood journey to be adequately informed, respected and supported by the circle of her choosing.

### ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU

Grateful for friendships formed with the other fellows and the new worlds that have opened up to me.

### MAMANDLA CONNECTIONS

Storytelling circle with Dithoriso

### HOPES/ PLANS/DREAMS FOR 2023

I'd like to explore the nexus between the arts and wellness more and connect that to supporting mothers in peri-urban spaces.



## Nolwazi Serero

Mompreneurs & Women Empowerment

### A WISH FOR MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Self Actualisation for every mother

### ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU

I learnt about self efficacy - that my growth and personal development is as important as those I advocate for. To look after myself to prevent compassion fatigue. Wellness is the foundation of being a great activist.

World Preemie Day is a cause that I was exposed to in my fellowship year through Tasmin. Every year I have had the privilege of inspiring moms with kids in hospitals at Bara, Charlotte Maxeke, Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital and Thelle Mogoerane. In 2022, I got to collaborate with Amanda at Bara. Teamwork makes the dream come true.

To launch Ms Boss Zonke platform digitally that will support Boss Moms around the country.



2021 cohort



## Gaopalelwe Phalaetsile

Conscious parenting, mental health

### A WISH FOR MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

To parent from a place of peace, rest, healing and love.

### ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU

The journey helped me see motherhood as political and not just something that happens in our homes. It made me recognise that mothers need support from all sectors of society.

### MAMANDLA CONNECTIONS

I've started a podcast with Palesa and Amanda

### HOPES/ PLANS/DREAMS FOR 2023

That mothers feel seen and heard



## Rachel Kinloch

Postpartum care and support

### A WISH FOR MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Every mom to have a doula for birthing and their first week at home.

### ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU

When like minded women come together, there is a palpable energy that can change the world.

### MAMANDLA CONNECTIONS

Nomfundo and I worked on a recycling project empowering mothers to collect recyclables to earn money whilst their babies were cared for. I also support Fellows' work through the Angel Network.

### HOPES/ PLANS/DREAMS FOR 2023

Creating a self-sustainable and upskilling community soup kitchen with flushing toilets, showers, lights and a vegetable garden in Inanda. It will serve a community of over 100 moms and children living in temporary homes, after the floods, with no access to electricity, water or ablutions. The project has just begun and I am so excited.





Joey Dlamini

Trauma healing and the journey of unlearning

**A WISH FOR MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

To be seen and heard.

**ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU**

Investing in self-care for mothers as a need instead of a want.

**MAMANDLA CONNECTIONS**

Hosted an Instagram Live with Tasmin

**HOPES/ PLANS/DREAMS FOR 2023**

To host my first Unlearning with Joey event



Beverley Chigwanda

Kambarami

Birthing and postpartum doula, Breastfeeding Peer Counsellor

**A WISH FOR MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

To have a positively memorable and supported pregnancy and birth.

**ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU**

To know I'm able to add my voice to the ensemble of advocates of motherhood and draw and give inspiration to like minded and "like passionate" individuals.

**MAMANDLA CONNECTIONS**

Upcoming podcast episode with Amanda, Gao and Palesa

**HOPES/ PLANS/DREAMS FOR 2023**

I want to step out and step up and hold myself accountable to my greater self.



## Nwabisa Mzamo

Supporting teenage mothers

### AA wish for mothers in South Africa

The liberty to express their feelings and views without being judged or having to justify themselves.

### ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU

To finally start sharing my story.

### MAMANDLA CONNECTIONS

Yes, watch this space.

### HOPES/ PLANS/DREAMS FOR 2023

To continue supporting other fellows



## Nompumelelo Mathibe

Early motherhood support and well-being

### A WISH FOR MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

That they have unlimited resources and support; from family, friends or an online community. There's so much help available if you know where to look.

### ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU

I've been able to trust myself, get over my imposter syndrome. The women I've met through Embrace have uplifted me to know and be proud of myself.

### MAMANDLA CONNECTIONS

Working with Amanda through the GLOW movement, consulting to the Embrace hub team.

### HOPES/ PLANS/DREAMS FOR 2023

To be the best version of myself, to show up for myself. I deserve everything I've ever wanted (imali, imoto, uthando nenjabulo) and need to ensure that I make that my reality.



## Roeline van Eck

Prematurity and NICU support

### A WISH FOR MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

I want mothers who are traveling on the NICU journey to know they are not alone, that their experiences are validated and that support is available.

### ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU

I've learnt from so many inspirational women who have made it their mission to be difference-makers for others.

### MAMANDLA CONNECTIONS

As a teacher, I initiated and assisted with a collection drive for premie care packages for Premie Connect, Tasmin's organisation, as part of their plans for World Prematurity Day 2022.

### HOPES/ PLANS/DREAMS FOR 2023

Finish writing a picture book for NICU parents and get it published.



