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PAUL HARRIS, FORMER CEO OF FIRSTRAND – HOW TO MAKE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON EDUCATION

May 12, 2014 [accelerate_admin](#) 0 Comment

South Africa's education system is below par. By international standards, our literacy is the lowest amongst developing countries and only 21.06% of schools have libraries. Our Maths teachers generally lack knowledge translating into only 13% of the curriculum being mastered by Grade 9s. Dropout rates after Grade 9 are high and only 35.79% of Grade 1s from 2000 matriculated with the National Senior Certificate in 2012. Youth unemployment is also high at 49.2% compared with the OECD's average of 17.1%. With this reality, Paul Harris, founder and former CEO of FirstRand has invested in a variety of educational initiatives which he highlighted at our recent Thought Leaders Breakfast on 9 May 2014.

For Paul, proactive action is required rather than more discussion about the state of education and business has good ideas and can give of their time to make a difference. 'We all want to make South Africa successful, so plant lots and lots of seeds. Many successful businesses started small in a dorm or a garage, so invest and watch it grow'.

Paul Harris' Initiatives

- **FirstRand Volunteer Programme** – this initiative was started with a single facilitator and today engages over 6 000 employees to donate their time, skills and raise funds which is matched by the firm.
- **Penryn College** – Paul is Chairman of Penryn College, a not-for-profit private school in a rural area of Mpumalanga that has achieved a 100% matric pass rate since its launch.
- **Penreach** – this is the largest teacher outreach programme in Africa, which uses the facilities and resources of Penryn College to upgrade the quality of teachers in the surrounding region. On an average weekend, 1500 teachers from the area come to Penryn for coaching to help elevate standards of education in their schools.
- **Shalamuka Foundation** - this is a funding vehicle for Penreach to overcome the need to continually find donations.
- **Click Foundation** – founded by Paul's daughter, Nicola, the Click Foundation identifies and funds innovative technology solutions which impact on education. They also fund after-school programmes which now have 6,000 young learners and 35 facilitators.
- **MXit Reach** – UkuFUNda Virtual School on MXit is an initiative designed to apply technology to help strengthen education in SA such as books available via cellphone and interactive sessions on particular subjects.

Other Projects highlighted at the event

- **Partners for Possibility**, founded by Louise van Rhyn, is a programme which matches school principals with business mentors to empower principals as change leaders in their schools.
- ASISA Academy works in the investment management and life assurance industry and aims to get graduates adapted for the working environment by partnering with corporates to provide internships.

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- [Pinotage Youth Development Academy](#) provides matriculants with critical training to enable them to get work in the wine and hospitality sectors.

Further reading

- Accelerate Cape Town's Overview of SA Education
- Performance in the SA Education System commissioned by CDE, Oct 2013
- Annual National Assessments 2011 (ANA 2011) – SA National Assessment of quality of education by assessing Grade 3 and Grade 6 language and Maths skills
- Progress in International Ready Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2011: SA Children's Reading Literacy Achievement

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