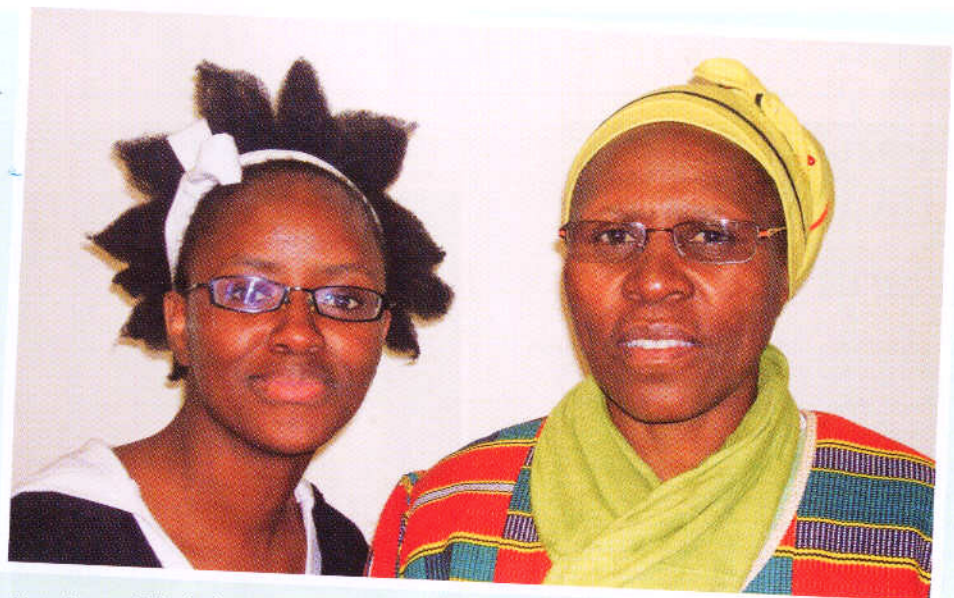


'Fulfil your promise'

Parents of UWC students and graduates often have to get used to the idea that their children may go abroad again to study or work. In the third article in our series about the value UWC places on parents' support for its work, we talk to Thelmina Makhismo-Makalima, mother of Nandipha Makalima (CR 06-08), about the outcomes of a UWC education and her hopes for her daughter's future.



Nandie and Thelmina

Thelmina Makhismo-Makalima welcomed her youngest daughter home to Cape Town, South Africa in June, but she knows that Nandipha (CR 06-08) may be with her for a relatively short time. 'Nandie', as she is known to her family and friends, plans further study abroad – and her mother will not stand in her way.

"I am not anxious about the prospect of Nandie leaving again," says Thelmina. "The past two years have been good 'training' for me, so I think I can cope."

Thelmina admits that she did not always feel so relaxed. When she first heard that Nandie had won a scholarship to UWC Costa Rica, she was very anxious. "My primary concern was my child's safety. This was because my last-born child would be flying alone and, worst of all, leaving her country of birth, something no one else in the family had ever done. I even suggested that she at least be admitted to Waterford KaMhlaba UWC in Swaziland, so that I would be able to visit her."

I hope Nandie will fulfil the promise she has made to share the benefits of her experience with South Africa and to give something back

However, Thelmina gradually grew used to the idea that Nandie would be going to UWCCR. "We hold public information meetings for prospective candidates, their parents and often teachers as well," explains Ruth Hall of the South African National Committee. "We find that many parents are initially nervous or suspicious about this endeavour – both about what it will mean to them to have their child leave home, and about whether there is adequate supportive infrastructure to look after their child during this important stage of adolescent development. The most direct reassurance we can provide is that the tutorial system at

the Colleges means that there is a member of staff who keeps an eye on all aspects of their child's experience and should be able to pick up any emerging problems.

"Also, before the successful candidates leave to take up their scholarships, we have a 'braaivleis', or barbecue, with their parents and siblings, our whole committee and recently returned scholars who are able to give them a vivid and up-to-date description about what to expect. This is great for parents, and we find that they often keep in touch both with each other and with us as committee members."

Adjusting to loss

After Nandie left for Costa Rica, her mother, sister and two brothers began the process of adjusting to the loss of the baby of the family. "It was very tough being without her, especially since she is the youngest," says Thelmina. "Nandie is one of the most lovable children in the family because she always breaks the silence with jokes and laughter. However, as time went on, we came to familiarise ourselves with her absence.

Communicating through telephone calls and letters made things easier; and hearing that she was enjoying herself and loving being independent in such a faraway country, I felt more at ease."

Although Thelmina did not know much about UWC to begin with, she soon began to admire its ethos. "The UWC ideals appealed to me because they meant that my child's education would extend beyond the classroom walls. There was also the opportunity of interaction with people from different backgrounds, which I believe is an attempt to bridge the many divides that exist in the world."

Thelmina feels that Nandie's experience at UWCCR has certainly given her a broader perspective. "For example, she is now more concerned about the affairs of other countries, and in general she is more informed and sympathetic.

"I feel that UWC helps build well-rounded students in the sense that they get a feel for so many things and thus are

able to recognise where their passions lie. In Nandie's case she was able to continue her commitment to community service [at the age of 14 she was already working as an AIDS activist and peer counsellor] and to try out new sports such as Tae Kwon Do. She has also developed mentally because her solid IB education challenged her greatly."

Thelmina says she is very proud and happy that Nandie received the quality education "she deserves". "Nothing has ever been handed to me on a silver platter, so it was hard for me to accept that my child had been awarded such a great opportunity. But Nandie has always strived to succeed. She does not fear changes or challenges. She approaches issues with a positive mindset, and she is full of confidence. Her primary school headmaster was so proud that he displayed the article that reported her success all around the school for everyone to see and to take her as an example of where perseverance can get you."

Nandie now plans to study and perhaps work abroad for a few years, but eventually to return as a biomedical researcher. Her mother looks forward to the day when she "fulfils the promise she has made to share the benefits of her experience with South Africa and to give something back".



Nandie in national costume on Costa Rican Independence Day