



Change a life

Our Projects

Change a Life raises funds for beneficiary projects that have a direct impact on thousands of disadvantaged young South Africans

The Mike Thomson Change a Life Trust


Over the past decade, the Mike Thomson Change a Life Trust has raised over R40 million for crime prevention and youth development projects which are creating more sustainable futures for young South Africans and their broader communities.

With the funds raised and careful selection of highly effective projects, we have been instrumental in:

- Legislating the use of DNA in South Africa's criminal justice system, and
- Providing sports training, nutrition, early childhood development, academic support and skills or tertiary education to lift our young Change a Life beneficiaries out of poverty.
- A growing number of our beneficiaries have become sportsmen of note, with some representing South Africa internationally in rowing, cycling, gymnastics and handball.
- Even those who have not excelled know that a different, more sustainable future is now within their reach.

During the past four years, Change a Life has strengthened its focus on sports development. The pace of achievement by its beneficiary projects has accelerated and the projects have celebrated significant milestones, some of which are highlighted below. Many of these are the result of increased funding support.





In 2014, the DNA Project celebrated the passing of the DNA Act it had lobbied through Parliament. In the same year, the Martin Dreyer Change a Life Academy achieved a significant breakthrough as Sbonelo Eric Zondi won his first Dusi Canoe Marathon with Andy Birkitt.

2015 was another big year for Change a Life:


- Nhlanhla Nene won the Non-Stop Dusi with Michael Mbanjwa
- John Ntuli won the inaugural 1070 Munga MTB race
- Nemato Change a Life's Athenkosi Hlekani graduated from UJ with a BBusSci degree
- Nemato's champion gymnast, Onke Mangele was named Best SA Junior Trampoline gymnast, a title he still holds
- 2 Nemato rowers were selected for the SA National Team.

By 2016, the RMB Change a Life MTB team was competing successfully in premier South African events and Martin Dreyer transformed his running league into a team of high-performance athletes trained to compete in the extreme 'Black-Ops Elite' category of the National Warrior Race Series. In addition:

- Change a Life ambassador Sbonelo Khwela won the Non-Stop Dusi
- Isaac Mdletshe achieved the Change a Life Karate-do's first black belt
- Nemato students attained a record 18 BD matric passes.

2017 was a bumper year with Change a Life projects achieving their best results ever across the disciplines of paddling, mountain-biking, running and academic support. Highlights included:

- A historic win for Maza Ndumiso and Mboneni Ncgobo in the Dusi2c MTB stage race – the first black team to win a major MTB stage race
- Sthembiso Masango represented SA at World Marathon Championships in Germany and World X-Country Championships in Australia, and Mboneni Ncgobo received KZN colours for X-Country

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- The Merchants CAL Running Team participated in all 8 National series Warrior races across SA
 - A record 5 Nemato gymnasts represented SA internationally
 - A Nemato handball player competed in the U17 World Champs in Mauritius
 - 25 Early Childhood Development teachers were trained for schools in the Eastern Cape.

The upward momentum of achievement continues in **2018** with Martin Dreyer's Change a Life Academy athletes achieving podium positions across their three sporting disciplines. Nemato athletes have achieved the following so far:

- Of the 4 SA trampoline gymnasts selected for Youth Olympics trials in Egypt, 3 were from Nemato, confirming that Nemato is a feeder club for national champions. The Nemato team won gold at the African Championships and Siyabulela Siwa ranked as African Champion in double mini-trampoline
- Nemato rowers won gold medals at the SA Championships in Johannesburg, while top Nemato rower and talented mathematician, Odwa Ntamo, was awarded a full scholarship to study at Grey College, Port Elizabeth
- 2 Nemato handball players won silver medals at the Zone 6 Championships in Zambia, while 2 fencers are ranked nationally in 15th and 26th positions.

While these stand-out performances attract attention, Change a Life and its partners contribute more broadly to the creation of sustainable futures for:

- More than 300 young South Africans who benefit directly from Change a Life programmes, and
- More than 5 000 family and community members, who benefit indirectly.

We are committed to implementing lasting change and improving the lives of all our beneficiary projects...



The Martin Dreyer Change a Life Academy

Martin Dreyer and Change a Life received the 'Foundation Award' at the World Paddle Awards for 2015 in Barcelona, Spain.

Martin Dreyer Change a Life Academy changes the lives of talented youths in KwaZulu Natal's Valley of a Thousand Hills, one of South Africa's most impoverished and socially challenged regions. Multi-sports champion, Martin Dreyer established the Academy in 2008 and has trained members to become champion canoeists and coaches. Martin has also extended the academy's reach to greater numbers of children in the valley by introducing a school running league and a high performance mountain biking team.

