Blue sky
SOCIETY TRUST

# ANNUAL REPORT 2018

# NOTE FROM THE FOUNDER

## HELLO, SAWUBONA, MHORO, MHOLWENI, DUMELA, HALLO, AND WA LALAPO.

I greet you in the MANY African languages to celebrate the closing of 2018.

Making a meaningful impact in conservation, communities and our environment takes passion, perseverance and partnership. It takes years, sometimes decades, to elicit positive change. Sadly, there is no quick-fix solution. To preserve our Earth's precious biodiversity, to change community mindsets and global perceptions, and to raise generations of eco-savvy children through conscientious education requires staying in the game for the long haul. It requires dedication, perseverance and an understanding that the seeds that sprout meaningful change must be planted every single day. There is no room for wishful thinking or a making-noise-from-the- side-lines attitude. This is hard work; persistent work on the frontlines because every single bit does make a difference.

As I reflect on everything we have achieved over the past 12 months, I am both humbled and thankful. Our projects seem to grow each year despite insufficient funding which means we are able to expand our reach and impact despite challenges. Part of our winning formula is our people. We are a small but passionate, productive team and each year our Blue Sky Society Trust family inspires more individuals and corporates to go out there and do more, having a powerful impact both locally and internationally. We are continually humbled by the ongoing work of our colleagues and by those who came before us.

We are determined to get more people involved on various levels to help us make a difference with the humanitarian, environmental and conservation projects that we support. This report highlights some of the successes of our second international all-women expedition into Africa, the continuous growth of our Soul2Sole project, and the beginning of our tree-planting and ocean educational initiatives and how we continue to work side-by-side with our partners to make significant impacts at grassroot levels.

On behalf of the Blue Sky Society Trust team, thank you for supporting our mission. We invite you to continue to help us save wildlife and wild places in 2019.

Kind Regards,

Carla Geyser

Image courtesy of Alize Yaccino

# BLUE SKY SOCIETY TRUST

## OVERVIEW

Blue Sky Society Trust is an independent non-profit organisation dedicated to conservation, wildlife protection, community upliftment, and ecotourism in Africa .

We believe that every act of kindness can have a positive ripple effect, and even the smallest contribution can make a big difference. Our mission is to protect, preserve, and improve life for people, wildlife, and communities in need.

Our vision is to identify and manage projects that people and companies can support by giving their time, expertise, ideas and funds.

Our philosophy is that there is no limit to what we can achieve if we work together. There are infinite opportunities to make a meaningful difference – which is why we want to partner with individuals, schools and organisations to work towards building a better world.

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Our Board of Trustees is passionate about Blue Sky Society Trust's role in building a better world and making a difference. Our trustees come from all walks of life, and bring a variety of talents, experiences and expertise to Blue Sky Society Trust.

They are all passionate about conservation, wildlife protection, community upliftment, and ecotourism in Africa, and the role that our organisation plays in protecting, preserving, and improving life for people, wildlife, and communities in need.

As the custodians of Blue Sky Society Trust, our trustees help guide and shape the direction of the organisation.

Carla Geyser – Founder Trustee

Nicky Rutherfoord – Trustee

Bronwyn Laing – Trustee

Andre Liebenberg – Trustee

# HUMANITARIAN PROJECTS

## PROJECT SOUL2SOLE

There are over seven million children in Africa who have never owned or worn a pair of brand new school shoes. Our Soul2Sole initiative provides new and pre-loved shoes to underprivileged schoolchildren in rural areas. Soul2Sole is about making a significant change one school, one child and one pair of shoes at a time. It's about giving the gift of footwear, funds, and other resources needed by the school and the community it supports. The project has grown exponentially since it was piloted in 2015, and we are truly grateful to the Lion Match Group and Aramex who have partnered with us on this exciting initiative.

