

## FROM SHELLEY

### We owe our children a fighting chance

I have always believed that working in the NPO sector is a privilege, largely because amidst the daily challenges we face in our country, the work we do is filled with reminders of people's generosity, courage and kindness. It is also a sector that responds bravely to challenges, and during these uncertain times, many NPO's have worked hard to find new ways of doing critically important work. We've strengthened partnerships to share and learn with each other and with government. Together, we've developed and shared new materials and are building new methodologies to best address the needs of young children who are so vulnerable to the impact of lockdown measures.

Although the majority of children will be back at school, we know that learning is not going to be optimal, with reduced teaching hours, and the likelihood of school closures. Our particular concern is for the thousands and thousands of young children who have missed out on vital months of learning to read and write. This is not a curriculum or phase in schooling that is easily 'trimmed' or caught up. We owe these children a fighting chance – their success at school will depend on the opportunities we provide for learning to read and write.

Our core work has always been to advocate for the vital contributions families can make to children's literacy, and to offer training and mentoring to support those that care for and educate young children. During lockdown, we've had to find ways of selecting and adapting content that has been most important in our face to face training. We have added elements to make materials more accessible: WhatsApp messages in home languages, voice notes, videos, low cost printed materials and a data free site. We've been challenged to embrace and make use of technology to connect in ways we would not have thought possible a few months ago. We've had to work very carefully to ensure that we are designing and sharing messaging that is carefully packaged and respectful of the real challenges faced by many families. We have aimed to enable caregivers and their children to enjoy success, and to add some light and fun to the heaviness that is ever present during this pandemic.

This newsletter tells a story of how messages about the importance of early language and literacy are reaching homes, and changing lives in ways that we could not have anticipated. It also tells the story of the huge potential for supporting literacy through involving and resourcing families.



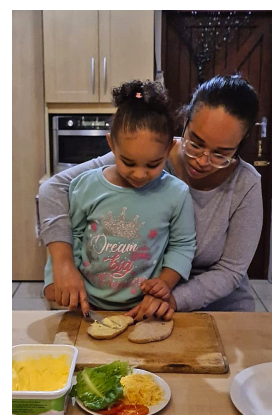
Shelley O'Carroll,  
Director of Wordworks



## Picture Story

We love the way families have been sharing pictures of their children enjoying our informal learning activities, and creatively using and expanding on ideas we have shared.

Here some little ones showing their playdough characters, homemade jigsaw puzzles, homemade pancakes and sandwiches, and pretend shopping trolleys. (Find these and many more Playing and Learning activities here: <http://www.homeliteracy.datafree.co>).



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: <http://www.homeliteracy.datafree.co>



## My Story

*The stories of individuals that have met the multiple challenges presented by the pandemic with energy and grace are countless. Here are some of the many people in our network that have shared early literacy resources with parents and teachers. We wish we could feature more!*



**Diane Nunnelee** is a volunteer co-coordinator of the Ready Steady Read Write Programme at Star of the Sea, St. James.

"As soon as I heard about the daily activities Wordworks would be providing during lockdown, I just knew these would be helpful to keep children engaged in learning, and parents engaged with their children. Louise Emere, a first grade teacher and head of the Foundation Phase (grades R, 1, 2, 3), at Star of the Sea agreed.

So, beginning with the play dough recipe, I have been forwarding the activities daily. Louise and the other teachers have been delighted, and so have the children. Surprisingly, the children enjoyed hearing "other adult voices" (in our recordings). They made fun puzzles. The mini book was a big hit. The activities made learning more fun. And those recipes! The children made the pancakes for their mothers on Mother's Day. Many are continuing to make them. One of the learners now knows the recipe by heart and is 'making fab pancakes often'."



**Bulelani Tsitsa** is an Amathole East District Foundation Phase coordinator in the Eastern Cape.

"The need to plant the seeds for the love and joy of reading begins at the early stages of life and so the material that you develop serves just this noble idea to work with the mind of a child. Most parents, especially in our rural communities lack literature (reading books, magazines and the like) so this material adds value to the lives of those little ones; and the materials are child-parent user friendly.

I found these (WhatsApp) activities very helpful, as we are unable to reach big audiences on the part of public schools. 7 of my colleagues (subject advisors) also share these activities with Lead teachers, some of whom have contact details of parents. Our challenge is that teachers in many of our public schools don't have the contact details of parents. This is a gap we need to close, as one of the lessons learned from this virus.

Some of the parents have highly recommended the literacy activities as they require the child's focused attention, whilst adding fun at the same time."



