Bridging programme *to address lack of skilled artisans*



The Jirah Academy is a development initiative of Jirah Projects, a non-profit organisation that serves disadvantaged communities of the South Durban Basin. The academy functions as a primary skills development facilitator (SDF) among its joint venture partners for the purpose of empowering candidates with a skill, trade or best fit career.

Jirah caters to all learning types – academic, technical, practical and creative minded as well as those with learning barriers. Customised support programmes are provided that are linked to mainstream programmes (such as Thekwini FET College's N1 & N2 Engineering Studies), thereby creating a complete pipeline that supports youths in qualifying in the technical career best suited to their learning type.

"We established that those best suited to becoming artisans were slipping through the cracks as there was no alternative for them to connect with further education and training as apprentices," says Jirah Projects chairman, Ian Jones. "To compensate for the short fall in our formal education, the chasm between the knowledge our learners have left school with, and what is required for them to successfully study a trade, needs to be bridged."

Through this initiative Jirah Academy will also be addressing the extreme shortage of highly-skilled, capable artisans industry so desperately needs. "By being mindful of and catering to learner specific requirements and challenges including life-skills training to build sound character, we intend to empower our candidates to become highly employable individuals," Jirah Projects is about to launch another programme to help place individuals with learning barriers into jobs where they will receive institutionalised training and be up-skilled at no cost to the employer. This is possible by making use of its PBO SARS tax exemption status linked to the employer's tax benefit act says Jones.

Stefanutti Stocks Marine, currently undertaking a project at Maydon Wharf in joint venture with Axsys Projects, has undertaken to spend R1.35 million on the academy's Bridging Programme, a six-month programme that prepares participants for mainstream training.

The academy's bridging pilot project is being implemented at the Fairvale Secondary School where Jirah is renting floor space. The Bridging Programme functions as a Satellite Campus to Lifeprep FET College. The Durban University of Technology and eThekwini FET College (DHET) form part of the joint venture partnership.

The bridging programme's objective is to rebuild the foundation in engineering mathematics, engineering science, technical drawing and trade theory.

Lecturers apply teaching methods that are suitable for practically minded learners. Practical experience and Trade Orientation forms part of the programme whereby learners will be exposed to the scope of every trade prior to choosing a career path. They will also gain some work place experience when placed at Jirah's joint venture industry partners in trades relevant to them, including at Stefanutti Stocks' Maydon Wharf site.

"We have committed to spending R1.35 million on the Jirah Academy Bridging Programme, originally planned to be spent over a period of three years," explains Dale Lees, enterprise development manager for Stefanutti Stocks Marine. "The amount has stayed the same, however the period has been shortened to two years, during which Jirah has undertaken to put 50 candidates a year through the bridging programme. We will review the success of the programme at the end of 2015."

Stefanutti Stocks' funding is being used towards setting up the training centre at Fairvale Secondary School. This includes administration set up costs as well as programme running costs and lecturers' salaries. "In addition to bringing more skills into the industry, another factor that makes this apprenticeship programme so attractive for us, is its focus on creating employable members of society by meeting these individuals at their level, rather than disqualifying them due to barriers to learning that can be overcome," concludes Lees.

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