Driven by the aim to provide as many underprivileged children with a pair of school shoes as we are able to, Project Soul2Sole connects like-minded individuals, groups and companies with schools that need help. Our client, The Lion Match Company, sponsors new shoes for the project. In 2018, we distributed 1000 pairs of new school shoes and this year we are hoping to increase this figure to 1500 pairs. In 2018, we also collected over 1600 pairs of previously-loved shoes and we have just finalised the collection for 2019. Some of the highlights of the project are:

- Collection of 1600 pairs of previously loved shoes from 11 schools within KwaZulu-Natal – we increased our distribution footprint by eight schools compared to the previous year (2017)
- Purchasing of 1000 pairs of brand new shoes
- Personalised delivery of each pair of shoes with a tin of Lion Match Quality Shoe Polish, a pair of socks and an Uzwelo drawstring bag
- Delivery of shoes across KwaZulu-Natal as well as to the North West Province
- Attaining more than R 1 million of national media coverage - R1,033,700.92 to be precise

# PROJECT HEART2HAND

Spreading love, support and care for society's most vulnerable – babies and young children – is the driving force for Project Heart2Hand. Through this initiative, we help to upgrade crèche facilities, build play areas, and donate much-needed supplies for little ones who didn't get the best start in life. We deliver hope by creating opportunities for a brighter future. In 2018, children in two provinces benefitted from Project Heart2Hand:

**WESTERN CAPE**

Little ones at the Maitland Cottage Children's Orthopaedic Hospital in Newlands, Cape Town now have a brighter, more cheerful environment to rest and recuperate, after The Lion Match Company's subsidiary company NSP Unsgaard and their brand Cherubs joined forces with Blue Sky Society Trust. This was a month-long undertaking that gave parts of the state-owned hospital a makeover that included the following refurbishments:

- The entire flooring in the boys' ward was replaced
- All the curtaining was upgraded thanks to donor, Dr Moonda
- A 50 metre mural based on the popular, magical storybook, The Little Optimist, was designed and painted on the wall outside the boy's ward. Now, children recuperating there will have colourful, positive images to look out on
- 600 copies of The Little Optimist, written by Greg Bertish were gifted to the ward as well as to other organisations in the Cape Town area
- Dekro Paints graciously donated the paint for the project
- The initiative received national media coverage valued at R84,243.25

**KWAZULU-NATAL**

Edendale Hospital is a state-owned facility situated 9km from Pietermaritzburg in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands. There has been little refurbishment to the hospital since it was established in 1954. At any given time, the paediatric facility is "home" to more than 40 children from disadvantaged backgrounds, ranging in age from new-borns to 13-year olds. When the hospital sent out an SOS to help restore the children's ward, The Lion Match Company's subsidiary company NSP Unsgaard and their brand Cherubs, together with ABSA immediately heeded the call, jointly contributing R350 000 to upgrade the ward. The Blue Sky Society Trust was enlisted to help facilitate the refurbishment.

The end-result was a bright, more cheerful environment that encourages hope and healing for the little ones in their time of need. The ward was handed over in August, as part of the Nelson Mandela Marathon weekend. The makeover included the following elements:

- The entire paediatric ward was stripped, prepped and then re-painted from floor to ceiling
- A 32-metre wall mural based on the popular, magical book, The Little Optimist, was designed and painted
- All curtaining in the paediatric ward was replaced
- 200 copies of The Little Optimist, written by Greg Bertish, were gifted to the ward
- The initiative received national media coverage valued at R181,554.56 in national and community publications

# CONSERVATION PROJECTS

## JOURNEYS WITH PURPOSE

Journeys with Purpose is an ecotourism fundraising initiative that invites like-minded individuals to join Blue Sky Society Trust on expeditions through Africa. It's this exciting combination of adventure travel and conservation projects that attracted global interest in 2018. A total of 13 women joined Blue Sky Society Trust founder, Carla Geyser, for various legs of a 50-day expedition through southern Africa, raising awareness about different wildlife issues and raising funds for a variety of causes. The Rise of the Matriarch trip was Carla's second successful all-women Journeys with Purpose expedition. This time around, crew members drove 11 235km through four countries from 16 September 2018 to 28 October 2018.

Mama Africa is one of the most beautiful places on earth. She creeps into your heart and soul and stays there forever. She makes you feel alive by igniting a sense of adventure inside you; takes your breath away with her magnificent sunsets and sunrises; leaves you speechless at her amazing wildlife and her boundless energy; and awakens emotions, laughter and feelings deep inside you that you thought were long gone. She is covered in a kaleidoscope of colours and governed by kindness. Her heart is filled with music and dance, wide spaces, endless roads, and breath-taking scenery. But sadly, like everything in life, the good is accompanied by the bad.

