

Good Work Foundation - where the best of Africa meets the best of technology

 By [Shan Raddiffe](#)

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Founder and CEO of the Good Work Foundation (GWF), Kate Groch has had a long career in teaching and is a true educationalist at heart. Her early teaching years spent travelling throughout Africa as the private tutor for the children of Dave and Shan Varty (owners of the Londolozi Game Reserve) has shaped many of her views on learning and life.



Kate Groch, founder and CEO of the Good Work Foundation

Groch believes we cannot expect our country's rural schools to build and maintain expensive media centres, and we cannot expect them all to maintain the latest educational software and apps, let alone equip children with devices and employ teachers with the digital expertise needed to take these children into the future. More and more, rural children are left behind because they are ill-equipped to navigate the digital world. Every day, she meets students who have completed high school in the past three years, but have never operated a computer.

Much of the work the GWF does now is steered by what Groch experienced during her time with the Varty children. Years later, with Shan Varty, Groch established an educational business in the Free State called Future Nature, which explores learning opportunities in both the wilderness and rural communities. An off-shoot of Future Nature has evolved into what is now the GWF.

Here we chat further with Groch about the GWF and the good work it does...

Tell us about the Good Work Foundation...

We're a non-profit organisation that has pioneered a unique ecosystem of learning and working on the edge of Bushbuckridge, one of South Africa's largest informal economies, bringing opportunities to people who might otherwise be excluded from the global community.

Our ecosystem delivers targeted learning programmes for adults and children in locally managed Digital Learning Campuses. The existing five campuses (in the Hazyview Cluster) are built to be adaptable to the needs of an emerging 4IR economy, and already attract more than 11,500 young learners and adult students per week. These learners have access to everything from English literacy, numeracy and digital skills training to coding, robotics, IT security, yoga, mindfulness, planetary health, and online storytelling.

The Hazyview hub operates out of a surprisingly modern centre that sits proudly beside a field where the local cattlemen graze their cows. It exists for one reason: to fill in the gaps that the formal schooling system cannot. And in a move to visibly reinvent the possibilities of Bushbuckridge, our largest campus in Hazyview has a successful start-up business process outsourcing (BPO) centre, employing GWF graduates and recycling profits back into reimagining education.

We took an old banana packing shed (affectionately known as the banana barn) and turned it into a fully functioning digital learning campus. However, the GWF is not running a school. For our adult learners, it is a bridging post; they need to speak English and digital to go further and do better in the next phase of their lives. For our pupils, we supplement their school curriculum and fill in the digital gap.

“ Quite simply, we believe we’ve taken the best of Africa, the best of technology and come up with a solution that will leapfrog young children and adults from rural areas into the digital future. The probability that if you’re born in the wrong place, you will be deprived of a world-class education, is removed. ”

■ **What is the process for schools looking to join the GWF’s Open Learning Academy?**

We are currently working with a network of 32 schools in the Bushbuckridge area. All of the schools within our network have approached our team – we don’t go after them. That’s a really important distinction – we want principals and teachers to be keen to work with the GWF right from the start. We work with schools that are no further than a 20-minute bus ride from our campuses. We also start off with Grades 3 and 4, and once we’ve worked with them for a year, we start to include the children in Grades 5 to 7.



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20 May 2022



■ **What do your specialised learning programmes for adults include and how does one go about applying?**

We’ve got a Bridging Year Academy for school leavers of all ages – we’ve had students up to 65 years old! This year-long course’s seven modules “bridge the gap” between what young people may have learnt in high school and what they may need in the modern-day workplace, at university, or as aspiring entrepreneurs. The modules include English, the International Computer Driving Licence, Employability, Online Learning, Media Studies, Career Interest Profiling and the

Ready to Work Programme.

Our Career Academies provide students with the next step towards a more specialised vocation.

Because of our geographical location, we've created a Travel & Tourism Academy that offers either a Hospitality or Conservation programme. The Conservation Academy offers FGASA (Field Guides Association of Southern Africa) Level 1 training, covering everything from astronomy and taxonomy to guest etiquette and first aid training. The Hospitality Academy covers the SA College for Tourism core modules: housekeeping, front of house, and table service. We also offer barista training, online reservations training, and English for hotels.

Our IT Academy is also a year-long programme, offering an MICT SETA-aligned global certificate in technical support from CompTIA. Here students cover A+ (IT basics, hardware, and software), N+ (IT infrastructure covering troubleshooting, configuring, and managing networks), and S+ (validates baseline skills necessary to perform core security functions and pursue an IT security career).



