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Begin

USB Dispute Settlement Centre launches Delft Schools Peer Mediation Project

A pioneering peacemaker initiative, the Delft Schools Peer Mediation Project was launched at the Africa Centre for Dispute Settlement at the University of Stellenbosch Business School (USB) on 2 April 2009. This project introduces conflict resolution by means of peer mediation in 12 selected primary and high schools in the Delft area, based on a model that includes the participation of the broader community.

This initiative has the support of Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, who is the patron of the Africa Centre for Dispute Settlement of the USB.

The project directly involves a group of 240 learners from the different schools in Delft. It aims to raise the learners' awareness and knowledge of diversity, gender violence, bullying, crime, conflict and democracy and to provide mechanisms for coping with these issues, by using a structured and participative approach. It is also hoped that this knowledge will spread to the greater Delft community via the inclusion of community members who will join the learners and teachers.

At the launch Francois Botha, project leader and a former magistrate, welcomed a group of five Cluster Leaders, school principals as well as teachers from schools in the Delft area which are involved in the project.

Botha said Delft was chosen because of the unique multicultural mix of people living in the area which brings a particular set of challenges that is different from those experienced in other areas.

"A learner asked: 'What does the project bring me when I go back home?' This peacemaker initiative offers the hope that instead of succumbing to gangsterism, drugs and other social evils learners will have an alternative set of dispute resolution tools to help them on these often tough streets. It also creates opportunities and alternative futures for them," said Botha at the launch.

"We hope that this community-based model will contribute towards creating a culture that is characterised by cooperation, reduced conflict, and a spirit of goodwill. This model will, however, only succeed if all the role-players involved work closely together, and especially if the schools and the community in Delft join hands to engage enthusiastically with this initiative," said Botha.

He said five Clusters were formed, consisting of either two or three primary schools, and two high schools per cluster. Each cluster comprise four teachers, 40 learners and 10 community support parents. Each cluster will be supported by a cluster leader who will be responsible for on-going training and awareness-raising.

The specially appointed mediation Cluster leaders have received training in facilitation and mediation. They are Michelle Adonis, Fungai Manhanga, Tonio Gantana, Mandisa Komani and Akhona Baba. Three of the Cluster leaders are residents in Delft who have an acute understanding of their community.

The Delft peacemaker initiative will go beyond school fences to reach the streets and homes of the often troubled Delft community, predicts Prof Barney Jordaan, director of the Africa Centre for Dispute Settlement.

He sees the project as citizenship education in action, and believes it will form the foundation of sustainable links between the needs of the learners, teachers and the community.

Prof Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, a clinical psychologist from the University of Cape Town who served on the Human Rights Violations Committee of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), is the co- facilitator in workshops with Botha.

“People need to be given a chance. I come from the township of Langa and know what it is to grow up in a community like Delft. If you can begin to touch the lives of these kids through this work it is going to be of profound value to parents and the community,” said Gobodo-Madikizela.

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Photo Caption:

At the launch of the Delft Schools Peer Mediation Project: (in the centre), Jerome Slammat, director of Community Interaction for Stellenbosch University, Francois Botha, Delft project leader, and Prof Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, co-project leader, with mediation Cluster leaders (left) Michelle Adonis, Akhona Baba and Tonio Gantana and (right) Mandisa Komani and Fungai Manhanga.

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