

UKUFUNDA KUKHULA

Reading is growing

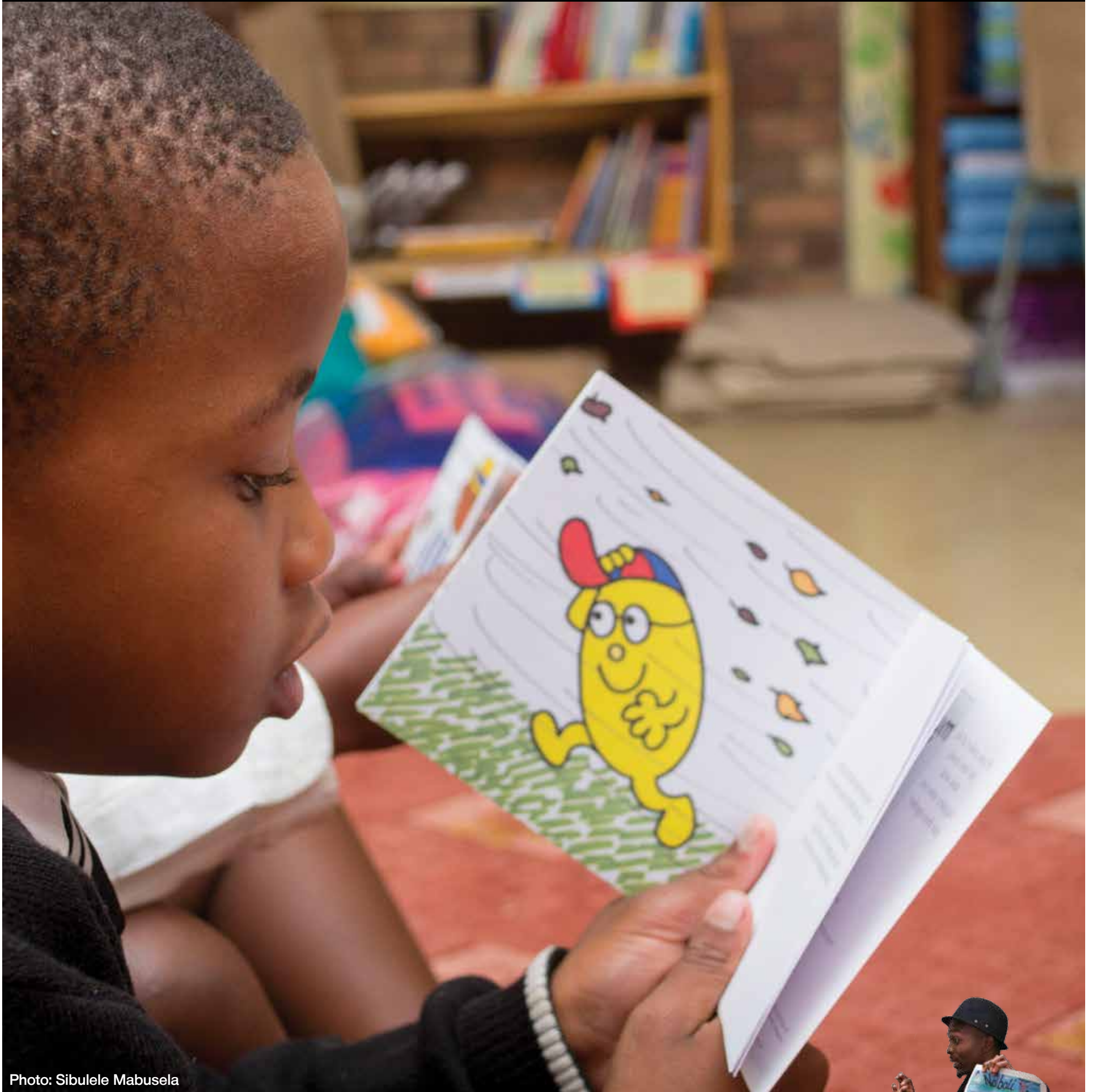


Photo: Sibulele Mabusela



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Landie Booie shares her love of reading

By Abbey Hudson

We meet at the prefabricated library in Extension 9 – it seems a fitting place to discuss the life of a woman who encourages and enables children to fill spaces like these.

The smell of books, both old and new permeates the air, and the hum of computers can be heard along with the chirping of the birds outside. Homemade posters advertising the joys of reading and the Nal'ibali reading club line the walls, as do informative posters on how to use the library facilities.

Tables and chairs fill the spaces not occupied by bookshelves, and I choose to sit in a bright, sunlit corner so that we both have a view of the grass outside.

