

# The Martin Dreyer Change a Life Academy



Kwanda Mhlophe

## Winning against the odds

This year, multi-sports champion Martin Dreyer has focused on spreading the reach of his Change a Life Academy to greater numbers of disadvantaged youngsters in the Dusi Valley, many of whom are simply waiting for the opportunity to spread their wings and fly.

Fledgling Change a Lifers, such as John Ntuli, who came on board in late 2010, have already proved their mettle, climbing to the top of the 'exponential curve of performance'. John was crowned KwaZulu-Natal's Duathlon Champion for his combination of running and cycling prowess and invited to compete in the World Championships in Spain.

### Achieving a multiplier effect

Martin has expanded his Change a Life Academy in other ways too. In 2010 he launched a Cross-Country Running League in the Valley of a Thousand Hills to encourage hundreds of local school children to aspire to greater heights. His Change a Lifers are the leaders and mentors of this programme, providing them in turn with valuable leadership skills. Youngsters of all ages are encouraged to take part in weekly time trials at their schools as a prelude to Inter-school Sports Days, and the times of the first 50 athletes are recorded. Every three months at the Sports Day, the excitement is palpable as the young athletes vie with each other for front positions. The ten runners, sports teacher and principal of the winning school get an outing to the Spur to eat as much as they can followed by a movie - a huge incentive, says Martin. The team from the school placed second also goes to the Spur, while the third gets valuable food parcels to take home.

Kwanda Mhlophe, a beneficiary of the Martin Dreyer Change a Life Academy, coordinates its Schools Cross-Country Running League and participated in the 2010 Change a Life Cycle Tour in Malawi. Kwanda's experience reflects the success of the academy in transforming the lives of talented young people in one of South Africa's most impoverished and socially challenged regions.

"The Change a Life programme has improved my life as an athlete. I used to be in the lower ranks of paddlers, not because I wasn't good enough but

due to the lack of essential resources. With the help of Martin Dreyer, my fitness in both running and paddling, and also my river paddling skills, have improved a lot. Change a Life has provided us with brand new boats, running and paddling kit, and now I race alongside the elite athletes in the sport," Kwanda says.

"Change a Life opens many doors of opportunity for us. After passing my matric and improving in my performance as an athlete I got good recognition. Martin helped me get financial assistance for tertiary education. Change a Life does not only help us improve as athletes, but is helping us improve our lives," he adds.

Meanwhile, Martin's core team of 14 Change a Lifers continues to perform well in a multitude of paddling events, including the Dusi and the SA Schools Sprint Champs, in which youngster Paulos Shoji was awarded a silver medal in the competitive Under 18 age group (1 000 metres and 200 metres).



John Ntuli

# iChoose to Change a Life



## Standing against crime

This year the Valued Citizens Initiative (VCI), which drives iChoose to Change a Life, has embarked on a major new initiative called Stand Against Crime. The intent is to combat crime in Johannesburg schools through 12 open dialogues run by Change a Life Ambassadors and leaders. By November, Stand Against Crime clubs had been launched at six public schools around the city with the aim of highlighting issues related to crime such as reporting, standing for our constitutional values as citizens and ultimately creating safer and crime free school communities.



A recent study by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) shows that 15,3% of all South African learners experience some form of violence at school, including stabbing, bullying and physical abuse. The CJCP reports that young people aged 12 - 22 are victimised twice as much as adults in South Africa. Continued exposure to victimisation, crime and violence has a marked impact on social development and for many young South Africans criminal behaviour has become normalised.

Stand Against Crime aims to mobilise learners to initiate crime prevention activities within their schools, with the help of iChoose Ambassadors, a select group of diverted teenagers who have excelled during the iChoose To Change a Life leadership programme.

