

Sisters are doing it for Barloworld Equipment - celebrating women's month

Let's hear it for the 70 female apprentice mechanics specialising in heavy earth moving equipment

Johannesburg – August 2017 – "It's not easy being a woman in a male dominated world but we are definitely going to make it!" This is the declaration of Mbali Dlalani, one of 70 female trainees currently doing 3-year apprenticeships as heavy earth moving equipment mechanics with Barloworld Equipment.

Dlalani attributes her positive attitude and persistence to the 8-week training programme she underwent with Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator prior to taking up the apprenticeship. When BWE decided to employ more women in typically male roles to balance gender equality, the company knew it needed the kind of help that only an organisation like Harambee could provide.

This was about more than Harambee's in-depth candidate assessments; it was about tailoring a bespoke training programme that would not only meet BWE's needs but also ensure that each candidate had the best chance of succeeding in this unusual placement.

Harambee searched its database of over 300,000 assessed candidates for women who had completed matric with Pure Maths and English and invited them to attend a work seeker support session where they completed a battery of tests and assessments appropriate to the requirements of the role: looking at spatial awareness, mechanical reasoning and visual acuity.

The successful candidates then embarked on an 8-week work readiness programme which included working on the candidates' numeric ability, literacy levels, communication skills, problem solving and judgment, as well as health and safety awareness. Their training even included an innovative engine building exercise. Because of the unusual job situation they were going to face, Harambee also worked with them on EQ, conflict management and physical training.

Dlalani, who had always imagined herself working in an office, says that if not for this, the physical aspects of the job would have proven much more challenging. "This job definitely needs strength. The physical training we received and the way we were taught to keep our bodies strong and fit is just as important as everything we learned about having a positive attitude and never giving up."

Hannes Wilke, BWE's Technical Training Manager, isn't at all surprised by the fact that, several months into the programme, he already knows that these women are going to be very successful as heavy earth moving equipment mechanics.

"They're all excited about this opportunity and they work really hard because they're determined to succeed," he says. "My instructors and I are enjoying working with them because they have such good attitudes. It's very rewarding to watch their growth as their skills develop."

Wilke says that BWE mechanics are held to a higher standard than usual. "The customer calls us in when their own mechanics can't solve a problem, so our mechanics have to be better than theirs – and theirs are good!"

Mandiphiwe Levani, Key Account Manager at Harambee says that designing a bridging programme for a very specific customer need is typical of Harambee. "We love it when our clients approach us to do something we've never done before. We're prepared to do whatever it takes to get more of South Africa's young people into employment. This is

one of the most exciting projects we've worked on and we're enjoying it as much as Barloworld Equipment and our female apprentice mechanics are."

Apprentice mechanic Dlalani has the last word: "I'm loving it! I've gone from being unemployed to having a very exciting job that is never mundane. I get to go out, I get to build and fix things. I'm very proud of my new life."