

Implementation partner for SA's Youth Employment Service (YES) hosts stakeholder engagement session to plot its future roadmap

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Youth@work is one of the longest-serving government-endorsed YES-programme implementation partners. Since its inception, YES has brought together the private sector, labour and unemployed youth to tackle our country's unemployment and skills challenges collectively.

The Youth@work session rounded off a successful year, bringing together 28 Youth@work partner organisations from across for the way forward. Youth@work has, in the three short years of its operation, placed more than 2844 youth into roles across businesses that represent the education, automotive, agricultural and ICT sectors, amongst others. Opportunities offered to extend from placement include upskilling and general mentorship. The organisation overcame the challenges presented by the Pandemic during 2020 and 2021 and continues to build its network of partners with strong growth ambitions for 2022.

Co-founder/director Erica Kempken notes that the success of the Youth@work initiative is due to its single-minded purpose to hold youth at the centre and develop their inherent potential, empowering them through work – not only for the 12 months in which they are formally in the YES programme - but far beyond. This is achieved through intentional and powerful collaboration with many partners to create strong support networks for these youth. The combined value of partner support in this ambition has totalled more than R150m to date.

For the participants, the session yielded three key questions:

- What can Youth@work partners do better together than trying to 'do it alone'?
- What can partners do to expand the magic to more youth?
- What is the partner network's collective narrative?

Partners attending the session discussed these and other challenges and highlighted some notable insights based on their collective combined experience.

Dr Waynand Goosen (Infomage RIMS Group) noted that both young people and broader society tend to associate the concept of employment with having a formal job and discount the power of the informal economy. At the same time, co-partner colleague Hassienna Marriott (Head of Education at the Global Teachers Institute (GTI)) highlighted the enormous role young well-trained teachers could play in nurturing young talent and supporting school going learners to meet the challenges of the post-school environment confidently. Other partners shared the interesting ways in which they have contributed.

Dr Petro Janse van Vuuren spoke about Drama for Life (WITS) programmes to train young mentors to deliver art and drama therapy programmes into schools. In contrast, Jaco Coetzer (Gauteng Women's Rugby Institute (GWRI)) spoke about how his organisation provides board and lodging and NQF L7-accredited training to 55 young women to enable them to achieve their dreams of playing international rugby and becoming role models within their communities.

Youth@work came away with a game plan for 2022 and is confident that it can build on the foundations laid for more



Co-founder/director Erica Kempken with Kayembe Gilles Ilunga, newly appointed consulting director at marketing and tech services firm Wunderman Thompson.

collaboration going forward. "Tackling South Africa's unemployed youth challenge is a shared responsibility; it can only be approached through intentional and powerful collaboration with many partners to create strong networks of support for the youth," says Kempken.

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