



UNLEASHED

POTENTIAL

STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2023

OUR VISION

A world where all youth are socially engaged, globally aware, and economically free.

OUR MISSION

Empower youth of African descent with the tools to confidently own their futures.

OUR PRINCIPLES

- Personal Consciousness // using self-reflection and discovery to foster an awareness of one's inner-self
- Global Awareness // creating a classroom without borders to cultivate cross-cultural competency, promote intercultural awareness, and prepare youth for the global market
- Entrepreneurial Mindset // instilling an entrepreneurial spirit to empower youth to own their economic success through real-world application of business management and marketing principles
- Social Responsibility // building a sense of civic duty, while developing leadership skills and a spirit of volunteerism through community action projects



There is a word in South Africa - Ubuntu... recognition that we are all bound together in ways that can be invisible to the eye... that we achieve ourselves by sharing ourselves with others."*

President Barack Obama
44th U.S. President

* Ubuntu is a Zulu word often translated to mean a quality that includes the essential human virtues; compassion and humanity. It is taken from the Zulu phrase "Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu", which literally means that a person is a person through other people.

LETTER FROM OUR FOUNDER



Last year I had the opportunity to conduct a youth development needs assessment across the Royal Bafokeng Nation (RBN). We spoke with parents, teachers, community members, leadership, and youth (high school learners, tertiary students, and unemployed and employed young adults). One of the most poignant remarks I heard during these focus groups was from a learner that stated to improve their community, one should “unleash the potential of youth.”

The youth I met were brimming with dreams for their futures, but the obstacles they were facing or faced merely finishing high school were also formidable adversaries. Their parents were struggling with a similar tug of war and there was despair present in their voices as they discussed their inability to provide all that their children needed.

In Langston Hughes’ poem Harlem he questioned “what happens to a dream deferred?” We all know too well the answer. I personally know that a 16 year old boy was arrested for murdering an 18 year old in the alley behind my house in Washington, DC last summer. I often wonder the path that brought each of them to the alley that day. What were their dreams and how did they get deferred? I know from speaking with youth in my neighborhood that the challenges they may have faced, as well as their parents, are very similar to those in RBN.

I made a vow after the RBN focus groups to do what I can; to do something. I made a similar vow to do my part to help my DC community, after the vigil for the boy murdered in my alley. I can see how our world, our countries, and our communities would be better if the potential of youth was unleashed and their dreams deferred weren’t exploding on our streets.

Youth embody hope and possibility. In them I see a future that could be, for all of us. I invite you to join me on my quest.

In light, love, and liberation,

Meisha Lerato Robinson

Meisha Lerato Robinson
Founder and Chief Executive of Hope
I Am, We Are

OPPORTUNITY

Begun in 2015 as a four-year pilot program, the Bokgoni* Empowerment Programme, in the Royal Bafokeng Nation within South Africa, I Am, We Are (IAWA) employs an adaptive, socio-ecological model that enables youth to be instruments and agents of their own development, while ensuring their environment is a positive, secure space that supports their universal well-being. We envision a Pan-African community collectively supporting the social and emotional development and wellbeing of youth of African descent. The opportunity before us today is expanding the program in partnership with like-minded communities around the world—unleashing the potential of youth at a larger scale.

