

Connecting the dots

Stories of change: Young Women in Local Government

Becoming a successful leader

Summary

Mandisa Mthimkhulu, local government HR officer, Mbabane Municipal Council, Mbabane, Eswatini

Project involvement: Women in Local Government network and being mentored

Having joined local government from the private sector, Mandisa Mthimkhulu has learned a lot about the workings of local government as a result of her involvement in the Connecting the Dots project. Thanks to her mentor, Mandisa has learned how to lead a team, despite her young age, and has changed the way she is doing her job.

Background and aims

Mandisa Mthimkhulu is a young HR administrator for Mbabane Municipal Council where she has worked for just over a year.

She had previously worked for a financial institution and joined the Connecting the Dots project to help her understand more about working in local government, including leadership and staff relations.

How the CtD project has helped

Mandisa says that the programme has really helped her understand everything that is happening in local government, how people working for local government are there to serve, and how Mbabane fits in within the whole of Swaziland local government system.

Mandisa was having some issues as a leader because of her young age. Mandisa has learned about what it means to be a leader, the approaches to leadership, how leadership skills are developed. She has learned from the views of different leaders who have been involved in training and seen the different characteristics for good leadership.

“One of things I needed assistance with was in leadership, so being with a mentor really helped me understand that a leader is not born, a leader is made, and you do it on a daily basis by working on yourself, and the people that you work with. For me that was a whole change: it helped me discover myself, understand the things I do, why I do certain things, the way I do them and the changes I need to make in my life to get to where I want to go,” noted Mandisa.

“I do have a goal as to where I want to see myself five or ten years from now, so she helped me identify the things I need to start doing, and what I need to stop doing to achieve my goal.”

Impact

Mandisa has made changes in the way she does things at work, thanks to working with a mentor who is herself in a leadership position. Her mentor helped her understand what it means to be a leader. This has led her to change the way she approaches the work: being more empathetic, listening to the people she leads, and understanding that people are not working in silos but must work as a team. Mandisa says that she would not have made these changes if it had not been for the Connecting the Dots programme.

Mandisa has also found that what she has learned from the project has helped with her personal social contacts. People in her social circles - such as church and friends - have seen a change in how she interacts with people. Mandisa says she used to be shy but is now more open to meeting new people.

“One of highlights of the project was having a leadership meeting with my mentor who also invited other people from her workplace, making me the programme director. This helped my confidence, my public speaking, and other aspects I needed to work on,” noted Mandisa.

“I have to say thank you for this opportunity and this programme and how it is empowering women,” says Mandisa.

“Growing up we have been taught that our space is in the household, but we can make our presence felt in organisations: we cannot do it through bulldozing but through actually doing the work - not just being given the opportunities but working for them,” she concluded.

Looking forward

Mandisa and her mentor have agreed they want to continue the programme, and the end of the Connecting the Dots project will not be the end for them but they will continue to assist each other. Her mentor has already helped Mandisa to further her studies, and will be continuing to mentor her.

