

Student Counselling welcomes the 2020 Peer Helpers

There is no denying the value of Peer Helpers, especially in the context of universities. A quick search on Google reveals the popularity of this approach in universities across the world. Mangosuthu University of Technology is no exception. Every year, the Student Counselling Unit within the Student Affairs Department welcomes a cohort of students who serve as Peer Helpers, extending the Unit's reach to fellow students across the University and its residences. It is this ability to connect with fellow students in a way that staff cannot, that makes Peer Helpers an important part of the Student Counselling Unit. At MUT the Peer-Help Programme (PHP) is a student volunteer programme initiative.

MUT Student Counsellor, Lungi Mkhize, is the co-ordinator of the PHP and is passionate about student development and peer helping. "At the end of every year, we embark on a recruitment drive for the following year's Peer Helpers," explained Mkhize. "Recruitment for the 2020 Peer Helper Programme began at the end of 2019 and concluded in February 2020."

Only registered MUT students who are in their second to fourth year of study are eligible to apply, as per the advertisements on posters across campus and on official MUT social media platforms.

"We look for students who can set good examples and influence their peers positively," said Mkhize. "These are students who are passionate about people and helping others, who are motivated and enthusiastic, who have good listening and interpersonal skills, who have a good academic record, and who are interested in community work."

This year, the Unit formally inducted 71 Peer Helpers into the programme and took them through the first phase of compulsory training on 29 February, which laid the foundation for the work that will be expected in the duration of their time with the Unit. The training focused on introducing students to the concept of Peer Helping; the qualities of a Peer Helper; ethics, values and principles of Peer Helping (confidentiality, code of conduct, professionalism, branding); standard working procedures; communication skills; listening skills; empathy; facilitation skills; and Emotional Intelligence. The content of this training is revised annually to accommodate Peer Helper needs, challenges, and emerging patterns and trends amongst the student



Students participate in group discussion during Peer Helper training

community that require additional skills development and knowledge acquisition.

"Peer Helper training is a critical component of the Peer Helper Programme as students often seek help from peers when they have personal problems," said Mkhize. "The Programme contributes to Goal 5 of the MUT Strategic Plan 2025: To create an enabling support environment."

Future training programmes will follow later in the semester to further capacitate Peer Helpers to fulfil their mandate in accordance with their roles.