## Kayla-Tess Pattenden

Maternal Mental Health, Sexual Intimacy and Confidence Coaching, Family Counseling

### A WISH FOR MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

I wish for moms to function from a place of confidence and security in all spheres of their lives (legally, sexually, in their parenting, businesses and relationships) thereby shaping the next generation of confident and secure children who will eventually become confident and secure leaders of South Africa.

### ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU

I am inspired by the fellow moms who form part of the Fellowship. In actively listening to the diversity in experience and stories, I feel grounded in my mothering, career moves and advocacy. I feel grounded in the sisterhood of mothers.

### MAMANDLA CONNECTIONS

Taught a Masterclass on Psychosocial First Aid to the Mamandla Alumni, supporting fellows and offering counseling referrals.

### HOPES/ PLANS/DREAMS FOR 2023

To become self sufficient in my private practice knowing that it can be a beautiful puzzle of all the capacities of my servant heart without draining me as working a 9am-5pm (sometimes 8pm) did to me in years past. I look forward to this step blessing other moms as I focus more work on them. I also look forward to this step inspiring other moms too!



## Amanda Mokoena

Antenatal & Postpartum support, maternal mental health

### A WISH FOR MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

May they get the support they deserve, have access to information and be empowered.

### ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU

The value of support and personal growth. My life keeps getting better and better.

### MAMANDLA CONNECTIONS

We started a podcast. There has been so much support between Fellows, and sharing of great ideas and opportunities.

### HOPES/ PLANS/DREAMS FOR 2023

Launch my postnatal gratitude journal for mothers. Connecting with more mums and growing my podcast.



## Maggie Marx

Motherhood mentorship and support

### A WISH FOR MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Being unburdened by society's additions to the "motherload". That means supportive, accepting and uplifting communities and systems.

### ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU

My Mamandla sisters continue to help me with massive unlearnings. I'm so grateful...

### MAMANDLA CONNECTIONS

Bronte and I are working to support the fellowship with an online home and sharing platform.

### HOPES/ PLANS/DREAMS FOR 2023

I want to know I've supported as many mothers as possible, in whatever way they need it.





## Cindy Mkhize

Community mothering, long-distance motherhood

### A WISH FOR MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

More involvement and inclusivity especially for mothers in the rural areas.

### ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU

You're not alone. We are all fighting the same fight to be able to provide for those we love. After our retreat I was able to recover from a deep depression and worked more on myself and got myself involved in more community activities.

### MAMANDLA CONNECTIONS

watch this space

### HOPES/ PLANS/DREAMS FOR 2023

Hoping to launch two projects. A home maintenance project connecting mothers who are without jobs to local maintenance jobs. The second project assists in the upgrading of informal settlements to off grid houses to ease the burden of loadshedding and the ongoing water crisis. Finally, I want to buy my mom her dream home by the end of this year and spend more time with my daughter, hopefully traveling together.



## Memory Linzie Simwaka

Ending obstetric violence and promoting maternity support grants

### A WISH FOR MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

To go into the labour ward without the fear of being mistreated by the medical staff

### ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU

To be proud of all the friendships we made and to appreciate the motherhood journeys that were shared. Mamandla fellows take their projects and initiatives seriously!

### MAMANDLA CONNECTIONS

I connected with Embrace for the Mother's Day 2022 programme at Vivi's soup kitchen. We handed out gift packs to elderly mother's living on farms.

### HOPES/ PLANS/DREAMS FOR 2023

To get more involved in advocating for issues of relevance



## Nomfundo Mkhabela

Representation and solidarity of black mothers

### A WISH FOR MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

To create intentional solidarity for mothers' experiences.

### ONE LESSON MAMANDLA TAUGHT YOU

I got to meet a diversity of mothers who are out there being intentional in their advocacy.

### MAMANDLA CONNECTIONS

Yes, I have connected with Rachel, who has supported the initiative I co-founded, called Omama Bemvelo project. I am in conversation with Nomfundo Msomi about a podcast that speaks to the documentation of black mum experiences and stories.

### HOPES/ PLANS/DREAMS FOR 2023

To record my podcast "being mother".



GILLIAN BIRD

1963 – 2020

## REMEMBERING GILLIAN

*“Every sister needs a sister who has her back.”*

Our beloved Gillian Bird – or Mama G or Gills, as she was affectionately called by the 2019/20 fellows and Embrace hub team – passed away suddenly and unexpectedly, leaving everyone who knew her in utter shock. Gillian was a committed and passionate member of Embrace, getting involved in all aspects of the movement over the past few years. She was also an integral part of the inaugural cohort of Mamandla Fellows.

Gillian joined Mamandla as the eldest fellow in her cohort. That being said, she never lauded her age and experience over us. Mama G knew all the popular tunes, had a wicked sense of humour and a love for all things glam and gorgeous. If you needed to borrow a lipstick, Gillian was your lady and her generosity meant you’d probably end up taking that lipstick home.

