



Lucky the Hero production by the Africa Centre for HIV/Aids.

*Ask Maties Alumni of a decade or four ago how they were of service to the surrounding communities of Stellenbosch – and the law students will remember their time at the Legal Aid Clinic, dispensing free legal advice, while other students will tell you about the adult-education courses or the primary-health programmes that they were involved in as part of Matie Community Services (MCS).*



Ukwanda staff and students on a house visit in Avian Park

# *SU acknowledges excellence* in **Community Interaction**

In the past decade, many other exciting initiatives have also become part of the Stellenbosch University (SU) Community Interaction (CI) portfolio – from fish farming and medical-care projects to a literary festival.

MCS's predecessors – USKOR and GOUS – had been very active on the Tygerberg and Stellenbosch campuses from the 1960s and 1970s, respectively. The MCS's current programmes focus on skills development. Teaching assistance for matriculants,

adult-education and training opportunities, primary-health care, entrepreneurship and business skills for adults and high-school learners, and a one-stop support service to student community projects are now offered.

The Legal Aid Clinic has been providing a free legal service to the neediest sectors of the community since 1988. It also provides valuable training for final-year LLB students of the Faculty of Law, as 32 student consultants are prepared for legal

practice through the Practical Legal Training course. Consultations, as well as the realisation of the necessary legal steps in the interests of clients, are undertaken under the supervision of staff members of the Clinic, who are qualified attorneys.

### *The CI Flagship projects*

These two stalwart projects, along with eight other new initiatives, were recently selected as flagship projects by the University's Community Interaction

Committee of the Senate.

Some of the projects will be funded through central University funds. "We want to acknowledge the institutional importance of these CI initiatives, reward excellence and promote the sustainability and stability of the initiatives," says Prof. Julian Smith, Vice-Rector: Community Interaction and Personnel.

According to Mr Jerome Slamat, Senior Director: Community Interaction, the initiatives were selected according to a set of criteria by the Community Interaction Committee of the Senate. The criteria include: innovation; exceptional results; impact; monitoring, evaluation, reporting and quality-assurance measures; focus on Vision 2012, the SU Strategic Framework and SU Community Interaction Policy; ethics; and the promotion of the University's image.

### *From health . . .*

Programmes such as Ukwanda, the TB-free Kids project and the Africa Centre for HIV/AIDS Management have significantly extended the University's health-related CI initiatives over the past decade.

The Ukwanda Centre for Rural Health was launched in 2002 as a rural platform for undergraduate training and has since evolved to include research initiatives on rural health issues. It forms part of the aim of the SU Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) to conduct at least 50% of all clinical training in community-oriented facilities and, of this, at least 10% in rural areas. At the same time, the policy objectives of SU endorse a new paradigm where teaching, research and CI are better integrated, emphasising the importance of multidisciplinary approaches to addressing the problems of local communities.

"Ukwanda exposes our students to the real health needs within communities," says Ms Lindsay-Michelle Meyer. "It develops their ability to think critically and empowers them to serve the needs of these communities practically."

The TB-free Kids project, a multi-pronged intervention, also an initiative of the FHS, aims to make decrease community transmission of TB in poverty-stricken urban communities that are part of the Desmond Tutu TB Centre's existing research studies. The project puts the Centre's research results into practice by influencing and changing policy and through its multi-sectorial approach creating a model of sustainably improving community health care resulting in improved quality of life. This approach ensures strong partnerships with various Departments of Health, other governmental departments, NGOs and community stakeholders.

About the Africa Centre for HIV/AIDS Management, Prof Jan du Toit says, "It's our mission not only to understand the complexities of HIV/AIDS but also to develop effective ways to ensure that all students and staff of the University, as well as the communities that we reach, are prepared on a personal and professional level to deal with this pandemic effectively."

The Centre's CI leg uses educational theatre to reach the Afrikaans-speaking coloured communities on the farms and outlying areas of the Western Cape. In the last two years 182 farms have been covered, exposing 96 000 workers to education and 76% of workers knowing their HIV status today.

### *. . . to education and culture . . .*

Other flagship CI projects with a strong focus on education include SciMathUS, TRAC and WOW, the empowerment project of the Woordfees.

SciMathUS, which was established in 2001, aims to address South Africa's serious shortage of black professionals in mathematics, the physical sciences, accounting and related fields. It is often called the "second chance" programme because it prepares recent matriculants to rewrite the senior-certificate examination of the Department of Education and to up their marks to stand a chance of gaining entry to degree programmes in the natural sciences, the applied natural sciences and the economic or management sciences.

TRAC is a unique science, mathematics and technology-intervention programme. Since 1994, it has grown into a programme with nationwide facilities and strong links with financial partners and various educational role-players.

"We were recently recognised at national-government level as part of the solution to address the skills shortage of engineers in general, as well as technicians, scientists and artisans," says Ms Debbeey Cromhout about this award-winning programme.

Over the past eight years, the University's institutional festival, the Woordfees, has evolved into a very well-attended and respected fixture on the local festival calendar. More than 100 presentations are on offer each year, which provides endless creative possibilities and work for both established and emerging artists, organisers, coordinators and student assistants.

The Woordfees and its comprehensive empowerment project, WOW, address SU's goal of greater cooperation between "Town and Gown", that is between the local community and the University.

WOW has a strong educational focus geared towards learners, students and teachers as well as the general public. By providing information and skills, it aims to create a dynamic around literature and art to promote Afrikaans in a multilingual context, in line with the SU's strategic plan and vision.

### *. . . to agriculture . . .*

On the agricultural front, 35 trout-production systems have already been established in irrigation dams in the Western Cape as part of the Trout Small-scale Farming Project. This initiative, by the Division for Aquaculture in the Faculty of AgriSciences, is supported by the national Department of Science and Technology.

Farm workers - especially women and youth - are trained in aquaculture and business practices with the aim of improving living standards, alleviating

poverty, transferring knowledge and skills and uplifting previously-disadvantaged communities.


The University acts as the implementer, manager and mentor of the "Hands-on Fish Farmers Co-op", which became active in 2004. Within two years, the co-op had already delivered 130 tons of fresh trout to the local market.

Individual projects, most of which are situated in the Boland, are registered as legal entities, such as trusts or close corporations, and are members of this cooperative.

### *. . . and religion*

The Faculty of Theology has been home to the Unit for Religion and Development Research since 2002. This flagship project is a self-sufficient entity within the discipline of Practical Theology and Missiology. It conducts research related to the development profile and needs of local communities, formulates relevant theory on development, provides a training facility and research space for postgraduate students and provides a professional research and training service to communities. The Unit's research results are regularly communicated through scientific and popular publications.

### *Closing words*

Vice-Rector Prof Smith hopes that the flagship initiatives will serve as inspiration to other programmes: "We're impressed with the quality of these projects and hope that others will strive to be awarded flagship status as well." 

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