

Making a difference

These workshops have directly impacted on more than a million pupils.

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TEACHERS Across Borders South Africa (TABSA) is a grass roots volunteer group of US-based teachers who work to improve educational opportunities in South Africa. Week-long teacher workshops were held during the winter holidays.

Mathematics and science teachers in America are mostly from Hawaii, where TABSA founder and director Yunus Peer works at US President Barack Obama's alma mater, Punahou School.

The project began in 2001, with the guidance of then education minister, Kader Asmal, and former mayors of Vereeniging and Port Shepstone, Yunus Chamda and Pauline Duncan.

In the past 13 years, more than 80

US teachers have accompanied Mr Peer to South Africa, and 3 500 teachers from rural schools have attended the workshops.

TABSA volunteers pay their own way to South Africa, and Mr Peer finds local businesses, family and friends to support their stay here, and promote other educational projects in rural communities.

Local sponsors include the department of education, First Car Rental, UV Trans, Vital Signs, Capital Office Automation, The Port Shepstone Rotary Club, and the Cassim Peer Family Trust.

The department of basic education has recognised that these workshops have directly impacted well over a million pupils through their teacher's upgraded skills.

Mr Peer hopes to bring the workshops back to KwaZulu-Natal

next year, after working in the Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga over the last six years.

"What is unique about TABSA workshops is that they respond directly to the needs of the teachers in the rural schools who have little equipment, large class sizes, and the requirements of National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) to meet," says Mr Peer.

The workshops are interactive and are designed to have local teachers eventually lead the workshops.

For senior phase teachers of mathematics and science, there is a free download of an entire library of materials on the TABSA website, <http://tab-sa.org/2012-project>.

Teachers are encouraged to download the materials and share them with colleagues.

TABSA began donating computer labs to rural schools in 2007 and providing school uniforms to financially disadvantaged families in rural



communities in 2012.

To date, more than 200 TABSA donated computers are being used in six labs in three provinces, serving 4 000 pupils per year.

This year's recipients of computer labs will include Ensimbini Combined Primary School in Gamalake, and Siyaphambili High School in Harding.

Last year, TABSA provided 50 uniforms to children in rural areas. Its partnership with Ziphakamise will expand this year, with TABSA committing to contributing 100 uniforms per year, for two years.

Reverend Lulu Bodla, CEO of Ziphakamise said, "We are excited about expanding our relationship with TABSA, especially in relation to the uniform project.

Let the child be properly clothed so that he or she is not stigmatised further in the midst of

Educational visit:

Yunus Peer (right) from Teachers Across Borders South Africa chats to Lulu Bodla, CEO of Ziphakamise during Mr Peer's visit to South Africa this week.

poverty. School fees are about the parents and the school.

School uniforms are about a child's self-esteem."

The uniform includes shoes, a full set of clothes and a schooljacket. The Dick Basday Family Trust has joined TABSA's effort by committing to donate 20 uniforms for two years.

The Port Shepstone Rotary Club helps to administer both the TABSA computer and uniform projects.

When asked what drives him, Mr Peer said, "My late father Cassim Peer believed that everybody has the capacity to do something to improve their community. There are enough people who complain and do nothing.

"No matter how small or large, let your actions speak the truth of who you are, and what you stand for."