

Govt's training project opens a window of opportunity

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When 24-year-old Mphafi Mamapepe lost her job as a facilitator last year, her biggest fear became a reality. While she was uncertain of what lay ahead, her determination to support her one year old son and her family set her on a different path. Today Mamapepe is one of hundreds of beneficiaries of government's Training of the Unemployed Project which aims to minimise the negative effects of the recession, Edwin Tshivhidzo reports.

The Department of Labour launched the Training of the Unemployed Project early this year and one of its objectives is to train and re-skill South African workers who were retrenched as a result of the global economic recession.

South Africa's unemployment rate rose to 25.2 percent in the first quarter of 2010, according to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) released by Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) last week.

Close to one million jobs have been lost so far.

The Project currently trains Gauteng electricians, boiler-makers, welders and mechanics to be employable and to start their own businesses. So far, more than 750 trainees have registered for the project.

Department of Labour spokesperson, Muzi Mkhwanazi, said the department with other stakeholders, are currently looking at the possibility of rolling out the project to other provinces.

"People who are currently on training were drawn from the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) database and once they have completed the training, another group will be called in," Mkhwanazi said.

Mkhwanazi said while the project was earmarked for UIF beneficiaries, those who are not, also qualify.

He added that the department would also assist with placement once the trainees had completed their training.

Mamapepe, formally from QwaQwa in the Free State, said she had been given a second chance. She was employed by the Education with Enterprise Trust (Ewert), an NGO working with schools in the Free State as a facilitator.

Now, she is training as a boiler-maker at the Sam Andrew Johan Training Institute (SAJ) in Wadeville, near Johannesburg.

While boiler-making is dominated by men, Mamapepe told BuaNews that she had been fascinated by the industry since childhood.

"While this job is mostly done by men, I am determined to prove that even though I am a woman, I can do what men can do," she said.

Mamapepe admits that boiler-making is demanding and hard work, but says she is determined to make a mark in the male-dominated trade.

Asked where she sees herself in five years, she said: "I would love to see myself being a Drafter."

According to the Department of Labour, the aim is to train as many South Africans as possible.

The department said qualifications the trainees obtain at the end of their course met qualification requirements of the Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Education and Training Authority.

Patrick Sekgobela, 26, from Phalaborwa in Limpopo, who now trains as a boiler-maker, was previously employed at Hydro Sebenza in Boksburg where he worked as a semi-skilled boiler maker.

Sekgobela says he is optimistic that once the training is complete in June, he will have a good job.

"Now I'm going to face the world with confidence with the right qualifications. Hopefully one day, I will own my

own company," he said with excitement.

The UIF and other government entities contributed almost R50 million to train the candidates. All those in the project are paid a stipend of R2100 a month. UIF beneficiaries get their UIF benefits as well as the stipend.

Mark Johaar, 32, who lost his job in 2005 and is a trainee at the Sam Andrew Johan Training Institute, sees himself as an employer upon completion of the training as welder.

"I want to start my own company and employ many people to help me," he said. "When I lost my job, I did not know what to do, I was just frustrated," he said. And now, Johaar says he is optimistic about the future.

Since its launch in March, the project has seen 426 UIF beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries receive training in an effort to improve their skills in various trades. - BuaNews