The Martin Dreyer Change a Life Academy continued to raise the bar in its paddling, running and mountain biking events, as its athletes achieved the best results ever in the FNB Dusi Marathon, performed exceptionally in Africa XCO (cross country) mountain bike Championships and qualified to represent South Africa at the Obstacle Course Racing World Championships later this year.

The academy identifies sporting talent at grassroots level and provides a support structure to develop champions. With Martin's natural competitive streak, participants compete at the top end of the spectrum. The academy also provides other support, including skills transfer and career development. All participants are role models in their communities, and their families benefit from monthly food parcels.

Here are the 2018 performance highlights of the Martin Dreyer Change a Life Academy:

Change a Life Canoeing

- Martin's Zulus achieved their best FNB Dusi Marathon results to date, with four boats in the sought-after top 10 gold medal positions. Banetse Nkhoesa finished fourth overall, with partner Ant Stott, and Change a Life paddlers took up 13 10 places in the top 20. Former CAL champion Sbonela Khwela ranked third.
- A highlight was the performance of the young paddlers Mthobisi Cele and Mpilo Zondi, who won the Under 23 age (7th overall), followed by Nqobile Makhanya and Siyanda Gwamanda in second place and Mvelo Ngidi and Thabani Msiya third.
- Change a Life paddlers pushed themselves to the limits in the one-day Non-Stop Dusi, with Richard Cele and Mpilo Zondi finishing third.
- The paddlers performed well at a number of other events, including the Berg River Marathon and the Tugela 20s Canoe Race.
- Martin will focus more on his younger paddlers in 2019 to build a new generation of champions.



Mthobisi Cele and Mpilo Zondi paddled to a spectacular 7th overall and first Under 23 in the 2018 FNB Dusi Canoe Marathon.



Hlelani Radebe has qualified for the South African team to go to the Obstacle Course Racing World Championships in the UK.

Merchants Change a Life Running Team

- Change a Life's super-athletes focus on the National Warrior Obstacle Race series as the trail running and obstacles offer an extreme challenge. The team has produced consistently strong performances since they started in 2016.
- Hlelani Radebe, Maswenkosi Mtolo and Mzamo Zondi finished in the top 10 at the South Africa Obstacle Course Racing Championships, which is race five of the extreme Toyota Warrior Race Series.
- Radebe, who was placed fifth qualified to represent South Africa at the Obstacle Course Racing World Championships in the United Kingdom.

RMB Change a Life Mountain Bike Team

- A highlight for the Mountain Bike Team was the performance of Sthembiso Masango who finished 7th overall in the Africa XCO Championships in Egypt. "It was amazing to race XCO in the desert, where there are no trees or grass, and to compete against top riders from different countries," Masango said.
- Masango was the first black rider to be awarded KZN Colours in 2014 and has gone on to compete in South African and World marathon and XCO Championships.

Education, nutrition and career development

- Older participants assist with coaching, management of sports events and mentoring of younger newcomers.
- Some participants achieved their drivers' licenses and were trained as security guards. Students get a monthly stipend.
- Successful athletes become role models in their communities and are able to support their families.



Sthembiso Masango

“Apart from high performance sport and improved nutrition and health, Change a Life Zulus develop life skills such as discipline, hard work, self belief and goal-setting that will assist them going forward in life.”

Martin Dreyer



Nemato Change a Life

Nemato Change a Life was established by Jan Blom as the Nelson Mandela Township (Nemato) Rowing Club in 2005. Initially it focused on teaching township youths to swim and row in the Kowie River. Over the years, the club expanded its development programme to include other sporting codes, daily homework classes, a feeding scheme and the development of further education and employment opportunities for its athletes. Change a Life supports the club's youth empowerment and education project, including an early childhood development centre which was established in 2013.

Nemato Change a Life excelled across the spectrum of its sport, education and youth empowerment initiatives in 2018. Nemato's members represented South Africa in gymnastics and handball, won national competitions in rowing and fencing, and were selected for highly sought-after study bursaries and opportunities in business incubation and international exchange.

The Nemato Change a Life Club, which previously operated from a dilapidated RDP house and a tattered funeral tent in the impoverished Nelson Mandela Township (Port Alfred) moved into its newly built Change a Life Centre, continuing to complete final elements of the building as part of its members' skills development training.

SASCOC recognised Nemato as a private academy and Nemato achieved level 1 B-BBEE contributor status.



