



# South African Disability Development Trust

## Increasing the economic participation of disabled people

### COMMUNIQUÉ No 8 January 2012

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#### Note from the Editor

As we cross the threshold into a new year, we can look back on twelve months of unprecedented growth in the activities of the SADDT. Over this short time span our staff complement has doubled, while our core programmes of Skills Development, Provision of Assistive Devices, and Poverty Alleviation have continued to flourish and expand. As a result our headquarters building in Randburg, acquired very recently, is already full to capacity.

The SADDT today enjoys a heightened profile both on the national stage and even at the international level. This was demonstrated on 3 December,

when the Minister responsible for disability, Ms Lulu Xingwana, together with the senior leadership from her department - as part of the celebrations during the International Day of Persons with Disabilities in Bloemfontein - paid a widely-publicized visit to one of the commercial sites to which our learners have been deployed.

Two months earlier a large group of our learners took part in the proceedings of the DPI 11th World Assembly in Durban, thereby taking our message to a global audience. The SADDT is an exceptional institution in international terms, delivering a cluster of specialized services sought after across the world. The SADDT has few parallels in other countries.

In this issue of our newsletter, we deliberately focus on our National Learnerships Programme already activated in five provinces and ready to be rolled out to further provinces early in the new year. We give a status report on the project, highlight the situation at one of the major employers, and again feature a story about one of our learners. It is stories such as this that best illustrate the transformative role of the SADDT as a factory of opportunity.

**WILLIAM ROWLAND**

## National Roll-Out of SADDT Learnerships

The SADDT has embarked on its most ambitious project ever. Over the next twelve months 404 disabled people are to be offered Wholesale and Retail learnerships in partnership with the W&RSETA. We already have 268 disabled men and women in training in the five provinces of Eastern Cape, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Free State, and Gauteng, while another 136 learners are soon to be recruited via a local schools campaign and the dissemination of circulars.

The current project builds on the success of an earlier initiative whereby 100 learners gained an NQF Level 2 qualification from the W&RSETA. 78% of those learners have since found permanent employment. This surely ranks as a major breakthrough, given that the majority of disabled people in the country are unemployed and remain trapped in poverty. The SADDT is proud to be associated with the W&RSETA.

The purpose of the new project is to introduce disabled people to the wholesale and retail environment, equip them with workplace skills and increase their employability. The course involves both theoretical and practical studies, with one week every month spent in the classroom and three at the place of work learning about wholesale and retail operations and customer services.

All learners are assessed for reasonable accommodation and provided with assistive devices where necessary, to ease their learning. Light-weight wheelchairs, laptops, magnifiers, and hearing aids are amongst the devices that have been allocated.

Training is provided by AboutLearning, a company with which the SADDT has enjoyed a constructive relationship for close on five years. Prenusha Govender manages the training and part of her responsibility is to facilitate the integration of disabled learners into the workplace. “We are not simply creating employment, but quality jobs,” she says proudly.

The learners are being hosted by five of the biggest retail chains in South Africa, these being Builders Warehouse, Foschini Group, Mass Discounters, Waltons Stationery and the Smollan Group. SADDT pays tribute to these forward-thinking employers. Their enlightened practices are changing lives by providing sustainable livelihoods to many disabled persons. These are the words of Nomaphakathi Ngcauzele, an intern at Waltons in Port Elizabeth: “I am working as an admin clerk and I didn’t think that I could manage to do a better job than an abled person. Now I’m proud of myself because I can see I am a hard worker.”

Olwethu Sipuka is Skills Manager at the SADDT and oversees all aspects of the project. His office at SADDT headquarters is known as “the war room” and the reason is soon apparent, as one observes him during a day of mounting pressure. His phone rings off the hook as calls stream in from all around the country – placements, stipends, timetables, transport, equipment, etc., “Yes, here we experience all the problems,” he confirms, “but also many joys.”

43 of the learners based in Durban were recently given a very special treat and a rare opportunity. For one full day, they were registered as delegates to the DPI World Assembly. Not only were they able to benefit from a multiplicity of lectures and workshops on every conceivable aspect of disability, but they were also able to rub shoulders with some 1 200 delegates from 41 countries and countless different backgrounds. For these learners the DPI slogan “Nothing About Us Without Us” will from now on have a greatly expanded meaning.

No doubt, the systems and resources of the SADDT will be stretched to the very limit over the coming year, but happily so, as the Trust implements its most worthwhile project to date. “We have never experienced greater challenges,” says CEO Thulani Tshabalala, “but also never greater rewards.”



