

How Room 13 and TBWA inspire kids with the arts

By [Maroefah Smith](#)

22 Jul 2019

Together with TBWA, NGO Room 13 uses art and creativity to develop and empower underprivileged children by creating a safe place to develop their self-esteem and sense of purpose.

The programme is currently run at six schools across three provinces – Free State, Gauteng and Mpumalanga.

TBWA provides Room 13 with administrative support and guidance, facilitating the relationship between the programme and the school as well as assisting with initiatives like [Inspiration Day](#) and [Sketch Day](#).



Room 13 coordinator at TBWA Silondile Jali lets us in on how TBWA first got involved, its #MandelaMonth stationery drive and how we can help.

TBWA Worldwide connected with Room 13 International in 2004 due to the shared vision of creativity for all and established a collaboration to help set up studios across the world using our global footprint. Because of the challenges of the country and the benefits of creative expression, South Africa was chosen as the pilot country and this year marks 15 years of Room 13. The programme launched in 2005 with two schools – Sapebuso Primary in Soweto, Johannesburg and Mmulankgoro Intermediate in Botshabelo near Bloemfontein.



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▣ *How does the initiative use art to help the children develop their self-esteem and sense of purpose?*

At Room 13, we believe that every child is an artist and has creative capabilities. We embrace and welcome all children interested in becoming part of the programme. This ethos of belonging creates a safe place for our learners, where they are encouraged to express themselves.

Through practice, our roomies learn and experiment with different art mediums which help them develop confidence as their skills grow. Creative activities are used as a tool to investigate, realise and communicate rather than a means of reproduction.



▣ *What kinds of activities does the initiative offer?*

Because Room 13 strives to be a place where our learners are free to express themselves, the programme does not have a curriculum and operates on 'open learning'.

Each studio is led by an artist-in-residence who drives the daily activities based on a combination of their skills and the interests of the children. Activities range from drawing, painting, sculpture, printing and etching as well as theatre, poetry and performance.



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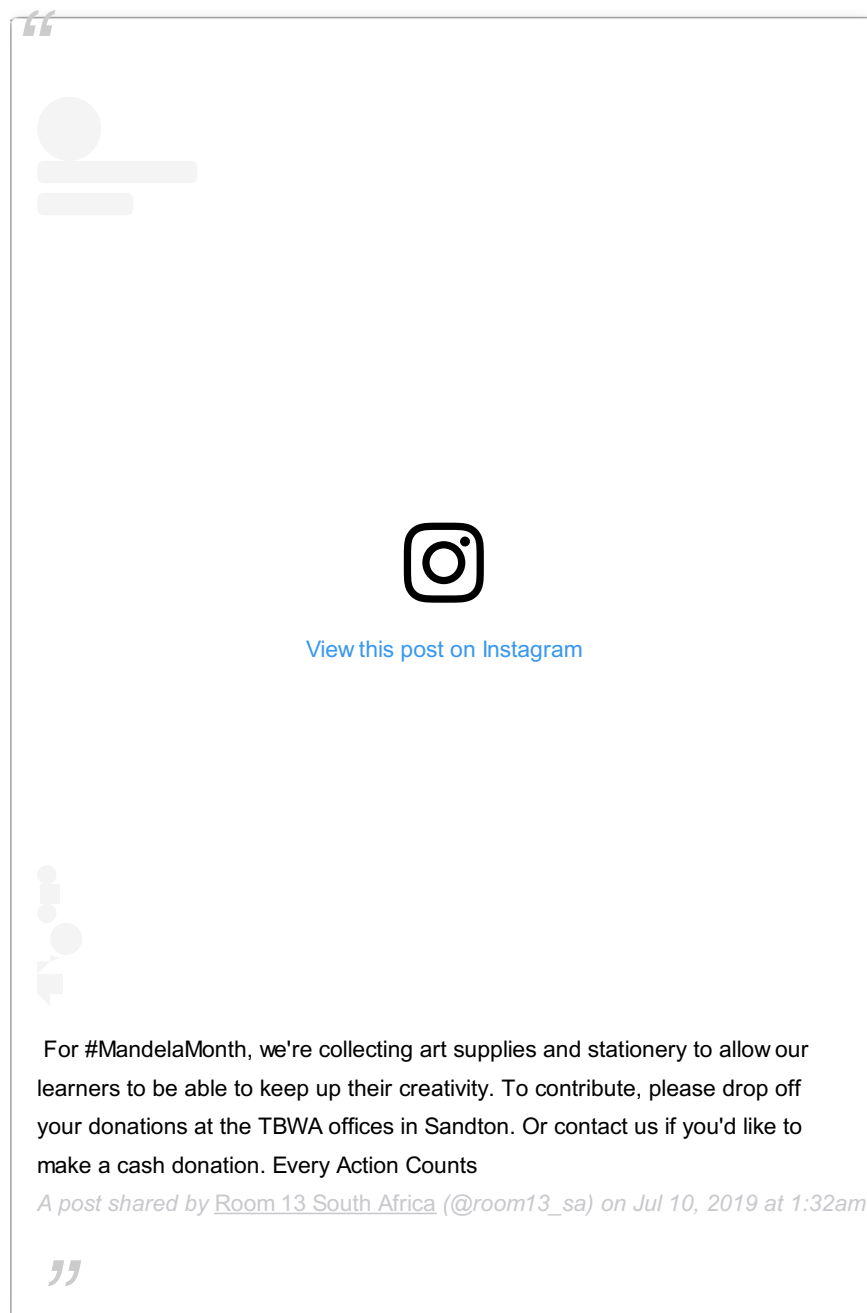
■ **Room 13 is currently running at six disadvantaged schools across three provinces. Are there any plans on expanding to other parts of the country?**

