**PRESS RELEASE**

AECOM highlights the impact of its learnership programme

**12 July 2022:** Globally trusted infrastructure consulting firm [AECOM](http://www.aecom.com) is not only making a positive impact on combating the high unemployment rate in South Africa but considers a segment that is often overlooked, namely people living with disabilities.

“Our learnership programme is founded on the understanding that people with disabilities, especially those from poorer communities, do not have the same access and privileges as abled bodies. When we help these few individuals, we indirectly support their families and communities,” comments **Senika Devsheel**, AECOM’s Human Resources Director for Africa.

“At AECOM, we believe that when employees are free to be themselves, they thrive. To empower people, we focus on attracting, hiring, and developing diverse talent, expanding our understanding of who our employees are, enriching our communities, and thinking without limits,” says Devsheel.

The New Venture Creation NQF Level 4 programme currently has 12 learners living with various disabilities. The programme guides learners to meaningful employment opportunities while earning a stipend. Learners complete a 12-month SETA recognised qualification culminating in a recognised SAQA accredited certificate.

They are further engaged for six to 12 months to enable them to gain more relevant experience for the workplace environment. The learnership programme began in 2017 in partnership with a SETA accredited training provider to guarantee the quality and authenticity of the programme. AECOM will continue to support the learnership programme in the years to come.

The current class is a group from last year’s programme that successfully completed a SETA accredited NQF level 2 Business Administration programme in 2021. AECOM then enrolled them into the New Venture Creation programme to further equip them with knowledge and skills to not only seek employment when they have completed the current qualification, but to also believe in themselves that they can be employers and open their own businesses.

“The current group of learners are hard workers and are dedicated to the programme because they have seen their lives change. Some of the learners are from poor backgrounds, so the stipend from AECOM not only assists them, but their extended families as well,” comments **N****tombekhaya Cenenda**,Programme Organiser, Lisolethu Consulting.

She adds that the highlight of the programme since it commenced has been the number of learners who have received permanent employment with the host companies that AECOM has seconded the learners with over the years. “The present group is more entrepreneurial. Most of the learners with the current qualification have gained business knowledge and skills that have driven them to start registering for businesses like local spaza shops and creches, to name but a few.”

Learner **Jama Nolutshung** explains that the programme has changed his way of thinking. “Now I know it is possible for me to start and register my own business. I can develop a plan focused on my goals.” He already has a business venture in mind and is developing his strategy step by step as the modules progress. “I will have completed it by the end of the learnership. That way my business will already have commenced.”

Learner **Thulani Khanyile** is enjoying the practical component of the programme. “The programme is preparing us for the working environment and how to be professional in the workplace. We are currently learning how to answer calls and communicate with clients. I am also interested in starting my own business because it is difficult to find employment. This will enable me to provide employment opportunities for my fellow citizens, and assist them to develop and prosper in turn,” he concludes.

**Pull quote**

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***Ends***

**Notes to the editor**

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