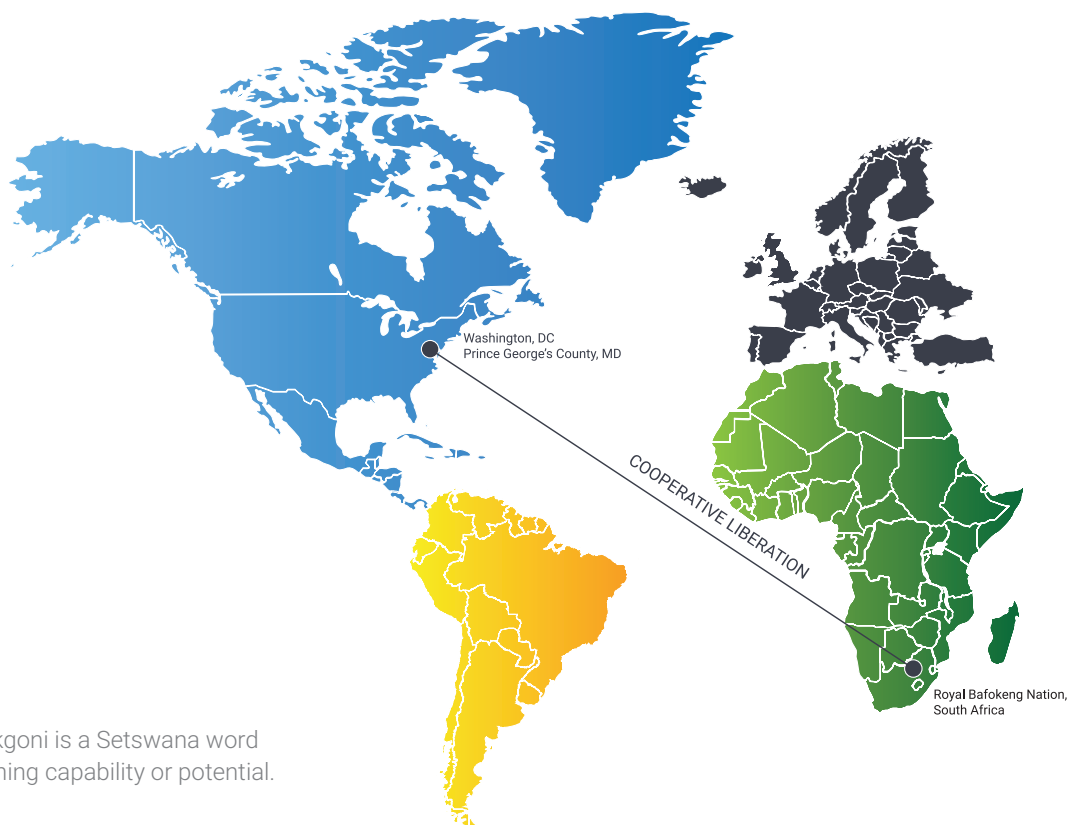
Our program brings together youth across Africa and her Diaspora to recognize their commonalities and see beyond their differences. In doing so, they gain global and historical context for the challenges they face on a personal, familial, and communal level. Further, they learn they are not alone. Cooperative liberation recognizes that our common humanity unites us in our struggles and in our achievements.

Over the course of the pilot program in South Africa, we gained critical insight which now drives our approach:

- Adverse childhood experiences may prohibit youth from reaching their full potential and developing into mentally and physically healthy adults.
- Generational divides, culture, lack of education, generational poverty, and cycles of trauma may prohibit parents from being able to comprehensively provide their children with the necessary guidance and structure to develop their children into healthy adults.

We therefore work in partnership with parents, teachers, and community leaders to ensure the places where our youth spend the majority of their time—home, school, and community—are environments that support their social, emotional, psychological, and spiritual well-being. IAWA earns a commitment for consistent, active involvement by all key stakeholders.

We are expanding to the Washington, DC Area, transitioning IAWA from partnering with US-based youth programs to developing internal programs that further progress the students' experiential learning and create an ecosystem of shared values while ensuring students build sustainable relationships. Prince George's County, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, DC and the Sister County to the Royal Bafokeng Nation for 20 years, is the ideal inaugural community for IAWA's US programming.



* Bokgoni is a Setswana word meaning capability or potential.



THEIR WORLDVIEW: RBN YOUTH

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In the community it is hard to find someone to talk to, it's hard to know who those people are. We need someone we feel comfortable with to talk about the factors that lead to depression and stuff.

“

The youth today, from my own perspective, are facing a challenge of confidence.

