

LEAD WITH PROJECT READ

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It's a family affair

BY LONWABO NODADA

Before we start our story, let us consider the concept of families. Every family has a family tree. It is from this tree that we learn the history of the family. It tells us who gave birth to whom, how many children they had, and how many children those children had.

Project Read, a child born in August 2011, belongs to one such family tree. At the head of Project Read's family is the Integrated Community Development Projects Trust (ICDP Trust). Established by Kingswood College in 2005 and now functioning as an NGO, the ICDP Trust is mother to the Lebone Literacy Programme, as well as a Preschool Programme and an Aftercare Enrichment Programme, all of which are located at the Lebone Centre in Grahamstown's Currie Street. These programmes serve the purpose of helping young children with reading and writing while taking care of them when their own mothers and fathers are at work.

The Lebone Literacy Programme, noticing that these young girls and boys sometimes needed more help than she or her sisters could give them, gave birth to Project Read, the Home-School Partnership, the Nal'ibali Reading Club Support, and the Clinic Programme. It is here that our story begins.

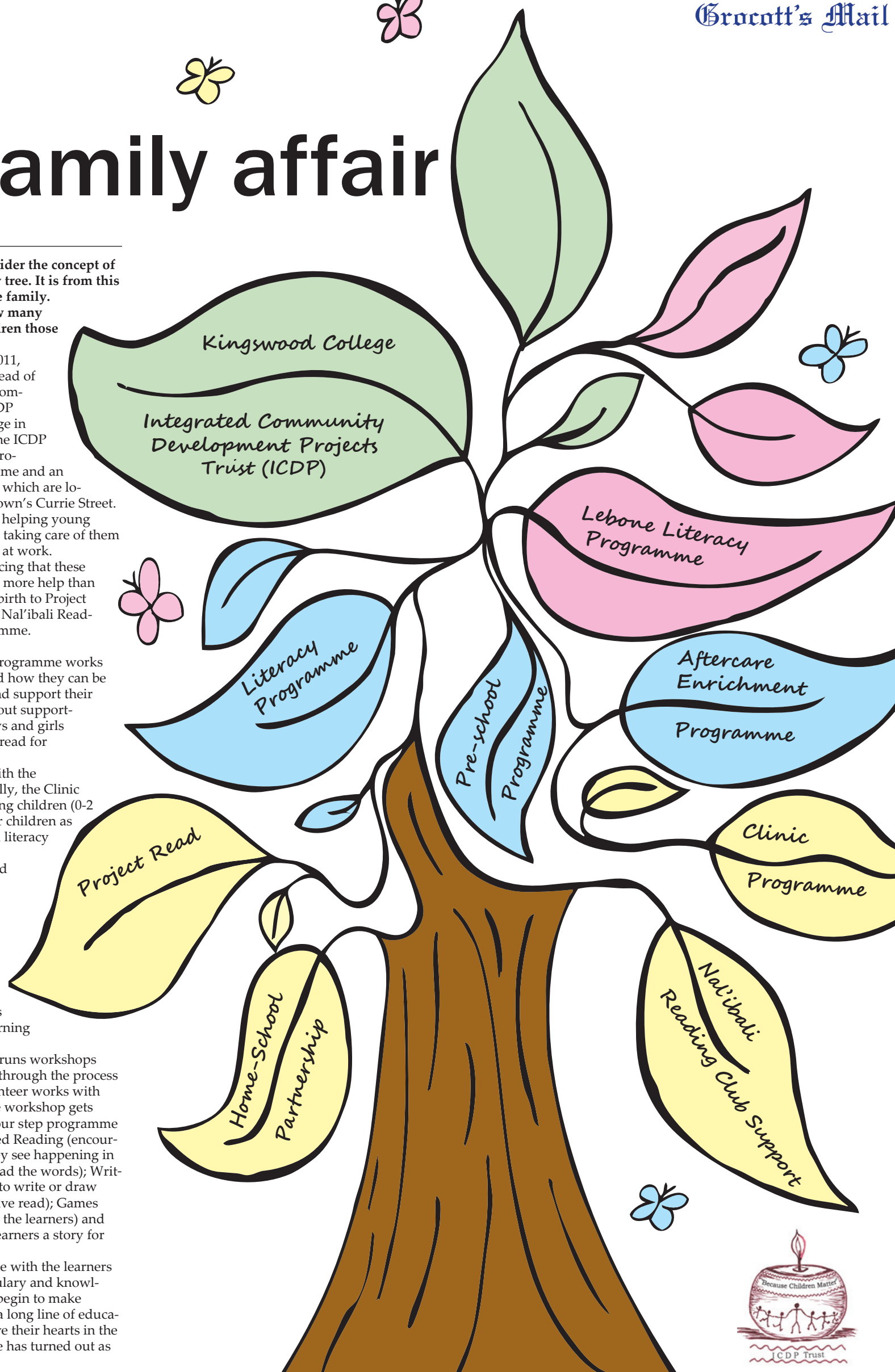
While the Home-School Partnership Programme works with teachers to help parents understand how they can be involved in their children's education and support their development, the Nal'ibali activity is about supporting initiatives that share stories with boys and girls in reading clubs and encourage them to read for enjoyment and pleasure.

