

Transforming SA's most vulnerable into outspoken PowerGirls change agents

 By Leigh Andrews

21 Oct 2019

With International Day of the Girl recently marked in celebrating the achievement of girls worldwide, we're putting the spotlight on the local PowerGirls seven-year programme, which aims to transform vulnerable South African girls into outspoken and powerful young women, capable of becoming change agents within their communities.



Mamas Alliance's PowerGirls. All images supplied.

Unfortunately, the reality of our current socio-economic landscape means many young girls are denied the opportunity of ever reaching their full potential.

It's reported that up to a third of South African female children grow up in disadvantaged homes, destined to be trapped in a continuous cycle of poverty which makes them particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, teenage pregnancies and the threat of HIV/Aids.



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That's where PowerGirls comes in, intending to break the cycle empower young girls with the tools to become resilient, positive and in turn inspirational role models to those coming after them.

Here Magali Malherbe, managing director of Mamas Alliance, explains how PowerGirls works and how you can get involved...

■ Let's start with the context of starting PowerGirls in SA.

Mamas Alliance is a voluntary alliance of 33 NGOs in South Africa, which work with vulnerable children. This 'network' of independent and autonomous grassroots organisations currently operates from 75 sites across South Africa in remote, rural, semi-urban and urban areas across the country, providing structural and practical daily care to the most vulnerable

and needy of children.

To date, more than 100 companies including Ford, Pick n Pay and Investec have provided support to the Mamas Alliance, which helps more than 60,000 vulnerable children in South Africa on a daily basis, via 2,000 dedicated and committed Mamas.

One of the trends we have been noticing is that the needs of girls are not being adequately addressed, given the high rate of teen pregnancies and high rate of school dropouts amongst teenage girls.



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Magali Malherbe, MD of Mamas Alliance. All images supplied.

As a result, in 2016 we began to look for a potential national initiative, specifically aimed at addressing the needs of girls. The PowerGirls programme is being funded for the first three years by the Dutch National Postcode Lottery, which has supported Netherlands-based NGO Kinderfonds Mamas for the past 20 years.

Kinderfonds Mamas raises funds for childcare organisations in South Africa, with a robust monitoring, reporting and evaluation process developed in order to measure success and impact, with specific outcomes and indicators designed for each workshop session.



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As a result of the success of the PowerGirls pilot project, Mamas Alliance invited all 33 partner NGOs to join the programme.

📌 **Amazing. Explain the name 'PowerGirls'.**

As MAMAS Alliance, one of our war cries, or mottos, is 'Mama Power', a saying which is printed on our tee-shirts and badges. It was, therefore, a natural progression to extend this power to girls with the name 'PowerGirls'.

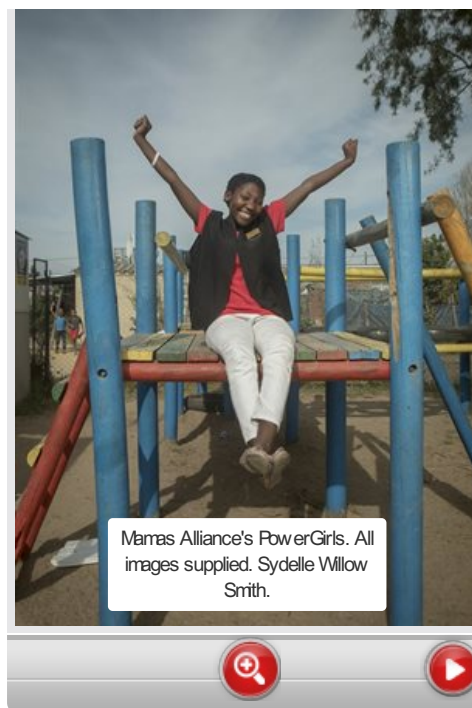
📌 **Love that. Talk us through your actions so far.**

Our aim with the PowerGirls programme is to see vulnerable girls become achievers in their communities: attending and completing school, gaining skills in order to become contributing and healthy members of society and valuable members of the future workforce, and fewer girls succumbing to teenage pregnancies.

Through our work with vulnerable children, we know the positive difference a caring mentor can make in the life of a vulnerable girl. The PowerGirls programme has the potential to break the cycle of poverty for so many vulnerable girls and allow them an opportunity to achieve great things.

Fun plays an essential role in the programme, which takes place on a weekly basis. In total, 40 PowerGirl sessions, consisting value-centred activities emphasising experiential learning, are planned for each year, including learning activities, talks, games, role-plays and outings.

The activities combine to form a layered programme that offers solutions to multiple issues including fun in safety, education, life skills and self-care, self-awareness, leadership, giving back, health, awareness of environmental issues, and group identity. Sessions are conducted by trained facilitators, assisted by a co-ordinator and each group consists of two age groups, of between 16 to 24 girls: a nine- to 12-year-old group, and a 13- to 16-year-old group.



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19 Oct 2017



Girls are rewarded for their progress throughout the programme with badges. On completion of the programme, the girls graduate as PowerGirls.

During the six-month pilot project to test the programme, run in both semi-urban and rural areas, the girls attending exhibited positive changes. In addition to learning to be kinder and more supportive of each other, they were beginning to understand their strengths and weaknesses and displaying more positive behaviour. Girls not on the programme were requesting to join and even teachers from local schools have asked if some of the activities could be shared with them!



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Our biggest achievement to date has been this very successful pilot project, which we are running in five different communities.



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We've been very encouraged at how well the pilot projects have been received. The formal roll-out of the programme will commence in early 2020 across 40 different sites in South Africa and involve 2,000 girls.

■ **Your thoughts on creating girl heroes?**

What we're hoping to grow through PowerGirls are young, female African leaders. We're not looking to emulate anybody

but rather to develop our own authentic leaders who can act as role models to other vulnerable girls.

■ Explain Mamas Alliance and PowerGirls' future plans.

PowerGirls is an initiative of Mamas Alliance, and at this stage is only for members of the Alliance. We have confirmed funding for the next three years, but growth of the programme beyond that will depend largely on how much funding we receive.



Mamas Alliance's PowerGirls. All images supplied.

PowerGirls is not a cheap programme to run given the frequency of the meetings, the specific training provided to facilitators and co-ordinators and support system provided to the programme.

■ Is posting about #InternationalDayoftheGirl enough? How can corporate SA get involved and make a difference.

Merely posting will never be enough. Corporate SA can get involved by channelling corporate social responsibility budgets via Mamas Alliance's CSI division, both to support the NGOs in the network as well as to provide specific support for those PowerGirls who facilitators identify as requiring additional support beyond the parameters of the programme.



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In short, there is huge scope for corporate SA to get involved and in doing so, play a meaningful role in helping the most vulnerable in our society.

That's your cue to [get in touch](#) with Malherbe and the Mamas Alliance and support the PowerGirls initiative.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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