

COVID-19 risks to scholars are real - but Rialto Project's Joshua Mbana steps up to the plate with an award-winning essay on learning under lockdown

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We're in this together. Extraordinary times require an extraordinary response. Our people and partners have responded by dedicating time and resources to various initiatives.

This is how one of our bursary students has stepped up with insights gained during the COVID-19 crisis.

The Rialto Project

The Futuregrowth Community Property Fund's operations on the ground provide unrivalled access to many of the poorest and most underserved communities in the country. Over the years, the Fund has managed a range of upliftment programmes in the communities surrounding its shopping centre investments. Through this work, it has established ongoing relationships with schools in rural and township locations, where talented students who deserve assistance have been identified.

The Rialto Project was founded in 2019 by property asset managers Capital Land and Futuregrowth, to provide educational bursaries for deserving learners to leading schools across the country – giving them the life-changing experience of a world-class education.

STS Lawhill Maritime Centre

The Fund currently sponsors three scholars to board and study at Simon's Town School's Lawhill Maritime Centre in Cape Town. The Centre forms part of the government high school and has been described by Professor Jonathan Jansen as "South Africa's best-kept secret and a possible solution to the crisis of education and unemployment."

Since its inception in 1995, more than 1 000 young South Africans have passed through the maritime studies programme, many of them pursuing successful careers in the maritime industry, while others have gone on to make their mark in other industries.

When schools across South Africa closed in March this year following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, all Lawhill boarders returned home to their families. One of these was Rialto Project bursary recipient, Joshua Mbana, who went back Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape – where he continued with his schooling from home until his return to the boarding school on 8 June 2020.

The lockdown essay competition

As one of its many initiatives to motivate and support its students over this difficult period, Lawhill ran a competition where students were asked to share their best and worst lockdown experiences, as well as the lessons they'd learnt during lockdown and what they were most grateful for. The winners received, amongst others, a cash prize donated by the Lawhill Maritime Educational Trust. Josh Mbana's submission was judged to be the winning story and follows below.

Learning under Lockdown

By Joshua Mbana

Be careful what you wish for, Joshua.

These words would constantly echo in my mind every time I felt an overwhelming sensation of frustration while at home during lockdown, and when I would struggle to grasp the various, overly-complicated mathematics and physical sciences concepts that were assigned to us, the students, to learn and understand, during this pandemic-induced lockdown.

Fun fact, I was born and raised in the small dusty town of Uitenhage, I have three older brothers, making me the youngest of my surname, and my parents are still happily married. We live in a relatively small house which caused too much commotion, and concentration and comprehension are difficult, increasing the anxiety I am experiencing in my final school year.

As the noise levels in the house were hindering my concentration when it came to school work, I decided I had to take matters in to my own hands and after a heated negotiation, I was able to convince my parents to encourage the rest of the household to, and I quote, "pipe down". I thank them for playing that vital role in seeing the need for a little silence in the house.

I then had to figure out how to gain access to online schooling as I do not have WiFi access. This meant, that one would have to make a quick dash to a shop, despite lockdown laws, to purchase the data bundles required for the various online learning sites.

In my opinion, online schooling is a completely different ball game compared to in-class learning. For one, there is no teacher present to fully explain and dissect a topic or to guide a learner in the right direction when he/she begins to go off track.

Not to mention those dreadful pop up adverts that come with the luxury of receiving all the information you need online and while in the comfort of your own home. Those pop up adverts can be compared to disruptive fellow classmates!

Learning under lockdown feels like being trapped inside a glass dome. Your movement is restricted like a vessel in bad weather. You cannot take those two to three minutes to stretch your legs and have a quick chat with a friend in between classes. Instead you are sitting in the same chair, for prolonged periods of time.

One major advantage of learning under lockdown is how it gives one the leisure of going at your own pace, in your own space. It really gives one a sense of independence as you fund your own learning experience. You get to choose the subject you would like to invest your time in, and the actual time of day you would like to start investing your time, all with the assistance of a carefully drawn up timetable.

If learning under lockdown has taught me anything, it has shown me how frustrating it can be to stay in the same place for prolonged periods of time. It has taught me how important it is for one's psychological and mental health to be moving and pushing forward in life, regardless of the current circumstances, and how frustrating it can be to repeat the same routine every day, without any alterations.

With that said, I urge students who will hopefully read this someday, to see this learning under lockdown experience as a taste of what the real world would be like if they do not work hard with their books today. They will be stuck in the same routine every day without moving forward.

It is important to always persevere and remain strong regardless of the hardships faced, and to stay positive even when it feels like your whole world is under pressure.

Finally, this learning under lockdown has taught me to be careful what I wish for, as I had I wished, a few months prior to this lockdown, to know what it would feel like to be home-schooled.

My only wish now is to take back what I had said.

SUPPORT OFFERED TO LAWHILL BURSARY STUDENTS DURING LOCKDOWN

A detailed plan was put in place to support students while at home. This is ongoing due space constraints in the hostel to accommodate all the beds at the required 2 metre distance apart, and will be reviewed again at the end of September 2020.

- **WhatsApp groups were set up**, to facilitate contact and support for parents as well as students, and data was provided to those who needed to access these groups.
- **Academic resources** for revising Term 1 work and the theoretical aspects of new Term 2 work were provided via WhatsApp - and as of September, via live Zoom classes.
- **Extra Maths and Physical Science Tutorials** were implemented, initially via WhatsApp and later via Zoom, to ensure the students did not fall behind in these important subjects.
- All maritime-related learning resources were made available to students via the www.maritimesa.org website and also via www.lawhill.org.
- In August all Grade 10 and 11 **students were provided with tablets**, keyboards and a 50GBM Data SIM to support remote learning. Usage/non-usage is monitored and students also have access to Vodacom's e-School platform.
- Lawhill educators and support staff are in **regular contact with bursary students** at home, and bursary sponsors are informed if any issues arise.
- Where necessary, Lawhill has helped students and families with the **provision of stipends for food**.

To read more student reflections on their lockdown experiences – and the Fund's Bursary and Rialto Project - see:

1. [Newsletter - Special Lockdown Edition - Student reflections](#)
2. [The Rialto Project](#)
3. [CPF Lawhill Maritime Centre Bursary](#)
4. [FG Community Property Fund Report Q1 2020](#)
5. [Helping young people to achieve their dreams](#)
6. [An update on Lutho Thomas](#)

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