

# ICDL: closing the digital divide

**A** HUMBLE background is no barrier to achievement for disadvantaged youngsters, who obtain exam results comparable to international private schools.

Zambia's young people need a range of skills if they are to become the innovators and leaders of tomorrow, and computer skills are a priority area. A qualification that is gaining increased profile in Zambian schools is the International Computer Driving Licence (ICDL), an internationally-recognised certificate of computer knowledge that has been integrated into the education sector in scores of countries world-wide. It comprises seven exams including computer basics, word-processing and the internet, and a major appeal of the programme is that it is flexible, affordable and self-paced.

Private schools including Rhodes Park, Baobab College, Mpelembe and LICS offer the programme, but the IC DL are not just for the country's elite; many less privileged youngsters have managed to attain their IC DL thanks to the efforts community organisations.

Don Bosco Technical College in Chingola is run by the Salesian community and teaches vocational courses such as carpentry, tailoring and computer skills to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. They have been an accredited IC DL train-

ing centre for the past three years, and last year their 38 graduates gained excellent results. "Our students work very hard to gain a qualification that will improve their employment prospects, and it is also credit to their teachers. I am very pleased that the IC DL is getting better-known amongst the business community in Zambia," says Fr Mariusz Skowron, College Principal.

One of the Don Bosco success stories is that of Mary Musenge aged 25 who was part of the 2008 intake, which emerged as one of the best in the history of the college. Coming from a humble background, she was encouraged to gain additional IT skills by her work-mate, and her boss sponsored her to do the exams. Mary says "Everything the IC DL programme offers is applicable in the world of I.T. and I am glad to be in a position to use the skills that I obtained. I encourage anyone who has the passion for computers to do IC DL". Mary now has gainful employment as an I.T. Assistant at a local Internet Café and provides services such as managing the server, typing, printing and business card design. Above all she is also teach-



The Don Bosco IC DL graduates in 2009 achieved results comparable to the top international schools

ing others, and so far 16 students have graduated with various computer skills.

The IC DL is also having an impact in more remote rural areas. LinkNet Information Technology Academy (LITA) in Macha Mission near Choma was

the first accredited IC DL centre to serve a rural community, and their trainer Consider Mudenda has been working hard preparing his first cohort towards their upcoming exams. UCZ Chodort Training Centre in Choma run 6-

month computer courses for around 60 students every year. Rev. David Nixon, the Principal believes that IC DL is an ideal benchmark of computer skills in Zambia, as it is in his home country Ireland. Chodort has col-

laborated with LinkNet on the refurbishment of shipping containers to become computer labs, and their vision is to expand into offering solar powered 'container-classrooms' to reach even more remote rural communities.