

Ezlyn Barends

"Courage helped me to step into my potential. I think everybody has the potential to be great, but it takes courage to actually heed to the call." - Ezlyn Barends



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21 ICONS featured its 15th icon of the third season: 31-year-old, Ezlyn Barends, an impact entrepreneur and founder of the South African chapter of DreamGirls International.

Driven by a passion to introduce underprivileged youth to opportunities, the *21 ICONS* short-film will showcase how Barends' Father established the Dad Fund (in honour of Daniel Arthur Douman (DAD) who was an outstanding community leader and mentor to him which inspired Ezlyn to follow in his footsteps on the principle of giving back and helping others. Through the Dad Fund she created DreamGirls, a sisterhood of young female professionals, entrepreneurs and leaders who actively mentor and guide teenage girls in underprivileged communities to be successful in their pursuit of higher education, and life in general.

Barends has been selected for *21 ICONS* South Africa Season III for empowering young girls to attend university and obtain higher education and increase the amount of high school diplomas and tertiary qualifications acquired by under-represented schoolgirls as a means to contribute meaningfully to society.

On her selection as an icon she comments, "Success for me is not a destination. It's a process. Knowing who you are, where you are going, and progressively moving towards it, that is success."

After working in the advertising, events and publicity arenas, at the age of 25, she did not feel fulfilled and questioned her life purpose. In July 2010, she decided to follow her calling to have a positive impact on society by assisting with youth

education and entrepreneurship. She established DreamGirls, a self-outcome based, capacity building enrichment programme for girls and young women.

During a portrait sitting she says, "When you are educated you are free. If we really want to take this country places - because we have all of the components to be exceptionally great - we need to educate our young people and set them on a new trajectory."

Her dream has always been to mentor teen girls and transfer skills and knowledge to enable them to become successful in their pursuit of higher education and their future and build their self-confidence and self-belief.

Barends, who holds an MBA from Henley Business School (UK), a certificate in Impact Investing from Oxford University and a Bachelor in Business Administration from the IMM Graduate School of Marketing, believes education is the pillar of society, and the means by which the cycle of poverty can be broken and society transformed.

About the portrait

For the portrait '*Higher Self*' Van Wyk describes the visual elements, "Seated at a wooden school-desk below a blown-up, projected image of herself, Barends is photographed looking past the camera lens, seemingly imagining her future success. Representing the enormous possibilities that can come about through education, the portrait embodies Barends' work to uplift and assist young women in their pursuit of higher education."

She concludes by saying, "I see opportunity in the youth of South Africa. Because of the spaces that I work in, I'm surrounded by visionaries, change makers and the leaders of tomorrow, and I really do believe that we are going to bring a new energy to this country. We are a nation of activists, we don't take anything lying down. We are friendly, we work together and we believe in the spirit of community."

View the video

About 21 Icons Season 3

The short film-series documents the conversations between Gary Van Wyk as the photographer and filmmaker and the icons. Each short film provides insight into both the subject and photographer's creative approach to the portrait.

Behind each portrait lies a carefully planned concept that captures not only the essence of each icon visually, but also in spirit and in terms of their unique legacy.

Season three of 21 ICONS South Africa is proudly sponsored by Mercedes-Benz South Africa.

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