To take Room 13 forward, we need to take our time and ensure that the project has taken root by adapting to the realities and priorities of the communities in which it lives.

While Room 13 SA already has potential studios earmarked, we have to remember that it took 10 years for the programme to mature from one studio into a network with studios in UK, England, Nepal and South Africa.

■ **For #MandelaMonth, you're running a stationery drive to collect art supplies and basic stationery. What kinds of supplies are needed?**

For our stationery drive, we're collecting materials that can encourage and allow our roomies to continue with their creativity. Our wish list includes regular items such as erasers, sharpeners, drawing pencils, sketch pads and charcoal, paints and canvasses to more specialist items for silk screening and lithography.



Our studios have a proven record of keeping young people engaged in education and are recognised as a means of addressing some of the most compelling problems facing young people, schools and society.

■ **As part of the Inspiration Day, professionals across the creative industry are invited to share their journeys and enlighten the Room 13 learners on the career opportunities available. How are these professionals selected?**

Professionals are suggested by the artists-in-residence based on the learners' interests or are invited in efforts to expose the learners how creative skills can translate into various career paths.

We always aim to have a variety of people from different career paths so that each session leaves the learners more informed and inspired than the last. Because Room 13 is an arts-based programme, there is a heavy focus on creative careers.

■ **How can we get involved?**

There are so many ways to support Room 13, depending on one's capacity.

For those who prefer to donate; you could make Room 13 a beneficiary on your Woolworths MySchool card or donate via our [backabuddy account](#) or sponsor a skills workshop.

Another way would be to support the business of Room 13 by purchasing their canvas art and drawings some of which have been turned into postcards and t-shirts.

Or one could expand the boundaries of Room 13 by hosting a Sketch Day at their office or by even donating their time to inspire the learners. You can also contact us on for a more tailored engagement.

You can also follow Room 13 on the following social media platforms: [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#). Click through to the TBWA [press office](#) for the latest updates and follow on social media: [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [LinkedIn](#).

ABOUT MAROEFAH SMITH

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