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Jacqueline Masilela was also one of many WOF firefighters deployed to Canada this year to assist with the raging fires in the province of Alberta. Photo | Supplied

WOF gets new base manager in Mayflower

MAYFLOWER - Jacqueline Masilela, the longest serving woman crew leader at Working on Fire (WOF), has been appointed as the new base manager in the area.

Her WOF journey began 12 years ago, when she joined as a new recruit at the Warburton base. Through the WOF's skills development initiatives, she was equipped with first aid and health and safety skills, which propelled her on a path that would shape her future.

Masilela progressed through the ranks and evolved from a new recruit to a crew leader type 2 in 2012. Her leadership potential did not go unnoticed, and two years later, in 2014, she became a type 1 crew leader and was transferred to the Mayflower base.

She has faced challenging moments in her work and personal life that have tested her resolve throughout the years. "There were many a time when doors have been shut in my face and caused me distress, because those were opportunities missed. Being a woman leader has many challenges, especially in a male-dominated industry. However, we have stood and will always stand strong in changing the perception and narrative that women cannot lead," Masilela said.

Her setbacks, she said, became turning points in her life. She experienced trauma when she was a victim of a crime that left her desolate. "I was going through

a difficult time, but my resilience and the support of the provincial management, Martin Bolton [general manager] and Bongani Nhlabathi [assistant general manager], changed my mindset, and I had a belief it would get better."

She said she embraces the power of positivity and determination. Her advice to her fellow firefighters is to remain positive, identify their life goals, and continually uplift themselves through learning.

Masilela has a vision and is on a mission to grow within the WOF programme, and aspires to lead in some capacity higher up the ranks.

She was also one of many WOF firefighters deployed to Canada this year to assist with the raging fires in the province of Alberta. "I was overjoyed, in disbelief, and grateful. These international experiences broaden our perspectives and enhance skills, which benefits the programme and individual growth."

The WOF programme is one of government's expanded public works programmes, aiming to alleviate the impact of wildfires. Funded by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, the programme recruits young men and women from underprivileged communities and offers them specialised training in wildland firefighting techniques.

WOF will also celebrate a milestone of 20 years of its existence this month.

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