

AFS Interculture South Africa

Company Profile

A world-class intercultural education organisation: a global movement to develop and activate global citizens

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About AFS Interculture South Africa

Empowering Future Global Citizens

In a world that is more connected than ever, the ability to understand and appreciate different cultures is not just a luxury—it's a necessity. AFS Interculture South Africa (AFS-RSA) is committed to developing young leaders through intercultural learning and global exchange programs that foster peace, respect, and cooperation across borders.

Mission

To provide intercultural learning opportunities that empower individuals to develop the knowledge, skills, and understanding needed to create a more just and peaceful world.

Vision

AFS envisions a world where people act as responsible global citizens working for peace and understanding in a diverse world.

Our History and Impact

Founded in 1958, AFS Interculture South Africa is a volunteer-based, non-profit organization that facilitates intercultural exchanges and learning experiences. Through year-long and short-term programs, we offer South African youth the chance to live and study abroad and welcome international participants to experience life in South Africa.

AFS-SA has grown from facilitating 35 student exchanges in 1995 to hosting and sending around 120 participants annually. We are proud to contribute to a global network operating in over 110 countries, with 50,000 active AFS volunteers and over 500,000 returnees. In South Africa, over 200 dedicated volunteers work across 20+ chapters from Cape Town to Hazy View, Durban, Johannesburg, Pretoria, and Bloemfontein.

AFS is affiliated with the United Nations Department of Global Communications (UN-DGC) and is a partner in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), promoting active global citizenship and peacebuilding through education.

What We Do:

Empowering Communities Through Dedicated Volunteerism

At the heart of AFS Interculture South Africa lies a robust network of chapter volunteers whose unwavering commitment drives the organization's mission forward. These volunteers are instrumental in:



Educational Outreach: Conducting school presentations to raise awareness about intercultural exchange opportunities, inspiring students to broaden their horizons.

Program Recruitment: Identifying and recruiting host families, schools, and students to participate in exchange programs, ensuring diverse and enriching experiences for all involved.

Community Engagement: Fostering and maintaining strong relationships within their communities, engaging with stakeholders to build a supportive environment for intercultural learning.

Alumni Support and Training: Providing guidance and resources to alumni, empowering them to initiate and lead community-based projects that promote cultural understanding and social impact. The dedication of these volunteers ensures that AFS-RSA's programs are not only effective but also deeply rooted in the communities they serve. Their efforts have cultivated a trustworthy and dependable organization that sponsors can confidently support, knowing their contributions will have a lasting and meaningful impact.

Program Offerings

AFS Interculture South Africa provides a diverse range of intercultural learning and exchange programs designed to empower individuals and foster global citizenship:

- **Study Abroad Programs:** High school exchanges, gap years, university exchanges, and short-term educational experiences that immerse participants in new cultures.
- **Volunteer Programs:** Opportunities for local and international volunteering, including roles that support intercultural learning and community engagement.

- **Hosting Programs:** South African families can host international students, enriching their cultural understanding and building lifelong connections.
- **Educational Programs for Schools:** AFS partners with schools and educators to promote global competence through teacher exchanges, classroom partnerships, and intercultural training.
- **Adult Programs:** Adults can participate in tailored study, volunteer, or internship experiences abroad.

The Importance of Intercultural Learning

Intercultural experiences allow young people to see the world through different lenses. Our participants have described their AFS journeys using words like:

- Life-changing
- Unforgettable
- Growth
- Family
- Transforming
- Perspective

These experiences build cultural awareness, tolerance, and leadership—vital traits in today's diverse workplaces and communities.

Global Relevance and Workplace Impact

A British Council report revealed that employers highly value:

- Understanding different cultural contexts
- Respect for diversity
- Multilingual abilities

AFS programs nurture these skills, giving our participants a competitive edge and positioning them to drive social and economic change. As a result, AFS alumni are often found contributing meaningfully to global industries, peacebuilding initiatives, and multinational organizations.

AFS was recognized by the OECD for its Intercultural Learning for Global Citizenship Education and was listed as a key contributor in the Education 2030 framework. These recognitions underscore our role in preparing youth for the demands of a global economy.

Funding and Sponsorship Opportunities



Sponsorships: The cost of a short-term program start from R78,000 with one year-long exchange programmes at starting at R135,000.

Community Grants: Returnees are eligible for small grants to run impactful local projects, such as community libraries or youth initiatives. With more funding, we can amplify this changemaking work.

Regional Programs: AFS in Africa (South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, Egypt, Tunisia) runs leadership exchange programmes that foster unity and collaboration across the continent.

