

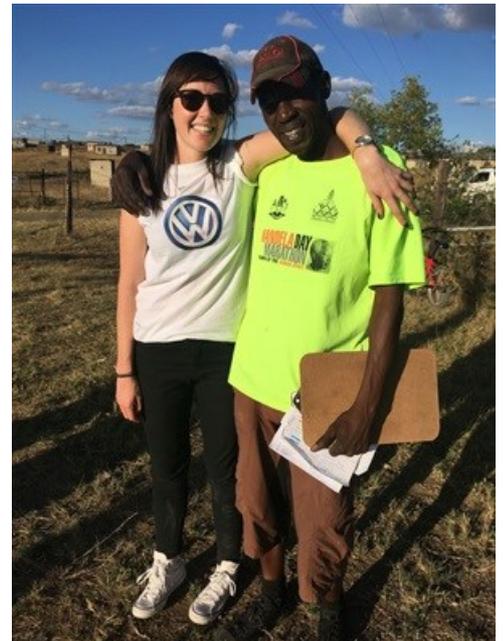
Nhlanhla Thabede is steering the way to a better future for the children of Bergville

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Nhlanhla Thabede is the coach of the six promising cyclists from Bergville, who received bicycles through the Volkswagen Blue Bikes project.

Nhlanhla has been a key member in the support team, who has mentored and helped develop a new-found passion for cycling in these kids from the rural community, who won the local Bergville cycling race. With the support of Volkswagen, Nhlanhla will be supporting these six youngsters on a brave and challenging journey on 'the road to 947'. Here we chat to Nhlanhla about the journey so far and the dreams of the team in the upcoming race.



1. How did you get involved in the Blue Bikes Qhubeka Project?

- I got involved with the Project initially because VW contacted Cycling South Africa looking for a coach to help train riders from the Blue Bikes Project. I am a UCI level 1 Coach and was identified in the District to help assist with the training of the Blue Bikes cyclists.

2. In an area like Bergville where there are limited resources for training, what have you done to help prepare the team?

- I use what we have, but mostly we do physical training to keep their bodies healthy and strong. The terrain in the area is good for cycling sessions with its up and down hills.

3. What are some of the challenges that the team have occurred so far?

- Our biggest challenge is getting enough time to train after school, as the team stay far from where we meet for training.

4. What are you and the team most excited for at the 947 Cycle Challenge?

- The biggest excitement for me, is that it's going to be my first time coaching Riders who will enter 94.7 Cycle Challenge. This is a big accomplishment for me personally.
- The Team are very excited as they see themselves as professional Riders who will win on the day. They are very ambitious to become professional riders.

5. How do you keep the team motivated?

- It is sometimes hard to keep them motivated because I don't stay in the same area as them and can't see them daily, but I send text and Whatsapp messages to check in on them and keep them motivated.

6. In which areas of cycling have the team most improved?

- Bike safety
- Bike control

- Braking
 - Riding as a Team and speed
7. How has the community supported the team over the journey thus far?
- The people of the community support the team through well wishes and encouragement to continue with cycling and practice. It is a great point of pride for the older people of the community.
8. What significant impact have you seen in the kids who are partaking in the 947 Cycle Challenge?
- They have become more confident in themselves and remain positive even when the route to 947 becomes tough.
9. What importance do you think a project like Blue Bikes has in rural communities?
- It makes a huge difference to the community, because since the project started in Bergville, i've seen children of the community save so much time. During the week, I see children who come from far areas riding their bikes to school. Over weekends I see children riding their bikes carrying bags from shops, which helps their parents and grandparent with travel. This kind of access to mobility allows the kids to have more time for their education, more time to play and more time to be children.
10. How has VW's participation in the project impacted the community?
- VW is like a father to us and is very special to those who are involved in the cycling project because most of our community cannot afford to buy bikes for their children or themselves. The VW Blue Bikes project helps children be on time for school, gives them mobility to travel far distances and allows them to be ambitious. Really VW is changing lives of the poor in that community.
11. What are your hopes and dreams for the future of the Blue Bikes project in the Bergville community?
- I hope that Blue Bikes project will continue to create visible development in the Bergville community. My dream, one day, is to run a coaching clinic that gives safe cycling training to all those who have received a bike, which can only be possible through the help of VW.
 - We hope to continue working with VW on the Blue Bikes Project, so that our dream of having a District Cycling Team can become a reality. The dream is to have a local Cycling Club of the most skilled riders, which will assist local development of riders in order to grow the sport in our District.