

Bringing technology to communities

The chief of the Shixini Great Place in Willowvale young people in Port Elizabeth's Northern areas and school nurses in the rural Transkei all have one thing in common. They all benefit from the work done by Prof Darelle van Greunen and the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University's Centre for Community Technologies (CCT). CCT aims to respond to the needs of the Eastern Cape and ultimately those of the larger South Africa.



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Tech in healthcare

Health is one of the areas in which the use of technology to improve school healthcare is making a significant difference. The primary objective is to make use of mobile devices with specific mobile applications to improve access to school health care and health education based on the needs of the schools in rural Eastern Cape.

Developed by (CCT), and originally funded by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) as the mobile health sector of their Technology for Rural Education (Tech4RED) initiative, a mobile app has enabled school nurses in rural areas of the Eastern Cape to use tablets and cell phones to more effectively assess the health of learners.

The app - piloted in Cofimvaba - has been so successful in its two-year Eastern Cape pilot phase that there are plans to roll it out nationally.

Contributing to rural-based industrialisation

In addition, Van Greunen was instrumental in setting up an ICT resources centre, supported by a solar charging station for laptops, tablet PCs and mobile phones among the deep rural villages in the Willowvale area of the former Transkei. This project supports the vision of Chief Ngwenyathi Dumalisile of Shixini Great Place, a leader within the Xhosa Royal Kingdom and of the Amajingqi Traditional Council. His visionary plan is for "rural-based industrialisation".

Helping the needy and exposed

Vulnerable women and youth is another focus area with a project that aims to change and improve the life situation and living conditions according to the millennium development goals for needy children and exposed mothers in the gang-ridden Northern Areas in Port Elizabeth. This project proposes to implement a mobile community health learning space in support of health education for vulnerable women and children in the selected communities

Other focus areas

Other focus areas are on ICT in higher education for people with disabilities, building capacity on TB/MDR-TB among community health workers and occupational health among mine workers as well as rural development and the creation of a wireless ICT monitoring application for hydroponic agriculture.

"The research and engagement work conducted in the CCT has made a significant impact not only in the Eastern Cape but also at a national level. The success of the Centre can be attributed to the strong partnerships with research institutes,

community organisations, industry, government departments and other African countries," says Van Greunen.

"There are currently some 27 postgraduate students working on research projects that support the aims and objectives of the CCT. In addition to this, an undergraduate Dev Academy consisting of software development students who work in different teams, support the software development projects. The members of the Dev Academy do an internship in the CCT, which not only builds capacity but also provides the students with valuable work experience while completing their studies," says Van Greunen.

It is the vision of Van Greunen to not only build human capacity among women in this male dominated field, but also to ensure that the products deployed in the critical areas are developed for Africa, by Africans in Africa.

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