

New INSETA internship empowers intellectually impaired South Africans

The Insurance Sector Education and Training Authority (INSETA) has launched an internship programme for the intellectually impaired which is helping equip young adults who have completed their training to gain valuable experience in the workplace ensuring their competitiveness in the open labour market.

In South Africa, there are at least 2.5 million people with impairments and those with intellectual impairments form a significant part of this group and have traditionally faced a number of different barriers that prevent them from gaining access to opportunities. A major barrier to employment of these young adults can be attributed to myths, misconception and apprehension about people with disabilities. Employers must ensure that workplace sensitisation training takes place to dispel perceptions and create a more inclusive workplace.

“There is a significant need for this type of initiative that INSETA is facilitating,” said Sandra Dunn, CEO of INSETA.

The main objective is to give those with intellectual impairments the opportunity to be a part of the workplace and to help facilitate their transition from school to work to independent living. The ultimate goal is for them to participate meaningfully in the workplace and the economy, added Dunn.

“It is a pilot internship that has been long overdue. Employers who wish to embark on such an initiative must ensure that reputable partners, like Living Link, are used to ensure that the right fit is done with the learners and the workplaces,” said Dunn.

Partnering with The Living Link, the project is running from April 2010 until April 2011 and is already proving to be a success.

The Living Link has successfully challenged barriers by working towards economic participation, inclusion and social justice for people with intellectual impairments, enabling them to participate in mainstream society. The non-profit organisation was founded by Ingrid Menzel and her daughter Julia. Menzel’s other daughter, Nadine, has an intellectual impairment.

“This internship is a first for us and means a great deal as the aim of the organisation is to find employment for our graduates. By having such a project in place, we were able to place six graduates at once and these young people can now use the skills they learnt in training and make a valuable contribution to the company where they work,” said Menzel.

Vivienne Delaney, Senior Manager of Learning and Development at Indwe Broker Holdings, one of the companies taking on board the interns, is proud to be involved in the programme.

“Indwe has taken on two intellectually impaired learners on a one-year internship programme. They were selected by the Living Link to make sure their abilities and skills could match the specific needs of our office environment. They are doing a sterling job and have been assisting in our mail room, HR department and with promotional activities,” said Delaney, adding that the company is looking forward to the months ahead.

Peter Tippett, Facilities Manager at Alexander Forbes, also reports that the interns they have taken on board have performed excellently. “They have settled in nicely and the support from The Living Link has been fantastic. It has been a learning curve for everyone in the company but one that we have all enjoyed being a part of. Once this internship is over we are keen to

take on more graduates down the line if possible as we think it is incredibly beneficial both to the graduates and to the company," he said.

Paula Mendes, Learning Consultant at Hollard, reports that their two interns have settled in well and that all is running smoothly. "Both the staff and interns are very happy and have adjusted well. One intern is working as a data capturer in one of our partner firms and the other is working in our HR department. Reports from both teams are very positive."

INSETA hopes to continue this internship in the future. "We will be looking to expand this initiative and for more companies to participate. It is running very successfully and the insurance companies involved have really gone out of their way to make this a success," said Snell.

"We are hoping to double the 2011 intake of intellectually challenged interns as employers begin to see the benefits of having a truly diverse workforce."

INSETA has exceeded the targets set by the Department of Higher Education and Training in the area of training those with disabilities. These results also show that the insurance industry is succeeding in integrating disabled workers into the workplace and that insurance companies are increasingly trying to create an inclusive work environment.

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