

[Applying for the Mandela Washington Fellowship: The importance of being a leader](#)

Lee Mark du Preez 
(Courtesy photo)

When South African Lee Mark du Preez first heard of the Mandela Washington Fellowship, he knew it was an opportunity for him to take the work he'd been doing in his community to the next level. Since his school years he'd been on the board of the Children's Home in his town of Pietermaritzburg, which helps orphaned, abandoned and abused children. He had also worked as an entrepreneur and consultant on South Africa's black economic empowerment initiative.

But when he applied for the fellowship in 2013, he was not among those invited to come to Washington. The next year du Preez applied a second time, and this time the outcome was very different as he was selected to be a 2015 Mandela Washington Fellow.

What changed between his first application and the second, and why did he become a better candidate the second time he applied?

He remained on the board of the Children's Home but doubled his efforts to get involved, giving more of his time and taking on more responsibilities. In addition, he became an advisory board member at the University of KwaZulu-Natal for Enactus, a global student organization that uses the power of entrepreneurship to create positive social change. Enactus teams from 1,600 universities in 36 countries compete for the best plan with the greatest impact. His chapter, du Preez said with no small amount of pride, has "won the championship in South Africa five times. We've never not made the semifinals."

He was also asked by the leader of his local chamber of business to create a youth leadership and business development program. "I became more involved in programs that run on a larger scale," he said, which he believes helped his application to stand out in a way it hadn't before.

"Absolutely keep trying," he said, when asked what he would advise applicants for the MWF who have applied and not been selected. "They must keep trying like I did. But they should also continue to develop and raise their profiles, so that by the time they do try again, they can be so good that it's almost impossible for them to be ignored."

[#YALI Network Events Across Africa](#)

Aspiring entrepreneurs in Kigali, 
Rwanda (Courtesy photo)

In the two months since we launched #YALILearns, there has been a flurry of activity among #YALINetwork members organizing and sharing events in our Facebook face2face group. Dozens of meetings and hundreds of people have shared their knowledge and connected with other young African leaders across the continent.

Papy Sibomana got together a group of prospective young entrepreneurs in Kigali, Rwanda, to teach business and entrepreneurship using the YALI Network Online Courses. There was also discussion of the #YALINetwork and its benefits for younger entrepreneurs and an overview of the Mandela Washington Fellowship application process.

Discussing the activities of the Regional 
Leadership Center at a meeting in Addis
Ababa. (Courtesy photo)

In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Frehiwot Negash joined with Yigrem Ashenafi, Asmeret Gebre, Edie Zachs and Helina Stiphanos to organize a #YALILearns event and even created a separate Facebook group.

“It was so inspirational,” Frehiwot said. “We look forward to our next monthly event.”

Zakariyyah Freeman Musa, a Nigerian working in Kenya, connected with the U.S. Embassy in Tanzania to develop a #YALILearns event at the American Corner in Zanzibar. Thirty people discussed the YALI Network Online Courses on leadership and took the quiz to get their certificates.

YALILearns meeting in Harare (Courtesy 
photo)

Southern Africa was particularly active, including Vincent T. Mabotja’s event in South Africa to discuss xenophobia and another that involved a march against corruption. In neighboring Zimbabwe, several events took off.

“#YALILearns is an amazing tool to seeing people grow and develop ideas into actual projects and livelihood,” said Kelvin Tinashe Mutize after a networking event he organized with #yalicreatives in Harare.

Munya Bloggo, a 2015 
Mandela Washington Fellow,
teaches business in Gweru,
Zimbabwe. (Courtesy photo)

Munya Bloggo shared another Zimbabwe event, this time in the central part of the country where several Network members used the YALI Network Online Courses to discuss business planning and modeling at the American Corner in Gweru.

“We had a feisty discussion with students on how we can apply the lessons to a local context,” Munya said, before adding a competitive element to #YALILearns. “I think when it comes to advancing education, Zimbabweans go at it like it was the Olympics.”

Just north, in Zambia, Patience Chisanga shared her expertise at a multi-day event.

“I spoke to 25 young talented and exceptional filmmakers about redefining entrepreneurship, the importance of turning art into a business, the basics of developing a business idea, a business plan, and how to deliver a business pitch to investors,” she said.

YALINetwork members take a quiz on  leadership for a YALINetwork certificate at a meeting in Zanzibar, Tanzania. (Courtesy photo)

To the west, Ruddy Kielo Lingela held an event that utilized the YALI business lessons in Lubumbashi, #DRC, at the American Space there.

“More than 20 young entrepreneurs were present,” he said. “I was much impressed (with the audience). All the participants arrived 30 minutes before the launch of the meetup. The Congo is changing my friends.”

Over in Ghana, Oxford Bonsu put together a group of 320 undergraduates at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology for an event.

A huge YALILearns event in Ghana saw  320 people show up for a meeting organized by Oxford Bonsu. (Courtesy photo)

“I used resources from YALI Learns to engage the students, and there was a positive feedback,” he said. “#YALILearns is a sure way to give back to your community and to empower young Africans to make real difference.”

If you want to hold your own [#YALILearns](#) event, you do not need any special tools or experience, just a willingness to gather people together and share knowledge. Use our courses or your own material, but please do share the results with us on our [#YALILearns feedback page](#).

Patience Chisanga, a 2015 Mandela  Washington Fellow, teaches about filmmaking at a YALILearns event in Lusaka, Zambia. (Courtesy photo)
