

ClemenGold Foundation creates a launch pad for rural youths

Since its inception in 2020, the ClemenGold Foundation in South Africa has impacted the lives of close to 200 youths in rural areas where school drop-out rates are alarmingly high and where youths feel directionless and unprepared for life and the world of work or future study. In response to these realities, the ClemenGold Foundation initiated the Ignite Youth Camp Programme where mentoring, wilderness, and group activities guide young people to see the value of education and work towards a hopeful future.

The ClemenGold Foundation, a registered Non-profit Company (NPC), was established to broaden the scope of already existing Corporate Social Investment (CSI) initiatives within the ClemenGold business family*. It has a clearly lineated focus. "The ClemenGold premium mandarin brand has a global commercial footprint but we've chosen to center our CSI activities in the rural agricultural communities surrounding our business's nursery, farming, and packing operations in the South African provinces of Limpopo, Mpumalanga, and the Western Cape," says Adèle Ackermann, ClemenGold marketing manager. "These deep rural communities might be far removed from the retailers where consumers find our brands, but they form the foundation of everything we do."



School Drop-out Rate among Rural Youths

This intervention was rooted in a deep concern about the dropout rate among children in rural areas in Grade 10 (aged 16). Analysis of the reasons for the alarming number of high school learners abandoning their studies showed a range of reasons, including 'broken' and dysfunctional homes with little guidance on life skills, and particularly their choice of high school subjects. "Most dropouts have no sense of direction and lack positive role models," says Joreth Duvenhage, the Foundation's executive director. "These youths also lack self-esteem and, without positive intervention, are destined to replicate the lives of their earlier generations."

Joining forces to potentiate change

The Foundation found a partner in Usiko, an NGO based in Jamestown, Stellenbosch with more than 20 years of experience in guiding at-risk young people facing psycho-social challenges in their households and communities. Usiko uses interventions that build resilience, self-reliance, independence, and self-esteem. In the over twenty years of Usiko's operation, approximately 80% of youths with whom they have worked have completed their matriculation, enabling them to enter further education or employment.

The Usiko programme empowers youths through nature-based activities, rituals, and rites of passage processes. These are specifically designed to assist young adolescents with their transition into adulthood. The programme works to instill four primary values: a sense of mastery, independence, belonging, and generosity. Participants gain a sense of responsibility towards themselves and are exposed to training in personal and social skills. The programme encourages

young people to look deeply within and to work with others to build a better life for themselves and those around them. Immersion in wilderness experience is at the heart of this intervention.

Not a hit and run approach

"For us, it is important to not instill a sense of hope at a camp and then, when the learners return home after four days, they find themselves in the same challenging circumstances, floundering to forge ahead with their new-found skills and insights," says Duvenhage. "For this reason, we created the Growing for Gold Launch Pad, a programme that allows us to continue this journey with camp attendees."

Ongoing interaction with and support for the youths includes assistance with their personal development and future career choice and preparation. They are, amongst others, invited to additional workshops, visits to tertiary institutions, and aptitude testing. Interaction with the youths and monitoring of their progress continues until they complete their schooling. Where problems are identified, they are addressed, thus ensuring the sustained benefits of the **various interventions**.

Monitoring and evaluation to demonstrate impact

Personalised assessments of each youngster before joining camps via a simple and user-friendly survey, provide a useful baseline for each participant and highlight their own areas of need. The same questions are then asked of them three months after a camp to establish their abilities to better manage their circumstances and whether their hope and motivation to work towards successful lives has improved.

The Foundation recently employed the services of Povaddo, qualitative research specialists, to help measure the impact of these camps with before and after surveys. According to Duvenhage and based on the outcomes of the research, the camps are changing lives. "There is no doubt about that. Because of the evident success of the program, we invite all who wish to walk alongside us in making a lasting difference, to financially support this project towards sustainability."

Other focus areas

The Foundation is also developing a new Vhula Tindzumulo ECD center in the Nkambako Village close to Letsitele, Limpopo – an area with limited preschool facilities. In parallel, they are building the human resource capacity of local creche teachers through their Teacher Toolbox training program including curriculum development implementation, and management.

For more information:

ClemenGold Foundation

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