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They can be there physically there but not there emotionally. That's why we end up doing wrong things. We end up drinking and those kind of things because we don't get the support and the care from the parents. We don't get parental care.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK



EXTERNAL BARRIERS

Youth lack local opportunities for self-empowerment and growth

Childhood trauma prevents youth from developing their full potential

Generational trauma and poverty may prohibit parents from guiding their children into adulthood



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

SUPPORTED YOUTH

- Empower youth to assume leadership roles by developing responsibility, self-reliance, and initiative, while also acquiring marketable skills
- Equip parents, teachers, and community members with the tools and resources to better support the well-being of their youth

MENTAL, EMOTIONAL, AND SOCIAL HEALING

- Help youth heal from any trauma experienced and gain the tools to address any challenges currently being experienced

CULTURAL AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING

- Enlighten youth with global and historical context for the challenges they face on a personal, familial, and communal level—and learn they are not alone.



UNIQUE ASSETS

Sister County Relationship - Prince George's County and Royal Bafokeng Nation

Native programming in Prince George's County and Royal Bafokeng Nation

Social, Emotional and Mental Health Services and Education

Adaptive, socio-ecological model

Proven 4-year interactive leadership program

Youth centered engagement and leadership development



GROUNDING PRINCIPLES

PERSONAL CONSCIOUSNESS:

using self-reflection and discovery to foster an awareness of one's inner-self

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY:

building a sense of civic duty, while developing leadership skills and a spirit of volunteerism through community action projects

GLOBAL AWARENESS:

creating a classroom without borders to cultivate cross-cultural competency, promote intercultural awareness, and prepare youth for the global market

ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET:

instilling an entrepreneurial spirit to empower youth to own their economic success through real-world application of business management and marketing principles

THEIR WORLDVIEW: RBN PARENTS

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We dream for our children to find work. We want our children to be more successful. Some of us haven't gone to school and as you can see in our communities life is very, very difficult. If they get the support that they need they will be able to achieve what they want to do. So in addition to support from the parents, they also need support from the community.

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I believe in my childrens' potential. The alternative is not acceptable. They can make better futures, they can. They are just facing obstacles and sometimes there is a lack of opportunities for them.

“

I know that these children have what it takes to succeed, they just need support. I wish mentorship for my 15 year old son before his life is ruined. He has started to hang around with youth who smoke and engage in wrong activities. I don't know how to stop him, I've tried everything. I want him to have the kind of life I dream for him, a life that I unfortunately was not able to live.

“

The fact that you need a job, that you need employment is the biggest thing for me. Truly speaking, you think about these things that can make your child succeed until there's absolutely nothing that you can do and the child looks at you and what can you do? So, at the end of the day what do you do?

THE PATH FORWARD

Over the next three years, IAWA will diligently pursue its strategic objectives (Supported Youth; Mental, Emotional, and Social Healing; and Cultural Awareness and Understanding) while expanding the program in partnership across the Africa Diaspora.

The holistic community approach of IAWA deeply engages the youth we exist to serve as well as facilitators and parents, both of whom are integral to their successful empowerment. A unique feature of our program is the compounding secondary and tertiary benefits generated by our simultaneous capacity building of parents and other community members. All are engaged, all grow and all give back. Youth social and emotional health + an actively engaged community = unleashed potential continuously reinforced in a virtuous cycle.



2021: CONNECTING CULTURES

YOUTH

IAWA Morafe Leadership Development Program

The 6-month Morafe* Leadership Development Workshop will bring together 40 10th graders: 20 from South Africa and 20 from Prince George's County. Participants will convene monthly for a cross-cultural immersive virtual experience. The program will focus on personal enrichment and professional skills building by including trauma-informed counseling, career coaching, mentoring, and character development programming. Students will also hear from experts in various fields to gain exposure to new opportunities. Finally, youth will use self-reflection and values exploration to enhance their awareness and self-efficacy, critical building blocks for resiliency, responsible decision-making, and self-actualization. The use of current educational technologies will ensure that the programming is both meaningful and fun!

