

sefa DRIVES **ARCL FUEL** BUSINESS VENTURE



Photographs: Tendai Mhlanga; Sefa.



Ashleigh Robin Barlow is a 26-year-old lady businesswoman, born and raised in the hot and semi-arid town of Kimberley in the Northern Cape province. She's the owner/director of ARCL Enterprises (Pty) Ltd, a fuel supplying company that is now a force to reckon with in the logistics arena.

After toiling for some time as an accountant, doing books for various businesses. Lady luck fell on her lap when one client advised her to dabble into the transport business given her solid accounting background.

"I met one of my clients who owns and operates a fleet of fuel tankers and after doing his books it became apparent that sitting behind a desk is not the future, I envisioned for myself anymore".

"ARCL was established in 2019 when this big, big dream I had started taking shape. I applied for a wholesale licence to be able to supply fuel on a larger scale and it was approved shortly after," said Barlow.

After all the paperwork and red tape had been overcome, it was time for real business to start, and she needed finance to purchase her first bulk tanker and resume trade.

"The biggest obstacle I faced then followed, in order to transport the fuel, I needed a fuel tanker which as you can imagine that does not come cheap".

Luckily for her Small Enterprise Finance Agency (SEFA) has an office in Kimberley which is very close to her home. sefa is an entity of the Department of Small Business Development and is mainly involved

with the funding aspect of Small Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) as well as Co-operatives and individual business seeking seeding capital.

"I shared my dreams and plans with the most helpful people and submitted a detailed business plan with a guarantee of possible returns and a growth in future" she added.

She resigned from her daily accounting job and focused on her new trucking businesses once her Small Enterprise Finance Agency application was approved.

"A R4.5M loan was granted early 2022 and I purchased a brand-new truck and tanker in May last year. After about a month of administration regarding licencing, registration, certification, safe-loading and induction ARCL started operations in August 2022".

"ARCL has been operational for the better part of a year, and it still feels so surreal. Agencies like sefa are making all the difference to small businesses and their development in this country" added Barlow.

Barlow has been advised to repay her loan in affordable instalments and that a successful repayment pay could lead to her credit facilities being extended to allow her to purchase a second tanker within a short space of time.

"The only suggestion I would possibly make is to move the process to an online platform to increase efficiency and I would highly recommend to anyone hoping to start a business or to improve upon an existing venture to contact DSBD and sefa," said Barlow.