AFS Impact Stories

Bongani Khumalo – Paraguay 2000

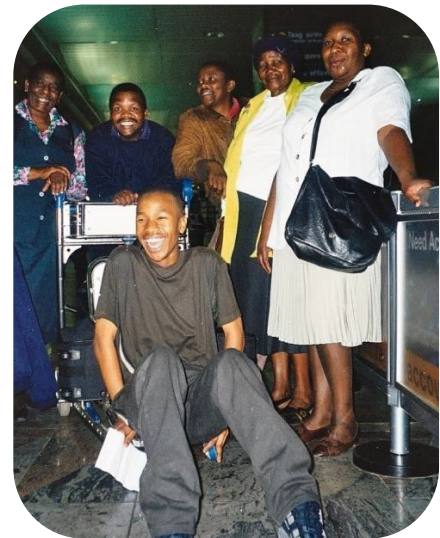
Program Manager Business Development | PetroSA

I was 17 years old when I boarded a flight to Brazil en route to Paraguay. I had just been awarded a scholarship to go on exchange through AFS Interculture South Africa.

I had been a volunteer in Soweto at the time, supporting young people from around the world hosted in South Africa for a cultural exchange programme. I was a dynamic curious young person, convinced that there was more to life than my little existence in Soweto; and one needed to seize opportunities as they came along.

At that time, I had also been accepted at Wits University for a degree in Geology on a full bursary from AngloGold Ashanti.

I remember not knowing what to go for and a good friend of mine said to me “Bongani you will never be 17 again and get to spend a year in a foreign country.” It was the best advice I have ever been given, and what a year it was. I was in a group of 45 teenagers from around the world, the only one from South Africa, to be hosted in local families around Paraguay.



Having lived in apartheid South Africa and seen the transition to democracy; I had assumed that all white people were racist. It was liberating to be in a country where the colour of my skin was a fascination rather than a reason to discriminate. People would rub my head to feel the texture of my hair, they would gather around me to listen to my native language; they would be interested in hearing stories about how we lived back in South Africa.

As much as it was a chance to teach about where I came from, it was also a journey of self-discovery. When one immerses himself in the culture of the other, a curiosity to want to understand why people behave the way they do emerges, you even start to question what influenced your long-held beliefs. One also develops an appreciation about what influenced their being. That who they are is also an offering to the diversity that is the world around us. Mahatma Gandhi sums it up beautifully when he says *“I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the culture of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.”*

AFS took a chance on me and gave me a life-altering experience. I do believe that I am a better human being due to my experience with AFS.



Mohau Mofokeng – China 2017
High School Student

I will start by greeting my readers in Chinese “你好” as I am currently in China for my exchange year. My name is Mohau, and I am 17 years old and I am an extrovert. I am a very enthusiastic person, and I am most happy when I am around people and communicate with them. I would like to consider myself as someone who can relate to anyone with any

culture and background, which allows me to make connections anywhere. I make friends easily. I am also an extremely determined person. No matter what, I will push through limitations and adversity to try and get what I want and what is best for me and the people around me.

I was motivated to choose AFS because it has been a trusted school exchange programme for a long time and it also has the longest school-based exchange time. I would most certainly love to learn Chinese as a language and to learn the Chinese lifestyle and fit in well with it whilst also teaching them about the South African way of life. My host family is so great they make me feel like part of them and they spoil me, a little too much at times, but I’m loving every second of it. Because I

strongly believe in the saying “it takes a village to raise a child” when I talk about my family it will most probably include everyone in the community and friends. I would like to believe I get along with everyone very well as the community members are also very curious about South Africa and its cultures too.

What I like most about my town is that it captures the essence of true China, there are markets everywhere, people care about one another and almost everyone knows each other and when you greet someone you may end up talking to them for as long as 2 hours and not even get bored. I like it here in China. What I think is most similar about China and South Africa is the sense of “UBUNTU”. This is a Zulu word for humanity to others, it also means *“I am who I am because of who you are”*.

The biggest difference is that in China the races and cultures are not as diverse as South Africa (which is known as the “Rainbow Nation”). People here are often surprised and amazed at seeing someone of a different skin colour or race, but I like it because I never run out of someone to talk to.

Silungile Kekana – Japan 2015 High School Student

Being on exchange is a test of independence and courage; it broadens one's understanding of global cultures and the importance of exploring different cultures.

The language and cultural barrier is huge. Not many Japanese I've met thus far speak English, that's because they learn to memorise English, and they are not encouraged to speak it publicly. In South Africa (at least where I come from) a stranger can just walk into your face and start a conversation in a blink of an eye, but here in Japan, a stranger will probably bow two-three times, stare at the ground or smile a lot before speaking; in addition, the Japanese are very shy and private (which is why it takes them a while to warm up to a conversation).

