

Dancescape South Africa (DSA) February 2024 Report

Dancescape South Africa (DSA) continues to facilitate daily dance classes in February of 2024 (2.00pm – 6.00pm Venue Zolani Hope Centre – Mantlane Road Zolani Ashton) engaging children in beginner and senior dance sessions. We currently employ the services of a resident teacher, a general assistant, and a director. Thanks to the support of all those who have donated to our project we are able to preserve the Fiona Sargeant legacy. Our top priority is to facilitate classes in a safe environment for both teacher and learners.

The Dancescape South Africa Directors Report:

After the excitement of Kristine Elliott's visit in January everything went back to normal as Nqaba resumed his daily classes. He reserved some of the afternoons for Kristine's syllabus but also included his powerful contemporary classes. The students are coming in good numbers, and they are enjoying the classes.

In late January I approached Lutho Zwedala to see how he was doing. Our founding member, the late Fiona Sargeant had often spoken about Lutho who was one of her students. After her passing, we continued to teach him and then supported him financially when he was accepted into the Cape Academy of Performing Arts (CAPA). He trained there for a year before that organization disbanded. Lutho was then given an opportunity to participate in the Cape Town City Ballets professional program. This program takes potential trainee professionals into the company for a year. They are essentially grooming them to join the company. Unfortunately, Lutho developed a serious groin injury and had to undergo a long course of rest and therapy. He eventually was allowed to dance again later that year. We believe that this had a negative impact on him. The result was that he wasn't accepted into the company the following year. In 2022/2023 Lutho returned home to Zolani. We, that is Nqaba and I, tried to encourage him to attend our classes but Lutho chose not to. We lost track of him. Earlier this year I began to think about Lutho and all that Fiona had said of him. She truly believed that he was a talented young man who could not only dance but could choreograph as well. Whilst with CAPA, we performed one of his pieces called "Are you ready" at the Baxter Dance Festival, to great appreciation. I decided to make contact with him and in some way attempt to rekindle his love for dance. We met and I learned that he had been making ends meet by working for the local canning factory in Ashton. He also has a young child from a previous relationship who needs support. I then invited him to come and assist Nqaba in his teaching. We discussed the possibility of creating a new piece which we hoped to include in this year's Montagu Arts Festival. Lutho has shown us a level of commitment which we hope he will continue to develop. He has also spoken of attending various auditions later this year and we hope that he will follow through with them and finally get work in the industry.

The rest of the month of February was a little troublesome. Sometime in the 1st full week of February, The Zolani Hope Centre was burgled. Parts of the alarm system were stolen, making it inoperable and exposing the building to further burglaries. And that is exactly what happened.....



Above: Nqaba teaching a growing number of junior dancers.

Sometime on the 20th of February the building was once again targeted by thieves who made off with copper piping used to supply water to the building. The result was that they opened these pipes allowing water to gush out in one of our changing rooms. The water then flowed under our new floor and then out of the building only to be discovered the following morning. Fanie, who sits on the Zolani Care Trust board and who manages the building, was able to close the water off at the mains. Whilst putting the new floor down I made several holes in a peripheral beam which allowed the water to run out. I am glad that I did this, but we are not sure if the water had risen high enough to permeate into the wood floor. We have lifted the vinyl floor mats to give the floor vital air to breathe and allow the cement floor below to dry. Only time will tell us how much damage has happened. Once the mats were lifted it exposed the underneath layer of 6mm plywood and it wasn't looking good. More waves have formed, and I believe that we are now at a crucial juncture. The question is whether we should take this layer off and replace it with a thicker board such as a 9mm or 12mm one. I drove to see our supplier, AH Marais, in Robertson to discuss our options and found Johan to be particularly helpful. Something must be done, and I hope to report on this in the next report.

Fanie fixed the plumbing problems so that the toilets are at least functional. We are also working towards getting the alarm system up and running as soon as possible. Securnet, the alarm company which initially installed the system, has been called in to find out what exactly is missing and to give us quotations on what is required to fix this problem. Clearly the alarm system is very important.

After the first burglary I had a chance to meet with Fanie and I spoke about a vision which I had for the Zolani Hope Centre. I also mentioned to him that I found that he and the Care Trust were unable to properly manage the building. Maintenance was lacking and as the building got older this is becoming more and more problematic. In January DSA spent money fixing several things in our studio. This included repairs to the roof, fixing broken windows and parts of the window frames. We also hung clothing hooks in both changing rooms. The Care Trust are unable to conduct these repairs largely due to the fact that they don't have any money to do so. I explained to Fanie that we were in a position to facilitate these repairs but would not be able to continue unless we had more guarantees in place. It would be throwing our money away if we looked after the building and then later forced to find another venue. I then spoke about my vision. There are two organizations which are working well in the township. Firstly, DSA which has been actively involved since 2016. The other one is the Zolani Youth Choir. I know that the choir is looking for a venue to rehearse. I propose that the current workshop area should be cleaned, revamped, and used as a rehearsal venue. Also, the church would use this part of the building which meets mostly on Sundays. The kitchen could be turned into a cafeteria where local arts and crafts could be on display and sold along with snacks and vegetables. I also mentioned Carol at Rescue Among Many (RAM), who may be interested in using the kitchen as a Zolani soup kitchen. Finally the entire project would be linked to local tourism, making the venue a destination. Visitors could see firsthand the talent of local artists and performers and buy refreshments. A township tour, showing tourists what life is like in our township could also be part of the package. Fanie liked what he heard but also mentioned that

he had had a similar vision himself. He said that he would discuss these ideas with his board and get back to me.



Above: Lutho Zwedala rehearses one of his new works.

Below: Students show off their new Dancescape South Africa tracksuits.



On Friday the 16th of February, our board met for the final meeting of the 2024 financial year. Much was discussed including the developments and my proposed vision of the Zolani Hope Centre. We are waiting for Fanie to come back to us after meetings with his board. We are also conducting our own investigations regarding what the Zolani Care Trust is allowed to do with the building. More information in further reports.

On the 28th of February, Patricia and I handed out unitards, leotards and tracksuits. A few weeks ago, I sent out a letter to the parents. It was an agreement which they had to sign stating that they were responsible for the outfits and had to look after them. Also, if their children stopped attending classes it was up to them to return all items given to them so that they could be worn by others. These outfits are expensive, and we have spent over R30000 on them over the last financial year.

Nqaba Mafilika, our resident teacher, report:

It's been a pleasure having Lutho around in the studio assisting with the students and also choreographing for the senior students. He's showing consistency coming in everyday and sure hope that he is gaining some experience through working close with me.

The vibe is good in the studio as we everyday get new faces and some of the kids returning back for their class, so the attendance is looking great but at some point we did see the senior students held back by their school work and were unable to attend daily.

I'm still also working using Kristine Elliott's syllabus which is working perfectly for the beginner class, and I am beginning to work more with the juniors and seniors as they have been in and out because of school. I try to let Lutho teach too so that I can see that he understands what we try to achieve which is to make our students enjoy themselves, feel good about themselves and monitor if they want to take dance seriously.

Though there has been maintenance in the building, we are still managing, and hope things will turn out alright with the floor, bathrooms, and the excess of water.

Once again, we thank you for taking the time to read this report. Please visit our website at: <http://dancescapesouthafrica.org.za/> and follow us on social media.

Mitya Sargeant (CEO, and Director – Dancescape South Africa)