



23 October 2008

For: The Campbell Foundation
Friends of the Mandela Rhodes Foundation
Kiwaniis Club of Greensboro, North Carolina
ADT Western Cape

Re: **Update on SAEP Gap Year Programme 2008**

Many thanks again for your generous support of this year's programme! The follow will constitute an interim report on this year's cohort of interns.

Intake and Retention. Our target was twelve interns, so we accepted fourteen in anticipation of some attrition. Of these fourteen, one resigned because he was unwilling to follow the academic programme he had agreed to. We dropped another who failed to abide by the terms of his contract in terms of abuse of alcohol and being a role model. A third has recently had to drop out because of family financial pressures. So we have ended up with eleven.

Academics. When they joined our programme, none had any prospect of attending university or securing a learnership. To date, five have been accepted at university, others have applications pending, and two who would be better served by a learnership are in the process of interviewing for one.

In our recruitment for this cohort, we talked with most of the learners from the high schools where we work who had earned "university endorsement" in their matric exams. We found, as we have in previous years, that learners who earn a university endorsement are under great pressure from family and community to go straight to university. Most parents are not aware of the very high rate of attrition – and frequency of change of course of study -- among township matriculants who go straight to university. Thus we always lose learners who we believe would have been ideal candidates for the programme. This was true in 2008.

Our ideal target group consists of learners who may have earned the minimum qualifications for university admission, but who could profit

significantly from a year of self-examination, academic preparation, academic and career counselling, life skills development, and intensive work in English and computer skills. We will focus our 2009 recruiting (which has begun with presentations at four schools) on learners with high academic potential, though our programme will remain open to young people with high motivation and potential in other areas and a strong commitment to community service.

Admission to further education (university or a government-supported “further education and training college”) will remain the ideal outcome of our gap year. We hope our recruitment will be able to attract learners with tertiary potential. However, tertiary admission will not be our sole targeted outcome.

A final observation: This year was an anomaly, in that our interns were required to rewrite their matric exams after only three months of tutoring. This was because a national curriculum change required rewriting by the class of 2007 to take place in May and June, rather than in November along with the matric class of 2008. Next year the system will revert to the usual schedule, so we will be able to provide a full academic study year in 2009.

Mentoring and Counselling. Integral to the gap year is a broad range of mentoring and personal counselling.

Academic and career counselling remains one of the greatest challenges of the Gap Year Programme, since the learners come to us very poorly informed about career options and little sense of the requirements for further study in areas where they may have developed an interest. We have worked very hard this year and believe most of our interns are headed toward fields of study or jobs where they stand a chance of succeeding and finding satisfactory careers. We have increased our job shadowing programme in collaboration with ADT, a local corporate sponsor of two of our interns. Academic and career counselling remains a cornerstone of our gap year.

Mentoring and psychological counselling. Our interns need consistent mentoring throughout the year, as well as psychological counselling for individual problems. The Gap Year Coordinator is the overall mentor and develops a close personal relationship with each intern. Other staff and volunteers, especially international volunteers, develop close supporting relationships with the interns. SAEP generally has a local social work student doing a placement who can provide a first line of psychological counselling. If an external referral is necessary, that is done.

English language skills. A major objective is to help the interns develop their capacity to understand, speak, read, and write English. This aspect of our programme is headed by Ros Emanuel, a retired high school English teacher (and chair of the local SAEP management committee.) The interns have at least two formal tutorials in English each week as well as a number of discussion groups, ranging from current events seminars to Touchstones Discussion Groups (see www.touchstones.org). A number of different people

conduct the discussion groups and seminars, including many international volunteers.

English language skills development continues to be one of the most successful components of our programme. It will remain a top priority, given its importance in terms of readiness for further education has been the very impressive PowerPoint presentations developed by interns on topics of interest to them.

Life Skills Development. There are a number of aspects to this programme. As in the past, training in typing, computer literacy, and use of the internet is high on the list. MS Word is the most useful of the applications we teach, but we also seek to give the interns the basics of Excel and Powerpoint so they can use these applications. We have added personal financial management, including budgeting for tertiary education, to the programme. Study skills are taught along with academic tutorials. The interns learn to prepare a CV and write a letter of application; this year they have attended workshops on how to present oneself in an interview. We have conducted discussions concerning HIV/AIDS and unplanned pregnancies. We have run workshops in entrepreneurship. And we have had very successful workshops on conflict management and resolution.

Enrichment Activities. This year, as in the past, we are giving our interns a wide range of stimulating activities, including hikes and other outdoor excursions; visits to museums and the Slave Lodge; and attendance at arts festivals and other cultural events.

Community Service. Last, but not least, our interns have participated in community service projects. This has been more difficult this year in the past, since the interns were required to concentrate on their studies during the first half of the year given the May-June schedule of exams; they were not able to begin their community service until July. Since most of the community service activities in the past have involved participation in after-school programmes such as debating and journalism or working with UCT tutors, these opportunities were not available to this year's cohort. However, three of them have been involved in our pre-school programme for their community service; this is a first, and has been highly successful. Three others have developed and run a new programme for teaching English to upper grade primary school students in one of the township primary schools. Four others have been involved in the revival of SAEP's after-school Film Clubs.

The Future of the Gap Year Programme. We hope to raise funds to continue at a level of 12 interns in 2009 and consolidate the improvements we have made in the expanded programme this year. Our next goal is to increase the number to 18 in 2010 and 24 in 2011. We have applied to one funder already for this multi-year funding. As soon as funding will permit, we hope to develop the programme into a "Post-Matric Academy" which could provide a bridging year to 40 or more Western Cape matriculants.