

NEWSLETTER

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Turning pages, transforming lives: *Tshokollo ya Setšhabeng* inspires hope at Bizzah Makhate

On 18 August 2026, Bizzah Makhate female correctional centre became a place where the transformative power of education, partnership and hope took centre stage. Through the *Tshokollo ya Setšhabeng* Engaged Scholarship Project at the University of South Africa

(UNISA), academic books were donated to incarcerated female offenders to encourage them to pursue education, develop new knowledge and prepare for meaningful lives beyond incarceration.



Acting Area Commissioner Mr MkhaliPhi welcomed attendees and framed the donation as more than a simple transfer of resources. He described it as a celebration of education, knowledge and partnership,

and said the books represent concrete opportunities for personal growth, rehabilitation and reintegration. Addressing the women directly, he encouraged them to treat the donated materials not as items destined for a library shelf, but as tools for learning new skills and discovering new ideas —



resources that could ultimately support their transformation and prepare them for a better future.

Dr Hlatshwayo, project leader of *Tshokollo ya Setšhabeng*, outlined the scope of the partnership between UNISA and the Department of Correctional Services (DCS). He said the collaboration serves both officials and incarcerated people, pointing to UNISA's Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) programme, which allows DCS officials to have workplace experience formally recognised toward academic qualifications. He added that UNISA also runs roadshows at correctional facilities to help incarcerated students resolve registration and administrative issues. According to Dr Hlatshwayo, the *Tshokollo ya Setšhabeng* project was established to



build a bridge between the community inside correctional centres and the community outside, supporting people



while incarcerated and continuing that support once they return home as parolees or probationers. He said the objective is straightforward: the physical walls of a correctional centre should not become barriers to a person's ambitions.

Dr Ngidi, a member of *Tshokollo ya Setšhabeng*, delivered the event's motivational address, telling the women that they remain the authors of their own life stories. She said their current circumstances represent a single chapter, not the full narrative, and urged them to look past the labels attached to incarceration in order to recognise their own capacity for change.

Mr Matsemela, also a member of *Tshokollo ya Setšhabeng* and a lecturer at the College of Law, shared his personal account of pursuing education while serving an 18-year sentence. He completed an LLB during his incarceration

and has since registered for a master's degree. He said the process built his resilience, discipline and perseverance, and that his experience proved physical confinement does not have to mean intellectual confinement. Rehabilitation, he said, begins internally, and past mistakes should not be allowed to permanently define a person's future.

Mr David Heritage, founder of the NPO Revive, addressed the challenges that often arise after release. Drawing on 17 years of prison ministry, he described how his organisation's focus expanded from supporting incarcerated individuals to assisting parolees once they return to their communities. Revive currently offers basic business-skills training and runs community support groups aimed at helping parolees achieve financial independence and support their families.



He noted that successful reintegration depends on more than education alone — it also requires personal responsibility, adherence to parole conditions, and support from family, community and government structures.



In her vote of thanks, Ms Khumalo, Acting Head of Bizzah Makhate female correctional centre, encouraged the women to make full use of the donated books as tools for rehabilitation and personal development. She expressed hope that the centre's library would see

increased use and that more women would register for studies with UNISA. She reminded attendees that preparation for life beyond the correctional walls does not need to wait for parole and can begin immediately.

The event underscored the value of collaboration between higher education, government and community organisations in supporting offender rehabilitation. Officials from UNISA and DCS described the partnership as a practical demonstration of how institutions can work

together to bring educational resources into correctional environments while advancing broader goals of reintegration and social development.

The donated books may appear simple, but their significance is far greater than their physical form. They represent access to knowledge, opportunities for learning and an invitation to imagine a different future.

For the women at Bizzah Makhate, a new chapter begins—not with the closing of a door, but with the opening of a book.



From a baobab tree to a future in criminology: Sunita Zive's journey with UNISA and *Tshokollo ya Setšhabeng*

Sometimes, the beginnings of our greatest journeys can be found in the simplest of moments. For Sunita Zive, that moment happened while she was still in high school, when representatives from UNISA visited her school to introduce learners to the university and its various study opportunities. Among the pamphlets they distributed was one featuring a baobab tree. Sunita remembers pointing at the image and confidently declaring, "I am going to go to this university." Years later, that childhood declaration became a reality.