She walks in and waves to two men who are sitting at the computers near the door, uttering a friendly "Hello." On her right hand, a gold ring with a black gemstone in it encases her middle finger. She walks over to me and it disappears momentarily as she shakes my hand by way of greeting.

Landie Booie was born and grew up in the Tyantyi location in Grahamstown, and is the youngest of four children. As a child, she went to Tyantyi Lower Primary School,



Landie Booie, temporary teacher at Mary Waters High School, speaks to Abbey Hudson about the library situation. Photo: Gabriella Fregona

which is near her father's home. She followed on to N.V. Cewu Higher Primary School, and finally went to Ntsika High School where she matriculated in 1992. She moved on to Worcester University in 1993 to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Education, graduating in 1996.

Landie has been teaching as a substitute teacher since 1997 and

has been involved in adult education programmes, including teaching matric English to adults in a pilot project called ASECA (A Secondary Education Curriculum for Adults) for three years until 2009.

She moved back to Grahamstown in 2012 in order to be closer to her elderly father and her husband, and started teaching at

Mary Waters High School.

During her time as a teacher in Port Elizabeth she started a reading club for grade eights at Pater-son High School in Port Elizabeth, with the help of Eileen Sheckle, a lecturer at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

She had noticed that some of the children in her grade eight class battled to read and write and so

decided to try get them to read and interact with books more often.

After her move back to Grahamstown, Landie noticed similar problems at Mary Waters, and so moulded her reading club idea to fit the situation at the local school.

"I hope I'm making a difference," she says. Earlier this year, she decided to tackle the source of many of the reading problems she encountered – children in younger grades.

"I thought, I'm educated, but what is my community getting out of me?" So she started a reading club at the Extension Nine Library which caters to children from ages six to thirteen – encouraging them to read and interact with the books they read through various activities.

Landie shares her love for reading with her community as often as she can, and says that she hopes to help improve literacy and reading in her community.

I ask her if she has any advice for the parents of learners in South Africa, especially in these times of economic, educational and political insecurity.

Smiling, she says, "Please read to your children, especially at a very young age. It's a legacy that nobody can take away from them."

Tata Thembalani: reading on the streets



Thembalani Fene started his own reading club for his children in Fingo Village. Many other children have shown interest and now he runs two separate clubs. Photo: Gabriella Fregona

By Gabriella Fregona

He shifts through mounds of colourful covers with his head tilted to the right to decipher the titles. "I used to love all of these books, especially Asterix," he comments. Cathy Gush, one of the literacy outreach community members of Grahamstown, rummages around her office looking for more things to give him. Books, newspapers and games begin to pile up as they go about their search.

Thembalani Fene started his own reading club for children earlier this year, where he can instruct and tutor his children, as well as any others who are interested in reading. He lives in Fingo Village with his family, and hosts his reading club every Tuesday. He has one group which meets outside of the Fingo library and another closer to his home. As a child he used to go with his grandmother to work and would take books to pass the time as he waited for her to finish. This is where his love for reading began and he hopes that his children will develop a similar passion for reading.

His reading club by the library is mainly made up of high school students to whom he reads; he also encourages them to take turns reading. His second group is made up of small children aged 4 to 7 and they gather on a street in Fingo by his home.

Thembalani has become known as tata ('father' in isiXhosa) as he provides a space for children to be pre-occupied after school while they wait for their parents to come home from school. This also allows them to go about their usual activities such as playing soccer and then when they take breaks they can be read to.

Thembalani is a fine example of how encouraging a reading culture can start from humble beginnings, and help from organisations such as Nal'ibali and the Leb-one Centre can help to keep it running.

Inkwenkwezi makes reading come alive

By Binwe Adebayo

Rhodes University's Inkwenkwezi Society recently received the Rhodes Community Engagement "Society of The Year" Award. These students recognised the problem of illiteracy in the Eastern Cape and make a difference 4 times a week by giving local learners the ability to gain reading and writing skills. Although the society members are humble about their work, the tangible difference being made in each child's life bears testament to the significant benefit which can be achieved when citizens take issues facing their community into their own hands.

Although Inkwenkwezi is made up of students from across South Africa, the members identify with the struggles of those whose space they share. One such example is 2013/2014 Chairperson, Hannah McDonald, whose older sister worked as part of Inkwenkwezi in its initial stages.

Inkwenkwezi's success comes from its good intentions, but more so from the commitment of all of its volunteers to show up and make their mark. "I've done a lot of community engagement at Rhodes but Inkwenkwezi is the best. There's a clear and vivid goal and the outreach really means something," explains volunteer Georgie Niven, who has been a volunteer at Inkwenkwezi for the duration of 2013.

