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Responsible and skilful driving is paramount for the safe transport of learners who live in rural areas to give peace of mind to parents and schools who entrust children to a bus driver every day.

This is where the Discovery Safe Journeys to School (DSJTS) learner transport programme, a joint initiative between Discovery Insure and Afrika Tikkun, provides invaluable training and support. In George, 17 local bus drivers have been enlisted to participate in the 2025 DSJTS programme and they gathered at George High on Friday and Saturday for training sessions in first-aid and basic defensive driving.

Sixteen of the drivers are from the bus company African Express, which handles a large chunk of learner transport in the George area. A driver from George High has also entered the programme. These drivers mainly transport learners and students.

Impeccable safety record

According to programme training coordinator Akhona Jaxa, the high levels of serious road accidents and fatalities in South Africa and how this impacts children's safe access to education are a major concern. More than 10% of road fatalities in 2023 involved children under 14. "South Africa has one of the highest rates of road-related deaths globally, with 19,39 fatalities per 100 000 people, surpassing the global average of 15 fatalities per 100 000 people."

Jaxa said their approach to reducing road accidents has been highly successful, maintaining an impeccable safety record with zero fatalities or major accidents among participating drivers, who transport more than 22 000 learners daily across the Western Cape and Gauteng.

"DSJTS works with learner transport drivers and services to raise awareness about the factors that contribute to high accident rates, and provide training and support for them to change driving behaviour for safer practices and improved skills. State-of-the-art tracking devices are installed in vehicles to monitor driver behaviour and performance. From the tracking data, DSJTS provides feedback to drivers and offers an incentive system to reward aggregated excellent performance."

Drivers are also supported with health checks and addressing eyesight issues. DSJTS tries to assist as many drivers as possible who need spectacles. Some 700 drivers countrywide are enrolled in the programme.



Yusden Adams of the First-aid Academy in Strand presented the first-aid component of the training.



The drivers who have been enlisted in the Discovery Safe Journey to School programme for 2025. At the back, second from left, is Akhona Maxa from Afrika Tikkun. *Photos: Alida de Beer*

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