

Giving Chalumna youth hope

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EMPOWERING YOUTH: Ray Schöne and Alexis Salaman pass on skills to Ovayo and Siyolise, two youth librarians from the Dyam Dyam village reading club in Chalumna

HOLDING a firm belief that children are not things that can be moulded, but are people to be unfolded, Ray Schöne and Alexis Salaman founded Youth Potential South Africa (Youspa) in 2015.

Their aim was to awaken creativity, potential and purpose in the young people of South Africa.

Since then, Ray and Alexis have been working with more than 2 000 pupils, teachers, principals and parents of six rural schools in Chalumna, bringing creativity, flexibility and passion into education through developmental programmes, aimed at enhancing and empowering the creative and logical minds of young people.

Youspa effectively brings education alive in the lives of socially disadvantaged and marginalised youth in Chalumna.

Schöne and Salaman both have vast experience in charitable work in rural Namibia and Kenya.

Schöne said they had learnt on their journey that rural children and schools were the most neglected in society.

“When pupils come from broken homes to school where windows and everything is broken, they think that their lives can never go further than that, that their lives will also be broken. In rural

schools, pupils are not exposed to any kind of art, creative skills development, discussion or problem-solving atmosphere where their inner spark is ignited.”

To overcome this, they run weekly creative youth and teacher empowerment programmes, leadership and team-building programmes for pupils, teachers school SGB members, as well as literacy and community garden programmes.

They are all designed to facilitate the holistic growth and development of young people into positively engaged members of the community.

The pair have also introduced village reading clubs (mobile libraries) in the communities they work with, where young people get to experience reading, listening and discussing, outside school walls.

The pupils themselves work as librarians.

“We saw the need to help rural pupils discover their own inner spark to enable them to flourish.

“Developing social and emotional skills is even more critical for youth living in these under-resourced rural areas,” Schöne said.

“They are more motivated and committed to school. Since the start of these programmes, the youth, principals, teachers and parents have been begging us for more.”

Youpsa has grown and gained momentum since its launch in 2015, but Schöne said it still ran on a limited scale because of a lack of support.

This however, has not deterred the team, who want to see the initiative become sustainable, extending to other remote areas in the province.

“We see a huge gap for rural children, who are the majority of the pupils in our country. Through our programmes, we want to fill this gap,” Schöne said.

If you’d like to support them, visit www.youpsa.org for donation details or call 076-123-3832.

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