

■ COMPETITION



MZAMBA soup kitchen – poignant prose from pupils in lockdown has sparked a daily feeding scheme in Mzamba village near the Wild Coast Casino. | Theo Delort-Laval

# Written from the heart

Amid the invisible threat of Covid-19 infection, education offers hope, writes William Western

A 12-YEAR-OLD Wild Coast lad says he “feels like the breadwinner of his family” after coming second in a writing competition and receiving a R750 food hamper.

Such is life in Mzamba, a rural village adjacent to the plush Wild Coast Casino, on the KwaZulu-Natal South Coast and Transkei border. The contrasts between the two are immense – a microcosm of South Africa where the poorest of the poor have been hardest hit by the Covid-19 lockdown.

“Street vendors suffer a lot since they can’t sell and provide for their families,” wrote Mfundo Shezi.

But the Grade 7 pupil did not only dwell on hardships.

“I live in a warm home with love. I eat more healthily because I am not allowed to buy chips and sweets.”

He said he missed his friends and school, especially natural science “because it gives me a clear knowledge of nature”.

Lockdown, he wrote, was “one of the hardest things my family has ever experienced”, but he had kept himself

busy, attending to household chores, looking after his dogs, watering plants, and doing lots of thinking “under a tree in the back yard”.

“I personally think it was a wise decision for the president to announce a lock down to prevent the spread of Covid-19,” wrote Mfundo.

In the meantime, staying home was the best option “since we waiting on government to get a vaccine”.

But what might happen if no vaccine is found soon, troubles Mfundo. “What will happen to us?” he asked.

Mfundo’s entry was one of more than 30 in the competition catering for grades 6 and 7 pupils at Ithuba Wildcoast Community College, a not-for-profit private primary school, built and funded by Austrian benefactors.

The competition was organised by the environmental journalism training agency Roving Reporters with the modest prizes sponsored by Founders Golf Tournament – the sole South African funder of the school.

The joint winning entries were by Onele Dimane and Khanya Mkhonza,

earning them food vouchers of R1 000 each and praise from the adjudicators for their “mature understanding of the situation” and “wonderfully refreshing” observations.

The acute impact of the Covid 19 lockdown and fears of a coronavirus outbreak in Mzamba were a central thread in many narratives.

“At home we have never suffered hunger ever since I was born, but now we are out of groceries and no one is able to go to work, or buy blankets, warm clothes or even medicine for fever,” wrote Onele, whose family have been using limited supplies of sunlight soap for sanitising.

She described the college as a fun and adventurous school with its own vegetable garden that contributed to nutritious lunches that pupils received every school day.

On reading the entries, Founders chairperson John Cheshire arranged an additional 180 food hampers for pupils from the most needy homes.

An Austrian volunteer, Theo Delort-Laval, has since started a soup

kitchen in Mzamba, entirely funded on donations from friends abroad.

While Amahle Nqadini, who placed third, also misses the school lunches, she said her biggest concern was catching up missed lessons, and how long it would take “for life to be normal again”.

“My favourite subject is life skills. It teaches us how to carry ourselves in life, careers we can follow, and freedom of expression. I can’t wait to go back to school, but what will happen if coronavirus is still out there.”

Amid these fears, Roving Reporters is rolling out the next round in its series of Covid-19-related story writing competitions for schools in rural areas of the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. The theme is, Life After Covid-19: The Future We Want.

● To find out more about the journalism-themed writing competitions contact Roving Reporters director Fred Kockott at 083 277 8907 or email fredk@rovingreporters.co.za



MFUNDO Tshezi, second prizewinner in Roving Reporters pilot Life in Lockdown writing competition – a R750 food voucher – says he now feels like a breadwinner in his family.



■ CHEMICAL WASTE



A BLUE uMbilu River tainted by an alleged chemical spill.

## Residents frustrated by river pollution

NATHAN CRAIG  
nathan.craig@inl.co.za

THE UMBILO river has gone from being a black and grey sludge because of sewage to an unnatural cerulean due to alleged chemical dumping.

Queensburgh and Pinetown residents, along the uMbilu River, namely from Paradise Valley, Glenpark, Moseley and Dawndcliffe are frustrated.

They have sent emails, lodged complaints and made desperate pleas for help which remain unanswered as issues of pollution have become an almost daily occurrence.

