

The Learner

Inspiring the nation through education

History of black inventors

George Alcorn is probably most famous for his innovation of the imaging x-ray spectrometer — a device that helps scientists better understand what materials are composed of when they cannot be broken down. — www.black-inventor.com

Shaping the lives of young girls

18twenty8 wants to help young women become competent professionals

Miyelani Mashaba

When TV presenter and actress Refiloe Seseane celebrated her 28th birthday, the greatest present she could give herself was to do some introspection on her life as an 18-year-old teenager growing up in Vosloorus. Little did she know that her reflections would one day expose kids to a new range of careers.

It was in August 2008 when she reflected on the previous 10 years of her life — on what she had accomplished academically, emotionally and professionally — and that she felt she would have gone a lot further had she received mentoring and support.

That's when the idea of 18twenty8 was born, to provide to other teenage girls the support that she did not have when she was a teenager.

18twenty8 is a non-profit organisation that empowers disadvantaged, young South African women between the ages of 18 and 28 by developing strategies for their educational and personal development.

As she puts it, "this is the age bracket at which young women are generally leaving school, preparing for their first jobs and tertiary studies. It is also the age bracket at which they are most uncertain about their future and most likely to make decisions that have an impact on the rest of their lives.

"It is for this reason that 18twenty8 came into being, to encourage young women to value their education because educated women are not only empowered, they are also more likely to confer the benefits of their education to others, unlike their male counterparts."

Seseane told *The Learner* 18twenty8 wants to reach as many young women from disadvantaged backgrounds in South Africa as possible and help them to become qualified and competent professionals in all aspects.

Seseane, who overcame many obstacles to get to where she is, did not want to wait until the age of 50 to plough back into the community. Through 18twenty8 Refiloe is involved with grades 11 and 12 in more than 12 schools from Gauteng where the project was piloted. There are also plans to roll-out the project to reach as many disadvantaged girls as possible in marginalised communities throughout the country.

Getting 18twenty8 off the ground was not an easy task for Seseane and her co-director, Amelia Vukeya-Motsepe, since they had, and still continue, to fork out



Refiloe Seseane with some of the Little Sisters from the Tertia King Learning Academy in Tembisa in October 2009 (top). With their partners from Spread Luv Movement, they facilitated a career day for high school learners at Mafori Mphahlele high school in Soweto (above and right)



for administrative and operational expenses. However, this did not deter them from pursuing their dream to shape the lives of young girls. Through the relationships it has with current schools, 18twenty8 has exposed 753 girls (who were in Grade 12 in 2009) to corporate bursaries, learnerships and employment opportunities.

"We are proud of the girls who managed to secure bursaries and / or learnerships in time for the start of the 2010 academic year.

"Those who were not able to get into college or varsity have been assisted with employment opportunities so that they earn an income, get some work experience, and study part time or via correspondence," she said.

The biggest challenge facing Grades 10, 11 and 12, according to Seseane, is

poor career guidance and advice. Most learners choose the wrong subjects in Grade 10, continue with them in Grade 11 and Grade 12 and are frustrated when they battle to get into the right degree programmes at tertiary level.

To address this, 18twenty8 is in negotiations with a leading South African company that conducts career readiness and psychometric tests that correctly profile learners so that they choose subjects — and ultimately careers — that are consistent with their personalities and aspirations; as opposed to subjects — and hence careers — that are determined by external factors.

"We hope that the company will agree to come to high schools in marginalised communities because that is where the need for its services is greatest and will be most appreciated," said Seseane.



About Refiloe

Refiloe Seseane completed primary and high school at St Dominic's Convent in Boksburg and matriculated from St Dominic's Convent with a distinction in English. She excelled at Drama and Public Speaking and was awarded full colours for both.

She majored in Economics and Finance in her BCom degree at the University of South Africa (Unisa) and graduated with a distinction in Economics. She also holds an Honours degree in Economics from Unisa and is currently completing the Registered Person Examinations in Equities with The South African Institute of Financial Markets.

Seseane holds a certificate in Media and Marketing Strategies for NGO's and was a delegate at the 2010 Tomorrow's Leaders Convention. She will complete her Masters in 2010, her ultimate goal is to have a PhD in Economics.

Seseane is also a TV actress, presenter and voice-over artist. Her recent on-screen appearances include lead roles for the country's top soapies, *Generations* and *Rhythm City* and she is also an eloquent voice-over artist who has read for many programmes and commercials. She is the resident voice on TV commercials for Hollard, Standard Bank in-house TV and the motoring show *Car Quest*.

Seseane started her corporate career at Allan Gray in Cape Town then moved to BoE Private Clients where she worked as a Business Analyst in the Investments division, reporting directly to the Head of Investments. While she was in Cape Town she also volunteered as a mentor and tutor at TSIBA.

TSIBA is an independent institution that provides free tertiary education for disadvantaged students to study a Bachelor of Business Administration degree. She is passionate about her role as Big Sister to girls in Vosloorus, Soweto, Tembisa, Wattville, Katlehong and Daveyton townships.

She runs workshops for Little Sisters in Grade 11 and Grade 12 in consultation with Life Orientation teachers.