



education

Department:
Education
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

On Saturday March 31st the Zenzeleni Community Centre in Mpophomeni in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands saw the opening of the first of the British Council's IT Hubs in Southern Africa opened by the Mayor of the Umngeni Municipality, Her Worship Honourable Mayor Mbali Myeni.



Mr Bonginkosi Ndlovu from the community welcomed all visitors, sponsors, local community members and stakeholders. Mr Chris Khoza representing members from the board of trustees of the Zenzeleni Community Centre provided the background to the development of the centre and the colourful and sometimes tragic history of the Mpophomeni community itself.

The representative from the British Council, Mr. Remo Chipatiso explained how the British Council is currently restructuring projects for schools worldwide into an all-encompassing Schools Online programme which will cover their Connected Schools programme as well as the DfID (Department for International Development) programme Global Schools Partnerships.



The provincial Department of Education was represented by Mr Phillip Dikgomo, Director of Maths Science and Technology who delivered a highly informative address outlining the array of considerations when using educational technologies in schools and communities.

The British Council had formed partnerships with SchoolNet South Africa, Sangari SA and Softstart to establish IT Hubs in South Africa as well as promoting a range of future projects for South African classrooms and communities. SchoolNet SA for the first time ever had funded the provision of a bank of 25 netbooks that have a greater hard drive capacity than most desktop computers. Even more remarkable is the extent of the coverage of the connectivity that has been arranged for the centre. A number of options were discarded in favour of a mesh satellite solution which provides connectivity to a staggering 5 Kilometre radius in the Mpophomeni community.



All the speakers and stakeholders present were concerned about the security of these very portable devices. However Janet Thomson of SchoolNet SA was confident that the hardware would be secure as she recounted the history of hardware at the centre since the late 1990s with only one burglary having been recorded and at that time the community was very quick to point out that the perpetrators had been from Durban, very much from outside the community. All community members present pledged that they would protect this valuable resource that had been donated and would ensure that it produced the promised returns.

The British Council had organised a competition for the local schools to participate by designing a logo for the new IT Hub. LeAnne Ponen from the British Council awarded a prize of a digital camera to Khulekani from Mphopomeni High School for his design. The British Council has a programme for Digital Ambassadors who represent their countries at international educational events. There are two such teachers from KwaZulu-Natal, Sibongile Mshengu from Mpophomeni High School and Siyanda Msomi from Mzuvele High School in KwaMashu.



Before performing the opening of the IT Hub by cutting the ribbon on the door of the computer room, the Mayor, the Honourable Mbali Myeni delivered her address. All those present were interested to hear that she had completed a Masters degree in the study of ICT for development in the Umngeni area and was indeed very knowledgeable in the field of Information and Communication Technologies. All attendees were then invited to view the hardware in the centre. This was followed by a video presentation by Mrs Hlengiwe Mfeka of SchoolNet SA who had recently returned from a trip sponsored by the British Council to Nairobi Kenya to represent South Africa. She had been accompanied by Siyanda Msomi. Hlengiwe made instant use of the newly donated Sangari SA ibox by projecting her video of the trip onto a wall in the computer centre. The benefits of the Sangari iBox were explained by the Director for Maths Science and Technology, Mr Dikgomo.



The day's proceedings were rounded off by a closing vote of thanks from Omashani Naidoo of SchoolNet SA who managed to thank the numerous individuals and companies who had made the launch of this hi-tech facility at the Zenzeleni Community centre possible and such an enjoyable day despite the weather. Omashani pledged that SchoolNet would monitor and support the centre in the coming months to ensure that the donations deliver the returns that they promise.