

FUEL THE FUTURE:

HOW SOZO IS BREAKING DOWN WALLS IN VRYGROND

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INTRODUCTION

In Vrygrond, Cape Town, a single wall separates two very different worlds.

On one side is Vrygrond, a community of over 55,000 people with no high school, no clinic, no police station and very few formal services. It is heavily affected by gangsterism, extortion and high youth unemployment.

On the other side is a thriving business park – one of the most sought after commercial and light industrial hubs in the south of Cape Town.

My recent visit to the Sozo Foundation, an Alquity Foundation partner, showed how a focused, community led organisation is literally and figuratively crossing that wall – and why that matters for our investors.

WHO ARE SOZO?

Around 15 years ago, Anton Cuyler and his wife Ilana (founders of Sozo) returned to South Africa from the UK, determined to “go one inch wide and six feet deep” in one community to make a difference.

They started with a single shipping container in Vrygrond. Today, Sozo runs:

- An after-school education centre, helping keep learners in school and supporting their success despite under-resourced, overcrowded schools.
- A leadership programme (eMERGE), building confidence and agency among teenagers growing up in violent, highly volatile environments.
- A cluster of vocational skills programmes (barista training, artisanal baking, beauty and wellness), designed to feed into real market demand.

Demand speaks for itself: Sozo’s skills school now receives around 700 applications a year for just 160 places, even after restricting intake to students living within one taxi ride of the centre.



Suresh conducting a Transforming Lives panel with some of Sozo’s beneficiaries



SOZO runs a cluster of vocational skills programmes, such as barista training and other hospitality skills

THE NEED THEY ARE ADDRESSING

Sozo operates in a context of:

- 50–60% youth unemployment nationally.
- Over 50% of school learners dropping out before the final year.
- Deeply entrenched gang and extortion economies in Vrygrond.
- High levels of chronic trauma and mental health strain.

Their response is to treat youth not as a risk factor, but as the primary solution by:

- Implementing group-based mental health and resilience work, equipping young people with tools for self-regulation and peer support.
- Investing in staff wellbeing, recognising that those working with trauma also need structured care.
- Working toward community-level change: significantly fewer riots, more stable local leadership, and young people from gang-affected families now acting as breadwinners.



Suresh with the team, including Ilana and Anton, founders of Sozo

SCALING THE WALL: FROM TOWNSHIP TO BUSINESS PARK

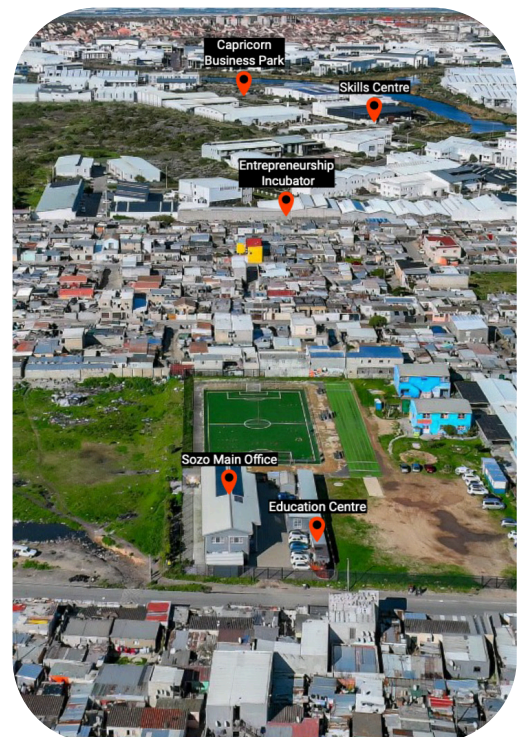
Historically, businesses in the neighbouring park refused to hire locally - “they’re all gangsters” was the stereotype. Most Vrygrond youth had never set foot inside the park, despite living next door.

Sozo’s strategy was to take their training directly into the business park. They began by renting space and running their coffee school and other hospitality skills programmes there. To overcome initial fears, they registered students as staff interns, complete with ID badges and security clearance, just to enter the park. Over time, by operating quietly and professionally, they earned the trust of the park’s businesses.

