

Ex-offender dedicated to saving lives

PAPAPARA MAKGAHLELA

AT AGE 17, Maleeto Mabe was already a convicted murderer, serving a 15-year sentence.

While in prison, she took a decision to change her ways to ensure a better future for herself.

Mabe received an opportunity to be part of Working on Fire (WOF), through the Department of Correctional Service's parolee programme.

She is now 25 and is a supervisor and team leader, supervising a 23-person team at the Bailey Nature Reserve in Carletonville.

WOF is an expanded public works programme funded by the Department of Environmental Affairs.

Mabe says she received a second chance in life through this programme, which trains young people to become veld and forest firefighters. There are more than 200 teams stationed throughout South Africa.

"I am saving lives and protecting our environment," she said.

In the programme, she says she was able to go through the different processes of healing.

"Part of healing is to admit the offence that you made. Be willing to go through rehabilitation and see life differently."

She relates her story, explaining the events that led



REHABILITATED: Maleeto Mabe, a parolee and supervisor for the Working on Fire programme in Bailey Nature Reserve.

to her being convicted for murder.

At the age of 15, Mabe was playing pool at a local shop in her community in Bekkersdal, Gauteng.

"I accidentally stamped on another man's foot, and I apologised to him for the mistake."

The 27-year-old man allegedly then took her mistake to heart and started swear-

ing at her and refused to accept the apology.

"He kept coming at me and intimidating me. I lost control of my anger and went into a house nearby where I found a knife and stabbed him, and he died," she said.

The police were called and she was arrested, and a two-year trial followed.

"In 2012, I was given the title of convicted murderer and given a 15-year sentence. When I arrived at the correctional centre, I took part in programmes such as anger management and I attended sessions with a psychologist."

She says that while going through the process of healing, she realised that her anger towards men came from being abandoned by her father.

"I grew up alone with my grandmother. There were no male figures in my life and I always thought that I should always protect myself because I had no one to protect me."

In 2013, Mabe was released on parole after serving one year of her sentence.

Although there is a stigma attached to former convicts, Mabe says she is not deterred from living her best life.

Mabe says women should always fight for their goals.

"It is also equally important for the community to respect the rights of women," she says.