In December 2011, the United Nations declared October 11 as a day the Day of the Girl Child. On this day we are called to recognise the rights of girls and the unique challenges they face around the world. We are collectively reminded of the power and agency of young girls. All adolescents, but especially the girl child, have the right to a safe, educated, and healthy life, not only during their critical formative years, but even more importantly as they grow and mature into mature women.

Across the world, adolescents and young people have shown over and over, their potential to change the world. There is truly no voice more powerful. And this Sunday on International Day of the Girl Child we will stand in awe as we witness the roar of our might young lionesses. #GirlPower.

It is therefore quite serendipitous that this week we feature a truly inspirational young leader and anti-bullying activist, Njabulo Zulu. Hailing from Soshangue, a township outside South Africa’s capital city of Tswana, Njabulo is a highly intelligent and deeply intuitive young girl. At 14 years old she has become a beacon of hope for many young girls in her community and further afield, for her brave and vocal fight against all forms of bullying. “I can still recall the hurt and humiliation I felt when I was being bullied just because my skin looked darker than some of the other children in my class.” The intense bullying initially made her withdraw and become a different young girl from the bubbly one she was before. But with the support from her mum, Dudu Zulu, Njabulo shifted her energy and focus towards turning her negative experience into something positive. “I was determined not to be a helpless victim. So I fought back, because I knew that my self-worth was more than my appearance.” In 2016, the Njabulo Zulu Foundation was established by her mother, Dudu Zulu, to support the various issues being advocated by Njabulo. Without a doubt Dudu Zulu has been her daughter’s most ardent supporter and has helped establish the foundation of her daughter’s activism. “My mum is my best friend, my rock and my mentor. She is the one who instilled in me the importance of loving yourself and understanding your value and worth as a girl.” Being an only child has greatly influenced her drive to connect with other young people. “I love being around young children and often babysit when I can. I guess that’s why I want to be a pediatrician one day.”

On what advice she gives to other young people who are being victimised by bullying, she says that the most important lesson is that they have to learn that they have value. “When you are being bullied you feel that you are not worthy and not loved. But if you take time to get to know yourself, you will be able to love yourself and you will not be a victim anymore.” Often seen as an issue that impacts girls more than boys, Njabulo dispels this myth. “Bullying happens to both boys and girls equally. Boys also suffer the same trauma. I have many boys who come up to me to share their stories and I try to help them.”

A keen violin player, her connection and love for music is tangible. Sharing why she chose the violin as her musical instrument, Njabulo is reverent. Saying that she knew that she wanted to play something different to what my other classmates were playing and when she heard the violin being played, it connected with her. “The violin speaks to my soul. I guess it symbolises all the lives that I want to change. When I hear the deep slow notes that represents the difficult time someone is going through. But, I know that I can help them. And when I hear the high notes,
it brings me joy, because it represents the positive change that I can bring to someone’s life.” Njabulo shares that she is also considering becoming a violin teacher too!

Not content to contain her energy, enthusiasm and positivity to just her work as an anti-bullying activist, this young dynamo is also a motivational speaker, drama student, Sign Language student, violin player, preacher, model, Ashoka Young Change Maker and a radio presenter. She was also recently awarded the African Children of the Year award, in the Safety and Security category. When asked how she fits this all in and still manages to get good grades and be an A+ Mathematics student, she offers a shy smile. Because for Njabulo this is not about work or sacrifice, it’s about soaking up all the opportunities, to learn and grow as she creates her own glorious canvas of life experiences.

She shares that the reason she started taking Sign Language lessons, is because she came across a number of hearing impaired young people who she was not able to help as she was not able to communicate effectively with them. “I wanna be able to communicate with everyone, so I decided that I needed to learn how to communicate with Deaf people. I wanted them to feel accepted and that they also mattered.” Njabulo has been taking Sign Language lessons for the past two years now and has become quite proficient. However the recent national lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic meant that her studies were put on hold for a time.

“All my actions are guided by harmony, love and acts of service to my fellow human beings. I am anti-wrong, so when I see someone suffering and in need of assistance, I try to see where I can help them.” For her the recognition that she has achieved for her activism does not motivate her, rather the thanks that she gets from people she has helped in her community is what spurs her on to continue her work. As is so often the case with activist trailblazers such as Njabulo, strong women have played a hugely influential role in her life. “I am inspired by such amazing women such as Connie Ferguson, Oprah Winfrey and South African First Lady, Dr. Tshepo Motepe Ramaphosa. Together with my mum they are my sheroes. Each of them have taught me valuable lessons about the type of person and activist I want to be and how I have a responsibility to pay it forward to the next young girl who wants to make a difference.”

When we meet exceptional young adolescents, such as Njabulo, it reminds us that regardless of where you are located geographically, or what your age or gender is, the importance of using your moral compass to guide your actions for good, remains the most important attribute of greatness. We salute all the young girls like Njabulo who are making a difference in the lives and lived realities of many adolescents and young girls across the globe. #GirlChild. #GirlPower.

Follow and support Njabulo’s anti-bullying campaigns here:

- Facebook: Njabulo Zulu
- Instagram: @njabulozulu4
- Twitter: @Njabulozulu foundation
- YouTube: Njabulo Zulu Foundation

#FRIDAYYOUTHACTIVIST #GIRLPOWER #SAT4YOUTH