

SOWETO LIFEGUARD TRAINING PROJECT

It is almost a misnomer for this project to be called "Soweto" as we are attracting candidates from many different areas. Soweto is however a good rallying cry with the images it evokes. That we have so many young people keen to train for a lifesaving award is very heartening, but in the present economic climate public utilities are not taking on staff. The private sector is becoming more aware of the need to provide lifeguards at resorts etc, this is however still only seasonal or weekend type work. This past season 6 or 7 of these positions became available and lifeguards are very grateful for the opportunity to earn some good money over the summer holidays. At the beginning of last summer four youths passed their awards and all found some work over the summer.

Three candidates have dropped out as the theory component is beyond their ability, due to a lack of reading ability in English and no idea of how to study. The assessors have tried oral testing but get frustrated by their attitude and some parents have refused to give them transport money until they do some studying. They travel about 65Km to Ellis Park so they can't walk!

Two others participants come from Klerksdorp, the round trip is 325 Km. They come when they have money or can get a lift. Last month one passed the test so I hope the other will do so soon as they have been around since last year. I arranged some coaching for them with a colleague in Klerksdorp and access to a warm facility which has helped. They have the same problem with English as the previous group. A third young man has been training with the group off and on for about 2 years and he also passed the award last month. He has changed from a reticent and shy fellow into a confident lad. I'm so pleased. He has found employment as an instructor.

The turn around time is between 6 -12 months with these candidates, only when they reach the required standard of swimming and are attending regularly do I register them and give them a manual. Even so it is a slow process.

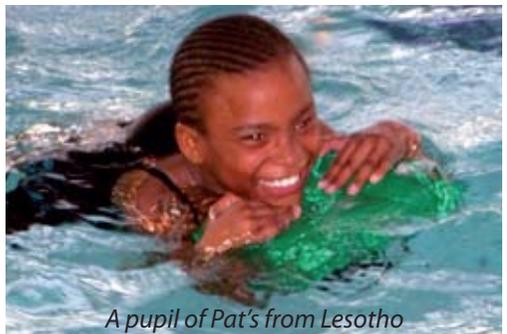
This month I started the training for retests for the new season so that the lifesavers will be prepared for interviews. It is amazing how many come back year after year.

Some had seasonal work last summer, Isaac, Kenneth, Phillimon, Kaizer, Bernard, Nimrod, Lerato, Mating, Tshepo and Muso as well as Lebo, Mandla, Tsepo and Kabelo all arrived for retests.

Much as the focus of the Lifesaving Foundation and myself is to empower young people to find meaningful employment and to raise their self esteem. Lifesaving South Africa (LSA) has increased the fees to such an extent that I am not sure how much longer this 'shoe-string' project can continue. I am going to have to attach all candidates to a club and then ensure that all their voluntary duties are recorded and reported to LSA in order to get members prices for them or else fork out approximately R2000 (€ 210) per candidate and then an annual retest fee. Paper work is my weakness and all this will require plenty of it. My local branch is setting up an Academy structure to try to accommodate these changes because at least 70% of LSA's focus is on club members and competition and qualifying as a lifeguard is expensive for independent candidates. Of the approximate 20 candidates I have on my books at least half have no regular income, some are working on a Learn to Swim project and get a small stipend. If I can get R250 from them I am lucky.

My thanks to the Lifesaving Foundation for the continued support and I hope to meet some of you when I am in Ireland over your summer.

Pat Wilcox



A pupil of Pat's from Lesotho