

Miss Soweto donates 120 pairs of school shoes, stationery packs to Rena Le Lona Creative Centre for Children in Soweto

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Reigning **Miss Soweto** Thobile Steyn knows first-hand what it feels like to not be able to start the school year on the right footing. Her mother Thabile, who convinced her to enter the White Star sponsored beauty pageant, would often struggle to find enough money to make sure her daughter went to school with the proper shoes and stationery. This is why Steyn started her own initiative to host a School Shoes Collection Drive to ensure that learners won't suffer the embarrassment she faced growing up.



Photo credit: Cyril Zuma

On Saturday, 17 April, children from the Rena Le Lona Creative Centre for Children located in Diepkloof Zone 6, in Soweto, were the first beneficiaries of the School Shoes and Stationery Collection Drive and received 120 pairs of school shoes and stationery packs from the beauty queen. Meaning 'we are with you', Rena Le Lona is a healing centre for orphans and vulnerable children. The centre offers 117 children in the area a safe place for them to spend their afternoons with coaches harnessing the medium of art to allow them to deal with loss and allow them the chance to lead meaningful and fulfilled lives.



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In a touching speech, Thobile Steyn addressed the young children at the centre narrating some of the challenges she faced as a teenager and how it encouraged her to strive for a better future. She said: "Back in 2012, my mom lost her job, and we had nowhere to go, we were basically homeless. We stayed in a very small room, sharing a single bed with my

mom. Most of the time, I had to use my phone or a candle to study because we did not have electricity or lights. Throughout high school, I had to go back to that small room every day after school and also experienced what it was like to go to school with worn-out shoes or shoes that couldn't fit me well because the size was too small for my growing feet."



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However, the 21-year-old politics and international relations graduate from the University of Johannesburg, who is currently doing her honours, didn't allow her circumstances to define her, she didn't allow it to dictate her future. For her reign in 2021, Miss Soweto plans to ensure that more young people continue to go to school. Her goal is to decrease the number of school dropouts this year. Steyn continues to be an advocate for education and states: "It is the only way to help create generational wealth, and triumph over generational curses that hinder Black youth from success."

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