

Mandela Day 2025: A Small Gesture, A Big Dream

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For Mandela Day 2025, DWR Distribution chose to support an organisation close to our hearts—the South African Roadies Association (SARA), founded by Freddie Nyathela.

Tucked away in Newtown, Johannesburg, SARA is more than a training centre. It's a safe space, a second home, and a launchpad for young South Africans chasing dreams in the live entertainment industry. Each year, Freddie and his team welcome around 20 students, many of whom arrive with nothing but curiosity and hope. They leave with skills in lighting, audio, staging,

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rigging, and power—real-world knowledge that leads to real-world work.



Freddie Nyathela with his SARA students

For Mandela Day, DWR simply brought a small care package—groceries, cleaning supplies, some treats, and cupcakes. A quiet thank you for the lasting difference Freddie makes.

As we visited, we met a few students. Kagiso Mogoba, 21, never knew this industry existed until a cousin pointed her toward SARA. “I was at home, I wasn’t doing anything and I didn’t have anywhere else to be. She told me about this school and when I got here, I had no idea what was going on. But as time went on, I learnt a lot of things and I heard there are things like live events and technical production. I love it—it’s fun. There is a lot to learn and you can never stop learning in this industry. I am more into AV, stage management, and stage design, and I see myself furthering myself.”

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Sarge Carlos, 23, who is interested in AV and filmmaking, drove from North West to Gauteng after Googling SARA “to make sure it was real.” It was—and life-changing. “The course was free, yet it covered everything I was interested in. The year has been interesting, and we are always learning something new every day—things I never thought of.”

And Jabulile Mangqangwane, a 31-year-old lighting freelancer, keeps coming back in between gigs. She started in theatre but has loved learning about the other aspects of live events. “I’ve learnt so much here—sound, backline, even rolling cables. I keep learning. I want to keep growing. I also regularly attend training at DWR.”

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Kagiso Mogoba, Sarge Carlos and Jabulile Mangqangwane

Freddie has always believed that skills change lives. He's already fought hard to transform SARA House from a crumbling building into a welcoming, professional space. His next dream? A fully equipped Backstage Academy Training Centre, backed by the government, to enable more students to gain access to an opportunity to work backstage.

"We have SARA graduates also working in the African continent, the Middle East, Europe and the USA—these skills are exportable," he says. "But we need access to tools. Our training is 70% practical. The results speak for themselves—hundreds of young people working in the industry today came through these doors."

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Also joining the visit was Edward Tsumele of *City Life Arts*, and It was a welcome surprise to meet Edward for the first time, someone who seems to have given his life and passion to support the arts. A beautiful thing really.

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Edward Tsumele of City Life Arts and Freddie Nyathela of SARA.

Mandela Day reminds us that making a difference can sometimes be showing up, saying thank you and holding a hand to walk across the finish line.