



LIBERTY
LIFE

Aha-Thuto Secondary School School matters



Liberty Life promoting excellence in education

Broad thinking

Equipping learners and the community with much-needed skills

With the onslaught of challenges facing our education system, it is inspiring and encouraging to find a school which is courageously proactive in addressing these challenges.

Aha-Thuto Secondary in Orange Farm is one such school.

Apart from its highly dedicated educators and their commitment to creating a true culture of learning in the school, Aha-Thuto has, for the last three years, embarked on a pre-emptive, conflict-resolution and leadership development programme with an NGO called Phaphama Initiatives.

The programme is known as the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP). AVP workshops facilitate a process where all stakeholders in the school (learners, educators, school governing body members and parents) come together to learn the skills of communication, cooperation and creative conflict resolution.

Together participants take responsibility for and explore solutions to the challenging issues of discipline, violence, substance abuse, gangsterism and HIV/Aids that surround them in their everyday lives.

One learner had the courage to

share with us that he had been "in a bad crowd, bullying, having fights, abusing sex and addicted to alcohol – AVP changed all that".

The strength and uniqueness of the programme lies, however, in its transference of skills to learners and educators in the school.

After attending a basic and advanced AVP workshop (two days each), participants volunteer themselves to be trained as AVP facilitators and to continue running these workshops in their school for other learners, educators and parents.

So the school is knit into a caring, respectful community where the priority is on enabling young people to become positive role models and leaders in their communities, reach their full academic and moral potential, and contribute to the development of our country.

In fact a number of AVP facilitators and who have completed their schooling in 2003 or 2004 are now in tertiary education institutions pursuing their chosen careers.

They, however, also find the time to return to their old school and facilitate further AVP workshops.

For many of them, it all begins with how we feel about ourselves:

"Before I had low self-esteem, I didn't want to get involved with

things as I was shy and didn't want to look like a sissy. Now I am chairperson of a youth organisation, one I initiated in my community."

Clearly, from participants' feedback, AVP is having much positive impact, not only on their school, but on the wider community as well, as learners and educators take these skills to their families and friends.

As one young learner explained: "I often used to get angry with my mother, because she says there's no money to buy me food for school, but she is drinking. Since the basic workshop I tell her my problems and listen to her problems and our relationship is now much better."

It is no wonder then that Mr Dlamini, the principal of the school, can confidently assert that not only does AVP help educators and learners understand one another better; it also "makes you grow and see life differently".

The school has also made sure that these skills spread through the community by inviting educators from surrounding schools to join the workshops; now Tshupo Themba in Sebokeng has also started running AVP workshops.

This spirit of sharing is what makes Aha-Thuto a pioneer school in its community.



Honoured ... Pule Morake has been recognised for his contributions to the alternatives to violence campaign.