

Business at the Summit

- [□ Partnership Initiatives](#)
- [□ Virtual Exhibition](#)
- [□ Business Day](#)
- [□ Legacy Projects](#)
- [□ Business Events Calendar](#)

Summit Media Centre

- [□ Press Releases](#)
- [□ Speeches](#)
- [□ Business Delegation](#)
- [□ Picture Gallery](#)

Resources

- [□ Articles](#)
- [□ Documents](#)
- [□ Events](#)
- [□ Position Papers](#)

About BASD

- [□ What is BASD?](#)
- [□ BASD Network](#)
- [□ Supporters](#)
- [□ Contact Us](#)

HOME

Search BASD...

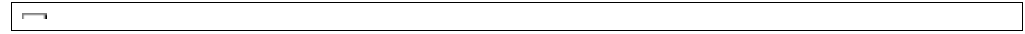



ABB helps young South Africans fight drugs and violence

26 July 2002 – Johannesburg - In the South African township of Westbury, people say giving birth to a boy is a curse because either you will lose him to gangs, or he will go to jail, or get killed. As part of ABB's social responsibility policy, the engineering group is working with a local initiative to help young people build a future free from gang-based violence and drugs. 

Conquest for Life (CFL) Director Glen Steyn grew up in Westbury and got involved in a gang at the age of twelve. The death of his stepbrother in a gang related incident in 1993 sparked him into setting up an organization that aims to break young people's dependence on gangs and change their environment so they can make new life choices.

The local ABB meter factory has supported Mr Steyn's initiative since its early days. ABB's Corporate Social Investment Project Coordinator Joos Lemmer is Chairman of CFL's management committee. He said, "Westbury is a 100 % coloured area. At times the press spoke about it as being the drug capital of South Africa.

"Gangs in Westbury knock the hell out of one another. And they last a long time. You can be born into the gang your grandmother was in. If a young person leaves a gang, it may reduce their family's security and income – so they may be forced out of the home.

Mr Lemmer said some young gang members rely on car theft and other robbery to sustain their drug habits.

According to ABB Sustainability Affairs' Michael Robertson, the group seeks to enhance the sustainable development of communities where it operates - economically, environmentally, socially and educationally - by engaging with stakeholders and pursuing common efforts.

But, he says, it has to be approached sensibly. "ABB is a business, not a charity. So we seek out local projects which satisfy local needs and which in some way - in the short or longer term - also benefit ABB.

"In the Conquest for Life project, [ABB is trying] to stabilize the local communities where we have operations and where we draw labour, so that the quality of life of the community is enhanced and so is the quality of potential future ABB employees, suppliers, customers, etc."

One key CFL programme supported by ABB – the In and Out Project - gives 14 to 25-year-olds a three-week break on an outdoor camp 47 km from Johannesburg. Away from peer pressure and the expensive clothes and flashy cars of the armed gang and drug lords that Mr Steyn believes act as role models, participants are encouraged to think as individuals. The scheme aims to break the influence of gangs, and begin building alternative trust relationships.

Mr Lemmer said, "There are dormitories, sports facilities, obstacle courses. And a victim counsellor programme. At the end, we involve the parents too, otherwise the young people go back home and nothing has changed."

"ABB doesn't pay operational costs, but I go and see what facilities they need, for example if there aren't enough toilets, showers, drinking water, lights or electricity, we pay for them to be put in place. We like to see that the money goes where it's needed."

Last year 94 youths took part in the camps, and coordinators liase with about 450 participants a week in follow-up support.

Mr Steyn said participants of the In and Out Project often become teachers in CFL's "Youth Enrichment Program", where they give food and after-school help to children with learning problems, and build relationships with the children's school and parents.

"There is an 80 percent unemployment rate in Westbury," said Mr Steyn. "We need to change these kids' mindset, give them the skills to get jobs, and support them on their way to moving up."

One of these young people is Brandon Johnstone who grew up in Westbury. When he discovered CFL three years ago, he was nineteen years old and had had no training. He said: "I used to sit at home all day. I couldn't find a job. Then a friend here told me about Conquest for Life."

Mr Johnstone went on to take part in a range of activities for CFL, including making household detergents to sell in the area, and teaching children peacemaking skills through games.

He had on the job training, fixing old computers donated to CFL by ABB, and now runs a busy computer centre. "I now install the software, and teach IT to children and parents," he said.

"Most of the people I've worked with that went through the programme left with a with a skill or two, and most got jobs."

According to Mr Steyn, the impact of gangs is already being reduced. He said, "The community has noticed the difference. You can feel the improvement here."

ABB Metering manufactures water meters, and markets water and electrical meters, for municipalities, utilities and industry. The operation was established in South Africa about 60 years ago and has been located at Industria, Johannesburg, for at least the past 50 years. The operation employs about 140 people, a high proportion of whom live in the disadvantaged areas of Westbury and Soweto. More than 80 per cent of shop floor employees live in these two townships.