

New green SU residence honours legacy of Nkosi Johnson

Stellenbosch University (SU) has named a new student residence after Nkosi Johnson, honouring the legacy of the iconic child Aids activist. Nkosi Johnson House is the latest of three new student residences at SU's Medical and Health Sciences campus in Tygerberg.



Image source: [Facebook](#)

“It is fantastic that the university is naming a building after Nkosi. He has never received any award in South Africa, and it is the first time that he is being recognised here,” says Gail Johnson, who fostered Nkosi for nearly 10 years. Nkosi made a powerful impact on the public perceptions of HIV until his death in 2001 at the age of 12. At the time, he was the longest-surviving child born with HIV.

According to SU rector and VC Professor Wim de Villiers, an institution’s culture is expressed in the names of its buildings. “By naming this residence Nkosi Johnson House, we are taking another step towards visual redress on our campuses, and we are acknowledging the important role played by the late Nkosi Johnson as a critical voice in the struggle for social justice in the fight against HIV/Aids in South Africa,” says De Villiers.

Strengthen inclusivity at SU

Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FMHS) Professor Jimmy Volmink sees the naming of residences as an opportunity to strengthen the culture of inclusivity at SU. “The naming of residences is part of a larger, ongoing initiative to make the Tygerberg campus a place every student and staff member can call ‘home’. In 2014, a participatory process in which our students actively took part, led to the first senior residence on campus being named ‘Huis Ubuntu House’. We again followed this inclusive process for naming our new senior residence, and were very pleased with the submissions received from students. It is an honour to have this residence named after an icon like Nkosi Johnson,” said Volmink.

“It is important that we recognise and honour African voices, especially those that contributed to the health sciences,” says SU medical student Regan Fancensie who proposed the name for the new residence.

“I’m humbled that my suggestion has been chosen, and ecstatic that Nkosi Johnson’s name will live on at Stellenbosch University. This is a small step in recognising those who have been affected by HIV. I hope Nkosi Johnson House will remind us of their struggle and motivate us to work towards a health system, and also a society, free of stigma, prejudice, and inequality,” said Fancensie.

'Greenest residence in Africa'

Nkosi Johnson House provides accommodation to 200 senior students and is situated adjacent to Tygerberg Hospital (a provincial teaching hospital in Cape Town’s northern suburbs).

It is said to hold the title of 'greenest residence in Africa' after being awarded Excellence in Design for Greater Efficiencies (EDGE) certification. Its 'green status' was earned through the considerable energy and water savings (30% and 22% respectively) achieved in the day-to-day running of the residence, as well as the environmentally friendly method in which the building was constructed.

The construction of Nkosi Johnson House required 45% less building materials and much less water than conventional methods, and produced only 0.25% waste, compared to 25% waste generated by standard construction. Solar panels are used to generate electricity for lighting and heating the building, and an extensive grey water system captures water from showers, which are then treated and used for irrigation.

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