

# Bophelo Recycling recognised for improving lives, livelihoods in Ermelo

Mpumalanga-based recycling project Bophelo Recycling was recently recognised by the Chemical and Allied Industries Association (CAIA) with the Responsible Care Initiative Award in its Corporate Social Responsibility category. It recognises the impact the project has made on improving the lives and livelihoods of Ermelo community members while making a positive difference to the environment.



Recycling in Ermelo has received national acclaim, thanks to local entrepreneur Johanna Leshabane's (pictured) Bophelo Recycling project. Following a R500,000 donation of equipment and infrastructure in 2019 by the PET Recycling Company (Petco) and polymer producer Safripol, the business has been lauded for improving the lives and livelihoods of the Ermelo community. (Image: Supplied)

Founder Johanna Leshabane launched Bophelo Recycling in 2007 after being retrenched. Today, with 11 full-time staff and 20 part-time waste pickers, the waste buy-back centre collects 36 tonnes of recyclable PET plastic from informal settlements, households and schools in the Ermelo area. This equates to a 79% increase in total collection volumes since inception.

Polymer producer Safripol and the national industry body for PET recycling (Petco) have together provided Leshabane with supporting recycling infrastructure worth R500,000. The joint contribution included, among other things, a shipping container, electricity supply, trailer, roofing structure, trolleys, signage, fencing and branding, as well as training and mentoring support.

"I feel so blessed and very honoured," said Leshabane, who attributed her success to Petco, Safripol, her staff, and the community members, schools and companies which allowed Bophelo to collect their waste. "I couldn't have done it without all these people," she said.



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## Plans for growth

Despite the business being negatively affected by Covid-19, Leshabane said she planned to grow Bophelo even more in 2021.

"I'd like to branch out into another town so that we can create jobs in other rural settlements and teach more people how they can start their own recycling business," she said.

Avashnee Chetty, Safripol sustainability manager, said the project demonstrated that "real change is possible in the lives of the most vulnerable when it is driven at grassroots level, and when community members are engaged as both partners and leaders".

"This project is embedded in the local community, and it is only through joint partnerships of this kind that real impact and sustainable social change can be achieved. Safripol is extremely proud to be associated with this project," Chetty said.

Petco collections and training project manager Belinda Booker said the training and mentorship of waste pickers was "critical to improving their working conditions and that of their surrounding communities, while simultaneously keeping our environment clean".

"The PET recycling sector has an important role to play in contributing to the transformation of the South African economy. Few issues are more important," said Booker.

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