

Good day ladies and gentlemen,

My name is Mandlenkosi Hlophe from Nelspruit, Mpumalanga.

I am here today to share my testimony about how EPWP changed my life. Mine is a story that can take a long day but today I will try and be brief because of the allocated time.

In 2013 I had an opportunity to join the Department of Culture, Sport and Recreation for their EPWP as a community coordinator. We were introduced to a project called my Village My Art. The purpose of the project was to try and enhanced craft and design as one of the economic sectors in the province.

My task was to work with craft producers and design..... their challenges and how the department can intervene.

After working with a lot of young people and elderly artisans, I found out that most craft artisans and designers the Department of Culture, Sport & Recreation were supporting lacked business acumen.

They were very talented in what they were doing but lacked basic business skills. For instance, things like drafting a bankable proposal, filling of funding forms, clearly defining your market was a nightmare for them. I found my niche. Without wasting time, I decided to start a Craft and Design company to support Mpumalanga craft producers that helps to network all players in the product-to-market chain. This includes craft producers and designer-makers, retailers, marketing agents, exporters and service providers such as designers, product developers, skills trainers, business development practitioners and mentors. We developed 3 programmes which are product support, business support and market support.

When we had our induction as EPWP beneficiaries, the Department encouraged us to consider starting businesses as an exit strategy from the EPWP programme. I then decided to approach the EPWP Director and she took me to the HOD to present my idea. Thank God, she loved it.

The department then gave me an opportunity to prop their new community libraries and we decided to use mosaic.

I then trained and employed about 30 EPWP students in mosaic art after being tasked by the department to prop their community libraries in the province. So far, we have completed about 12 libraries in the province.

In our Market support programme, we have an annual Fashion & Craft show and annual exhibitions around shopping malls in the province. For the show alone, we provide about 130 employment opportunities.

Whilst working with the contractors at the libraries.....

German company called Geze.....

To cut my story short, I would like to thank the Department of Public Works, Department of Culture, Sport and Recreation and the EPWP Director of DCSR, Ms. Jabu Dlamini for empowering me. I am back to my feet again and running a successful business all because of EPWP. May God bless you. I thank you