

YOUTH MONTH

Celebrating the **youth** whose work contributes to **meaningful change** in **South Africa** and **beyond**



Full circle moment: alumnus now hosts her own NYS volunteers

For Thabile Mthiyane, the National Youth Service (NYS) programme of the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI) was more than an opportunity—it was the turning point that transformed her career aspirations and inspired her to become a science communicator, educator and entrepreneur.

Born and raised in a small village near Richards Bay in KwaZulu-Natal, Thabile's passion for science began at a young age. Growing up near a mining community sparked her interest in geology and the earth sciences, leading her to pursue a Bachelor of Science degree in Hydrology and Geography at the University of Zululand. She later expanded her qualifications with a Postgraduate Diploma in Project Management and is currently completing a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE).

When Thabile joined the NYS programme, she was placed at the University of Zululand Science Centre, where she was introduced to a field she had never previously considered: science communication. "I did not even know there was something called science communication," she recalls.

The experience opened her eyes to new possibilities and equipped her with skills that extended far beyond her academic studies. Inspired by what she had learned, Thabile founded the STEM Infinity Science Centre in Richards Bay in 2019.

Despite facing funding challenges, the centre continues to operate and serves as a platform for science engagement in the community.

In a remarkable full-circle moment, Thabile now hosts NYS volunteers at the same centre she established after gaining exposure and experience in the programme herself.

Today, she works as a Natural Sciences Facilitator while continuing to grow STEM Infinity Science Centre and support the development of young science communicators. Looking ahead, Thabile dreams of obtaining a PhD, growing her science centre and becoming a freelance science communicator who creates opportunities for others.

Reflecting on the value of the programme, Thabile encourages young people to embrace opportunities that come their way. "If there's an opportunity presented to you, grab it," she says. "The programme doesn't only provide training, it helps you build networks and gives you skills that can make you competitive in the workplace or even help you start something of your own." Her journey stands as an inspiring reminder that one opportunity can change the course of a life—and in turn, help shape the future of many others.



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