

## Department of Labour - Supported Employment Enterprises (SEE)

Dennis Matsepe is young dapper, entrepreneurially-minded businessman whose eyes shine with passion when he expounds about his unique portfolio, Business Development for Supported Employment Enterprises (SEE).

SEE's mandate is to create employment with dignity for those handicapped people who are unable to find employment in the open labour market due to the nature of their afflictions. There are about 4.7 million people with disabilities in South Africa of whom some 10% to 15% probably require an environment such as the Supported Employment Enterprises.

Dennis says he is selling a story and envisions SEE's many offerings in the prestigious offices and hallways of South Africa's main banks and top businesses. SEE works closely with Productivity SA constantly conducting work study reviews of SEE manufacturing processes in line with SABS certified norms and standards.

The implementation of approved SEE norms and standards are maintained throughout the factories countrywide coupled with the upskilling of key personnel involved in production, planning and execution.

SEE has been part of the **Manufacturing Indaba** landscape for 2 years and the impact that this non-profit organisation has had on all those that have encountered its Ubuntu-minded management and dedicated employees has been heart-warming and inspirational. The respect and patience given to employees should become part of employee relation manuals in most organisations that do not have the challenges of SEE.

The unique aspect of SEE is that although each manufacturing operation is overseen by industry supervisors and manned by employees with disabilities, this is not the atmosphere that one imbibes when walking around these factories; one feels that it's business as usual, and everyone regardless of affliction contributes with pride. Social workers are hired as permanent staff members and Dennis noted that over time the "disabled" aspect of the person disappears. He states that the whole process is not just about "making furniture per se" but the manifestation of the by-products of gainful and dignified employment, which inevitably translates to new found confidence and self-esteem in each individual SEE employee.

Andrew Bafana Moeketsi in 2003 was involved in a horrific hijacking that left him shot in both legs and in the abdomen. He was hospitalised with severe injuries for seven months and one of his legs was amputated. Andrew presents as a well-dressed, inspiring and articulate young man, adores his only child and is very grateful and proud of his skill as a finishing sander in the wood section of SEE.

He believes "everything in life happens for a reason" and one of his aims in life is to "become a motivational speaker and empower" other people facing similar challenges. He also wants to create a Foundation that would enable people like himself especially in the rural areas to have access to inexpensive mobility equipment such as crutches, prostheses and wheelchairs.

Without this access people can remain housebound and indefinitely bedridden. Currently, Andrew is hampered by poor mobility equipment which includes crutches that have seen better days, and desperately needs a prosthesis but has been unable to procure one due to the very high cost.

Louise Badenhorst is another exceptional person that makes up the remarkable setting of SEE.

Louise is an exceptionally talented computer digitised savvy Textile designer, Pattern maker and Fashion Designer. The winner and finalist of many awards in her 36 years and recently married has Friedreich's ataxia which is an autosomal recessive inherited disease that causes progressive damage to the nervous system. The disease is progressive, and ultimately a wheelchair is required for mobility.

Louise's very brave outlook is manifested by her response to this very debilitating condition; she is very pragmatic and describes herself as "future orientated directing my insight towards understanding myself and others...allowing my contributions to speak for themselves".

Another employee, Hannelie Roos was left with a traumatic brain injury after a head-on collision and is about to retire with a pension after 38 years at SEE. Hannelie has only praise for her work environment and is reluctantly leaving SEE.

In South Africa, the government's national agenda includes the active participation of people with disabilities in the economy of the country and this is in line with international initiatives. However, this endeavour is more than just another government initiative but a well-honed unique eco-system that takes care of itself pays all its own expenses, staff and adds value by increasing and contributing to the manufacturing sector as well.

Currently, one hundred percent of the workers in the factories fit the profile of being either physically, emotionally or psychologically challenged. SEE is a non-profit organisation and people with disabilities are its sole beneficiaries. The business is learning-oriented and Dennis proudly notes that "the people are disabled, but are not seen as such. They do all the work and if given a chance can do anything!"

Dennis also sees the business as a skills-development initiative where some of the more able people have left to work out in the open-market place, and contribute with their special brand of excellent ethics and are considered to be skilled, loyal, hardworking and punctual.

The SEE factories under the helm of Dennis Matsepe and rest of the inspired and compassionate management drive these manufacturing entities as efficient outlets while economically empowering people with disabilities.

We were privileged to be taken on a tour of the factory by the very empathetic but with his finger on the pulse, Sibusiso Ngobeni. Sibusiso doesn't miss a beat, moving effortlessly from one employee to another acknowledging their special talent or ability. They in turn greet him with warmth and enthusiasm reflective of effective management and a well-run business.

SEE have 12 factories which operate in 7 of the 9 provinces and employ nearly one thousand people with disabilities, but have the capacity to employ at least another 3000 people. The factories manufacturing capacity includes 3000 different product types and currently their customers include hospitals, the police and schools.

Its products range from furniture (wooden and metal for offices, schools and domestic use), textiles (garments, bed linen, protective clothing, hospital and surgical garb - with printed or embroidered logos), metal work (shaped and welded construction), leather work, canvas work, book binding (beautifully crafted leather binding with gold lettering) and screen printing (printing onto promotional products, e.g. T-shirts, logos, caps, linen, flags, bunting, banners).

Dennis is very proud of the fact that SEE supplies the furniture to its flagship project; 700 schools nationwide. In the rural areas SEE has created another 1100 jobs indirectly. SEE transports the school desks and local carpenters assemble these desks for the schools, and this outsourcing framework has now created a sustainable eco-system whereby the school desks are repaired as

well by these local craftsmen.

Dennis states that SEE can custom design, create finishings, fittings and accessories to meet a client's requirements. Given the business and sales orders, SEE can deliver the goods, and in so doing continue make a significant difference to the lives of these remarkable people.