



TECHNOLOGICAL BENEFITS: Jeremy Opperman, left, who is blind, and James Chatwind, who is partially blind, listen to a voice memo that directs them on what to do on a laptop at the Modern Technology Training Centre for the Blind in Worcester.

PICTURE: CINDY WAXA

Centre opens doors for the blind

MATCHING your socks without seeing them is not an easy task and even more difficult for Hein Wagner who has been blind his whole life.

However, technology is changing this and opening up a new world to blind people.

Kaleidoscope, an organisation that assists blind people, launched the world's first technology centre of the blind in Worcester yesterday and hopes to bring such technologies closer to blind people.

The centre, equipped with modern information technology equipment and software, aims to empower blind and partially sighted people to get jobs in the government and private sectors.

Wagner, a Kaleidoscope brand ambassador, said describing being blind is difficult because he has been blind his whole life, but, he said, new technology has made life a lot easier.

"There are apps that are available where you can point your camera to a piece of clothing and it can tell you what colour it is. I know I always mess up socks. They all feel the same and

Yolisa Tswanya
STAFF REPORTER
yolisa.tswanya@inl.co.za

it is a mess."

Wagner said the centre aims to make sure blind people are well-equipped to work in any place they desire.

"Say you land a job and you work behind a PC screen, there will be internal software you will have to work with. We are able to train people so when they get to whatever job, they will have seen it and have experience with it. We will teach them those interfaces so when they get there they are not behind. Then they will have a much bigger chance of being employed."

Kaleidoscope partnered with Absa and Apple to make the centre a reality and the organisation believes it is the first of its kind in the world.

In its first year, the centre hopes to train at least 400 students. Philip Crous, who is blind, will give the training.

"When I went blind my world went small, but when I learnt to use a PC my world opened up again. I hope to help other blind people in the same way. We will not only train them, but change their way of thinking and of interacting."

Social Development MEC Albert Fritz said he hopes more centres will open across the country and he visualises more blind people being employed in various positions.

"We are very excited because this is taking blind people out of a stereotypical space of being switchboard operators and telling them they can be anything in private sectors or the government where they can contribute equally, because there is nothing wrong with them mentally. All they have is the inability to see."

He added that more creative ways of getting funding must be found to roll out similar centres to other areas.

"I will speak to managers of special needs and see how to get this to disadvantaged schools and see how other disadvantaged blind schools can and will benefit from this."