

Tzaneen's threads of hope: how one woman escaped the streets, and now helps others

As a teenager, Grace Mohlabe left her small-town home in Tzaneen for a better life. However, her journey led her to homelessness in Polokwane, the capital of Limpopo, where she had to resort to sex work to survive. Everything began to shift in 2013, when a chance encounter with Corinne Sandenbergh, founder of the women-led initiative [Ani Vileli](#) opened the door to a new path.

Ani Vileli teaches vulnerable and unemployed women in Tzaneen the art of crocheting. Women create hand-crafted items, like bathmats and baskets made from upcycled twine, which enables them to earn an income. For many, a single crochet stitch becomes the first thread in rebuilding a stable life.

Though it would take another two years before Grace joined the programme back in Tzaneen – by then a young mother of two – her fierce determination to build a better life for her children led her to embrace the opportunity offered by Ani Vileli. Today she is no longer just surviving, she's thriving. A skilled artisan, a trainer and a mother who now provides for her children.

"I knew I had to turn my life around, not just for myself, but for my two children," says Mohlabe. "Ani Vileli opened that door. Today I can earn an income, put food on the table, and pass the skills I've learned on to other young women so they can do the same."

Mohlabe learned the craft directly from Sandenbergh and under her mentorship, Mohlabe didn't just learn to crochet, she became a leader in her own right. As a trainer, she now helps other women reclaim their futures.

Since 2019, Shoprite has donated more than 3 000 balls of twine to Ani Vileli, including a recent delivery of 500 through Shoprite Tzaneen, helping to sustain the programme's reach and impact.

"Ani Vileli demonstrates how practical, hands-on skills can uplift lives and transform communities," says Sanjeev Raghubir, Chief Sustainability Officer at the Shoprite Group. "Supporting sustainable grassroots initiatives like this is at the heart of our [Act For Change](#) programme because it creates long-term impact, promotes dignity through employment, and helps build stronger, more resilient communities."

As Mohlabe continues to train the next generation of women at Ani Vileli, her journey is proof that change doesn't just happen – it's built, stitch by stitch, by those willing to believe in the strength of others.

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