

Successful trainee programme graduates get jobs

In March last year, 196 unemployed young adults from Gauteng were selected to participate in a yearlong programme, which included theoretical training as well as internships at Retail Relate's retail partners. Last week, 160 of them graduated from the Unemployed Youth Assistance Programme.

The company provides W&RSETA accredited and funded retail training to matriculants who sometimes qualify for tertiary training but are hindered by financial constraints. The students are graduating with NQF 5 qualifications, which will equip them to fill junior management posts as a start to a career in retail. Many of the graduates have already been offered jobs by retail groups.

"The extremely high retention rate of the UYAP and the personal and professional development of these youngsters within a year is particularly gratifying," said Leigh Blochlinger, who heads up Retail Relate. "We see this as a step towards rectifying the huge skills shortages prevalent in the retail sector."

A recent report on the critical skills shortage by the Wholesale and Retail SETA has indicated that there is a shortage of 42 000 retail managers. The situation is further aggravated by the fact that close to 88% of the retail workforce, are under qualified, with education levels equivalent to matric or below.

In particular, companies are struggling to source adequately qualified and trained mid-level managers. About 70% of the jobs advertised require skilled and senior labour, while only 44.61% of potential career seekers represent the demanded skills. In addition, the demand for entry level and junior staff is very low, yet these positions would be the only option for those with a matric certificate or less.

"We were also impressed at how well the students adapted to the culture and environment of the retail sector. Coming from rural or informal areas, it was quite a culture shock to them, but they quickly learnt how to function in a much more corporate environment."

The UYAP was financed by the Wholesale and Retail SETA's skills levy fund, currently estimated to be around R350-million. "The UYAP was an extremely worthwhile investment and the outstanding level of follow through by the youngsters is a testament to the commitment by all involved parties," said Joel Dikgole, CEO of W&RSETA.

"These include Retail Relate and its high quality of training, the retailers who made the effort to mentor their interns and the students themselves, who did their utmost to make the most of this opportunity.

"We were particularly impressed with the inclusion of the learnership aspect into this comprehensively crafted programme. The practical workplace experience gained through the internships is particularly important for the retail sector and complements the theoretical training, which will provide a sound foundation for successful careers," he concluded.

Among the retailers that participated in the UYAP offering the learners vital workplace experience were The Essential Hardware Group, AutoZone, The Cambridge Group, Hoxies Foods, TWK and The Foshini Group (TFG).

The students received some of their theoretical training at Heronbridge Retreat, which since the beginning of this year, has been the company's centre for excellence. Students of its sister programme, the Rural Youth Project, are also receiving some of their training here and the rest of it in their home environments, situated throughout the country.

For more information, go to www.retailrelate.co.za.

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