

Stellenbosch University's first group of ISFAP graduates triumph through the pandemic

By [Sifanele Biyela](#) and [Anne Havemann-Serfontein](#), issued by [SAICA](#)

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The Ikusasa Student Financial Aid Programme (ISFAP) is a non-profit foundation established as part of the response to the South African **#feesmustfall** movement of 2015. Aimed at the poor and missing middle (R0 - R600,000 p.a. household income), the programme funds the undergraduate studies of successful applicants on a full bursary. The programmes funded are driven by the Occupations of High Demand as defined by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). The current partnership includes a total of 11 public universities.



The pandemic of the missing middle

Morné du Toit, SAICA 16 Feb 2021



Launched in 2017, ISFAP welcomed its first group of 135 students at the Stellenbosch University in 2018. Part of this group were 37 bright young minds embarking into the world of accounting, and this article tells their story of support, trust, resilience and, ultimately, triumph.



Samantha Williams. Photo by: Stefan Els

According to one such student **Samantha Williams**: "ISFAP covered everything from my tuition to my accommodation. ISFAP is very understanding and caring towards their students considering everything they would possibly need. Not only did the bursary cover our finances, but they also provided emotional support. I am grateful for Mrs Anne Havemann-Serfontein, my bursary coordinator - she was my rock and helped me through difficult times and helped me get to the point where I am today."



Tumelo Mofokeng. Photo by: Stefan Els

Fellow student, **Tumelo Mofokeng** agrees: “I was elated to know I had the financial backing to complete my tertiary studies. I would just have been grateful for the financial support, but ISFAP went far and beyond just that. The bursary envisioned itself as a ‘wrap around’ support programme.”



Yazeed Tyman. Photo by: Stefan Els

Being a part of the ISFAP family has been the “most phenomenal experience” for ISFAP bursar, **Yazeed Tyman**. “The ISFAP bursary gave me a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to advance socio-economically without the burden of student debt – while receiving support from all areas. Without the bursary’s financial support, I may not have been able to pursue higher education due to its high costs in South Africa.” He adds that the sense of community created by the bursary fund made him feel valued and part of something bigger and he hopes to “bring about positive change in South Africa.”



Nothando Letsie. Photo by: Stefan Els

Nothando Letsie, another student studying accounting thanks to ISFAP explains how ISFAP changed her life: “The first term of my first year was challenging on me, both mentally and emotionally. Coming from high school and being a perfectionist, I was terrified of failure. I was constantly studying. I convinced myself it was because I did not want to fail – and while that was true to some extent, a large part of it boiled down to fear and anxiety. I thought if I did not do well, if I dropped the ball even just a little, I would not get funding. I love the comprehensive support that ISFAP gives to its students. It allowed me to study a lot better instead of operating from a place of fear. There were so many workshops and courses that were aimed at equipping us with the skills needed to make a successful transition from high school to university and to be well-rounded graduates who would not just graduate with a degree but crucial life skills.”

In 2019, during her second year of studies, a fire broke out in the residence she was staying in (Huis ten Bosch) and Nothando lost everything – including all her work of the year and her textbooks.

“ISFAP played an instrumental role in me keeping my head above the water and making it through second year. My programme manager, Anne Havemann-Serfontein, went above and beyond the call of duty, speaking to ISFAP on my behalf, explaining my situation to them. They deeply empathised and I was very touched to have them assist me with replacing all the textbooks I had lost in the fire. That gesture of kindness and support went a long way. Ultimately, I want my career to be rooted in fruitful service to others and to be driven by the commitment to effect change and make a difference in ways that matter and have a long-reaching impact. I’m grateful to have had my life impacted by the ISFAP programme.”

The university’s ISFAP programme manager **Anne Havemann-Serfontein** speaks on her experience:

“I feel extremely privileged to be part of the journey of the students in the ISFAP programme. To see how they develop/grow from the day they arrive as first years to when they graduate is amazing. The programme is really empowering – not only because they get support and are equipped with skills for their future – and often helps students to grow in confidence and maturity. Being part of a community of learning and support is also both empowering and helpful.

“I feel that we have the privilege of doing work which is both meaningful and inspiring – and by that, I mean that the students inspire me with their energy and often to see the challenges that they have overcome to succeed!

“I am very grateful to have had the support of my regional project manager, Sifanele Biyela, from the very start when I joined ISFAP. She is always responsive when I need advice and guidance and I have constantly been aware of her

unwavering support. She always keeps me informed. She is visionary, practical and solution focused in her leadership approach.”

Summary

Much can be achieved when the vision is shared, every contribution counts and leads us closer to the change we aspire to make. Having the opportunity to have a front row seat to lives being changed, not only benefits the students but all of us involved. It is a team effort, and we appreciate the relationships we have built and continue to nurture with the institutions.

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