

'It's not a risk to hire us'

Firms' reluctance to employ young people slated by students and activists

Siyamtanda Capa
capas@timesmedia.co.za

RISKS associated with heavy drinking, substance abuse and irresponsible behaviour, coupled with a tough economy, have seen businesses reluctant to hire young people.

This emerged yesterday as students, business leaders and social activists in Port Elizabeth discussed how to get young people – the worst-affected by unemployment – into jobs.

The Youth Employment Enterprise Skills Solutions (YEESS) conference

held at the ETC conference centre in Zwide sought to expose young people to job or entrepreneurial opportunities in the city.

During a panel discussion, youth agency Harambee provincial manager Masa Mlamla said some companies were reluctant to employ young people because of perceived associated behavioural risks.

Olwam Mngwazi, 32, of the Black Hat leadership academy, said: "Young people are not receiving the risk label as a comment but as an assault on their youthfulness."

"To look at them and start putting tags – (such as) young people are irresponsible, drunkards, abuse drugs and are not educated – constitutes a perpetuated assault on

young people based on their being a part of the youth.

"This, in turn, puts the blame on the youth for not being employed."

NMMU final-year development studies student Sandile Mjamba, 23, said the risk label was an outright resistance to change.

"The reality is that the youth are the majority and are the most affected and marginalised when it comes to unemployment," Mjamba said.

"Because of that, we are seeing the frustration mushrooming into chaos in the form of movements such as #FeesMustFall and #HireAGraduate."

Mjamba said the frustration was building to a point where it would explode unless the government in-

tervened to address the situation.

Nelson Mandela Bay economic development councillor Andrew Whitfield said: "One in two young people (in the metro) is unemployed and the worst part is that the longer you are unemployed, the harder it is for you to find work."

"This means that many young people do not find meaningful work in their lifetime."

Whitfield encouraged the delegates to consider taking up jobs outside their fields of study, keeping in mind that a qualification was not required to secure employment.

"While the government has the responsibility to create an enabling work environment and create opportunities, businesses have the

responsibility to take the risk and employ young people," he said.

Konrad Adenauer Stiftung programme manager Tilmann Feltes highlighted the German model of vocational training, which sees students attend lectures once a week and spend the rest of the time working in companies which would later employ them.

"This system ensures that young people not only exit institutions with a practical skill



YOUTH VIEW: NMMU development studies student and panel member Sandile Mjamba speaks at the conference. Picture: MARK WEST

but that they graduate with five years of experience," Feltes said.