

Enhancing the employability of the visually impaired through tech

Two award-winning students from Cape Town Society for the Blind (CTSB), an empowerment hub for visually impaired persons in South Africa, have bounced back in emphatic style in 2021 after losing their jobs due to blindness.



Source: Supplied

Lizelle de Wet, chief executive officer of CTSB, says the society is determined to break the ceiling through the use of a comprehensive range of skills, a low vision clinic and work readiness interventions to get these students into the economic mainstream of South Africa.

Due to blindness, Akhona Njolo lost her job as a registered auxiliary nurse while Watse Eefting, who was a kitchen supervisor at a private hospital in Durbanville, could not continue in his role when he lost his sight. Both reacted to these economic setbacks with aplomb in 2021, finishing at the top of their respective classes of visually impaired students as they graduated on 30 November at CTSB.

On the eve of disability day 2021, only 3% of the 1.4 million blind people in South Africa have jobs. In total, 90 % of the students who lose their sight in their youth, won't work for more than six months for the rest of their lives, said De Wet.



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Eefting received the coveted Jannie Mouton Award for best student of 2021. Now he wants to use his enhanced computer (International Computer Driving License) and smart-phone skills to assist companies with accountancy needs, while also teaching learn-to-cook novices and visually impaired people about the wonders of advanced culinary skills.

Njolo received the CTSB Congeniality award for her selfless work-ethic, and now wants to combine her smart-phone skills and knowledge about the world of nursing to work administratively in the medical or social development field.

Empowering the visually impaired through tech

De Wet said the technology offered to students as well as the soft skills which enhance their confidence, are pivotal to equip the students, while the on-site Jannie Mouton Low Vision Clinic improves the employability of blind students of CTSB.

Sandra Dreyer, head of training, education and development at CTSB, echoed the same sentiment: “All these technological advances that the class of sixty visually impaired students mastered during 2021, make them very competent to operate as comfortably as any able-bodied person in an administrative capacity in a formal workplace.”

The on-site Jannie Mouton low vision clinic in Salt River has already enhanced the employability of more than 100 clients that were assessed by an optometrist since April 2021 and has given renewed hope to a small percentage of the five million South Africans who live with low vision, said De Wet.

Since opening its doors, the low vision clinic has already performed assessments on 91 new low vision clients, while there were follow-up consultations for 40 clients, said Karsten.



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De Wet added the CTSB continuously runs awareness campaigns in partnership with BlindSA to make the public, the corporate and private sector aware of the stigmatisation of blind and visually impaired persons.

“We are continuously improving the job readiness programmes that we run at CTSB to make sure the students overcome accessibility roadblocks when they are employed. We liaise with industries in the mainstream economy to ensure that when our students start working in a formal workplace, they are there for the long haul,” De Wet concluded.

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