Here are Nemato's 2018 performance highlights:

Gymnastics

- Nemato's national trampoline champions Onke Mangele, Liyema Nxobo and Siyabulela Siwa represented South Africa at the Youth Olympics trials in Egypt, winning gold for Team South Africa.



Rowing

- Nemato rowers Thembani James, Akhona Quma, Thando Ngoqo and Xolisani Hina beat the Buffalo, UJ and UCT rowing clubs to win gold at National Championships in Gauteng.



Handball

- Brothers Lifa and Lihle Nxobo, were selected to represent South Africa in handball, and brought home the bronze medal from the Zone 6 Championships in Zambia.
- Lifa was selected by Laureus Sport for Good for leadership training and is currently on an exchange to Germany where he volunteers at youth development camps.



Fencing

- Two Nemato fencers ranked nationally (15th and 26th).
- Nemato won an award for the best fencing club at a competition in George.
- A fencing piste donated by Lottery enables Nemato to run fencing competitions.

Education

- Having trained two groups of ECD teachers in the Eastern Cape, Nemato hosted a numeracy workshop by Rhodes University and raised funding to feed 18 pre-schools in Port Alfred and Bathurst, including development of food gardens.
- Nemato members' maths results continued to improve, with average results increasing from 47% to 70%.





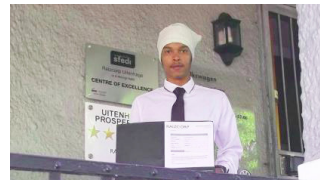
Onke Mangele is the first Nemato athlete to compete on trampoline at the Senior World Championships in Russia, 2018.

“Nemato Change a Life operates in one of the poorest rural areas in South Africa where it is extremely difficult for disadvantaged young people to access opportunities to excel in sport. Through Change a Life they can reach the highest levels of competitive sport and also benefit from a holistic empowerment programme that sets them up for life.”

Jan Blom

Individual excellence

- SA development rower and maths whizz-kid, Odwa Ntamo, was awarded a full bursary to study at Grey High School in Port Elizabeth.
- Top rower, Buhle Ngcelwane received a sports bursary to study Biokinetics at UJ.
- Damian Marais was selected from 40 candidates for training by start-up business incubator Raizcorp. This will enable Damian to develop and grow his own building company.
- All-rounder Odwa Quma, assistant builder of the CAL Centre and assistant to local sculptor Maureen Quin, was selected for 6-month skills development programme.







Change a Life Karate-Do

Kushido Karate-Do was established by Allan Thomson and his brother, Mike Thomson in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg as a vehicle to inspire disadvantaged children to become productive members of society through the discipline and power of karate.

The Change a Life Karate-do has transformed frightened youngsters into confident karate-ka who are as able to instruct a karate class as they are to step up as role models in their communities.

Over the past decade, the Change a Life Karate-do has largely achieved its goal of developing its young students into confident, mature and responsible karate-ka and citizens.

Forging leaders of the future

Something positive and inspirational has emerged from tragedy

Originally established in Bryanston by Allan and his brother Mike Thomson, a third Dan exponent in the art of Karate-do who was murdered at his home in 2007, the programme aims to forge a long-term bond with a core group of young people from the communities of Drummond and Cosmo City to guide their development into well-balanced, productive members of society through the discipline and power of karate-do. In the process, something positive and inspirational is emerging from the tragedy of Mike's death.

As the years have gone by, the dojo has acquired a firm base of middle level students (green belts), which makes for more interesting classes as basic training on a white belt level can be slow and boring. The green belts will progress to brown belts in the years to follow – taking them a step closer to the prized black belt status that has now been achieved by a growing number of older participants.

Allan and Gary le Kay, the day-to-day administrator and volunteer coach, have been working with the older students to pass on their skills in martial arts and prepare them for future management roles in the Karate-do so that one day they will continue the tradition of the Thomson brothers.

Students become teachers

"It is gratifying to see how the teaching skills of our new black belts are developing. When they joined the dojo all those years ago as curious youngsters, few of them ever imagined that they would one day be teaching others as they are now," says Allan.

This succession programme has also involved the bus driver, Moses Mdletshe, who chose to train with the students instead of waiting at the back of the dojo to transport them home. Moses became the first student in the history of the programme to qualify for the prestigious black belt grading in 2016 and has become a respected figure in his community.

Stepping up as community leaders

For many of the members, the karate-do is a second home and a place of safety. This is a consequence of the dojo's approach which involves instilling psychological wellbeing and self-empowerment in its candidates. These attributes also have a valuable impact on the members' communities, where they become role models for their peers and younger children by displaying good behaviour and higher levels of tolerance which helps to reduce violence and crime.

