

PE-born actor draws on own circumcision in local drama

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A HARD-WORKING Nelson Mandela Bay actor is showing that it takes a lot of "soul" to make it big on South African television.

Siyanda Sesimani, 22, who was born and raised in the city, has landed one of the lead roles in the new series of the edutainment drama, *Soul City*, now in its 11th season.

Sesimani is cast in the role of Mandla, a young man who has to make the choice between traditional circumcision or medical male circumcision (MMC).

Sesimani, a former Gelvandale Primary School pupil, lived with his grandmother in Kwazakhele before moving to Johannesburg to join his parents in 2003.

"I faced similar challenges to those Mandla faces in the series.

"I love tradition and before I went for my traditional circumcision in 2009, there were people whose opinions mattered to me who tried to persuade me not to

go," he said. The series forms a central part of the Soul City Institute's ongoing OneLove Campaign, a social change campaign focused on preventing HIV.

The 11th series focuses on male circumcision and prevention of mother-to-child transmission.

A spokesman said: "The Soul City Institute encourages MMC in order to reduce the risk of HIV infection and would like to see a coming together of the rites of passage

Sesimani, a second-year BCom Law student at Unisa, said had he not become an actor he would have pursued a professional soccer career. However his decision was virtually made for him after his teacher at North View High School in Johannesburg spotted his acting abilities.

"I once represented the u-13 Eastern Province soccer team. Now soccer is a hobby.

"*Soul City* comes as a break for me. Prior to this I did some theatre acting. I auditioned for seven years and finally made it," he said.

"I get to act along legends like Dumisane Mbebe, Leleti Khumalo and Florence Masebe. I learn a lot from them and they are always ready to assist.

"I never saw myself acting alongside them. It is an honour to work with them – and a huge learning curve."

Sesimani believes if it was not for the support and belief of his agent, Kimberleigh Stark, his lucky break would not have come.

Soul City can be seen on SABC1 at 8.30pm every Tuesday.



ACTING DREAM: Port Elizabeth-born Siyanda Sesimani (left), who plays Mandla, with fellow actors Dumisani Mbebe (Malusi) and Robert Mpisi (Sam) from *Soul City*

PHOTOGRAPH: RUPHIN COUDYZER

of the traditional male circumcision and the full medical male circumcision.

"Both young males, Mandla and his brother, Sam (played by Robert Mpisi) have undergone the procedure according to their acting role and so they are aptly equipped to play their parts."