

# I became a mentor

Dr Tuleka Mkula, 64, from Crystal Park is a doctor. She's divorced and has three grown-up daughters.

Growing up, I was fortunate enough to be sure of what I wanted to do, with supportive parents to direct me and keep me on the straight and narrow. But, as a doctor, I'm constantly coming across teenagers who haven't been so lucky.

So when I heard my daughter, Refiloe, talking about founding her own mentoring organisation, 18Twenty8, I was keen to get involved. Refiloe was looking for qualified professionals to chat to young women about their careers and give them advice about, and exposure to, the field they were interested in pursuing. I was overjoyed to have a chance to help out. It really didn't require a lot from me – just half an hour of my time every few weeks, whenever a mentee needed advice, or simply someone to chat to.

The guiding you do as a mother gives you skills that you never unlearn. Every day you become better and better at listening and understanding. Being involved in the mentoring programme means I get to use those skills all over again. My daughters are grown up now and although we're incredibly close, they have their own lives. It warms my heart to give guidance and offer advice to other young women who need it.

The positive response was overwhelming. The young girls I spoke to were so grateful to have someone to answer their questions about studying medicine. They bounced ideas off me, and we talked about the subjects they needed to take if they wanted to become doctors. I gave them insight into what studying medicine involved, which universities offered the degree and what the experience was like. When I answered their questions their faces lit up with excitement. I never thought that my tiny bit of input would go such a long way.

The best thing about mentoring is that it shows others that it's possible for them to reach their goals. I've also taken them with me on clinic visits, so they can see what it's like being a doctor. Some of them are a bit squeamish if there are needles or blood, but I just laugh and tell them they'll overcome that in time. They love watching how I interact with patients and it's wonderful seeing them so captivated.

The programme has been running since 2006 and it has had a huge impact. There are 22 girls being mentored at the moment and some have managed to get scholarships for university through 18Twenty8. Most of them didn't know that by taking a few simple steps in the right direction, they can become a doctor, an engineer or a businesswoman. It gives me a real buzz to see the impact just half an hour of my time can have, and to watch a shy girl grow into a confident young woman.  
[18twenty8.org](http://18twenty8.org)

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- ✦ To be a volunteer, visit [18Twenty8.org](http://18Twenty8.org) for opportunities to mentor young women – the best thing about it is you can use skills you already have.
- ✦ For courses on writing fiction, comedy or screenplays, we recommend the RandomStruik and GetSmart Creative Writing Course Short Course. For more info, visit [randomstruik.co.za](http://randomstruik.co.za)
- ✦ Solo holiday experts [flyingsolo.co.za](http://flyingsolo.co.za) offer travel experiences around the world for single travellers. **w&h**

