

New River of Life

By Sky-Lee



My journey began in 2020, when I completed matric during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was a difficult year marked by isolation, uncertainty, violence and emotional struggles for many people.

I sacrificed most of my free time to focus on my academics, trying to catch up on the three months of learning lost during lockdown. The pressure eventually took its toll on my mental health. I began experiencing migraines, withdrawing from others and isolating myself. I became increasingly comfortable being alone, which eventually led to self-loathing and self-harm. I had no friends, no goals and no clear direction in life.

After matric, I decided to take a gap year to find myself and figure out what I wanted from life. I dedicated much of my time to exercising, spending time in nature and practising art. Through these activities, I was discovered and became part of an organisation called **7349 Art Crew**.

During my gap year in 2021, I travelled to different places, met fellow artists, worked as part of a team and helped beautify communities through art. It was during this time that something began to awaken within me. I discovered how much I loved helping people. I started volunteering for more opportunities, and although these experiences did not provide an income, they gave me valuable knowledge, practical experience and new skills.

My team and I painted our final mural on Heritage Day at West Coast College. That experience inspired me to enrol at the college the following year. Eighteen months later, after completing my studies, I began applying for jobs. I submitted CVs wherever I could, travelling from place to place and spending money on printing applications, but nothing seemed to work. Eventually, I became discouraged and stopped actively looking for employment.

Fortunately, my mother had a friend who owned a food truck business, and I got an opportunity to work as a trainee. I enjoyed the feeling of being employed and gaining work experience, although the opportunity did not last long. I continued attending training workshops and searching for ways to improve myself. These experiences kept me busy and

helped me grow, but I still felt that something was missing. I remained patient and continued to pray.

Then, a friend recommended that I attend a **Peer Connect session**. I asked what it was about, and her explanation introduced me to one of the most valuable opportunities I had ever encountered.

I discovered that the Basic Package of Support (BPS) offered much more than assistance with job and study applications. It welcomed young people with warm smiles, compassion and genuine care. Through ongoing support and one-on-one coaching, I found people who were willing to walk alongside me and guide me through different aspects of my life, including my mental, physical, emotional and spiritual well-being.

For the first time in a long time, I felt that someone genuinely cared about my future. I committed myself to attending my sessions, learning and working towards a better life. My motto became simple: **NEVER GIVE UP**.

Through BPS, I attended training workshops and job-preparation seminars that equipped me with valuable knowledge and practical skills. Then one day, my coach, Kaytlin, called me and told me where I needed to be and what time to arrive. I trusted her guidance and followed through.

The very next day, I experienced a renewed sense of hope when I secured employment with **Planet Youth**. It was one of the best decisions I had made: trusting my coach and taking that step of faith.

At that point in my life, I began to feel like a person again. Life felt worth living, and I became excited about discovering what else the future had in store for me.

My journey has not been easy. It has included heartache, pain, doubt, struggles, setbacks and negativity. However, it has also been a journey of growth, healing, self-discovery and renewed hope. Through it all, I began to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Since becoming part of BPS, my life has never been the same.

Because of BPS, I have been able to get my mindset back on track.

Because of BPS, I have regained my confidence.

Because of BPS, I have the support of a coach who always has my back.

Because of BPS, I have found the courage to face my fears and embrace new opportunities.

Because of BPS, I have secured three jobs in one year.

And because of BPS, I am finally finding my place in the career of my dreams.

Looking back, I realise that my journey was never just about finding employment. It was about finding myself, rediscovering my worth and believing that my life could become something meaningful.

BPS did not simply help me find opportunities; it helped me believe in myself again. It reminded me that my past does not define my future and that, with the right support, guidance and determination, positive change is possible.

This is my new river of life — a journey of healing, hope, purpose and new beginnings.

And as I continue moving forward, I will carry one motto with me:

NEVER GIVE UP.