

TO LUVUYO, A VISIONARY AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR.



■ AIMING HIGH: Luvuyo Rani's computer company has 18 training centres in the Eastern and Western Cape. Picture: ANTON SCHOLTZ

Bitten by the entrepreneurial bug

ADELE SHEVEL

LUVUYO Rani was a teacher in Khayelitsha who enjoyed his job and loved his students, but wanted to start his own business.

He saw a growing demand for computers, so he resigned and started selling refurbished computers from the boot of his car.

He launched Silulo Ulutho Technologies in 2004, but soon realised his target market did not understand the technology. So he opened an internet café where he could give Khayelitsha residents access to the internet and where they could learn about computers.

At first, no-one came. "We realised we had recognised a market — but that the market hadn't recognised itself.

"People need technology but we were pitching to a market that simply didn't know how to use what we were offering."

He started offering training courses. At first, the courses were ad hoc — an

hour or two each day at the internet café. They eventually became more formalised and today Silulo has 18 computer centres in the Western Cape and five in the Eastern Cape, with plans to expand further and move into franchising. The centres offer training and internet access, as well as sell computers.

The centres also offer support and advice and each one has an internet café with support.

About 300 to 400 people visit the internet cafés each day.

Rani said entrepreneurship is something he has been interested in from a young age. "When I was growing up my mother used to run a shebeen. It shaped me and I wanted to do something around entrepreneurship.

"I don't think I was meant for teaching. I was much more in love with entrepreneurship. It's more about doing something no-one has done and creating employment, and the effect of technology and people

learning from us that you can start your business from nothing."

Silulo has gone from strength to strength and 3 000 students will be trained this year. Since 2007, Silulo has trained more than 12 000.

At one point the business struggled to get funding and was blacklisted. Silulo entered SAB KickStart, an entrepreneurship development programme, and won a grant.

Since then, internet provider MWeb has refurbished five centres for Silulo and cellphone network Vodacom has also entered into a partnership. The Bertha Foundation helped fund five stores.

Rani wants a presence in every province and the plan is to franchise the business by the end of the year.

"It's a huge opportunity. We see ourselves as a great distributor. When you look at rural areas and townships, people are still using old technology. There's not much about m-business [doing business using wireless

services] or e-commerce."

Rani, 38, studied at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology and got a diploma in education and technology before teaching accounting and business economics at Kwamfundo High School. He later studied management at UCT's Graduate School of Business.

What advice would he give people starting a business?

Love what you do and remember that you cannot do everything, he said. It is important to focus and do things to the best of your ability.

And dream big, he added. Rani has plans to write a book about Silulo to motivate and inspire others to be entrepreneurial.

"It's my drive to see people running their businesses."

Every six months he takes students from East London and Queenstown to help with projects in the area. Silulo hosts basic computer courses for high-school students from schools in Khayelitsha during school holidays.

Helping school heads become more effective

Partnerships for Possibility encourages involvement of the whole community

JANA MARAIS

SCHOOL principals and business leaders are joining hands to improve education and get parents and communities involved in schools across the country through an innovative, award-winning leadership development programme.

Louise van Rhyn, a businesswoman and academic with a PhD in organisational change, started the Partnerships for Possibility programme in 2010 after moving back to South Africa from the UK with her family and feeling a responsibility to use her skills and knowledge to help improve an education system in crisis.

The project partners 84 principals with business leaders from more than 50 organisations. It helps them to develop leadership skills, empower teachers and facilitate change at schools by getting parents and communities involved. It aims to reach 2 000 of the estimated 20 000 failing schools by 2017. The World Economic Forum ranks South Africa 140th out of 144 countries for the quality of its basic education.

"If you're a principal in this country and you've worked in that position for 10 years, the chances are you've had less than 10 days of quality leadership and management training in those 10 years. If you're a business leader in any of the large corporates, you would've had about 100 days of high-quality training and you would have had the opportunity to experience very high-quality leadership.

"Our principals, who we say do the most important job in South Africa, are simply not adequately equipped and supported for their task. They're being asked to do a job they don't have the knowledge and skills for, and then we wonder why they're not successful?" Van Rhyn said.

The project was started in April 2010 when Van Rhyn partnered with Ridwan Samodien, principal of Kannemeyer Primary School in Grassy Park. "I spoke to many principals about the idea and he was the first principal who was courageous enough to say yes."

It had a major effect on the school: "We've seen a dramatic increase in the levels of engagement from parents and the community. We've seen increases in academic outcomes and teachers feel more



■ MAKING PROGRESS: Louise van Rhyn with Ridwan Samodien, principal of Kannemeyer Primary School in Grassy Park, where the Partnerships for Possibility leadership development initiative started in 2010

supported. We've done some very specific structural things, so now we've got a science lab, library and reading room. We have parents who work as teachers' assistants without being paid. Parents show up to come and paint the school. There are others who cook because we've realised many of the children are hungry and can't concentrate.

"There are lots of very practical things that brought a level of energy into the school that is now resulting in positive academic outcomes," Van Rhyn said.

In Diepsloot, a principal realised that parents were partly uninvolved because many couldn't read or understand correspondence in English from the school. As a result, he started basic adult literacy classes after hours, with more than 500 parents signing up. Today, parents are paid as security guards to safeguard the computer lab.

Firstly, the project focuses on empowering the principal, to move from being de-energised and disengaged to a place where he/she can reclaim their role as a community leader.

Then, the school leadership team, the handful of people around the principal, have to buy into a vision and the need for change. "This is basic stuff for people who are in business, but it isn't for school leaders," Van Rhyn said.

Lastly, parents and the wider community have to get involved and be in agreement

on the vision for the school, which typically is not part of the culture at under-resourced, failing schools. Partnerships for Possibility focuses on.

Partnerships for Possibility facilitates the first year — business leaders pay R38 000 for the opportunity to be part of this world-class leadership programme and have to commit to at least 106 hours for the year — but it is unlikely the relationship will end there, Van Rhyn said.

"We say you get promoted from being a Partner for

'Our principals are simply not adequately equipped and supported for their task'

Possibility to a Buddy for Life. My identity is now linked to the fact that I am part of the Kannemeyer community. Ridwan and I have become friends. But we have a different kind of friendship, because I care deeply about his professional life as well as his personal life, and he doesn't have many other people who care about both," she said.

"We are discovering this programme is not just about leadership development or about schools, it's also about social cohesion and nation building. I now have a Muslim

man who lives on the Cape Flats as a close friend — it's given me the opportunity to connect into a community I wouldn't otherwise have a connection with. It's enriched our lives as a family," she said.

The project, with a long waiting list of principals, needs more business leaders to get involved. "We are a social enterprise rather than a charity, which means that we are committed to do this without being donor dependent. Business leaders who do this programme pay to be part of a world-class leadership programme," Van Rhyn said.

It also needs more funding. Partnerships for Possibility will become self-sustainable as it reaches critical mass, but it has a budget shortfall of R3.8-million this year.

The money will be used for citizen engagement and mobilising more business leaders to join the project. In addition, social change programmes need a strong monitoring and evaluation component in order to show impact to donors and this is expensive, Van Rhyn said.

If business leaders cannot make a partnership commitment, companies can contribute to the project and earn points on the broad-based black economic empowerment scorecard for socio-economic development. The programme is accredited by the University of the Western Cape and can count towards skills development points.

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