Africa has a festering wound that seems to be growing at an alarming rate - the brutal poaching of our wildlife, over-population, poverty and human wildlife conflict. The Rise of the Matriarch expedition had, at its heart, the following objectives:

- To create awareness for human-wildlife conflict, youth conservation education, fundraising support for four beneficiaries and women empowerment for young girls in rural communities
- To drive global awareness about 13 specific conservation projects that were interacted with along route. These organisations have come up with excellent mitigation projects to try and reduce or control wildlife and conservation-related issues
- To bring together 13 like-minded eco-warriors from around the world – women from various walks of life, different ages and backgrounds linked with one common passion: the protection and preservation of our wildlife
- To distribute 30 000 educational booklets through various organisations to children in rural areas adjacent to designated wildlife zones. There are many "human-wildlife conflict hotspots" where education could diffuse tensions and bring about positive outcomes
- To drive international media awareness about the core issues. We achieved over R3,170,880-70 in media coverage to date.

# ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS

## TREES4KZN

We need trees to survive. They give us oxygen, shade and beauty. This is the fundamental driving force behind a project that aims to plant 1 000 trees before 2020. We observed our inaugural tree-planting on 26 May 2018!

Children from three schools in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands enjoyed a hands-on, fun-filled experience at the uMngeni Valley Nature Reserve, as they helped plant 250 indigenous trees as part of Blue Sky Society Trust's Trees4KZN initiative. It was a great way to combine outdoor fun with education and giving back to Planet Earth. Studies have shown that tree planting is a sustainable way to combat the effects of environmental pollution. So, planting more trees is crucial and we would like to see more people involved as we expand this project in 2019.

We are grateful for the support of The Umhlanga Women Achievers group that raised a further R40 000 to plant more trees, which we will be doing this year.

Trees4KZN is aimed at increasing the province's tree count while educating KZN's youth about why it is important to plant and nurture our trees. In 2018, we teamed up with IT trailblazers, Network Configurations, and WESSA uMngeni Valley for the KZN Midlands rollout. The initiative included the following objectives:

- Roping in community support. We were joined by 120 children from Shea O'Connor Combined School, Corrie Lynn Primary School and Curry's Post Primary School as well as little ones from Siyabonga Helping Hands and the Shiyas Bizali Eco Club
- Providing a hands-on eco experience. A 50-strong Network Configurations team joined Blue Sky Society Trust for an entire day outdoors, planting trees
- Creating awareness about the project. The initiative received media coverage valued at - R117 941. 83

## NELSON MANDELA 100 DAY ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME

This programme drives environmental awareness and the promotion of environmental education through hands-on training, exploration of habitats, and corporate social responsibility. On 21 July 2018, Blue-Sky Society Trust facilitated an initiative that brought together IT giants, Network Configurations, and environment body, WESSA. The programme rolled out at WESSA's Treasure Beach facility on the Bluff in KwaZulu-Natal in aid of Nelson Mandela 100 Day.

Treasure Beach offers a variety of courses, workshops, presentations and projects to build the knowledge, skills and attitudes of people, young and old, towards a more sustainable future.

The hands-on approach used by the staff encourages a practical understanding of the environment and our role in caring for the earth. Educators and group leaders are invited to share in the programme and course design to ensure that the specific needs of the participants are met. A great day outdoors was had by all that included the following:

- The participation of 50 Network Configuration staff at the WESSA educational centre on the Bluff
- The participation of 95 Grade 8 children and six teachers from two underprivileged schools - Swelihlwe High School and Embizweni High School - in an outdoor environment
- Key eco lessons amidst rocky shores, dune forests, mangrove swamps and a freshwater wetland

