

AT THE COALFACE OF SERVICE DELIVERY IN THABA NCHU - PASCALINA THAKHELI

From a young age growing up in Ventersburg and Qwa Qwa, Pascalina Thakheli had dreamt of being a doctor, mostly to help people. Unfortunately, due to lack of funds, it was not to be. However, this did not stop her from pursuing her main goal; she just started helping people in a different way and capacity. Throughout her lengthy and accomplishment-filled career, she has fought for worker's rights, ensured people's access to housing and continues to advocate for service delivery on behalf of residents of Thaba Nchu in her capacity as the Acting Regional General Manager (RGM).

Pascalina Thakheli, known to many as MaThakheli, started her career in local government even before the time of the Botshabelo Transitional Council which was amalgamated into Mangaung Local Municipality at the dawn of democracy. Her main role as an RGM is to ensure that services are delivered to residents and to intervene when there are bottlenecks, whilst interacting with community and councillors on a regular basis.

MaThakheli's professional life began at Country Birds farm in Botshabelo during the apartheid era, which is where she found her feet in organizing workers in the fight for better conditions. After embarking on an illegal strike and losing her job as a clerk, she found work at the Department of Development Aid in Botshabelo, working in housing.

"I started working for Developmental Aid which was later absorbed into the municipality after democracy. At that time, Developmental Aid was running the local affairs of towns under homelands...there were no municipalities," she remembers. As part of training for the new governance system, she was sent to Netherlands by Nehawu and the Botshabelo Transitional Council



Pascalina Thakheli can be regularly found on the ground in Thaba Nchu, especially when there are service delivery challenges

to learn municipal management and partake in an internship in Southern Holland.

It was when she started working for the municipality she realized that her passion for helping people can still be achieved by ensuring that services are delivered to people. Before heading the Thaba Nchu office, MaThakheli worked in the city's Housing directorate and rose through the ranks from a clerk to a manager. These roles also prepared her for her current role, where she deals a lot with people's emotions.

Explaining how these experiences have had a positive effect on how she does her job, MaThakheli says: "Housing deals with land issues; it is emotional and sentimental as you constantly need to interact with different people, politicians and different stake holders; it's not far from my current responsibilities as regional manager."

The experiences throughout her working life prepared her for the challenges she encountered as RGM, especially when doubt is cast on her capabilities to lead. MaThakheli says: "There are policies that allow woman to hold any position in the municipality but sometimes I find that people belittle me because I'm a woman." However, this does not deter her, as she has dealt with and overcome similar negative

perceptions before.

She explains: "My background of being trade unionised has equipped and capacitated me to absorb and endure day to day challenges. You must bear in mind that trade unions are male dominated but I participated until I become provincial chairperson.

"I relied on my experience of close to 30 years of dealing with administration of housing department, from the time I started at Development Aid department to the present day," she continues.

When she's not fighting for resources to provide services to communities, MaThakheli enjoys some downtime with family and her close circle of friends. Occasionally, she takes a trip down to her favourite coastal towns where she feels "closest to nature".

With a bountiful of experiences in local government under her belt, MaThakheli continuously preaches to young women to be courageous and not shy away from occupying their rightful places.

"Young women must not underestimate their strengths, even when compared to males. They must be their own cheer leaders and not wait for people to acknowledge them before they take themselves seriously," she concludes.



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