## Teaching constitutional values and responsibility

VCI founder Carole Podetti-Ngono says the plan is to grow Stand Against Crime into a substantial programme that will positively influence the Gauteng public school environment. She illustrates the case of the GR Harris Primary School which in February, at the start of the Stand Against Crime Initiative, reported many crime incidents involving pupils, as well as a case where a father came to school to avenge his daughter and beat up a girl learner in class. In just a few months, crime incidents at the school have dramatically diminished and previously unruly children have embraced the Stand Against Crime message. A key theme is taking responsibility for one's own actions and reporting the actions of others who display inappropriate behaviour. Paige Bühr, a

Grade 7 learner from GR Harris Primary School says: "Stand Against Crime educates us about what is appropriate behaviour and helps us to ensure that we grow up without falling into the trap of crime or abusing drugs."

VCI's success lies in the organisation's ability to inspire children to stand up for their constitutional values, take responsibility for their civic rights and abide by the rule of law. Since its launch eleven years ago, VCI has trained over 5 000 educators and 468 000 school children from 1 605 public schools across Limpopo, Gauteng, Free State and KwaZulu Natal around value-driven themes.

In recent years, there has been a shift from punitive criminal justice practices in South Africa towards more rehabilitative options for juvenile offenders. VCI runs an official diversion programme, which is supported by the Johannesburg, Wynburg, and Randburg Children's' courts. Young offenders aged between 12 and 21 are encouraged to develop a positive self-image, rebuild family relationships and learn communication skills and emotional intelligence.



Carole Podetti-Ngono and the 2011 iChoose to Change a Life Leadership graduates.

## The DNA Project



### Tackling crime with DNA

In 2011 The DNA Project team, under the guidance of founder Vanessa Lynch and her colleague Carolyn Hancock, has been working tirelessly to ensure the success of the DNA Awareness Campaign. The primary aim of the campaign is to provide basic training to all those who may be the first at a crime scene on the value of forensic evidence such as DNA, and the importance of crime scene preservation.

The DNA project has hosted DNA awareness workshops throughout the year and to-date over 8 000 people in the security sector, emergency services, SAPS, Metro Police and general public have been trained throughout South Africa (in comparison with 1 080 people at the same time last year). In order to ensure the sustainability of the DNA Awareness Campaign, a "Train the Trainer" programme has also been developed to enable security organisations and paramedic training centres to provide their own ongoing DNA Awareness training thereby ensuring that, no matter the turnover of staff within a company, each new employee will automatically receive training on crime scene preservation and the value of forensic evidence. To facilitate this process, The DNA Project brought together all of its trainers in Cape Town in July 2011 to collectively 'brainstorm' and produce a Train the Trainer programme for use in these types of workshops. "We will have hosted over 15 Train the Trainer workshops by the end of this year and by so doing, effectively creating an exponential effect as each trainer will now continue with the awareness programme within their organisations", says Vanessa.

In recognising that DNA profiling is increasingly vital to ensuring accuracy and fairness in the criminal justice system, The DNA Project has developed a 'legal DNA Awareness' which aims to make certain that prosecutors, magistrates, attorneys and members of the legal fraternity dealing with DNA evidence in the courtroom, are properly conversant with the scientific basis and presentation of such evidence, as well as with its potential usefulness in criminal cases. The intention of this course is to form a bridge between the science of DNA and the legal aspects of DNA evidence which will provide trainees with the necessary information not only to understand the significance of DNA evidence, but also to successfully adduce, recognise and if necessary, challenge the validity of such evidence in court.



The DNA Project has been continually lobbying support for changes to the current Criminal Procedure Act via the media and social media platforms. Through constant pressure and engaging with key members of the Portfolio Committee who are reviewing the DNA Bill, The DNA Project has been given access to the report of the International DNA Study Tour which the Committee finally embarked upon during June and July 2011. Vanessa attended the Parliamentary hearings following the Study Tour which centred around finalising and adopting the comprehensive report drafted by the Committee after the Study Tour. It is hoped that the Criminal Procedures Act will finally be enacted during 2012. The urgent need for the proposed change in our legislation was highlighted recently in an article written by Chris Asplen, the executive director of DNA4Africa when he said: "The legislation sits in committee, while the worst sexual violence statistics in the world continue to pile up. Except they are not really statistics. They are terrified women and little girls staring into the face of horrific violence..."

