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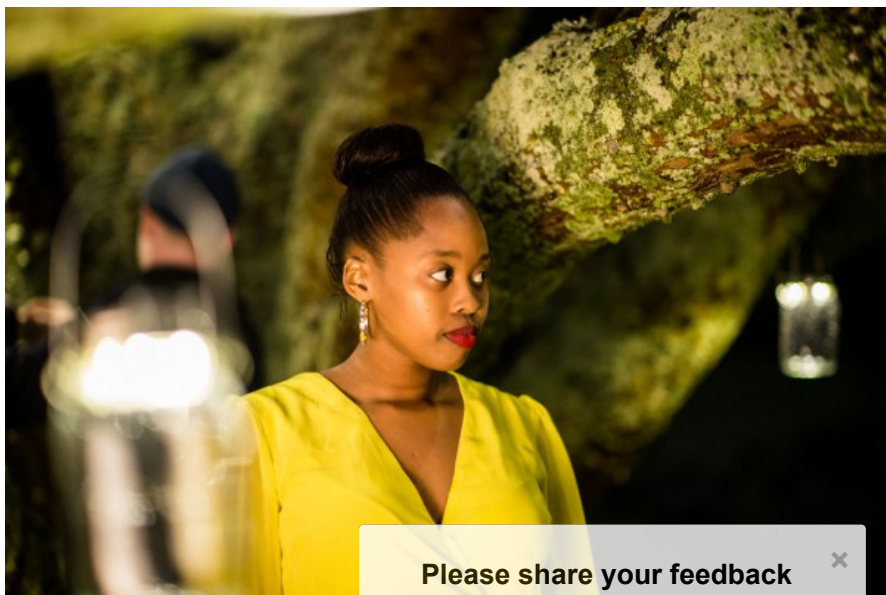
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Entertainment 18.10.2015 11.00 am

# 21 ICONS featuring Thato Kgathanye

Citizen reporter



Seven icon Social Entrepreneur, Thato Kgathanye will be discussing the importance of making choices, acting on them and empowering others through purposeful business. Picture: Supplied

## 21 ICONS will feature social entrepreneur Thato Kgathanye who co-founded Rethaka Trading and the innovative initiative Repurpose Schoolbags.

The 22-year-old who hails from the small town of Mogwase, just outside of Rustenburg, had big dreams from a young age. She attributes her nature to serve others to her mother, who is a healthcare worker, and her entrepreneurial spirit to her father, who runs a successful taxi business. Kgathanye has been selected for 21 ICONS South Africa Season III as an inspiring social entrepreneur and humanitarian. She stands as an example of how with tenacity and determination anyone can overcome great odds and find solutions to address South Africa's social issues.

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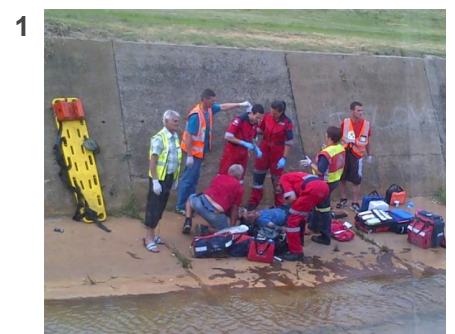
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She says: "As much as it feels like I'm walking a tightrope every day, I'd rather that than be the person that's looking up at the person walking the tightrope."

It started with an assignment at university to create something, and the idea of a schoolbag made from recycled plastic emerged. While her peers have gone on to join the corporate world, Kgathlanye tackled what once scared her most, her ambition and the unknown with the bags.

Through the establishment of the non-profit organisation, Repurpose Schoolbags, she has made a sustainable contribution to the environment by using reinforced plastic shopping bags to create recycled school bags for disadvantaged learners, thereby empowering multitudes of lesser-resourced learners across South Africa. This a collaborative project with society at large, as her organisation partners with private schools who acknowledge the need to go green and collect plastic bags on their behalf and people who go to land fill sites and collect plastic from waste.

Aimed at children in rural communities, the bags serve to waterproof their books during the rainy seasons. The bags are fitted with retro-reflective material that improves the bag's visibility ensuring child-safety. It also features a solar power point that enables schoolchildren living in households with limited access to electricity to use the bags as an energy source to read, study and do their homework, thereby eliminating the danger of shack fires caused by paraffin lamps.

She says: "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."

Kgathlanye continues: "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."

On the future of South Africa, she comments: "I see opportunity in the hands of young people. And it's waiting for us to take it and run with it."

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