Three years after moving to Petervale, the dojo has moved again to avoid escalating rental costs. Its new home is more affordable

"I marvel at the students who have been with the dojo for almost nine years. Initially we wondered if any would stay as long as a year. It is a remarkable fact that students who started out as frightened, but excited, youngsters at the back of the class are now proudly wearing black belts, and confidently instructing the class from the front."

Allan Thomson

premises in Bryanston Drive and it continues to transport its students with a bus donated by Tracker.

In July, a number of the Change a Life Karate-do members participated in a gashuku in Hoedspruit that was hosted by a group of visiting Swiss karate students. For many, it was an opportunity to reunite with friends made during another gashuku in 2010. As the Change a Life Karate-do continues to transform the lives of its members, they thank the cyclists and sponsors of Change a Life for the decade of support that has nurtured this opportunity.





The DNA Project

DNA Project Directors', Vanessa Lynch & Carolyn Hancock

The DNA Project seeks to strengthen crime detection through DNA sampling. Since the DNA Project was established in 2005, its founder Vanessa Lynch has made significant progress in her bid for a functional DNA database in South Africa and effective DNA legislation to support the use of DNA as a criminal investigation tool in the national fight against crime.

The support from Change a Life enabled the DNA Project to bring about a positive change not only through our various projects and awareness campaigns, but most importantly in allowing us to champion the need for effective legislation in South Africa – which ultimately lead to the passing of the new ‘DNA Act’ – to make better use of forensic DNA evidence as a crime fighting tool.

The DNA Project comes full circle

It's been eleven years since Mike Thomson was tragically murdered in his family home and the Mike Thomson Change a Life Trust was formed in his memory. Eight years later, Razor Zulu, the leader of the gang responsible for Mike's death and the final member to be brought to book, was sentenced to 15 years for armed robbery and 20 years for murder on 26 July 2016.

Vanessa Lynch, the founder of the DNA Project, has a personal interest in Razor Zulu's arrest. Having lost her father in a similarly brutal murder and seen how the police contaminated the crime scene, destroying evidence that could have led them to her father's murderers, she gave up her law career and started the DNA Project to develop DNA into a crime-fighting tool.

When Mike died, Vanessa was introduced to the Thomson family who expressed an interest in the work of the DNA Project and, as a consequence, it became the first project to receive funding from the Mike Thomson Change a Life Trust.

Since then, Vanessa and her colleagues have contributed significantly to the passing of DNA legislation that is transforming South Africa's

criminal justice system. The DNA Act makes it mandatory for all arrested and convicted scheduled eight offenders to be swabbed for DNA and for the results to be stored in a national forensic DNA database. This empowers the criminal justice system to use DNA evidence not only to convict criminal offenders and reopen cold cases, but also to exonerate those who have been wrongly accused of a crime.

In addition to lobbying relentlessly for the legislation, the DNA Project ensured that when it came into effect, there was a supportive environment, with trained police officers, paramedics, prosecutors and magistrates and a growing awareness within broader society of the need to preserve evidence left at crime scenes.

As a consequence of the relationships she has built in government and the police services, Vanessa was appointed Deputy Chair of the National Forensic and Oversight Ethics Board by the Minister of Police, and tasked with monitoring the implementation of the provisions of the DNA Act as well as providing oversight over the overall operations of the DNA database in South Africa for the next five years. This positions her to continue influencing the use of DNA in crime-fighting as her role changes from lobbyist to facilitator of the DNA Act's implementation.

The DNA Project continues to provide awareness training in DNA management and has played a critical role in raising public awareness about the importance of preserving crime scenes as it is often family members or close friends who are the first to arrive after a crime has been committed. In the lead up to the passing of the DNA Act, they launched a number of innovative, provocative media campaigns to draw attention to their cause. These include a hard hitting TV advert entitled ‘the Cigarette that Saved Lives’ and a clever activation showing the physical effect of disturbing a crime scene, both of which received free airtime across a range of media platforms. Print campaigns entitled “She Asked for It” and “Case solved” were published during the 16 Days of Activism campaigns to highlight the importance of evidence collection in rape cases.

To ensure that there is adequate professional capacity to support the DNA law reform, the DNA Project has established the foundations for tertiary education in forensic DNA analysis. When the DNA Project was established in 2005, there was no training for forensic DNA analysts in South Africa. It became a key objective of Vanessa and her colleagues to develop a group of competent, professional forensic scientists to perform forensic science examinations and assist the courts of law to secure convictions through the use of DNA evidence.

