

Discover the 'New York of Africa' with Dlala Nje

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

4 Oct 2018

What started off in 2012 as a games arcade for the 400-plus kids of Ponte City in Hillbrow, Johannesburg, has evolved into an inspiring social development project that aims to 'challenge perceptions and create opportunities' within some of the city's most misunderstood areas.



Sam Varney, director, Dlala Nje

[Dlala Nje](#), founded by Nikolaus Bauer and Michal Luptak, now runs inner-city immersions and experiences through the greater Hillbrow area, hoping to take the area's notorious reputation down a notch and introduce locals and international visitors alike to some of the "normality" of Hillbrow. And what was once an arcade, now serves as a community centre for the children and youth of the area, providing a safe learning environment.

Dlala Nje offers walking tours of the Johannesburg inner city, as well as corporate training that aims to take people out of their comfort zones, allowing the suits of Joburg to develop an empathetic lens to make socially responsible business decisions. Dlala Nje is one of this year's five beneficiaries of the 5 For Change black tie event set for Saturday, 27 October, at The Station in Newtown, Joburg.

As part of our [#5forChange](#) series, we interviewed Sam Varney, director of Dlala Nje, to learn more about the organisation's work, the impact of the community centre, and what it plans to do with the proceeds from the [#5forChange event](#).



Get ready to dress up to the nines for [#5ForChange](#)

Sindy Peters 7 Sep 2018



 **Tell us a bit about your team's background.**

Sam Varney: As a group of people, we are all from incredibly diverse backgrounds. I started out my career in management consulting with Ernst & Young. Whilst working there I managed to wrangle my way onto a corporate social responsibility project in Zambia where I lived for a year. After coming back from Zambia, I decided to move away from the corporate world and joined the Clinton Health Access Initiative where I ran the Malaria Programme in South Africa. I did that for about two years and then made the decision to join Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator.

Michal Luptak (cofounder) is a chartered accountant who started his career at Ernst & Young and joined Dlala Nje full time at the end of 2013. Nikolaus Bauer (cofounder) is a political journalist. He's worked for a number of media houses including most recently ENCA. And Jono Wood (director) is a freelance photographer.



#5ForChange: CRSP dsgn tackles injustices around edtech with LCERT

Sindy Peters 23 Oct 2018



■ **What prompted Nikolaus and Michal to launch Dlala Nje?**

When Dlala Nje was launched it was a very different organisation. It started out as a games shop for kids living in Ponte. What we soon realised was that the games shop was not sustainable from an income perspective, which was how the tours came about. Eventually the tours enabled the centre to shift its purpose and it was at this point that we evolved into a kids community space.

Living and working in the area, you quickly realise that kids grow up much too fast in these kinds of communities, and it was this learning that prompted the evolution of Dlala Nje into the spaces that you see today.



#5ForChange: Connecting, equipping, inspiring - enke helps SA's youth make their mark

Sindy Peters 25 Oct 2018



■ **What do the Dlala Nje immersions and experiences entail?**

Our aim through our tours and immersions are to challenge people's perspectives. The idea is to expose people to different kinds of experiences within the inner city.

We offer walking tours through some of Joburg's most misunderstood communities, where you can engage with aspects of our diverse history and taste food from across the continent. We also curate immersions for organisations based on some of the strategic objectives of our clients. These range from market insight immersions to corporate culture and diversity workshops.

All of our experiences aim to challenge thinking and preconceived ideas that people might have. They also are a lot of fun.

■ ***What has the reception been like for local and international visitors?***

We often talk about the journey of emotions that our guests go through. Normally, the first emotion is fear or nervousness, but these change as people come through our spaces, explore the city and get to experience the diversity and wonderful culture found within Johannesburg's CBD.

It's often much easier to get foreign tourists to Dlala Nje, predominately because they do not have the same reference points and haven't grown up hearing the stories about Hillbrow and the inner city. But over the years it's definitely become a lot easier than it first was in the beginning, and we see more and more locals come through our doors.

■ ***What are your goals with the initiative?***

We want to continue to be an organisation that challenges the way in which people think and perceive things. This has evolved over the years, and we want this to continue to evolve as we learn more and as we grow.

Our short-term goal is to do some more work on the spaces that we occupy at Ponte. We began the first phase of renovations in our community centres in July, and as we raise more money, we are excited to begin working on phase two - which will be setting up our teen centre and learning kitchen.

■ ***Tell us more about the community centre and what sort of impact it has had thus far for the community of Ponte City?***

Our community centre to date has been catering for youth aged between four to 20. We offer daily facilitated programmes which range from skate boarding to drama to arts & crafts. We have a homework facilitator and offer tutoring to some of the older kids on things like science, maths and accounting.

It's a busy space and the key idea is that we provide a space where kids get to be kids in an environment where, often, that isn't possible.



Sindy Peters 27 Sep 2018



▣ ***You've been selected as a 5 for Change beneficiary - what will you do with the proceeds?***

The plan is to put the proceeds from 5 for Change towards the upgrading of the teen centre and kitchen.

▣ ***What are your long-term plans for Dlala Nje?***

We love the idea of using space as a catalyst and as we grow, we hope to be able to continue to use spaces in interesting ways that impact the communities in which we operate.

Keen to attend #5forChange and support this year's five beneficiaries? Go to www.5forchange.co.za. Tickets are available [here](#).

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

Sindy Peters (@sindy_hullaba_lou) is a group editor at Bizcommunity.com on the Construction & Engineering, Energy & Mining, and Property portals. She can be reached at sindy@bizcommunity.com

- ▣ 2022 Lesedi Award winner Faeza Marshman on what drives her giving spirit - 9 Dec 2022
- ▣ #ESGAfricaConference: Why integrating the environmental and social components of ESG is key - 3 Nov 2022
- ▣ #ESGAfricaConference: ESG an opportunity for purposeful shareholder engagement - 1 Nov 2022
- ▣ #ESGAfricaConference: Success in ESG starts with leadership, partnerships and good governance - 31 Oct 2022
- ▣ #ESGAfricaConference: What should ESG reporting look like in Africa? - 26 Oct 2022

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>