

Show off your culinary skills, #Cook4Madiba

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

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Literacy-focused NPO Help a Child Grow (HCG), in partnership with Maboneng-based JHB Culinary and Pastry School, will be hosting a cook-off on Saturday, 16 July, to mark Mandela Day. Members of the public are invited to show off their culinary skills while engaging in healthy competition for this great cause.

The event aims to raise funds for Kgotso Crèche and Mighty Kids Centre children's home in Katlehong on the East Rand which are in dire need of resources for their daily operation.



Participants, spectators, and sponsors are invited to join in on the cook-off. At a cost of R200 per person, teams of five will attempt to cook up a storm with a mystery basket of ingredients. Spectators pay R150 to get in and will receive a complimentary hot chocolate. The cook-off will take place over four one-hour sessions at 244 Main Street, Maboneng Precinct.

Session times:

- 1st session: 12:30–1:30pm
- 2nd session: 2-3pm
- 3rd session: 3.30-4.30pm
- 4th session: 5-6pm

We interviewed Matilda Sekoakoa, founder of HCG, to find out more about their Mandela Day initiative, what sparked the #Cook4Madiba idea, and how, beyond Mandela Day, the public and corporates can get involved with HCG.

 ***Tell us a bit about what your Mandela Day initiative entails?***

It's about getting like-minded people under one roof to create hearty meals for a mutual purpose to serve Kgotso Crèche and Mighty Kids Centre children's home, which are based in Katlehong and Malvern respectively. It's a day where we will be showing our cooking skills while raising funds. The most fun part of the event for me is the mystery basket and the theme that all participants will receive on the day to cook their socks off within limited time provided for prep and cooking the food.

■ ***How was the #Cook4Madiba idea sparked?***

The winter season always makes me crave a hot bowl of soup and to snuggle under a warm blanket. Driving home from work every day, I always see women sitting by the robots with their young kids asking for work and food; that always hits home and – being a parent myself – things can get really tough. I often wonder how many women out there are doing their best to fend for their young - some are minding homeless children, children that do not have anyone to look after them because their parents have to work and cannot afford any child-care service. There is nothing more heart-breaking than having to wonder when your next meal will be. So, amongst other things that we do passionately in the organisation, food is one of love. The initial idea was to cook a hearty meal for Mandela Day of goodwill and give to the beneficiaries we chose for this year. As nice as it seemed, it was not going to sustain the recipients. We then thought of inviting foodies to compete amongst themselves in making their best dish that identifies them and raise funds, that way the beneficiaries will be able to further sustain their children's home and the nursery.



■ ***What role will the JHB Culinary and Pastry School be playing in the initiative?***

They will be hosting the event on their premises and involving individuals and corporates in contributing to society. Their students are involved in many platforms at their school and this will be another opportunity for them to get involved with guiding contestants and be part of this amazing celebration.

■ ***How is the initiative a sustainable one?***

Having all the competing teams and spectators to contribute monetarily, we are able to secure at least half of the target amount we would like to raise on the day of the event. This will in turn improve the conditions at both Kgotso and Mighty Kids Centre.

■ ***How were the beneficiaries selected?***

We've been involved with the crèche for a while now and what attracted us to select it as a beneficiary is the work that Mama Winnie committed herself to do without receiving any compensation from the parents or the community around. She opened up a child-care service to assist the parents with their children as she couldn't bear seeing the children playing in the streets unattended by an adult. Some parents would miss work because they couldn't leave their children alone at home - no work, no food for that evening. Mama Winnie started taking care of the kids without asking anything from the parents until she registered her facility as a crèche and learned how to best care for children. The fees the children pay is a fraction of a basic minimum wage per day, so one can only imagine how she pays for other things such as food and material for the crèche. If we didn't have women like Mama Winnie around, I don't know where our children would be today. It takes a woman like her to move us a step further to creating a change we want to see, showing kindness and love to one another.

■ ***What is the significance of Mandela Day in 2016?***

A spirit of giving, an opportunity to fully choose how you want to put a smile on someone else's face. A celebration of a man who stood for what he believed in and brought nations together. A man who challenged many ideologies that were there during the apartheid era for a better solution for all. Mandela loved children, equality and education, and also believed that for one to break the chains of poverty, we need to equip ourselves with knowledge, constantly educating ourselves so we can make informed choices for our future. Although Mandela Day for us is every day, each year we look forward to celebrate it with like-minded people and bold ideas. For Mandela Day 2016, we wanted to do something fun while we raise money for a good cause.



Matilda Sekoakoa, founder of HCG

■ ***What is the greatest challenge for SA at present, and how can we harness the power of Mandela Day to address this challenge?***

We see the challenge being the low rate of literacy in primary school level, which in the long run will affect individuals with issues low self-esteem. This may lead to isolation, impact on health as they will be limited in knowledge, lower income, unemployment; and for the society, the difficulty in understanding societal issues, which will then limit community involvement and participation. The lower the percentage of literate adults, the slower the GDP growth rate will be. We think if we work towards the same goal of ensuring that all primary schools in SA, especially in the less privileged areas, and ECDs have fundamental basic skills of reading and writing, this will accelerate children to do better in different subjects and to be able make informed choices for their careers.

■ ***Beyond Mandela Day, how can the public and corporates get involved with HCG?***

We would appreciate sponsorship of the programmes we run to improve literacy in primary schools, assistance in donating a square metre to build a library of 1500m², partnerships to ensure that we breed young entrepreneurs, excellent readers and bookworms to prepare our leaders of tomorrow. Such work needs a collective to make it happen. Monetary donations and donations in kind are welcome too. We believe that in order for our country to benefit economically, we need to invest in our children, grooming them while they are still tender. That way we save tons of money trying to rectify past mistakes when these kids are much older. It starts with the fundamental basics of reading and writing!

For more info, go to www.helpachildgrowsa.org, or email Matilda Sekoakoa on info@helpachildgrowsa.org.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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