Through the incredible support of the Mike Thomson Change a Life Trust and a local advertising agency, The DNA Project has produced a TV advert which in the space of a minute clearly highlights the importance of preserving evidence that may be left by criminals at a crime scene - the key message is: "DNA Convicts. Never Disturb a Crime Scene". The advert will be aired on national TV during the 16 days of activism for no violence against women and children (25 November to 10 December 2011).

During 2012 The DNA Project will embark on an extensive media campaign developed by Foxp2 advertising agency, which will create DNA awareness through print, on radio and TV, as well as through the distribution of crime scene tape. The media campaign is being supported by 'SHOUT for a Safer SA' which has offered to flight the TV advert on Combatant Rank TV and through their social media network.

# Kushido Karate-Do



Allan Thomson, Dee Knights and the Kushido Karate-Do students

The Kushido Karate-Do started 2011 with an inspirational Gashuku which was held in the bushveld in Mpumalanga. (Gashuku is translated as "Hard Training" and entails several days of waking up early in the morning and spending the whole day training!). For the four underprivileged youngsters who attended, the Gashuku was a fantastic privilege - not only giving them the opportunity to hone their karate skills but to spend quality time interacting with two prestigious instructors (Karate-Ka) from Switzerland, Renshi Paul and Shihan Juanita. Allan Thomson, the founder of the karate-do says: "As always on Gashuku, a close camaraderie grows between all students and not only is karate taught but many important life skills.

A key development during the year was the sponsorship by Tracker, assisted by Change a Life, of a vehicle and driver to transport the youngsters from Drummond and Cosmo City to weekly classes at the Dojo - a huge benefit to the programme.

Gradings this year took place in May and October and provided an opportunity for the youngsters to prove their skills and demonstrate the confidence and self-esteem that has grown through their involvement with the programme. Against the backdrop of South Africa's violent crime levels, with 30% perpetrated by youngsters under the age of 18, Allan is positive that the values and self-discipline taught in the Karate-Do programme make a healthy contribution to society.

Twelve of the original 15 students from Drummond are still training. However, three younger students have joined their ranks so there are still 15 training on Monday evenings. The Thursday group lost a few students but also gained two new students.

A Close Quarter Protection (CQP) - Self Defence Course in October was attended by ten youngsters from both Cosmo City and Drummond. They thoroughly enjoyed the informality of this way of learning and became more aware of what they had learnt during the formal Karate training. The instructors commented that it is wonderful to see the expressions on a youngster's face when he shows someone else a basic technique which he takes for granted.

Sensei Dee Knights describes the impact of the Mike Thomson Change a Life Trust on the Kushido karate-do: "It has touched many lives including mine. Mike was my beloved Sensei (instructor) and losing him was terribly hard. Our dojo seemed to be suddenly emptied of life and certainly laughter. However, due to the hard work of Shihan Allan Thomson (Mike's brother) and the Computershare team we have been able to fill our dojo with energetic youngsters who bring plenty of life and lots of laughter back - breathing new life into the Kushido Riverside dojo. They come from underprivileged environments and are appreciative of the attention and care the Sensei and existing karate-ka give so willingly.

"As instructors, we have watched some of the timid and withdrawn youngsters begin to lift their chins and look us in the eye. Others have lost the "I don't care" attitude. And many are trying to help by translating instructions to the very young ones whose English is not good.

"The youngsters bring us pride in being associated with Kushido Karate-do and Sensei Mike's voice seems to have returned to the dojo."