While Inkwenkwezi is an incredibly successful community engagement programme, it does not operate without constraints. The programme supports reading clubs at 4 different schools, many of which are without books, learning aids or even (adequate) teachers. McDonald explains that although the programme is targeted at Grade 1 and 2 level learning, the program often accepts learners at Grade 3 level who have not had a sufficient grounding in basic literacy concepts.

Added to this, the project does not receive any monetary support from Rhodes' Student Representative Council (SRC) despite having applied for a grant on more than one occasion. Nevertheless, Inkwenkwezi manages to stay afloat through student membership subscriptions, which have increased from R70 to R150 over the programme's four-year tenure (a dramatic increase by Rhodes society standards). In addition to this, Cape Town-based literacy initiative WordWorks provides resources to conduct literacy teaching, which are provided to Inkwenkwezi at a markedly reduced rate, in recognition of their importance in the Grahamstown community. WordWorks' mission links closely to Inkwenkwezi's aims, which are simplified in their motto: "Helping learners shine". Reputable local literacy organization Nal'ibali also contributes reading resources and a strong relationship exists between the three organisations.

Community engagement is a buzz phrase

which often arises at Rhodes University, shrouded in heated debate around the role members of the Rhodes community should serve. With this in mind, approaching Inkwenkwezi with a neutral lens was difficult. I expected to see disinterested Rhodes students who would begrudgingly read to children for an hour in order to get some credit behind their name. Conversely I expected the regular members to be wannabe altruists with too much time and unending patience. While these estimations did apply to the odd few, the majority fell in a happy place in the middle.

Information Systems Honours student Justin Brasher swaps his tie and tablet for an hour at Samuel Ntsiko Primary School every week. He also plays in local band, The Bad Hands, with McDonald. This image of a busy student is hard to reconcile when watching him with his partner child Asanda. There are lots high fives and conspiratory giggling.

"What are you writing over there?" he asks when he notices me in the background.

"I'm just observing. Trying to get to know Inkwenkwezi," I reply.

"Well I hope you can see how smart she is. That's really important," he says about Asanda, like a proud parent.

Samuel Ntsiko has little access to books and with classes of up to 40 learners, many children inevitably fall through the cracks.

Another volunteer at this school, Xolelwa Ngantweni believes that the work done by volunteers serves a gap which exists in the formal teaching which children receive.

"When I came here, Ababalwe didn't know past 'e' in the

alphabet. Now, because we practice, she can read and recognize sounds and words much better," she explains, pointing at Ababalwe's tiny notebook, full of scribbles and drawings. "Yes, she made me clever," says Ababalwe. She shows me the book full of exercises which she has done with Ngantweni over the last few months.

At Good Shepherd, the picture is vastly different. Samuel Ntsiko's tiny red chairs and double tables were built for function but not comfort. At Good Shepherd, the library is lined with books and magazines and bright colours and comfortable seating creates conducive conditions for learning. Volunteers and their partner learners have formed strong ties to each other, which in

many cases add to the level of success in trying to teach.

"Kuzimla, how's the dancing?" asks volunteer, Lilian Magari.

Kuzimla doesn't answer, showing off all of her new moves and ending with an exuberant flourish.

After choosing a book related to Kuzimla's aspirations of being a star, the

pair read slowly together.

Inkwenkwezi strongly avoids traditional grading methods and crosses on writing work as this discourages the learners. Shouts of "Well done!", "Nearly there," and "Much better!" are commonplace in the sessions and help to show the learners that success exists beyond right and wrong answers, but is also found in simply trying to be better than they were in the session before.

"She struggles sometimes and she doesn't want to read, but she doesn't want to let me down because I encourage her," explains Magari.

It is the dedication of volunteers like this which holds the organization together. There are certainly frustrations around issues like funding, transport issues and a flippant attitude by some members. Nevertheless, the goal of 'helping learners shine' goes beyond an ethos on paper, but is reinforced by the commitment of its members to see it through in the progress of their learners.

“Inkwenkwezi's success comes from its good intentions, but more so from the commitment of all of its volunteers to show up and make their mark.”



