

Keynote Address by the MEC for Education, Mrs. Reginah Mhaule at the Occasion of the 5th Soul Buddyz National Congress on 13 December 2009 at Badplaas Forever Resort

Master of Ceremonies

Executive Mayor: Cllr Nkosi

Head of Department: Mrs Mahlasedi Mhlabane

Deputy Director General; Curriculum: Mrs Lucy Moyane

Chief Executive Officer: Ms Kasthuri Soni

Members of Senior Management

Senior Executive; Social Mobilization: Ms Aadielah Maker

Principals

Life Skills Co-ordinators

Educators

Hola! ma Buddies, Hola!

Let me begin by quoting the famous T.S Elliot, who said, "We shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."

We have gathered today to appreciate the contributions of young boys and girls and to chart a way forward for the Soul Buddyz Club as well as the welfare of our schools and communities. I have been informed that there are 120 clubs and their facilitators present here. Our appreciation is extended to all of you; we really appreciate your work and contributions towards social transformation.

The yearning for success is forever engraved in the human soul and that is why we have to take the words of T.S Elliot to heart working towards arriving at the ideal South Africa that we all dream of.

As Soul Buddyz, you have achieved the highest points from each category in each province. You have been invited to this congress so that we can congratulate you on the good work you have done. You all represent our success stories as you have contributed to a large extent in the fight against HIV and AIDS and other social ills bedeviling society. Because of your contributions communities have been empowered and the lives of our people have changed for the better.

History has recorded over the years that the human spirit has triumphed over a lot of adversities that have threatened human survival. Unity has been proven to be the greatest and “**the**” ingredient for the recipe to victory. We are presently reminded of this simple yet very effective tool and weapon in our present fight against the HIV and AIDS pandemic, drug abuse and crime. We should now stand together and be united in our fight against these social ills than before.

As Government, we are witnessing an increase in the number of Orphaned and Vulnerable Children as a result of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The disruptive nature of the pandemic is not helping our mandate of providing quality education and learning. This calls for a co-operative and collaborative effort in the implementation of intervention strategies not only to improve learner performance and retention but to mobilize children to participate in taking responsible actions to shape their lives and that of the community, now and in the future.

Those who are bestowed with wisdom always say that the future of a nation is in the hands of its youth.

It is for the above reason that Government is making everything possible to ensure that there are programmes in place to directly influence the upbringing of our children so that they in turn can be better citizens.

There can be no better time to prepare our children for the future than now.

Soul Buddies Clubs have not only succeeded in spreading the spirit of friendship and Ubuntu through out the country but have proven beyond reasonable doubt that children can be real agents of change only if given time and space.

I urge you to continue spreading the spirit of love, Ubuntu, empathy and let the nation be ignited with your zeal, determination and true patriotism.

Extend the message of friendship and remain responsible to your peers at school and in your social circles.

Soul City and the Soul Buddyz Club in particular provide us with the appropriate vehicle and forum to influence a positive message. I appreciate your patriotic efforts of changing the mindset and I want to encourage you to do even more.

The Soul Buddyz have provided a voice for the voiceless by equipping our children with life skills that enable them to bravely deal with social and health issues.

The theme of this congress is; FRIENDSHIP and is relevant to the task at hand as we intend to take control and unite against social ills affecting our schools and communities. Taking a cue from the theme; let us foster FRIENDSHIP, as we strengthen our partnership forging ahead as agents of change in our schools and communities.

Workings together, united as friends, let us work towards making the values of Change, Hope and a Promising Future a reality. The Department of

Education welcomes the promotion of partnerships and collaborations in the quest to emancipate children and our community from poverty hopelessness and fear through the advocacy of children's rights, life and coping skills.

I am confident that this congress will add impetus in our endeavour to inculcate understanding and application of social and health issues. The outcomes of this congress should not be limited to this gathering only but should be shared in our various schools and communities to develop and equip our communities for a better life. Share your experiences and enrich one another as you discuss and talk about caring for the environment, HIV and AIDS, crime, peer pressure, drug abuse, bullyism and other things associated with these challenges.

As you engage on these social and health issues be always mindful that you represent your schools and communities and therefore are obliged to be good ambassadors. Be good ambassadors at this by applying your minds and participating in the discussions as you add value through your wisdom and the sharing of your experiences.

Your roles as ambassadors and agents of change do not end here. This role will take you through a process of life and calls for responsibility, honesty and integrity in line with the office and functions of an ambassador.

Soul City, our partnership with you goes a long way. This partnership has made it possible for us to hold our first Jamboree (co-ordinated service delivery campaign) at Nkomazi Municipality in 2006 which benefitted 3700 learners. The turning schools into Nodes of Care and Support of Orphaned and Vulnerable Children Programmes are also gaining momentum.

We also appreciate and acknowledge your involvement in the development and capacity building of our educators in various accredited programmes. Recently, 317 Grade 7 learners from all provinces (50 from Mpumalanga) were rewarded with a trip to Magaliesburg for the wonderful projects they submitted. This we really appreciate.

Once more, I reiterate the Department's commitment to working in partnership with Soul City.

As I conclude, let me remind you that it was the young people of 1976 who took matters into their own hands leading to the attainment of freedom in South Africa. Those young men and women have also taught us that the power and energy of the youth bears much fruit if correctly channeled. I am fully convinced that the Soul Buddyz can emulate the youth of 1976 and come out victors.

The challenge for us is to work together, in unity and friendship taking responsibility of our actions, lives and the future of South Africa. Let us embrace the spirit of Ubuntu and be true messengers of the good news of unity and friendship.

Thank you.