Residents have compiled spreadsheets with over 70 complaints lodged with eThekweni Municipality and have online folders filled with photographs of the river in various unhealthy states. Marinus Needham, a long-time Glenpark resident, said the issues were escalating and worsened every day.

“The issues are widespread but in my home, we suffer between 6pm to 8pm every day as a putrid smell wafts from the uMbilu River valley into my home. We are forced to plan our meals around this inconvenience. This property has been my home for over 20 years but this is a new issue.”

Justine Saunders, member of the Pinetown Conservancy and founder of the uMbilu River Watch, said the river flowed through the bottom of her garden and she could not sit idly as the river deteriorated.

“One of the major issues are nearby factories which border the river. They have to comply to regulations in order to dispose of chemical waste but we still have these issues meaning something is not right.”

Desiree Laverne, spokesperson for Greenpeace Durban said they were disappointed and felt the municipality was not bothered by any environmental disasters that involve the uMbilu River.

“The river is always polluted and the culprits just don’t seem to ever be held accountable for their actions. Government is a disaster when it comes to environmental protection or conservation.”

Queensburgh councillor Chris van der Berg said issues of sewerage leaks into the river were ongoing and he always received complaints from residents.

Ward 18 councillor, Melanie Brauteseth: said there were compounded issues from the maintenance of the Umbilo Wastewater Treatment Works to outdated sewerage systems and manholes situated around the river.

“Unfortunately, the only response I ever receive is that the municipality has depleted its budget and thus cannot allocate resources to this problem. Which is unacceptable.”

Municipal councillor and eThekweni executive committee member, Yogiswarie Govender, said attempts had been made to escalate the issue but unfortunately, with the lockdown, there had been slow progress.

eThekweni Municipality’s spokesperson Msawakhe Mayisela said the city had not come across any cases of illegal dumping and that most of the investigated issues were traced to infrastructural issues.

“For example, breaks in the sewer lines, and blockages often caused by misuse of the sewer system. We cannot dismiss the possibility of illegal discharges and our team is investigating.” Mayisela said if a company required to discharge trade effluent, they were required to comply with municipal sewage disposal by-laws.

“Perpetrators caught illegally discharging into the river will be fined and prosecuted. They will also be required to clean up and remediate the entire area affected.”

■ EDUCATION

## ‘Our kids are desperate to get back into classes’

A COURAGEOUS step is being taken in resuming school activity amid the Covid-19 pandemic, said Jackie du Toit, the general manager of Ithuba Wild Coast Community College.

Over the past week, the school management team and staff have been grappling with the myriad regulations to ensure a safe environment, some of which could prove challenging for cash-

strapped rural schools like Ithuba.

But unlike the Eastern Cape leadership of the South African Democratic Teachers Union (Sadtu), which has called on teachers to stay at home until the pandemic is over, Ithuba staff are keen to catch up on lost teaching time.

“Our kids are desperate to get back into classes,” said principal Tembazi Makedama.

She said orientation and training would provide full understanding of the potential risks to both teachers and pupils.

Temperature screening and sanitising will be done at the school gate at the beginning and end of each day.

Strict access control will be in place and parents and health authorities immediately alerted should a

child shows suspected symptoms of Covid-19.

Makedama said although school attendance was not compulsory, a full turn-out of Grade 7 pupils and teachers was expected tomorrow, followed by a phased in introduction of other classes as per guidelines provided by the Independent Schools Association of South Africa. | www.rovingreporters.co.za

East Coast Radio  
**REDEFINED**

INTRODUCING YOUR NEW DAYTIME LINE-UP

<b>DARREN, KERI &amp; SKY</b> 06:00 – 09:00	<b>THANDOLWETHU</b> 09:00 – 13:00
<b>VIC NAIDOO</b> 13:00 – 16:00	<b>STACEY &amp; JSBU</b> 16:00 – 19:00

ON SATURDAY  
**INDEPENDENT**

**WEBINAR**  
featuring  
**celebrity Hair Stylist Terry Scott**

As he talks to us through hair care during lockdown

Terry Scott  
Hair stylist

Join us via Facebook Live on Wednesday, June 3 at 1 pm.

Facebook icon @IOSNewsSA

Tune in and get an opportunity to learn how to keep your hair healthy at home.

**INDEPENDENT**