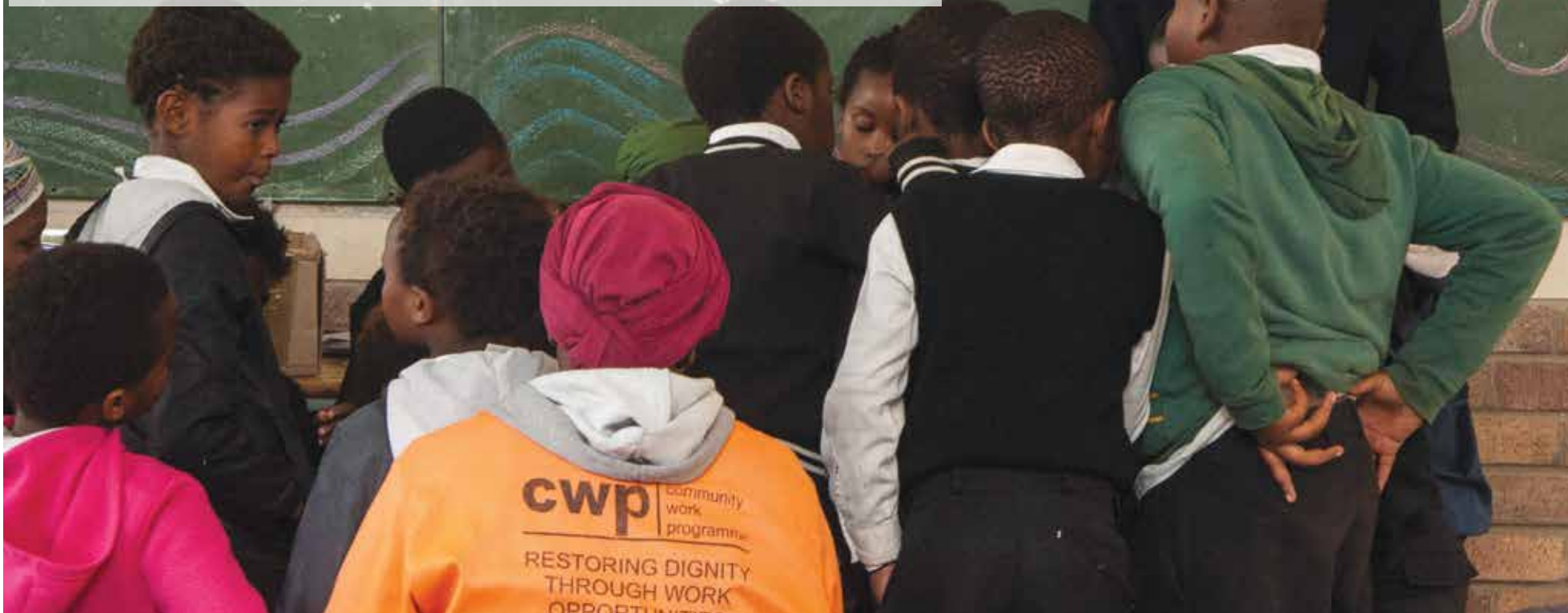
Ovayo Lukwe listens closely as his Inkwenkwezi volunteer and reading mentor, Khutso Tsikane, reads to him during their last visit to Good Shepherd for the year. Photo: Sibulele Mabusela

Reading is fun for everyone!

On Monday the 21st of October, Rhodes Journalism students facilitated a fun day of reading and literacy games at Samuel Ntsiko Primary School. Parents of learners in the school's Foundation Phase (Grades 1-3) were invited to join their children and their children's teachers for an informative session which aimed to emphasise the importance of reading from a young age. It was also to encourage those parents in attendance to become more actively involved in the learning journeys of their children.

A great deal of fun was had by everyone at the workshop, during which learners, parents and teachers alike played a variety of games with flash cards and puzzles and read to one another from several reading books. Attendees were then addressed by Tsepiso Nzayo, the Makana Cluster Mentor for Nal'ibali's national reading-for-enjoyment campaign. He spoke about why he believes that reading – both at home and at school – is so vital. Overall, the day was a great success and there are already plans in the pipeline for a follow-up event, so keep your ears to the ground!

Photos: Juané van Dyk



Tsepiso Nzayo, Makana Cluster Mentor for Nal'ibali, watches as children from the Foundation Phase at Samuel Ntsiko Primary School gather around a book.



A parent asks the children in his group to identify the animals on a flash card under the watchful eye of Nombulelo Koliti, the principal of Samuel Ntsiko Primary School.



One of the parents in attendance at the fun day shows the children in her group the illustrations in the book which she is reading to them.



A couple of parents attending the fun day at Samuel Ntisko interact with a group of learners while the principal, Nombulelo Koliti, and one of the Grade 3 teachers, Nosipho Ndabeni, look on.



Hannah McDonald, one of the Rhodes Journalism students who helped to facilitate the literacy fun day held at Samuel Ntsiko Primary School recently, discusses a reading book with a group of Grade 3 learners.

