



IT'S THANKS TO YOU, SAYS [UKUTHUNGA](#)

Yes, you, with that beautiful open heart

In the turmoil, we have not forgotten our generosity of spirit. In fact, as South Africans, it is something we hold high in carrying us through it. We know, in various ways, what living on the precipice of change and uncertainty means. We have well-curated muscle memory for it!

[Ukuthunga](#) (a SiSwati word meaning to create with hands) is a small, but not insignificant, self-sustaining not-for-profit registered social enterprise that makes crocheted toys and home décor items. It is only small in that you may not have heard of us before. But it is huge in its impact on the lives of 60 unemployed women in Mpumalanga. In the lives of the broader network of people, it supports too.

The lesson of the pandemic's furore is something the women of Ukuthunga learned a long time ago: to live presently.

Where lockdown has eliminated aspects of choice and opportunity (feeling at times like an imposition on civil liberty) it has also created a fast understanding of living, for now, day-to-day. We are remembering the importance of community; and perhaps, abruptly confronting our very own disconnection from it.

"We founded humbly five years ago while I was doing outreach work at an orphanage in the community of Msholozzi, on the outskirts of White River, Mpumalanga. Our group of five women, who joined to learn a new skill, and establish a sense of worth and belonging, grew to 60 almost overnight.

Passion, hard work, and dedication we had (and still have) in spades. We needed to turn our attention to finding channels and markets through which we could sell our ever-mounting handmade artisanal crocheted creations. To create income for Ukuthunga," shares Juliana Walters, co-founder, Ukuthunga.

Ukuthunga found a home in the travel and tourism sector. Most of our revenue came from visitors to the country, wanting to take authentic, handmade, "easy-to-fit in their luggage" gifts home.

Although it has been immensely sad, unjust even, to watch our bountiful and buoyant travel and tourism industry haemorrhage during this time, Ukuthunga has been incredibly moved by the efforts of our customers within it to try and help keep us alive, too. Its promise to take Ukuthunga with them on its journey to resurrection in (the hopefully near) future.

"We have largely called off existing stock to fulfil orders, which frankly flatlined at the start of lockdown. As the dream of finding employment seemed further distant, we realised we had to

innovate. Innovate to keep breathing. Our breaths remain gasps for now, but we have hope, we always have. The Ukuthunga team knows what can come from that.

We had marginal savings for a rainy day, disbursed over the last four months. During this time we have pivoted our business to accommodate sales online, have partnered with another socially minded and conscious business in the US called Handicraft Soul and negotiated courier agreements to ensure door to door delivery," says board member, group matriarch (and formally trained teacher), Leah Mavimbela.

We all know local is lekker. But, guess what, locals are lekker too it would seem.

Ukuthunga has also made connections with designers and other small businesses to brainstorm new products and designs that lend better to the home interior space, while still focussing on building a sales pipeline for their toy range. It has been creative in approaching local businesses and even medical practices that they had not considered before.

The corporates have come to the party too. First National Bank has been entirely supportive of the venture. Not only in giving it access to a business banking account but also by including Ukuthunga as keynote speakers at their regional Mpumalanga business breakfasts, through which it garnered new leads and business.

Our community at home, in Mpumalanga, an agricultural mecca and leading producer of macadamia nuts, and home of safari and the Kruger National Park, has been nothing short of incredible. We have been gifted a three-year lease on a retail space in White River by the Christie Group, which will serve as a much-needed storeroom, workshop area, office, and shop. Watch this space!

A local not-for-profit organisation, Giving Back 2 our Community, has made true the dream of bringing our bricks and mortar (at last you hear us cry – we have been working out of shanties, in fields and under trees till now) space to life. By donating money to us for the use of kitting the store out with desks, shelves, computers, and a long list of other necessities to take our business to the next level.

It truly is thanks to you. All of you.

<ENDS>

NOTES TO EDITORS

Contact Annelle Whyte, email: annelle@kokoandtree.co.za, mobile: 0711 638719

About: not-for-profit registered social enterprise, [Ukuthunga](#), is empowered to recognise that the human hands that make our products have lives and that those lives share ours for purpose, dignity, and belonging. We honour community, value opportunity, and respect quality.

Ukuthunga infographic and image gallery: <https://ukuthunga.com/gallery/>

Price list and product: <https://ukuthunga.com/product-catalogue/>

Not-for-profit registration number: 2 0 1 9 / 5 3 8 5 3 9 / 0 8

About Giving Back 2 our Community (GB2C): founded in October 2019, the GB2C initiative was started by Crossing Centre Nelspruit. Several local Mpumalanga businesses form part of GB2C, including BUCO Nelspruit, the Tom le Roux Family, the Omar Family, Mica Nelspruit, SuperSpar Crossing and the Visagie Groep amongst others."