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Some of the RelatED Education graduates raise their graduation certificates.



The RelatED Education, CEO, Leigh Blochlinger (third from left) address the audience.

Village near Kruger Park benefits from learnerships

124 young people from a remote village in Limpopo recently graduated with a qualification in wholesale and retail.

The NQF 4 wholesale and retail SETA qualification was obtained after a 12-month learnership in TFG stores.

The youngsters, from the remote village of Mhinga were part of learnerships conducted by the leading retail training provider, RelatED Education, in partnership with TFG.

According to the chief executive officer of RelatED Education, Leigh Blochlinger, the recent graduation brought to 230 the total number of Mhinga matriculants that have graduated with wholesale and retail qualifications over the last six years. Their qualifications change the trajectory of poverty and youth unemployment in the process.

“Most of these learners have been placed in TFG stores in nearby towns and many of them in management roles,” said Blochlinger.

TFG has invested more than R6 million towards tackling youth unemployment in the village. “We understand that by helping one household to produce an income, at least six other dependents are affected. We are proud of the number of graduates that are now running their own stores,” said Senta Morley, group human resources director at TFG.

“With national youth unemployment rates of close to 41 percent, it is gratifying to see the dreams of these young graduates and their families of being trained and employed in a vocation, becoming a reality,” she said.

The 12-month retail learnership programme is the result of a unique training partnership between business and a visionary village chief.

Back in 2012, Chief Hosi Shilungwa Mhinga, had a plan to uplift the young people of his region through specific career-oriented training. At that time, the area was an impoverished rural settlement with minimal economic activity, low incomes and high unemployment.

The first step was to establish a partnership between RelatED Education, an accredited training provider, and one of Africa’s leading retailers TFG.

RelatED’s role was to provide 12-month learnerships for Mhinga’s young people,

funded by the wholesale and retail SETA, while TFG was to host the learners providing vital on the job experience for Mhinga’s unemployed youth.

Situated close to the north-western border of the Kruger Park, six years ago only 17 businesses existed in the area and these were too widely spread-out to attract significant numbers of consumers from outside the village.

Due to Mhinga’s vision, the Kruger Mall and other commercial ventures outside Mhinga village are now a reality, providing vital employment opportunities for the community.

Partnering with TFG and under the patronage of the Mhinga, RelatED Education’s training and upliftment initiative has meant that TFG now has locally-sourced and trained employees for many of its stores in the region.

98 percent of the employed learnership graduates are employed in Mhinga and the surrounding areas, thus fulfilling Mhinga’s dream.

“Training of staff to run the various components of the retail hub in the Mhinga region was essential for the success of the project. Our training programme was tailored to address firstly the unique challenges inherent in this rural setting and secondly the fact that it was being built from scratch,” Blochlinger explained.

At the grand graduation ceremony for the 124 graduates, Blochlinger spoke about the massive unemployment problem facing young people in South Africa. “We all know the statistics, which are frightening. 8,3 million of South Africans between the ages of 15 and 34 are not in employment, education or training. We believe that one way of addressing this problem is what we at RelatED call ‘building your ocean one drop at a time.’ In other words, steadily, region by region.

“We now thank these graduates for working with us. Because you believed you could succeed and you tackled every challenge and never stopped dreaming, you have been a part of building this particular ocean, namely reducing unemployment in Mhinga, one drop at a time,” said Blochlinger.