

NPO addresses healthcare staff shortages in rural hospitals

While there has always been an imbalance of professional healthcare workers and services between urban and rural communities, the Covid-19 pandemic has intensified this problem. Dr Lungile Hobe-Nxumalo, chair of the Rural Doctors Association of Southern Africa, explained in a recent article that, while rural communities form 42% of the public health system in South Africa, only 15% of the doctors and 20% of nurses are based in rural areas. She added that the shortage of human resources is a challenge that will leave rural populations being hardest hit by the pandemic.



Some of the beneficiaries of Umthombo Youth Development Foundation

This skills shortage is the reason the Umthombo Youth Development Foundation (UYDF) exists. The non-profit organisation identifies, invests in and supports rural youth who have the potential, and interest in becoming qualified healthcare providers. Partnering with 15 rural hospitals in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape, the UYDF consigns its graduates to work at their local rural hospital for the same number of years they were supported for. Some of the health science disciplines on offer include doctors, emergency medical rescue services, biomedical technologists, nurses, radiographers and more.

Through financial and mentoring support, the UYDF has yielded 434 graduates over the past 20 years. 98% of these graduates have returned to work in their rural communities on completion of studies, and the majority continue to work there. Just last year, the organisation supported 219 students. The average pass rate of supported students is over 90% compared to a national average for health sciences of 50%.

Naturally, partners and donors are critical in helping the UYDF achieve its objectives. The Department of Health, the Department of Education, plus support from the districts and communities, as well as funding organisations and individual donors, ensure that the programme is sustainable and continues to provide life-changing opportunities to rural youth, while transforming the face of rural health.

UYDF director, Dr Gavin MacGregor, said: "It is costly to run the organisation, a clear vision, concrete plans and amazing partners have helped us make a difference to so many living in rural communities.

"To extend our programme to support more students in 2021, we need to raise an additional R6m in annual funding commitments before the end of this year. One area UYDF has historically struggled with is to put its amazing story in front of major donors, so we are delighted to announce a major pledge in this regard."



Storytelling

Rogerwilco, the digitally-led marketing agency, which provided UYDF with a digital makeover in 2019, has committed services to the value of R600,000 for the next 12-months as part of its CSI initiative.

"It costs around R730,000 to educate and support one student, and so we're partnering to help the UYDF tell its story to assist in its fundraising efforts. Our approach to helping them achieve this will be to adopt a precision targeted digital marketing programme that aims to put the message before key decision makers in corporates, foundations and trusts and in front of high net worth individuals," Rogerwilco CEO, Charlie Stewart, said.

"It's so important for us to be able to play a part in stimulating local youth development and ultimately help the UYDF build hope and prosperity within rural communities. While this coincides with Mandela Day, our involvement goes beyond a single day or even 67-minutes. We're proud to contribute to one of the most sustainable solutions for the long-term supply of professional healthcare workers, which is already severely overburdened," he said.