

Free-to-access Wi-Fi hotspots in Witsand enables local NPOs

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In June 2020, 10 free-to-access, uncapped, solar-powered Wi-Fi enabled ThinkZones were set up in Atlantis, providing free internet access to between 5,500 and 10,000 people per month. Seven of these access points also include solar street lighting. This project was enabled by ThinkWiFi and GreenCape as part of an alternative service delivery project. Read more [here](#).



This ThinkWiFi network has now seen the community use the service more than 1,200,000 times since the sites were installed, and has had a positive impact on various local community initiatives by not only providing them with much needed access to the internet but also saving them money. The average saving per household is over R300 per month, with many people using ThinkWifi service as their primary Internet service.

Clever Kids Smart Dogs (CKSD) is a non-profit education and youth empowerment project which assists children from under resourced areas in and around Witsand, Atlantis, with caring for their dogs. Often, emergencies happen, and the community needs to contact the CKSD team for help with taking a sick or injured dog to the vet.

“Before the installation of the Wi-Fi hotspots, this was difficult because airtime is a luxury not everyone can afford,” said Lana Rolfe, programme coordinator at CKSD. “Now, the children are able reach out via WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger to alert us of a dog needing urgent medical attention. This has meant that numerous dogs’ lives have been saved,” she added.

During lockdown, when the community was not unable to move freely, the children have been able to send photos of sick animals, and the CKSD team could forward these queries to their vet, who then makes treatment suggestions, effectively doing e-consults via WhatsApp.

CKSD utilise the dogs as teachers: To teach compassion, safety, respect and responsibility and expose the children to new opportunities. They hope to have a hand in developing caring humans, who are also employable.

“By teaching the youth to love and care for their dogs, the importance of vaccinating and sterilising pets and basic dog

training skills, we hope to give them a sense of pride and purpose in their community. We encourage them to become leaders in taking responsibility for their pets and in encouraging those around them to do the same,” said Rolfe. “As a result of the Wi-Fi access, we have also been able to direct the children to educational videos online, in lieu of running our weekly humane education session. Due to Covid-19, the official mobile veterinary clinics aren't operational, and we are seeing a surge in unwanted canine pregnancies and life-threatening diseases. Therefore, until we can run our classes safely again, we are focusing on pet sterilisation campaigns and monthly pet vaccination clinics for the local community.”

The partnership with ThinkWiFi, to set up the Wi-Fi ThinkZones in Witsand, was supported by an enumeration completed by the Community Organisation Resource Centre (CORC) on behalf of GreenCape. This exercise enumerated more than 2,500 households in the Witsand informal settlement working with local enumerators, local leaders, organisations and public stakeholders.

This enumeration, and the subsequent community co-design, was done with a focus on creating a strong social foundation for service delivery, building an inclusive platform for local community members to express infrastructure preferences, and to understand the communities' propensity to pay for infrastructure services while also mapping existing infrastructure assets. From this process, the Witsand community prioritised area lighting and connectivity as their most pressing energy related needs.

“I am so encouraged to hear about the positive impact of the ThinkWifi network in Atlantis,” said Alderman James Vos, City of Cape Town mayoral committee member for economic opportunities and asset management. “This work links to our focus on green economy growth in Atlantis through the intersection of connectivity and alternative energy solution innovations that support economic development in the region. In this case it also empowers our civil society to thrive,” he added.

About GreenCape: GreenCape is a non-profit organisation that drives the widespread adoption of economically viable green economy solutions from South Africa. The team works with businesses, investors, academia and government to unlock the investment and employment potential of green technologies and services, and to support a transition to a resilient green economy. GreenCape's vision is to create a thriving and prosperous Africa using green economy principles. Our aim is to be globally relevant in driving the uptake of green economy infrastructure solutions in the developing world context.

About the Alternative Service Delivery Unit: The Alternative Service Delivery Unit (ASDU) has been established to design, facilitate and manage the provision of energy services to unserved¹ and unserviceable² communities, on behalf of relevant stakeholders. ASDU applies an adaptive co-design framework to facilitate community led energy provision. The ASDU model is built on three interrelated fundamentals of modern service delivery - social inclusion/mobilisation³, customised technical design and financial sustainability. ASDU is being implemented by the GreenCape Sector Development Agency (GreenCape) and is directed by GreenCape's institutional identity, governance, standards and compliance frameworks.

About Think WiFi: Think WiFi is building world-class public wifi infrastructure to provide free, uncapped wifi in communities, townships, universities and transportation hubs across South Africa. Everywhere there are people, there will be free uncapped wifi available. Think WiFi's mission is to empower people. Think works with local communities to find employment solutions and work with organisations to bring digital skills education to each community they serve. Since the launch in November, Think WiFi has reached over 1 million people in the Western Cape. The launch of the free WiFi initiative has been more successful than anticipated and plans are already underway to roll free wifi out to the Eastern Cape, Gauteng and some areas in Mpumalanga. Think WiFi endeavours to work with the private and public sector to bring connectivity to the unconnected. Not only will Think WiFi bring free internet access to areas where there is little to no infrastructure in terms of ADSL or fibre lines, but they also endeavour to employ members of each community they operate in, to uplift the people. Giving back to the community is central to Think WiFi's purpose. They employ and train local talent from the community to be Wi-Fi ambassadors; giving them the tools and training to upskill themselves, support their family and help the community thrive. Think WiFi looks forward to working with GreenCape and other government (national, provincial and local), Telecoms industry, NGOs, universities and private citizens to enable the implementation of this free wifi network countrywide.

1. Currently no traditional government lead utility services being provided.
2. Areas where it is not possible to provide government lead utility services due to location (i.e. flood plain) or land ownership (private land) etc.
3. In-depth process is to identify community priorities, resources, needs and solutions in such a way as to promote representative participation, good governance, accountability and peaceful change.

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