



FLYING HIGH: Jacobus shows off super skills
Pics by JACK LESTRADE

OPPORTUNITY: Kagisho, from Khayelitsha, got the chance to change his life

LUCKY: Jacobus Classen



CIRCUS OF LIFE

A CHANCE encounter with some Cape Town acrobats has propelled this local boy from homeless teenager to professional circus performer.

Five years ago, Jacobus Classen, 19, was barely surviving on the streets of Paarl.

Then one day he stumbled upon an outreach programme called Second Chance run by the Zip Zap Circus School, an organisation established by trapeze artist Brent van Rensburg and his wife.

"I met the people from Zip Zap while I was staying in a hostel for homeless kids. I used to do tumblers and things like that so I thought I would try out the acrobatics in this Second Chance programme. My life has been different ever since," says Jacobus.

Today, Jacobus is living in Zip Zap's residence halls in Cape Town while he continues his circus education.

He has just returned from Paris, France, where he was involved in the opening performance of *Cirque du Demail*, the top circus competition in the world.

Lucky

And he is preparing to travel to Wales, where he will take part in shows in July linked to the 2012 Olympic Games.

"I never thought I could do something like this," Jacobus admits.

"Zip Zap has taken me to a place most homeless children never get the chance to go. I know I am very lucky and I want to make the most of this opportunity."

Brent founded Zip Zap Circus School in 1992.

Since then it has offered thousands of children from all

EXCLUSIVE BY
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walks of life the chance to learn the art of circus performance – free of charge.

Based in the *Forshore* in Cape Town, children from some of the city's poorest and richest areas can come together at their big top tent to learn the art of acrobatics, trapeze and other circus-related skills.

"Here we also help to break down the racial barriers," Brent says.



SECOND CHANCES: Zip Zap's founder Brent van Rensburg



TALENT: Kagisho Muthlane

Street kid now a travelling acrobat

"Everyone is treated the same and the kids have to learn to trust each other because when you are performing acrobatics, your life is very often in the hands of other people."

Professional

Jacobus' good luck story is not an isolated one.

To date, Zip Zap can be accredited with turning a growing number of kids from Cape townships into professional circus performers.

Kagisho Muthlane, 25, grew

up in Khayelitsha and has been involved with Zip Zap since 1997.

He is now a professional acrobat and trapeze artist and has taken part in shows across Europe for the past four years.

"I was very young [age 10] when I got involved with Zip Zap and I think they have saved my life. Many of my friends growing up have got involved with drugs, gone to prison and even been killed by gangsters," he says.

"I would probably have ended up like them."