

How the Collen Mashawana Foundation is planting seeds of hope and courage

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

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Arriving in 2000 in Johannesburg from Venda, Limpopo, with very little to his name, Collen Mashawana promptly spun his dreams into reality, driven by unassailable ambition. It's almost 10 years later and he's now executive chairman of pan-African investment company Afribiz Invest and founder of the Collen Mashawana Foundation.



Collen Mashawana, executive chairman of Afribiz Invest and founder of the Collen Mashawana Foundation

Mashawana's story is one of perseverance, agility, and great fortitude, and is sure to be a source of inspiration to the many youth he's determined to uplift and empower. Passionate about inspiring South Africans to live their best lives, through the foundation Mashawana has been going the extra mile to help South Africans who need it the most. The NGO, dedicated to creating jobs for the youth, prioritises improving education and boosting employment with the goal of eradicating poverty.

The organisation has also invested in transforming the lives of people through compassion, restoring dignity to the most vulnerable in South African society through house handovers. In 2018, the foundation gave away 15 houses to the elderly and disabled persons; this year its aim is 30 houses.

We interviewed Mashawana to find out more about his beginnings, the foundation - its goals and achievements thus far - and its housing programme.

Tell us more about yourself, your beginnings.

I was born and bred in Venda, and was raised by my mother who is a single parent, and she worked at a local hotel. I was raised together with my two siblings - my older brother and my older sister. My mother strongly believed in education and, as a result, made a lot of sacrifices for me to attend a private school in Venda where I've interacted with multi-cultural groups of people, which is important for me as it has paved a way for my ability to relate to people across race and culture.

Even though she made sacrifices for us to attend one of the best schools in Venda at the time, she still encouraged us to thrive, from which I developed an entrepreneurial spirit that has seen me overcome many life challenges. I learnt the importance of stretching oneself and believing in any possibilities. For example, I had to contribute towards my own transport and pocket money as my mother could not afford all the expenses and so I would always find myself wanting more and doing more and never being in a comfort zone.

What is the source of your commitment to compassion for the less fortunate?

My upbringing has taught me the importance of giving back, especially to those in need. This mainly stems from understanding what it's like to be in need and understanding the importance of showing gratitude. To me, the very least I could do to show gratitude is to give back. Most importantly, I believe that one never knows where they will receive their blessings and so it's not about receiving anything back. For me it's about playing my part and acknowledging that sometimes blessings are not for myself alone but for those around me as well.

I feel most content and satisfied knowing I've contributed towards someone's livelihood, and I especially have a passion for young people who are where I've once walked. Sometimes it just takes that one helping hand to take a leap. The Collen

Mashawana Foundation was specifically established to create a vehicle for reaching out to as many young people as possible.

■ ***Tell us more about the foundation. What are some of the primary goals it was set up to achieve?***

The Collen Mashawana Foundation is a non-profit organisation that was established as a vehicle to assist in addressing youth unemployment in South Africa. Our vision is to create a workforce of forward thinkers and dream builders. We have a team of young people who are energised and have a serving spirit, and sacrifice their time in helping others. We run initiatives that expose young people to various opportunities available, maximising their likelihood of being considered in the job market. We also lobby various industries cultivating job creators.

■ ***What are some the foundation's achievements thus far?***

Our aim is to eradicate poverty by being an agent that links young job seekers to employers from various sectors and industries. We are the central hub of job opportunities where young people can have assistance with anything that would increase their likelihood of being considered for a job. So far we've assisted in creating over 5,000 jobs across industries. We are building the foundation to be the leader and central link between young people and employers. We want to make a significant and notable difference in young people's lives by forging partnerships that will allow this to happen. We want to have a lot more programmes aimed at different aspects of employment.



■ ***How does the foundation ensure its impacts are sustainable?***

There are many opportunities available by way of learnerships, internships, and bursaries, permanent and part-time employment. These opportunities do not always reach young people. We make sure we target these meaningful opportunities and encourage young people to apply. By having a central place where all of this information is published ensures that the right audience is reached, and young people are able to take advantage of the various opportunities available and untapped. Furthermore, we encourage an entrepreneurial culture where young people become employers and in turn create jobs for other young people. In that way everyone is involved and becomes a sustainable vehicle contributing towards youth development.

■ ***South Africa has a number of issues to address, from health to housing. Why does Afribiz Invest and the Collen Mashawana Foundation choose to tackle housing in particular?***

The need for shelter is a basic human need and one's sense of well-being depends on their living conditions. If one has this basic need they then have the right focus on other life challenges without the worry of physical health or even safety. The

South African Constitution protects this right and this can be seen with how this is always on the agenda for government. I believe that if we work together with government we can do a lot more in this area and ensure most, if not all, South Africans have adequate housing. To build a healthy economy requires a stable nation and to achieve this it starts with addressing the basic human needs and ensuring the well-being of society.

▀ ***The foundation aims to donate 30 houses to those in need in 2019, how do you plan to achieve this target?***

I've learnt over the years that it takes a good strategy and a great team to achieve anything, but first and foremost there has to be passion that will drive this purpose. I have passion for social development and am most content knowing I've made a difference. I've been fortunate enough to have a great team that is able to follow through on our strategy and deliver. I believe with the right focus we can achieve the target of 30 houses in 2019.

▀ ***What from the foundation's work brings you the most joy?***

I am most fulfilled when I see a positive change in others, especially when something brings joy and hope to the next person. Handing over the houses and seeing the effects of a new home for the less fortunate gives me the most joy. Seeing a young person get that first opportunity to succeed gives me joy because it plants a seed of hope and courage.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

Sindy Peters (@sindy_hullaba_lou) is a group editor at Bizcommunity.com on the Construction & Engineering, Energy & Mining, and Property portals. She can be reached at sindy@bizcommunity.com.

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