While these two programmes work with the parents, teachers and learners individually, the Clinic Programme tries to help mothers of young children (0-2 years), encouraging them to read to their children as a way of exposing them to language and literacy from a young age.

Like the rest of her family, Project Read is interested in the education of young learners. As a result, the programme has its focus on the Foundation Phase (grades R to 3). Working with learners and teachers from Grahamstown Primary, George Dickerson Primary, St Mary's Primary and the Little Red Dragon Pre-school, Project Read tries to develop the reading and writing skills of struggling learners by making the learning experience fun and easy.

Programme co-ordinator Cathy Gush runs workshops with interested volunteers, taking them through the process of working with the children. Each volunteer works with two learners for an hour a week, and the workshop gets them particularly acquainted with the four step programme that Project Read uses: Talking and Paired Reading (encouraging the learners to talk about what they see happening in the book, and then only attempting to read the words); Writing and Drawing (encouraging learners to write or draw their own stories, based on what they have read); Games (playing fun literacy-related games with the learners) and Shared Reading (reading or telling the learners a story for their enjoyment).

The idea is that by working one-on-one with the learners in a conversational manner, their vocabulary and knowledge of sounds improves, but they also begin to make meaning. Yes, Project Read comes from a long line of educators, supporters and facilitators who have their hearts in the field of child literacy. It is no wonder she has turned out as well as she has.



THE LEADER OF PROJECT READ

BY MERYL MAHLANGU

Many people know Cathy Gush only as the co-ordinator of Project Read, but aside from that Cathy is also a mother, a wife, a daughter and a sister, and values spending time with her family. She and her husband own Woodbury Lodge on Amakhala Game Reserve and have a home on the family farm near Sidbury, as well as in town. They have two sons with whom they do a lot of travelling to far-flung places every four or five years. "I really love family life," she says. She admits to being a laatlammetjie, with three siblings who are in their 60s and parents that are both still alive at the age of 91 and 92. She describes her mother as an avid tennis player and her father as a passionate soccer coach, activities that took up all their spare time. In summer she would accompany her mom to the tennis club and in winter she frequented the soccer fields with her dad. This meant she grew up loving sports, playing tennis and netball in junior school and hockey in senior school, and is still very keen on her tennis.

As a young girl she read mostly Afrikaans novels, especially ones about hostel life such as the Maasdorp series and the Keurboslaan series. Her favourite characters when she started reading were South African ones such as Liewe Heksie. Her sister taught her to read before she went to school, and once she was in school, she and her best friend would visit the library often, especially during holidays, and spends hours reading. These days she has diversified, reading books by international authors such as Carlos Ruiz Zafon (Shadow of the Wind and its sequel The Prisoner of Heaven), but still enjoying South African authors such

as Rayda Jacobs and Chris van Wyk. She confesses that one of her bad habits is a tendency to start a book, stop midway and then start another: "I'm actually halfway through about eight books right now!"

Although she has worked most of her life in the education field, Cathy says she never actually wanted to be a teacher. She was more interested in writing, but ended up with an Honours degree in Sociology rather than a formal qualification in journalism. Luckily, these days Cathy often finds herself in the Rhodes University School of Journalism, helping the young journalists with stories and putting them in touch with the best sources for issues on literacy and education. "All the strands have come together nicely," she says, but there are still things she wants to do.

She would like to get into radio work and dreams of one day hosting a radio show such as SAFM's Woman Today, which is anchored by Nancy Richards. Cathy recalls meeting Richards earlier this year at the Franschhoek Literary Festival and saying to her, "I must tell you, I want your job." She adds excitedly, "I would also love to own a book shop/coffee shop, where I can be amongst books and chat to people."



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Die belangrikheid van geletterdheid

DEUR CHANTÉ DARIES

"Beskerm ons kinders", dit is die emosie wat jy ervaar as jy die klein saaltjie binnestap. Ek kon nie help om te dink dat kennis en geletterdheid die enigste manier is om die jeug te beskerm nie. Die Rhodes Inkwenkwezi studente-organisasie probeer om kinders te bemagtig vir hulle toekoms, so te bemagtig dat hulle beskerm is teen die onheil van ongeletterdheid.

Hierdie uitstappie na St Mary's Primêr, was iets wat my oë regtig laat oopgaan het. Ek was nog nooit regtig een vir gemeenskapswerk nie. Ek het altyd gedink dit is nie so n groot probleem nie. Dit was regtig 'n belewenis om te sien hoe die kinders se vordering 'n impak kan he op hulle menswees. Dit het beslis 'n impak op my gehad.

