

I have a dream...

By  Danette Breitenbach

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Ciao Bella, a women empowerment initiative aimed at uplifting the lives of young women, is the dream of Alarece Eaton, HR manager group of the MediaShop. "Having this dream translate into reality is so exciting for me."



Alarece Eaton

The initiative, which launches this weekend in Johannesburg, first took form for Eaton when she visited a Salvation Army orphanage in downtown Johannesburg. "I spent a lot of time there and wanted to do something to help these young women - some just girls really."

What struck her the most, she says, is that nearly all the girls came from a poor background, and even if they managed to do well at school, their choices were still limited. "Many of these girls have the potential to have a career but because of their circumstances they cannot see this. In these very poor communities if a girl does well at school then she can become a Checkers cashier or maybe even work at Pick n Pay. This mindset needs to be changed," she explains.

However, to achieve this these girls need more than financial and educational assistance; they needed something that will make them believe in themselves. That is what Ciao Bella offers them, says Eaton.

The programme is holistic so it offers more than just academic learning. "It includes courses in grooming, dressing, carrying yourself, finance, and even golf as well as coaching and mentoring."

The aim is to mentor 15 girls between the age of 15 and 19 each year for a period of three years. They must be in grade

12 and have a 60% average in mathematics to qualify. The course is in partnership with the Maharishi Institute.

The objective extends further than just the girls, to their families. “We are encouraging activities with the girls’ families, such as teaching them computer skills on a weekend. The programme is also about uplifting the communities where the girls come from as this is the only way to change the prevailing mindset.”

Building media skills

While the primary purpose of this initiative is to satisfy the growth potential of young women within South Africa, its secondary focus is on the media industry. “The programme is there to empower and educate selected young women in the field of media and advertising in order to build future media leaders.”

In terms of the media, the Media SETA is looking for priority skills that are lacking or scarce in the media space. “The programme allows us to fill these gaps that the industry is in desperate need of.”

It will also assist the girls in making the transformation from student to employee. “Too often we have seen these young graduates come into learnerships in the workplace and be completely overwhelmed or shell-shocked. Through this programme we will integrate the girls into the business.”

The programme is a demanding one that requires the students to do their BA at the Maharishi Institute while working in their free time, including weekends and holidays.

The first 15 girls are starting the programme this weekend following the launch.

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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