

HUMANS OF YearBeyond

● ● ● BE INSPIRED.

From YeBoneer to Mentor - Young man finds passion to serve youth

Hailing from Bredasdorp in the Western Cape, 23-year-old Damian Marais is on a mission to inspire and give back to his community

“Growing up, things were tough. My dad was the only one working, and money was tight.” His early years in school were challenging, and he felt isolated. “During my early years in primary school, I was often picked on and had very few friends. I wish I had a Damian (YeBoneer) to support me, to remind me that I am worthy and that I am seen.”

Damian’s transformation began in high school when his three closest friends encouraged him to find his voice. They inspired him to conquer his shyness and invest in personal growth. Damian’s journey led to his election as Deputy HeadBoy in 2018.

However, the journey beyond high school was not without its challenges. Like many young South Africans, Damian grappled with the financial barriers to pursuing higher education. His parents found a way to support his dreams. In 2019, he studied Social Auxiliary work at Hugenote College in Wellington.

Despite honing his skills, Damian faced job-hunting challenges. Undeterred, he volunteered at the local Department of Social Development. However, he yearned for more. “I had worked hard, and completed my studies but I felt stuck. Searching for opportunities and being unsuccessful demotivated me. The prospect of working at the local flower factory seemed like my only option until I stumbled across the flyer for the YearBeyond Programme.”



Former YeBoneer Damian Marais, now Programme Mentor in Bredasdorp



Damian enjoying an energiser during his mentor training at the YeBo Academy.

YearBeyond was a lifeline. During his YearBeyond journey, Damian met his mentor, who played a vital part in his journey. “She provided guidance and unlocked my passion, pushing me to be my best when I felt low.”

YearBeyond’s Youth Development Programme, particularly the Future Fit programme, reshaped his mindset. “The Future Fit sessions covered crucial topics, enhancing my emotional intelligence, communication, and conflict resolution skills, reigniting my drive. ”The programme also provides pathway and progression support, teaching CV writing, cover letters, job search optimization, and interview skills. Damian also speaks of the value added of the Practice Interviews – an opportunity for industry professionals to give of their time and expertise and run a simulated interview with the YeBoneers on a one-on-one basis to build skill and confidence as the YeBoneers prepare for their next.

“It is so helpful to get the 1:1 feedback on your CV and cover letter and where you can improve. The career fairs also opened my mind to the possibilities of what is out there. And when I graduated, the reference letter I received reflected my hard work. Damian is now a student at the YeBo Academy, along with 24 other alumni, in training to be a mentor.



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At the end of 2023 he will graduate from the programme and take up the role of Programme Mentor with one of the YeBo Implementing Partners. The mentor role leverages his commitment to his community, his YearBeyond experience and his social work training. Damian Marais has ambitious dreams. He aspires to lead change, become a beacon of hope, and impact the lives of young people who do not have the support he had from his parents. When asked, what his words of encourage to others is, he had this to share. “Always remember who you are, where you come and remember who the people were that supported you.”