

## How the JESU Club is tackling unemployment

Glenn Weiss

With the first quarter of 2021 reflecting a dauntingly high unemployment rate of 32.6%, and indications being that further increases are to be expected, can anything be done to turn this around?

Now add to the problem that the expanded unemployment rate is 10% higher even, sitting at 42.6%, with our beloved Eastern Cape Province in an even worse position than the national figures would suggest. Here the official unemployment rate is 45.8% the expanded unemployment rate sits at a dismal 51.2%.

For our Eastern Cape youth (aged 15 to 35 years), the unemployment rate is a dizzying 50.8%.

Trying to solve this challenge can often feel like screaming into the wind.

Can the church make a difference between government's struggle to find traction with its job creation and skills initiatives and businesses effectively forced into survival mode due to the pandemic?

In a little church, situated on a corner shared by some of the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro's richest and poorest residents the answer is "yes, we can make a difference and perhaps even be that critical link between government and business."

For 40 years, the Joy to the Nations Church, lovingly referred to simply as "Joy" by its congregants, has been serving as a bridge between black and white, rich and poor, from its home on the corner of Heugh Rd and Walmer Township (Gqeberha).

The church's ministries tend to seek practical solutions to extraordinary circumstances.

Farming Gods Way principles are used in The Walmer Initiative Gardens (TWIG). This initiative is run in partnership with another Port Elizabeth church, Connected Life. Basic subsistence farming skills are being taught to local households and fresh, and nutritious produce is being grown for those in need within the Walmer area.

Other Ministries include the Food-4-Africa food packs, ECD schooling, pregnancy crisis counselling, a fleet of different justice ministries operate from this little Walmer church hub. But, "Joy" was ready for more.

And so, the Joy Employment & Skills Upliftment (JESU) club was officially launched on Wednesday, 9 June 2021!

The name JESU has a clear meaning for our Xhosa and Shona speaking family who would easily recognize this acronym as it forms the Shona/Xhosa translation for Jesus.

JESU Club is a weekly networking space on Wednesday mornings for the unemployed or partly employed with the JESU team.

This space includes businessmen and women with networks, connections and relationships in place, to assist the vulnerable club members to find employment.

Ultimately, the goal is to increase their skills or to even start a small business!

Over 40 job seekers signed up during its first meeting and had their details entered into the JESU database which will be used to promote the club members as opportunities become available.

The JESU Club has extended an open invitation to any potential partners as the network grows and more people regain their dignities instead of relying on handouts to survive.

From accredited computer training courses, semi-skilled artisans trade tests and linking qualifying candidates with national initiatives, such as the YES Program, there is room for anyone to either be enrolled or be involved.

This network will allow the vulnerable to be exposed to skills development initiatives, potential employers, small business start up funding, business plan development, work readiness programs, mentorships and much more into the future.

It can be reasoned that unemployment is our country's number one enemy.

When we stand against Unemployment, we are conscious that Poverty and Crime are directly linked.

Fitting in with the Nehemiah Strategy, by TCN (Transformation Christian Network), rebuilding our metro would mean standing up to the "big three" and trusting that they will fall like dominoes.

Though we may not be able to scale the mountain of 50% Unemployment, we can certainly make a difference, one job at a time, one person at a time and one family at a time.

The weekly JESU club aims to encourage, upskill & prepare members to be reintegrated into the working world in order that they can provide for themselves and for their families. JESU club is community for both job seekers and partners.

The church itself is simply following the Joy mission statement: "We are a family, who is being equipped, to take the Mercy of Jesus, to the Margins".

JESU Club is free to join and employing a JESU club member will be at no additional cost to the employer. We look forward to celebrating each victory as employment and earning opportunities start opening up for club members and as we gradually begin to turn things around!

**Pastor Glenn Weiss: Joy to the Nations Church.**