

Celebrating Zululand women

Passionate about education

Megan Erasmus caught up with St Catherine's Principal Vanessa Janse van Rensburg who received a major award

PHOTO: MEGAN ERASMUS

According to Principal of St Catherine's School in Empangeni, Vanessa Janse van Rensburg, teaching is not a job; it is something in your blood.

'It is so much more than just a salary, so to receive an award for the work was completely unexpected.'

Janse van Rensburg received the Regional Business Achievers' Award in the corporate category in June, and says she was quite taken by surprise when she was told that she had been nominated.

'We all have goals and we all work hard, not expecting to receive anything in return, so to receive an award for something I am so passionate about was such a great honour.'

'Being part of the whole experience also gave me so much motivation because I was able to meet so many inspirational women who achieved so much from nothing.'

Janse van Rensburg took over from Elisabeth Johanson in January 2011, and says since she took on the role she has seen much personal growth in both herself and the school.

Incredible support

She says she would not have been able to achieve nearly as much as she has had it not been for the support she receives from her family.

'My husband gives me space to grow and develop, but can still ground me when I need it.'

As for her two children, Janse van Rensburg says she thinks that while her son was proud of her achievement, it definitely meant more to her daughter.

'In my mind, my daughter was extremely excited by the event, because she understands what it all means, being female herself.'

Janse van Rensburg says if she could make her pupils understand one thing, it would be that they should be content with life.

'Material wealth is not the be all and end all of life.'

'I just want them to be happy.'



Doing what she loves best - St Catherine's Principal Vanessa Janse van Rensburg assists pupil Trinisha Govender with a problem



LifeLine Zululand Director Sue Stephenson

A lifeline to the community

Ronelle Ramsamy

Sue Stephenson literally eats, sleeps and breathes LifeLine.

It is therefore no surprise that when she relocated to Mtunzini 10 years ago to semi-retire with her husband, she ended up taking on the reins as Director of LifeLine Zululand, a position she still holds today.

But it is her community passion that not only saw the NPO survive amid economic hardships, but also enabled her to win the Social Entrepreneur category in the recent Zululand Businesswomen's Association regional achievers' awards.

'My initial vision was to stabilise the centre.'

'Then I felt we needed to get our services out to those who could not access them.'

'So, in the last 10 years we have managed to get vehicles and a secure home while becoming a well-respected NPO in the area,' Stephenson says.

While running a NPO was a 'rollercoaster ride', Stephenson says she believes in the organisation's values and mission.

LifeLine Zululand offers 24-hour crisis counselling services, support groups and training, rape counselling, face-to-face and trauma counselling, supervision of the Victim Support Volunteer Programme at police stations and HIV/AIDS peer education and training, among others.

'There is no guarantee in a NPO, but we always survive.'

'We do not have any investment funding to fall back on when times are lean.'

'Everything that happens in life relates to a battery - there is a negative and a positive.'

'Keep focussed on the positive and work with what you have instead of worrying about what you don't have,' she added.

Support

And Stephenson admits that she would not have been able to run the organisation without the support of her husband.

'I have been a workaholic for the past 30 years.'

LifeLine has absorbed my life and I couldn't do this job without him behind me.

'He runs our house and always has a meal waiting for me when I get home.'

Hailing from the UK and completing most of her schooling in Zimbabwe, Stephenson held four directorships and two alternate directorships in a group of companies in Gauteng before entering the social sphere.

Literally working up the corporate ladder from being a bookkeeper to a financial director, Stephenson spent 20 years at the group of industrial companies involved in hydraulics, high pressure water cleaning equipment and refractories.

As for future plans, Stephenson says she is now ready to finally retire.

'I need to stabilise the funding and resources at LifeLine Zululand so that I can hand over to my deputy and then ride off into the sunset and go travelling with my husband.'

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