

Future Crew mural inspires Lavender Hill Senior Secondary

Future Crew is a schools-based project aimed at empowering learners in challenged communities to make positive changes in their lives through being active and life skills training. Lavender Hill Senior Secondary School learners have recently created a graffiti-style mural that underlines the tenets of the project.



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Well-known community artist, Mak1one was the visionary and facilitator behind the creation of the Future Crew brand. He, along with professional artists, Sergio Riquist and Claire Homewood and a 'crew' of learners, created the brand identity and participated in creative workshops to design the murals.

One has pride of place on the second block quad wall while three smaller graffiti-type murals adorn the walls of the gym. "Graffiti is not always about negativity," explains Mak1one, "Our message is that life gives you choices. With slogans of 'it's a new day, make it count', 'in here and in life every bit counts', and 'don't stop believing' we reinforce the fact that we all have to make the choice to be positive about life. It's up to you."

The collaboration between Virgin Active and the Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport (DCAS), promotes a healthy, balance lifestyle through the establishment of fully equipped gyms and mentorship by Virgin Active staff. By engaging learners in sport and sharing knowledge the project will also identify, harness and tap into raw talent to help create employment opportunities.

Its brand ambassador, Ashwin Willemse, is testimony to how young people can turn their lives around. Willemse, who had a troubled upbringing before being selected to play for the Springboks, encouraged learners to determine their success and future. "It is up to you," he said. "You can change if you believe in yourself."

More 'gangster' areas targeted

This model, piloted at the school six months ago, is set to be rolled out to an additional five schools over the next two years. The schools that have been identified are all in disadvantaged areas where gangsterism and drug abuse is rife and alternative lifestyle choices, role models and positive reinforcement are most needed.

A demonstration of how being active can lift the spirits was proven when a group of 50 Lavender Hill learners participated in a group training and exercise session. "Having identified the need for extra mural sport coaching at schools, including basic stretching, fitness and nutrition, we grew the concept to focus beyond the gym and physical activity to incorporate life skills training," explains Theresa Kearley, national transformation manager for Virgin Active.

Proof of this change is already being seen at the school with the Class of 2012 achieving a 88% pass rate. Principal Faseeg Manie, a keen chess player uses his tactical skills to ensure learners get the most out of their time at the school. It boasts an excellent library, fast internet access, a feeding scheme for 250 students and now, the well-equipped gym.

"The impact the school is having on the broader community is getting noticed. Our learners know they are cared for, that they matter and that despite their circumstances they are in charge of their destinies. Every time I think of the gym and this initiative and see the impact it is having on our learners' lives, it puts a smile on my face. This project is definitely an instrument of change and transformation. I have to thank Virgin Active for being a business with a conscience and for investing in our youth."

Vital PPP

According to Lyndon Bouah of DCAS, this project ticks all the boxes in terms of being socially inclusive, creative, getting South Africans active to limit the burden of disease and help alleviate unemployment. "Public/private partnerships like these are vital for future planning," he said.

"Future Crew is about looking forward. It's about actively providing learners with the skills to make the right decisions," says Ross Faragher-Thomas, MD of Virgin Active SA. "We believe that with the right attitude you can rise above your circumstances and become a success. It is how to respond to challenges and turning obstacles into opportunities. We're looking forward to working with Lavender Hill and the additional five schools that have been identified to assist learners and the community to fulfil their dreams for a better future."

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