Terwyl die vrywilligers by hulle tafels gesit en wag het vir die kinders om in te kom, kon ek nie help om te wonder wat deur hulle koppe gaan nie. Dit is nie maklik om met vier baie energieke Graad 2s te werk nie. Ek respekteer die vrywilligers vir hulle geduld en toewyding. Sodra die kinders die lokaal betree, kan jy die verskil in die lug voel. Daar is ywerigheid,

energie en gelukkigheid te bespeur en die kinders is gretig om by die werktafels uit te kom, gretig om te leer en om al die nuwe kennis te absorbeer.

Ek het met 'n paar van hulle gesels en ek kon die smag na kennis in hulle oë sien. Hulle was maar net te gelukkig om my te vertel van die boeke wat hulle lees en my te wys hoe hulle hul name kan skryf. Terwyl hulle my vertel het van al hul aktiwiteite, kon ek die hoendervleis op my arms voel. Ek het nog nooit soveel gretigheid vir kennis gesien nie - hierdie kinders wil hier wees, hulle wil leer.

Die kinders se entoesiasme en hulle bereidwilligheid om nuwe konsepte aan te leer, het my heeltemal oorweldig en woordeloos gelaat. Die uithouvermoë van hierdie kinders was definitief iets om te beleef. As hulle nie 'n woord regkry nie, dan probeer hulle weer.

Diep in konsentrasie, met 'n plooi op die voorkop en die tong effens uit, kan jy onmiddellik sien dat hierdie kinders die geleentheid aangryp en nie tou opgooi nie.

Daar is baie negatiewe ooreenstemming oor die Suid - Afrikaanse onderwysstelsel en baie mense dink dat geen vordering plaasvind nie. Ek het tot 'n



'n Inkwenkwezi vrywilliger en die kinders in haar groep werk saam aan 'n taak.
Foto deur: MIA VAN DER MERWE

groot mate saam gestem, maar dit wat ek gesien het op daardie dag het my weer hoop gegee vir ons land en ons kinders.

Ek het besef dat daar meer vrywillige organisasies soos Inkwenkwezi moet wees. Ons moet hierdie inisiatief en soortgelyke pogings bystaan en hulle ondersteun, want

as ons saamstaan kan ons 'n verskil maak.

Ons lewe in 'n land vol diversiteit en moontlikhede en ons moet ons kanse benut om die beste te gee vir ons nageslag. Ons moet uit ons gemaksones beweeg en ons medemens help. Ons kan slegs

ons kinders beskerm as ons vir hulle die geleentheid skep om geletterdheid te bekom.

Die Inkwenkwezi
studente-organisasie
werk in vennootskap met
Project Read.

Our children should read

BY CHANTE DARIES

When the word “reading” comes to mind you do not immediately think of “fun” and “exciting”, but rather “boring” and “dull”. This is what our children think of reading and also school in general. Action must be taken to combat this problem and get our children back into the habit of reading. This is where Nal’ibali comes in.

The Nal’ibali campaign, started by The Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA) together with Avusa Media, and funded by the DG Murray Trust, is one of a number of reading initiatives that have been developed to target the young people of South Africa. It does, however, have a very specific aim – reading for enjoyment. While the main objective of the Nal’ibali initiative is to bring back the enjoyment of reading, it also aims to instil an active reading lifestyle in both adults and children and promote multilingualism in the community.

Weekly supplements are now available in English, isiXhosa and isiZulu in the major newspapers of five provinces, including *The Herald* and *The Daily Dispatch*. Our children are being given the chance to access these free resources that are beneficial to their learning experience and language development. But it does not stop there. There are also Nal’ibali reading clubs that promote the enjoyment of reading and help children to improve their reading abilities. Melanie Daniels is the head librarian at the Community Library in Currie Street and leader of the Vulindlela Reading club that takes place at the Library on Friday afternoons. She says she started this reading club after attending the Nal’ibali workshop that was organised by the Lebone Literacy Programme on the 2nd of June this year. Daniels says she thinks these reading clubs are great at occupying children with something that is constructive yet fun at the same time. “The main aim is that we want the children to have fun while reading and not feel forced to do it.”

The Vulindlela Reading Club at the Community Library is not the only reading club in Grahamstown. There are also Nal’ibali reading clubs at the Lebone Centre, Makana Primary and in Extension 9. There has been considerable progress considering the Nal’ibali initiative in Grahamstown has only been active for just over three months. All the organisations that participated in the Nal’ibali workshop in June are having the weekly supplements delivered to them free of charge, courtesy of the Nal’ibali headquarters in Cape Town. This includes schools such as Mary Waters, community projects such as Upstart and also community libraries. The focus is on getting the message through to the children as well as their parents.