I have been trying new things since I've been here like kendo and tennis; and I tried out a public speaking competition (I'm not much of a talker but it was worth it). As much as this is supposed to be fun, it's supposed to be educational too. All my classes are in



Japanese and it's pretty hard considering that I don't speak Japanese, yet! I have seen a change in the way I do things, like I've disciplined myself. Usually, I plan on doing something and actually don't, but something clicked in me and I've been disciplined. My practices have changed. I'm open to more change in my life. Someone once said to me, '*An opposite culture is not wrong or immoral, it's just different*'; I can say exploring differences is good for inhabiting a new mindset and setting new goals.

I've had many people ask what am I going to do after this, I'm not sure about that yet; but, moving back to Japan might be a possibility. I think I could study teaching English and empower more Japanese people to speak English.

I believe I will emerge from this exchange as a complete individual, who knows what they want and where they want to be, because I believe I was far from finding myself in my 'comfort zone' back home. I'm thankful for all the people who are helping me make this exchange a success and for a wonderful experience.



Nathan Swartz – USA 2013 (KL-YES)

Youth Director at AFS-RSA | Freelance Copywriter

On the 27th of July 2014, I had the privilege to attend and stand as a representative of the youth of South Africa at Freedom Park in Pretoria, to celebrate the Great Father of the Nation, the late Nelson Mandela and the continuing legacy he left for the people of South Africa.

The day included a "Passing the Flame of Ubuntu" ceremony, where a torch was passed down to a representative from each cultural group in South Africa. Each representative had to give a reason as to why they were accepting the torch as a representative of the youth

within South Africa – my message was fairly simple, as I took the torch I said "We as the youth of the Republic of South Africa have the power to create a legacy, a legacy that has the potential to leave footprints of change for generations to come, as we change the world, not in one instance, but one person at a time". I felt honoured to represent the youth of South Africa as we hold the future, and it is important that youth realize the responsibility we will have to take South Africa forward.

Never be afraid to share what you believe in or what inspires you, because it is the only way we will see a change in the world, by being the change we would like to see in the world, as Mahatma Gandhi said. Let us as youth all around the world unite in our differences to help one another, inspire a shared vision and dedicate ourselves to being change makers.

Boikemelo Morake – USA 2017-18 (KL-YES)
BCom Accounting Graduate | AFS-RSA Staff Member

Growing up, the idea of becoming a high school exchange student felt like something that only happened in movies. But in 2017, what once seemed impossible became my reality when I was selected for the KL-YES Program, an opportunity that would shape the rest of my life.

I spent my exchange year in Redding, California, with a warm and welcoming Caucasian host family—who to this day, remain my second family. It was my first time abroad, and I jumped at the chance to pursue my dream of studying internationally. I thank God for that once-in-a-lifetime experience that has opened so many doors for me.



Before the program, I struggled with confidence. I was passionate about making a difference but lacked the voice and platform to do so. Through KL-YES, I didn't just gain a new family and lifelong friendships—I gained the life-changing skills that ignited my passion for active citizenship. I learned how to speak up, show up, and lead. Today, I'm proud to say I can sit at any table, share constructive input with confidence, and mentor young black girls who are afraid to dream big—because I once was one of them.

The program introduced me to practical, sustainable ways to drive change in my own community. Since returning, I've led and participated in several initiatives, including:

- **Clothing and food drives** for a refugee center in Jabavu, Soweto
- **Sanitary pad campaigns** for girls in need
- Supporting **KL-YES orientations and selection days**
- And most proudly, launching a **community library in Botlokwa, Limpopo** in January 2024

My continued involvement with AFS Interculture South Africa not only brought me back to the U.S. in April 2024 to visit my host family, but also allowed me to attend a global Changemakers Workshop, where I received in-depth training in design thinking, leadership, and changemaking strategy.

AFS Interculture South Africa’s mission is to develop active global citizens through intercultural learning and exchange, and their vision is to foster a more just and peaceful world. I am living proof of that mission in action. I’ve gone from a shy teenager with a dream to a confident young professional using her degree and passion for impact as a proud AFS-RSA staff member.

This program didn’t just change my life—it gave me the tools to change the lives of others. And for that, I will always be grateful.



Lwazi Dlamini – Brazil 2024 (BP Global STEM Academy)

Reasoma High School Student | UWC Mostar Scholar

"Before the BP Global STEM Academy, I was just a quiet boy from Protea Glen, Soweto—introverted and unsure of my place in the world. Then AFS Interculture South Africa came into my life and changed everything."

In 2024, Lwazi Dlamini, a proud learner from Reasoma High School, received a life-changing scholarship to participate in the BP Global STEM Academy in Brazil, through AFS Interculture South Africa. This prestigious program brings together diverse young minds from across the globe to explore sustainability, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math), and intercultural skills, preparing them to become future

global problem-solvers.

Driven by his curiosity and a desire to help bridge the gaps he saw in the STEM industry, Lwazi chose to pursue Mathematics and Physical Sciences. But it was through AFS that he discovered there’s so much more to STEM than the conventional classroom teachings. “AFS showed me that STEM is not just about numbers and formulas—it’s about innovation, sustainability, and making a real difference in the world,” he reflects.