Image: [Good Work Foundation](#)

And finally, our Facilitator Academy educates facilitators to teach students new skills and enhance existing skills, both academically and socially. The course is presented as a combination of classroom theory and interaction, and practical experience. It includes national skills programmes, an internationally accredited programme, and short courses covering communication, educational methodologies, classroom management, and more.

■ ***Where does most of your funding come from and how can businesses get involved?***

Our funding comes from South African corporates, family foundations, and private funders; US-based private individuals; and tourism partners based in and around the Sabi Sands Game Reserve.

We welcome financial support (both for our yearly operational expenditure but also for some exciting capital expenditure projects in the pipeline). We are also always open to volunteers and any expert advice. As we are a Level 1 B-BBEE partner, there are multiple benefits for South African-based organisations that support our mission. If businesses want to get involved, they're welcome to reach out to gemma@goodworkfoundation.org.



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▣ **Do your programmes offer employment assistance or opportunities to graduates?**

Yes, absolutely. Our Alumni Programme aims to:

- Create a safe space for young people who might be feeling overwhelmed
- Be a network of opportunity for those who have none
- Help create and provide access to meaningful employment
- Facilitate life-long learning
- Be an emotional support base, sounding board, and empathetic ear
- Ensure graduates' continued success
- Continue growing young people into empowered, equipped global citizens

Three core objectives drive our activity in this space:

1. **Ongoing support:** maintaining an active communication platform with GWF alumni; tracking alumni to record the effectiveness of GWF programmes and placement initiatives; and serving as a postgraduate support network for our students; upskilling and access to short courses.
2. **Employment network:** having a thorough understanding of our graduates so that they can be best matched with employment opportunities; facilitating their placement into jobs, internship programmes and further study opportunities; educating businesses about GWF initiatives; and developing partnerships in which these businesses support the GWF's greater vision by recruiting and training graduates.
3. **Entrepreneurship:** continuing to expand on the Bridging Year Academy entrepreneurship tracks by helping alumni to understand entrepreneurship opportunities in their own communities; providing support and tools for success in their current micro-businesses; and connecting them with a network of extended micro-entrepreneur support.

Already we've seen excellent results from this aspect of our work. For example, all 14 of our 2021 Hospitality Academy graduates have gained paid internship positions at hospitality establishments around Hazyview and in the Sabi Sands for 2022, and 45 graduates are employed in our own BPO centre. Also of the 147 GWF employees, around 72% are graduates of our programmes.



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10 May 2022



▣ **Share with us some of your success stories...**

Godfrey Mlambo, of Mkhuhlu, outside Hazyview, is a graduate of the GWF's Conservation Academy, and was one of 16 youth who earned a Global Conservation Corps (GCC) scholarship place at the Southern African Wildlife College in 2020.

His favourite part of his year-long course was taking care of orphaned baby rhinos at Care for Wild. He says that feeding them, staying with them, cleaning their enclosures, just loving them, made him realise that he wanted to become a ranger and protect them. He said that the most gruelling part of his training was not sleeping, but if you want to become a ranger, you must sacrifice a lot – such as baths and smelling nice!

Paris Moeng had a difficult childhood: poverty, lack of support, and limited access to education. He was 17 years old when the pastor of a church in Hazyview told him about the GWF and encouraged him to apply to a programme that would help him to improve his English and digital skills. Moeng was the first ever adult student to register. He has also attended the GWF's Bridging Year Academy and ICT Academy, and has also been a facilitator.

Today the GWF's Hazyview campus has its own start-up, called VillageUp, and Moeng is employed on the service desk on the Gijima (formerly T-Systems) account. He has been Agent of the Month many times (bearing in mind that this encompasses not only the Hazyview call centre, but what was then T-Systems's national business, across multiple BPO centres nationwide). In 2018 and 2019, he was Agent of the Year. He has a well-paid, meaningful job and is plugged into the digital marketplace from Hazyview.



Image: [Good Work Foundation](#)

■ **What's at the top of your wish list for the Good Work Foundation?**

Our Career Academies are growing and we need more space. We want to build our new Career Academies building, which means we'll be able to take up to 150 students per Career Academy. We've also got a coffee shop and roastery planned for this building, which means we'll be able to employ some of our hospitality students (but also give them all real on-the-job experience).

We also want to expand our BPO centre from its current 45 employees to a 200-seat BPO centre.

■ **Where do you see the Good Work Foundation in five years?**

We see our current Hazyview Ecosystem of Learning & Working at full capacity (reaching over 30,000 young people per year), a sixth campus, the Career Academies expanded, and a fully operational, 200-seat BPO centre on our Hazyview campus grounds. We may even see ourselves starting the establishment of a new cluster of campuses in another location

... watch this space!

ABOUT SHAN RADCLIFFE

Shan Radcliffe is the editor of Bizcommunity HR, Education and Legal.

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