



# IMAGINE SCHOLAR

## IMPACT REPORT

20

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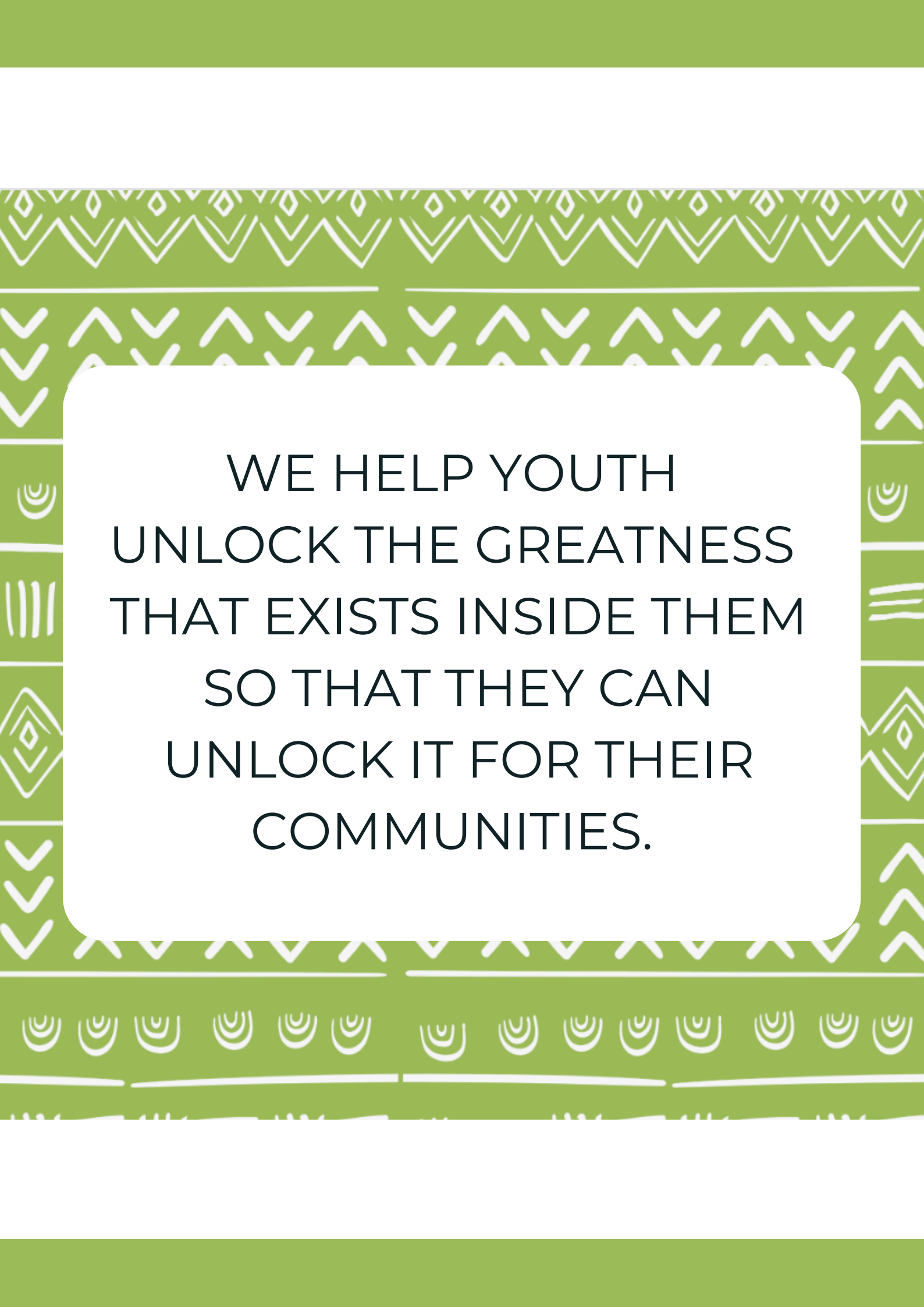
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WE HELP YOUTH  
UNLOCK THE GREATNESS  
THAT EXISTS INSIDE THEM  
SO THAT THEY CAN  
UNLOCK IT FOR THEIR  
COMMUNITIES.

# INTRODUCTION



# FOUNDER'S MESSAGE

Dear Friends and Supporters,

As we reflect on this past year at Imagine Scholar, I am excited to share our progress and the vibrant and joyful impact our community continues to foster.

