

How WNS SA fosters community spirit in its CSI initiatives to create a magical change

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

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Business process outsourcing company WNS SA has four key initiatives that form part of its [CSI strategy](#), one of which is its Youth4Change Movement which aims to assist young South Africans bring about positive change within their schools and communities. The initiative falls under the charge of the WNS Cares Foundation, a group company of WNS, whose mission is to serve society and create a strong foundation for sustainability initiatives and corporate social investment by WNS.



Megan Meredith, CSI manager, WNS South Africa

The Youth4Change Movement entails a six-month Towards Tomorrow Leadership Programme in which selected youth from underprivileged schools undergo leadership skills training that they then apply in an upliftment project within their respective communities. Projects range from school facilities upgrades and makeovers to educational workshops and awareness drives around water saving. Finally, at the end of the programme, participants are provided the opportunity to apply for an internship with WNS.

Bizcommunity interviewed Megan Meredith, CSI manager for WNS SA, to find out more about the Youth4Change Movement initiative, how it ensures its CSI initiatives are sustainable, and its plans for Mandela Day this year.

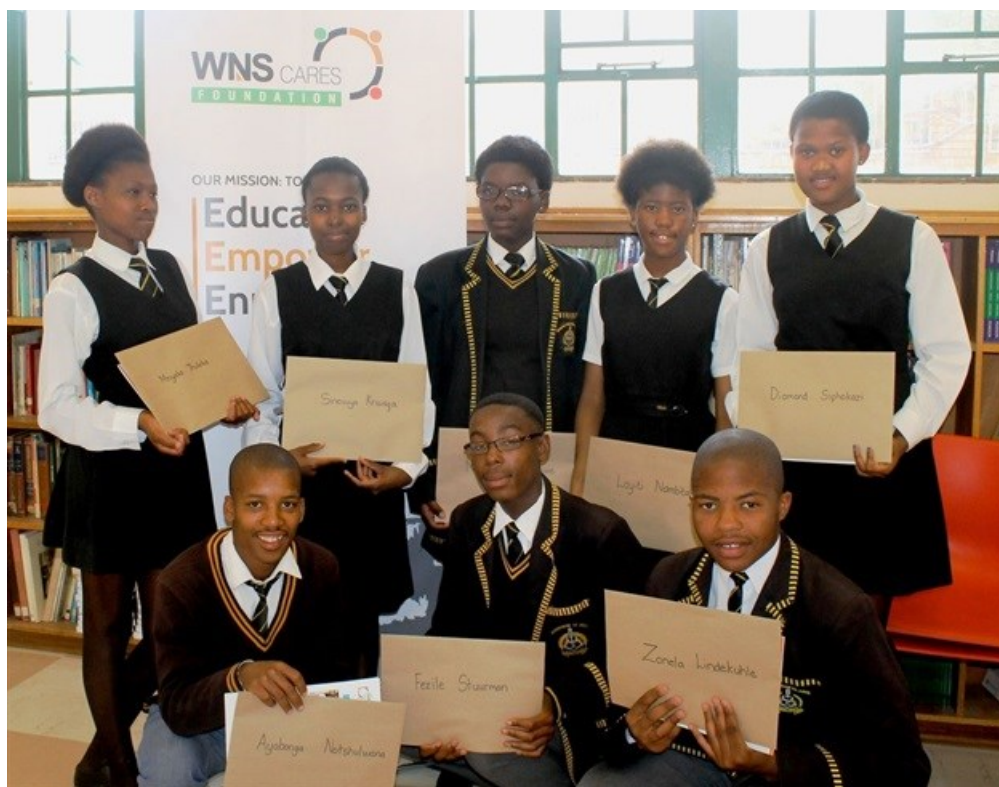
 **Could you share with us a success story from the Youth4Change Movement?**

Megan Meredith: There are many success stories to tell, but the most valuable of this is the internal change the youth undergo, which surpasses the actual physical project completed. Some 'pearls of wisdom' the youth have verbalised and internalised include:

"I now understand that opportunities and hard work can take you places that you never dreamed of. This project changed how I think about my future. I want to set goals and plan ahead for a career. I may even consider marketing and media."

"I have grown as a result of being on the programme. What really brought the changes home was when my parents and teachers said they could see changes in me."

"Belief in myself was in short supply at the beginning of the project, but this changed as I was able to accomplish what I had set out to do."



