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As artists we express and celebrate, we expose and nurture, we explore, shift and change frontiers. Through sports of all kinds, we push the limits of our possibilities. Our philosophies and stories have enriched the world.

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National development plan / vision 2030

Partners for Possibility (Pfp) is a creative solution to South Africa’s education crisis - it is a co-action, co-learning partnership between School Principals and Business Leaders, enabling social cohesion through partnerships, and empowering Principals to become change leaders in their schools and communities. The **Pfp** Programme facilitates cross-sectoral reciprocal partnerships between Business, Government and the Social Sector.

PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE

“When my partner from Sanlam - Chantal Paul - asked me, ‘why **Pfp**?’ I told her I want to understand how business solutions can be applied to our school’s challenges,” said Principal Mary Banda of their first meeting.

Their journey started with the three **Pfp** Workshops: A Time to Think, Flawless Consulting, and Community Building.

“It was important to attend them together, in order to instil the principles and decide how we wanted to impact the school with what was learned. While attending the Time to Think workshop, what struck me is how to listen attentively. I tried to use this new-found skill during staff meetings, whilst working with learners, and with teachers.” Mary continues:

“I learned how to listen with my body, heart and even my feet, so my whole being could connect with someone. Not listening to offer advice - or complete someone’s sentences, but just to listen without asking any questions - because everybody matters.”

The Flawless Consulting workshop inspired Mary to master the skill of improving difficult conversations; the ability to contract, and try to master skills of dealing with resistance.

The Community Building workshop offered valuable learnings which inspired Principal Banda to take into her classroom: ‘community is gold when we sit together’:

“We sit around a table with our knees touching each other, we are all on the same level where everyone’s voice can really be heard. I tried this ‘thinking counsel’ technique at school in my class where I give everyone a voice and the results are profound.”

At a glance

- Established in 1977 under the leadership of the late Mr. E. Sampson. Started as a Junior Secondary School with 870 learners. Located in Newman Street, Amstelhof, Paarl, the school serves the communities of Paarl, Wellington, Newton, Kylemore, Pniel and Franschoek.
- After having proven that exceptionally high academic standards are maintained, the School became a Senior Secondary School on 1 January 1983.
- With 1350 learners and 43 staff members, more than 20 teachers are examiners and moderators for the Grade 12 exams. Currently, the school boasts a 93% pass rate, 30 Distinctions, four subjects with 100% pass rate and one learner with an A aggregate.
- 17 teachers were awarded for outstanding academic performance from Drakenstein Municipality. In 2015, principal Banda was nominated by the Department of Basic Education to join 30 principals on a tour to China where she visited the Beijing Education Department. Together they signed an agreement to help Klein Nederburg for 5 years starting in 2016, working with the staff as well as learners.
- The school has a long line of graduate excellence, boasting chartered accountants, psychology masters, dentists, occupational therapists, nuclear physicists and astrophysicists.
- Sporting alumni include rugby legend Chester Williams, Elgar Watts and Burton Francis, basketball player Jermaine Kermis and cyclist Garth Thomas.

Sanlam Partner Chantal Paul’s learning in terms of the Flawless Consulting workshop impacted her professional context in particular:

“I work in the HR space where it’s almost natural to contract with your clients. I enjoyed brushing up on my contracting skills – one can always sharpen the tools in the shed. However, having the difficult conversation with people in business is not easy, but saying exactly what is needed is always more constructive than avoiding conflict around pertinent issues.”

For Chantal, the Community Building workshop’s focus on the ‘possibility’ instead of the ‘problem’, was a different, refreshing perspective and she was keen to apply these learnings to the programme:

“I wanted to get going and get results, but Mary is very considered in her approach. This is something I learned to take back to Sanlam. You can’t rush with an answer, so the opportunity taught me things about developing a different style of leadership. I wanted to deep-dive into working the school management team and governing body, but we had to slow down before we impact the teachers and embark on the other aspects of what was needed to be done.”

Mary explained why Sanlam, as a pillar of the school, and PFP were so important in the context of their core challenges:

“Our first concern was that our learners are impacted by a lot of social issues. The second was the process of moving with the leadership towards a shared vision - essential to education.”



BUILDING RESILIENT FOUNDATIONS

PfP’s primary theme ‘How do we make the school the centre of the community?’ is embedded in Klein Nederberg School’s mission statement.

“We strive towards establishing an environment in which cultural and academic excellence prevails, with a view to develop the learner as a whole, in order to serve society as a loyal and dignified person.”

