

Engineer Ntyikwe keeps beating the odds

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Five years ago Simazile Ntyikwe, who lost his legs in a train accident at 13, made headlines as one of the bravest people in Cape Town because of his daily struggle to get from Nyanga to Rondebosch to study. Now Ntyikwe 24, of Delft is well on the way to achieving his dreams, against all the odds. He is doing his experiential learning with a company called Unitemp in Lansdowne for 12 months after finishing his Mechanical Engineering course at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Sizamile lives with his unemployed mother, his sister and brother. The family depends on him and his 28-year-old sister to bring in money. Ntyikwe matriculated at Heideveld High School, did a bridging course at Leaf College in Rondebosch in 2002 and then began studying at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. When he was at school he became a top wheelchair athlete. But from the very beginning of his tertiary education things became difficult. The secretary of the college in Rondebosch didn't know he was wheelchair-bound, and for his entrance interview gave him directions that involved going through the station subway. He had immense difficulty making the interview.

When he was doing his bridging course he battled further because his arrangement for a lift from his home in Sweet Homes, an informal settlement in Nyanga fell through. He had to go through a daunting journey every day from where he stayed, taking two taxi rides and then wheeling himself for 4km. And the wheelchair he so desperately depended on was in a poor condition. This week he said that at the University he faced problems of accessibility and the attitudes of some students and lecturers who kept on asking him how he was going to work as an engineer.

But it was all worth it as he has now finished his diploma and is well on track to achieving his goals. "I've been working here for four months now but my contract is for 12 months, and it is not difficult to come to work because we have a lift club," said Ntyikwe. "I'm still doing wheelchair racing but now it's difficult to juggle between work and sport as I work every day of the week. My other problem is that I don't have a sponsor, so when we go outside the province I have to pay out of my own pocket."