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Umzi Wethu Programme Celebrates Graduation with R1-m Grant for Next Phase

Eastern Cape premier Nosimo Balindlela announced a R1-million (\$167,000) provincial grant to help fund part of the roll-out of the Umzi Wethu training and job placement programme developed by the Port Elizabeth-based Wilderness Foundation and partners. She spoke at the graduation of the first Umzi Wethu intake of vulnerable young people.



Umzi Wethu is one of the first partnerships between some 35 organisations representing environmentalists, social workers, AIDS organisations, academics, training institutions and the hospitality industry, says Wilderness Foundation CEO Andrew Muir. "Our students are identified through local non-governmental organisations and social workers. They are selected on the basis of their potential and a lack of funds and support to help them realise that potential," he says.

The Umzi Wethu academy provides free training, pocket money and clothing for the duration of the course and then finds jobs for the successful students. All of the current intake have been trained for the hospitality industry and have been employed by game lodges and hotel groups throughout the province, according to Muir.

"Most of the funding up to now has come from overseas donors, and the grant announced by premier Balindlela will help fund the roll-out of the programme," he says. A second intake of students training as game guards and guides is already hard at work. "The real success of the programme is in the difference it has made to the lives of our students."

There are plans to open a second Umzi Wethu elsewhere in the Eastern Cape soon.

Quotes from a workshop with the students include:

"What vulnerability really means is there is a gap between you and your future through lack of funds and support. It opens up the potential to be exploited."

“This is a chance to show my talent. A chance to feed my family. As I develop skills I build my own resourcefulness and I help my family.”

“Getting work is about two things – skills and access. You can develop the skills that you have got but often you cannot access further training and employment because of lack of funds. Through Umzi Wethu we have gained accredited skills that raise us above the competition in developing opportunities for advancement in the workplace.”



“The greatest challenge is how are you going to make use of what we have achieved through Umzi Wethu so that it can be effective to your surroundings. With my own success is the opportunity for me to help others to gain success.”

“My approach is to work so hard that I gain all that I can. We have achieved through all the challenges of a pilot programme and are seeing it through to what was promised. And one of our achievements is that we are the first graduates of the programme, the first ambassadors.”

“I’m proud of what I have achieved in this programme. It has brought something very positive.”