Thulani Tshabalala with a group of SADDT learners at the International Convention Centre in Durban. These learners had the unforgettable experience of attending the DPI World Assembly as delegates along with people with diverse disabilities from countries across the world. Also pictured behind Thulani, Under Deglon, CEO of Disability Workshop Development Enterprise (far right) has also been appointed SADDT coordinator for the W&RSETA project in the Western Cape.

## Manage Disability in Your Own Private Space

For ten SADDT learners the International Day of Persons with Disabilities 2011 will have a special place in their memory.

The event traces back to the launch of the National Learnerships Programme by the Deputy Minister of Higher Education and Training, Professor Hlengiwe Mkhize, and the Minister for Women, Children and People with Disabilities, Lulu Xingwana, in May 2011. As part of the International Day celebrations in Bloemfontein on 3 December 2011, it was agreed that the Minister would follow up with a visit to Waltons Stationery in the Free State, to engage with management and their learners, as well as with the W&RSETA and the SADDT. The Minister was accompanied by her Deputy Minister, Ms Hendrietta Bogopane-Zulu and a retinue of high-level officials from various government departments.

SADDT CEO, Thulani Tshabalala, kicked off proceedings with an overview of the partnership between the SADDT and the W&RSETA in five provinces, noting that learnerships would be extended to the remaining four provinces in 2012.

A spokesperson for Waltons said they had experienced a steep learning curve over the past months in understanding the rights of persons with disabilities and the true meaning of reasonable accommodation, but they had grabbed the chance to make their learnerships all inclusive and representative. “Our company believes we are all equal and that people with disabilities, as members of our communities, should have equal opportunities.”

The most difficult challenge faced by the learners had been in adapting to the work ethic and discipline and in following rules and procedures. It had also come to light that the majority of learners were unable to serve customers in their language of choice, which in this instance was Afrikaans. This created a challenge for Waltons not to alienate this core group of customers. They were therefore putting together a course in Afrikaans and this would give their learners a future advantage over other learners when applying for work in the Free State. Two of the learners, delegated as spokespersons by the group, said that the opportunity had translated their hopes and aspirations into reality. “We feel equal because we are treated as equal. Yes, let this opportunity be extended to other young people with disabilities.”

The road they had travelled had not been an easy one, having to overcome their individual challenges and focus on service delivery to customers, but it had given them a new sense of self-worth and belonging.

Deputy Minister Hendrietta Bogopane-Zulu, being a disabled person herself with partial sight, spoke to the learners right from the heart. She told them to appreciate the opportunity given them, an opportunity cherished as a hope by thousands of other young people with disabilities who had not been fortunate enough to access learnerships as yet. She called on them to take responsibility for the hopes of those young people still queuing up for learnerships. “Your behaviour, your discipline and your service levels will determine not only whether you have employment when you complete your learnership, but also whether Waltons will continue to prioritize the intake of young people with disabilities.” She warned that other companies were eagerly watching to see whether the placements were successful and whether they should follow suit.



Minister Lulu Xingwana and Thulani Tshabalala with Waltons' learners. Also present are Waltons representative Sandra Grobler (far right). With Minister Xingwana from her department are Deputy Minister Hendrietta Bogopane Zulu (behind the Minister) and Deputy Director General, Mzolisi Toni (far left). The Head of Department, Social Development, Ms S.S. Maboe, is to the Deputy Minister's left. Also seen is SADDT Coordinator for the W&RSETA project in the Free State, Fezekile Gadi (2<sup>nd</sup> from left)

Finally the Deputy Minister gave this advice: “Do not make your disability a problem for the company. Manage your disability in your own private space. The company must focus on reasonable accommodation, not on managing the personal challenges of their learners.”

Minister Lulu Xingwana concluded proceedings by acknowledging the role being played by the W&RSETA, the SADDT and, in particular, by Waltons in building an inclusive and shared economy and a society for all, and also by challenging prejudice and discriminatory practices in the workplace. She encouraged them to continue and expand the work they were doing, “as an economically active population grows the economy, thereby creating more jobs, improving basic living conditions, and creating a better life for all.”

