

FROM SHELLEY

This year, over 100 schools will be using the Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme to run an annual series of workshops for parents and caregivers of children aged 5-8 years. To our knowledge, this is the only programme like this in South Africa. It is also one of the only professional development courses for teachers focusing on parents that is both a university short course and SACE accredited.

When we started this work in 2006, we did so on the basis of three key principles that have not changed as the programme has grown in reach.

Firstly, we recognised that parents and caregivers have a very important contribution to make to young children's first steps into reading and writing. We believed that many parents wanted to be more involved, but did not know how best to support their children's learning at home.

Secondly, parents and teachers are powerful when they work together. From the outset, we believed that it was important that teachers ran the programme for parents in order to build bridges between home and school. This meant that teachers needed to take off their 'teacher's hat' and become skilled facilitators of adult learning.

Thirdly, we were not just looking to provide information but to support families in trying out new ways of engaging with young children. We were aware that new ideas needed to be shared in accessible ways, wherever possible in parents' home language, with practical, doable activities that could make learning part of their daily routine. We also realised that it was not enough to share good ideas, but that resources were needed to enable families to try new activities at home.

Our recruitment, training and support for schools has evolved as the programme reach has grown. We know that the programme works best when principals recognise the contribution that parents can make and choose to invest in their parent body. So, schools apply, and are invited to renew their membership of the HSP network annually. Programmes are strengthened through opportunities to connect with and learn from other schools, and through support from a mentor.

12 years ago, we believed that it was vital to invest in parents as their children's first teachers. Our work has shown that across urban and rural contexts, across different language and cultural groups, there are dedicated teachers and parents who share this vision. In this newsletter we pay tribute to them.



Shelley O'Carroll,
Director of Wordworks



The vibrant Home-School Partnerships programme - bridging the gap between home and school



The passionate Wordworks team trains and supports teachers who volunteer to run the programme.



Dedicated Teacher-facilitators share skills during eight after-hour sessions with parents and caregivers.



Enthusiastic parents and caregivers support their children's early literacy and language development at home.



A celebratory parent certification event is held after lots of hard work (and fun!)



MY STORY

Andiswa Sondezi

I started attending the Wordworks Home-School Partnerships programme sessions in 2017 at Intshayelelo Primary School, where my grandchildren attend. We were invited to the school and told about the new programme for parents to

better assist our children informally at home. This was my first experience of any kind of early literacy programme.

I never thought that I could ever be able to assist my grandchild in the learning process. What was exciting for me was that the things we did in our everyday life could be a great opportunity for me to teach. I soon realised there was so much more that I could do as a grandparent to give my children a good start in their education. I was also developing as an adult because I started to be interested in learning more and realising my potential. This got me excited and looking forward to what was next for me.

I think it is very important for the school to work with parents because this could help build a solid foundation in the child's experience of learning. When I was growing up, the home setting and the school environment were completely separated and we grew up thinking that was normal. When the school opened their doors for us as parents with the HSP programme it bridged a big gap of communication and understanding between teachers and parents. When communication was possible, we then started sharing knowledge with each other in a free space allowing for opportunities of learning for both to convey the same message to our children.

Graduating from HSP programme was my first experience of receiving a certificate.

We were then offered the opportunity to train as co-ordinators for the Wordworks Ready Steady Read Write tutor programme. This gave me the opportunity not to only help my grandchildren but to assist in the school community as a whole.

I have come a long way since my first introduction to the Wordworks programmes. I am now studying at the College of Cape Town Level 4 in ECD which I never thought possible. I am also an assistant for the Grade R teachers on the days when I'm not doing RSRW. This has been life changing as I was a domestic worker and never realized my dream. I am living my full potential in my later years, and in the process helping my children and my community.

DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know many children may have undetected mild hearing loss? Children who have had repeated ear infections when they were younger are more likely to experience hearing loss. Such children may have language delays and difficulty learning to read and write. If you think a child in your care has this challenge, approach the child's teacher or seek professional advice.



TOP TIP

Talk about children's drawings

Children enjoy drawing from when they can first produce a few squiggles! The more they draw, the more they become interested in the details of what is around them.

Where do my arms begin? How many legs does a dog have? What shape is a roof? With time, children's drawings become imaginary worlds, complete with context, characters, and action! As family members we need to encourage and praise their efforts and talk about what they have drawn. By putting their ideas onto paper, children are not only having fun and building creativity, they are developing cognitive and physical skills important for writing.



DID YOU SEE?

Lessons from the longest study on human development – tracking some of the 'best studied people on the planet'. Helen Pearson looks at



how to use science to do the best for our children. The data shows that children who have engaged, interested parents, are much more likely to go on to do well in school later on – and this even if their material circumstances would usually reproduce disadvantage. Listen to this well-presented and fascinating talk! <http://bit.ly/2MddtSe>

DID YOU HEAR?

Our WordWorkshops on our resources continue this term:

- Stellar Home Language: Update – Teacher's Guides for 8 two-week cycles (10 April).
- Stellar Home Language: Teacher's Guide for parent meetings (15 May).
- Big Game Box workshop (17 April).

Find out more and register on our website here:

<http://www.wordworks.org.za/workshops-on-resources-2/>