

# Telling the stories of partnerships that work

The PfP programme is making a real difference in struggling schools

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**T**HE BEST way to get a point across is via the power of storytelling, and there were some great stories told at the Inanda Club in Johannesburg last week.

The occasion was a celebration to mark the end of a year-long partnership between the principals of eight Soweto primary schools and eight Joburg business leaders.

The 16 made up Leadership Circuit 13 of the PartnersforPossibility (PfP) programme, an initiative that pairs principals of struggling schools with successful business people with the aim of getting the schools on track and setting them up for sustainable excellence.

Instead of making speeches outlining the many successes the programme has enjoyed in the five years of its existence, the organisers got the principals and their partners to speak for themselves.

Some of them delivered sophisticated presentations, PowerPoint and all; others stood unaccompanied and spoke deeply from the heart; and in one case at least, the body language on display (between a tiny black woman and a giant Afrikaner, in this case), spoke of an affection and mutual respect that made words superfluous.

In every case, the stories were of difficult circumstances alleviated

**PARTNERSHIP OF POSSIBILITY: Someluwazi Primary principal Sifiso Ntshangase (second from right) with his partner Gail Walters (in pink) at the opening of the Shout library at the school. With them are Danny K (right) and Kabelo Mabelane of Shout SA.**



through clever utilisation of limited resources and the harnessing of communities' support.

The principals, through lack of experience and specialised training, were battling to cope, and the business people were able to lend perspective and bring their experience to bear.

In return, they learnt some valuable lessons of their own on how to cope against seemingly insurmountable odds, and on how to prioritise a multitude of conflicting issues.

The practical measures taken emerged through the stories: food gardens, new buildings and renovations, educational visits and new technology are all features of those schools now, and it is the children who are benefiting.

The PartnersforPossibility programme is the brainchild of Dr Louise van Rhyn, a business con-

sultant and founder of Symphonia.

She is deeply concerned about the education system in the country and she realised that, while the leaders of the better resourced schools will typically have expert advice on tap in their school governing bodies and parent communities, the principals of the vast majority of schools in the country do not have that.

"They come into the management role straight out of the classroom and often do not have the skills required to lead effectively," she says. So, she came up with the partnership idea. "We supply training and support for each partnership, but the pair must come up with their own solutions to their own particular problems."

The programme is structured and designed to last for one year, after which the business person is no longer formally involved with

the school.

This is to promote sustainability, Van Rhyn explains. "It's not an assistance programme, it's about guiding the school leadership to identify and solve their own problems. The business leader is there to apply the lessons he or she has learnt in their world and to absorb the lessons that come with immersing themselves in a different world to their own for a year."

The programme is being rolled out nationwide, but at this stage, most of the partnerships are in the Western Cape and Gauteng.

In Gauteng, thanks to the vision of MEC for Education Panyaza Lesufi, the provincial department of education has become involved, and it funds 66 partnerships.

They are looking to expand that number this year, and PfP are always looking for business leaders who are prepared to

be involved.

The principals and business leaders involved in the Gauteng Department of Education programme will be celebrating the end of their year shortly, there are, no doubt, going to be some great stories told that night.

The schools making up Leadership Circuit 13 are:

Atamalang Primary School – principal: Andrew Ratshefola; business leader – Chris Maiketso (Monash University).

Isipho Primary School: principal – Thuli Dabula; business leader – Hendrik Lourens (Stratflow Consulting).

Leratong Primary School: principal – Masete Ramokgobathe; business leader – Dawood Vally (Fair Price).

Lufhereng Primary School: principal – Nelly Mbatha; business leader – Ibrahim Ibisomi (Africare).

Moetapele Primary School: principal – Gadifele Bertha Motladile; business leader – Itumeleng Kgabosele (Sphere Holdings).

Nandi Primary School: principal – Frans Nkanga Chiloane; business partner – Carmen Biggars (Momentum).

Someluwazi Primary School: principal – Sifiso Ntshangase; business partner – Gail Walters (independent business consultant).

Eldridge Primary School: principal – Jakobus Cloete; business partner – Harvey Keown (African Foundation for Sustainable Development).

● For more information, or to join this growing movement, visit [www.pfp4sa.org.za](http://www.pfp4sa.org.za)