

# Partners make learning possible

SUMMER JACOBS

The country's education system is often described as being in crisis. This is scary considering how important a decent education is, especially in today's South Africa.

Not shying away from the crippling problems most schools face in the country, a Durbanville woman has made it her mission to aid schools by creating a programme tailor-made to each school's needs.

The Partners for Possibility programme (PFP) was created by Louise van Rhyn in 2010.

The programme partners business leaders with principals to improve the schools' education outcomes and to date it has benefited more than 373 schools across the region.

Ms Van Rhyn, who worked as a business consultant in the United Kingdom, said she first became aware of the schools' needs when she returned home.

"I started helping at Kan-nemeyer Primary School in Grassy Park and realised that many principals are never trained or prepared for their jobs as managers of a school which is a very complex organisation. With the help of Kan-nemeyer's principal, Ridwan Samodien, and many other principals, colleagues and industry specialists, we designed PFP to help a school at its heart which is the management, then circle wider to include the



■ Sophakama Primary School's principal, Sabelo Makubalo.

staff, community and children," said Ms Van Rhyn.

Once partnered, the principal and business leader embark on a year-long journey of formal training.

"It includes structured leadership training, mentorship and help. After that we help successful partnerships to continue, but without requiring them to pay PFP. At a recent celebration in Cape Town, where 10 partnerships celebrated the end of their year's training, they all surprised us by presenting their three to five year visions and programme for further help. I believe once a partnership has tasted suc-



■ Pupils play on a jungle gym donated to the school.

cess and the rewarding feeling of working to improve a child's future, there is no stopping them," said Ms Van Rhyn.

An example of such a partnership is that between Sophakama Primary School's principal Sabelo Makubalo and Irené Raubenheimer, director of a pet gear company called Rogz.

The partnership began in 2013.

Mr Makubalo, who was still fairly new in his post at the school in Dunoon, said Mr Raubenheimer came just at the right time.

"When I was approached by PFP I immediately grabbed the opportunity because I needed the support," said Mr Makubalo.

The relationship between the two started with Sophakama's staff visiting the Rogz factory for team building and networking.

Mr Makubalo said they identified more than 20 projects that needed to be completed and these were streamlined into four main projects which included creating a literacy support group for pupils, starting a school choir and supporting pupils with special needs.

Taking Tabletalk on a walk around the school, Mr Makubalo points out further projects Mr Raubenheimer was instrumental in. He points to a large jungle gym which was donated by someone who heard about Rogz' involvement with the school. Around another corner a few pupils bounce on a trampoline donated by a Rogz client.

"Irené believes small things make a big difference. I am very

grateful for all his help," said Mr Makubalo.

Mr Raubenheimer said he chose Sophakama because a lot of Rogz's factory workers were from Dunoon.

"In our business we are linked to a lot of suppliers and customers. When they become aware of what we are doing with the school, they want to become involved," he said.

He said during this partnership he has gotten to know Mr Makubalo well and said he takes his hat off to him.

"It is easy to get overwhelmed with the crippling problems faced in townships but it's important to look for possibilities ahead of problems. I have learnt how to influence people and steer them in a direction," said Mr Raubenheimer.

Ms Van Rhyn said PFP is growing rapidly and many schools are contacting them to join the programme.

"We are also planning on expanding into new regions, such as Mpumalanga, where there are many schools who need assistance. With this in mind, we want to invite businesses and interested business leaders to make contact and learn more by visiting [www.pfp4sa.org](http://www.pfp4sa.org)."



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