The Mamandla Fellowship brought together a group of women from across the country. We were all there because we believed in the power of collective motherhood and the opportunity for a strengthened network of leaders who

believe mothers matter in South Africa. We came to the fellowship with excitement, but also often with the struggles of our individual circumstances weighing heavily on our shoulders. Gillian took the time to get to know every single person. She counted it a privilege to listen and create space to hear both pain and joy. She guarded secrets, remembered birthdays and I witnessed her wipe many, many tears with the tenderness of a mother.

Gillian was a woman of deep faith. A self-described and unashamed “Jesus girl”. Her faith compelled her to serve those around her, never drawing attention to her deeds and often taking on actions that I know scared her. In 2019 I asked her to step up and lead at Mother’s Day Connect. We gave her the project’s founding hospital – one that holds a special place in my heart. She was nervous, but oh, how she shone – loving every new mother sitting in her hospital bed and serving every woman on her team.



Gillian had an infinite capacity for people. In spite of having a tough 2020 in which she lost her beloved sister, she still took the time to care for everyone around her. She was gifted with words of encouragement. In these days after her passing, we shared her voice notes in our Fellowship group and I continue to be amazed by the words she offered to each person – bespoke messages to comfort tired hearts. Even now, after her death, her words and voice notes and podcasts continue to encourage us.

**Julie Mentor**

Embrace Movement Leader

Gillian, our dearest Mama G. We were not ready. The ache in our hearts is so very real. Your impact on motherhood in South Africa is a legacy your family can be proud of, as you were so very proud of them.

We love you and we miss you. May you rest in peace with your sister and our Maker until we meet again.

# MAPPING THE MAMANDLA NETWORK



## Bloemfontein

Dithoriso Mphuthi 2019



## Cape Town

Kayla-Tess Pattenden 2021

Nwabisa Mzamo 2021

Maggie Marx 2021

Memory Linzie 2021

Qaanita Rossier 2022

Noloyiso Williams 2022

Chimonay Masumbe 2022

Bronte Davies 2022

Jolene Hollenbach 2022

Nomgcobo Galela 2022

Yvette Zihhalirwa 2019



## Durban

Rachel kinloch 2021

Nomfundo Mkhamba 2021

Lyndall Moodley 2022

Christie Roberts 2019



## Hartbeespoort

Nolwazi Serero 2019



## Port Shepstone

Cindy Mkhize 2021



## Johannesburg

Beverley Chigwanda 2021

Amanda Mokoena 2021

Joey Dlamini 2021

Roeline Van Eck 2021

Ntokozo Mabhena 2021

Gaopalelwe Phalaetsile 2021

Mahlatse Kgatle 2022

Palesa Mphambani-Singo 2022

Nodumo Makaza 2022

Nqubeko Shezi 2022

Pamela Mkhize 2022

Mildred Hlatshwayo 2022

Tasmin Bota 2019

Somi Swana 2019

Portia Mahlobo 2019

Tabea Nong 2019

Duduzile Mathebula 2019

Taryn-Zoé Gurr 2019

Smangele Mathebula 2019



## Pietermaritzburg

Nomfundo Msomi 2019



## Pretoria

Tana Makgoka 2019



## Rustenburg

Nompumelelo Mathibe 2021

MAPPING THE MAMANDLA NETWORK







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integral role in co-creating this community of  
support for mothers and mother-leaders

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Thank you to Jess Meyer who is responsible for the creative vision behind Mamandla and for developing its visual identity.







# APPLY FOR THE MAMANDLA FELLOWSHIP

The Mamandla Fellowship  
is an opportunity to:

- deepen your passion for supporting mothers,
- upskill yourself as a leader and advocate for motherhood issues,
- build strategic links with other like-minded women, and
- form lifelong friendships while you do it.

We believe a Fellowship like ours offers an opportunity to come into a space that redefines who leaders are and refines what leadership is.

If you:

- Currently live in South Africa;
- Have a proven track record as an involved and engaged supporter of mothers in your community; and
- Are able to travel away from your home and family for at least 2 full weekends during the course of your fellowship year to attend Mamandla gatherings

Head over to [embrace.org.za/mamandla](https://embrace.org.za/mamandla) and apply for our next intake.



# THE POWER TRIP

It brings us great joy to share this first Mamandla publication with you.

Founded in 2019, the Mamandla Fellowship provides an opportunity to harness the collective efforts of our work and passions for the good of all mothers, and to leverage the power of our diverse experiences through a network of relationships.

Mamandla Fellows demonstrate powerful leadership and civic duty in so many different ways.

The Power Trip showcases stories of our 2022/2023 Mamandla Fellowship cohort.

