

HUMANS OF YearBeyond

● ● ● BE INSPIRED.

A Mother and Son's Inspiring Story of Resilience

As we build our path toward independence, we often find ourselves caught between a delicate balance of internal conversations and the mumbling background of societal pressures or expectations. This path to adulthood can be a little kinder when you feel seen, heard, and supported. Without this feeling, many spend years seeking this comfort in various forms of companionship hoping to potentially gain belonging and support.

Raised by his grandmother and aunt, 20-year-old YeBoneer Simbonile Matshaya was consistently the centre of attention at home. They took delight in watching him step into his element as a dancer and performer, a passion he had embraced since the age of five. Even at such a young age, he longed to captivate a larger audience, a dream enthusiastically supported by many, especially his mother, Sindisiwe Matshaya. Despite not living under the same roof as his mother, he remained the apple of her eye.

Sindisiwe acknowledges that her journey into adulthood has not been without sacrifices. She had to leave her then one-year-old son, Simbonile, with her family in Butterworth, Eastern Cape, in search of a job in Cape Town to support her loved ones back home. During one of Simbonile's visits to his mother during a school holiday, he firmly insisted on staying in the city, yearning for his mom's presence.

Unfortunately, during that time, Sindiswa was still transitioning from one opportunity to the next and later worked at McDonald's, where she developed a passion for interacting with people. After years of searching, she finally found her footing and considers herself blessed to be a part of the security team at the University of the Western Cape.



Former YeBoneer Simbonile Mtshaya's mother on stage at the 2023 GoBeyond: Shape your future conference

Through her journey and interactions with the students at work, Sindiswa has become more intentional about being a supportive and open-minded mother. While they are deeply fond of each other, the mother and son acknowledge that their relationship has faced its fair share of unique challenges. Over time, Simbonile developed a preference for his grandmother and aunt, describing them as gentler and more considerate of his needs.

During his teenage years, he found his mother to be “overprotective,” struggling to find understanding. The emotional turmoil intensified when Sindiswa remarried, and he began to sense emotional distance because he did not know what to do with his feelings. Describing himself as someone who prefers to bottle things up, he found it hard to open up to his mother, even when she tried to open a space for conversation

Simbonile became popular among students and teachers through music and his passion for dancing. He excelled in school and actively participated in after school activities, especially arts and culture, where he engaged in contemporary dance. This allowed him to find a positive outlet for his feelings and to remain the ‘bright and loving son his mom described him as, even though he was starting to sense a difference within himself.

Peer pressure gradually began to influence Simbonile, and his initial desire for attention on stage transformed into a toxic need for acceptance. While his comedic and fun personality attracted both positive and negative friendships, he increasingly found himself in compromising situations. His social circle started to burden him, often leading to moments when he realized his actions were becoming out of character. Simbonile found himself becoming a ‘people pleaser,’ often doing things he didn’t agree with to gain acceptance from his friends. His mother noticed these changes and expressed her concerns, but Simbonile dismissed her advice, saying, “even when you know your mother is trying to help, it’s hard to listen because she’s your mother.”

Sindiswa noticed that Simbonile was dimming his light and retreating from his larger-than-life personality, wondering if this was due to the absence of a father figure. Simbonile also felt that his peers didn’t respect him because he didn’t have a male figure at home, but he felt this absence was more of an external issue. He still valued his women-led home and support system and considered it to be very strong, but unfortunately, he often endured disrespect and sometimes violence from his friends because of it. Simbonile hesitated to report his friends’ mistreatment because he feared for his family’s safety since no father, uncle, or brother could defend him.

It was a turning point when his friends attacked him outside the door of his home. This incident made him realise it was time to change, and he remembered his mother’s advice. He turned his journey around, focusing on self-improvement and self-discovery, stating, “I saw that people will always talk. Whether you do good or bad, you can’t make everyone like you. It would be better for me to focus on how I see myself and work toward what I want; I spent too much time trying to fit in”.

After completing matric, Simbonile, like many young people, was still determining the direction his journey would take. When he received his results, he felt disappointed for not achieving a bachelor’s pass. His once high-percentage marks had become average, and he felt that his choices had denied him this opportunity. Sindiswa was still very proud of him and wanted to celebrate, but Simbonile wasn’t in the mood. With a clear dream in mind, he wished he could turn back time and redirect his energy toward his future instead of seeking the approval of those around him. His mother tried to motivate him to continue dancing, encouraging him to participate in church events, but he was beginning to feel defeated.



Sindiswa worked very hard to keep her son’s spirits high, suggesting and sharing opportunities for programmes that she believed would suit him well. In 2022, she worked with UWC’s security team at the #GoBeyond: Shape Your Future conference, considering herself fortunate to have had the opportunity. At the conference, she learned about YearBeyond, a programme she saw as a perfect fit for her son. She explained her attraction to the programme, saying, “I love a beautiful thing. I appreciate projects that bring happiness to young people. I saw so many young people here who were joyful, and I saw that they were given an opportunity to better themselves.”

Being part of the conference provided Simbonile with a fresh perspective on the programme. Surrounded by like-minded individuals, he felt a deep sense of belonging. "I am delighted to be in an environment where I feel so welcomed and inspired by people who have overcome hardships," he said. Sindiswa couldn't hide her pride, witnessing her son's progress in the programme and his determination to steer his life in a positive direction. Simbonile aspires to become an independent and successful teacher or creative. While he's unsure about the exact path to achieving his dreams, he is determined to make his mother proud. One of his greatest wishes is to repay her for the support and sacrifices she has made for him to be where he is today.

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Former YeBoneer Simbonile Mtshaya with a learner during a Youth Day Activation.

When Sindiswa presented the idea of joining YearBeyond to Simbonile, he initially viewed it as another one of his mother's overprotective ways. However, after conducting his own research, he couldn't deny his interest. He decided to apply for the programme and was successful. Being a YeBoneer in the Shukuma programme meant that Simbonile was now part of a team that could help students who have had similar experiences to his. He saw an opportunity to make a difference and be the safe and supportive peer he needed. While the programme helped the young people in his community, he too has been feeling transformed by the experience. Describing the skills he has learned from being part of YearBeyond, he feels "more equipped to deal with emotions. I have been in sessions where we talked about what to expect going into the world, how to handle your emotions and your mental well-being."

Having the opportunity to experience the conference this year and see what his mom was telling him about, he feels like this was a big part of his experience in the programme.

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Update: Simbonile has since exited from the YearBeyond programme to pursue his next opportunity. Following his participation in the GoBeyond: Shape Your Future conference at UWC, he has become a part of the university community as a student at the Samsung Future Innovation Lab.

This initiative specifically targets youth who are previously disadvantaged South African citizens. By recruiting unemployed young individuals with matric certificates, the programme aims to inspire those interested in building a career in software development and digital innovation.

Simbonile's mother is elated by this opportunity, observing significant positive changes in his life since becoming a YeBoneer. She attributes his newfound motivation to explore opportunities that once seemed out of reach to his time in the YearBeyond programme. Since enhancing his soft skills and emotional intelligence, she perceives him as more receptive to her advice and interventions as a mother.

In the past, he might have dismissed her attempts to motivate him to apply for such opportunities, but now they are working together to build a future Simbonile can be proud of.