

Partners for Possibility leads education change

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A programme that has been running for only four years is taking innovation in education to new levels. Partners for Possibility, a world first, award winning and uniquely South African programme is endorsed by some of the country's most influential educational thought leaders, already touching 150 000 learners and more than 7 800 teachers in South Africa.

Partners for Possibility (PFP) is the flagship programme of Symphonia for South Africa (SSA). SSA is a national NPO & PBO, based in Bellville, Cape Town, with a bold and audacious vision: Quality education for all children in South Africa by 2022.

The PFP Programme was founded in 2010 when Louise van Rhyn (Director and Founder), became the first Business Leader to partner with a Principal in an effort to improve a school's education outcomes.

"The Pfp initiative speaks to the idea that enhancing the quality of education, improving the school environment and encouraging engagement between parents and teachers are meaningful and attainable goals that would provide an upward spiral of real change in society," says Louise van Rhyn.

"By placing the school at the centre of community we believe that a radical transformation can be achieved in the education sector."

The beauty of the programme is that it dissolves the boundary between business and education and creates opportunity for business leaders and educators to be in a deeply reciprocal partnership where they continuously learn from each other.

Currently 194 business leaders have partnered with 194 principals in schools across South Africa. 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 Pfp programme maintains that the Pfp 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 maintains, "My influencing skills have definitely 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 improved academic outcomes can take time, but the programme is already starting to see dramatically improved academic results in some of the schools that got involved in Pfp three years ago.

The programme includes an impressive list of endorsers: Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Professor Jonathan Jansen, Wendy

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Trevor Manuel, Minister in the Presidency in charge of the National Planning Commission says, "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 the initiative for how it develops business people and gets them into communities those business people would not necessarily get involved with. That has to help nation building as well. Well done PFP."

Professor Brian O'Connell, a PFP patron maintains "It is clear that we all underestimate just how deeply our history has hurt people and institutions, but if our country is to have any chance of transcending that hurt and if our people are to take full ownership of our future then our schools must lead the way.

"I believe that Partners for Possibility has it right and that partnership with our leaders in this critical venture, our principals, will create a new environment and release the kind of positive, confident energy, supported by knowledge that will put us on a new path. I support this project unconditionally and hope sincerely that the project will be supported: for all of our sakes."

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 energized leaders, aligned and cohesive school management teams, energized 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 on (021) 913 3507 or louise@symphonia.net.

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