



AS IT IS

South Africa Club Teaches Township Youth Kayaking

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A group in South Africa's largest township, Soweto, is helping young community members learn **kayaking**.

The Soweto Canoe and Recreation **Club** offers young people from the mostly Black township the chance to gain skills in kayaking and canoeing. The two sports are similar, but use different equipment.

Traditionally in South Africa, water sports like kayaking are usually only experienced by upper-class members of the country's white minority. But the Canoe and Recreation Club -- created in 2003 -- has aimed to change that. The group currently has 72 members that range in age from seven to 22.

One member is 20-year-old Benjamin Mntonintshi. He spoke to Reuters while taking a kayak down the Klip River, which runs through Soweto township.

"The water helps me **focus** and be alone with my thoughts. When I'm facing **challenges** in life, I come here, take the boat and get into the water," he said.

Soweto, like South Africa as a whole, suffers from high youth unemployment. The latest national data from June showed that nearly half of young people aged 15 to 34 are unemployed.

The club says on its website that it also offers help to members beyond the development of sports skills. These include educational programs designed to aid students in graduating and exploring possibilities for continuing schooling. In addition, the group offers career guidance and employment assistance.

Nkosi Mzolo is a **coach** at the club. He said the group has to work to overcome traditional beliefs in the country that evil spirits can live in lakes and rivers.

"There are still **negative connotations** attached to children being in the water," Mzolo said. "People still believe that there is a (supernatural) snake that lives in this dam, so kids should not be playing here," he added.

Mntonintshi says he successfully overcame those fears. Now, he is dreaming of very big things in the sport of kayaking. He says he aims to keep training hard and hopes one day to be good enough to compete in the Olympics.

Mntonintshi currently ranks second in the under-23 grouping in Gauteng, the area around South Africa's largest city, Johannesburg.

The club says it has already produced "some of the most exciting up and coming **paddlers** in the country." Among them is Siseko Ntondini, who became the first black South African to finish at the top of the Hansa Fish Canoe Marathon in 2015.

I'm Bryan Lynn.

Reuters reported this story. Bryan Lynn adapted the report for VOA Learning English, with additional information from the Soweto Canoe and Recreation Club. Susan Shand was the editor.

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Words in This Story

kayaking – *n.* the act of riding a long narrow boat that is pointed at both ends and that is moved by a paddle with two blades

club – *n.* an organization for people who want to take part in a sport or social activity together

focus – *v.* to give special attention to something

challenge – *n.* a difficult task or problem

coach – *n.* a person whose job is to teach people to improve at a sport, skill or school subject

negative – *adj.* not having desirable opinions about something

connotation – *n.* the feelings or ideas that words give in addition to their meanings

paddler – *n.* one who paddles something, such as a canoe or kayak
