

The TuksRes Women in Leadership Academy

The TuksRes Women in Leadership Academy is a student-run leadership body that aims to uplift and empower young women to realise their leadership potential, whilst simultaneously breaking down the barriers between gender parity, therein allowing young women leaders in the country to prosper.

CHALLENGES

It is evident that there is a need for the current status quo to be changed, for more women to pursue higher levels of education, for more opportunities to be created for women and for societal structures regarding the roles of men and women to be changed in our country. The University of Pretoria lies in close range of several underprivileged government schools in the city. Many of these schools foster young women who have great leadership potential, but who do not receive the necessary cultivation and development of their talents and skills. These young women often struggle to complete their schooling up to and including matric level and are either unable to qualify for university, fund university fees or find other work to make a success of their future. Coming from backgrounds of low socio-economic status, opportunities are limited and these limitations are exacerbated by a lack of motivation as a result.

INTERVENTIONS

This community engagement project therefore targets young women from grades 8 to 12 in local, underprivileged schools in Pretoria – aiming to develop leadership skills and ambitious attitudes that will encourage an increase in the number and quality of women leaders in our country. As our country strives towards gender equality, the emerging need for strong women leaders is evident. During community service outings, groups of women from the TuksRes Women in Leadership Academy visit local schools and facilitate discussions with the schoolgirls on various topics. The idea of the outreach is for the TRWLA participants to empower the schoolgirls through informative and interactive sessions. Each content session is approximately one hour long. The TRWLA participants work in groups of two and divide the schoolgirls into more or less equal groups so that each leadership pair is in charge of a smaller group of schoolgirls. Below are some of the topics covered during these sessions:

- public speaking
- leadership identity
- time management
- basic first aid, hygiene and sexual health
- being your own woman, dealing with bullying abuse, mental illness and substance abuse
- professional writing and communication

- tertiary studies, career opportunities and available bursary/funding options

The need for a project such as this was demonstrated through the overwhelming response and voluntary enrolment of first-year women residing in residences in the TRWLA in its first year of implementation in 2015. This stressed the need for such skills and knowledge to be developed not only at university level but also pre-university levels.

IMPACT

In 2019, we have thus far completed numerous community service outings at Pretoria Technical High School and Eersterust Secondary School. During each of these outings we spoke to girls from different grades on the topic of “Being your own woman”, which focuses on dealing with experiences (your own and friends) of bullying, abuse and mental illness, as well as informing them of the consequences of using drugs and alcohol, as well as breaking down myths with regard to all these topics. The schoolgirls responded with enthusiasm to the content and very successfully engaged with our students. Not only did the high school students gain insight from the content sessions, but our students who are enrolled in the academy also enjoyed the sessions and found the content sessions extremely fulfilling.



A lot of the high school girls feel comfortable opening up about their troubles to our facilitators and almost form a mentorship relationship with the students.

For international menstrual hygiene day we set and met a goal to collect 500 packets of pads. We collected 512 packets, which we are currently delivering to the schoolgirls we work with for community service as well as women at UP who cannot afford to buy them. The girls who received the pads were appreciative and in some cases a bit shy, but we made them feel comfortable as menstruation should not be a taboo subject as it is natural. The community service team has also launched a campaign against period shaming. The campaign is called the #P LETS TALK campaign, where people can buy a t-shirt for R150. The proceeds will go towards future TRWLA community service projects.

For more information, please send an email to director@trwla.co.za.

