

■ Parents encouraged to be involved

Focus now on schools

GARY VAN DYK

Schools will become a major focus of empowerment in Bishop Lavis, with the launch of a major initiative at the University of the Western Cape this weekend.

Various schools and organisations from the community gathered at the School of Governance on Saturday, where some very lively discussions took place at a workshop to position schools in its rightful place, namely at the centre of the community.

One of the organisers, Quentin Newman, principal of John Ramsay Secondary School, explained the

project had been started after they were invited by the district office to take part in this initiative of the Symphonia organisation.

"Participating schools are linked to different corporates as Partners for Possibilities (PFP) with Sanlam linked to us," he said.

He pointed out the reason for the session was a broader building event to move youth away from accepting their disadvantaged circumstances through education.

Another important participant was René Wright from Sanlam Personal Finance: IT Development Application portfolio head, who has been working closely with John Ramsay school as their PFP.

She was allocated as a partner to John Ramsay's principal, to assist him and his school through the sharing of management skills and knowledge.

She facilitated the morning session at the workshop and reminded participants that this project was for the children.

"It is important to remember that as partners for possibility we as the community must avoid the downward spiral that they seem to be heading for.

"Our purpose must be to engage with them to stay positive and get them to embrace positive core values like respect, accountability and integrity, as well as the opportunity

to have fun," she said.

Another important speaker at the workshop was Ridwan Samodien, principal of Kanne Meyer Primary in Grassy Park, who became a Partner for Possibility in 2010.

He gave an overview of what difference this made in his life and his school and explained the benefits of bringing the community into the school.

"Looking back, the old Kanne Meyer story is one which says that 'parents are not involved in our school' and my PFP Dr Louise van Ryn challenged us and wanted to know how valid that story was.

"Upon reflection, we soon realised that theory was a myth we were

clinging to, as it dawned on us that there were a few parents who worked at the school – a few men and woman who wanted to make a difference and were concerned about the future of our children.

"As we set about the task of drawing the community closer, more and more citizens rose to the challenge. And so today, we can proudly claim that more parents are involved at our school. We are not yet where we want to be, I liken our journey with that of a train at the station. For me, we have just started our journey, our train has just left the station and we are on our way."

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School, community must find way together

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"So what can we show for our efforts over the last year since the inception of the project: We no longer have meetings, we call it gatherings. A gathering is a place, just like we have here today, arranged in small groups, where citizens meet and exchange ideas and share gifts, their talents.

"We deliberately structure the room in small groups, creating space for each voice to be heard, as each voice is important to us. This format, holding small grade gatherings led to our huge community building events day, simply called our Madiba Day, held on July 17 last year, in honour of our former president, held the day before his birthday and it culminated in the participants making commitments and as these commitments were harvest-

ed, we captured them and called them "Ripples for Madiba".

He also pointed out how the school's PFP introduced the school to various training and networking resources that were making a huge difference at the school.

"This resulted in a new shared vision for the school, positioning us as the 'school of choice' in Grassy Park, perhaps in years to come, the school of choice in Cape Town.

"There have been a number of initiatives making this difference that includes staying in touch with parents via SMSes, getting the parent involved with home-

work and directing them to resources available to help them, and most importantly that each learner had to do an act of kindness, before receiving one.

"We are hoping soon to be included in a character building programme, which I believe will truly transform every person at school and create ripples into the community, as our learners become the messengers spreading the values into the community.

"My call to you today is for you to rally around our schools, it is on-

ly when communities support the schools that solutions to South Africa's education crisis will emerge. These solutions will not be found in Parliament but in this very room, because the power to make of our world a better world is within your hands."

The participants at the workshop were very inspired by Samodien's information and they were divided into groups to take part in a brainstorming session.

The aim of this session was to be conscientious of all the sectors of

the Bishop Lavis community, and identify the problems in order to find solutions.

Wright said that one of the main messages that came from these sessions was creating a Bishop Lavis that is distinct from the past, identifying talents, gifts, assets and contributions.

"The aim for this session was to list possible solutions for the challenges faced by the community," she said. "Transformation is about creating the 'New'. In this session the participants were challenged to

keep a positive mindset and to think outside the box in finding alternatives.

"This resulted in a unanimous commitment at the end of the session by all attendees to meet again to carry on moving forward with the ideas. It was suggested that a vision and mission be developed for the project, so there are a lot of possibilities ahead.

"At the end of the workshop each person in the room had to write down their own commitment to the project and making a difference in the future of youth in the area."

More information from John Ramsay Secondary on 021 934 6427.



Participants at the workshop during the brainstorming session to find the way forward for learners in the area.

Photo: Gary van Dyk

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