

Coega Celebrates Hospitality Graduates Living with Disabilities

First-of-its-kind Hospitality Training Programme for persons living with disabilities welcomes its first graduates



Hospitality Training Graduates at their Graduation Ceremony at Coega Human Capital Solutions in Gqeberha.

To mark National Disability Rights Awareness Month, which is celebrated annually from 3 November to 3 December, the National Institute for Development (NID) Training NPC and the Hospitality Academy, supported by the Coega Development Corporation (Coega) hosted an awards and graduation ceremony on 23 November 2023 for 32 hospitality students at the Coega Human Capital Solutions (HCS), located in Africa's leading Coega Special Economic Zone (SEZ), in Gqeberha.

"The first-of-its-kind Hospitality Training Programme for persons living with disabilities was funded by the National Skills Fund and facilitated by NID Training, the Hospitality Academy, and Coega Development Corporation," says Mr. Craig Luckman, Unit Head of Coega Human Capital Solutions (HCS).

Speaking at the inaugural graduation ceremony on the purpose and outcome of the Programme, Hospitality Academy Chief Executive Officer, Ms. Thabang Njuza, says:

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The objective of the programme is to empower and equip persons living with disabilities with skills to make them more employable within the hospitality industry. Looking at our graduates, I believe this partnership has achieved that.

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According to Statistics South Africa, approximately 7% of the South African population comprises persons living with disabilities. Of this, reports further state that over 80% are unemployed. These statistics necessitate the development of targeted training programmes to improve the employability of persons living with disabilities. Coega, in line with its vision to be a leading catalyst for the championing of socio-economic development, established the Disability Affirmation Programme (DAP) to restore the dignity of persons living with disabilities by equipping them with skills that enhance their employability opportunities, and integrating them into the working world.

The Hospitality Training Programme duration was 12 months, comprising a National Certificate in Professional Cookery (NQF Level 4) course and a Skills Programme Assistant Chef (NQF Level 2) course. All learners were between the ages of 18 and 35, living with various disabilities including visual impairments, loss of hearing, psychological conditions, and chronic conditions that impact their daily living. Both courses required practical work placements, which included placements at the Coega Vullindela Accommodation and Conference Centre and the Bluewater Bay Sunrise Hotel, which is wholly owned by Coega.

NQF Level 4 Professional Cookery Graduate, Ms. Phaphama Novasa, speaking about how the qualification benefits her, says: "I am extremely happy and proud of myself for receiving this qualification, and it has been of great value to me. Now, I am currently working at one of the Impact Group Food Service Units based at Discovery in the Coega SEZ."



Mr. Craig Luckman – Unit Head, Coega Human Capital Solutions, Ms. Thabang Njuza – Chief Executive Officer Hospitality Academy, Dr. Lentile van Renaburg – Chief Executive Officer NID Training, Mr. Gerard Welling – Industrial Catering Consultant, Ms. Lynne Wilmot – Former Coega Hospitality Training Project Lead, Ms. Sandisive Nzuzo – Facilitator, Mr. Envor Wesso – Coega Training Manager and Project Lead, and Ms. Tsakane Nyathi – Facilitator.

Coega HCS Training Manager and Project Lead, Mr. Envor Wesso, expresses his delight in HCS hosting the Programme successfully. "The quota that comes to mind from Alime Mullins is that 'We all have weaknesses or disabilities that undermine our belief and confidence in our abilities. Embrace them as opportunities to grow'.

These learners have been allowed an opportunity to empower, develop and grow themselves. The experience that they have gained and the new friendships they have made in the past 12 months will stay with them forever. This would allow them to go into their industry with great confidence and vigour to succeed in their profession," adds Wesso.

Coega HCS Unit Head, Mr. Craig Luckman, describes the occasion as momentous and looks forward to further progress with this initiative and providing people living with disabilities with more skills.

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I feel nothing but goosebumps and proud of our learners. We worked well with Coega and have experienced great support. Their assistance was extremely vital especially with recruiting persons with disabilities for this Programme. I encourage Coega to keep up their good work empowering people living with disabilities. Even when it's tough, soldier on, concluded Njuza.

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More about Coega's Disability Affirmation Programme

The Disability Affirmation Programme (DAP) aims to restore the dignity of persons living with disabilities, by providing them with skills that enhance their opportunities to secure employment. The Programme is intended to facilitate their integration into the mainstream economy and enable them to earn a living with less dependence on government grants and welfare interventions. In terms of Coega's Employment Equity Plan, the organisation has an annual target of 5% of employees living with disabilities. The organisation also provides work-related transport to employees with disabilities; and is constantly working towards finding practical and innovative solutions to create a conducive environment for employees living with disabilities.

As a beacon of hope for the region, Coega nurtures strategic partnerships to implement innovative and meaningful community development projects. To explore partnership opportunities, email stakeholders@coega.co.za.



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