**A Community of Catalysts** - Day by day, our dream of nurturing a deeply connected and profoundly influential network of young leaders sharpens into focus. This year marked a significant milestone as our alumni network is not merely returning to our community; they are re-engaging with our mission in deeply meaningful ways. Alumni have launched several diverse and transformative initiatives this year, including a low-cost public health clinic, a chess-based critical thinking programme, and a maternal health programme designed to support local mothers and children.

**Serendipity in Action** - Imagine Scholar has always transcended the conventional NGO framework, favoring a deeply human-centric approach in a field preoccupied with what can be easily measured. We've always set our sights on loftier, more ethereal ambitions like transformation, paradigm shifts, and self-actualisation. Words that can easily sound like jargon unless you're living them. Over the last 14 years, our journey has been predominately sustained by the heartfelt support of hundreds of individuals who have believed in Imagine Scholar's unique dream. This has allowed us to evolve authentically toward meaningful impact rather than superficial metrics.

This year, 'serendipity' has been our compass, guiding us through numerous fortuitous encounters that shaped our narrative and expanded our community with like-minded individuals eager to make a difference. These moments of serendipity are not mere coincidences; they are the bedrock of a committed network that pulses at the heart of Imagine Scholar. If our vision resonates with you, I ask you to please share our story and mission with others who might also feel a connection.

**Looking Forward** - As we turn the page to the next chapter, our commitment to empowering the next generation of ethical, visionary leaders remains unwavering. With your continued support, we will expand our reach and deepen our impact as our alumni return to lead the organisation.

I am immensely grateful for your belief in our mission. Together, let's continue to nurture this garden of potential, sowing the seeds of change that will mature into the formidable forest of tomorrow's leaders. Thank you for being a pivotal part of our story. Here's to more serendipity, more growth, and even greater impact in the years to come.

With heartfelt thanks,

Corey Johnson  
Executive Director



# YEAR IN REVIEW

Students Served In  
Weekly Programming

214

Students Served In  
Outreach Programming

1821

% of Alumni on SA  
Board of Directors

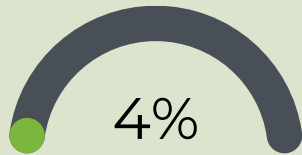
100%

Imagine Scholar  
Alumni on SA Staff

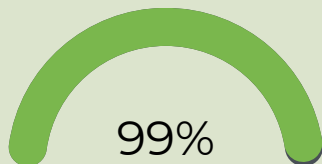
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Continuing Education

Typical Nkomazi University  
Graduation



Imagine Scholar University  
Graduation



Annual Budget

R4,848,626

THE IMAGINE  
SCHOLAR DIFFERENCE



# THE CHALLENGE

**The Prevailing Narrative:** It is common to hear a destructive story about rural South Africa. Whether it is disheartening discussions about a shortage of opportunities, youth unemployment, or an overall lack of hope, there is a common theme around what is not there rather than what is. People tend to see permanently broken systems that youth struggle with, resulting in secondary school dropouts, astounding university attrition rates, and a brain drain of local talent.

While these comments have kernels of truth, we invite you to forego the deficit mindset. Instead, join us in asking opportunist questions:

**01** What untapped human potential exists in these communities?

**02** What would it take to truly empower a community from within?

**03** What South Africa do we want to live in, and how do we take tangible steps to make that a reality?

# THE OPPORTUNITY

**The Imagine Scholar Narrative:** Over the last 14 years, Imagine Scholar has constructed a different narrative about rural South African communities and the opportunities within them. Our work in the rural Nkomazi region of Mpumalanga is founded on the deep belief in the power of a community of extraordinary individuals working together towards something larger than themselves: Enacting a new story of community development. We invite you to learn more about how we do this and the outcomes this philosophy results in, but even more so, to join us in this new narrative of what is possible.



# A BLUEPRINT FOR LOCAL, SUSTAINABLE EMPOWERMENT

At its essence, Imagine Scholar is driven by the conviction that untapped talent is the most potent resource in South Africa, and it is waiting to be harnessed for the greater good. **We help youth unlock the greatness that exists inside them so that they can unlock it for their communities.**

The Imagine Scholar approach is elegantly straightforward. We cast a wide net to identify young minds eager to seize control of their destinies and commit to something larger than themselves. Once identified, we embark on a transformative journey with these individuals, equipping them with a robust toolkit of skills and mindsets crucial for leadership in the future. Our emphasis lies in fostering a sincere sense of community and collective responsibility, instilling a shared vision for the kind of South Africa we aspire to create.

