



TRUST NEWS

Winter 2020-21

Trust student tells of struggles amid pandemic



A 21-year-old medical student has provided an insight into the challenges being faced by those trying to pursue their studies at the University during the Covid-19 virus crisis. **Thabo Phakamani Langa** is one of the 18 needy students being helped by the Trust in 2020.

He told the Trustees earlier in the year he was “barely coping” with the circumstances brought about by the pandemic. He said schedules and plans for the academic year had been disrupted and this had had a negative effect on his studies.

“Things were bad at the beginning of the pandemic and lockdown where the University resorted to online learning,” Thabo said. “The environment at home was not favourable to that kind of learning at all. The internet connection was bad... My house is too crowded, I couldn’t focus on my studies.”

He said the situation had improved with the easing of virus restrictions, allowing students to return to residences and for courses to progress online “with no limitations”. But he voiced concern about losing clinical experience which he felt posed a threat to “the quality of doctor I’m destined to become”.



Thabo said he was deeply grateful for the Trust’s help, given the burden of historical debt for his studies and poor finances at home.

TRUSTEES: Roger Smith (Chair); Tess Marsh (Secretary); Richard Cooper (Treasurer); Erin Bargate; Penny Holmes; Colin Morgan; Lorna Nimmo.

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Medical students speak of their determination to make a difference

The Trust is assisting more medical students in 2020 through meal and textbook top-up allowances, against the background of the health crisis wrought by the pandemic. Here is a sample of their stories:



Lona Mpepo, 22, says she wanted to become a doctor from the age of seven when she suffered migraines. "Doctors' efforts not only helped me deal with the pain but also my mother could get some sleep."

Lona tells of the desperate circumstances of her family, dependent upon her mother, a widow. With Lona's two brothers out of work and another at school, her mother struggles with debt.

Lona says of her ambition: "I cannot save the world but my goal is to have life-changing impacts on those I can reach." She is among the students who cite experience in a Doctors Without Borders UKZN voluntary programme as an inspiration.

Prince Nhlahla Dube, 32, says the experience of accompanying his grandmother to hospital made him want to become a doctor. He was fascinated by the doctor who attended her. "I saw how gentle he was and the amount of knowledge and skill he had."



He speaks of wanting to focus on family medicine and public health, "driven by my zeal to go to rural areas and be a hand of help".



A'zah Abdalla Kheir, 32, says she wanted to become a doctor from a young age. "I admired doctors for the manner in which they carried themselves, their rich knowledge and the sturdy dedication... to helping others despite their long hours of work and the stress."

She declares: "I want to use the skills and knowledge gained... as a doctor to help others, alleviate pain and suffering and... improve the quality of life of as many people as possible." ->

Keep in touch!

Please make sure the UKZN Alumni Relations Office and the Trust have your up-to-date contact details, including for email.

Remember to email alumni@ukzn.ac.za and info@ukznuktrust.org with any changes. Add these two email addresses to your contacts so that our emails are not rejected.



Siphelele Mthembu, 32, tells of his struggle to escape crime-ridden poverty and pursue his dream of becoming a doctor. He says growing up in the Durban township of Umlazi was not easy. "I had to fight to get out from the street gang and try to focus on studying [even though] I was being discouraged and told it will waste my time."

He says he turned such negative opinions "into a positive motive" for becoming anything he wanted to be, rather than being involved "in gang-related stuff". He declares: "I believe I am an agent of change in this country towards a better society."

Like Thabo Langa (page 1), he voices concern about the impact of the pandemic on his studies: "Being a medical student now is difficult because we need clinical exposure more than online learning."



Nelson R. Mandela Medical School

Xoliswa Njapha, 21, hopes to see the cause of women advanced as she pursues a career in medicine. She says she grew up a sick child in a deprived community where girls were expected to become child bearers. "Being the kind of woman I am, I wanted to change... the perspective of women in my community."

Xoliswa was inspired to become a doctor because of the love shown to her by the doctor "that saved my life when I was just a kid." But she adds: "My goal is beyond just being a doctor. I want to have a positive impact on young women, to show them everything is possible."



Nqobile Mtshali, 21, says the experience of feeling unable to help a friend suffering from depression made her want to study psychiatry.

She tells of adapting to meet the challenges of learning during the pandemic. She enjoys reading fiction and sewing in her spare time, including making alterations for friends. "The money I make from it, though little, helps in cases of emergency. The skill helps me open my mind and not waste time. When I'm not reading, I'm sewing!"

Nqobile does voluntary work at a GP practice in her home town, which suffers high rates of deprivation and teenage pregnancies. She would like to work with schools and social workers to better her community.

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Scholarship student thanks Trust

The student awarded the Margaret Thomas Scholarship for 2020 is among those who have written to thank the Trust for the help provided. **Craig Scelo Mthimkhulu**, 22, who is pursuing a BA Honours degree in political science, speaks of his "utmost gratitude".



He tells of growing up in different households, moving a lot and changing schools, as his parents were separated. He was unable to keep childhood friends and he has been glad to make friends at university. He comments: "The harder things are [when] growing up, the stronger your character will be, I believe."

Craig hopes his degree will help him to "work for the people". He recently completed a research paper on the impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution on employment in the global economy.

Chair sets fund-raising example

Trust Chair Roger Smith appealed to colleagues and ex-colleagues for donations to the Trust to mark his retirement from work at the end of August – and raised £570, including one significant donation. The Trustees are grateful to all those who gave.

The pandemic has made charity fund-raising even more difficult. We urge you to bring in donations through sponsored activities or events wherever feasible.

One option is to set up an online sponsorship page on Virgin Money Giving. Do so following the guide on www.virginmoneygiving.com and let friends, family and others know, as well as the Trust.



Connect with the Trust on social media



Find us on Facebook at: www.facebook.com/UKZNUKTrust

The Trust's postal address has changed

*Please be aware the Trust has changed its mailing address for correspondence from the London one used for the past 15 years to: **Church House, Yr Allt, Llantrisant, Pontyclun, CF72 8EF.** The Trust's registered address in Sheffield remains as before.*