

Bursary Support Programme – Optimi Workplace & University of Johannesburg

Bridging the Funding Gap: Optimi Workplace's Commitment to the 'Missing Middle'

In South Africa, education remains one of the most powerful tools for economic mobility and national development. While the government has made significant strides in supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), a substantial group of students—the 'missing middle'—continues to face financial barriers to higher education. These students do not qualify for NSFAS funding but still cannot afford tertiary education without assistance.

Optimi Workplace recognizes this critical gap and is committed to collaborating with various stakeholders to develop creative solutions that ensure these students are not left behind. Access to education should not be a privilege determined by financial status but a right that empowers young South Africans to reach their full potential.

Aunyana Moloisane, the Managing Director of Optimi Workplace, is making a call to corporate South Africa to step up and collaborate in finding sustainable solutions to fund the 'missing middle.' His passion lies in unlocking the potential of South Africa's youth and ensuring it plays a meaningful role in both the domestic and global economies. "Our young people are our greatest asset. If we do not invest in them, we are failing not only them but the future of our country," he emphasizes.

Optimi Workplace believes that with strategic partnerships among corporates, higher education institutions, and other stakeholders, we can create innovative funding mechanisms to bridge this gap. This initiative is not just about financial assistance; it also aims to foster an ecosystem that nurtures talent, skills development, and economic inclusion.

Student Testimonial

The impact of this venture is far reaching and is felt mostly by the students whose lives are changed. Most of the students who cannot get funding, drop out of university and

are further marginalized from the economy. Optimi Workplace is not just addressing an academic problem, but an even bigger socio-economic issue of inequality, unemployment and poverty. One of the students who was a beneficiary of this programme is Vukona Gavin Mbhalati, from rural Limpopo, and this is his testimonial:

“I come from a small village called Guwela, in Giyani, Limpopo. Growing up in a rural area, I always had big dreams of pursuing a career in hospitality, but I knew that the road ahead would not be easy. Education has always been my priority, and through hard work and determination, I was able to obtain my first qualification. However, I knew I wanted to further my studies to create better opportunities for myself. That’s when I pursued my Advanced Diploma in Hospitality Management at the University of Johannesburg, making this my second qualification. While my academic journey was rewarding, it also came with significant financial struggles.

The university assisted me with R25,000 towards my fees, but I was still left with an outstanding balance of R10,810. Coming from a humble background, I had no means to pay this amount, and without settling my debt, I wouldn’t be able to graduate or collect my certificate. Then, something incredible happened Optimi Workplace stepped in and changed my life. When I was selected as a sponsorship recipient, I was overwhelmed with gratitude. At the time, I had no plan or means to pay off my debt, and Optimi became the miracle I had been praying for. Their support lifted a huge burden off my shoulders and gave me the opportunity to finally see my hard work pay off.

Today, I am proud to say that I will be able to collect my certificate on graduation day. This moment means everything to me because it represents the sacrifices, dedication, and perseverance that have brought me this far. I am deeply thankful to God, the Optimi staff, and my parents for their unwavering support throughout this journey. Optimi Workplace is not just helping students—they are transforming lives and opening doors to brighter futures. My hope is that they continue to extend this opportunity to others who, like me, are determined to succeed but face financial barriers. Their generosity has made a lasting impact on my life, and I will forever be grateful.”



The University of Johannesburg (UJ) stands out as a like-minded partner that shares this strong commitment to empowering South Africa's youth. Optimi Workplace extends its gratitude to UJ and Vice-Chancellor, Prof Letlhokwa Mpedi, for their unwavering dedication to student success and its willingness to collaborate on solutions that drive meaningful change. Partnerships like these, when approached with intention and purpose, have the power to reshape the future of our country. By investing in the missing middle, we are investing in South Africa's long-term economic prosperity and social cohesion. The time for action is now—together, we can change the face and fortunes of our nation.