Unlike conventional models, our commitment extends beyond short-term goals. **We guide our students through a 16-year coaching journey, focusing not solely on individual success but on nurturing a collective force for social impact.** Imagine Scholars emerge as the architects of change—doctors, teachers, and entrepreneurs who reshape the very fabric of their community. When they are ready, we act as seed investors and business coaches to bring their social and entrepreneurial projects to life. What began as an audacious dream 14 years ago is now materialising into a tangible reality. Imagine Scholar stands as a testament to the potential for replicable, scalable models that can redefine the trajectory of any community willing to invest deeply in its youth.



# THE LEADERS WE NEED

*To build the South Africa we want to live in we need ethical, empowered, and transformative leaders. Imagine Scholar believes these are the eight traits true leaders need to embody.*

01

## **DOING THE RIGHT THING**

Instilling an internal moral compass that guides decisions toward ethical actions.

02

## **ACCOUNTABILITY & AGENCY**

Creating a culture of empowerment where individuals embrace complete responsibility for their lives and choices.

03

## **PASSION FOR CONTINUOUS GROWTH**

Fostering an unyielding thirst for personal and collective advancement.

04

## **ETHIC OF EXCELLENCE**

Cultivating a culture where excellence is the norm, not the exception.

05

## **CREATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING**

Thinking innovatively to tackle challenges with fresh perspectives.

06

## **EMPOWERING STORIES**

Crafting narratives that inspire and foster resilience and determination.

07

## **COLLABORATION & NETWORK BUILDING**

Emphasising the power of collective effort and strategic alliances.

08

## **JOYFUL OPTIMISM**

Choosing joy and optimism in the face of adversity. In a world of pessimism, positivity is a superpower.



