

## Bursary support post-pandemic vital for SA's poorest learners

Now in the second year of the global pandemic, we're counting the costs, not just of the ways COVID-19 has highlighted the systemic inequalities in South Africa, but how it has deepened them. This has been particularly laid bare in education, where the digital divide; lack of access to devices and data; and under-resourced schools unable to pivot to remote learning, isolated vast numbers of children across poor communities, cutting them off from their basic Human Right to access education.

While the Department of Basic Education has been focused on curriculum and school safety challenges, a burden has fallen on the South African educational non-profit sector to do their best against extreme odds to help leave no child behind. Non-profit organisations have played a vital role in keeping children connected to learning through a variety of programmes. One such programme is the [Kay Mason Foundation](#) (KMF), an NPO that provides schooling, social and personal development support through scholarship programmes to disadvantaged young people.

According to the CEO of KMF, Lauren Bright, the opportunity gap in South Africa is one of the country's greatest challenges for our learners. *"It's our goal to give children the chance to change their future and to not be defined by their socio-economic status. Given the devastating impact COVID-19 has had on the financial wellbeing of families in our poorer communities, this year's recruitment process and scholarship programmes will play an even bigger role in ensuring that learners have access to quality education."*

Established in 1999, each year KMF recruits Grade 6 learners from disadvantaged communities into its Junior Development programme which takes place throughout their Grade 7 year. Unlike many educational support and scholarship programmes, the Junior scholars are not selected on academic performance alone. KMF seeks talented applicants in financial need who can recognise the opportunity that is offered and respond with determination, enthusiasm, and commitment. The foundations mission is to develop well-educated, self-aware positive citizens, change agents, and leaders. Each Junior Scholar has a tailor-made development plan that takes into account, not just their academic needs but their psycho-social and personal development, which have been majorly altered by the pandemic.



Last year during hard lockdown alone, the South African economy shed 2.2 million jobs plunging more families into a deep financial crisis. By the end of 2020, the unemployment rate soared to a record high of 32.5%, dashing hopes for a rapid COVID-19 recovery and robbing 7.2 million people of their livelihoods. *"A family's financial struggles leave children vulnerable in many ways, including the greater likelihood that they may drop out of school. Like everyone else, we have had to pivot to virtual formats during the pandemic to ensure the continuity of our programmes and activities. When it has been necessary, we have provided our scholars with data and devices so they could stay connected and attend weekly tutoring sessions and workshops online. If the regulations at the time allow for it, our planned, upcoming activities for the 2021 cohort will take place safely in-person which will be a boost for our scholars,"* says Bright.

KMF alumni stay connected to the organisation which works with them to open up opportunities for networking and skills development. The foundation's impact is evident in the lives it has changed over the past 22 years. Alumni, Asongezwa Sitwebile who became a KMF Junior Scholar in 2009 is today a Software Engineer with Deloitte Consulting says, *"The Kay Mason Foundation saw potential in me and helped me to realise it. The leadership skills that they instilled in me have helped me navigate the cut-throat corporate environment with ease and humility. I will forever be grateful for the opportunity the KMF afforded me."*

Now a doctor on the COVID frontline, Alumni, Alyson Adams, received a KMF bursary when she was 13 years old, at a time when her parents had two children in high-school and were struggling to meet financial obligations. The bursary enabled Adams to excel at high school and go on to win a bursary to study medicine at The University of Cape Town. Together with her husband, she is now paying it forward by sponsoring a KMF scholar this year. *"While I see COVID every day on a medical basis, I know that covid has had a profound effect on our scholars who need all the support that they can get right now. I think that is really the embodiment of what the Kay Mason Foundation is about, empowering young people so that they can go on to empower the rest of society,"* she says.



The KMF programme includes parent and student support groups, ongoing developmental workshops, and educational camps. Learners recruited into the programme in 2021, will undergo a full programme of Saturday academic tutoring, life skills workshops, developmental camps, and one-on-one mentoring during Grade 7. After they complete Grade 7, the top Junior Scholars will then be selected to participate in the 5-year KMF Senior programme which provides a full bursary at a best-in-class High School as well as ongoing tutoring and mentoring. After that, Scholar's graduate to the Catapult Program which helps them navigate the challenges of university and access the workplace until they are 25 years of age.

Applications to the 2021 KMF Junior development programme are open to Grade 6 learners until 14 May 2021.

Learn more about the eligibility criteria and download the application [here](#)

**Digital links:**

**Website:** [www.kmf.co.za](http://www.kmf.co.za)

**Facebook:** [@kaymasonfoundation](https://www.facebook.com/kaymasonfoundation)

**Instagram:** [@kaymasonfoundation](https://www.instagram.com/kaymasonfoundation)

