



Press Release – Tsogo Sun – 05/07/2017

Tsogo Sun's The Challenge winner takes R5 million

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The principal gives significant credit to the Columba Leadership programme (<https://www.tsogosun.com/citizenship/community/learning/columba-leadership>) that Tsogo Sun's Silverstar casino (<https://www.tsogosun.com/silverstar-casino>) has sponsored since 2012, together with wholehearted commitment from participating educators and learners to positive change in the school.

The school has 1 850 learners from grades 8 to 12 and 63 educators. Dr VK Joseph is the principal – and he's proud of the school's steadily improving results. "We're not just getting an excellent matric pass rate, we're also getting high quality passes, with many matriculants achieving university exemption." He recalls how it started: "When Columba first came and presented their programme, I was impressed with their vision and values, which are closely aligned to this school's. It made sense to embrace the programme and give our learners and educators the opportunity to benefit from it."

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Columba's vision is "to instil a sense of grit, purpose, determination and 21st century workplace skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication, resilience, self-awareness, and leadership, into young leaders through a peer-on-peer leadership model, with the goal of seeing them become self-motivated, work-ready and highly employable." The Columba core values are awareness, focus, creativity, integrity, perseverance, and service.

Shanda Paine, Tsogo Sun's Group CSI Manager, says the Columba programme is an ideal fit for Tsogo Sun's CSI focus on educational development and preparing disadvantaged young people for the working environment. "Gaining a strong foothold in the employed or entrepreneurial sectors is crucial to the future success of our young people. With its unique peer-driven programme, Columba has provided a platform that is enabling learners to become leaders in their school, to be disciplined in their academic work, to gain life skills, to engage productively with their community, and to run projects that make a difference to the school."

The Columba programme has run annually with a group of 12 Grade 10 learners, selected for their commitment to build a better society, and three educators who work alongside the learners, making sure the programme is absorbed into the culture of the school so the impact is sustained even after the programme ends. The group attends a leadership training camp and then puts their learnings into practice, adopting special projects and engaging with other learners in the school, through Grade 11.

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Grade 11 learner Keletso Thabede (16) is in the Columba programme. She applied to join because “I wanted to make a change in my school. I wanted to help learners who are disrespectful of education to take it seriously.” She has gained a whole lot more, she says. “Columba is providing us with the skills to be responsible leaders for the next generation, it has helped us see the need in our community, our subject marks have improved, our confidence has been boosted, and our behaviour is better – even my mother has noticed a difference in my attitude and behaviour.” Thamsanqa Shosha (15) in Grade 11 says, “I learned to respect everyone equally – our teachers, class mates, and the younger Grade 8 kids.”

Projects run by the Columba teams over the years include cooking for the Grade 12s when they have weekend study sessions at school, establishing and maintaining a school library, creating a school garden, ensuring Grade 8s got their meals at the school feeding scheme lunches, running a book club, cleaning classrooms, and addressing learner issues such as late coming, bullying, gambling, discipline in classes when the teacher is absent, substance abuse, and even teen pregnancy, by taking practical action and engaging with learners.

Educators too, have directly benefited from the leadership programme, and those who have been involved speak of understanding their learners better, improved engagement, gaining greater confidence in leading, and more. Mali Ntombi, Life Orientation and isiZulu educator, who attended the Columba camp in 2013, says she also shared her learnings with other educators. “We invited them to join us and told them what we had learned about treating learners better, not judging them, seeing the good in them, and working more closely with the learners, helping them to see that no matter their backgrounds, they can make it if they take school seriously.”

Other teachers have seen progress in their careers, which they attribute in part to their participation in the Columba programme. Economics teacher Qaphela Makhala was a Columba educator in 2013, and has been promoted to Deputy Principal. Mzomhle Baninzi, now HOD of Commerce and Accounting and Teacher Liaison Officer, says, “There used to be more disrespect by learners for each other and educators. The Columba values have spread, and learners and educators are more motivated to achieve better results.”

Tracy Hackland of Columba Leadership says Mandisa Shiceka has been an exemplar of the power of youth-adult partnerships, a supportive principal, motivated educators, and effective mobilisation of adults and youth to become involved in the movement for change. “Though Columba is exiting Mandisa this year, we are hopeful of sustainability as we have trained several educators, the school will be connected to a community of practice with other Columba schools, and the alumni will be supported to return and invest in the school.”

Shane Collison, Silverstar’s Director of Operations and Complex GM, says it has been a privilege working with Columba at Mandisa Shiceka, which “is a shining light of possibilities and success in the community. We will remain engaged with the school, encouraging them to continue the legacy that has been instilled through Columba.”

Tsogo Sun’s portfolio includes over 90 hotels and 14 casino and entertainment destinations throughout South Africa, Africa, the Seychelles and Abu Dhabi. For further information, visit tsogosun.com (<https://www.tsogosun.com>), follow on Twitter and Instagram @TsogoSun or like on Facebook /TsogoSun.