

Leadership Excellence Award in After School Programming

Meeting Silver Award Winner Wandred Theunis

A Man of Principle

Oprah Winfrey poignantly summed up the attributes of a mentor when she said: “A mentor is someone who allows you to see the hope inside yourself.” Few personify this quote more than Wandred Theunis, principal of De Rust Futura Academy in Grabouw. A man with a vision to instil hope through the establishment of an after school programme (ASP) that will develop and unlock the potential of the marginalised youth from his community.



THE AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMME

“The ASP was established to give pupils a safe environment in which to do their homework, and to equip them with skills that aren’t normally taught during regular school hours. The focus of the ASP is a holistic approach to life skills, sports, academics and arts and culture. We started the programme in 2014 with 168 learners and only 6 teachers. Today we have over 300 learners and 10 teachers enrolled in the programme.” says Theunis. In addition to mobilising a number of teachers Wandred and his team have also created opportunities for NGOs to bring their programmes to De Rust and have supplemented the capacity with young EPWP funded coaches.

At its core, the After School Programme is a collection of activities that provide a basis for good values and healthy involvement, rather than the anti-social activities taking place off school grounds. De Rust Futura Academy offers a myriad after-school activities across a wide range of categories so that each and every student can find a place where they feel they belong.

Activities fall under the following pillars as laid out by the Western Cape Government After School Game Changer team:

Academic Support

Access to tutoring, academic support and new subjects shows learners, that with hard work, they can achieve any career they want, including career opportunities beyond the standard school curriculum.

Sport and Recreation

Active kids are happy kids. Aside from helping them be both happier and healthier, sport programmes open learners up to new opportunities and career paths they might not otherwise have considered.

Arts and Culture

From dance to drama to public speaking classes, pupils learn to express themselves and find their voice. They are exposed to inspiring performances and exhibitions and are given the opportunity to showcase their own creative skills too.

Life Skills

From learning to grow their own food in the school garden to training shelter dogs, life skills programmes help young kids in difficult environmental circumstances to find a positive grounding on which to build their futures.

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FILLING THE VOID

Many of the school's learners come from previously disadvantaged communities. Parents typically work long hours, which means that they often do not have much time to spend with their children to supervise and mentor them. This can have a substantial effect on the development of a child, and can directly impact learning and performance at school. In extreme situations, this lack of parental supervision opens a void that is often filled with drug, alcohol and sexual experimentation and anti-social behaviour.

Through the establishment of the Aftercare School Programme, the school aims to counter these issues facing learners by offering:

- A place of safety for children while parents are at work
- Nutritious and balanced meals
- A supportive environment in which to study
- Opportunities to learn and develop new skills



PARTNERING FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE

The traditional African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child" has been widely quoted when examining the partnerships required during the development of the youth.

Mr Theunis understands the importance of forming partnerships in order to turn his vision into fruition. After all, one man's exuberance can only take a project of this scale so far.

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The school reached out to various stakeholders from the community to promote the ASP programme with the aim of assisting learners and lessening the financial burden on parents. This is even more prudent in the challenging economic climate we are facing.

- In partnership with Gaffley Transport, learners from the surrounding farms were offered free transport to and from the ASP activities.
- GECKO and IGNITE offered drug and alcohol abuse courses for the learners educating them on such issues as Foetal Alcohol Syndrome and the dangers of drugs such as tik and dagga.
- In partnership with local farmers and the Woman Institute, a UK-based voluntary organization, meals were supplied to all participants in the programme.
- The Click Foundation assisted the younger learners with a reading programme.
- In collaboration with the Department of Transport students were assisted in a learner driver licence programme.
- Rural Arts, an NGO that promotes the creative arts in rural communities, came on board to ignite, grow and nurture talent. A highlight of this collaboration was the school's recent participation in the International Marimba Steelpan Festival in Johannesburg.

The principal follows a strict open door policy whereby parents and stakeholders are encouraged to come up with suggestions on how to implement new ways of delivering better services to the learners. Furthermore, he also invites the learners themselves to meet on a regular basis so that he keeps in touch with their needs and wants.

THE FRUITS OF LABOUR

All these efforts and energy would mean very little without concrete results. The impact of the ASP programme is measured through quarterly results and daily school attendance. Since the adoption of the programme there has been a marked increase in the pass rate of learners in the crucial subjects of mathematics, numeracy and literacy.

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In 2015 the school received an award of excellence from the Overberg Western Cape Education Department for a 22% increase in the systematic maths results for Grade 6 students. The Grade 12 pass rate was raised to a staggering 97,1% and an increase of the Bachelor's Degree pass rate of 39% for which the school was recognized by the Premier in 2016.

But it wasn't just on the academic front where results were seen – arts and culture is another important field of focus. The school's Marimba band won various awards at Eisteddfods and even performed with Emo Adams. This gave students a valuable taste of life in the entertainment spotlight. Who knows? Maybe the next big local star will be a product of Mr Theunis and his team's ASP programme!

On the sports field 13-year-old programme participant, Warric Pheiffer, excelled at the 2015 South African Championships where he won the 100m hurdles. He was also awarded the South African Athletics Sportsman of the Year award.

The biggest feather in the school's cap was when it was awarded the Silver Award at the Western Cape Government's After School Game Changer awards.

This initiative attempts to expand the quality and impact of after school activities to 112 000 learners in low and no-fee schools across the province by focussing on three key levers – namely to create an enabling environment, build quality programmes, and strengthen new and existing partnerships and collaborations.

ONWARD AND UPWARD!

Mr Theunis is an optimistic man by nature, but he doesn't underestimate the challenges ahead. Underneath his calm demeanour is a steely resolve and enduring energy to see things through from start to finish. So where does he see the project going over the next few years?

“Our mission is to keep growing the programme. This can only be achieved through sustainable partnerships. We will continue to develop programmes designed to equip learners with skills they will need to take their rightful place in society.”

– Wandred Theunis. Principal of De Rust Futura Academy