A local reading hero



Tsepiso Nzayo, Makana Cluster Mentor for Nal'ibali, is well-loved by the children of Grahamstown with whom he works, both for his silly antics and his kind-heartedness. Photo: Juané van Dyk

By Abbey Hudson

Tsepiso Nzayo kneels down to their level, saying words in isiXhosa which I don't understand. Several of the children attending the Nal'ibali Reading Club at Duna Library sit around him in a circle, taking in what he has to say with furrowed brows and concentration written on their faces. He is teaching them how to fold their newspaper sheets into little books that they can take home and read. He knows just how to keep their attention – a joke here, a smile there, words of encouragement at other times. His confidence and easy-going nature is infectious and seems to inspire confidence in the children with whom he works. They smile and laugh at his antics, which only serve to make them even more comfortable and relaxed. When it is time to read, rulers and staplers are left in a pile on the table and several children scurry off to the reading circle clutching their newly made Nal'ibali booklets bearing the story of a pet python. Tsepiso looks completely content in this moment and it is clear to onlookers that he is passionate about the case for reading.

A slight man, Tsepiso uses his small frame and expressive hands and face to keep the attention of the children to whom he tells stories. His dynamic nature is not only reflected in his personality, but in the way in which he moves about the room. After a book or story has been read, he will grab the attention of the children in the space and get them to engage in interactive listening games and activities. A chorus of "If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands" rings out clearly through the hall when Tsepiso leads the learners in singing the song – the actions exaggerated and remixed into a 'diski' type dance by the Nal'ibali 'story sparker' and cluster mentor.

Towards the end of the session, he joins the circle of children and begins telling a fairy tale. His expressive nature brings the story of Cinderella to life, and it is

not surprising that this energetic and imaginative man has used these talents to author children's books. His version of Cinderella is brought into modern times, setting her as a Grade 5 schoolgirl in Grahamstown, with big dreams of being on the talk show, 'Noeleen'.

The tale is woven in isiXhosa, with a few English words thrown in for good measure. Not surprisingly, this African Languages major creates a thrilling and educational saga detailing Cinderella's forced labour, her work put into her winning essay, her prize of being on Noeleen's show and her subsequent liberation from the household in which she was mistreated as an unpaid and underage labourer. His story is aimed at showing the children at the reading club the importance of reading and schoolwork, and the questions he asks after the story is finished seem to make them think about how they would react to being treated like this modern-day Cinderella. He asks them who they would speak to if they felt they were not being looked after or had someone mistreating them, and stresses the importance of authority figures like the police, social workers and teachers.

A girl borrows his hat towards the end of the session, putting it on her head and running away giggling. Tsepiso smiles at her and makes her laugh by tickling her and telling her an amusing story in isiXhosa. It seems that his role as a cluster mentor for the Nal'ibali reading for enjoyment campaign is strongly influenced by his comedic roots, as he jokes and plays the fool with the children. He brings out the playful and happy nature in the children with whom he interacts, while still managing to keep their focus on learning and reading. His enthusiasm for reading appears to rub off on them, creating a space in which reading is a happy escape from the realities of everyday life. It is clear that through being himself around these children, Tsepiso does what many teachers, librarians and parents fail to do – he makes reading fun.



Making the Samuel Ntsiko library work

By Matthew Kynaston

The library at Samuel Ntsiko Primary School is a mixture of great success and untapped potential. The library is fully equipped and ready to use, but it stands empty for large parts of each school day.

The library was given a donation of R20 000 by Friends of the Library in 2010. (See story about the Henderson bequest on page 7 of this supplement.) They used it to set up the room by buying shelves and books and making it ready for pupils to use. However, there was no system of managing the library, and teachers found that they couldn't use it with ease. They needed someone to categorise the books.

Lindi Arbi was instrumental in helping set up a simplified system of use for the library in 2012. An artist and lecturer, she wanted a break from her daily schedule and approached GADRA (Grahamstown Area Distress Relief Association) for a project to be involved in. "GADRA introduced me to the Lebone Centre and to ITEC, who

showed me how to set up a library," said Arbi. ITEC is a non-profit educational and training organisation based in East London. "I did a workshop with them and came back full of ideas. They really showed me everything," she said.

Felicia Zawale, Head of Department for the Intermediate Phase and the librarian at Samuel Ntsiko, said, "We moved everything into the library in 2012, which was hard work," she said. "Before that there was just a reading corner. Finding books was never the issue. We can get books. But the teachers here have not received training in how to run a library."

