

Unisa brings Madiba magic to women behind bars

Unisa's celebration this year of 145 years of lighting the way coincides with the centenary celebration of the life of Nelson Mandela, and on 18 July 2018 the university honoured the great man in the best way possible: a multi-disciplinary team visited the Kgoši Mampuru II correctional facility to present a range of workshops to women inmates.

Hosted by the Department of Correctional Services (DCS), the initiative was coordinated by Unisa's Division of Community Engagement, an outreach unit in the Office of the Vice-Chancellor, and the university's Gauteng Region, Department of English Studies, Department of Psychology, and the Chance 2 Advance programme participated. External partners supporting the event were the City of Tshwane, the Tshwane University of Technology, and the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Police Department.

The university was warmly received by women offenders and Department of Correctional Services staff attached to the correctional facility, and were entertained by the Kgoši Mampuru II women's choir and a short play depicting the trial and imprisonment of Nelson Mandela. Also forming part of the programme was a most inspirational testimony by parolee Tshepiso Williams, a trainee career guidance practitioner.



In his welcome address, Acting DCS Senior Manager Ali Mashabathakga honoured Madiba and stressed the importance of reaching out to others on Mandela Day.



The Kgoši Mampuru II Women's Choir sang the national anthem and performed various songs throughout the programme.



Women offenders took to the stage with a dramatisation of the trial and imprisonment of Nelson Mandela.



In her inspirational testimony, parolee Tshepiso Williams said that one should not wait to be rehabilitated, but should rather take the initiative.



Programme director Natalia Molebatsi (Unisa Library) shared the vision of higher education as a platform for social transformation.



Dr Genevieve James presented a Chance 2 Advance workshop on the topic of women at the crossroads.



Offenders attending the event were given the opportunity to attend one of four workshops.



Staff from Unisa's Gauteng Region presented a career guidance workshop.



Unisa's Department of Psychology presented an Inside-out Outside-in Books workshop.



Prof. Mandla Makhanya (Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Unisa) said that more than anything, the legacy of Mandela meant remaining human and continuing with our humanisation mission.

Speaking at the event, Unisa's Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Mandla Makhanya, said that while in prison, Madiba remained focused on a vision that was far bigger than the situation that he faced while incarcerated. He focused on ideals that were higher than the prison walls. "It may be that your stay here is, at times, in fact, most of the times, very hard to bear. It is during those times that you must draw inspiration from Madiba's life lessons and resolve to remain hopeful that your situation is but a passing phase."

The VC said that Mandela's resilience and focus should serve as motivation for the women offenders attending the event. "The fact that you find yourselves in this place should not serve as a barrier to you reaching for your dreams," he continued. "Use this time to refocus your energies and become an even better person than you were before the unfortunate incidences that landed you here. To this end, the University of South Africa would like to be a partner to those who may wish to pursue their formal studies. As Madiba once said: 'Education is the most powerful weapon which one can use to change the world.'"



Unisa luminaries were given a tour of the correctional facility's museum. Here a DCS official explains an exhibit to Unisa Council member Sandy Lebese (left) and Principal and Vice-Chancellor Prof. Mandla Makhanya (right).