

Partnerships can change face of education

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The Partners for Possibilities programme (P4P4SA), a South African initiative that partners principals with business leaders in their communities for support and guidance, has created its first Bloemfontein partnership. This partnership is between Thapelo Pitso, principal of St Bernard's High School and Sean Lakey, director of BRT NT LEFT Sales and Solutions.

Lakey says that he and Pitso unknowingly sat next to each other during the first P4P4SA presentation in Bloemfontein. He believes that his role in the partnership would be the catalyst in streamlining processes at the school that will allow the principal more free time to focus on important things. "We bring business skills to the school. We will for instance look at wastage and how to transform

it into something that can be profitable," says Lakey.

According to Louise van Rhyn, CEO of Symphonia: School@ the Centre of the Community program and business partner to a principal in Cape Town, most South African parents have handed over responsibility for education to the teachers at their child's school. "Most schools are under-resourced and teachers are de-energized and disengaged," says van Rhyn. "They simply don't have the resources to educate our children on their own and as a result the children suffer because they are being taught by over-worked teachers."

Principals in our education system face daily challenges and are being expected to lead major change initiatives at their schools. "But most of them are not equipped for this task," says Van Rhyn. "Here the business leaders, who have been trained for years on how to

address this situation, can be of invaluable support to principals."

In addition to the above there are wonderful examples of the business leaders creating opportunities for learners to visit their business for work shadowing opportunities. "At Kannemeyer Primary School, we recently arranged a careers evening for the Grade 7's," says Van Rhyn. "70 adults arrived to have conversations with the Grade 7's about the future."

But the partnership also comes at a price. Both the business leader and principal sign up for an accredited course in leadership that is presented in conjunction with the University of the Western Cape and the cost is R15 000 per person. Lakey and Pitso received support from SCP Polycloth Manufacturing for their course fees to the amount of R25 000. "I only need to get another R5000 together," says

Lakey, "and I think it is a wonderful opportunity for principals to earn a leadership qualification."

Education is one of the two most significant issues facing our country (as per the National Planning Commission). There are 27 000 schools in our country and only 2000 of these deliver the educational outcomes that we need. "If we don't change education around now," says Van Rhyn, "our children and grandchildren will suffer as we are fast becoming a functionally illiterate society. We believe that every sector of our society have a role to play to secure a future for OUR children."

P4P4SA's next information session is on 14 November at 10:00 at the Conference Centre of the University of the Free State South Campus. Interested business leaders or principals can contact louise@symphonia.net.