

# Skills Development | With 51.2% of South Africa's young people between the ages of 18 and 24 unable to find a job, GetOn decided to assist in plugging some of the gaps

JANA MARAIS

DOLLY Molefe is a 31-year-old woman from Atteridgeville, west of Pretoria. Like 3.2 million other unemployed young South Africans, she sat at home with no prospect of finding a job for years after finishing high school.

Last year a friend told her about the GetOn Skills Development Centre, which was started by Dutch businessman Jan Bijpost with the guidance of Brazzaville community leader Isaac Skosana in 2004.

For a minimum fee, Molefe signed up for a bake-for-profit course hosted by GetOn.

When we met on a cold July morning at GetOn's new facilities in the ArcelorMittal business park in Pretoria West, Molefe had taken charge of the GetOn cafeteria, using it also to run a catering business that serves other office buildings in



**SERVICE WITH A SMILE:** Dolly Molefe is running the cafeteria at GetOn's premises at ArcelorMittal's Pretoria works and is planning to sell food to factory workers in the area

## Unemployment in the early stage of a person's career leaves scars

the area. The GetOn team is helping her to register her own company and she is planning to take over bigger facilities to serve lunch to the many factory workers in the area.

For Molefe and hundreds of other unemployed Atteridgeville residents, GetOn — unlike many well-funded government institutions with a similar aim, such as the National Youth Development Agency — has provided the critical first step on the employment ladder.

The need is massive: 51.2% of South Africa's young people between the ages of 18 and 24 are unemployed, up from 44.5% in 2008. This is the highest youth unemployment rate of any middle-income country in the world and significantly higher than the global youth unemployment rate of 12.6%, according to statistics by the International Labour Organisation.

Unemployment in the early stage of a person's career leaves permanent scars in terms of future opportunities and earnings, the organisation warns, making it even more important to get young people in jobs as soon as possible.

In the European Union, lawmakers have agreed to guar-

# A step on the ladder to full employment

antee that all school and university leavers will get a proper job or receive new training within four months of entering the labour market.

It will not be cheap, and an additional €8-billion (R104-billion) has been set aside for the programme. Critics say €21-billion will be needed.

Around the world, governments are struggling to address the youth jobs crisis, which includes unemployment, a mismatch of supply and demand of skills because many people are either under- or overqualified for their jobs, and young people not having access to further education and training.

In the UK, only 4 690 subsidy payments of £2 275 (R34 247) each have been made since April 2012 when a £1-billion government work programme was launched to encourage employers to give jobs to 18- to 24-year-olds. The statistics, released this week, reveal that 63% of participants who initially registered under the programme were still in their jobs after six months, showing how difficult it is to find sustainable employment for young people.

GetOn tailors its intake and programmes, which include office administration, basic computer skills and point-of-sales training, to ensure that nearly

70% of students are in employment within three months of completing their courses.

The foundation works in close collaboration with corporate sponsors, including the Foschini Group, Mr Price's social investment JumpStart initiative, UCS Solutions and Premier Foods.

The aim is to copy the centre in other parts of the country — plans for Newcastle, where ArcelorMittal also has operations, are well advanced — and to expand the courses to include technical skills such as upholstery, plumbing and plastering.

The challenges included finding money to pay staff salaries, the biggest expense, said Bren-

ton Cryer, general manager. Most of GetOn's funding comes from the Netherlands.

Although black economic empowerment legislation, whereby corporates earn points for skills development and corporate social investment, and the government's Jobs Fund provide some new opportunities for foundations like GetOn to access additional sources of funding, much more should be done to support these types of initiatives and ensure as many people as possible benefit.

According to the International Labour Organisation, nearly two-thirds of youths in developing countries are not achiev-

ing their full economic potential. In South Africa, this proportion is bound to be much higher, given the high unemployment rate and the likelihood that many employed young people are either in informal-type jobs or under- or overqualified for the work they are paid to do.

While institutions like the youth development agency spend hundreds of millions of rands irregularly and politicians bicker over a youth wage subsidy, millions of young South Africans remain without jobs.

Fantastic initiatives like the GetOn Foundation can do only so much. To address our unemployment crisis, we need a government that can renew confidence in the economy and attract investment, support small and medium-sized enterprises, fix our education system and drastically reform our labour regime.

Of course, nothing of this is new. If an unemployment rate of 51.2% cannot jolt them into action, what will?