When she started work at the Samuel Ntsiko library, Arbi said it was well-equipped and simply waiting to be used. "It was well stocked and had all the right things," she said. "But it didn't have the system that would make it just right for the children. You have to create an environment that's inviting for them. Children must read for enjoyment and have a safe place to do it in." Arbi organised the layout of the bookshelves,

separating fiction from non-fiction and having the walls painted two colours to reflect that. She labelled every book and made it easier for teachers to help pupils find the books they want. She also implemented a book lending system.

"My goal was that every child could take a book home to read as they please," she said. "It's not good enough for the library to work. They must also have books in their classrooms and in their homes." Pupils can take out one book of their choice and carry it in a plastic packet – a simple but effective way of keeping the book safe. "I'm glad they have the lending system," said Arbi. "Not many schools in Grahamstown do. It's very necessary."

Zawale said that while the library may be performing its function, their biggest problem is getting pupils interested in reading beyond the library. Cathy Gush, from Friends of the Library, suggested that the lending system is a good place to start.

"I am a firm believer in sending books home with pupils. While some books may

be damaged or lost by being taken home, the benefits far outweigh the possible loss. If they're taking books home and reading with their parents, I think it's fine if they lose one or two," she said. "It's bound to happen. But they would be reading along the way, which is great."

Gush emphasised that when children take books home, they learn to read faster and they also learn responsibility, because they are looking after the books and making sure they come back to school.

Kelly Long, a project co-ordinator at GADRA, believes that what is needed more than anything is regular external assistance. "They need properly organised reading clubs, where people come in and read with the kids once a week," she said. "This would be very valuable. It's easier to get them interested in reading that way. Classroom libraries are a great idea but sometimes they aren't utilised as well as they could be, because teachers have many other concerns. It's easier for people to come in and have library classes with the pupils."



The Victoria Primary School library is currently undergoing a series of changes to be more efficient and up to date. However, it is still one of the best-equipped school libraries in the area. Photo: Gabriella Fregona

VP library: a brilliant place to be

By Binwe Adebayo

On a rainy afternoon, the Victoria Primary School (VP) library is packed with books and children. Girls sit on a large bed laid out on the floor reading to each other, while elsewhere, a heated game of chess is beginning.

One might think that a rainy day is one of the only ways to get young children into a library but this is certainly not the case here. Under the visionary approach of the school's new librarian, Monique Mulholland, the library has become a sanctuary for learning and the simple joy of reading for reading's sake.

Unlike many libraries or reading rooms in Grahamstown schools, the VP library provides for both function and comfort. The shelves are neatly arranged and there are informational posters everywhere – a diagram of the parts of the book, a box of cut-out recipes. All around the room, Mulholland and

her very proud library monitors are sorting through old books.

"I'm really trying to streamline the library by weeding out what the girls don't read and letting them decide what should be in the library," says Mulholland.

The new librarian, who was appointed in April, is incredibly dedicated to her post. She is currently re-organizing the library in terms of genre, following requests from the girls.

She is also looking into a digital cataloguing process, which is faster to administer and doesn't allow for lost books or missing slips. Mulholland is clear that the core aim of a library should be to serve the girls, and her efforts are certainly appreciated by her learners.

"We come here almost every day," says grade 6 learner, Amanda Gambiza. "We like being here and we get to read anything we want," adds her reading partner, Tas Abdul.

The new plans for the library are evidence

of a collaborative effort between the schools and the learners themselves, which Mulholland believes creates an incentive for the girls to use the library fully. Besides plans to install a digital cataloguing system, Mulholland has focused strongly on the content on the library.

"There are some things which have to go. Sometimes books talk about 'Negroes' or there are books about Christianity being the only religion," she explains.

Besides the old books, some of which date back to the 1950s when Victoria Primary was a convent, there are several books which the learners don't read but which still have value. Aware of the need for books in school libraries, Mulholland expressed some interest in sharing the books.

"You know, most of the books will end up in boxes. I don't see why we couldn't donate what we're not using," says Mulholland. "Sometimes Miss organized the books in themes, so it's easier to choose books," says

Abdul.

"If we aren't in the library, we do sport. I like the library because it's a change – and it's comfortable and cosy. I think libraries are important," adds Grade 7 learner, Linique Denston.

The library acts as a meeting place for girls of all grades, both those who are day scholars and those in hostel. The group of girls we spoke to encompassed Grades 5 to 7 learners who have become friends as a result of spending time in the library. The older girls read with the younger ones and while there is buzz and chatter, the library is still a calm and easy environment.

Mulholland's plans reflect the belief that although libraries can be updated and made more 'modern', the traditional learning space of the library is still valued by young learners.

The library extends its use by providing library lessons and allowing the girls to take books home with them.