# THE IMPACT



# IMAGINE SCHOLAR IMPACT NUMBERS

**2162**

Annual Youth Served

**95**

Students at University  
85 in SA / 10 International

**49**

Graduates From University

**8**

Alumni Staff Employed  
Full Time

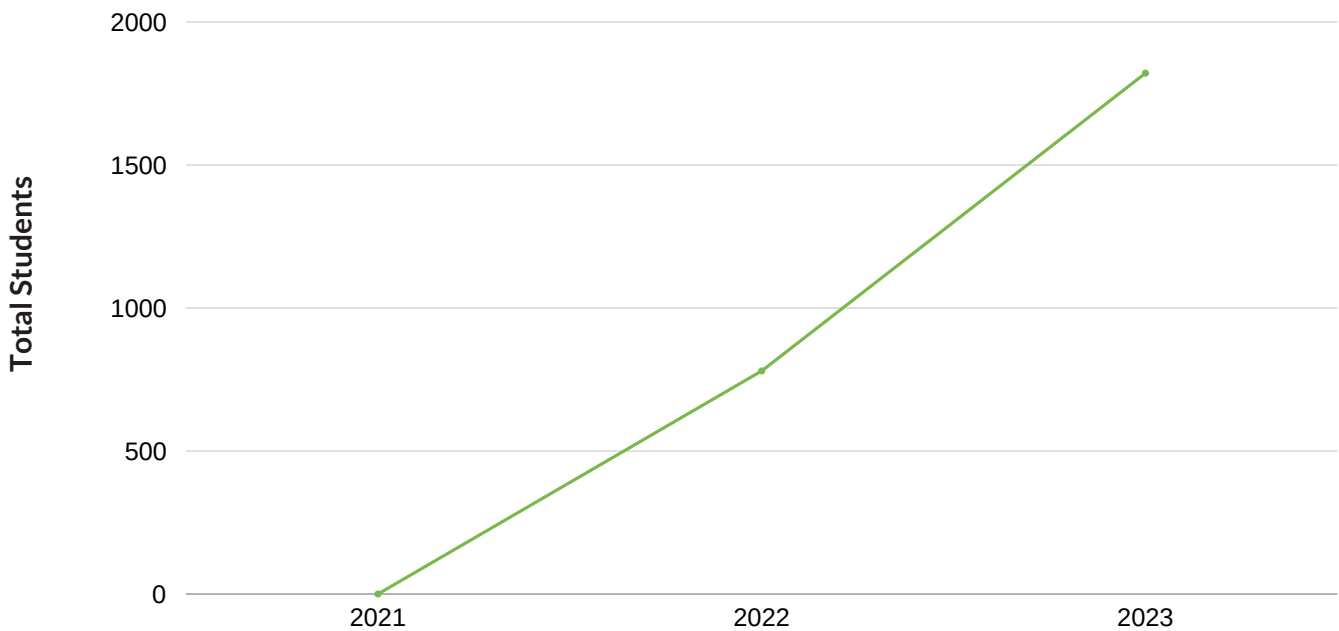
**18**

Returned to Nkomazi  
Community

**35**

Employed Post-Tertiary  
Schooling

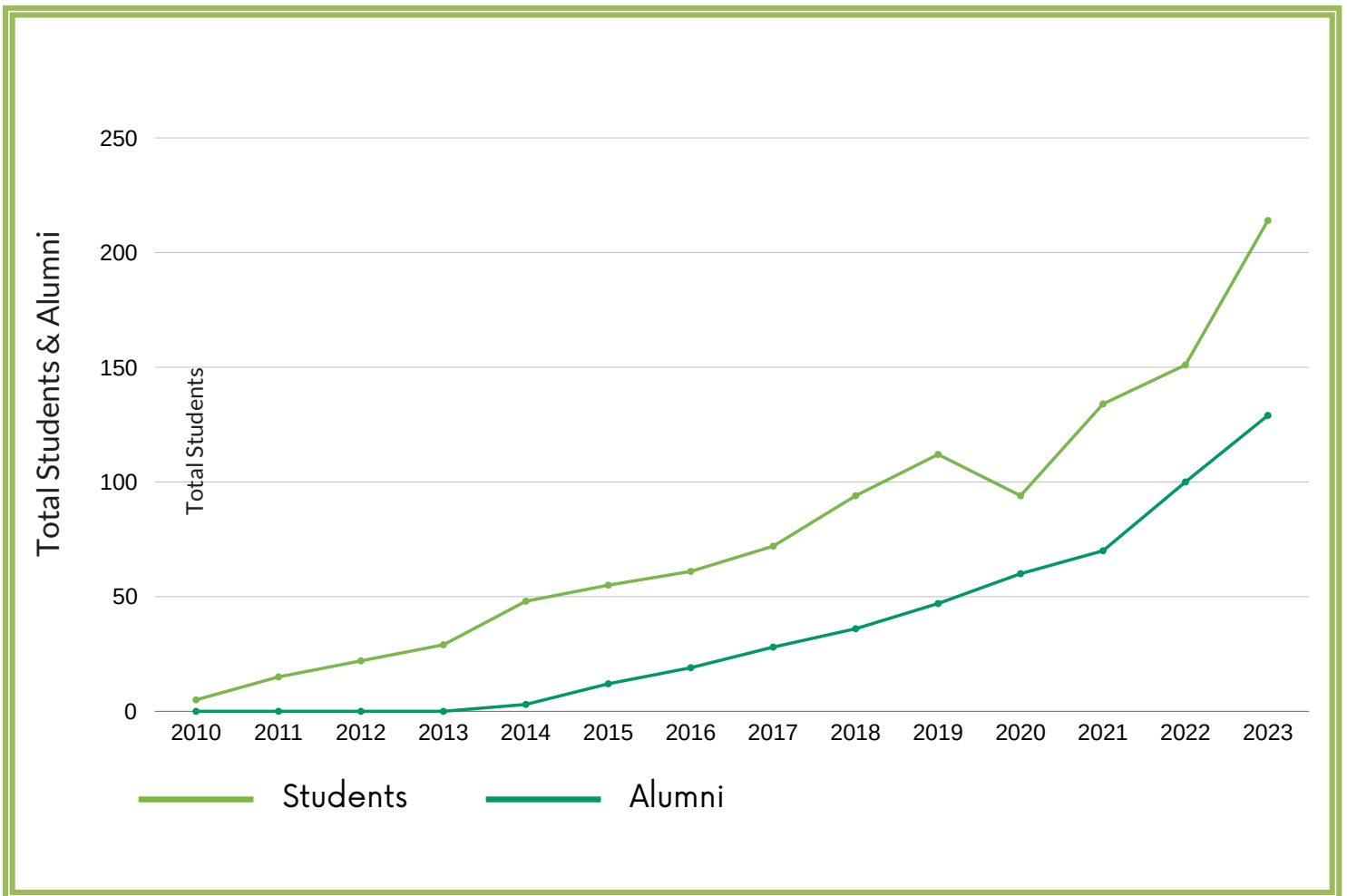
# ANNUAL YOUTH SERVED IN OUTREACH PROGRAMMES



\*Current programmes include secondary school-based university strategy and mindset curriculum for grade 8s and 9s, and our Grade 12 mindset and learning strategy curriculum.



# ANNUAL STUDENTS & ALUMNI SERVED IN INTENSIVE PROGRAMMES



# HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMMES



# OUR ALUMNI STAFF

From Imagine Scholar's inception, a steadfast aspiration has flourished: to see students who have completed the programme and wholeheartedly embrace its mission return to assume roles on our leadership team. We believe sustainability manifests when those who have gone through our programme continue to build and carry on the impact. Learn what motivated these alumni to join the team:



## **Banele Nkalanga**

At Imagine Scholar, we don't just dream of change, we actively pursue it, shaping a brighter future for our communities.



