

NWU helps with library services for the blind in the NW province

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The North-West University (NWU) has partnered with the North West Department of Arts, Culture, Sport and Recreation (ACSR) and the South African Library for the Blind (SALB) to improve reading access for the blind and the visually impaired in the province.

The project, sponsored by Sasol Social and Community Trust, was launched at a media event at the Mmabatho Library on 5 November 2020.

This venture aims to support and enhance the existing services for the visually impaired, and will benefit 24 established mini community libraries for the blind in North West municipalities.

The project also seeks to help redress inequalities in the library and information sector, develop infrastructure, stock public libraries and to enable local communities to have access to information to broaden their knowledge and in turn improve their socio-economic conditions.

The project will also make the latest information and communication technology resources accessible to the visually impaired community. This includes dedicated spaces in community libraries equipped with suitable furniture and assistive technological equipment such as screen and video magnifiers, reading machines and scanners, computer-based software like Jaws, Zoom text and Braille, as well as audio and e-books.

At the launch, Linda Ngaleka from the South African Library for the Blind (SALB) said it is a great honour for the library to be part of this partnership.

"The SALB extends its gratitude to Sasol and the NWU for assisting the visually impaired and recognising the NWU's role in the bigger community," she added.

"This initiative coincides very well with our 'Priority Five' project," said ACSR MEC Virginia Thapi.

"We aim to develop and implement cultural and sports programmes in schools and communities, thereby, promoting social cohesion and nation building. We also want to raise awareness of the career opportunities in various industries."

Prof. Marilyn Setlalentoa, the NWU's deputy vice-chancellor for community engagement and Mahikeng Campus operations, said the NWU is committed to creating an inclusive environment for all, thereby demonstrating the university's ethic of care.

"Community engagement intervention projects form part of our responsibility to ensure that the knowledge we create is also benefiting our communities," she added.

She further explained that, through its Disability Rights Office, the NWU offers an environment that is conducive for all staff and students, making sure that activities are accessible to all of them.

As preparation for this project, librarians and community members were trained through workshops and seminars



ACSR MEC Virginia Thapi and NWU deputy vice-chancellor for community engagement and Mahikeng Campus operations, Prof Marilyn Setlalentoa.

presented in 2019. Additional training was scheduled this year but was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

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