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Video tech to empower Alex teens

By [Admire Moyo](#), ITWeb's portals deputy editor.
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"We will be able to connect with hundreds of children, thanks to the use of video technology," says Infinite Family's Amy Stokes.

remotely by using modern collaboration tools.

The laboratory is the brainchild of Amy Stokes, founder of Infinite Family, which also connects communities ravaged by HIV/Aids in SA through Internet mentoring.

Speaking at the ceremony yesterday, Stokes said the opening of the lab was one of the most important days in the history of Infinite Family. "We have had a dream for the past six years that is only coming alive today," said Stokes.

"This lab will solve most of the problems that we have faced over the years, especially in regards to having one-on-one mentoring sessions. Now, we will be able to connect with hundreds of children, thanks to the use of technology."

She also revealed that Infinite Family considers the lab to be a launch pad for resourcefulness among the participating youth. "We aim to build resilience, resourcefulness, as well as responsibility in these children as they turn into young adults," Stokes noted.

□ According to Stokes, mentoring via the Internet could positively affect the lives of under-served teens. "We are currently working with mentors in 58 countries, including Africa, and 39 in the US.

"Our mentoring technology combines open source components and business applications for face-to-face interactivity. The platform enables private, secure mentoring, as well as community activities."

She also revealed the labs are mainly targeting apartheid-era townships, informal settlements and disinvested neighbourhoods, where about 68% of the mentees do not live with a parent.

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"These labs are also designed to maximise mentoring and educational potential while using passive technologies to reduce energy use," she explained.

Among the energy reduction strategies at the lab is a solar shading canopy and recycled bottle thermal wall, while there are also plans to install solar panels in future.

Stokes also pointed out that their objective for the next five years is to roll out 100 mentoring labs in sub-Saharan Africa capable of serving 11 000 mentees a year.

Also speaking at the event, Keith Matthews, GM, BT sub-Saharan Africa, said: "BT is, once again, proud to collaborate with Infinite Family and be involved in this project, as it reaches the most vulnerable in our society. The project enables youngsters to significantly improve their career prospects by acquiring much-needed computer skills."

He also pointed out that the opening of the lab was a dream for both organisations, which have been working together for the past three years.

"It is a logical continuation of our local involvement and builds on the previous work BT has done in establishing the Nkosi's Haven Village communications centre."

Dumisani Mbatha, principal of Realogile High School, expressed his gratitude for the lab, saying: "This laboratory is not a monetary investment that you will all accuse us of squandering in future. This is the best gift that you can give to a human being, for this technology will go all the way in shaping the lives of these children."

Also at the function was Zodwa Tlale, a board member of the Alexandra Child Care Support Centre, an organisation that works with teenagers in Alexandra.

She said the lab is a First World facility that would certainly change the learning skills of the students.

"These children used to write letters in order to communicate with mentors abroad. However, because of the video and computer technology, the process will be much faster.

"We would want to thank BT and Infinite Family for this gesture because most of these donations are only being done in Soweto communities, while Alex, the oldest township, never receives any," Tlale concluded.

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