Together with the Criminal Justice System Review Task Team and leading academics from around the country, the DNA Project developed a postgraduate qualification at Honours level to provide training in forensic DNA analysis. The University of the Free State (UFS) was the first to adopt the course in 2010 and then go a step further by offering an undergraduate BSc degree in Forensic Sciences. A number of other universities, including UCT, UWC and KZN followed suit. The next step was to develop a DNA and the Law course for law students to bridge the gap between science and law, followed by a Forensic DNA law degree.



A group of women and young people are working together in a community center. In the foreground, a woman with dark hair and a red and white patterned headband is focused on sewing a bright orange fabric bag with a colorful geometric pattern. She is holding a piece of the fabric and a yellow glue stick. Behind her, a young girl with dark hair in a bun is also working on a similar orange bag. To the right, another woman with dark hair is looking towards the camera. In the background, other people are visible, some looking at their phones. The setting is a bright, indoor space with white walls and some greenery in the background. A purple banner with white text is overlaid on the bottom left of the image.

The Change a Life Rape Crisis Centre

Care pack bags sewn by a group of rape survivors working at the Change a Life Rape Crisis Centre.

The Change a Life Rape Crisis Centre is an organisation of volunteers recruited from communities and trained to support to rape survivors in Cape Town. The volunteers provide counselling and support at emergency health centres and during court cases. The Change a Life Rape Crisis Centre has a vision of a South African justice system that supports rape survivors and where rape survivors suffer no secondary trauma during their journey to justice and recovery.

Rape Crisis was established in 1995 to empower rape survivors in the Western Cape by supporting their bid for healing and justice. The organisation joined our Change a Life family in 2014 to partner with us in a specific intervention to support rape survivors and empower them with income-generating skills and opportunities in a safe environment. This will help them re-enter the economy, gain independence from their abusers and make choices that will make them safer in their homes, at the workplace and in their communities.

Empowering rape survivors

Change a Life is making a positive impact on the Cape Town-based Rape Crisis organisation by renovating a building that will become a haven for some of the most vulnerable victims of crime.

Rape Crisis is an organisation of volunteers who are recruited from local communities and trained to provide support to rape survivors in Cape Town. The volunteers are available 24/7 and take over 4 000 telephone calls a year. They provide counselling and support to approximately 2 800 rape survivors at emergency health centres and support about 1 500 rape survivors at five Cape Town courts each year. In addition, they offer information and training sessions to over 8 000 community members each year. The counselling helps survivors to understand and cope with the trauma they have suffered and provides them with information about the medical and legal processes and support within the criminal justice system if they report the rape.

Creating a safe haven and independence

The first objective of Change of Life and Rape Crisis was to renovate the organisation's existing premises in Khayelitsha to better equip the

building for the services offered by Rape Crisis. In 2016, Change a Life completed its renovation of the Khayelitsha branch of the Rape Crisis organisation, providing a haven for some of the most vulnerable victims of crime. The project has been designed and costed pro bono by Michele Sandilands of MS Architects, Elize Gazeau of Elize Gazeau Interiors and Estia Kokt of Kokt and Co Quantity Surveyors.

A second objective was to offer a specific intervention that supports rape survivors and empowers them with income-generating skills and opportunities in a safe environment to help them re-enter the economy, gain independence from their abusers and make choices that will make them safer in their homes, at the workplace and in their communities.

The organisation has been exploring entrepreneurial ideas with industries in the Western Cape, such as fashion, craft markets and gardening, and conducting a feasibility study that compares these ideas with best practises. Once completed, this study will be submitted to MBA students at Stellenbosch University's Business School and to local business men and women for comment and recommendations.

The income-generating project will only come into effect once the renovation is complete.

It will be managed by Joyce Nomxhego Doni, the counselling coordinator of a rape survivor support group that currently meets monthly. Loubie Rusch of Making Kos is a local consultant assisting Ma Joyce with the necessary research to establish a viable model for the project and identify potential partners and clients.

Another empowerment mechanism that the Change a Life Rape Crisis Centre is developing is the Speak Out project which encourages rape survivors to speak publicly about their experiences to educate people about the challenge of rape in South Africa, encourage rape victims to come forward for help and draw support for programmes addressing rape. The project also challenges rapists to stop.

Kathleen Dey, Director of Rape Crisis comments: "It is thanks to the generosity of funds like Change a Life that we are able to continue to deliver services like these that mitigate the effects of crime in South Africa".



Renovation of the Khayelitsha branch of the Rape Crisis Centre