

“Opportunities for everyone” as Engen bursaries extend work training to poor with learning disabilities

Engen sponsored bursaries aimed at extending access to crucial work-training opportunities for persons with learning disabilities has seen *Work4You* successfully place 90% of candidates, significantly boosting employment of these young adults in the formal labour market.

Although Engen has spent five years supporting *Work4You*, a Cape Town based NGO that prepares people with intellectual disabilities for permanent jobs, the bursaries are new – and the results have been phenomenal.

Lynn D’Alton, *Work4You* Operations Manager and occupational therapist, says Engen’s commitment has allowed them to dramatically increase their impact on young adults with intellectual disabilities, who may never have afforded the training costs.

Salt River beneficiary Shaakirah Harris, who says Engen “opened the way for opportunities for everyone”, now has a permanent job at Fashion and Hair Emporium in Woodstock, despite her learning disability.

“I’ve gone from just lying around at home to earning my own money, meeting new people, and building on my dream of one day becoming a hairdresser,” she says, urging others with intellectual disabilities to follow her example.

Work4You focuses its attention on people with intellectual disabilities aged 18 to 30, acting as a bridge between the end of special needs education and supported employment.

D’Alton says they boast high commercial employment rates, thanks to their skills and personal development programme, which is delivered by a team of professionals.

Prior to Engen’s introduction of bursaries to benefit youngsters from poor communities, the company supported *Work4You* with petrol allowances. The change came in 2016 when Engen took the decision to deepen its involvement in order to reach a more diverse and representative group.

Adhila Hamdulay, Engen’s Corporate Social Investment Manager, says this investment saw them allocate eight bursaries in that first year, with three of the recipients offered almost immediate employment.

In 2017 Engen upped that number to 10, from which *Work4You* actually assisted 12 candidates, and have now allocated funds for a further 10 bursaries in 2018.

“We are fully committed to supporting people with disabilities, in line with our CSI goals. But this is much more than just a box-ticking exercise for us. We know this is a key area of need, and are humbled to play a part in seeing these young people gain relevant work experience and life skills, and then hopefully permanent jobs,” adds Hamdulay.

Harris explains that she first attended *Work4You* assessment and training, after which she started with work exposure, job trials, and finally supported employment.

“This would never have happened without their support, but I was excited when it came to an end and I could start working and earning my own income. The independence is amazing,” adds Harris.

To date, says D’Alton, *Work4You* has trained 87 people, successfully placing trainees in 107

different positions. Some juggle several different jobs on different days of the week.

“Engen’s support really enables our organisation to continue advancing the employment of youngsters with intellectual disabilities in the open labour market,” she says, adding that increasing interest and need for their services had led to the development of a social franchise model.

“We hope to use this to expand our impact across South Africa, and we are grateful to Engen for helping us get to this point,” adds D’Alton.