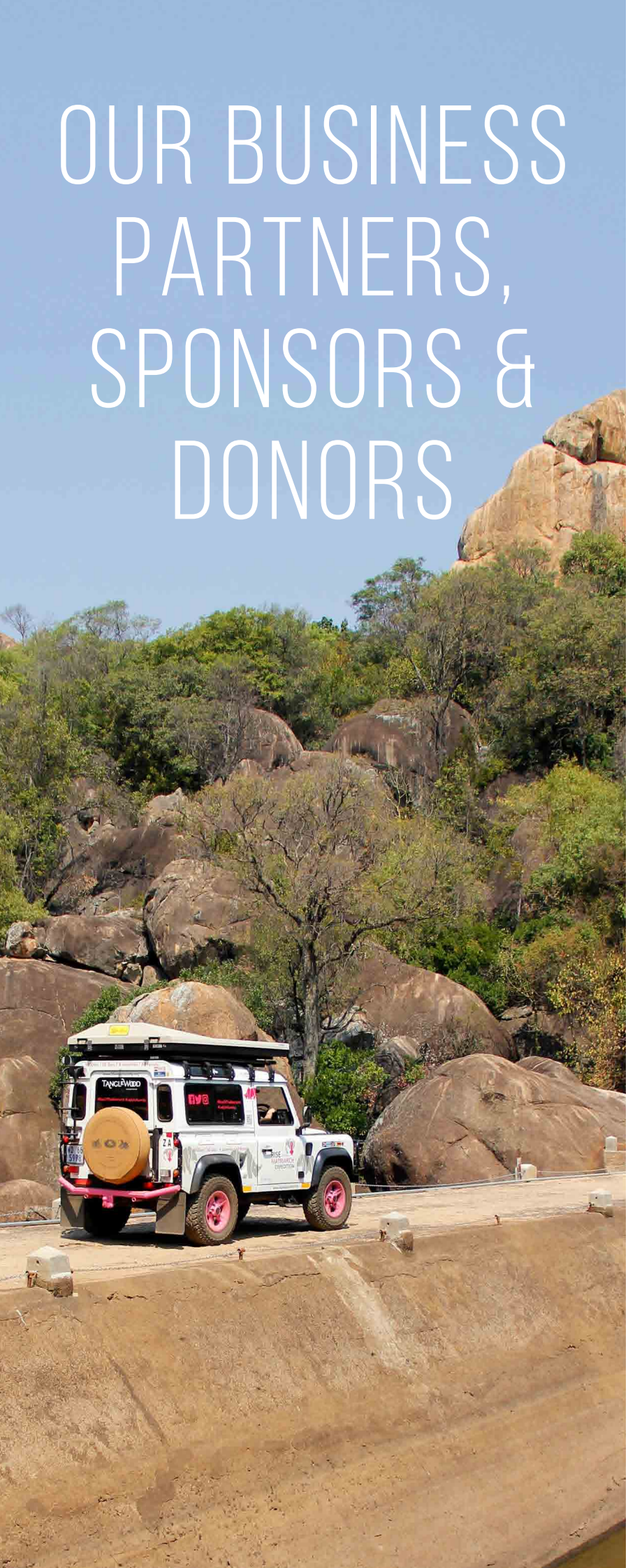
## ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME (EEP)

2018 was a wonderful year for the EEP project. In conjunction with the Africa Foundation, Mpilonhle and &Beyond, EEP has gone from strength to strength and has been rolled-out successfully in 5 schools surrounding Phinda Private Game Reserve in northern KwaZulu-Natal.

EEP is a curriculum-based environmental education project. It includes classroom-based lessons as well as practical demonstrations and experiences, such as regular game-drives through the Phinda reserve.

The project has also been filmed for the SABC 2 TV Show 50/50 which will air in late January 2019. Filming took place at the Nkomo Full Service School with the learners, their teacher and their headmistress demonstrating the practical applications of EEP- as well as a game drive into Phinda with the EEP game ranger.

# OUR BUSINESS PARTNERS, SPONSORS & DONORS



Our heartfelt love and gratitude go out to those individuals, schools and organisations that sponsor and support our projects, initiatives and mission.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for supporting us in 2018, seeing hope and opportunity where others see negativity! It is through your selfless support that we have made – and continue to make – a significant, meaningful difference.

PLEASE NOTE: We have listed donors and sponsors below. If we have somehow left out anyone, we humbly apologise. It is through your kind donations that can help animals and people in need – and that is truly priceless!

