

FROM SHELLEY

September is literacy month and a time to reflect on the fact that after 24 years of democracy, the great majority of our young children are not able to read, or understand what they read.

It is of course easy to blame the government. Government is failing our children and we have to keep holding it to account, while acknowledging officials who work tirelessly to improve things. The truth is the government can't actually solve this crisis alone. Not this year, nor next year, nor in my lifetime.

This is not government's problem alone – it is every South African's problem. It is the one thing that this country must get right. With millions of children in this country not learning to read and write successfully, what hope do we have of a better future?

Our generation's struggle is not for democracy, but to ensure that every child learns to read and write so that their lives are enriched and they can reach their full potential. How can we, as ordinary South Africans, make this happen?

If learning to read and write only began when children started school, and the only people who could teach children to read and write were teachers, and the only place where you could learn how to read was in a classroom, then we could reasonably ask "what role we could possibly play?". However, we have seen the impact on children's learning when parents and caregivers become more involved in supporting learning at home – and when schools and ECD centres reach out and acknowledge the important role that parents play.

If we are to succeed, we must begin this struggle for children's literacy in homes and communities. This is where we can make our contribution to a better future for our children. The struggle for democracy was won by ordinary people taking a stand against an injustice that could not be tolerated. A generation of young children not able to read is another injustice that we must not accept.

We honour the growing number of parents and caregivers from under-resourced communities who are stepping forward, because they want more for their children. However, this is not their struggle alone. As a parent of children who easily learnt to read by virtue of a well-resourced home and quality schooling, I must step forward and make this my problem too. If I want a better future for my child, I must be prepared to give of my time and resources to raise awareness and contribute to initiatives to improve literacy for every child in this country. This is a crisis that demands an urgent and sustained response from all South Africans.



Shelley O'Carroll,
Director of Wordworks



The Home-School Partnerships Programme in Pictures



Training: Over 140 new Teacher-Facilitators were trained in 2018, in schools in the Metro, West Coast, Winelands and the Eastern Cape. These Foundation Phase teachers are committed to bridging the gap between school and home.



Parent workshops: Over 1000 parents found time after hours to attend eight course sessions at their children's school, and had the courage to try out new language and literacy ideas at home.



Parent graduations: Teacher-Facilitators celebrated parents through graduation events which recognised the vital role of parents and caregivers in children's early learning.



Mentorship: Each group has been supported by their school management and mentors who have been trained by Wordworks to use the programme and materials.



Teacher Certification: In 2017, 115 teachers received certificates, and we anticipate that number will increase to over 140 this year.

Congratulations to all involved in this important work!



MY STORY

Cathy Lincoln has been a much-loved and highly-respected team member at Wordworks since 2011, and has mentored colleagues and partners alike with dedication and care. She has been involved in the Home-School Partnerships (HSP) and Stellar Grade R Programmes.

It has been one of the greatest pleasures of my life to be part of Wordworks, working to change lives through literacy.

I spent many years teaching Pre-Grade R and Grade R, in mainstream and special needs environments before finding Wordworks through Brigid Comrie. In 2011 I became involved in the HSP Programme, and then later also in Stellar. This work resonated so strongly with me - I felt as though I had come home!

In seven years I've witnessed phenomenal expansion at Wordworks, from a 7-person team running 3 programmes in 1 language, to a 20-person team, offering 4 programmes in 3 languages, and with an ever-increasing reach.

To have been on the inside of this dynamic and unique organisation is something I will always treasure: rock-solid collegial support, generosity of spirit, well-researched bases for our programmes, professionalism, learning from each other, the wearing of many hats, creativity, empathy, hearty laughter and the all-hours Wordworks group chat are just some aspects of the teamwork I've experienced.

My biggest highlight, however, has been the learning visits to our schools, both in the Cape Town Metro and further afield, connecting with HSP Programme facilitators and parents in their sessions, listening to their stories, witnessing their growth and celebrating the small but significant early literacy victories achieved.

As I will be retiring soon, I'd like to take this opportunity to warmly greet and say goodbye to the many wonderful people I have met and worked with over the past years. I remain in awe of the important, challenging and life-changing work that you do, with both heads and hearts – thank you! I'll always be part of the Wordworks family, and will want to stay in touch, so I trust that our paths will continue to cross.

DID YOU KNOW?



All cultures have stories and we are all story tellers.

We tell made-up stories, personal stories – about ourselves, about others, about what

happened yesterday, what happened a long time ago, or what we hope is going to happen. We can include our children in story telling from when they are as young as two years old. They will love developing the stories with you. It is one of the important ways we can support their language development, and at the same time give them a sense of belonging.

DID YOU HEAR?

New! Wordworks is excited to now be offering workshops for the public on our resources. Over the past weeks, we have conducted successful workshops on our Big Game Box, and our Stellar Teacher's Guide for parent meetings in Grade R. Find out more about these and other workshops in our newsletter, social media and website.
<http://www.wordworks.org.za/category/workshops-on-resources/>



TOP TIP

Drawing is real brain work and is fun too!

Create space and opportunities for children to draw. Children love to draw and this is very good thinking time for them. When children draw they learn to put their thoughts on paper. This is preparation for later when they put thoughts on paper in writing. Allow your children to draw and don't make your own assumptions about what they have drawn. Ask them to tell you about their drawings and do not criticise or compare children's drawings.