Before beginning work in Prince George's County, IAWA will perform a local landscape analysis and resource mapping to answer "Who are the youth here and what do they need?" then adapt the program to best cultivate possibility there.

FACILITATORS

IAWA Morafe Leadership Fellowship

The 7-month Morafe Leadership Fellowship deepens lessons learned from youth programming and trains college-aged young adults to lead IAWA programming and expand their knowledge and leadership to make them competitive applicants in future job opportunities. The inaugural class will include 10 undergraduate students: 5 from South Africa and 5 from Prince George's County. Fellows will learn from experts in the fields of education, psychology, social work, and more. They will gain professional skills that transfer to both IAWA and other professional settings. Fellows will also serve as mentors to youth participants during the year and on immersive programs.

PARENTS

Parent Community

Parents will receive updates and trainings similar to their children in IAWA. They will get a 'taste' of IAWA programming through interactive newsletters that include exercises they can do with their family. Additionally, parents will be connected through opt-in experiences such as monthly workshops that will respond to their Social, Emotional, and Mental Health. Parent programming will mirror the Morafe Leadership Development Program.

*Morafe is a Setswana word meaning community

2022: CULTIVATING GROWTH

YOUTH

IAWA Morafe Leadership Development Program

Building from 2021, we will improve the programming based on participant feedback and welcome a new class.

IAWA Morafe Advanced Leadership Program

Participants in the Morafe Advanced Leadership Program are graduates from the IAWA Leadership Development Program. These 11th graders will deepen their knowledge gained in 10th grade and practice their new skills by developing socially conscious projects that all members of IAWA can take part in. Participants will work side-by-side with mentors who will guide them in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of their projects – allowing youth a safe space to fail, succeed, and build confidence. Graduation from this program includes an immersive educational trip to a location where participants can explore new modes of social action and socially conscious enterprises.

FACILITATORS

IAWA Morafe Leadership Fellowship

Building from 2021, we will improve the programming based on participant feedback and welcome a new class. Additionally, graduates from the previous class will serve as volunteers supporting and mentoring the work with the new class.

PARENTS

Parent Community

Building from 2021, we will improve the programming and invite parents who have already been involved to become Parent Ambassadors, recruiting new parents and youth to join the IAWA family.

2023: INTEGRATING HOLISTICALLY

YOUTH

Bokgoni Empowerment Program – Holiday Camp

For the first time, we will host our premier Bokgoni * Empowerment Program add jointly in the United States and South Africa. This proven youth development program invites a younger cohort, 8th and 9th graders, to learn about themselves, career opportunities, and serves as the entry point to our pipeline of leadership development. Youth develop meaningful relationships, assume leadership roles, develop responsibility, self-reliance, initiative, and acquire marketable skills, all while having fun!

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PARENTS

Parent Community

Building from 2022, we will improve the programming and invite parents who have already been involved to become Parent Ambassadors, recruiting new parents and youth to join the IAWA family.

Additionally, in 2023 we will open our first physical building in the United States and/or in South Africa, which will house our programs and be open for afterschool activities such as tutoring and socializing.