Masiphatisane Senior Secondary Students receive their graduation certificates.

■ **WNS SA, for the second time, received the Community Spirit Award in last year's BPESA National Industry Awards. To what would you attribute this recognition?**

Meredith: At WNS SA, we do not "outsource" our community programmes and CSI projects, but rather take a direct hands-on approach in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the impact of the programme and projects on our employees and the communities from which they come.

Mentors and volunteers from WNS willingly participate by getting involved in the trenches, and don't mind getting dirty. Their involvement in the Youth4Change Movement provides the greatest opportunity for a boost in morale and motivation in the workplace and in the community. Each of our eight delivery locations across South Africa is aligned to a school and share a degree of accountability for the initiatives undertaken. They step up and support the youth in their care to make the project a success. It is no wonder that team work and the value it presents is often the biggest lessons and greatest success factor to these community upliftment programmes. Through team work we are able to foster community spirit to create a magical change.

■ How does WNS SA ensure its CSI initiatives are sustainable?

Meredith: The Youth4Change movement is empowerment based. Projects are short term (six to seven months), youth/school chosen and owned, and have smart objectives and deliverables in place. A memorandum of understanding is signed and adhered to with all parties involved for each project. The principles that are taught, practiced, modelled and upheld are what give the initiatives its own momentum, especially when the going gets tough. This, together with fundraising and financial planning, sustainability planning, nurturing and self-help action, team work and a belief in the capacity of the individual and school, is what keeps the recipients functioning independently of the WNS community programme.



Students from Phoenix Secondary School in Manenberg graduate from Youth4Change Movement programme.

■ How important is authenticity and transparency in the CSI space in South Africa?

Meredith: Transparency is the absence of corruption, and given South Africa's challenges with corruption, it is simply vital within a local CSI context. Once a commitment to social responsibility is made, the investment and transparency thereof is non-negotiable. Given the social plagues and unique needs South African communities have, businesses have a responsibility to honestly uplift the environment in which they operate.

WNS South Africa invests in youth and focuses on teaching them leadership skills as part of the initiatives undertaken. A good leader practices authenticity and transparency as well as responsibility, commitment and accountability. These leadership practices are entrenched into the projects undertaken by demanding complete financial transparency and shared decision making between the team.



Tlhatlogang Secondary School Arts & Culture Centre opening.

The Youth4Change projects take the Management by Objectives (MBO) approach, which includes:

- Memorandums of understanding are entered into with the schools detailing the work ahead, goals and objectives, each parties commitments expectations and an agreed upon time schedule;
- Participants for the youth leadership and core volunteer programmes are selected according to set criteria and trained. Graduation at the end of the programme is a success target;
- Measured youth leadership training outcomes and impacts (pre and post assessment reports) to showcase growth and change (skills, capacity gains and impact);
- Qualitative feedback reports by the youth on the impact of WNS core volunteers mentoring and coaching of them;
- Qualitative feedback reports by WNS core volunteers on the professional and personal gains as a result of participating in the programme (skills learnt and changed outlooks especially around leadership, management and communication); and
- Completed projects.

Moreover, WNS South Africa is a Level-4 B-BBEE contributor and qualifies as an Empowering Supplier according to the B-BBEE Amended Codes of Good Practice. We remain committed to maximising social impact while always adhering to the B-BBEE Amended Codes of Good Practice and undergo regular audits to this end.



Westridge High students celebrating their success.

■ ***What is WNS SA doing for Mandela Day this year, and what do you think is the significance of Mandela Day in 2017?***

Meredith: We will be running our annual Today's Basics for Tomorrow's Leaders campaign, where WNS employees will have the opportunity to donate much needed toiletries and hygiene products to employee-selected local children's charities / organisations. The charities include:

- Cape Town - Vision Orphanage;
- Port Elizabeth - Lukhanyiso Home;
- Johannesburg - Refilwe Legae Home;
- Durban - Domino Foundation; and
- Centurion - Ki-deo Home.

These collections will be handed over by a group of WNS employees on Mandela Day where they will have the opportunity to interact with the children and staff of the chosen charities / organisations. Each child and employee will receive a cupcake and juice box on the day to celebrate the handover.

Mandela was a firm believer in the South African youth being our future and of the need to nurture youth. Providing for some basics is one way in which we are helping to provide some of that nurture.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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