

At the helm of East London youth empowerment

By Temana Mabula

Since starting his own business in East London in 2013, Malcolm Meinie is among the pioneers of youth empowerment in his community, helping to save young people from a life of drugs and crime on the streets. Meinie is the owner of Malcolm's Auto Engineering.

With 12 young employees, Malcolm's Auto Engineering boasts fixing anything on wheels, from lawn mowers to heavy commercial vehicles. Their customer base stretches as far as Mthatha and Butterworth.

Meinie started work as a driver in 1986, which is when his passion for auto mechanics became apparent. He registered as an apprentice under the merSETA in 1997 and qualified as an Automotive Machinist in 1999.

He ventured into his own business after his apprenticeship qualification and says his motivation was to educate the youth about the motor industry. Meinie explains that he grew up poor and wanted to become the "stepping stone" for young people to realise their dreams.

"It often sounds like I am ministering to my staff, but I always tell them that they can never build better lives by roaming the streets and engaging in a life of crime," he says.

Meinie mentors three merSETA-registered apprentices, all of whom express absolute satisfaction with their training programmes.

Sandisiwe Xanti is a 23-year-old female apprentice at Malcolm's Auto Engineering. She studied Mechanical Engineering at Loveday College. Xanti



supports a family of seven from her salary, including both parents. She is the bread winner at home and says the opportunity she was granted by Meinie is highly appreciated by both her and her family.

"I was sitting at home wrecking my brains as to what I was going to do to help support my family and Mr Meinie became my saving grace. I have learnt so many things since I started working here

and hope to learn much more during my training," says Xanti.

Meinie also helped Davian Capkey, a 17-year-old who says his life was a vacuum before he started his apprenticeship. He turned to drugs to ease the pain.

"I was living a life without purpose before I started working for Mr Meinie. He has instilled in me valuable skills which I also

want to pass onto others when I get the opportunity," explains Capkey.

Simbulele Suduka says drinking excessively used to be the order of the days before he was taken under Meinie's wings. "I came to realise that there was bound to be an undesirable destination from a life of drinking, so I decided to re-route and I absolutely love the direction I am headed," he says.



Malcolm Maine, Owner of Malcolm's Auto Engineering drilling holes with the drill press machine

Meinie explains that as much as he knew that starting a business was not going to be a walk in the park, he did not anticipate the severity of the struggles he'd have to endure. He thought he was buying a fully functional workshop but found that almost all the machines needed to do the work were not functioning. "I had to start by fixing all the machines in the workshop and it was tough as I had to fund it from my own pocket," he says.

He explains that empowering the youth is necessary to grow the economy.

"With the country's ailing economy and unemployment spreading like a disease on steroids, our youth need to be put in the forefront with regards to empowerment so that they can have opportunities to better their lives and be the agents of economic emancipation," explains Meinie.

Meinie can only do so much alone and will need as much assistance as he can get to help the youth get off the streets. All three apprentices agree with this

notion and have vowed to preach to their peers about the dangers of street life and the opportunities available in the motor industry.

He really is a man on a mission, and his mission is to not see youngsters roaming the streets.



Simbulele Suduka, apprentice at Malcolm's Auto Engineering honing a block with a hone machine



Malcolm Maine with his three apprentices and the rest of his staff at Malcolm's Auto engineering



Davian Capkey, apprentice at Malcolm's Auto Engineering cutting cranks with a crank grinding machine



Sandisiwe Xanti, an apprentice at Malcolm's Auto Engineering skimming a cylinder head with a skim machine