

Prison inmates weld their way to prosperity

By Sibongiseni Ziinjiva Ka-Mnguni

Vuyisile can attest to the adage that 'all that glitters is not gold'. Like any other young man, he had a dream of making it big in the City of Gold, but it was not to be. Instead, he found his niche back home in the Eastern Cape.

Forty inmates at Grootvlei Prison in Bloemfontein have received special "get-out-of-jail" cards.

The "cards" in question came in the form of the National Certificate in Welding Application and Practice,

after they successfully completed an extensive and testing welding course funded by merSETA.

merSETA injected R1.5 million into the initiative, which is aimed at equipping inmates with skills to

enable them to confidently face the world of work on their release.

The certificate places them in an excellent position to obtain employment in the steel industry or for a future in the business



Two Grootvlei Prison inmates (second and fourth from left) with (from left) Dr Lynette Fourie, Ms Subashini Moodley, Dr Raymond Patel and Mr Gustav Wilson at a ceremony to hand over toolboxes.



The merSETA CEO Dr Raymond Patel

environment – far away from crime. This crucial skills development intervention is the result of a partnership between merSETA, Grootvlei Correctional Services and Goldfields Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) College.

The programme also helps with character building, in line with other rehabilitation programmes, and provides hope for the inmates.

The aim of the programme is to equip inmates who are about to receive parole with skills and to place them at merSETA member companies and assist those who want to start their own business upon release.

The training took place at Grootvlei Correctional Services Centre. The Goldfields TVET College provided the training, while merSETA, as a certification authority, ensured that the qualification was registered with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA).

Speaking at the certification ceremony, merSETA CEO, Dr Raymond Patel, said the SETA had

a social responsibility to restore the dignity and self-worth of all South Africans.

“We place strong emphasis on the developmental nature of skilling inmates, as well as the capacitation of the Department of Correctional Services’ facilities to become independent training providers in future,” he said.

“The Grootvlei skills development project helps us to refine a model through which we can partner with the Department to implement trade-related skills development programmes at other facilities. merSETA will also continue to source potential job opportunities for trained prison inmates.”

Dr Patel said that merSETA had accompanied the Department of Correctional Services personnel on a study tour of prison facilities in Scandinavian countries, during which they took note of practices the countries had adopted to support inmates in adopting new life goals, skills and values.

“We hope to contextualise these good practices for the South African

environment in our partnership with the Department of Correctional Services,” he said.

The Department of Correctional Services’ Regional Commissioner, Ms Subashini Moodley, said the department is always called on to do good for “fellow human beings”.

“It is our moral duty to equip inmates with skills, so that they are able to contribute positively to the mainstream economy,” she said.

She said some of the offenders who had gone through the programme were now employed by mines in the Free State as well as by other companies in the private sector.

“We are grateful to the merSETA for showing its unwavering commitment to changing the lives of our people. This goes a long way to correcting the sad return rate of inmates. Our appreciation also goes to Goldfields TVET College, which provided inmates with the necessary training,” she said.

Inmate Peter Mokhoabane said, “We went to prison as offenders and will now leave it as defenders of the community.”

He said studying and training in prison was a daunting task, but through perseverance and determination they had all managed to successfully complete the programme.

“We need to protect our community against social ills and start to live a new, meaningful life. The skills we received while in prison will go a long way towards helping us to find employed or start our own businesses. We’re grateful to merSETA, the Department of Correctional Services and Goldfields TVET College for this opportunity,” Mokhoabane said.