For Lwazi, this was his first time traveling abroad—and it marked the beginning of a powerful transformation. “Being immersed in a new culture and learning environment opened my mind in ways I never imagined. I saw what the world could offer—and what I could give back.”

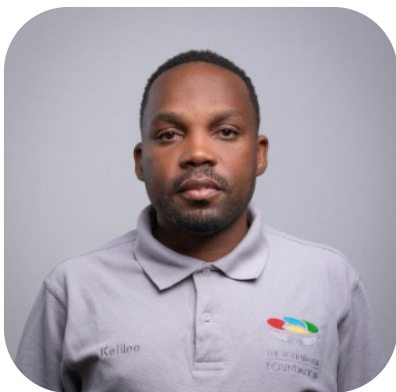
His journey of growth, leadership, and excellence led to another remarkable achievement: a full scholarship to complete his high school studies at United World Colleges (UWC) Mostar in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where he will continue his journey as a global changemaker.

“AFS opened doors I never even knew existed,” says Lwazi. “I will always be grateful. This journey has been empowering and has shaped who I am becoming.”

Today, Lwazi continues to give back as an active AFS and STEM alumni volunteer, inspiring the next generation of young South Africans to dream bigger. His story is a true reflection of how AFS intercultural programs don’t just send students abroad—they unlock potential, build bridges across cultures, and transform lives.

Kefiloe Mokoena

Chairman of the Board AFS Interculture South Africa Non-Executive Director | Board Member
Johannesburg Water



“In 2010, following the xenophobic attacks in South Africa, I participated in an AFS intercultural exchange program aimed at fostering unity among youth in the SADC region. My six-month exchange to Mozambique from July to December was more than just a cultural immersion; it was a transformative journey that broadened my understanding of our continent's diverse cultures and economies.

This experience was pivotal in shaping my professional path. The intercultural competencies and insights I gained have been instrumental in my roles within public utilities and governance. As the Chairperson of AFS Interculture South Africa and a Non-Executive Director at Johannesburg Water, I continuously draw upon the lessons of empathy, cultural sensitivity, and collaborative leadership that AFS instilled in me.

AFS-RSA didn't just offer me an exchange opportunity; it laid the foundation for a lifelong commitment to fostering intercultural understanding and driving positive change in our communities.”

Sponsor Engagement and Recognition

When a sponsor supports a student's participation in an AFS exchange program, AFS Interculture South Africa ensures the sponsor is kept informed, acknowledged, and engaged in the meaningful impact of their contribution. The following materials and information are provided:

1. Student Profile & Background

- A brief bio of the sponsored student, including their background, interests, and future aspirations.
- Information on the country of exchange, program duration, and overall goals of the experience.

2. Program Overview

- A description of the relevant exchange program (e.g. KL-YES, AFS Year Program).
- Core objectives, such as fostering intercultural understanding, leadership development, and global citizenship.

3. Progress Updates

- Pre-departure and in-program updates, including photos, reflections, and key milestones.
- Post-program feedback and highlights from the student's exchange experience.

4. Thank You Letter

- A personal letter of appreciation from the sponsored student, sharing gratitude and insights gained through the opportunity.

5. Impact Report

- A summary report upon completion of the program, showcasing the student's growth, achievements, and the broader impact of the sponsorship.
- Testimonials or anecdotes that reflect the transformation made possible by the sponsor's support.

6. Recognition Materials

- A formal Certificate of Appreciation from AFS Interculture South Africa.

- Optional recognition via AFS-RSA's communication platforms (social media, website, or newsletter), with sponsor approval.

7. Engagement Opportunities

- Invitations to selected AFS events such as orientations, returnee presentations, or alumni gatherings.
- Opportunities to meet the student (virtually or in person) before or after their exchange.

8. Section 18A Tax Certificate

- For monetary donations, AFS Interculture South Africa will issue a **Section 18A Tax Certificate**, enabling sponsors to claim the donation as a tax-deductible expense in accordance with South African Revenue Service (SARS) regulations.

A Message from the National Director

“At AFS Interculture South Africa, we believe in fostering global understanding and cultural exchange. Our exchange student programmes embody and support this vision, providing opportunities for young individuals to immerse themselves in new cultures, build lasting relationships, and develop valuable life skills.

By sponsoring an exchange student, you'll be investing in the next generation of leaders and changemakers. Your support will help break down cultural barriers, promote empathy, and cultivate a more interconnected world.

We invite you to join us in shaping the minds and hearts of future global citizens. Together, let's create a brighter, more inclusive future that is led by truly global citizens.”



Adam Baatjes
Chief Executive and Partner Director

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Join us in building a more connected, understanding, and peaceful world—one exchange at a time.