

SA Chefs training programme a positive for youth in hospitality

With the current under 25-unemployment rate sitting at 67.4% - the highest it has even been - the South African Chef's Association (SA Chefs), a non-profit industry organisation, together with the National Department of Tourism has continued its efforts to address this persistent obstacle in the country by investing in skills development and job creation.



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Since entering this unique partnership with the National Department of Tourism in 2011, SA Chef's the National Youth Chefs Training Programme (NYCTP), has seen 2,000 aspiring young chefs complete the programme, with 72% securing permanent employment.

As a result of the NYCTP's impact and outcomes globally, the Deputy Minister of Tourism, Elizabeth Thabethe received the Ministerial Award in recognition of its achievements at the Global Summit of Women in Sydney, Australia last month. "This award recognises the programme's success in building strong business skills and leadership capabilities among the youth, particularly women."

"Youth employability is a priority for us as it not only builds the hospitality talent for the future, but it gives us the opportunity to invest in future leaders that will contribute to the South African economy. We believe that we can positively impact the employability of young people who have a passion for cookery through building skills and providing the platform for them to gain experience," says Thomas Overbeck, SA Chefs general manager.

Young people with no formal education are the most vulnerable and a lack of accredited skills and qualifications make it harder for them to secure employment. The NYCTP acts as proof of the real and measurable impact that upskilling can have on South Africa's young people by making it possible for them to train to be future chefs and culinary experts.

Building hospitality skills

The dynamic programme is tailor-made for South Africa and accredited by City and Guilds, a global leader in skills development and apprenticeship programmes. The most recent programme was inundated by 32,000 applications for just 400 places – clear evidence that hospitality skills are prized among South Africa's youth.

The NYCTP's 600 students each year are distributed over 24 different training schools and academies across the nine South African provinces. SA Chefs issues the same learning material to all training schools, ensuring the same high standards and outcomes nationally. Students are recognised at a certificate level if they successfully complete their first year, obtain a diploma in the following year, and specialise in pastry in their third year.

"Progress and promotion is rapid once students have qualified and we have seen some remarkable success stories," explains Hudson Masondo, NYCTP project manager.

"For example, 23-year-old Nosiphiwe Mbele, a graduate of the programme was given the opportunity to work in the USA for 12 months following her training at NYCTP. Not only did she receive invaluable experience which led to her current employment, but upon returning to South Africa, she was able to buy her mother a house. This is a testament to the high level of training that the culinary students receive and the impact that the programme is having on young lives."

Mbele says that NYCTP has played a significant role in her life: "I was always passionate about cooking, but I was unable to attend cooking school because we just didn't have the money. I was determined to change my family's circumstances and seized the opportunity given to me. I am so grateful to SA Chefs and the Department of Tourism for helping me achieve my life-long dream of becoming a chef."

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