The Nal’ibali reading initiative is a very necessary step towards giving our children a better chance at obtaining an education and creating a culture of reading in our communities, something that will lead them to achieve great things for themselves and for our country.

PHOTO: RIGHT

Melanie (right) and Phindeka (left) guide the children through how to use the supplement.



PHOTO: LEFT

Melanie Daniels helps children create books from the reading supplement.



Phindeka Nzweni (left), Portia Mashele (Far left) and Melanie Daniels (right) with children from the Nal’ibali reading club.

PHOTOS: AMITIE LEE

PROJECT READ

"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go." - Dr. Seuss

Photographs by Robynne Peatfield

1. Project Read volunteers choose an easy to read book that they will work on with the children throughout the hour. **2.** Jady reads to first time volunteer Anna Tshuma, who guides him through the book. **3.** After reading, Ntombebhongo Manca writes a sentence about the book she's read. **4.** Anna ends the session by reading to Jady Hopst. **5.** Jady Hopst and Khanyisile Witbooi use the pictures to guide them in creating their own stories. **6.** Volunteer Jess Poulos and Ntombebhongo draw a picture to go with Ntombebhongo's sentence.







DEAR FUTURE VOLUNTEER

There is a quiet revolution taking place in our town. It concerns about 48 volunteers and 90 children. It is Project Read in action in four Foundation Phase sites in the Scott's Farm area, where Grade R – Grade 3 children are being helped to overcome the barriers to their literacy and language development, including many for whom English is a second language.

The children on this programme, which utilises the Wordworks methodology as well as materials from the Shine organisation in Cape Town, are benefitting in all sorts of ways. And judging by the feedback and response from volunteers, they are also finding it hugely rewarding.

For many of these children, who come from difficult socio-economic circumstances and are part of big classes, it is the only time that an adult gives them undivided attention, in a supportive and non-threatening environment. This allows them to make mistakes and build up the confidence to have a go at trying out their reading and writing skills. They also begin to associate books, reading and stories with positive and caring relationships, and in the process open up new worlds for themselves.

The Lebone Literacy Programme, home to Project Read, works in a holistic way that includes targeting parents through the Home-School Partnership, and partnering with schools to develop their classroom libraries and media centres. We are also targeting young mothers at the local clinic so that we can get a comprehensive early literacy programme going. All of which means that our volunteers are part of a bigger project that we believe is starting to make a difference to literacy development in Grahamstown.

Please consider getting involved. It will only take an hour of your time per week, and the rewards will far outstrip what you put in. You do not have to be a qualified teacher to be part of the programme – the necessary training and materials will be provided. We are all aware of the awful literacy statistics in our country (virtually bottom of the pile internationally and worse than most other African countries) – this is your opportunity to help our children get to a better place.

If you would like to know more about becoming a literacy volunteer, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Sincerely,
CATHY GUSH

WORDS OF THE VOLUNTEERS



"Children need reassurance, recognition and encouragement in order to learn successfully."

MICHELE SPARROW

PHOTO: LEIGH WORSWICK

Michele Sparrow has been a volunteer for many years, first with Meals on Wheels and now with Project Read. She is working towards her B.Ed with hopes of becoming a teacher. Sparrow says that it is vital to create a solid foundation with children at a young age.

"I'd really urge people to join Project Read. The hour goes by so fast and if you make time for it you'll realize there is an hour to spare"

Megan Yendall, a third year student at Rhodes University, has been with Project Read for a short period of time and has already begun establishing a connection with the children. She and her mother, Bev Yendall, decided to join Project Read after coming across an advertisement in the newspaper.



MEGAN YENDALL

PHOTO: ROBYNNE PEATFIELD

"In a classroom, it is very easy for children to get lost. Project Read gives them the attention that they so desperately need."



DIANA GRANT

PHOTO: ROBYNNE PEATFIELD

Diana Grant is a teacher who provides academic support at various schools. She has found volunteering to be incredibly rewarding and has learnt as much as she has taught. Grant believes that people should try volunteering because more often than not, it comes more naturally than they expect.



JACKIE DAVIES

PHOTO: MELANIE JANE

"I am passionate about helping people and also helping and protecting children. Because I love children. The reward of helping these kids is unbelievable."

Jackie Davies is a full time mom and found out about Project Read through her friend Corinne Knowles, who works at Rhodes University. She has been a volunteer at Project Read for close to six months and she is in charge of Sesona (6) and Sheldon (6) who are two grade R children from Grahamstown Primary. She is passionate about children and loves helping them. She says that her love for children started with her two daughters who are three and five respectively.

Introduce children to
the magical world of
reading books

Volunteer
with
Project Read

Project Read operates as part of the Lebone Literacy Programme, which is based at the Lebone Centre in Currie Street.

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Lebone Centre