## **Carol Sithole**

The Imagine Scholar mission resonates deeply with my passion to empower individuals to discover their unique strengths and enact impactful change in the world.



## **Constance Manana**

Imagine Scholar inspires me because it focuses on lifelong learning, innovation and a sense of community. It creates a space for all to work together to make a positive impact.



## **Marcos Tibane**

Imagine Scholar is a community where your ideas matter, and your number one job is to grow and evolve your thinking.



## **Noluthando Nkuna**

Imagine Scholar inspires me as it reinforces the belief that I am a multitude capable of effecting change and taking ownership of my life's journey.



## **Thenjiwe Ndimande**

It is an honour to witness students uncover their potential as they discover their purpose and passions.



## **Zinzi Nsingwane**

It's a privilege to be a part of a journey and a community where every moment is infused with purpose and possibility.



## **Zodwa Madonsela**

What inspires me about the Imagine Scholar mission is that it empowers people with a radical mindset shift that opens up a whole new realm of possibilities.



# HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMMES

Our outreach programme provides critical foundational skills and mindsets through light touch programmes. We invite deeply engaged participants to join our personal coaching programme, which takes place at local schools for two hours a week. In these sessions, we focus on cultivating their dedication, accountability, and sincere commitment to challenge themselves.

The most passionate, committed students are invited to our intensive on-campus programme, a comprehensive 26-hour weekly commitment. We are not looking for academic achievers but those demonstrating genuine enthusiasm for hard work and personal growth. This stage combines hands-on, experiential learning with coaching to enhance critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. By integrating project-based learning and ideation training, we enable young individuals to transform ideas into tangible outcomes. Students balance their time with local public school attendance, embedding a robust sense of individual agency, excellence, and identity.



*Idea Lab students conducting market research to help a local health clinic.*



*Students meet in their weekly coaching pod, where they get executive-style coaching on creating their weekly plans and goals for the week.*

# A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF AN IMAGINE SCHOLAR

How a student spends their 26 hours a week at Imagine Scholar

DAY	SESSION	WHAT/WHY
Tuesday 2 hours	Critical Thinking	Utilising chess and complex board games, students learn a strategic thinking protocol that can be applied to all areas of life.
Wednesday 2 hours	Executive Coaching	A deep dive into personal success planning in an intimate coaching session tailored for navigating life's complexities.
Thursday 2 hours	Leadership Projects at Schools	Students take the lead in introducing the Imagine Scholar culture and toolkit through programmes at their local secondary schools.
Friday 2 hours	Idea Lab	Students become thinkers and doers, solving intriguing problems through entrepreneurship in action. They conceptualise, create, and run projects.
Saturday 9 hours	Holistic Wellness & Meta-Learning	Dedicated to holistic well-being, encompassing mindfulness, physical health activities, meta-learning sessions, reading time, technology training, and opportunities for external projects.
Sunday 9 hours	Student-Directed Growth	With full agency and control, students plan a day of pursuing personal passions and academic growth, fostering a sense of ownership over their development.