Sunita began her studies at UNISA in 2022 when she registered for a Certificate in Practical Labour Law. Her journey into higher education, however, was driven by an interest in law that had developed from a young age. She initially dreamed of becoming a lawyer and later a judge because she believed that these professions could contribute to justice and security in society. Her academic journey eventually led her to discover criminology, a field that broadened her understanding of crime, justice, rehabilitation and the relationship between communities and the criminal justice system.

In 2023, Sunita was accepted to study for a Bachelor of Arts degree in Criminology, with a focus on the Correctional Management stream. She successfully completed her degree in 2025 and celebrated an important milestone when she graduated on 23 June 2026. Even before completing her undergraduate degree, Sunita was already looking towards the next stage of her academic journey. She applied for a BA Honours in Criminology, was accepted, and is currently completing the qualification



For Sunita, studying at UNISA means much more than obtaining academic qualifications. It represents the fulfilment of a dream that began during her school years. The fact that she once looked at a

UNISA pamphlet and declared that she would attend the university makes her educational journey particularly meaningful. Studying at UNISA has become a significant personal achievement and a reminder of the importance of believing in one's dreams and pursuing them with determination.



From left to right: Dr Aaron Labane, Ms Kgotelele Moremi, Ms Sunita Zive, Dr Francois Louw (in front), Mr Charles Kgoale, Dr Tandiwe Mdlungu and Prof Kevin Sibanyoni

Her journey with *Tshokollo ya Setšhabeng* began in 2023, during the second semester of her studies. Through her PEN2603 Community Corrections lecturer, Dr Francois Louw, and other members of the project, Sunita, together with fellow students, Ms Kgotelele Moremi and Ms Mmanoko Kekae, was given the opportunity to become part of the *Tshokollo ya Setšhabeng* Engaged Scholarship Project as a student member. What initially attracted Sunita to the project was its focus on ex-offenders, parolees and their reintegration into society. She was

particularly interested in understanding what happens after people leave correctional facilities and how individuals, communities and the criminal justice system can work together to support successful reintegration. Her longstanding interest in law and justice made the opportunity especially meaningful, but her

involvement soon developed into something much deeper: an opportunity to connect what she was learning academically with the realities experienced by people and communities affected by crime and the criminal justice system. Through *Tshokollo ya Setšhabeng*, Sunita has been able to witness the practical application of many of the concepts she encounters in her

criminology studies. She has seen how law-enforcement officials, correctional officials and other stakeholders work to support people under their care and respond to the challenges faced by communities. She has also been inspired by the emphasis placed on education and



From left to right: Ms Lorraine Ntuli, Ms Sunita Zive, Dr Francois Louw, Ms Kgotelele Moremi, Ms Phola Mokgethi, Dr Joseph Hlatshwayo and Ms Mmanoko Kekae

rehabilitation, particularly the continued efforts to educate people who are incarcerated as well as those who have been released.



Her involvement in *Tshokollo ya Setšhabeng* has also helped answer some of the questions that arose throughout her studies. One of the questions that particularly interested her was: What happens after ex-offenders are released? Rather than only reading about reintegration, rehabilitation and community corrections in study guides, Sunita has had the opportunity to hear about and witness real-life experiences, struggles and challenges faced by ex-offenders, parolees and communities. This exposure has helped her understand that criminology extends far beyond theories and concepts contained in textbooks. The theories developed to explain

crime, identify patterns and promote crime prevention become much more meaningful when they can be seen in practice.

Tshokollo ya Setšhabeng has therefore provided Sunita with a valuable opportunity to connect academic knowledge with lived experiences.

The experience has also influenced the kind of criminologist Sunita hopes to become. She wants to continue learning, asking questions and gaining practical experience so that she can contribute meaningfully to the criminal justice system. Her ambition is to continue with her studies until she obtains a PhD and to establish a career within the criminal justice sector.



Her contribution to *Tshokollo ya Setšhabeng* has extended beyond her role as a student member. She has also had the honour and opportunity to serve on the editorial team of the *Tshokollo ya Setšhabeng* newsletter. Through this role, she has been able to contribute to telling the stories of stakeholders, community members and, most importantly, offenders, ex-offenders, parolees and probationers as they navigate journeys of crime prevention, rehabilitation, reintegration and healing.

Tshokollo ya Setšhabeng and UNISA have played an important role in shaping who Sunita is becoming. Her journey demonstrates the transformative power of education when academic knowledge is combined with practical experience, community engagement and a commitment to making a difference.

Her story is an inspiration to the *Tshokollo ya Setšhabeng* family and to fellow students who may be wondering where their own educational journeys will take them.

