

# Buy a Bag of Hope - one way business can help SA's children succeed

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

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[Uzwelo Bags](#) was launched with the goal of making a meaningful difference in terms of the challenges South Africa's disadvantaged communities face. An Expand a Sign initiative, excess material from the textile production and printing process are upcycled into bags of all shapes and sizes - diverting what was previously discarded as waste from landfill. The project aims to upskill community members and empower them with entrepreneurial opportunities.

Among the range of bags Uzwelo designs and produces, it manufactures school bags that have a built-in poncho installed to protect children and their books from the rain as they make their way to and from school. Together with [Save the Children South Africa](#) - a development and rights-based organisation for children, Uzwelo is running a campaign inviting individuals and businesses to donate these Bags of Hope to underprivileged school children by [making a pledge](#). 10% of all the school bag proceeds will also be donated to Save the Children.



Tanya Bailey, chief operating officer at Uzwelo, and Rodney Knotts, marketing manager at Save the Children South Africa, shared with us more about the initiative, how the business community in South Africa can help, and the environmental impact the project has had so far.

## **Take us through the journey of the Uzwelo Bags initiative - when and how did it all start?**

**Tanya Bailey:** Uzwelo Bags officially launched in 2016 as an answer to a conscious need to play an active, positive and constructive role in our economy.

My family has been involved in the production and printing of textiles for the marketing, advertising and branding industries globally for many years and we know that there is an inherent waste of excess fabric that results through this production process. The opportunity to prevent waste/excess fabric from heading to landfill along with the desire to create a skills development and job creation platform amongst our own communities became reality when Uzwelo was born.

We are passionate South Africans and we want to be an active part of solutions to the economic and environmental challenges we face every day as South Africans.



Tanya Bailey, chief operating officer, Uzwelo

## ***Tell us more about the Uzwelo & Save the Children campaign and how South Africa's business community can help?***

**Rodney Knotts:** Each year thousands of children enter “big school” (Grade 1) for the first time. Sadly, almost 50% of these children won’t make it to Grade 12. There are many contributing factors for those who make it to high school, including a lack of resources. The reality is that these pupils are walking long distances, carrying their belongings in plastic bags. When their possessions get ruined by rain, it leaves children frustrated and disillusioned, and often prevents them from reaching their full potential.

Through the Uzwelo / Save the Children partnership, we hope to ease the burden of children in communities across South Africa. The Bags of Hope campaign is just that - we are delivering hope and a practical solution to a problem that is easily solved. An investment in a child’s education is an investment in our country’s future. It is critical that businesses (and individuals) see this and invest in a solution that will benefit hundreds of passionate, determined children.

By purchasing Uzwelo school bags from the Save the Children collection, South Africans can help us provide more children in need with a durable backpack that is kitted out with a built-in poncho that covers the bag and protects them in the rain. It sounds so simple, but it is in these small steps that our society can make giant strides.



Rodney Knotts, marketing manager, Save the Children South Africa

### **■ Why the focus on school bags?**

**Knotts:** School bags are essential for any school-going child in South Africa. It is a simple solution to a problem facing millions of children. We don’t have exact numbers, but we witness children carrying textbooks in plastic packets or torn bags on a daily basis. The damage caused to textbooks cost families and schools financially. A weather-resistant bag is vital to the durability and longevity of textbooks and stationery.

Not so long ago, I met a young girl who worked all night on a history essay and on her way to school the next day it started to rain. The torn bag she used to take her books to school could not protect her essay. She said the rain didn’t just wash away her essay, it dampened her dreams of becoming an anthropologist one day.

**Bailey:** There is an enormous education challenge faced by school-going children of South Africa. Education is either

inaccessible due to locations of schools and the vast distances learners have to cover to get there in all kinds of weather conditions, never mind the limitations of the facilities of the schools once they do get there. Most rural children do not have access to the basic requirements for a successful day at school and we really felt very strongly that we could assist in giving them a tool/bag that would encourage them to attend school and protect them at the same time. We believe that education is key in creating future entrepreneurs and active participation and support of our own economy.



■ ***How much waste is Expand a Sign now diverting from landfill through the Uzwelo Bags initiative and what sort of environmental impact does that have?***

**Bailey:** Expand a Sign produces an estimated 85,000m of fabric every month. Whilst our waste is kept to a minimum of 3-5% of this, that still amounts to approximately 5,000m a month, which we are now diverting from landfill. Our fabric is printed with natural inks which are environmentally friendly, but what really struck us is the opportunity cost of not seeing this waste recycled and made into other products.

■ ***What are the goals with the Uzwelo & Save the Children campaign?***

**Knotts:** Our partnership aims to provide 50,000 children with durable bags that will last them throughout the academic journey - and we won't stop until we reach our goal. We aim to keep children in school and let them know that the country (including businesses in South Africa) are rooting for them. We want to them shine and contribute to our economy.

[Click here](#) to pledge school bags. For more information on Uzwelo Bags and the Save the Children campaign, go to [www.uzwelo.co.za](http://www.uzwelo.co.za).

## ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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