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## THATO KGATLHANYE, SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR AND ACADEMIC ENABLER – 21 ICONS

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**“As much as it feels like I’m walking a tightrope everyday – rather than than be the person who’s looking up at the person walking the tightrope”**

Learning from her mother’s nurturing spirit as a healthcare worker and her father, a successful taxi business entrepreneur’s, knack. Thato is a young woman creating change in thousands of school children’s lives through the Repurpose Schoolbags Initiative and Rethaka Trading, a business aimed at fixing social issues.



The idea began in university when as an assignment where students were asked to create something. Thus, her idea for the repurposing of school bags came about. She then was one of 18 young entrepreneurs selected to intern with marketing guru Seth Godin in New York. Seth emphasised the importance of following your dreams, especially if they seem scary.

**“You are scared of it, so go figure out why it scares you and live that.”**

Through the non-profit 'Repurpose Schoolbags' organization, Thato has created a sustainable environmental solution to low-cost school accessories where recycled plastic bags are used to create school bags for disadvantaged students. The bags are waterproof, serving as protection during the rainy season and are fitted with retro-reflective material that improves the bag's visibility at night, aiding in child safety as many children walk home at night.



The bags also feature a solar lamp that charges through the school day and allows them to study at night, reducing the risk of shack fires caused by the use of paraffin lamps.



The NPO partners with private schools who understand the need to go green and people who collect plastic waste from landfill sites.

“It’s a child’s way of having dignity because a lot of the children that we gift these bags to don’t even have a school bag. From having to carry their schoolbooks in a plastic bag or under their jersey, they now have a school bag, and that’s big. What the bags represent for the kids is a way of looking at themselves. It might seem like I am nothing but I am something. Imagine a plastic bag. No one really looks at it and thinks, wow. But if someone else comes along, picks it up, looks at it, and sees something different...that could be you.”

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**Portrait: ‘Entrepreneur’**



The plastic bag is a metaphor: **“it might seem like I am nothing, but I actually am something.”**.

The leafless tree symbolises Thato’s aspect of her work where she looks at something lifeless and bring it back to life – the discarded plastic bag. The portrait is a literal representation of her work with *Repurpose Schoolbags* while also referencing her bringing to light pressing social issues facing rural child.

**“When you walk a journey there are always people around you, and embracing that sense of community is how you get far.”**



## Experience more Icons

To get involved in Thato's project, visit [Repurpose Schoolbags](#)

21 Icons behind the scenes is on SABC every Sunday from 6 September at 19:27. Alternatively follow their movements on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

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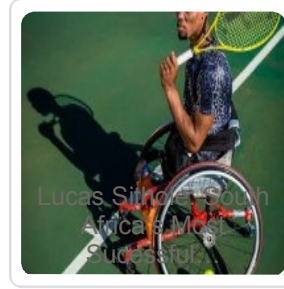
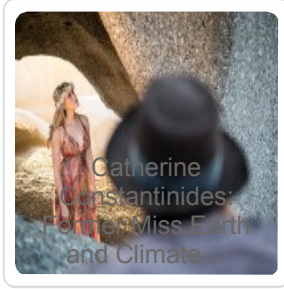
**Jordan Coetsee**

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"Life isn't about finding yourself, its about creating yourself"

Jordan is a Joburg based student currently studying at WITS. In his free time loves to socialize, screenprint and sometimes dabble in music.

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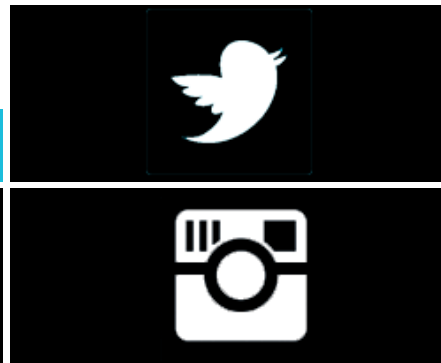


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