

Increasing ability to recognise young people's potential vital

At a Youth Mentorship Symposium, held in April 2016 at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS), keynote speaker Professor Jonathan Jansen, vice-chancellor and rector of the University of the Free State, said that for mentorship to be effective, a holistic approach that meets the intellectual, emotional and physical wellbeing of young people is key.



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The symposium, hosted by Rachel's Angels Trust, aimed to explore key knowledge about mentoring across multiple experiences to add to mentorship theory and practice. Various stakeholders from Rachel's Angels' participating schools, different universities and other partners of the trust attended the symposium.

Jansen shared critical lessons about mentoring young people, including that it is vital that South Africa, as a nation, increases its ability to recognise the potential that all young people have.

Wilfred Taylor, principal of Eben Dönges High School in Kraaifontein, added, "We do not easily see the potential of all our youth. Often we have judgemental attitudes based on our personal racial growth path. Some people need to be treated differently because of their unique challenges and barriers."

The symposium included panel discussions on 'Building a mentorship programme around partnerships' and 'Mentorship models and levels of key interventions'.

The ten panellists in two sessions represented a range of educational institutions and shared best practices and knowledge in effective mentoring.

“Mentoring creates a caring environment and space for us to move forward as a nation,” said Dr Vincent Bosman, an education and ethics specialist from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Professor Charl Cilliers, retired Director of Stellenbosch University’s Centre for Student Counselling and Development, shared his three-point meta-plan for building a mentorship programme around partnerships. “There is a need to appoint a steering committee from all schools, organise provincial feedback sessions and share best practices of mentoring partnerships.”

“Just as with leadership, mentorship starts with self,” said Adri Marais, co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of Tertiary School in Business Administration (TSiBA). “The first step is to understand what you want to do with mentorship and define those expectations. Mentors are seen as travelling partners. If you want to walk fast, walk alone; if you want to go far, walk together.”

The power of the mentor needs to be understood – it can make or break the mentee. Not everyone can become a mentor especially when dealing with vulnerable adolescents. This was the caveat of E’Louise Botes who recently completed her Master’s degree in Industrial Psychology at Stellenbosch University. Her thesis focused on the development of a youth mentor competency model and the skillset required by youth mentors within Rachel’s Angels’ mentorship programme.

Gloria Noemdoe, one of the educators at Steenberg High School who attended the presentation, said that the panel was “so inspiring and showed us that we all speak the same language when it comes to the well-being of our children and society”. In her concluding remarks, Prof Rachel Jafta, chairperson of the Rachel’s Angels Trust, encouraged all the stakeholders to keep moving forward and thinking of practical ways to reach out to more young people. “Share the knowledge you have gained from this Symposium and also celebrate small victories along the way.”

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