

## FROM SHELLEY

We know that children who have well-developed language and early literacy abilities when they begin school are those that are most likely to learn to read and write successfully. Yet many children miss out on vital learning opportunities in their early years. Government has ECD firmly on its agenda, but we cannot wait for the system to provide. With close to 7 million children under the age of six in South Africa, we must all play our part.

The 2019 South African Early Childhood Review revealed that 1.1 million children aged between 3 and 5 in South Africa do not attend an early childhood quality learning programme. There are also very few opportunities for parents and caregivers of young children to learn how to support early language and literacy learning.

History has always shown that if we want to bring about real change it must start with us – all of us, with whatever skills we have, wherever we find ourselves. At a recent Wordworks event I looked around me and realised that all of us were from different backgrounds and different areas; we spoke different languages; some of us had young children, some were grandparents; some were qualified, some were not; some represented churches, some were from libraries, some from NGO's and some from ECD Centres. And in the end, none of these things really mattered. What had brought us together was that we were all invested in and passionate about supporting young children's language and literacy learning – and were doing this in our work, in our own families, and as volunteers. There was such power and hope in that room.

At Wordworks, we have always believed that what counts in the end for children are day-to-day interactions, conversations, shared stories and words of encouragement. It's the books that are read and re-read, it's the fun we have playing games, and the sense of pride in our children's drawing and the celebration of their early writing. This is what will give them the confidence and the language to become readers and writers, to listen with interest and to speak their truth, to learn about themselves and about their world, to be the best people they can be.

We are reminded in this newsletter that anyone can be a literacy champion, anywhere, anytime – be inspired, get involved and lead the way for others to join too!

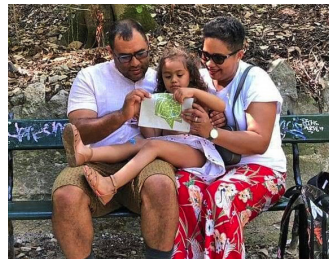


Shelley O'Carroll,  
Director of Wordworks



## Wordworks Early Literacy Challenge

During Literacy Month this September we ran a social media challenge encouraging moms, dads, grannies, grandpas, sisters, brothers and caregivers to share pictures of themselves reading, talking, playing and writing with little ones. A huge thank you to everyone who shared pictures to encourage and inspire families to play a more active role in developing their children's language and literacy. Here are just a few of the lovely shares.





## Rugby coaches lead the way in early literacy!

Recently, eight VUSA rugby coaches from the Vusa Rugby and Learning Academy completed a series of Wordworks' Every Word Counts workshops over five weeks.



Mercedes (Mechi) Artigue\* says, 'The coaches work with primary school children teaching them rugby, and do physical education with the children at three creches in Langa. Vusa is trying to be more proactive by being involved in early literacy development. It makes sense that these coaches, who are in contact with children and are an example to them, learn how to stimulate language and maths while doing physical exercise. I wanted to show those who are parents (or future parents), that as fathers they also have to be part of their children's education and nurture them. I encouraged them to read, play and engage with their children regularly and actively.'

Wordworks is so inspired by

what some of these participants had to say after the course:

*'One afternoon some children arrived late for practice. Instead of shouting at them, I asked them why they were late and listened to their replies. I was amazed by what they told me and made me understand more what*

*they go through and also connect with them. This happened after one of the sessions when we discussed the importance of connecting with children and talking to them, being nurturing, etc.'*

*'These young ones, when they see us they don't see us as coaches only but they also see us as father figures. I gained a lot of experience of how to communicate with kids, the understanding of kids and the realizing of that sometimes young ones feed off adult energy. If a young kid sees an adult unhappy the kid then will feel neglected so that's why we need to stimulate them, and early literacy for the young ones will give a child a brighter future.'*

*'What stood out for me was the interaction between children and adults. It was very eye opening. A lot of the time adults ignore children or act strange in front of them. Children look up to us and we have to act in a good manner at all times. This is what I will surely encourage my coaches to work on every time they are on VUSA duty.'*

Mechi concludes: 'One of the coaches who is also a father told us that when his daughter came to spend the weekend with him, he engaged better with her and he noticed her attitude was also different with him, and she wanted to come back again to visit him.'

I have realised during this course the importance of including young men and fathers in early literacy workshops and education. We need to change the mentality that men are just bread winners, or that literacy should be left to teachers or mothers. Fathers can feel more empowered and be more present at home, creating a more solid sense of the family unit.'

\*Mechi, their facilitator, runs programmes at schools with Siyakhula-Langa.

See more here: <https://web.facebook.com/VusaAcademy/>; [www.siyakhulalanga.org.za](http://www.siyakhulalanga.org.za)

## DID YOU HEAR?

During Literacy Month, over 80 Wordworks team members, their families and friends, and some of our partners spent a wonderful, rejuvenating morning participating in the Sanlam Cape Town 5km Peace Run. We wanted to help lift the profile of early literacy during this very public event – and spread the message that anyone can be a literacy champion, anywhere, anytime. We loved having babies and young children being part of the event! See more pictures on our website here. Make sure you join us next year!



## DID YOU SEE?

NEW! Zulu versions of these free-to download Wordworks games have been uploaded onto our website: Train game, Snake game, Lily Pad game, Stepping Stone game and Snail game. Visit this page to see these (together with the English, Afrikaans and Xhosa versions): <http://www.wordworks.org.za/games-2/>



For more information visit [www.wordworks.org.za](http://www.wordworks.org.za)

**Wordworks is moving!** From November 2019 you will find us at 46 Main Road, Bergvliet, Cape Town. Note that our telephone number and other contact details will be unchanged.