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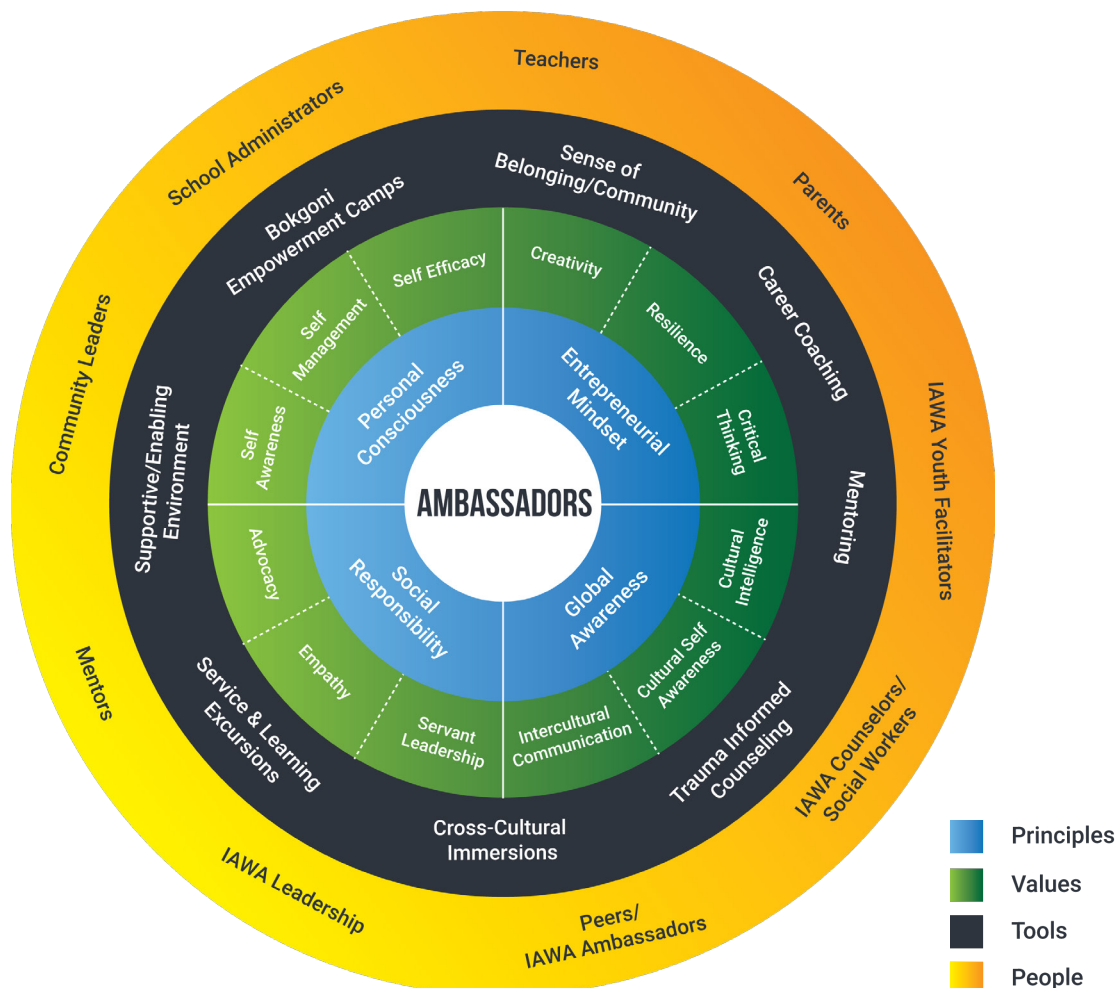
APPENDIX: OUR MODEL

Our refined approach to cultivating possibility is holistic, values based, and trauma informed. Our curriculum builds our youth’s (ambassadors’) character and addresses the root cause of behaviors that could take them off course during their formative years.

WE CALL OUR YOUTH “AMBASSADORS”

On their first day in our program, we tell our youth that the experience and growth is not just about them and not to be confined to our limited time together. We empower them in name and purpose as Ambassadors, to share what they gain with others in their community and to hold themselves, and each other, accountable to the principles of conduct we instill.

As illustrated below, our youth Ambassadors are surrounded by the four IAWA principles at the core which instill values supported by tools and people.



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Apartheid, slavery, jim crow and all other systems of oppression were the legalized removal of hope. IAWA is anchored in restoring that hope.”

Meisha Lerato Robinson
Founder and
Chief Executive of Hope



iamweareyouth.org



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