

## **DCS partnership with business community fosters positive change for offenders and parolees**

The Department of Correctional Services in conjunction with its business partners in the Bojanala District Municipality yesterday launched a social responsibility development programme called Mogwase Textile Sewing Project at Mogwase Correctional Centre in its Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West Region. The project was officially launched by the CDC Development and Care, Ms Nontsikelelo Jolingana, who officiated on behalf of Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula in the presence of maKgosi, mayors, business sector, sister departments and the members of the community.

The five month old project initiated by DCS in partnership with Sun City, is aimed at combating crime by rehabilitating repeat offenders who relapse after being frustrated by employers who discriminate against them for bearing the ex-offender tag. The project's other objective is to facilitate the smooth reintegration of ex offenders into the society and seeing to it that they get considered for job opportunities in the booming platinum province (North West), the home of the wealthy Royal Bafokeng clan.

According to Mr Noah Nkosi, the Head of Mogwase Correctional Centre who has been instrumental in setting the project off the ground, the project started with the enrolment of 15 offenders and three officials and trained them in sewing of a various items such as table mats, pillow cases, bags, and other home decors from recycled lined from Sun City. He said the officials and offenders who received their competency certificates for phase one at the launch yesterday, will now have to teach other offenders the self sustained trade while Singer Sewing Machines prepares to take them on an advanced second phase of sewing and knitting training.

The offenders are now able to sew offenders' track suits and vests. Their produce is distributed to other correctional centres. "The project has captured the imagination of the people of Bojanala and has started making an impact within DCS. We are overwhelmed with the support we get from our partners and the community. Now there pressure is to enrol and train more offenders to cope with the demand," explained Mr Nkosi.

Speaking at the launch, CDC Jolingana said that the partnership being celebrated with Sun City, Singer Sewing Machines and DCS was testament and living proof of the viability of the ideas esteemed lawmakers had when drafting the ambitious White Paper and proclaimed that corrections was indeed a societal responsibility. Without the support from families and society at large, the psychological warfare that offenders have to win as they embark on a rehabilitation path is almost impossible to achieve as they feel that society has given up on them. No amount of investment in rehabilitation programmes can replace the value of your family and genuine community support to the inmates."

She mentioned that the department intends empowering women offenders with skills to manufacture sanitary towels for their own supply and provide the surplus to girls and women in impoverished communities. She urged the sewing project managers to be conscious of community

needs and start sewing uniform for the needy children to proactively curb them from the life of crime.

Ms Jolingana also mentioned that the minister intends initiating dialogue with the business community of South Africa to discuss the issue of criminal record serving as an impediment to the employability of parolees and ex-offenders despite their acquired skills and experience.

Speaking on behalf of the community, Chairperson of the Traditional House of the North West Province Kgosi Mabe reiterated the importance of breaking the barriers between DCS and communities. "We must return to our African practices. That will enable every community member to raise the neighbour's child as their own. We need to be informed as traditional leaders when parolees are returned into our communities so that we can assist with their reintegration. It should not only be their immediate families. The fact that they resorted to the life of crime means that we failed them as a society. We are here to assure them that we love them and we want them back," he said.

Kgosi Mabe challenged the business community to do away with casual employment as it leads to the vulnerable workers to steal to make a quick buck in a short period.