

PRESS RELEASE

UK firm teaches SA kids via Internet link-up

UK-based distance-learning college offering free teaching over the internet to underprivileged South African teenagers.

Luton based SkillsTrain, the UK's leading quality IT training and distance learning company, is giving free live internet teaching to schools in South Africa, as part of its 'SkillsTrain Project Africa' charitable initiative, bringing IT skills, software and applications into a South African classroom via a live link-up.

The IT sessions enables Skillstrain, from the UK, to teach students in South Africa how to conduct and present a Project, which can be about virtually any subject. The subject matter is taught by the teachers in South Africa and, working in conjunction with the UK teachers, Skillstrain teaches the students how to research their Project work using the Internet and how to present their findings using a variety of IT packages, such as word processing, presentation tools and other application packages.

The initiative has been made possible by SkillsTrain investing over £500,000 in Live Internet Training (LIT). Classroom-like training can now take place between a teacher anywhere in the world and students anywhere else in the world – providing both have a PC with a connection to the internet.

The next phase of the project starts in early November 2007 and SkillsTrain is asking head teachers or principals of youth organizations in South Africa to apply for the training, which will comprise of sessions, in virtually any subject, offered absolutely free.

SkillsTrain's Myra Smallman explained "We're looking for previously disadvantaged organizations, such as schools, youth groups or community projects, who have already been able to improve their situation in some way, but whose children can benefit from further training and support.

Using the live internet training, pupils can hear and speak to the UK based teacher, who in turn interacts with them using a variety of tools. The beauty of the scheme is that even if the host school doesn't have the software, it can be displayed on the screen via the UK link, and children can have hands on working on using it".

The scheme is open to all schools and youth organizations in South Africa and is provided completely free of charge. After the initial live internet training, SkillsTrain continues to remain in close contact with the organisation to provide follow-up training.

Myra Smallman added “Education is so important to growing up in South Africa, they just can’t get enough of it. As Nelson Mandela said ‘Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world’ and if SkillsTrain can do something to change just a handful of lives, then this entire initiative will have been worthwhile”.

Mr Stranger Kgamphe, the general secretary of UNESCO in South Africa, has said he is “very excited” about the project and would like to see it extended to more schools throughout the country. He believes the project can help stop the brain drain from which South Africa is suffering.

Mr Kgamphe said: “If taken to its logical conclusion, this initiative has the potential to stop the emigration of skilled intellectuals from South Africa or anywhere it may be implemented. In this regard, it is global and necessary.”

Darryl Geffen, Head Teacher of a school for 650 children on a squatter camp outside Johannesburg, said the project will help to end his pupils’ “isolation. It is giving them a feeling for things that are happening outside their community”.

Masibambane College on Orange Farm has 35 PCs donated by local businesses and was connected to the internet last year. The only white person in an otherwise black school added” “The skills my pupils are learning to search the web are proving really useful.”

A teacher at a poor school in the Western Cape, who did not want to be named, said: “Black children don’t know about internet. They don’t know about computers. They don’t know about anything. Now, thanks to this project, things are getting better.”

The LIT platform allows 20 pupils to be taught at once. They can talk to the teacher, show their work and even ‘put a hand up’ – all online. “Potentially we can teach thousands,” said Myra.

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