School libraries benefit from Henderson bequest

By Matthew Kynaston

The library at Amasango Career School is one of five school libraries in Grahamstown which has benefited from a large donation to be spent on books and other accessories.

Schools in Grahamstown face the serious problem of being under resourced and understaffed. Money is not often spent on the library system, and when it is, there are other problems which can obstruct learners' access to books.

Linda Ngamlana, Acting Principal at Amasango Career School, says the donation of R25 000 has been a huge help to them.

"We bought many books and games for the children to use," she said.

"It has been wonderful see our

library grow. Now the children can learn to read not only in their classroom. They come here once a week and can take books with them when they leave."

The money for libraries at Amasango and the other schools was dispensed by the Friends of the Library committee, having received the money in trust from the daughters of Derek and Derek Henderson after they passed away.

Thelma Henderson was, amongst other things, a founding member of GADRA (Grahamstown Area Distress Relief Association), which provides education services and is active in transforming the school system in Grahamstown.

When the books in the library of the Henderson were damaged by water leaking from a burst geyser, their daughters, Margie Keeton

and Angie decided to donate the money claimed from insurance to Friends of the Library, as they knew their parents were always hugely supportive of education and reading initiatives.

Cathy Gush, from Friends of the Library, said that when the money was given to them they decided to donate it to the schools that would benefit most from the funds because they had been seeking to grow their libraries.

"We issued invitations to schools which we had identified as being active in this area, and invited them to a workshop," said Gush.

"In total there were eight schools which attended and after a further application process, five were selected from Grahamstown."

These schools are Amasango Career School, Mary Waters High

School, Samuel Ntsiko Primary School, C.M. Vellem Primary and Ntsika High School.

Not all the school libraries have been able to receive their donations. "Mary Waters was having trouble with where to house their library when the funds were made available," said Gush. "So we've kept the money for them in a bank account, and it's gathering interest."

This problem has now been overcome and when their library is fully operational again, the money is theirs to use.

The schools that were interested in applying for the funds met in the latter half of 2010 and put forward proposals, indicating what they would use the funds for.

Awards of between R5 000 and R25 000 were given to each of the five schools, depending on their

needs.

"We are a special needs school," said Ngamlana. "We help children catch up with other schools and bridge the gap. So they gave us R25 000."

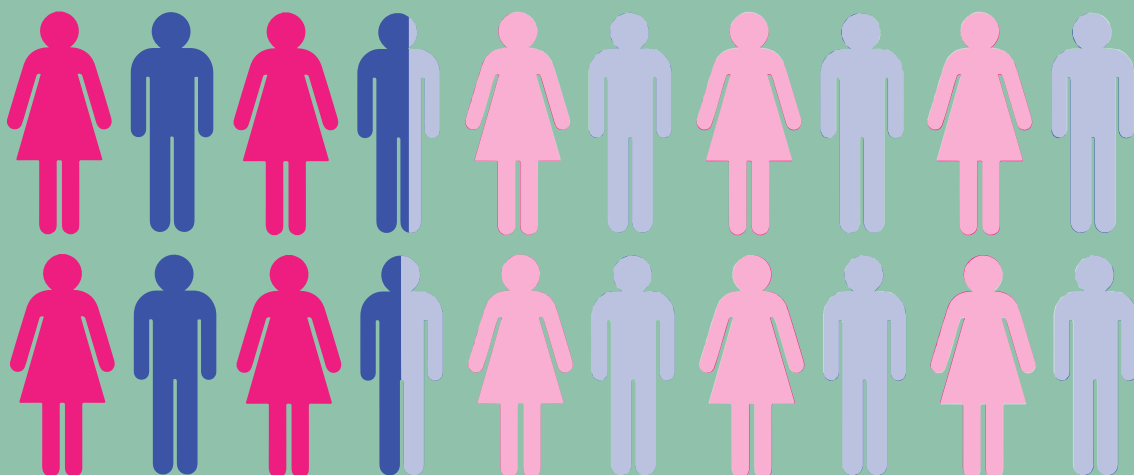
Amasango has not spent all of their funds yet. "We still have about R9 000," said Ngamlana. "We're moving the school to new premises next year so we're keeping money for outfitting the new library. We want to buy Xhosa books, because the kids need to read in their language."

Not all the money from the Henderson fund was given to school libraries. "Some money went towards other ventures such as increasing the holdings of large print books and assisting the mobile library that serves the Brookshaw Old Age Home," said Gush.

