

# Ambassadors' plan equips youth

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From a mere 86 ambassadors, a programme championed by the Department of Community Safety, in conjunction with the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), has grown to more than 1 000, stretching far and wide across the Western Cape.

At a launch event at West End Primary School, a new group of youth safety ambassadors were welcomed to the programme. It followed several other launch events in areas across the city since April.

The role of these ambassadors will be to assist at local schools in areas such as school discipline and forms part of the violence prevention component of the provincial safety plan.

Albert Fritz, provincial Minister for Community Safety, says the ambassadors will not only be placed at schools but at various partner institutions such as schools, municipalities, NGOs and other locations around the province as youth violence prevention facilitators.

"This project is the culmination and result of many months of hard work, starting with a much smaller pilot project from which we have learned many lessons in regard to how we ensure that such programmes have the desired impact. This project pulls together a number of different partners, from municipalities around the province, to WCED, to NGOs and other placement institutions," said Fritz at one of the launch events.

The youth safety ambassador programme also seeks to ensure that all the young people involved will be able to access opportunities for further career and personal development through training and other elements built into the programme.

"The idea of placing them in schools and communities is to ensure that their time is taken up by constructive, produc-

tive activities in which they are also expected to be role models for other young people," says Fritz.

The project has been launched in areas including Lenteguur, New Woodlands and Hanover Park, initiated in vulnerable areas across the City as well as smaller towns outside of the metropole.

Britney Ruiters from Mitchell's Plain joined the initiative after hearing about it through peers.

"What motivated me to get involved in the youth safety ambassador programme was the fact that this programme made a difference in many young people's lives. I could see this programme was not only just to get youngsters 'off the street' but to also equip them with skills that they could use in their day-to-day lives and also in their future.

"This programme is a stepping stone to bigger things and I believe that joining this programme was the best decision by far," says Ruiters.

"My favourite part of the programme thus far was the fact that I could reach out to young kids & actually get to see them excel in all aspects. I've always wanted to get involved in young kids lives & make a difference & I've been graced with that opportunity when I started working at Mitchell's plain primary," says Ruiters.

Another ambassador, Lazola Dabula from Kraaifontein heard about the program through a friend.

"I wanted to get involved in my community. Start making a positive change," says Dabula.

"My favourite part about the project has been the exposure to different environments outside of my community. Learning from other safety ambassadors has also meant that I can try new ideas where I am placed and where I live to bring about the change I want to see."

The expansion of the project was made possible through the second adjustment

budget of around an R8,4 million increase for the 2021/22 budget. This allowed the department to invest R20 million in the implementation of the safety ambassadors' project which saw the recruitment, training and deployment of the 1 000 youth, women and differently-abled persons as violence prevention practitioners.

The facilitators are from various communities and will work in areas where youth are at risk.

A monthly stipend has also been introduced.

"The safety ambassadors will earn a monthly Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) stipend for the duration of the contract which will run for six to 12 months.

"It is expected of them to show the necessary commitment and dedication to the objectives of the programme.

"My department is investing a lot of resources into this programme, including further opportunities for upskilling that will enable them to access other personal and professional development opportunities once their contracts come to an end.

"We have put in place a structured management system to ensure that the young people received the necessary support but they must also play their part by showing the necessary determination to succeed and thrive," says Fritz.

Ruiters says: "My message to other youth out there is that I believe we are the change our communities need. We are talented, young beings who should put our fears aside and arise. Start making the difference in your community, whether it's by holding a little clean-up or even implementing youth programmes within your community. We are the optimistic future leaders."

Dabula agrees: "Change in communities sometimes doesn't come over night. But if we consistently apply ourselves in small but meaningful ways, we will eventually bring about the change we want to see."