



SBONGILE MZULWINI

Child and Youth Care Worker, South Africa



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Overview

Sbongile Mzulwini began as a child and youth care worker and now supervises the individuals who serve as mentors to new child and youth care workers. These workers provide developmental and therapeutic care to vulnerable and at-risk children and youth. Prior to 2007 there were no child and youth care workers in Sbongile’s home community. Her passion has always been for maximizing opportunities for her own community—connecting with the children and understanding her community’s issues. Sbongile connects on a personal level, too. She sees the value of the support she provides to youngsters who, just like her, grew up without a mother.

Typical tasks and responsibilities

Sbongile works within the framework of the ISIBINDI model, designed by South Africa’s National Association of Child Care Workers to “respond holistically to the needs of children, youth and families who are vulnerable and at-risk.” The ISIBINDI program screens unemployed community members and selects, trains, and deploys them as child and youth care workers serving families in their own communities. Working under the mentorship of experienced social service professionals, the child and youth care workers blend practical household support tasks with care and development opportunities. Each project using the ISIBINDI model creates a safe and caring community that meets children’s developmental and therapeutic needs through comprehensive community-based services delivered by child and youth care workers.

When she began working with ISIBINDI, Sbongile underwent training and joined a team of 17 brand-new child and youth care workers, led by three experienced residential care child and youth care workers from Durban’s Children’s Home. Her ability to lead was recognized, and she became a team leader in due course. Continuing to climb her career ladder, she then was employed by the National Association for Child and Youth Care Workers as a mentor. As the ISIBINDI footprint in the province grew, her position evolved. She soon began to identify potential leaders and help them grow to the point where they could become mentors, too.

Sbongile has been a senior ISIBINDI mentor for three years now. She supervises mentors who, between them, assist 17 ISIBINDI projects with all aspects of

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running a project. The position includes providing online in situ real-time supervision as well as monitoring child and youth care workers' performance and modeling good practice. Sbongile carries out her supervision and mentorship through site visits, monthly meetings, and long-distance telephone assistance. She makes sure help is always on hand—even via social media.

Training and skills

Sbongile's academic journey has been impressive and speaks to her determination to gain knowledge. Through ISIBINDI, she completed the Basic Qualification of Child and Youth Care, a two-year part-time course. She then completed the Further Education and Training Certificate, which is an accredited course that allows learners to access tertiary education opportunities. After completion of her certificate, Sbongile enrolled in a Diploma program for Child and Youth Development through the Technikon SA, went through the restructuring of the tertiary education system in South Africa, and ultimately ended up at the Durban University of Technology where she is in the fourth year of her degree program. "It took years," she admits, "one subject at a time. But the trainers of the National Association of Child Care Workers always told us about the bigger world, and so I had to set out and explore this for myself."

Why she loves her job

Sbongile states decisively that "instant connection is what I felt with the [social service] field and the people in it when we first started our [child and youth care worker] training." She says that it is an honor to witness the growth of child and youth care workers who start from scratch and gradually learn to stand strong and advocate for those in their care. Sbongile loves it when she can feel the engagement with young people that permeates the child and youth care workers' stories. Engaging with young people remains a true blessing for Sbongile as well, but now she does so with the added intention of modeling good child and youth care practice. She says, "I want the child and youth care workers to experience the subtle nuances of the therapeutic touch and see the outcomes."

The Global Social Service Workforce Alliance would like to thank NACCW for contributing this profile to the "I am a Social Service Worker" series.



**"Improving the workforce.
Improving lives."**

Who is the social service workforce?

While capturing any one definition of the social service workforce is challenging, it can be broadly defined to describe a variety of workers – paid and unpaid, governmental and nongovernmental – who staff the social service system and contribute to the care of vulnerable populations. The social service system is comprised of a set of interventions, programs and benefits that are provided by governmental, civil society and community actors to ensure the welfare and protection of socially or economically disadvantaged individuals and families.

What is Social Service Workforce Week?

During this week, advocates will bring attention to and build support for the social service workforce as well as raise awareness about promising workforce strengthening efforts supported by stakeholders around the world. Organized around daily themes focused on areas of practice, the week will allow Alliance members and the public to engage in a dynamic platform of information exchange and advocacy through various forms of social media.

What is ISIBINDI?

Designed by South Africa's National Association of Child Care Workers, the ISIBINDI model "responds holistically to the needs of children, youth and families who are vulnerable and at-risk." The program screens unemployed community members and selects, trains, and deploys them as child and youth care workers serving families in their own communities. Working under the mentorship of experienced social service professionals, the child and youth care workers blend practical household support tasks with care and development opportunities. Each project using the ISIBINDI model is part of a wider network of community-based programs.

Learn More

Learn more about Sbongile and other social service workers! Join the conversation on Twitter by using the hashtag #SSWWeek and online at www.socialserviceworkforce.org/SSWWeek.