



How SA's Young People Can Take Up Government's Call to Action this Youth Month

Promoting sustainable livelihoods and resilience of young people for a better tomorrow. This is the South African Government's Youth Day theme. It is a call to action for youth to forge resilience and pursue opportunities for a sustainable livelihood, today and in the future¹. While this is necessary, it is even more important for our leaders to provide an enabling environment that supports youth across South Africa in being able to heed this call.

This is according to Deb Zelezniak, CEO of the [Santa Shoebox Project](#) who says that for this to happen, every child in the country should have access to security of every kind. "This must include safety, food supply, healthcare, quality education and a stable economy in which to flourish."

Statistics reveal that more than 60% of South Africa's youth are multidimensionally poor², which means that they don't have access to basic public services to sustain their wellbeing and dignity³. "Underprivileged children should be seen to be as valuable as children of privilege, with access to the same resources and encouraged to see their very same potential for success. It is unacceptable that the cycle of inter-generational poverty remains unbroken, entrenching powerlessness in children living in South Africa today," she adds.

The Santa Shoebox Project strives to instil hope in these overlooked children through the kindness and generosity of a stranger who chose them to be the beneficiary of a love-filled Shoebox containing gifts of essential items and treats. "The fact that millions of children and young people grow up without access to the basics is absolutely inexcusable," explains Zelezniak.

The Santa Shoebox Project and its group of dedicated supporters have so far ensured that almost 1.1 million children have received these items and, in turn, the gift of basic dignity. "Our beloved Project is addressing shortcomings and failures, largely those of people in positions of power," she comments, adding that there should, in fact, be no need for this project. "We are here because we have to be, and we do it with huge passion. The need is so massive, but we really shouldn't be needed."

In 2022, the Project's #ShareTheLove theme takes this one step further by empowering the beneficiary child to also be the giver of a gift. Donors are encouraged to include a duplicate item in their Santa Shoebox which will be identified by means of a printed sticker attached to the item at drop off. The child receiving the Shoebox is therefore able to choose a friend or family member to give the duplicate item to, amplifying the number of children receiving a brand-new gift at the end of the year.

She says that each year, the number of applications for shoeboxes received vastly exceeds donor capacity, necessitating the heart-breaking task of declining two out of three applicants. "Need in South Africa is dire, which is why a gift containing basic necessities such as a toothbrush and toothpaste, a face cloth and soap, is critical. These are often the most appreciated items in the shoebox."

This Youth Day, she says that while it's important to encourage our youth to forge resilient futures for themselves, there is much to be done to ensure underprivileged children are getting the attention they deserve and are able to take up any opportunities that may be afforded to them.

“All South Africans can be beacons of hope to ensure that we are making a difference in underserved communities. Starting now, let’s make every month Youth Month, and ensure we are doing all we can to provide all young people with a better tomorrow, today,” Zelezniak concludes.

Pledges open to the public on 1 September, and team pledges of more than 20 Shoeboxes on 1 August each year. Virtual Santa Shoeboxes are available all year round.

To share the love or for more information, go to <https://santashoebox.org.za>.

About the Santa Shoebox Project

There are three initiatives within the Santa Shoebox Project:

Traditional Santa Shoebox: Over the last 16 years, 1 077 289 Santa Shoeboxes each containing eight specified items of treats and essentials have been given to underprivileged and socially vulnerable children throughout South Africa and Namibia. From 01 September each year, Santa Shoebox donors choose their beneficiary child/ren by name, age and gender and are given the child’s clothing size. Each personalised shoebox reaches the very child for whom it was pledged. Using the Santa Shoebox app, donors are able to track their shoebox from the moment it is pledged to the magical moment it is handed to the child.

Virtual Santa Shoebox: These shoeboxes are purchased online by donors and are available year-round, meeting the needs of donors who live too far from drop-off points, are too busy to shop or are perhaps Covid-vulnerable. Components are chosen by the donor on the Santa Shoebox website, the shoeboxes are packed by the Santa Shoebox Team and delivered to children attending far-flung rural facilities. A Virtual Santa Shoebox contains the eight specified items, as well as additional items, such as masks, a lunchbox and books. A Virtual Santa Shoebox costs R450 plus an optional delivery fee of R30.

Santa Shoebox Legacy: All Santa Shoebox Project operating costs are covered by corporate sponsors. Privately donated funds have been accruing under the SSB Legacy Fund which are now being used to bring permanent change to the lives of Santa Shoebox beneficiary children and the impoverished communities in which they live

Fiduciary information: As a Level One Contributor to B-BBEE, the Santa Shoebox Project earns 100 points on the generic scorecard, and with Section 18A status, is able to provide a tax-deductible receipt in recognition of donations. The Project is an initiative of the JOG Trust (IT2671/2009). The Trust is registered as a Public Benefit Organisation (PBO-930031301), and a Non-Profit Organisation (NPO 102-098).

Social media:

Facebook: /SantaShoebox

Twitter: @SantaShoebox

Instagram: /santashoebox

YouTube: The Santa Shoebox Project

Pinterest: /santashoebox

¹ <https://www.gov.za/YouthDay2022>

² <https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=13438>

³ <https://southafrica.un.org/en/106905-embedding-multidimensional-poverty-structural-recovery>