

Preserving Historical Stories and Celebrating 67 Minutes

By Life Sithole

26 July 2025

On 18 July 2025, the Gauteng Provincial Archives, under the Gauteng Department of Sport, Arts, Culture and Recreation, hosted a significant community event at the Kagiso Archives, near the Kagiso Police Station. The gathering celebrated both International Archives Day and Nelson Mandela Day, bringing together government officials, community members, and local organisations to recognise the value of record preservation and community service.

International Archives Day was established by the International Council on Archives (ICA) to raise awareness about the importance of preserving and managing records. This year's event in Kagiso highlighted the crucial role that information integrity plays in today's institutions and communities. It was not only about libraries, museums, or government offices, but about every space that produces, stores, and depends on documentation. Whether in private companies, NGOs, health facilities, or schools, the questions raised were universal: Are we keeping what matters? Can we find it when we need it? Can we trust that it is accurate, untouched, and properly preserved?

To mark the occasion, the Gauteng Provincial Archives partnered with the Mogale City Fire Department for a Mandela Day activity. Together, they dedicated their 67 minutes to cleaning and restoring the area around the archives repository. Overgrown trees were trimmed, and waste that had accumulated outside the building was removed. The rubbish dumps had become breeding grounds for pests such as mice, termites, and cockroaches, natural enemies of paper records. Through this joint cleanup, the archives department demonstrated its commitment not only to environmental care but also to protecting historical records and promoting information integrity.

Sizwe Mbuyisa, a staff member at the Kagiso Archives, expressed pride in how the event unfolded. "We were thrilled to see so many people and organisations participate," he said. "Archives Day aims to raise awareness about the importance of preserving and managing records. Every year, institutions across the world share stories about their collections, new digitisation efforts, and innovative methods for managing information. It's not just a day for national libraries or government offices, it's for everyone who deals with documentation that must be retained, accessed, and protected."

Mbuyisa added that he hoped the event would continue to grow each year, attracting more participants and building public understanding of archives as living centres of memory and heritage.

Among the young people who attended was 21-year-old Banele Metwa, a resident of Swaneville and a member of the Young Minds Art Project. For Metwa, the day was both educational and inspiring. "The event was great and very helpful for me," he said. "I learned a lot about archives, that they are government facilities responsible

for collecting, organising, and safely storing important records. I didn't know how much goes into keeping our history alive."

Metwa also shared his appreciation for being part of the Mandela Day cleanup with the firefighters. "It was good teamwork," he said. "Helping to cleanup the space made me feel like I was contributing to protecting the place that keeps our community's history."

Another participant, 23-year-old Jotasi Hlongo from Kagiso, described the event as eye-opening. "Before attending, I didn't really know what an archive was," she admitted. "This day gave us the opportunity to visit the archives, spend our 67 minutes doing community work, and attend a workshop that explained the significance of archives as places of memory."

Hlongo said she was surprised to discover how archives differ from libraries. "At first, I thought they were the same," she explained. "But I learned that while a library is mainly a space for reading and research that changes with time, an archive remains constant. It captures and preserves documents, photographs, and other records that tell the story of events, people, and communities. It keeps the evidence of where we come from."

For Hlongo, the archives now represent a valuable community resource. "I see it as a good place for students to study, for ordinary people to store important documents, and for artists or researchers to explore their community's past," she said. "Many people don't realise that we have such places where we can keep records about ourselves and our surroundings. These archives can help future generations understand their roots and their history."

She left an important message for others: "The archives serve as both a library and a museum, a space of story-keeping and storytelling. It's unfortunate that many people in our communities don't know about them, but they exist, and they are open to us. I encourage everyone to learn about archives and how to use them. It's part of learning how to research our own stories."

The event's success lay not only in its educational focus but also in its spirit of collaboration and service. By merging the celebration of International Archives Day with Mandela Day's 67 minutes of community service, the Kagiso Archives team created a meaningful connection between record preservation and active citizenship.

As the cleanup concluded and participants gathered for closing remarks, there was a shared sense of pride. The once littered and overgrown area around the archives had been transformed, symbolising the importance of taking care of the spaces that safeguard history.

In celebrating both heritage and community, the Gauteng Provincial Archives reminded everyone that archives are not just buildings filled with files, they are living repositories of memory. They preserve the footprints of communities, institutions, and individuals, ensuring that stories are not lost but carried forward.

By dedicating their 67 minutes to caring for the Kagiso Archives, the participants honoured Mandela's legacy of service and reinforced the message that preserving the past is also an act of building the future.

This article is an opinion piece submitted on 31 August 2025. The views expressed by the author do not necessarily reflect those of Karibu! Online or Khanya College. You may republish this article, so long as you credit the authors and Karibu! Online (www.Karibu.org.za), and do not change the text. Please include a link back to the original article.