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UCT student's initiative makes parenting pets a walk in the park



Vuthlarhi Shirindza

Photo: Supplied

University of Cape Town (UCT) student Vuthlarhi Shirindza understands that being a parent to a fur baby is one heck of a demanding task. So, she developed a one-stop virtual pet shop that makes parenting pets a walk in the park.

With Chewi, an application-based veterinary telemedicine platform, pet parents can relax. Now, everything their four-legged babies need is available at the click of a button – from virtual pet consultations to value-added services like pet walking and training, and food purchases.

“At Chewi, we understand that pet parents have a lot to worry about – there are like a dozen points to tick off on that to-do list. We want to make things easier for them,” said Shirindza.

The fourth-year medical student is one of UCT's three Entrepreneurship Intervarsity regional final winners. She will progress to the final round of the competition in Johannesburg in November.

A first of Africa

The Chewi concept is a first of its kind for South Africa and the continent, and Shirindza said she is excited that her business is leading the way for the pet care industry in Africa.

She has big plans to take Chewi to new heights. Apart from the everyday services like virtual veterinary consultations and pet walking, Chewi also offers dog training. This service forms part of the start-up's community outreach initiatives. The programme encourages youth participation and has been developed to keep youth off the streets.

"This is a great initiative and we're targeting youth in marginalised communities to teach them new skills that they wouldn't pick up in a hurry elsewhere. It also gives them something to do after school and keeps them away from bad influences," she said. So far, Chewi has recruited several youth from Langa in Cape Town to participate in the programme.

Peace of mind

Shirindza said she has two primary goals for her business: to make pet parents' lives easier by providing everything they need in a simple and accessible way; and creating jobs for those who've been affected by the country's high levels of unemployment.

"We love and care so much for our four-legged friends, and we know you do too. In a demanding world where you can find just about everything online, we thought that it was high time that we do the same for pets," she said. "We'd love to become the leading e-commerce platform for the pet industry in South Africa."

On the upcoming Entrepreneurship Intervarsity competition final, Shirindza said she is beaming with excitement and counting down the days until the competition. She said the event demonstrates the undeniable skill of young South Africans and highlights that entrepreneurship holds "great potential" for the youth.

"Entrepreneurship is a driving force and leading Africa towards a thriving future. As young entrepreneurs, we are the ones solving Africa's problems and this allows us to create sustainable financial ecosystems for ourselves, our families and our communities," Shirindza said.

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