Mission Statement: Klein Nederberg School

“Due to all the societal concerns at the school we invited a young lady who interned with us last year, to do a motivational talk for the Matrics. She has had her share of experiences in life, and motivated how she has taken her career onto a different path from the perspective of youth. I think that worked very well,” Principal Banda continued. Chantal then proceeded to introduce details of a two-day impactful workshop they held in December, with the leadership student body: “It was great to see the kids energised.”

Mr Barends, a member of the school governing body, made a huge impression on Chantal during these learner workshops: “He is such a passionate parent. I could see how his involvement in the school shows what it takes to make the school part of the community. It is encouraging to be part of a school that shows that type of commitment.”

In the meeting with the school management team, as well as the Clarity 4D Personal Learning and Development Tool, the partners could immediately see more of the alignment in terms of the last workshops held. Chantal could see how Principal Banda’s approach paid off, that she has enormous resilience and carries quite a bit, but she could also see that the teachers are with her on the journey as well.

“I think from Mary’s perspective, she aimed to consciously shift the way she does things in the school in terms of the thinking environment.



To encourage more listening, to allow for other people's thoughts to come to the fore. This way it's not a box we ticked, but an ongoing work in terms of the approach that we adopt."

In terms of results, Mary explained that the Grade 8 and 9 baseline and systemic tests showed huge improvement, allowing for an increase in the intake for maths and science in the FET phase: "Part of our plan is to get buy-in so there is a bigger intake."

Another notable impact was the study zones, held around 5pm where it was evident that both parents and teachers were dedicated to improve their academic results:

"I really see the fibre of academic and cultural excellence coming through, even though we are still thriving for that in terms of our goals," Chantal pointed out.



THE PRINCIPAL:

Mary Banda

I have over 30 years' experience as an educator and have been a principal for seven years. At the moment, I am juggling a great deal related to capacity building in the education space. As one of the candidates invited to UCT's Principal's academy year-long Management skills programme, myself, Mr Bam, Mr Matthys and two other Principals from Paarl experienced how demanding the process can be. Regardless of these sacrifices, my dedication to personal growth and development is a priority.

Before I enrolled in the **PfP** Programme, our school lost five teachers in two years due to retirement, illness and resignations – it was a lot of experience that left the school. The problem was to find the right people to replace them.

New processes of appointment started and, as Principal, I had to prepare teachers to apply for the vacant positions.

It was frustrating to manage the process of appointment, because the student governing body was new and there was a lot of uncertainty among the school governing body members.

"I also became aware of how important it is to look after myself: I cannot look after other people if I cannot look after myself."

For me personally, the workshop Time to Think demonstrated the importance of listening to the people that enter my office and not to give them advice, but to create a thinking environment.

During my sessions with Chantal, I found a friend, a confidante and a mentor, who listened to me without asking questions, giving advice or criticising. My confidence in dealing with difficult people grew as a consequence of this partnership.

Amid challenges, although two new people were appointed to the school management team before their workshop could be held, the Partners were pleased to have left the school with a motivated student body.

The journey is far from over, with future focus for the school based on School Management Team (SMT) workshops, and the next step is the entire school body. In addition, the partners want to hold a follow-up workshop with the teachers and learners, after noticing the correlation between learner and SMT goals.

Teachers have been assigned to a learner leader, as well as the monitors and the Prefect Body, a synergy that has high expectations from the Partners in terms of achieving goals. An additional aim is to have a workshop with the school governing body and parents.

"So while I wanted to rush in and do things, I think that the time that we took and the staggered approach have paid off. Now they are ready to leverage into new ground," Chantal concluded. ■



THE PARTNER:

Chantal Paul

I have 10 years' HR experience at Sanlam and a few other companies. I hold a BA Hons in Psychology, HDE and MCom in Organisational Psychology and, although I started out in education for 4 years, I never taught a subject.

My reason for joining **PfP** was to re-connect with education and to give back because that was the start of my journey. I was excited to see how I could learn alternative leadership practices, and that's really been the gem out of this Partnership for me.

I learned that leadership is driven in various contexts and that the business world can learn too, not just teach. During our journey, Mary and I discovered how we present as very different leaders, yet we discovered many similarities along the way.

We developed a special friendship during the time we worked together. As Partners, we were excited about the workshop that we attended and future workshops that we wanted to do with the student body as well.

My daughter matriculated a year ago and my son is in Grade 11, so I have not looked at the papers in terms of school graduation results. However, now I find myself looking with a sense of pride to see what our results are.

I got to know Mary in a way that I can say it feels almost sad to 'let go of the school'. I do think there will always be a connection, and I am grateful for both the friendship and partnership.