FIVE YEARS ON...

Sozo has moved from tenant to landlord, owning multiple premises in the park. They are building a hospitality skills campus – effectively a “mini university” for vocational training.

Alumni are not only getting jobs in cafés, hotels and bakeries across Cape Town; some have started their own businesses and are now employing other local youth. In practical terms, Sozo has turned a hard boundary into a functional bridge between a marginalised community and a thriving economic hub.



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FUEL THE FUTURE AND ALQUITY'S ROLE

Through the Alquity Virtuous Circle, we donate 10% of our revenues (not profits) to the Alquity Foundation, which funds high-impact projects for people excluded from economic growth. The Sozo Foundation, identified and supported in partnership with Empower and the Alquity Transforming Lives Foundation, is a flagship example.

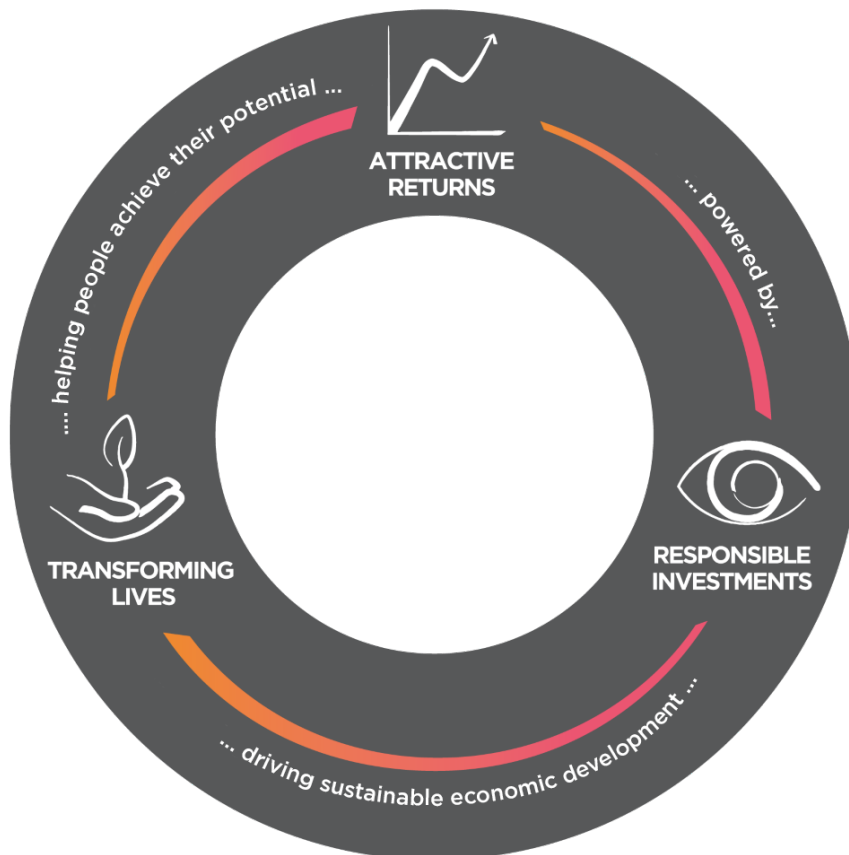
Our current support is focused on "Fuel the Future" - expanding the hospitality and coffee house ecosystem that links Vrygrond youth to real jobs and enterprise. The initiative aims not just to train individuals, but to seed a hyper-local economic ecosystem where previously unemployed young people become employers, not just employees. Sozo will train 48 barista students, employ 4 interns and 4 baristas, and provide workplace exposure to over 100 youth, alongside digital literacy support and mentoring.

In short, Sozo shows what happens when you combine local leadership, long-term partnerships and targeted capital: walls come down, opportunities open up, and a generation once written off as a "problem" becomes a powerful part of the solution.

Funding: \$32,000

Alquity's support will provide:

- Training for 48 barista students
- Employ 4 interns and 4 baristas
- Workplace exposure to over 100 youth
- Digital literacy support and mentoring



NOTICE:
(TUTORS/STUDENTS)
FORGET TO SIGN
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transformation