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South Africa: MEC Albert Fritz Launches Epwp Initiative to Combat Fetal Alcohol Syndrome On West Coast

PRESS RELEASE

Western Cape Social Development MEC, Albert Fritz, has launched a groundbreaking youth development initiative using the Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP), to boost the fight against Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) in the West Coast area.

The Department of Social Development (DSD) has partnered with the Landbou Gemeenskap Ontwikkeling (LGO), and in April provided funding for 15 EPWP posts.

LGO has used the resources to train 15 young people and deploy them as Community Workers into the farming communities on the West Coast. The Community Workers work under the guidance of the LGO Social Worker and its Farmworker Committee. They'll run;

public education,
school holiday programmes,
leadership development,
anti-teenage substance abuse and,
anti-FASD programmes (link pregnant mothers, who may be drinking, to health and counselling services).

The partnership will also see DSD local offices in the region work closely with the LGO, to provide social work resources, such as child protection and early childhood development services, to tackle other social problems.

Our efforts as DSD are guided by evidence and data. A recent study funded by DSD indicated that the prevalence of FASD in the West Coast was found to be 64 children per 1000 affected (6,42%).

The West Coast prevalence rate can be compared to the findings in the most recent studies conducted in Kimberley (60/1000) and the Witzenberg area (96/1000). However the prevalence rate of 122/1000 found in De Aar, still makes it the highest reported FASD rate worldwide.

The West Coast's prevalence rate means that there is a serious problem with FASD in this area, and the impact of this will be felt throughout its communities.

FASD is 100% preventable. Prevention is essential because FASD is unfortunately 100% incurable.

The Head Manager of LGO, Mr. Johan van de Hoven, in his address thanked the Department for the 15 EPWP intern positions, as it greatly expands the organization's impact and reach. Mr van de Hoven highlighted the problems FASD creates in our communities, saying: "FASD poses a major challenge to the development of children and, later, adults. I am proud of the partnership with the Department, as it brings social services closer to communities".

MEC Fritz expressed his commitment to providing opportunities for young people and eradicating FASD from all affected communities. "We will continue the fight against FASD and all other forms of substance abuse. Empowering young people to take the lead is central to this objective", said MEC Fritz. "This is why DSD spends R112-million jointly on the Youth and Substance Abuse Programmes, which provide services that tackle drug and alcohol abuse, and create social and economic opportunities for young people".

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