



Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed guests, learners, and respected parents, along with the distinguished principal and staff members of RECS,

I am truly honored to stand before you today at this Heritage Event, where we come together to celebrate the rich tapestry of our history and the connections that transcend time and space. We gather here, not just as individuals from different backgrounds, but as a united community that bridges the gap between continents, connecting us from the United States of America to the heart of South Africa. Today, I'd like to share with you an extraordinary journey, a story that embodies collaboration, firm dedication, and a profound commitment to positive change. It's a story that revolves around three fundamental questions: How did we get here? What is our contribution as Amanzi2schools? And why this partnership?

The journey of Amanzi2schools began in January 2022 when we forged a connection with the Riebeeck East Combined School, affectionately known as RECS. But why RECS, you might wonder? AMANZI had received glowing reports about the exceptional leadership of Principal Thobile Ncula and the resolute dedication of RECS teachers and the School Governing Body. From the very beginning, it was evident that this partnership was destined for greatness.

AMANZI's visionary founder, Julia Heemstra, embarked on a voyage of exploration, engaging in extensive discussions with Mr. Ncula and later with the school's staff and the School Governing Body. Their collective vision was to establish a sustainable plan for a water and sanitation system at RECS. What followed was a lightning of action. Within a matter of weeks, Sawyer water filters were provided for each classroom, ensuring that the learners had access to purified drinking water. Handwashing buckets were swiftly introduced, reinforcing the critical importance of hygiene, a lesson underscored by the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

But our mission didn't stop there. In 2022, we undertook the significant task of expanding the school's water storage capacity from 2,500 liters to an impressive 15,000 liters. This achievement was made possible by installing a 10,000-liter tank and repairing an additional 2,500-liter tank. Moreover, a pump was installed to provide running water to the school kitchen and classroom sinks, further enhancing the school's facilities.

In 2023, Julia returned to Riebeeck East to further develop the water and sanitation system plan. Inspired by a visit to a school with waterless toilets in Makhanda, Principal Ncula and the school's stakeholders decided to transition to waterless toilets. The aging existing toilet blocks were slated for

demolition and replacement. In a commitment to sustainability, we introduced a rainwater harvesting system, necessitating extensive repairs and upgrades to the school's infrastructure.

Through Julia's tireless efforts, AMANZI forged a partnership with Natural Homes/NES Consults, a company specializing in carbon-negative concrete made from invasive plant species, for the construction of environmentally friendly toilet blocks. The project required meticulous planning, and Julia tirelessly fundraised a total of R1.8 million to bring this vision to life.

Funding was secured in April 2023, and on June 26, 2023, the ground was officially broken. The project, a testament to vision and hard work, was completed on August 1, 2023, marking a remarkable transformation. You can witness this incredible journey through a slideshow available on the AMANZI homepage at [Amanzi.life](http://Amanzi.life).

But why did we choose this particular path? What drove AMANZI to make these choices? The answer lies in our unwavering commitment to environmental sustainability. We recognize that water security in the Eastern Cape is increasingly threatened by climate change. Therefore, AMANZI has pledged to utilize climate-smart technology and explore innovative approaches to minimize our impact on the planet. This commitment led us to proudly become a 1% for the Planet Environmental Partner in 2023, aligning our mission with other organizations working tirelessly for climate justice, indigenous land rights, and environmental education.

Ladies and gentlemen, it's crucial to emphasize that AMANZI's partnership with RECS is far from over. Beyond water and sanitation improvements, we have collaborated with additional funders and organizations to enhance the staff room, provide a security cage for safety, and improve the playground. Our mission is to create the optimal learning environment for the promising learners of Riebeeck East Combined School, standing as a beacon of hope and inspiration for our entire Riebeeck East community.

In closing, let this story serve as a moving reminder that positive change is attainable when individuals and organizations unite with a shared vision and an unwavering commitment to making a difference. AMANZI's journey with RECS exemplifies the power of partnership and underscores the paramount importance of environmental stewardship in shaping a sustainable future.

Thank you for granting me the privilege of sharing this remarkable story with you today. May it serve as a source of inspiration, motivating each one of us to seek out opportunities for positive change in the world. I leave you with two profound quotes that remind us of our shared responsibility:

"If you really think that the environment is less important than the economy, try holding your breath while you count your money." - Guy McPherson

"We are the first generation to feel the sting of climate change, and we are the last generation that can do something about it." - Jay Inslee