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MTN CONNECTS COMMUNITIES OF THE MANTSOPA MUNICIPALITY WITH INNOVATIVE HEALTHCARE ISSUED BY: **MTN**

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People living in rural communities across South Africa face multiple challenges every day. Cycles of poverty are exacerbated by high rates of unemployment, lack of infrastructure and poor economic development. Basic services such as healthcare are often lacking, or situated so far away that villagers have to walk many kilometres to reach them.

“During 2010, the provision of four real-time healthcare services, through the innovative use of four Telemedicine Workstations, will be committed to the Free State Province. R50 million will also be committed nationally with R2.5 million going into the community of Free State,” said Eunice Maluleke, Head of MTN SA Foundation at the launch of the community-based health programmes in Free State.

Telemedicine technology allows patients to receive comprehensive care at a local clinic or hospital instead of being referred to a tertiary hospital with appropriate services. This reduces the cost of unnecessary patient transfers and saves the patient valuable time and expenses when away from work or their family.

MTN SA Foundation believes access to healthcare is of critical importance to the development of the community; and that by implementing projects at three levels, namely disease prevention, treatment, and care and support, overall community health can be improved.

“Good health, dependable infrastructure, quality education and opportunities for entrepreneurship is all necessary for individuals, families and ultimately, the stability of the entire community,” continued Eunice.

The Free State launch is the second in a series of provincial launches of the Foundation's Integrated Development Model, which sees the implementation of health, entrepreneurship, arts and culture and education programmes in selected communities in the six provinces (Limpopo, Free State, North West, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Mpumalanga). As a three-year social development commitment, the initiative aims to deliver maximum benefit to impoverished communities.

The Foundation work started in the Mantsopa Municipality during 2009, which was also the year that the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed with the Mantsopa Municipality. After a period of training and workshops, the 40 SMME and NGOs trained during 2009 were awarded their certification today. The Business Support Centre was also established in Ladybrand to increase potential for success amongst start up businesses and break the survivalist cycle among established small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) and income generating projects. The centre was launched by the Head of Department of Economic Development Environment and Tourism in Free State in December 2009.

The training of community care workers on the accredited Home Based Care course will help address the shortage of nurses and overloading of hospitals by patients suffering from chronic diseases. The programmes are aimed at up skilling community care workers to be confident and knowledgeable in their work. Last year both theory and practical training was completed within the Excelsior community.

Eunice said: “The introduction of school based programmes empowered learners with the knowledge and skills to prevent amongst others teenage pregnancy, drug abuse and HIV infection, enabling them to make informed decisions about their lives. The training is aligned to the Life Orientation curriculum and with the trained learner peer educators from high schools and educators who attend the workshops, it is estimated that with each peer educator reaching a minimum of 10 learners, 12 000 people were reached during 2009.

Following on the success of 2009, the Foundation offered the Excelsior community in Free State an opportunity to screen for lifestyle diseases such as hypertension, diabetes and HIV, conducted in partnership with the local clinic, hospital and NGOs. Other basic government services, such as grant application, birth registration, counselling services and ID application, were available to the community on the day. Another important service on the day was RICA, where the community was invited to register their mobile phones as a government requirement.



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“A whole-community approach does not only target the next generation. Our interventions at school level helps to highlight where the greatest needs lie in the rest of the community, and inform the kinds of projects that we will implement. While schools are our entry point, it is our aim to build infrastructure, increase capacity and create economic opportunities that will benefit every community member,” concluded Eunice.

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