

Holistic approach to sports and arts programmes is impacting children's lives

According to 19-year-old Nkosikhona Ndebele of Diepsloot Number 3 High School, the Tsogo Sun Arts Academy “inspired me to become a better person”. That’s the holistic nature of the Tsogo Sun CSI flagship school programmes that impact thousands of children’s lives every year.

“Our sports and arts programme are designed to have a tangible impact on young lives – particularly the lives of disadvantaged children – and to do more than just foster an interest in a sport or the arts. Our Tsogo Sun academies use sports and arts as a medium to deliver life skills, leadership and healthy lifestyle information, while also reinforcing the importance of education to young learners in school, ultimately aiming to nurture the children’s wellbeing,” says Vusi Dlamini, HR Director for Tsogo Sun.

It’s paying off, according to reports from youngsters, facilitators, teachers and parents. Ndebele says he used to be a bully at school, taking other kids’ money because “everyone else was doing it” and hanging out with a bad crowd that negatively influenced him. “But my attitude changed when I joined the Tsogo Sun Arts Academy. It has helped me become more respectful and more disciplined and made me see the importance of being a positive role model to others. It has taught me to be humble and to communicate with other people without being violent. There is now a lot of progress in my life.” As a result, his school also discovered he had leadership skills and he was elected school president.

Child psychologist, Sheryl Cohen, says, “Children learn through cognitive, emotional and sensory experience – touching, moving, smelling, watching, and hearing are all powerful sensory experiences which facilitate learning. Sports and arts programmes do just that! They use sensory experiences to help children learn and develop. These sensory styles of learning also expect the child to be an active participant in the process of learning, rather than a passive recipient. Sport and creative arts activities also encourage

the development of social skills and teamwork. When an individual works towards the benefit of the whole team (such as soccer or a group stage performance), he or she learns about good impulse control, turn taking and participation. These are important life skills.”

With personal experience in the Tsogo Sun Soccer Academy, international footballer Morgan Gould, who plays for Kaizer Chiefs FC and Bafana Bafana, comments on its programme: “It is overwhelming to see the impact such a programme has as an extra-curricular activity in schools, encouraging the boys to develop discipline and camaraderie. This programme teaches a range of skills I wish I understood from a younger age.” He says the boys commit to school just to play soccer, “but more importantly they strive to excel at school in order to be part of the programme. Some of the boys may become sporting heroes or maybe lawyers, but it is the Tsogo Sun Soccer Academy that is laying the fundamental life skills through sport that will allow them to succeed and accomplish better lives.”

Holistic-education.net says children need to develop academic capacities, but “much more than this is needed”. Children need to begin to learn about themselves. Conveying to children that they are worthy of time and attention, not only from their peers, parents and programmes such as Tsogo Sun’s CSI programme, but also through taking the time to get to know and develop themselves and their inherent skills as individuals, seems fundamental to healthy self-respect and self-esteem. “Children also need to learn about relationships. As our societies become increasingly pluralist, complex, and fraught, social development becomes more difficult as well as more necessary.”

The Tsogo Sun school programmes cover these aspects and encourage the children to write reflectively about their experiences and learning.

Bree Street Primary School is running both the chess and arts programme through Tsogo Sun and educator Waheeda Mohamed

states that it is making a dramatic difference in the children's lives. Most of the children are from communities that "would have very little or no opportunity to attend programmes like these without sponsors," she says.

Sheila Digoro, a mother of one of the soccer players in the sports programme, Keabetswe Digoro, says her son became a lot more focused in his school work when he started playing soccer. "His behaviour improved too. Before he spent a lot of time in the streets and was often in trouble. Now he helps out at home, he is always on time for soccer, and I can rest easier knowing that that he is working hard."

There are many other children in both the Tsogo Sun sports and the arts academies who testify to the holistic benefits of the programmes in their lives, such as Nompumelelo Moyo, 16-year-old pupil at Diepsloot West Secondary school, who says the Arts Academy has "built my personality as well as developed my artistic side that I never knew existed. This whole experience has made me a better person. I am now more confident and able to perform in front of a group of people. I also started a choir with some of my friends which helps other children stay off the streets. It has helped me in numerous ways such as being disciplined, working hard in my academics, and being a respectful person."