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Learning from our implementing partners

Learning Brief 14

IkamvaYouth: Equipping learners to access tertiary education and employment opportunities

IkamvaYouth has set itself a tough but important mission: to enable disadvantaged South African youth to pull themselves out of poverty and into tertiary education and/or employment. It's tough because we're up against a national education system in crisis. And it's important because South Africa's future depends on it.

Key indicators depicting the challenge from a national perspective include:

- South Africa's ranking out of 100 national education systems: 97[1]
- Number of learners in grades 10-12 to drop out of school between 2002 & 2007: 990 794[2]
- % of learners registered for grade 1 in 1998 that enrolled for grade 12 in 2009: 38[3]
- % of matrics that wrote and passed science in 2006: 67.39[3]
- % of matrics that wrote and passed science in 2009: 36.83[3]
- Average % of grade 12s achieving A to C symbols in maths between 2006 – 2009: 2.2[3]
- Average % of grade 12s achieving A to C symbols in science between 2006 – 2009: 0.7[3]
- Of the 2.8 million South Africans between 18 and 24 not in education, employment or training in 2007 who had not achieved grade 12: 2 million[4]

The depth and breadth of these poor results and their implications are echoed when viewed from a local perspective. For example, in Khayelitsha, 3 228 learners wrote matric in 2010. Only 50% of these learners passed (1 624 learners)[5]. Factoring in the huge numbers of learners who don't make it to grade 12, it's clear that a significant proportion of the 2.8 million young South Africans who are not in education, employment or training come from places like Khayelitsha.

How we are assisting youth

Ultimately, IkamvaYouth aims to enable disadvantaged youth to pull themselves and each other out of poverty through education. Research has shown[6] that with a matric, 25-year-old South African youth are less likely to be unemployed and that the higher their post-matric qualification, the better their average monthly income. 25-year-old South Africans with incomplete schooling who are employed earn an average of R1 100. With a matric they earn R1 600, but with a tertiary certificate or diploma this jumps up to R3 200. Armed with a degree, young South Africans earn an average of R5 500 per month; five times the average township household monthly income.

IkamvaYouth's programme strategy is focused on ensuring that learners matriculate and access the post-school opportunities that will be their passport out of poverty. Although the programme offerings differ slightly from branch to branch, most provide:

- Homework sessions two afternoons per week

1   Van Wyk, J. (2010). SA Education System the 4th Worst in the World according to Newsweek. University of Pretoria http://edulibpretoria.wordpress.com/2010/08/26/sa-education-system-the-4th-worst-in-the-world-according-to-newsweek/

2   Branson, N., Liebbrandt, M. & Zuze, T. (2009). What are the returns of tertiary education and who benefits? In N. Cloete (Ed.), Responding to the Educational Needs of Post-School Youth (pp.45-60). Cape Town: CHET.

3   SNRI (2009). South African Transformation (SAT) Monitor – Transformation in the education sector: Enrollment in primary, secondary and tertiary education institutions and throughput and success of the school education system. Centurion: Solidarity Research Institute

4   Nzimande, B. (2010). Address by Minister of Higher Education and Training Dr. Blade Nzimande at the Further Education and Training College Summit

5   Hodgson, J. (2011). Equal Education's Invitation to the People of South Africa. Cape Town: Equal Education

6   Branson, N., Leibbrandt, M. & Zuze, T. (2009). The Demand for Tertiary Education in South Africa. Cape Town: SALDRU, UCT

for all learners
- Computer literacy classes once a week for grade 10 learners
- Weekly Saturday tutoring sessions for all learners
- Two-weeks of full day holiday programme activities for all learners
- Mentoring & career guidance for grade 9s (to assist with subject choices) and grade 11s and 12s (to assist with accessing post-school opportunities)
- Participation in the Careers Indaba for all learners
- Financial assistance with tertiary institution application and registration fees for grade 12s

Learners in grades 8 to 12 can enroll at the beginning of each year, and are required to attend a minimum of 75% of all sessions to keep their place in the programme, which is free of charge. Attendance is incentivised in that learners who achieve 100% attendance are rewarded with excursions and fun enrichment activities. In addition to the above-mentioned programmes, learners are afforded opportunities to participate in the media, image and expression programme and to participate in health and life skills workshops and HIV counselling and testing.

IkamvaYouth creates a culture of learning where learners take their futures into their own hands, and provides the supportive environment they need in order to take responsibility and drive their own learning. Key to this supportive environment are the volunteer tutors, whom in addition to facilitating small-group tutoring sessions, act as mentors and role models to the learners. Each year, more matriculating ikamvanites return as volunteers, and the branch becomes more established, so it becomes increasingly led by ex-learners.

Due to the nature of the relationships ikamvanites have with one another, the support they provide inevitably extends beyond needs around education and career guidance. Our learners have been victims of shack fires, teenage pregnancy, domestic or gender violence, xenophobia, health challenges, losing family members etc. and have supported each other through these ordeals. We also ensure that learners have access to the professional support, guidance and assistance provided by other organisations focusing on these various issues.

IkamvaYouth has a democratic youth-led structure. Each branch's management committee (branchcom) is voted annually and everyone (including parents, partner organisations, learners, community leaders) is welcome to participate in branchcom meetings held every two weeks. Everyone gets one vote; official branchcom members get two. Everything is discussed openly and transparently (including salaries, performance reviews, budget decisions etc.) and everyone gets a say in how things are done at the branch level. This transparent and inclusive means of operating has led to community ownership and support of the project, and enabled the beneficiaries of the project to become its leaders. It is through this youth-centred decision-making model, that IkamvaYouth builds its members' leadership capacity and work experience.

