

Partners for Possibility takes education forward

Business and schools see positive impact on pupils, teachers

WORKPLACE STAFF

IN RESPONSE to the continuous crisis in education in the country, Louise van Rhyn started the Partners for Possibility (PfP) programme four years ago and it has already touched 150 000 pupils and more than 7 800 teachers in South Africa.

The programme is based on the understanding that school management is a complex issue and that the principals of struggling schools find themselves in a situation where they have no one to turn to for assistance.

At the same time, there are many business leaders with skills and experience that could assist those school leaders in turning their schools around.

Partners in Education seeks to pair these principals and business



Louise van Rhyn

people in a programme that dissolves the boundary between business and education.

This creates opportunities for business leaders and educators to be in a deeply reciprocal partnership where they continuously learn from each other.

Presently, 194 business leaders have partnered with 194 principals

in schools across South Africa.

The partners come from a diverse group of companies such as Microsoft, Vodacom, Multisol, Metropolitan, JF Hillebrand, Nedbank and African Bank.

Bob Head, acting chief financial officer at Sars and a partner in the programme, maintains that the programme is a mutually beneficial situation.

“While I have seen the far-reaching benefits for the principals and schools, I have never been so immersed in a township community. I have taken people into the township who have never been there before, and they are doing more. The more this happens, the more rainbow the nation,” he says.

In the process his own influencing skills have improved. “I only have influence, no power. Imagine a business run only on influence. I am more open to other points of view. How many businesses would have that?”

The methodology for PfP is based on decades of educational and community-building research.

It is centred on the idea that mobilising community members to work together, to build better schools, creates an upward spiral of change, leading to a better quality of life and a healthier, happier and more productive country.

Traditionally, improved education and academic outcomes can take time, but the PfP programme is already starting to see dramatically improved academic results in some of the schools that got involved three years ago.

The programme includes an impressive list of endorsers: Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Professor Jonathan Jansen, Wendy Luhabe and Clem Sunter.

Trevor Manuel, minister in the Presidency, in charge of the National Planning Commission, said “The National Development Plan is all about different parts of society working with government to increase capacity.

The PfP programme is exactly what is needed to make the NDP real and take our education forward.

“I commend the initiative for what it does for education, but I also commend it for how it develops businesspeople and gets them into communities the businesspeople would not necessarily get involved with. That has to help nation building as well. Well done PfP!”

Over the last four years of working with principals and business leaders, the programme has identified the key foundational factors for change in schools: confident and energised leaders, aligned and cohesive school-management teams, energised and committed teachers, and engaged and supportive parents.

By placing schools at the centre of the community, Partners for Possibility believes that a radical transformation can be achieved in the education sector.

It is this path that will help it reach its bold vision of providing quality education for all South African children by 2022.

For more information on Partners for Possibility, contact Louise van Rhyn at louise@symphonia.net.