## DONORS

Sue Davidson (Bunny Hop)
Trumpeter Publishers (Catherine)
Francois Roode
Shaun Laing
Davide Ruggiero
David Meachin
Elaine Magson
Rick Southam
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Farmserve Umhlali
Rencel Accounting
NDSS Trading
Umhlanga Women Achievers

# BUSINESS PARTNERS & SPONSORS

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Tanglewood Foundation (Peter Eastwood)
Cooper Tires
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Functions 4 Africa
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James Ralph (Casio)
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SAT4Rent
Getaway Show
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MG Print Services
Dezzo Branding
National Lunar
Hirt & Carter
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Russell Cooper (Legend Aviation)
Melvill & Moon
Wild Coolers
Panda Rest Camp
Kalahari Game Lodge
Chobe Game Lodge
Wild is Life
Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA)
Dekro Paints
KZN Media & Communications
PeggyManis.co.za
Salt and Candy
Black Bean Production
Uzwelo Bags

# DISCOUNTED RATES

Avis Safari 4x4
Landy Parts 4 Africa
Tactical Distributors
The Ultimate Guesthouse
Tuli Wilderness Trails - Molema Camp
Sunbird Guesthouse
Muunze Forest Lodge
Matobo Hills Lodge
Tuskers Campsite
Eco-exist Research Camp
Okavango River Lodge
Ngepi Camp
Rare & Endangered Species (REST)
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Arrebusch Travel Lodge
Tracks 4 Africa
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Ragland
Dekro Paints
Graeme Madsen
Shaves Paints
Simply Bathrooms
Talisman PMB
Refined Accountants

# SCHOOLS & ORGANISATIONS

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Earth Awareness
Africat
Elephants Alive
Black Mambas
Soft Foot Alliance
Wild is Life
Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust
Mayibuye Game Reserve / Lawrence Anthony Earth Organisation
Elephants without Borders
Eco-exist
REST
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Durban Girls College
Orient School
La Lucia Junior Primary
Clifton College
Virginia Prep School
Chelsea Preparatory
Durban Girls High School
Reddam House Umhlanga
Danville Park Girls' High School
Al-Falaah College

# FEEDBACK & COMMENTS

Words cannot explain the passion, the love, the purpose that goes into and comes back out of this amazing organization. You have to experience it first-hand.

– Stephanie de Wit (RSA)

Blue Sky Society is founded on the profound belief that every single one of us can make a difference in this world. With heart, determination and passion, everyone I have met through Blue Sky has inspired me to go after my dreams, live life with purpose, face my own fears and trust that we are all connected to nature and to one another. Joining the Rise of the Matriarch Expedition in 2018 and being part of the movement to empower women in wildlife conservation has been one of the greatest adventures of my life. I feel I am now part of an extended network and family of courageous change makers who are bonded together by our love of wildlife, mother Africa, exploration and a deeper calling to boldly live life to the fullest. So much gratitude to Blue Sky Society for having the vision and courage to create experiences that truly do have such meaningful purpose. Thank you!

-Jennifer Palmer (USA)

I was honoured to be a part of this year's Rise of the Matriarch expedition, and it was more than I could have hoped for! Carla has found a way to support and educate about wildlife conservation, while also creating an experience for women that literally changes their lives. I can't wait to come back and work with her again

– Emily Scott (USA)

The perfect blend of lifetime adventure, vacation with purpose, learning experience and unforgettable time with amazing people who are positively impacting our world. I don't think there is any better way to spend a few weeks.

– Tommi Wolfe (USA/SA)

I cannot thank Blue Sky Society enough for the experience I had. I don't even know where to begin. Meeting Carla and her crew of Matriarch's inspired me to try and take action in my own life and try make a difference outside of my life. The entire expedition was so expertly and perfectly coordinated. Not only did we get to interact with organizations doing such incredible things for our wildlife, but we got to take home memories and moments that money simply cannot buy. I am only but hoping that I can tag along on the next one. I highly recommend the expedition to anyone looking to make a difference and find inspiration to live a full and meaningful life

– Tarren Benson (RSA)

Blue Sky is about doing good and the people involved are beyond passionate and dedicated to their mission!

– Isabel Wolfe Gillespie (German/SA)

Amazing experience. Thanks to Carla for allowing me to join the second leg of this awesome trip. One hears of Human/Wildlife conflict but, until you actually get to experience it and talk to people on the ground, it just doesn't hit home. The places we visited were amazing and so special in their own rights. A trip not to be forgotten - ever.