Representatives from each branch sit on the national management committee (natcom), where decisions which affect all IkamvaYouth branches are made. Ultimately the natcom is accountable to the board of directors. Core functions (e.g. fundraising, marketing, national volunteer recruitment drives etc.) are shared by natcom members and the aim of this body is to ensure collaboration and to prevent duplication of effort.

How we got started and what we have achieved thus far

IkamvaYouth was established in Makhaza in 2003, when two young researchers at the Human Sciences Research Council, Joy Olivier and Makhosi Gogwana, looked at the mathematics and science pass rate of black matriculants and realised that something had to be done. With the intention of providing information and support to township learners who need to improve their academic achievement and access tertiary education, Joy and Makhosi sent out e-mails to all their friends asking "who wants to tutor at Makhosi's old school?" and an overwhelming "yes" was the start of IkamvaYouth.

IkamvaYouth currently operates in seven townships: Khayelitsha (since 2003), Nyanga

(2006, reopened in late 2008) & Masiphumelele (since 2009) in the Western Cape; Cato Manor (since 2007) and Umlazi (opening in 2012) in Kwa-Zulu Natal and Ebony (since 2008) and Ivory Park (opening in 2012) in Gauteng. Branches are based at public libraries, community centres, churches and university campuses; most of which are availed free of charge. In eight years, IkamvaYouth has helped over 1 500 learners — of which 88% passed matric and 75% accessed either tertiary education, learnerships or employment.

351 learners have matriculated as ikamvanites since 2005, and IkamvaYouth currently has 660 learners nationwide. By harnessing volunteerism and the power of peer-to-peer learning and support, learners who participate in IkamvaYouth's programmes have achieved a matric pass rate of between 85 and 100% since 2005. In 2010:

- 90 to 100% of grade 9-11 learners passed at each of our five branches
- 87% passed matric
- 81% of IkamvaYouth's passing matriculants accessed post-school placements (42% are now at university, 38% at colleges, 6% at technikons, and 6% have been awarded learnerships)

Demonstrating greater impact, many ex-learners have gone on to travel the world, secure great jobs and, in becoming the key breadwinners, lift their families out of poverty. Moreover, nearly half of all ex-IkamvaYouth learners have returned as volunteers, ensuring youth in their communities are able to access the same opportunities they have.

IkamvaYouth aims to have reached at least

5 510 learners by 2016. Without establishing any additional branches beyond 2016, these efforts will have impacted 11 050 learners by 2020. Projecting an 85% matric pass rate, this will produce almost 900 matriculants by 2016 and over 1 850 by 2020. Projecting tertiary access of at least 70%, this will result in over 600 matriculants entering the doors of higher learning by 2016; 1 300 by 2020.

Our lessons learned and advice to other organisations

The positive impact of extending learning hours has already been identified by the Department of Education. Most schools are now implementing winter schools, and some have extended the school day (by adding afternoon classes) and others have extended the school week (by requiring learners to be at school on Saturdays). Unfortunately, during these periods most schools are simply doing more of what is clearly not working. Most are also providing this additional support only to grade 12 learners. IkamvaYouth has found that beginning in grade 12 is unfortunately in most cases just too late as most learners need to make big jumps in their academic achievement. Often learners are missing the building blocks for learning and by correcting fundamental knowledge earlier on it makes it easier for the learners to build on this knowledge.

The gaps in our learners' knowledge are so vast and so deep that the only way for learners to improve their results is through individual attention. IkamvaYouth aims to achieve a tutor: learner ratio of not more than 1:5. There is a big emphasis on tutoring rather than teaching, in that the tutor does not set or drive the learning agenda nor provide the answers. Instead, learners are required to take responsibility for their own learning by bringing the questions and aspects of their work with which they are struggling most. The tutors then facilitate and encourage peer-to-peer learning whereby the group works together towards understanding. They don't move on to the next question until everyone understands. Often tutoring groups need to go right back to earlier grade-level fundamentals in order to achieve this, and it is only through small-group tutoring that these gaps can be filled.

We believe that all learners who work hard can

achieve well. Results consistently demonstrate that learners who work hardest, achieve highest. And so, rather than selecting learners who're already demonstrating academic potential (an approach adopted by most education interventions), our focus is on attendance. In order to keep their place in the programme, learners must maintain a minimum 75% attendance requirement – for all sessions. We have "kick-outs" three times a year to ensure only committed learners remain and work consistently throughout the period.

Finally, learners need a reason to commit their time and energy to their studies. During our Holiday Programmes we conduct career guidance workshops and expose learners to diverse post school opportunities. IkamvaYouth helps learners to make the connection between academic achievement and realising their dreams for a better future.

In many cases we're still figuring out what "the most successful approach" is, but we've begun to document our knowledge as we go, and are developing "how-to-guides", which feed into an online, open-source resource portal, The ikamvanite zone (www.ikamvanitezone.org) whereby the information, resources, lessons learned and networks that enable effective programme delivery are availed to all.

The kingpins in the IkamvaYouth model are the young social entrepreneurs who coordinate the branches. IkamvaYouth's branch coordinators are each responsible for between 50 and 160 learners and 20 to 50 volunteers. It is up to them to inspire all these young people to keep choosing hanging out at the library over the streets and shebeens. As the roles require extensive resourcefulness, initiative, flexibility, and an innovative approach, as well as the shouldering of an often overwhelming

amount of responsibility, it does not work to fill these roles with people who have an "employee" mindset. Running an IkamvaYouth branch is so much more than a job, and a key unknown in the replication of the IkamvaYouth model is how many potential branch coordinators are out there. Thankfully, the young people who currently run IkamvaYouth branches are setting the standard of just what's possible, and will hopefully inspire more young people to choose to stand up to the ultimate responsibility and privilege of transforming our country.

This learning brief tells of the hands-on experience of:

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INCLUSION OF THOSE MOST LEFT OUT