

US Professor brings action plan to a university and a local community

By **MONDLI ZWANE**

In an effort to educate society and fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS the International Education and Partnership Office of DUT in partnership with the University of Michigan hosted, last month, The Pedagogy of Action (POA), a three-day community outreach programme on teaching about HIV/AIDS.

The novel and innovative programme, simplifies information on HIV/AIDS to a half hour presentation especially on transmission, stigma and prevention. What separates this programme from others, apart from the simplicity of content, is that it is easily translated and has very little reliance on resources, so that it can be taken to an entirely unresourced community or the deepest rural area and still be effective.

Professor Neesha Haniff, lecturer at the University of Michigan, together with the students she has trained, facilitated the workshop which was attended by HIV/AIDS community activists and advocacy groups.

The Pedagogy of Action programme, initially meant to run for five years only, was started in the United States in the early 1990s by Professor Haniff with the aim of teaching domestic workers and cane cutters about the dangers of the pandemic. As the rate of infected people increased, however, the programme remained both essential and relevant and therefore, still continues.

South Africa is among countries with the highest rate of infections in the world and numbers of infected people continue to rise.

Haniff suggests that one of the reasons HIV infections continue to rise is the use of the English language in raising awareness and teaching about the pandemic. She said that not everyone speaks and understands the language and even though some people may think they know the language, they do not.

“We need to recognise all languages not just English if we are to be victorious in this fight against HIV. In the Pedagogy of Action (POA) we try and teach in all languages, as was the case here. We taught in French, IsiZulu, Swahilli and Portuguese,” said Haniff.

According to her, the most important method emphasised in the programme is interaction by forming groups to have dialogues, share information on HIV/AIDS and get rid of the stigma attached to it.

She implored all the trainees to go back to their communities and impart the information they acquired at the workshop.

Addressing the trainees, the Director of IEP, Dr Lav-

ern Samuels, said that it had been a great pleasure and honour to work with the University of Michigan and hoped that their relationship grows from strength to strength. “This is the sort of programme that we will conduct and promote in educating society on HIV/AIDS.”

He praised the trainees on their commitment towards the project and said he hoped that all they had learnt would enrich them and their society.

In initiating the 'spreading of the message' the Gandhi Development Trust (GDT) last month took the programme to Inanda, as part of its ongoing education drive in the area. Professor Haniff and her team conducted the workshop at the Dr John Dube Renaissance Resource Center with over 60 grade 7 learners and their educators. The workshop was a great success and educators praised Professor Haniff and the GDT for taking

such an informative programme to the community. They also said that they were inspired because they realised that they were not fighting the pandemic alone. Educators and learners in attendance were expected to take back the knowledge to their schools and communities.

Previous programmes conducted in Inanda by the Trust include skills development, environmental awareness and conservation.



HIV/AIDS Workshop facilitated by Professor Neesha Haniff at the JL Dube African Resource Center, Inanda