

## FROM SHELLEY

While we struggle with the challenges and constraints imposed on our daily lives, one thing is for certain during these uncertain times: our families are our most important resource. Stripped of the support of neighbours, churches, ECD Centres, schools, and community centres, families carry a huge burden of responsibility. As we spend more time in our homes, we are reminded daily of the inequalities in our society, and of the lack of access to space, to food and basic services, to security - and also to data, books and practical learning resources in many homes. This crisis is a reminder of how much more we need to invest, as a country, in supporting parents and caregivers in their vital role. There is so much work to be done to ensure all children have access to vital early learning experiences at home.

And yet, we should not forget, so much work has been done! Each of the teachers who offered the Home-School Partnerships Programme at their school, each of the trainers, teachers and home visitors who shared the Every Word Counts Programme with parents, each Ready Steady Read Write Programme tutor who has taken activities back to their community, should feel proud today. You have contributed to making homes more interactive and fun learning spaces - even during this difficult time. We salute you for what you have done to support early learning, but also what you have done to strengthen families, build relationships and ease the stress that parents are experiencing.

Although Wordworks can't provide training during this time, we continue to try and find ways of staying connected and sharing ideas through WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram.

Amidst fears about staying healthy, we all have concerns about how we can make this time meaningful for our children, and how we keep their worlds as stable as possible while so much is changing. As parents and caregivers, it is so easy to feel we're not doing enough, or we don't have enough to offer. And yet, what we have always believed at Wordworks, is that some of the most important gifts we can give our children are those that don't require materials or qualifications: our time and attention, a kind and encouraging phrase, a family story, a conversation while doing chores, a chance to ask and answer questions, a song, a game of pretend play or 'I spy with my little eye'.

These ordinary moments are what children will remember from this time.



Shelley O'Carroll,  
Director of Wordworks



## Picture Story

**The Home-School Partnerships Programme is an extraordinary effort by layers of dedicated people:**



The Wordworks team works with Foundation Phase teachers who train as facilitators.



These teachers give of their own time to work with parents.



Districts, NGOs and schools support and encourage this important work.



Parents complete the course and transform their approach to raising their children, to communication, and the joy of learning language together!

**Wordworks remains in touch, even while social distancing!**

**We are sharing practical early literacy tips for families in different languages through social media.**

**You can now also find them on our website - [wordworks.org.za](http://wordworks.org.za) - under Get Resources/ Tips for Lockdown. Please share widely.**



## My Story

### Amanda Sickle - The Reading Room

*I founded The Reading Room in 2012 and Wordworks has been my go-to right from the start. Wordworks is a mentor, a sponsor, a resource centre and often an inspiration to keep on walking alongside learners and parents on their literacy journeys.*

Wordworks came through for me and for The Reading Room when other organisations were unhelpful or plainly closed the door when I sought guidance. I don't have a background in education but with Wordworks in my back pocket, assisting the learners and facilitating the parent workshops on Saturdays is a breeze.

I started the reading assistance when to my dismay I learnt of the alarmingly low literacy rate among Grade 4 learners. I could not sit back and watch illiterate learners go through the education system without a means to live a successful life, so I started The Reading Room from my lounge. From there we progressed to hiring premises – the rental cost was paid from my salary – because the need was huge and today we operate from Wynberg High School; even offering their learners assistance during school hours. We are also assisting schools in other areas to set up their school libraries.

Just thinking about this work gets me excited and it's something I can talk about all day. Inspiration comes from seeing the learners get it! I love early learning and focusing on the holistic child. I enjoy seeing a child captured and participating in a story. I love listening to their little stories and their understanding. I am thrilled when scribbles are actually a pie meant for me to eat! I love hearing the sound of children's voices reading out loud.

It is important for schools and parents to collaborate on this literacy journey because society and learning has changed. Doing this work, I have learnt that parents are very eager to assist their young learners at home. Parents often just don't know how to help them. With the Wordworks Home-School Partnerships Programme being interactive and equipping parents, it gives parents a sense of confidence and a paradigm to better assist their young learners. Parents are excited and that excitement spills over at home which contributes to make learning pleasant and fun, the way children learn best!

Through the programme, others have been inspired to start literacy clubs and literacy assistance from their homes for learners in their communities.

People often ask if I am an educator or a psychologist. I snigger when I answer because after completing high school I wasn't able to study further. Back then I wanted to be an auditor, but I had to work to make a contribution in our home. Throughout the years, further study always took a back seat because of family and commitments but this year I embarked on a study journey...I am on the road to attaining my B.Ed. ... and I acknowledge Wordworks for inspiring me to hop aboard this titanic task.

## DID YOU HEAR?

We have five new additions to the Wordworks team this year!

From left to right are Christine MacLachlan (Programmes Officer), and Early Literacy Specialists Natasha Rosen, Kerry Saadien-Raad, Cheryl Ann Thomas and Ntsiki Ntusikazi.



We have already benefited greatly from the rich experience and skills that these capable and lovely women have added to our team.

## Top Tip

### Join in your child's pretend /fantasy play.

In the picture, the mother and little boy have made a pretend stove from a cardboard box. The boy is cooking 'porridge' for his teddy, while his mother listens and plays along, adding to the game and to what he says, but always letting him lead the game.

### Why is pretend play important?

Children use language to think and work things out; they play different roles; they have to explain what they are thinking and they learn that one thing can stand for something else – a box becomes a stove! (symbolic representation). They develop their imagination and creativity, learn to cooperate and understand the feelings of others... and they PLAY!



## DID YOU SEE?

Wordworks was honoured to be in the company of other amazing NGOs as a winner at the Community Chest Impumelelo Awards in November 2019.

Our Home-School Partnerships Programme won in the category of Social Innovation in Education.

Thank you to all the teachers and schools that run this programme with so much dedication, and to the parents that participate with so much commitment.