*From the speech of Minister Lulu Xingwana during a rally at the Clive Solomon Stadium Heidedal, Bloemfontein, marking the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.*

The failure of our public and private sector to achieve the meagre 2% target set for the employment of people with disabilities as part of our work force, is an indictment to our commitment to give life to the Constitution we fought so hard for. No amount of excuses can explain away the failure by both government and industry to achieve the 2% target. For as long as we have so many graduates and matriculants with disabilities who remain unemployed, dependent on hand-outs and at the mercy of their communities and families, we cannot use the excuse that there are insufficient numbers of disabled job-seekers with the required skills and qualifications

## **Sonwabo Somyali : The Power of Personal Motivation**

I call him on his cellphone and get an animated voice message: “My name is Sonwabo Somyali. I’m in the mood to do things right.” I call again early evening and Sonwabo is in a taxi on his way home. We agree to chat at 8pm. Already I have the picture of a young man full of enthusiasm, prepared to work long hours to get somewhere in life.

Sonwabo, 26, was selected by the SADDT for a Wholesale and Retail Learnership with the W&RSETA. For the practical part of his course he has been placed at a Game Store in Port Elizabeth as a telephonist/receptionist. His switchboard has been adapted with synthetic speech, enabling Sonwabo as a blind man to move his fingers nimbly to the right buttons – “A1” for external calls, “N1” for internal calls, “C1” when a call is returned to the operator unanswered. Dozens of numbers have been committed to memory so that he can call out to suppliers and sister stores without any assistance from colleagues.

At school Sonwabo was a clever student and excelled at sport, being chosen as rugby captain for Gelvandale in the Eastern Cape. It was there during rugby practise one day that he sustained an eye injury. Infection set in and spread to the other eye and soon he was totally blind. He was just 17 years old.

Facing up to reality, Sonwabo’s family sent him to the Khanyisa School for the Blind. He matriculated

and then entered training at the SABC to become a broadcaster, only to be told some months later that a blind man could not do such a job. It was a bitter disappointment being refused like that, knowing he had the skills as well as the voice.

For the next two years Sonwabo volunteered as a counsellor at Lifeline, but of course he earned no income. He tried a course in computers at Optima College in Pretoria, but he still remained unemployed. Again he became a volunteer, this time as a journalist for a community radio station. He particularly enjoyed covering the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown.

Then Sonwabo heard about the SETA Learnership. How did he feel when he got the news?

“Oh, I was so happy. I had been hoping so long for a chance. I am ready. I am ready to learn.”

Perhaps his long wait for opportunity explains Sonwabo’s motivation. Every morning he rises at 4am to take two buses from his home in Uitenhage into Port Elizabeth. By the time he finishes work, the buses have stopped running and he has to take three taxis back, arriving home around 8pm. On Saturdays from 10am to 3pm Bulelwa, the young PA assigned to him during his course, reads his study materials to him.

Long hours, but he doesn't complain. "I like it too much," he says. And he still has dreams for the future: "Maybe a training course in business management."

If enthusiasm has anything to do with it, Sonwabo will go all the way.

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## Call for applications: Assistive Devices hereby invited

The SADDT hereby invites applications for Assistive Devices .Limited funding for the specific consideration of applications under our Assistive Devices Programme has been received. The aim of the Programme is economic empowerment through the provision of assistive devices which enable persons with disabilities to sustain or retain employment. The following conditions apply:

### PROVISION

Each application will be assessed according to its own merit and consideration will be given where:

- The device is critical to maintaining or retaining employment;
- The employment is formal (work in the open labour market) or informal (self-employment), where the person is able to fully motivate the request; and
- Preference will be given where the greatest need exists in terms of economic livelihood and location.

### EXCLUSIONS

The Programme does not provide assistive devices where:

- The employer has an obligation to provide equipment for the workplace under reasonable accommodation;
- The Department of Health provides assistive devices according to health and rehabilitation considerations; and
- Medical aid schemes provide funding for the required devices.

### SCOPE

- The Trust funds assistive devices up to the value of R20,000.00 per applicant. This depends on personal need and availability of funding; and
- Grants are limited to one device per applicant.

### HOW TO APPLY

Application forms are obtainable from SADDT on telephone: 011-326-3282

The closing date for applications will be 15 February 2012.

Applications must be submitted on an official SADDT application form and delivered to the SADDT offices by post or by hand at:

**Physical Address**

85 Fleet Street  
Ferndale  
Randburg, 2125

**Postal Address:**

P.O. Box 856  
Ferndale  
2160

Faxes will not be accepted.

Further information about the Programme, the application process, and technical assistance is available from the Project Manager at the above telephone number.

A minimum of 3 quotations are required and must accompany the application form.

Where less than 3 suppliers are available, this must be clearly indicated in the application.

Payment for assistive devices is made directly to the supplier by the SADDT.

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