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COP@20, celebrating 20 years of service!

Strathmore University's Community Outreach Program (COP), under the Community Service Centre, this year hits its 20 year mark. A big year, worthy of celebration!

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By the time you hit age 20, you've had a lot happen in your life. You learned to walk and talk, tie your own laces and cross a busy highway. You've experienced the highs and lows that are part and parcel of

existence and made your mark on the people you've met along the way.

Over the last two decades, the COP members; staff, alumni and volunteers have championed the University's pillar of service to society. Week in, week out they have engaged centres in and around the community; visiting prisons, mentoring high school students, painting classrooms and even cooking *chapatis*. Anyone who has ever participated in a COP activity can tell you, it is a truly life changing experience.

On Saturday 12th August, the COP community got together on campus for what turned out to be the most joyful and rousing afternoon, characteristic of most COP events. The auditorium was filled to the brim with the young people of Kwetu Home of Peace, Dorothea Rescue Centre, Wings of Compassion and the

Macheo Programme. We danced! And sang! And skipped around the auditorium in the most energetic and chaotic *mugithi* of all time.

Each of the centres came prepared with a presentation that showcased their talents. The Kwetu Band got us started with the national anthem and a few musical numbers played passionately on a consortium of wind instruments, drums and cymbals. After inspecting the guard of honour, Michael Babu welcomed everyone, and declared that it would be an afternoon of fun, with very few speeches. And so it was!

The Dorothea Queens, dressed in vibrant green and yellow tutus got everyone dancing along as they performed their pieces. And I do mean everyone. Luis Borallo, Director of the Community Service Centre could be spotted in the impromptu line that danced around

the auditorium, clapping and jumping along to song after song until the DJ stopped and everyone collapsed into their seats.

We got to hear stories from one of the Dorothea Queens, a former street child who spoke with as much eloquence as she had danced with rhythm. One of the instructors at the centre also spoke of how their interaction with COP held so much meaning for each individual girl, and the centre as a whole. With each performance, we heard the impact that the past 20 years of community service from the University has had on the different centres.

After the Dorothea girls, we saw a solo performance of spoken word and dance from one of the Macheo students, a hilarious *Zangalewa* performance from the Kwetu boys and a choir performance from Wings of Compassion that likely made the

angels in heaven pause their singing to listen in.

The afternoon was exactly what was needed. A perfect celebration of 20 years of service, friendship and impact. A gathering full of gratitude for the past, joy for the present and hope for the future. There were smiles on everyone's faces as the afternoon progressed into evening and the event wound down.

Bringing it to a close, Mr. Borallo talked briefly about the last 20 years, having been there from the very start. He reminded us all why we do what we do, the importance of the time taken and the work done. He thanked the alumni and volunteers, both past and present and the COP team for always jumping in to serve. And to the eager gathering of young boys and girls, he said, *"You are very special. You are very special in the eyes of God and you should be very*

special in your own eyes. Even if sometimes things have gone wrong in your life, either through your own mistakes or the mistakes of other people, that doesn't change who you are. So remember for the rest of your life, you are very special."

With those words, the event dissolved as some went off to try out the bouncing castle, others to get their faces painted. Around the graduation square smaller groups gathered, reminiscing on past experiences and a wonderful afternoon spent celebrating 20 years of service.

*This article was written by **Celia Kinuthia** and first appeared on the Strathmore University website [here](#).*

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