



MEDIA RELEASE FROM GROWSMART, AN INITIATIVE BY GROWTHPOINT PROPERTIES AND THE WESTERN CAPE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Growsmart winners proudly represent the country at the African Spelling Bee

A young learner from Liwa Primary School in Nyanga, one of Cape Town's townships with a troubling past and few resources today, is showing the world that a person's background doesn't define their future.

Unamandla Mqaleni represented her country, school and community at the African Spelling Bee in Uganda this week where 18 countries and 108 spelling champions competed.

Mentor and teacher Andrew Gumindoga accompanied her to the competition and describes her performance as extraordinary. Rising above the difficult circumstances in her community, Unamandla competed with excellence and made it all the way through to the competition's second round.

The day after she returned from the competition, Mr Gumindoga overheard her telling her fellow learners at Liwa Primary School, that their background doesn't determine their ability and if they always work hard, they can do it.

Learner and teacher ascribe her success in large part to the Growsmart literacy competition - both were part of the team that won the prestigious Growsmart title in the Western Cape province in 2018. Liwa Primary has been participating in the Growsmart educational programme since Growsmart's inception a decade ago.

Growsmart is a keenly-contested annual competition, was started and funded by Growthpoint Properties and fully supported by the Western Cape Education Department. It helps the learners and schools that need it most to boost Literacy, Story writing, Mathematics, Science and Debating in, and takes place at a level where it can have the biggest impact, in Grades 4, 5 and 6.

It has grown to include the above-mentioned competitions and as of next year, intends to add Entrepreneurship to the Western Cape competition offerings. Two years ago, Growsmart expanded into the Eastern Cape and next year, the competition intends to launch in Limpopo.

It is no secret that South African schools continue to face major challenges in Literacy, Mathematics and Science. The size of this massive challenge is clear in the alarming statistics, which place South Africa troublingly low on national and international benchmarks in all three areas.

Since inception it has more than doubled its reach from 80 to 160 schools in the Western Cape and the Growsmart newspapers have been distributed to over 70,000 children.

Mr Gumindoga explains that while he put Unamandla through her spelling paces in preparation for the continental spelling battle, Growsmart had already ensured that she was very well equipped.

"In fact, a spelling bee covers only one of the three levels of literacy training emphasised in Growsmart, which includes spelling, defining and using a word correctly," says Mr Gumindoga. "This prepared Unamandla well and has created an important stepping stone for her. She is also very talented and hardworking. Unamandla was exceptionally brave. She presented with such grace. We are incredibly proud of her."

Growthpoint Properties' regional general manager Jewel Harris explains that the Growsmart competition is designed to boost their school performance, but also to change lives. "Growsmart helps children gain exposure on bigger platforms and really launches them to greater things. It is a platform



to excel. This is exactly what Unamandla has done, and we congratulate her on all her hard work and this wonderful achievement.”

Growsmart was approached to enter an alumni into the 4th African National Spelling Bee, and facilitated sponsorship for Unamandla and Mr Gumindoga to attend along with young spelling champs from counties including Benin, Botswana, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leon, South Africa, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Mr Gumindoga says, “I want to thank you guys for the opportunity, we salute you guys.” He also learned for the trip, and notes with interest how many of the young competitors would ask judges for the origin of a word before trying to spell it. “English is made up of words from many other languages. Knowing a few basic spelling rules from Latin, German, Greek and other common source languages goes a big way in helping youngsters to spell. As educators and teachers in South Africa it is important for us to ensure our learners are literate in English. Even at the African Spelling Bee, this was the common language of communication between the different nations.”

Based on this experience, Growsmart is exploring way to incorporate an opportunity to compete in the African Spelling Bee for the top spellers in its programme in the future.

“This would provide yet another Growsmart space to inspire, boost confidence and create positive experiences that will subsequently translate into courageous and passionate future leaders,” says Harris.

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Note to Editor

- Growsmart is an annual competition that started in 2010 with 80 schools selected by the WCED
- Initiated and funded by Growthpoint Properties
- Fully supported by the Western Cape Education Department
- For Intermediate Phase learners within the metro areas (Grades 4, 5 and 6)
- Currently reaches 69 410 learners (160 schools) in the Western Cape and 25 121(60 schools) in the Eastern Cape, who receive 4 editions of the Growsmart newspaper per year
- Schools must have less than 60% for literacy to qualify and are selected by the WCED

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Released by:

Growthpoint Properties Limited
Nadine Kuzmanich
Head, Marketing and Communication
Tel: 011 944 6251
NKuzmanich@growthpoint.co.za

For more information, or to book an interview, please contact Mahlatse Bojanyane on 083 453 6668 or email Mahlatse@marketingconcepts.co.za.