

After School Sport Coaching Excellence Award

GRACE MAPFUMO

Grace Mapfumo, the winner of the After School Sport Coaching Excellence Award 2018 started out by volunteering to coach her young daughter's netball team at Kleinberg Primary School in Ocean View. Now, four years later, Grace is a CoolPlay Champion - offering netball and life skills training at two primary schools and one high school in Ocean View. She is a role model as well as a coach, helping her players to envisage positive futures for themselves.

Grace and her two daughters came to Cape Town from Zimbabwe in 2007. She'd worked as a secretary in Zimbabwe, but was employed as a domestic worker by the time she began volunteering at her daughter's school. Grace began playing netball in grade 3 and had played throughout her schooling career. So, when she saw the team's struggles, she offered to share her skills, particularly seeing how much her daughter and her teammates enjoyed the game.


Kleinberg Primary School is a no-fee school, without the resources to pay coaches in the various sporting codes. "Our learners thus end up playing for surrounding schools," said Kleinberg's principal, Mr Zafrullah Oppelt. We are grateful that we do not have to send our girls to other schools for netball as an extra-curricular programme," he added. "Grace basically saw the need and met it, without expecting anything in return."

All was not smooth sailing, however.

"When I first started, it wasn't easy," Grace confessed. She explained that some of the girls had trouble with discipline and teamwork. "I needed to work very hard to convince them," she said. "No matter which child or what their circumstances are, you can't allow any stranger into their lives. I had to be patient. I had to understand the girls and their background. I had to befriend them. I checked in with them by asking them about their day and in this way, I gained their acceptance."

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About a year into her voluntary coaching, Grace was approached by CoolPlay to join the organisation as a Champion. CoolPlay is a non-profit organisation that delivers life skills through sport to youth across five sites in the Western Cape. “This offer came at the right time,” Grace said. “At the time, I needed more knowledge. They offered me training to be a better coach. I felt like my prayers were answered.”

Through CoolPlay, Grace received training in social and emotional learning techniques. She is now a qualified Western Cape netball referee and is currently pursuing further netball coaching accreditation through the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee (SASCOC).

Grace coaches more than 100 girls at the three schools throughout the year. At the same time, she imparts the CoolPlay code, based on principles of team goals, team values, identifying skill and characters strengths, creating team spirit or cohesion, communication, maintaining composure, thinking positively and making responsible choices.

According to Scott Sloan, CoolPlay’s Operations Manager, “Grace continuously (year on year) attracts the highest number of participants to her life skills through sport sessions. She maintains a devoted squad of learners each week despite the constant disruptions in the community due to gang violence. She continuously puts her children before her own personal safety and walks them home even in times of unpredictable and random gang violence.”

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Thanks to Grace’s coaching, two of her learners have represented the Western Cape for netball at their age level. One has been appointed captain of the school team. As a result of discussions around the gender-based issues that affect the girls in her care, CoolPlay secured a donation of sanitary pads so that the players can continue playing with confidence.

Indeed, confidence is one of the key lessons that Grace imparts, especially when she accompanies her learners to various tournaments. This, Principal Oppelt said, has exposed the girls “to things outside their world.” He added that Grace’s deep interest in netball and coaching is shared by her players. “Our girls have won trophies and excelled against other schools. Despite the social contexts these girls find themselves in, they have been taught that they are equal both on and off the court. It is evident in how the girls conduct themselves, whether playing home or away.”

Grace married a South African man and now has five children, two boys and three girls. Recently, she has been voted onto the governing body of Kleinberg Primary School by the other parents. “They told me: ‘We’ve seen the work that you’re doing in schools. With your work, we think you can make a difference,’” Grace recounted.

And a difference is what Grace aims to make; it’s what she thinks about when she wakes up in the morning. In her four years of coaching, Grace has witnessed how girls from Masiphumelele and Ocean View now work together as a team. “CoolPlay teaches respect and now they work as a team, with girls of all colour and show love to each other, and understand different backgrounds,” she said.

“Further, I have seen them apply themselves in school, and the teachers often thank me for their renewed dedication in the classroom – the sport is really changing their lives on and off the sports field. My real aim for the girls is to see them smiling and preparing for their futures.” Grace said.

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Remember it’s not just an After School Activity,
IT’S AN AFTERSCHOOL ADVANTAGE!