

MPEPU RURAL YOUTH ENCOURAGEMENT (MRYE) OUTREACH INITIATIVE

Two of the five “hurdles” which the DST/NRF Centre of Excellence in Tree Health Biotechnology (CTHB) has to pass as part of its Service Level Agreement, are “knowledge brokerage” and “service rendering”.

Although FABI is involved mainly with post-graduate training and research, the importance of supporting and being involved in outreach programmes at all levels of the educational chain is fully appreciated. FABI is therefore actively involved in communicating the importance of science to learners at school level as well. It has been involved with initiatives such as the UP with Science programme, the National Science Week, visits to local schools, visits of school children to FABI and other SAASTA initiatives.

The CTHB has decided to support a special outreach project in 2006. The MRYE outreach initiative was started by a group of very inspired and enthusiastic 3rd and 4th year engineering students at the University of Pretoria, all of whom came from disadvantaged rural backgrounds and were aware of the problems of poverty, poor education and deprivation facing these learners in the rural areas. The group’s mission is to preach the message that education would provide the key to enable hard-working learners to rise above their situation and open up opportunities for them to continue with tertiary education and so embark on a successful career.

Initially, without sponsorship, the MRYE group paid a one day visit to rural schools in Kwazulu-Natal. They provided learners with details of subjects that they needed to take at school in order to follow various careers, discussed courses available at different tertiary institutions and made learners aware of the funding opportunities available to them. Their aim was to motivate these learners and excite them to do well at school so as to open up the opportunity for further study at tertiary institutions. The group developed their own logo with the slogan “Insight inspires success”. They believe that an educated nation = a well informed nation and that the MRYE creates an atmosphere of excellence.

Profs Mike and Brenda Wingfield, of the CTHB, decided to support the MRYE group this year and to sponsor three of the visits that they had planned.

The first visit took place to Nquthu in Kwazulu-Natal from 18–21 January 2006. Eleven enthusiastic and excited students under the leadership of Samukelo Vilakazi, visited seven schools in the Nquthu area and were able to assist and inform learners and teachers. On the whole they were well received and considered that their visit had been a great success. A full report on the visit is available from the CTHB in which the MRYE group thanks the CTHB, the NRF, the DST, SAASTA and the various higher education institutions, who provided brochures and prospectuses to take to the learners.

The group learnt a great deal from this visit to Kwazulu-Natal and implemented changes to their presentations, programme and arrangements so as to ensure that their visit to the Eastern Cape from 8-12 April was an even greater success. There were different hurdles and challenges in Umthatha and surroundings but they came back inspired to prepare for the third visit of 2006 to Limpopo and Mpumalanga between 2 and 8 July. A full report on the visit to the Eastern Cape is available from the CTHB.

The Board of the CTHB has approved that further financial support be given to the MRYE Outreach group in 2007. They have also enlisted the support of the Department of Education. We wish the group every success in their drive to help the rural youth of South Africa.

The photo shows the MRYE team in their bright and attractive t-shirts displaying the MRYE and CTHB logos, about to embark on their January visit to Kwazulu-Natal.

