

ABSA'S 'ADDICTED TO LIFE'



THE IDEA

To ABSA, being a partner in growing South Africa's prosperity means more than just contributing to financial prosperity. The financial institution is also committed to South Africa's intellectual, artistic, cultural and sporting capital. Evidence of this is ABSA's sponsorship of many projects including The ABSA L'Atelier Art Competition, the longest-running in the country, and the ABSA KKNK in Oudtshoorn.

As part of its combined commitment to the arts and culture and on social development and wellbeing of South Africa's communities, ABSA decided to embark on major anti-drug awareness community project and youth awareness in the Cape Flats about the dangers of drugs. Theatre is one of the best possible tools to educate the youth around the dangers of drugs like Tik and so the ABSA Anti-Drug Initiative "Addicted to Life" was conceived.

THE AIM

The aim of the drug awareness community project was to reach about 30 000 high school children and educators, from 12 years and older, mainly in Cape Flat schools through a six week schools tour and a four week, run at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town.

Apart from the school children and educators, ABSA staff and their families were also an audience of the production. The remainder of the 35 000 ABSA staff were also involved in this intervention, as per the in-house communication media, including the ABSA Channel, a TV channel for all staff.

Addicted to Life, brought to the Western Cape by ABSA, is a story of hope and guidance to an audience that ABSA wants to inspire and connect with in order to help them find better alternatives in life.

THE BRIEF

Venete Klein, ABSA Executive Director: Retail Bank approached award-winning stage producer, Lara Foot Newton, to package a production for the youth of the Western Cape on the dangers of the drug, Tik. Foot-Newton was intent on making sure her production was properly connected to the communities it's aimed at. Using her signature style of collaboration, she worked closely with members of the community, rehabilitation centres, addicts who are in recovery and others who have experienced the fall-out of the drug first-hand.

THE HURDLES

Aside for logistics of bussing schoolkids in and out of the Baxter and preparing the attendance schedule, there were few hurdles. In fact, ABSA reports that there has tremendous support from educators, Headmasters, scholars, parents, educational institutions and churches for the drug awareness created, followed by requests to continue with a much wider roll-out strategy.

THE RESULTS

The final product adheres to the international standards of prevention and is careful not to make the drug appear exciting or glamorous. It focuses on the personal battle that the drug brings on, as well as the ways in which the family unit is affected. It also touches on how such families and individuals can seek help, via an informative Comic Booklet with helpful contact details.

During the month of May, the production ran at the Baxter Theatre. Schools were bussed in for the performance which was followed by a lecture and discussion led by a qualified facilitator and two actors. The learners were also given reading material and questionnaires to take home and to share with their families. All of this was at no charge to the school and the cost of bussing in the children was covered by the ABSA sponsorship. Daily shows from 10:00 were dedicated to school tours to the Baxter with Friday evening shows reserved for ABSA guests and Saturday shows open to the general public.

After the mid-year break, the production toured around the Western Cape for six weeks. Schools in zones where tik is most rife were the priority, and the company visited one school a day in the Western Cape for thirty days, from 21 July to 31 August 2008. Again, this was no charge to the schools.

ABSA is determined to make sure that the play's effect will extend far beyond the run of the production itself. Alongside the production, ABSA and Foot-Newton are also creating a short film, which will be distributed to all schools in the Northern and Western Cape free of charge. The film will focus on tik and drug addiction in general, and will be comprised of material from the play and other research material.