

Education essential in breaking cycle of poverty, liberating young people

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

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Musa Thomo is operations manager at Sparrow FET College, a social enterprise that specifically caters for the disenfranchised youth of South Africa.

This #YouthMonth, we chat to Thomo to find out more about his work at Sparrow FET College, how the organisation is advancing youth empowerment in SA, and how we can address some of our most significant challenges, in particular, the current Covid-19 crisis.

■ ***Tell us a bit about yourself and your background.***

Musa Thomo: I was born in the mid-80s in a strict Zulu cultural background. I count myself blessed to still have both my parents alive, which I draw a lot of inspiration from. I hold a tertiary qualification in Public Relations Management and Communication, and I have worked within the education space for just over 10 years, giving me various skills within my line of work.

■ ***Tell us a bit about what Sparrow FET College does and its roots.***

Thomo: Sparrow Schools Educational Trust was founded in 1989 by our general manager, Jackie Gallagher, with the idea to bring about some sort of a balance/equality within the then education system which didn't offer adequate support for children with learning disabilities.



Musa Thomo, operations manager, Sparrow FET College

Sparrow FET College was then established in 2011 where we strive to improve the lives of learners and youth with learning difficulties by creating excellent educational opportunities tailored to their specific needs. We prepare the youth, who experience barriers to learning, for future employment. We do this through a comprehensive curriculum which includes learning support and training in vocational skills.

Sparrow FET College, a social enterprise that caters specifically to the disenfranchised youth of South Africa, partners with industry to fund our programmes, ensuring that there is no training cost to the learners. All of our learners are assessed by an in-house psychometrist before entering the college to ensure that they are offered programmes that suit their interests and that they are capable of completing. Our classes are intentionally kept small so that we can offer our learners "hands on support". Our Occupational Skills programmes have a maximum of 20 learners per class and our Soft Skills programmes have a maximum of 30 learners per class.



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■ ***What makes you most passionate about the work you do at the college?***

Thomo: My role as the operations manager at Sparrow FET College is to oversee the high-level HR duties at the college, and also create a space where staff can grow and thrive in order to best empower our students. My other duties include

ensuring the smooth operation of the college through overseeing four other departments that are involved respectively in learner recruitment, training, job placement, and learner well-being.

My job, which allows me to be in the midst of youth development, and the opportunity to transform ordinary youth into “economically contributing citizens” of the country, is what drives me and what I am most passionate about.

■ ***What are some of the major strides the Sparrow FET College has made thus far in advancing youth empowerment in SA?***

Thomo: As a social enterprise training model, Sparrow FET College continues to address the challenges in education, and the skills deficit in our country. This historic deficit has not been adequately resolved since independence and continues to cause widespread unemployment and poverty.

Sparrow FET College is committed to continue providing youth, including persons with disabilities, the opportunity to gain access to a formal qualification and, hopefully, employment.



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■ ***What are some of the most significant challenges for South Africa's youth? How do you believe we can overcome them?***

Thomo: Over two decades after South Africa's first democratic election, the realities facing young people remain as troubling as ever due to issues such as crime, poverty, unequal educational opportunities, unemployment, and drug abuse. I believe that the “root” of many challenges faced by today's South African youth “stems” from the lack of quality in our education system.

According to statistics, South Africa currently ranks 128th out of 137 countries for its quality of Maths and Science education. For me, improving our education system and offering better quality education (through institutions such as Sparrow FET College) is essential for breaking the cycle of poverty and liberating young people.

■ ***How is the Sparrow FET College innovating in the face of the Covid-19 crisis in SA?***

Thomo: The Covid-19 pandemic has “forced” training institutions like Sparrow FET College to re-look and improve our traditional methods of content delivery to a more user-friendly online platform. With the lockdown restrictions due to the Covid-19 crisis, and Sparrow's commitment to reaching marginalised students, it has become apparent that our footprint must be broadened.

Sparrow FET College is in a process of converting learning programmes to an online platform. The future is in information technology; online education and training is a solution to reach the youth.



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■ ***What to you is the significance of Youth Month in 2020?***

Thomo: This year marks 44 years since the youth of 1976 stood up against the apartheid government and laid their lives fighting for freedom and the right to equal education. In 2020, the common enemy for the youth is different to that of 1976, in that today we are fighting against poverty, corruption, illiteracy, and unemployment, to mention a few. It is, therefore, fitting for the youth of today to equip themselves with education as a “weapon” to fight against this new enemy. It is only

through education that we can combat poverty, illiteracy, corruption and unemployment.

📌 **Words you live by?**

Thomo: “Failure is simply the opportunity to begin again, this time more intelligently.” (Henry Ford 1863 – 1947)

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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