



Youth Take Centre Stage in Gen S Programme

November 2024



The Generation Science (Gen S) Youth Job Shadow programme took place during Youth Month and aims to empower the future generation of youth scientists. This youth empowerment programme is run by the South African Medical Research Council. Grade 11 and 12 learners in Cape Town, Durban and Pretoria were afforded the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the SAMRC's work.

The primary aim of Gen S is to expose learners to the various facets of the SAMRC, giving learners access to people in various science and medical professions while combining all of this with a practical element. It is hoped that the programme helps broaden the horizons of the learners in terms of the various career paths that exist in health science research.

Durban learners were identified from communities where the SAMRC is conducting research in Durban, KwaMashu, Umlazi and Verulam. The high school from Umlazi is based in ward 79 in USINGA HDSS. In Durban the participating host units were Biostatistics, HIV and other infectious diseases (HIDRU), Health Science Research Unit (HSRU) and SAPRIN.

A comprehensive and engaging three-day long programme was crafted for the 23 learners from 01 – 03 July. On day 1 a career panel discussion took place where SAMRC staff from the medical doctor, statistician, scientist and pharmacist professions provided an overview of their studies, careers and they engaged with the learners during the Q& A session. There was a presentation on the Sisonke COVID-19 Healthcare worker vaccine study



roll out followed by a research site visit where HSRU unpacked their research and conducted relevant activities with the learners.

SAPRIN collaborated with Africa Health Research Institute (AHRI) to unlock an extensive laboratory tour for the learners on day 2. The interactive visit saw master's, doctorate and post-doctoral students take the learners on an interactive facility tour. The learners were split into two groups and had the opportunity to visit multiple laboratories and speak to the staff about their career paths. All learners were also given the chance to conduct a basic experiment. This was followed by an interesting session with the Biostatistics unit where a senior statistician shared her inspiring journey into the realm of biostatistics. This was followed by fun activities introducing the learners to the field of statistics.

On Day 3 learners were split into four groups and each group visited one HIDRU clinical research site in either Chatsworth, Isipingo, Phoenix or Verulam. Here they were given the run down of the entire site from the waiting room, data management, laboratory, systems and pharmacy. The staff also responded to questions and imparted information on their specific careers. On returning to the Durban office, the learners filled out evaluation forms, which would enable the SAMRC to assess the Gen S programme. Thereafter all learners received a certificate of participation.

Some learners described the career panel as, “eye opening,” “inspiring” and “informative. Another learner commented that the programme had made them realise that they would want to embark on a career as a social scientist. One learner found the COVID-19 vaccine discussions stood out and was captivating. A learner found the visit to the AHRI laboratory interesting and was thankful for the opportunity to speak to the staff and see their daily work experience. Another learner already knew that they wanted to pursue pharmacy but they advised that by the end of Gen S they were more informed and had a clearer understanding of what was required of them. One learner said that they had discovered so many careers that they were not aware existed and they were grateful for this.

Similar visits took place in Cape Town where 56 learners were welcomed to the Medicina campus from 18 – 21 June. Learners got to spend time with scientists and researchers in participating units, which included Centre for TB Research Unit, Genomics Platform, Biomedical Research and Innovation Platform, Biostatistics, Environment and Health Research Unit and the Non-communicable Disease Research Unit.

For the first time Gen S came to the Pretoria campus on the 25-26th June, hosting 16 Grade 11 and 12 learners, who got to learn more about the work being performed by the Biostatistics, TB Platform, SAFOODS and Gender and Health Research Unit, spending time with researchers and gaining hands on practical training.

Dr André Rose, Deputy Director at SAPRIN said, “The Gen S programme in Durban was a success and it is heartening to see the interest displayed by the learners in the health science field. A lot of planning and effort goes into crafting a programme that is relevant and meaningful to learners. We are passionate about empowering the future generation of scientists and that starts here - by making information, resources and experiences available to unlock the plethora of careers in the medical and science fields for these young minds.”

