



The Sumbandila Scholarship Trust

The Sumbandila Scholarship Trust was founded in 2007 by Leigh Bristow, currently the Executive Director of the Trust. It is governed by a Board of Trustees, all of whom have life-long professional experience in the fields of secondary education and community development with two Trustees being Senior Education Specialists with the South African Department of Education. Our focal area is the Vhembe District in the far north of the Limpopo Province where, in the language of the local Venda people, Sumbandila means “point out the road”. Expressed in more idiomatic English, it becomes “*Show the Way*”.

“Sumbandila’s vision is the transformation of underprivileged children with exceptional potential into entrepreneurs and leaders who make significant contributions to society and their own communities”

Mission. The Trusts mission is to provide deprived children with a high quality secondary education alongside a strong mentorship programme, nurturing both leadership potential and entrepreneurial skills while encouraging social responsibility and awareness. We develop children’s potential through both academic education and practical experience and empower them with a belief and the ability to make a difference in their communities. We encourage both Western and African values, “Service in Leadership” and “Ubuntu: becoming a person in and through other people.” Through our partner organisations we will assist them to obtain entry to tertiary education.

The issue. The problems the Trust addresses arise from the systemic poverty which cripples the efforts of intelligent and determined children to benefit from their secondary education and to continue successfully into tertiary education and careers. Public schools are under resourced and staffed by often poorly trained and de-motivated teachers. Hunger, deprivation, broken families, HIV/Aids infection, a near total lack of the resources such as access to books, money for school fees and the need to contribute as early as possible to the family income are factors which prevent many children from completing school successfully. Even for those who do so, the failure and drop-out rates at Universities are extra-ordinarily high, indicating the inability of many schools to prepare their students for the transition. Sumbandila addresses these problems in two ways.

Sumbandila Full Scholarships. This is a programme for those scholars who have been selected from backgrounds of extreme poverty, on the basis of academic achievement and outstanding



potential, for full bursary support. The goal is to provide bright, determined children with a fully rounded education. It is our belief that this development of talented yet disadvantaged children will have an impact that goes far beyond the lives of the individual scholarship students. It is a residential programme based on the curriculum offered at [Ridgeway College](#), a small but highly academically successful independent school with whom Sumbandila is partnered. The school programme is buttressed by mentorship programmes, guidance, additional lessons, the development of entrepreneurial skills and educational trips and the progress of all the children, academically and personally has been astonishing. We recognise the need for the children to keep close ties with their families, friends and communities of origin and scholars go home for three weekends out of four and spend the school holidays with their families while the orphans are cared for by Sumbandila staff. Currently we have 19 children enrolled at Ridgeway and accommodated at two

houses we have rented nearby. Nine children are in their third year of high school, eight in their second year and two in their first year. In addition Ridgeway College has enrolled five children identified through the Sumbandila testing and offered them 50% bursaries due to their parents low income. Three of these children are subsidised by Sumbandila and live in the hostel. Current sponsors of the Sumbandila Full Scholars include [Marwyn Investments Ltd](#) and their associates, the Ir Felix August Schippers Stichting and numerous private donors.

The Sumbandila Outreach Programme. The process of selecting the full scholars brought Sumbandila into contact with a group of learners who, although they were not selected were nevertheless talented, determined, ambitious and capable of performing very well academically and making a substantial contribution to society. These learners are now in secondary schools,



even the best of which are under-resourced and over-crowded and in which conditions militate against the development of their potential. Sumbandila provides intensive educational support and mentorship in core areas to these learners through a programme of Saturday and holiday schools. Thus they are assisted towards academic success and admission to tertiary education while, at the same time, keeping them focused on the needs of their communities of origin and instilling in

them the commitment, once they are qualified in their careers of choice, to bring their skills back into the service of those communities. Saturday schools for the first 20 children selected for the Sumbandila outreach programme began in 2008 and have been expanded to include a further 22 in the 2009 intake and 27 in the 2010 intake. The Sumbandila Outreach Programme is sponsored by the [D.G. Murray Trust](#) and the [Study Trust](#).

Focal areas. Apart from the academic focus, which is the main component of both programmes, Sumbandila seeks to introduce the children to a diversity of different ideas and disciplines. In a country where there is, in real terms, 48% unemployment, we have selected those children who we believe can become job creators rather than job seekers. Of particular interest to us, therefore, is the emphasis on the development of the children's entrepreneurial skills and we regularly expose the children to examples of entrepreneurial thinking as well as making use of games and activities designed by the South African Institute of Entrepreneurship. Recently, as part of Ridgeway Colleges development as a WWF/WESSA Eco-School we have introduced environmental education lessons and educational trips and hikes to nearby areas of natural interest. Other extra curricular activities that have been held include regular astronomy evenings, snake shows, trips to art exhibitions and a trip to Johannesburg to hear the inspirational speaker and conductor of the Boston philharmonic, Ben Zander.

Summary. The need is immense and we are still in the early stages of pioneering a particular, very personalised approach to the education and in-depth development of children from impoverished and deeply disadvantaged backgrounds. We believe that what we offer is what is needed – it may be years before we see the first results and a generation perhaps before it fully flowers but there is no place here for the quick-fix solution. Both we and our supporters are intensely aware that, if all we succeed in doing is to take individuals from poverty and give them access to careers and a comfortable lifestyle through a privileged education, we are failing the aims of the Trust, failing the needs of the community, failing the potential of our scholars to make a difference. We strive to instil in each child the ideal that with opportunity comes responsibility, a duty and a commitment 'u sumba ndila' - to show the way.

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The Sumbandila Scholarship Trust is a registered South African Trust, number: T6/2008 and a registered United Kingdom Trust, number: 1128276.