

Umthelela Epworthian Award - Mags Davison, CEO, RE N-GAGE

RE N-GAGE: The programme leverages **sports and mentoring** to cultivate resilience, motivation, and hope in students at risk of exclusion, gang involvement, drug abuse, violence, and opting out of school. In the UK, there were 9,400 permanent exclusions (expelled) from school last year - up from 6,500 in 2021/22. These young people are **four times** more likely than their peers to face **prison** and end up mired in the recidivism cycle. Without support, these young people are likely to be disadvantaged for life - at RE N-GAGE we aim to give them a chance and, vitally, give them hope for a better future.

Victor Hugo said "He who opens a school door, closes a prison." At RE N-GAGE, we know the reverse also holds – closing a school door on a vulnerable young person very often opens a prison door.

Dear Epworthians, my name is Mags Davison (Marlene Davies, year of 1989) I grew up in a little town in Zululand called Melmoth and counted myself very lucky to have been accepted into Epworth School from standard 6. Our parents worked very hard to afford us this opportunity. Being a Zululand girl, At 13 years old, I already had a very strong sense of the injustices of our lovely country and in choosing a school like Epworth, who in 1978, had become the first multiracial KZN school in defiance of the apartheid government, was very important to me, as it was then the only school where girls of all ethnicities could collectively be educated side by side.

It is the profound, appreciation for cultural diversity in South Africa that makes me so proud to be nominated for the Umthelela Award, especially as the name "Umthelela" is an isiZulu word that embodies the essence of **impact**. The work I now do in London has a real **impact** on the young people we support, their families, communities and has a large social and economic impact on society as a whole.

Needless to say that while at Epworth, besides a fantastic education, I also found lifelong friendships that would impact and shape me into who I am today. I have kept in close contact with many Epworthians, especially from the class of 1998 and my sister Bev's year - 1999. We all joined the Epworth reunion in 2023 - sleeping in the dorms again was such an amazing flashback and we did not stop laughing the whole weekend. Many amazing Epworth women had an inspirational impacted on who I am today, even if they did not know it, for example; Shona Alexander (Head girl when I was in standard 6) was inspirational, and it was such a pleasure to tell her this in person at the 2023 reunion - 30 years later!

Since leaving Epworth in 1989, I completed a fashion diploma at Durban Technicon and not long after met my husband, Billy - an amazing British man who was playing rugby for Collegians/Sharks - this meeting - set up by fellow Epworth Buxton girl, Debs Hulley. This meeting marked a pivotal turning point in my life. Later Debs was our 'mistress of ceremonies' at our wedding.

Billy and I moved to the UK in 1996 and had our two amazing children, Natasha and Thomas. Both our children and Billy support the work in which I have been honoured

with by this nomination - I could not do it without them. For example: The work we do at RE N-GAGE can be emotionally challenging, even in a positive way, and they all support me with this. Tom and Billy will be running the London Marathon 2026 raising funds in support of RE N-GAGE.

I am blown away to receive the **The Umthelela Award** nomination, especially considering that our impact work is based in London - our Epworth network is far reaching!

A little about RE N-GAGE - I helped set up the charity RE N-GAGE a little over five years ago. During the first two years, we worked directly with young people from Feltham Young Offenders prison. Prisoners would be let out on ROTL (Released on Temporary Licence) for three days a week onto our (then) rugby based mentoring programme. During the pandemic, all prisons were on lock down and we switched our provision to preventive work and started working with young people aged 12- 17 who were excluded from prison and on the 'school - to - prison pipeline' Our programme has to date supported over **360 young people** and we have over **80% success rate** of young people re-entering education, getting jobs or apprenticeships. This has been highlighted in our video link below.

We recently partnered with Bidwells to independently assess our social and economic impact. They reported:

Total economic benefits associated with one typical individual on the RE N-GAGE programme over a ten-year period is anticipated to be approximately £315,000.

Assuming 18 participants per year with a success rate of 80% and only two at risk of criminality, we estimate the STRIDE programme to have an economic impact of £1.5 million over ten years, an economic multiplier of approximately 2.5.

 [Who We Are – Video](#)

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Mags Davison, CEO, RE N-GAGE

DIVERTING THE SCHOOL TO PRISON LINE