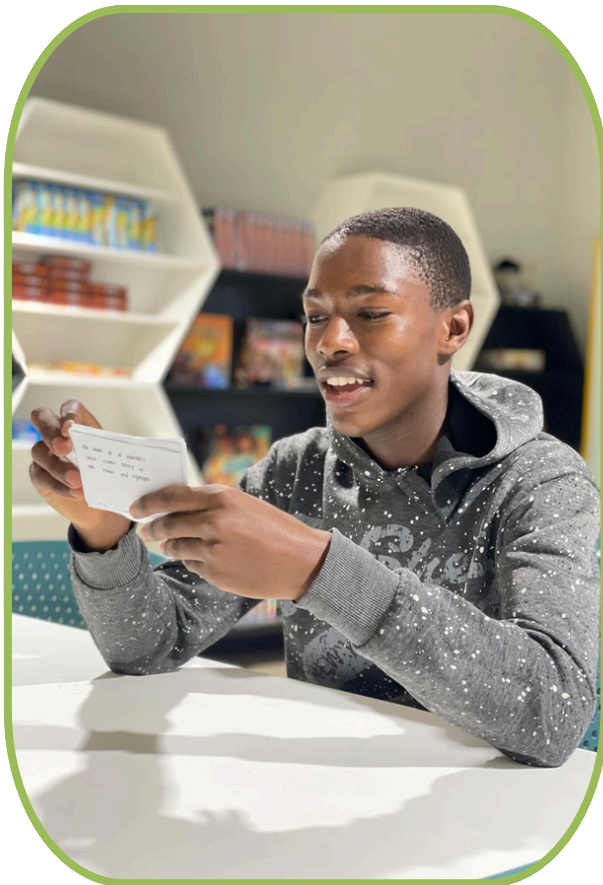


# CURRICULUM SPOTLIGHT: META-LEARNING

In South Africa, achieving success in grade 12 exams and university graduation is paramount, yet rural students face significant disparities in these crucial areas. The conventional response advocates for more resources, intensified studying, and enhanced teacher training. At Imagine Scholar, we propose a more efficient and impactful solution: meta-learning.



Meta-learning, at its essence, is the art of learning how to learn. In this weekly session, youth come to understand how their brains work, how long-term memories are formed, and what evidence-based learning strategies work. They explore how habits are formed, the power of mindsets, how to plan their time, and even more importantly, how to analyse their results to modify their systems each term. Ultimately they practice systematic and strategic thinking, resulting in agency over their learning. This transformative approach has positioned Imagine Scholar students among the nation's top performers.



# RICK'S STORY: META-LEARNING IN ACTION



After joining Imagine Scholar in 2018, Rick was a typical student without a structured approach to optimising his studies or achieving his academic ambitions. Coming from a public high school, he lacked the strategies necessary for academic success. However, through our meta-learning curriculum, Rick developed personalised systems that allowed him to comprehend his cognitive processes and employ effective learning techniques, which led to continuous academic growth. Embracing the mindset of learning how to learn, rather than solely focusing on what to learn, proved to be a pivotal shift for Rick. It unlocked his potential, igniting a drive for excellence in his academic pursuits.

Our firm conviction rests on the belief that potential is evenly spread throughout the world. This truth is vividly exemplified in rural communities, as evidenced by Rick's remarkable journey. Despite attending a local high school with a modest 60% matric pass rate, Rick emerged as the top student across all government schools in South Africa in 2021. His outstanding achievements, including perfect scores of 100% in Math, Physics, and Accounting, underscore his unwavering commitment to academic excellence. Rick's drive stems from an intrinsic ethic of excellence, fueling his relentless pursuit of knowledge and success. Our meta-learning curriculum has thoroughly prepared Rick, as he pursues a degree in Accounting at the University of Cape Town. [Video - Rick's Story.](#)

# UNITED WORLD COLLEGE (UWC) STORY

The United World Colleges (UWC) are an international network of 18 prestigious secondary schools located around the globe. Their mission is to use education as the force to unite people, nations, and cultures for peace and a sustainable future. Each year, around 5 students from South Africa are accepted. Since 2017, Imagine Scholar has had 14 students accepted to attend their schools around the world on full scholarships, totaling over R14,000,000.

The area we serve has an approximate population of 300,000, which is about .003% of the population of South Africa. From our small community, we have produced roughly 20% of the students accepted to UWC since 2017.





# PROMISE'S STORY

Promise's journey began as a member of the inaugural class of Imagine Scholar students in 2010. Following her graduation from the programme, she dedicated a year as an intern, actively supporting the development of future Scholars. During a gap year spent volunteering at an early childhood centre in Germany, she deepened her commitment to community service. This experience inspired her to pursue a degree in Clinical Medical Practice at the University of Pretoria. Promise discovered her passion for healthcare throughout her university years, particularly in addressing the complex issues confronting rural healthcare systems.

In line with our vision for a transformed Nkomazi, Promise initiated a low-cost health clinic in Kamhlushwa. The clinic provides high-quality, private healthcare services at accessible rates. Promise shared, "Opening this clinic means I have realised my dream of giving back to my community. I hope to bring people a step closer to trusting our health care system and health care workers."

Through the years, Promise has served as a board member for Imagine Scholar and an exemplary alumnus. Her unwavering dedication to the mission has been instrumental in shaping our organisation's identity. She epitomises the leadership qualities we strive to cultivate and showcases the profound impact our network can achieve. Promise's initiative is a testament to our collective mission of empowering individuals to drive positive change within their communities.



# IDEAS FESTIVAL 2023

Our annual Ideas Festival is a transformative force igniting impactful change. We empower our Legacy members to immerse themselves in their communities, passionately addressing social challenges through for-profit and nonprofit ventures. It is a collaborative haven where bright minds converge, forging a professional network that defies boundaries. During the festival, Legacy members engage in intensive ideation, rigorously stress-testing, and passionately conceiving projects poised to leave a lasting impact in their communities. The event acts as a launch pad for year-long collaborations and prototypes. Witnessing our alumni wholeheartedly embody the Imagine Scholar ethos and propel our mission forward is inspiring. At its core, the Ideas Festival epitomises our Legacy Programme.





