



Peddie textbook entrepreneur Zakes Ncanywa shows off one of the textbooks he prints in the rondavel behind him which serves as his office and bedroom.

# NO TEXTBOOKS? NO PROBLEM!

Resourceful Zakes has turned his home into a printing works where he produces educational material for needy learners

By PIETER VAN ZYL Pictures: MARTIN DE KOCK

**A**T THE end of a bumpy dirt road that takes you through a rural Eastern Cape setting of huts and kraals of sheep, cattle and goats is a large rondavel.

Here, about 5 km from the centre of Peddie, is where the district's textbook man, Zakes Ncanywa, lives.

"Welcome to my home and office," he says as he opens the door. The rondavel

adjoins the house of his mom, Nombulelo. It's icy cold outside but inside it's cosy and warm.

The room is a cheerful tangle of dogs and children because Zakes (32) and his mother are raising his six-year-old daughter, Liyobona, along with several young nieces and nephews.

He's a big man with a jovial laugh – and he has a clever scheme for bringing learning to the needy children in his area.

She's really proud of him, Nombulelo (54) says. "Many of the people here are unemployed and poor. We survive by sharing food and other things with one another."

Limpopo isn't the only province experiencing a textbook crisis. Many Eastern Cape children don't have books either and the resourceful Zakes spotted an opportunity to start a home business and remedy the situation in his community at the same time.

With legal software and just a computer,

printer and copier he's turned his bedroom into a small printing works. Here he produces the textbooks, study guides and question papers he sells to schools inexpensively.

But that's not where it ends. "I negotiate with schools to make books and question papers available to kids who can't afford them. I also encourage kids to share books and so make them more affordable," he explains.

His bedroom is also packed with old computers which he fetches in his minibus from as far away as Cape Town. He refurbishes and sells them to schools and others for as little as R1 500 each.

"If you want to do upliftment work here you have to provide the infrastructure as well. There's nothing here," he says. "The people deserve better. Life here can be good but a few simple things are needed to make it easier."

He puts up posters all over Peddie to advertise his inexpensive computers and regularly visits schools in the area to market his books and study guides.

"Everything is legal. Paperight [the company whose technology he uses] negotiates with the publishers of the books for the rights to print them with a computer for cheaper. A R400 matric maths book then costs only R150 and the schools can get it from me immediately."

Educational publishers estimate about 30 per cent of their prescribed material is illegally copied.

"But my way means the money still lands in the pockets of the publishers and writers and even the poor schools can afford my books."

He's currently printing 28 textbook titles which he'll deliver to schools of Ngqushwa, a poor but extensive municipal area that is home to 92 000 people



**Nombulelo Ncanywa, a nurse, is proud of what her son, Zakes, has achieved at Feni, near Peddie.**

**'An internet café here would make it easier for youngsters to complete courses'**

**Z**AKES was born in Grahamstown where his mother worked as a nurse and his father, Baba, ran a bottle store and a property agency. "I inherited my entrepreneurial spirit from my father," he says.

After his parents divorced in 1988 his mom returned to Peddie, where she'd grown up, while he stayed with his dad in Grahamstown until he'd finished Grade 10. He continued his schooling in Port Elizabeth before attending the University of the Western Cape, where he completed a master's degree in molecular oncology.

"My mom always wanted me to be a doctor but it's difficult to get into medical school."

He then worked for two years, until March this year, as an assistant technician at a pharmaceutical company in Cape Town.

His dad died five years ago and left Zakes R30 000, which he invested with the aim of eventually starting his own business. This April he moved in with his mother with a plan to give something back to the community as an entrepreneur.

"Many young people in Cape Town's townships come from the Eastern Cape. When I was doing my master's degree I realised what a big challenge the cities are for young rural people. It's a big jump and a lot

of them don't make it. I help prepare the youth around here for it."

His cellphone beeps endlessly with messages from youngsters wanting to buy his textbooks and computers. "The people here long for technology."

But there are many obstacles to overcome. Internet access is a nightmare – reception is so bad it sometimes takes Zakes up to 20 minutes to download his e-mails. And options such as an ADSL line or satellite connectivity are simply too expensive.

His dream is to open an internet café, bookshop and office in Peddie. At the moment the nearest internet café is in King William's Town, which requires a return trip of 110 km. The taxi fare alone is R80, which is unaffordable for most local people.

"An internet café here would also make it easier for youngsters to complete correspondence courses. And I'd also be able to supply them with textbooks."

**D**OES he regret giving up his permanent job and salary in Cape Town for the uncertain life of an entrepreneur? "It was a risk but it's here that I can make a difference.

"And I'm close to my family. It was a good decision. Life here is better, even though the economy isn't so strong," he says, gazing out of his window at the green hills surrounding his rondavel.

Nombulelo pops in to ask about his plans for supper. She works in the casualty unit of the Nompumelelo Hospital on the outskirts of Peddie.

"Yes, I wanted him to study medicine but I'm glad about what he's doing because he's helping people, just like I do. I support him because he has a clear-cut goal in his life."

She thinks for a moment, then adds proudly: "He's helping to build a future for our children. And that's good." ■

**EXTRA SOURCES:**  
MG.CO.ZA, NEWSNOW



**FAR LEFT: Zakes refurbishes old computers and sells at affordable prices in his community. LEFT: He prints his school textbooks from this computer.**