– Joan Arnestad (RSA)

"The children's laughter and smiles were definitely the best part of the day, our team really enjoyed being able to work together in a natural environment, interacting with the children and witnessing their joy as they caught all kinds of creatures and learnt about nature."

- Erica Floweday,

Network Configurations

"What a fantastic initiative for our beautiful nature reserve! We are working hard to eradicate alien vegetation on the property, and by planting yellowwoods, acacias, cabbage trees and stinkwoods in the place of the resident gum trees, we are returning the valley to its natural state."

- Matthew Cocks,

Centre Manager for uMngeni Valley Nature Reserve & WESSA

"At the Lion Match Group, one of our first-class brands are our Lion Quality shoe polish and as part of investing and growing our company ethos and awareness, we strongly believe in giving back to the communities who are so loyal to our brand. We believe by partnering with Blue Sky Society Trust on the Soul 2 Sole Project, we are helping future leaders of our beautiful country, one shoe at a time."

- Milena Domiro,

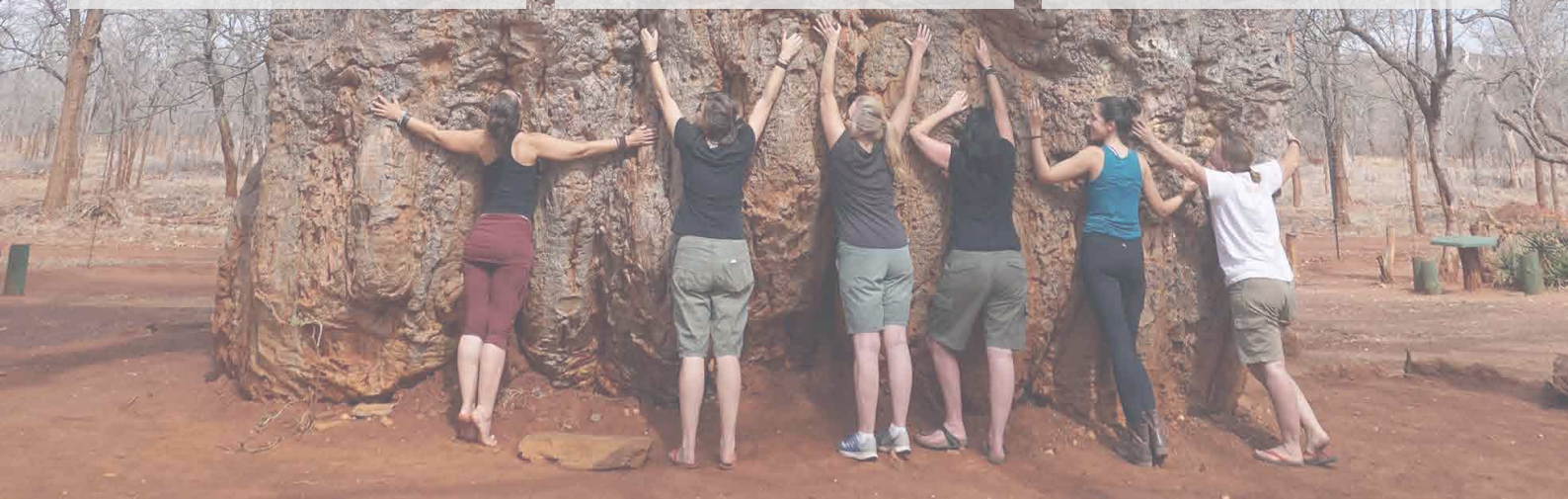
Marketing and CSI Manager at Lion Match Group

"We are living in a poverty-stricken area and most of our learners do not have full school uniforms, so this is a great day for us, to have new school shoes for our children. We are so grateful for Project Soul 2 Sole."

- Simon Ntuli,

Deputy principal of Mdepha High School

"Whether working with the youth, entrepreneurs or for environmental protection, community engagement is a central aspect of our strategy. The Soul 2 Sole Project is a perfect fit for us as our main focus has always been supporting children and education. We are so excited to be able to have a positive impact on communities in need and to make a real difference."

- Sade Goodman,

Transformation Director for Aramex South Africa (Pty) Ltd.