

# Deadly blaze turns girl into firefighter

MONTSHO MATLALA

THE traumatic childhood experience of seeing her father dying in a burning fire at home outside Mokopane 16 years ago has prompted Debbie Baloyi to become a firefighter to save lives.

Baloyi who is today a safety health and environment (SHE) representative at the Working on Fire (WOF) base in Mokopane cannot forget watching as flames engulfed their family house in Makekeng village in 2001.

“Though the neighbours tried to rescue him, my father never made it to hospital alive. I was only 10 and it was traumatic to us as a family and part of me wanted to blame the fire and emergency rescue teams for not coming on time.

“Right then I took a vow that I would become a firefighter when I completed my studies,” she said.

But due to financial constraints, Debbie, could not afford tuition fees for training in fire safety fields after passing Grade 12.

However, she never lost hope and kept

on praying until she joined the WOF base in Mokopane in 2012.

“Even though I did not have funds for my studies I never lost hope because I knew that one day God would answer my prayers.

“Miraculously, my prayers were answered. WOF is giving me the opportunity to save lives,” she said.

Due to her hard work, passion and dedication the young woman was appointed SHE representative in 2013 and will not rest on her laurels as her father’s tragic death in a fire spurs her on in her quest to save lives.

WOF is a forest and firefighter resource programme of the national Department of Environmental Affairs and has close to 5 000 firefighters and 200 bases throughout the country.

The programme provides veld fire suppression support to provinces, disaster management centres, fire protection associations and landowners such as SA National Parks and Cape Nature.

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