



'We struggled a lot when I was growing up,' remembers Abongile Ngalo.

'My uncle was the only one working and my grandmother received her pension. We were 10 people all living in a one-bedroom house. It was difficult.'

But living in such arduous circumstances did not stop this dynamic young woman from wanting more.

'BEADS
CHANGED MY
LIFE'

This tenacious lady beaded her way to a better future.
By Thozama Nozuko

A SENSE OF PURPOSE

After finishing Grade 11, Abongile spent the school holidays with her aunt, who lived in an informal settlement in Cape Town. It was then that she decided not to return to her home in Queenstown, but rather stay on there to further her education. Enrolling in school proved to be a challenge, but she had no idea an opportunity would soon arise.

Her aunt, who worked as a domestic worker, supplemented her income by working at Cape Town-based non-profit organisation Relate, whose members make and sell beaded bracelets. With nothing else to do, Abongile helped her aunt with some beading on weekends, earning a bit of pocket money.

Business soon started booming for the social initiative and bracelet orders increased, so it became clear that they needed full-time staff. Since her aunt was employed already, Abongile stepped in.

For the first time, she was able to support herself and her family, and she couldn't believe the feeling. 'It felt really good,' she recalls. 'I had always wanted to stand on my own. Now, I could do that - and send money home to my mother.'

STEP INTO THE FUTURE

Abongile delighted in the work and her new-found independence, but the real change in her life happened about a year into her time at Relate. She, along with her colleagues, were called in to a meeting by Relate founders and trustees, in which they were offered a unique opportunity.

'They asked us all to recall what we wanted to be when we were kids and asked if they could make those dreams a reality. Of course we said "yes",' she smiles. 'It hadn't been my plan to go to Relate. What I had really wanted was to go to school. So when they said we could take courses, I was very happy.'

When considering which course to choose, Abongile thought back to her childhood in the Eastern Cape. 'When I was growing up, my grandmother was always unwell. And I was the child who helped her out, whether she needed water or her treatment.' So with this in mind, she decided to pursue a career in nursing.

She started out by taking a course in home-based care, and after completing the six-month course, she was prepared to tackle a degree in nursing. Now, at 27 years of age, Abongile is in the second year of her degree.

SOMEONE TO LEAN ON

Abongile couldn't be more grateful to Relate. 'Since joining Relate, a big load has been lifted off my shoulders. I have changed and become someone else. Before, I didn't have much hope, but

strong woman,' she states proudly. 'When I put my mind to something, I do it and I'm not easily discouraged.'

A FORCE - FOR GOOD - TO BE RECKONED WITH

It also helps that she is crystal clear about what drives her. Her family and, more recently, her young daughter Amila, have always been at the centre of her aspirations. 'Everything I do is to improve things at home and provide a bright future for my child.' Among her



dreams for the future are that all her younger siblings may also have the courage to pursue their passions.

This positive attitude has inspired fellow residents in the impoverished community of New Rest, Guguletu.

'The people in my neighbourhood encourage me so much. They always tell me how impressed they are with me. There's even a woman who tells me that I'm the example she uses to motivate her children to do better for themselves!'

She admits that she often feels a bit pressured by this attention, as she doesn't know what tomorrow brings. But she chooses not to dwell on that too much. 'The type of person I am is only negative about 1% of the time. With my faith, the rest is all positive!'

now I am confident; I can walk tall and I'm proud to be building a career that nobody can take away.'

And, while she gives a lot of credit to Relate, Abongile doesn't downplay her own resilience. She is very aware that her own efforts have done just as much to propel her forward. 'I am a