

Bell uplifts the lives of learners at Sigisi Primary

The vision of NUMSA President Cedric Gina coupled with the generosity of Bell Equipment has changed the lives of hundreds of young learners at Sigisi Primary School in Ngwelezane, outside Empangeni who now have level playing fields and a spacious kitchen from which the school can run the Department of Education's National School Nutritional Programme.

Sigisi Primary School has 371 learners, many of whom are in the care of their grandparents. Some 255 learners receive government grants and 245 learners are classified as 'vulnerable', with the result that the school struggles financially.

With this understanding, Mr Gina who hails from the area and also attended the school, chose to spend his 67 minutes on Mandela Day in 2011 undertaking community service at the school. After identifying the infrastructural needs at the school he approached Bell Equipment Group Chief Executive, Gary Bell who agreed to build the kitchen and undertake contouring and levelling of the playground so that the school could access funding to complete netball and tennis courts.



School learners from Sigisi Primary School sing and dance to show their appreciation to Bell Equipment and NUMSA President Cedric Gina for the school's new kitchen.

A year later and the projects have recently been completed at a combined cost of about R350 000.

To ensure opportunity for smaller businesses the tender for the kitchen was limited to established small BBBEE businesses. Kophela Trading, with Justice Ngwane as the owner-builder, was the successful tenderer meeting all the builder and safety criteria having demonstrated his ability to deliver quality buildings within budget and on time for other Zululand corporates as well as the local municipality.

David Vundla of Vundla Management Services is another small BBBEE business owner and was the project manager. David is a qualified civil engineer with extensive knowledge of building requirements to the Department of Education specifications. Opportunity for additional job creation was encouraged by ensuring that wherever possible local skills within the Ngwelezane area were used by the builder to assist with the kitchen.

At the official handover function at the end of August, Mr Bell said: "This area is important to us because many of our employees come from this region. This is our way of putting back into the area and we hope that this kitchen will encourage children to go to school and learn. As a large employer we are proud to be able to assist education in the region. We have assisted numerous schools with various projects over the past 15 years and we hope that we will be able to provide employment and opportunities to many of these children once they have completed their education," he said.

According to the Principal Mr Mandlakhe Khoza the feeding programme was previously "very difficult and time consuming to run" because food was prepared several kilometres from the school and had to be transported by vehicles. "Bell has done wonderful work for us and we are hopeful that with this new facility we can provide a more efficient and professional feeding programme for our learners."

He said the school was appreciative and proud of the intervention by Mr Gina and the learners echoed the appreciation by singing songs of praise, dancing and reading a poem specially written for Mr Gina for the occasion.

DOE Circuit Manager, Vusi Mhlungu added that the Department is grateful to Bell for partnering with the Department and appealed to the learners to look after the structures so that the investment can be enjoyed for many years to come.

In his address Speaker of the uMhlathuze Municipality, Cllr Mvuseni Mngqayi commended Bell for its commitment towards creating sustainable development in South Africa and also mentioned the company's sponsorship of

Thanda Royal Zulu Football Club, which seeks to provide a platform for local soccer talent within the Zululand region.



(Left) Vusi Mhlungu (Circuit Manager; DOE), Gary Bell (Bell Equipment), Cedric Gina (NUMSA), Mvuseni Mngqayi (uMhlathuze Municipality) and Mandlakhe Khoza (Sigisi Primary Principal) with the plaque to commemorate the opening of Sigisi Primary School's new kitchen.