# PRINCE'S STORY

Prince stands as a testament to the transformative power of Imagine Scholar. He was among the initial five members of the programme's inaugural class, and after completing the programme, he pursued a BSc in Computer Sciences and Mathematics degree from the University of Limpopo.



With a deep-seated passion for making a meaningful impact in his community, Prince embarked on his professional journey by serving as an IT lecturer at a college in Pretoria after graduation. In this role, he dedicated himself to imparting his skills and knowledge to the next generation of computer scientists, contributing significantly to the development of future tech leaders.

Driven by a desire to broaden his horizons and contribute to larger-scale societal change, Prince transitioned to a new role as a Functional Specialist at the South African Revenue Services. Here, he leverages his expertise and experience to navigate complex challenges and contribute to the efficient functioning of a critical governmental agency.

While his career continues to thrive, Prince recognised an opportunity within the transportation industry, he ventured into car leasing through Bolt, a decision that has seen him successfully manage a fleet of three vehicles in Pretoria. This entrepreneurial endeavor showcases Prince's versatility and underscores his proactive approach to identifying and capitalising on emerging opportunities. Prince's journey is a compelling illustration of the diverse forms impact can take. In the span of this year alone, he has facilitated employment opportunities for three individuals. Consider the potential of a global landscape populated by numerous individuals like Prince, each generating micro-level impacts that collectively create a significant ripple effect of positive change.

# LEGACY VOICES

Legacies share what it means to be part of the Imagine Scholar Network

“Being a part of the Legacy Network has resulted in a continuous transformation of my outlook on life. The network continues to shape and inspire me to strive towards creating positive change for me and those around me.

**-Njabulo, Class of 2013, Consultant at Mastercard**



“It is inspiring to be a part of a greater purpose. It comes with acknowledging that each one of us fulfils a piece of this larger puzzle. It’s not just a beautiful picture we are trying to create but we all need to position ourselves in a way that elevates the next person.”

**-Victoria, Class of 2011, Medical Doctor**

“I am eternally grateful to be part of a community that makes it their mission to leave this world better than how they found it. It gives my life purpose.”

**-Mandisa, Class of 2012, University of Edinburgh Graduate Student (Global Food Security and Nutrition)**



“No one can whistle a symphony, it takes a whole orchestra to play it. This embodies the ethos of our Imagine Scholar mission: teamwork and collaboration are essential for meaningful change. Just as an orchestra requires every member to create beautiful music, Imagine Scholar believes in the power of collective effort for change.”

