Jirah Academy's overwhelming success fuels dream of becoming stand-alone, *fee-free trade school of excellence*

Since the Stefanutti Stocks and Jirah Academy paths first crossed in 2014 the academy has seen incredible results in terms of personal growth and academic achievements on the part of its 50 learners. Originally it was founded as a bridging programme with the objective of rebuilding the foundations in engineering mathematics and engineering science. However, following the overwhelming success of the 2014 Bridging Programme, Jirah went on to pilot N1 and N2 in early 2015 and will complete N3 Engineering Studies by November 2015. The academy has been operating as a community-based satellite campus, in partnership with public and private TVET colleges that are registered with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and quality assured by UMALUSI (the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training).

Its first mainstream engineering studies learners will graduate at the end of November 2015, many of who will have achieved their N3 Engineering Studies. Graduates can then pursue the artisan route by going into apprenticeships, while some of the top students may be given opportunities to continue to study in local universities of technology and abroad at the Virginia Tech University. Grants for a teacher/learner exchange programme could be sourced from various mechanisms. "We don't dictate to our students which path they should take, however we do try to give them career opportunities to consider," says Academy chairman and founder Ian Jones. "We understand that some of them need to earn money to support their families - first-year apprentices earn over R6 000 a month whereas those who choose to continue with their academic qualifications do so with no income."

The Toyota Training Centre in Prospecton has undertaken to take in 15 of the graduates as part of their unemployment programme, and negotiations are underway with other companies including Transnet Engineering Apprenticeships, Transnet Maritime School of Excellence, NMI-DSM Vehicle Dealerships Group, Engen Refinery and Stefanutti Stocks for learners who choose to pursue civil and construction-related careers. The Academy's Training Centre partners also place graduates.

"We would be doing our learners a disservice if we just trained them in engineering studies, without also helping them to foster good work habits, timekeeping skills, self-management as well as a commitment to a value system," says Jones. Jirah's approach to developing youth is based on 360 degrees of wholeness.

"Our ultimate goal for the academy is that our reputation for educating quality artisans who are fully prepared for the work place, will precede us and that we will have industry queuing up at our door to place our candidates." This dream includes expanding the facilities to include a workshop for practical hand-skills training, as well a Youth Career Resource Centre to serve both the Academy and the wider community.

Stefanutti Stocks' has thus far been the main financial sponsor for the initiative. In 2014 the Stefanutti Stocks Marine / Axsys joint venture contributed a total of R1,35-million towards the original Bridging Programme including mainstream N1/N2 Engineering Studies. In September 2015 Stefanutti Stocks Civils KZN contributed R250 000 to be used towards completing the N3 by November. "Stefanutti Stocks has for a long time targeted education, particularly in disadvantaged schools, as an area of sustainable intervention and a corner stone of improving the lives of South Africans," says Matthew Horwill, Stefanutti Stocks Civils KZN managing director. "In all fairness what the Group has done to facilitate the start and sustainability of this initiative is the easy part - the real accolades, praise and gratitude must go to Ian Jones and his team for their commitment and passion to improving the lives of these young adults."

Tanyaradzwa Chinodakufa, teacher (second from right)

"We work with three categories of learning ability in one classroom - there are fast learners, slow learners and slower learners. In the public sector everyone gets treated equally in the classroom so not everyone can excel in that environment. It's a lot of work to do it this way but at the end of the day, you achieve what you want. It touches my heart when the slower learners achieve, and there have been some real surprises in the results. As teachers we are here for them to cross over into a bigger future and I need these kids to excel. I want them to be big people someday."

21-year old Raywin Johns (far right)

"Jirah is an opportunity to develop who we are, and also to better ourselves through education and make something of ourselves. I am a more practical person, and prefer practical to academic activities, but I am really enjoying the civil class and think a career in a civil environment would be good for me"





Chairman of the Jirah Academy, Ian Jones (pictured left) receives Stefanutti Stocks Civils KZN's contribution of R250 000 from managing director Matthew Horwill.

In just over one year the Jirah Academy has proved it has a successful formula, and has developed with its students in order to provide a complete pipeline, from the Bridging Programme to the work place. Despite continued financial support by Stefanutti Stocks and a number of other product sponsors, as a Section 18A Tax Exempt Non-Profit Organisation that does not charge any fees, the Jirah Academy is in great need of continuous financial support as it faces monthly running costs between R120 000 to R150 000.

"The Jirah Academy is a prime example of how investing in people as a priority can yield incredible results. It is both humbling and inspiring to witness this success and in particular Jirah Academy's impact on the Wentworth and extended communities," says Horwill.

"I sincerely hope that other corporates will see the value of this initiative; and that they too will feel compelled to contribute to its sustainability to ensure it continues adding value to our industry's skills-base for years to come."

Leonard Mandzivanzira, teacher (standing)

"We have taken the upper level of achievers, and mixed them with the lower achievers so that they can help each other outside the classroom. Teachers step in if necessary but this student-to-student interaction has proved very successful and shown a marked improvement throughout."

20-year old Dayle Gordon (middle)

"Jirah is a second chance for me to improve my grades in mathematics and science, and to get into university. I am currently doing the N3 and would like to go to the Durban University of Technology to study Civil Engineering next year. Civil construction can make a real difference in peoples' lives and I'd like to build cheaper houses and a shelter for those living on the street. You can't always be a hero, but you can make a difference by doing small things."

22-year old Brenne van Rooyen (far right)

"It's fantastic! I was in the Bridging Programme and am now doing my N3. I didn't do mathematics and science in school, and now I feel like I have accomplished what I thought I couldn't! Now that I am doing and understanding these subjects, it brings real joy to me."



E: ian@jirahprojects.org
W: www.jirahprojects.org
C: +27 83 371 8900