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Disabled swimmers excel at Liberty

Many young people with disabilities are not afforded the opportunities that their able bodied counterparts enjoy. In a country like South Africa where the unemployment rate is 25% the situation is even more difficult.

Two people who have not allowed stereotypes get in the way their success are Jappie Thulo and Mpho Mainganye. In 2008 they applied for the Liberty Learnership programme and were selected from thousands of hopefuls. Mpho and Jappie both have a condition known as Phocomelia, which results in a lack of arms or shortened arms).

Since they joined the programme they have both gone from strength to strength. They joined the company along with another 120 learners and are currently working at the Liberty's head office in Braamfontein in the claims processing department. Being employed full time has afforded them the opportunity to pursue their passion – swimming. Both swimmers successfully competed in the Short Course Provincial Swimming Tournament in Pietermaritzburg in August, winning a range of medals.

They train vigorously every morning and evening to compete in the Paralympics swimming championships to be held in London in 2012. They have bravely overcome the challenge of their disabilities through courage, discipline and commitment no easy feat when you have a full time job and studies to consider.

According to Jappie Thulo, working at Liberty has given him valuable skills and the financial security to dedicate himself to training which he does every morning and evening at the Mandeville Dolphins, a sport club for the physically disabled.

"I train six days a week, swimming for two kilometers every morning and evening, before and after work. At the end of this year we will have the skills to secure full time employment giving us both the financial training and support to have careers and also the resources to focus on our passion for swimming competitively."

Mpho has also benefited from the Liberty Learnership programme. His salary has afforded him to rent a place to stay in Kensington, near to the Mandeville Dolphins training facilities so he can train every day.

"The Liberty Learnership programme is teaching me valuable career skills while also allowing me to focus on my swimming as I am training hard now for the Paralympics,"says Mpho. He has already won nine medals in local competitions including three gold, four silver and two bronze.

Audrey Mothupi, Chief Executive: Group Strategic Services at Liberty feels proud of the successes that both Mpho and Jappie have achieved, in work and in pursuit of their dreams. "They are true ambassadors of our philosophy: Own Your Life, because they have managed to turn challenges into opportunities,"

"Mpho and Jappie's swimming success is a clear example of how dedication, commitment and hard work pay off. Both strive for excellence in all aspects of their lives. They give 100 percent to their day to day tasks and 100 percent to their swimming. Both did very well and have made everyone at Liberty very proud."