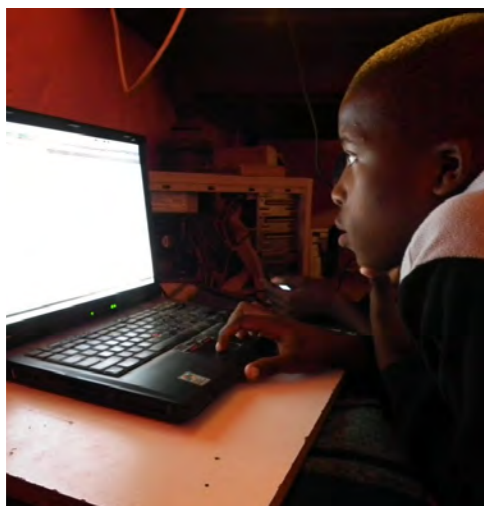
## Restoring hope

Kushido Karate-Do uses an established Dojo karate facility - originally set up by Allan and Mike Thomson - in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg. After Mike's sudden violent death in 2007, his family and friends assisted by Change a Life decided to develop a programme to make a difference to the lives of underprivileged teenagers who also live north of Johannesburg but in different circumstances.

The programme aims to inspire these children to grow in confidence and become well-balanced, productive members of society through the discipline and power of karate-do - creating something positive and inspirational out of Mike's tragedy. It started in 2010 with 15 students, aged between 11 and 20, who were recruited in the informal community of Drummond. Despite being desperately poor, with few clothes and often little food to sustain them, the 15 students all passed their first official grading in August 2010 full of pride for what they had achieved. A second batch of 15 students from Cosmo City was taken on in late 2010. This year the programme aims to accommodate 60 youngsters with the assistance of four black-belt teaching staff.



# Nemato Change a Life



## Changing lives, one child at a time

The Mike Thomson Change a Life Trust will add Nelson Mandela Township (Nemato) Change a Life to its stable of beneficiary projects in 2012.

Nemato Rowing Club was established in the Nelson Mandela Township close to the Kowie River in Port Alfred (Eastern Cape) in 2005 to teach youths from the impoverished township to swim and row. Its initial focus was to use sport as a vehicle of empowerment and it recorded significant achievements, not only in competitive events, where the rowers demonstrated their ability to compete at the highest levels of the sport in South Africa, but also in the empowerment of its participants.

In 2010, the club expanded its development programme to include other sporting codes and daily homework classes for its athletes, with a strong focus on basic mathematics and language skills, and computer literacy. A feeding scheme was also established to cater for the nutritional needs of participants.



The empowerment programme has had a significant impact on local youngsters, opening up opportunities that previously would have been no more than a dream. Two of Nemato's stars are now studying at universities: Athenkosi Hlekani is a top rower and captain of the rowing club at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), studying on a full sports bursary. Khayakazi Madikane is at Rhodes University. Three rowers are studying at Port Elizabeth College and a further nine rowers are in career counselling to start skills training and FET or university studies in 2012. Two rowers, Lunga Vulindlu and Chuma Nyendwana are currently employed by the club in senior management positions.

On the strength of its track record, the Mike Thomson Change a Life Trust has selected the programme as a beneficiary, and the programme has been renamed Nemato Change a Life. The Trust would like to establish a Change a Life Centre to house the programme's youth empowerment and education project, including an Early Childhood Development centre (2013), and its other activities. If current efforts to acquire land for the programme are successful, it is envisaged that the Change a Life Centre will be developed in two phases, with completion of the ECD facilities in Phase 1 and additional educational facilities and a gymnastics / fencing hall in Phase 2.

On a recent visit to the programme, Stan Lorge, Ursula du Plooy and Mnandi Bestbier were so impressed with its achievements and future

potential, that they are considering taking the 2014 Change a Life Cycle Tour to Port Alfred and its surrounds.

Jan Blom, the inspirational founder and mentor of the programme, says that by supporting Nemato Change a Life, the Mike Thomson Change a Life Trust is will not only contribute to the transformation of a community in great need but also to economic development in Port Alfred.



Mnandi Bestbier and Jan Blom.