

Case Study on the Department of Correctional Services of South Africa Adopting ICDL

Updated April 2011

Background of the Project

There are 240 prisons in South Africa under the supervision of the Department of Correctional Services (DCS), accommodating about 165,000 inmates. With a mission to place rehabilitation at the centre of all departmental activities, DCS constantly looks for partnerships with social and educational organisations to enable and empower inmates and ex-offenders to have a second chance in life.

In February 2007, the Shuttleworth Foundation recommended the International Computer Driving Licence (ICDL) to the DCS as an effective tool to up-skill the inmates and to provide them with employment opportunities upon their release. At that time, over 200,000 South Africans had already registered on the ICDL programme.

Department of Correctional Services Adopting ICDL

The Department of Correctional Services chose ICDL to provide inmates with the practical skills that would be needed in the workplace upon their release from the correctional facilities. Compared to similar programmes, ICDL is unique in its values of vendor neutrality, accessibility, flexibility, and its wide corporate endorsement globally and locally.

To commence the project, DCS first arranged a pilot rollout at Pollsmoor Correctional Centre and Malmesbury Correctional Centre in 2007, which became the first two ICDL centres in prisons in the world. Twenty-five inmates from each centre were put through the ICDL programme, and 40 of them were ICDL certified. Today, some candidates have already found gainful employment following their release from prison.

More recently (2009/2010), as part of the Department of Communications e-Literacy Programme for Youth Offenders, 250 youth offenders at Modderbee and Leeuwkop Correctional Centres in Gauteng, Barberton Correctional Centre in Mpumalanga and Durban Westville Female Correctional Centre in KwaZulu-Natal enrolled on the ICDL programme. ICDL Start or full ICDL certification was achieved by 81 of the candidates. Those who have not yet qualified for their certificates are continuing with training in order to qualify.

Feedback from the Candidates and the Governors

The benefit of the ICDL project in South African Correctional Centres can be best ascertained through the inmates' feedback:

"I thank ICDL from the bottom of my heart for making big changes in the lives of people who thought there is no more hope. I'm proud to be named as an ICDL candidate" – Carol

"Thank you, ICDL, for allowing me to learn and to grow as a human being" – Shelley

"The ICDL course helped me to start believing in myself, because now I know that nothing is impossible" - Latisha



The Department of Correctional Services is very pleased with the results and benefits achieved so far. Mr Dennis Bloem, Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee, reported to Parliament on 26 October 2007 that, "The Department of Correctional Services' vision is to be one of the best service providers in the world, by delivering correctional services with integrity and commitment to excellence. ICDL, we are very proud and privileged for your decision to be a partner with DCS in order to achieve this vision".

The Minister of the Department of Correctional Services, Mr. Ngconde Balfour, praised the project further at the ICDL Graduation Ceremony at Pollsmoor Correctional Centre, "The role the ICDL certification can play to develop offenders and maximise their ability to return to the workplace with real skills needed by the South African economy is a reality".

In a speech by the Deputy Minister of Communications, Obed Bapela, at the e-Literacy Graduation Ceremony in March 2011, the Minister stated that: "The Department's seriousness about ensuring that ICTs are demystified can be attested to by the type of investment that has been committed to this programme. Information Communication Technology has become the cornerstone for socio-economic development. It is for that reason that this programme is focusing on getting as many young people as possible to be ICT skilled and capable to enable them to participate actively in both the information society and knowledge economy".

The Way Forward

We all make mistakes in life, and sometimes we learn from those mistakes. With more Correctional Centres joining as ICDL centres, this internationally recognised programme will benefit a lot more ex-offenders by increasing their self-esteem and improving their prospects in life. The partnership between the Department of Correctional Services and ICDL South Africa not only provides the ex-offenders a second chance at life, but also inspires a ripple effect of concerted community action to support the ex-offenders and their families.