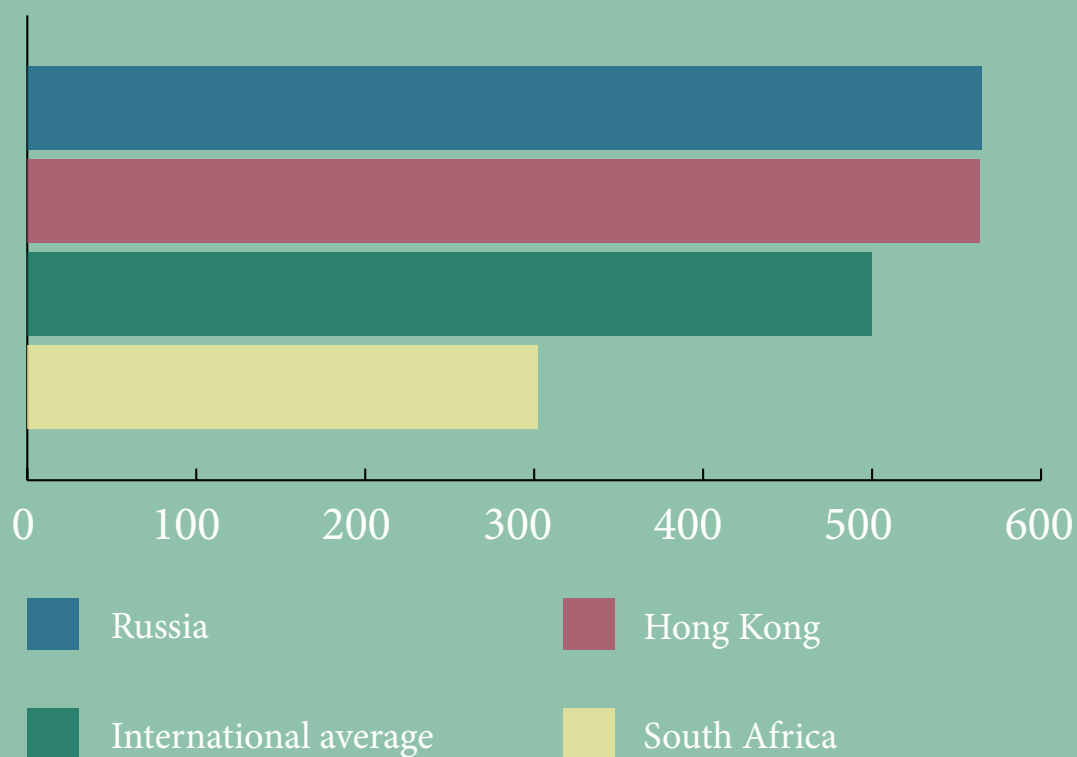
Why **READING** is important to the future of **SOUTH AFRICA**

Literacy is an essential component of the economy, democracy and individual development. It is crucial that Foundation Phase literacy is prioritised and effectively taught in order to prevent reading problems which fail to get resolved beyond this phase. Shocking statistics indicate that SA still faces enormous challenges that need to be addressed urgently.

In 2001 the national average for Grade 3 literacy was just 38%, meaning that on average, out of every 10 learners, less than 4 of them were literate.



By 2011, rather than improving, the national average performance in literacy for Grade 3 learners had dropped to 35%.



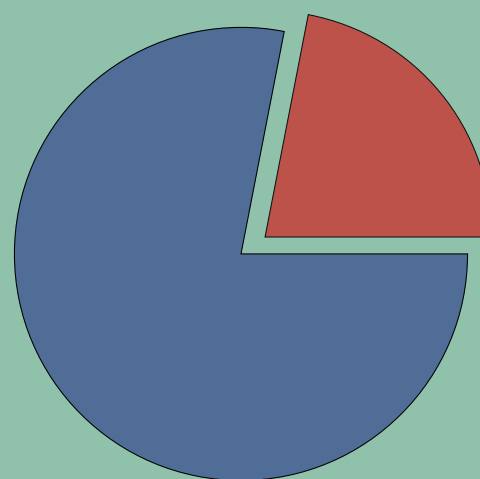
In 2006, SA was the worst performer out of 40 countries in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), scoring well below average. Russia and Hong Kong achieved the highest scores.

Even the countries which scored less than average were within 100 points of the international average.

Only four countries achieved lower than 400 points.

SA scored only 302 points!

- Only 1% of South African Grade 4s reach the **Advanced International Benchmark**.
- Only 1% of isiXhosa, siSwati and isiNdebele learners reach the **minimum international benchmark** by Grade 4.
- This means that **99%** of these learners are illiterate after three years of schooling.



Only **28%** of Grade 6 learners could read at or above their grade level in 2004.