**- Sandile, Class of 2019, WITS Engineering Student**



# FINANCIALS

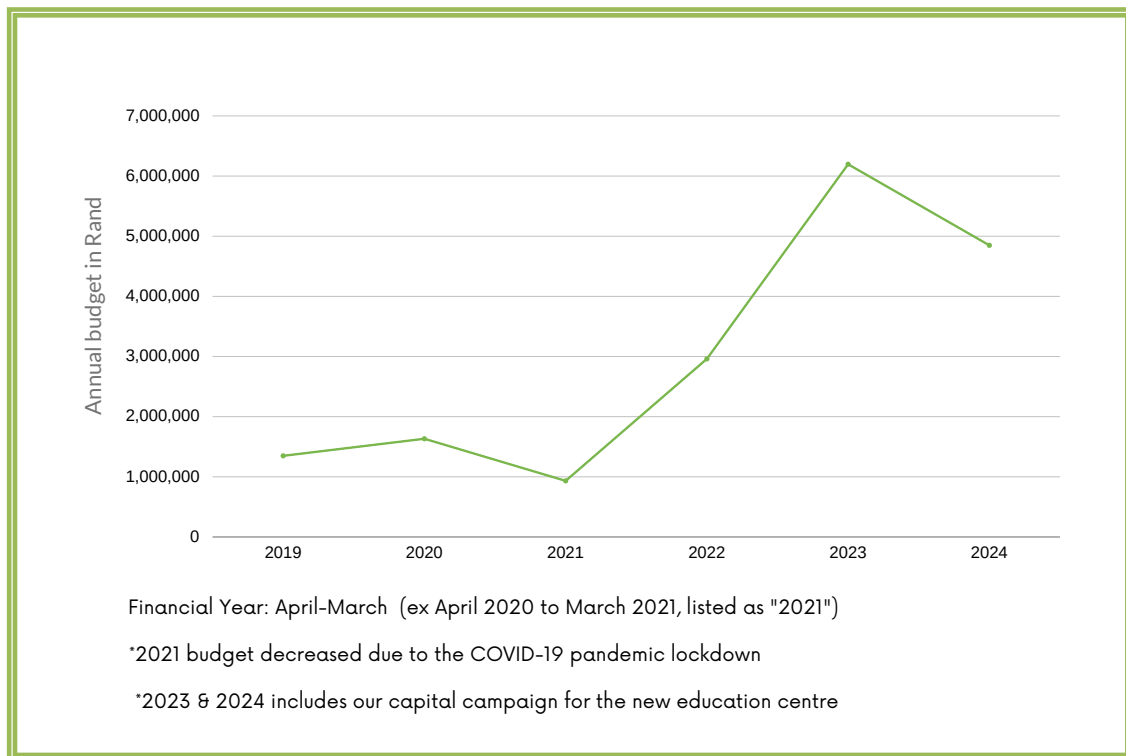


# CAPITAL CAMPAIGN UPDATE: INNOVATION HALL OPENS

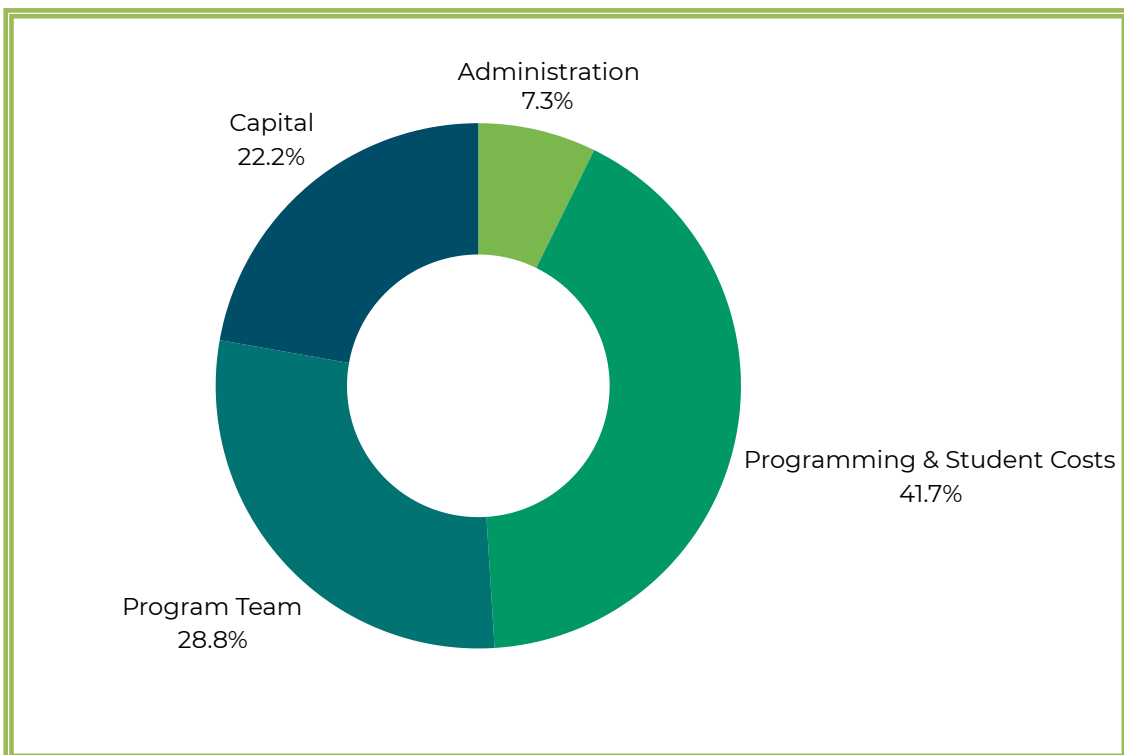
We are beyond grateful for everyone who contributed to our capital campaign over the last two years. The Imagine Scholar Innovation Hall officially opened for use in early 2023 and has changed the number of youth we can work with and the scope of our work.



# BUDGET HISTORY



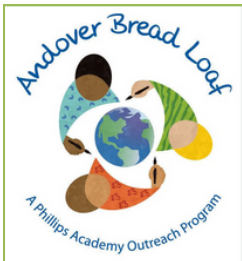
# BUDGET BREAKDOWN



# OUR PARTNERS

NOVARE®

Roy A Hunt Foundation



GROTON  
— SCHOOL —

AMG



RES  
Foundation

# CONTACT DETAILS

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*We thank you for your continued support  
in bringing the Imagine Scholar mission  
to life*

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