**Sue Davids** is a learning support teacher at Jamaica Way and Wespoort Primary schools in Mitchells Plain.

"I began to receive the activities at the beginning of the lockdown period. I found them to be such a wonderful educational resource in this time that I began sharing it ... with about 40 to 50 teachers, parents and district officials. I was contacted about children who had not received any learning materials during lockdown and I knew these activities could help.

The reason I began sharing them with others was due to the easy, pre-planned and budget friendliness of each of the activities. I felt that parents and caregivers could easily manage these activities at home as each came with a voice clip and visual picture to guide them along. As an LSEN educator I immediately identified that the activities had key learning skills that young children need to build good literacy. They are multisensory learning, learning through play, basic concept revision and developing them holistically. These teaching approaches help young children build a good foundation and consolidate early literacy skills.

The impact that these resources had on the child and families have been immense. Young children learn through play and each activity has them actively engaged and exploring their environment in a safe and secure way. They are growing academically but emotionally as well. Caregivers were being equipped with this resource as many might have not known how to keep their young ones engaged during this time. Many parents also had the opportunity to see their child develop through these activities."



**Dipo Mhlongo** is a literacy team leader for Africa!Ignite in KZN.

During June, as part of our response to COVID-19, our early literacy facilitators ran 6 workshops with 70 parents in deep rural villages around Mbazwana (near the Mozambique border in KZN). The sessions had 3 parts: information to protect ourselves and others from getting the virus, reading and telling stories with young children so that they can continue learning during the lockdown, and ensuring young children are supported emotionally during this time. We handed out face masks, Wordworks leaflets on reading, and other literacy resources.

I have been translating Wordworks activities into isiZulu for the past 3 months for sharing via Whatsapp, so included some of the ideas from these Whatsapp messages in our workshops. For example, having conversations with children about the items in shopping leaflets and linking these items to what is in your cupboard at home. Parents are eager to learn how to support their children's learning and they enjoy our interactive workshops where they can talk about their own experience. I always like to hear from parents what they know, so that our team can share new ideas with them to make learning at home fun for all.





## Did you know?

Wordworks has developed a set of learning resources to support parents of Grade R and Grade 1 learners at home.



As many of you know, Wordworks Ready Steady Read Write and Home-School Partnership programmes were designed to resource and encourage parents to become more involved in the teaching and learning of their own children, and others in the community. We have therefore drawn on these programme materials to create a simple set of 'mini-lessons' for parents or caregivers to do at home with their young children. We have designed a short guide - Read and write with me- together with small packs of resources, for four weeks of mini lessons. The guide supports parents to spend a structured 30 - 40 minutes with their Grade R or Grade 1 child every day. Here is a link to the Read and Write with Me guide for parents, as well as resource packs for three months: <https://homeliteracy.datafree.co/readwrite/>.

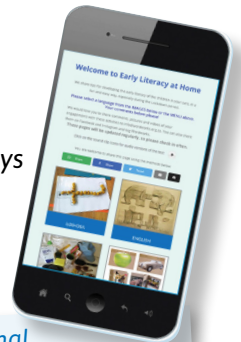
With the support of Education District Officials, school principals and teachers, 256 schools and ECD centres in total received the materials (5 schools in the Eastern Cape, 1 school in the Northern Cape, 250 schools in the Western Cape). These materials are reaching 39 514 children (16 229 Grade Rs and 23 285 Grade 1s).

## Did you see?

To date, over 65 informal early literacy activities for younger children have been shared by Wordworks since the start of lockdown in March 2020.

Our focus has been on highlighting important learning opportunities and encouraging informal ways of supporting early language and literacy learning at home.

We have shared these illustrated activities, together with our Read and With Me packs, widely on our social media pages, as well as on our data free website; with 7458 visitors to the website and 8982 clicks on Facebook posts. We have also sent over 45 000 daily WhatsApp messages to our network.



*We believe that informal learning is fun and effective, and should be encouraged. Wonderful feedback from parents, caregivers and educators has secured this belief:*

*"Thank you so much am enjoying the activities with my kids especially now that it is data free. Thanks once again keep up the good job.*

*I think this program is pretty impressive. Helpful especially now during the lockdown period. It'll keep us busy for hours every day.*

*I'm elated to come across this on the web and I think it's a good idea. I have downloaded all and will use it. I appreciate the creativity.*

*Baie dankie vir die lekker oefeninge. So kry ouers en kinders ook kans om te bond.*

*Dis verskriklike oulike aktiwiteite wat so goed, stimulerend en interessant is vir ouer en kind.*

*I think this is good. Our children are learning good things every day. I'm so impressed.*

*Ndifunde lukhulu kwaye ulwazi endilufumeneyo ndizakulusebenzisa."*

*Wordworks has also seen a period of professional growth during this time. Here is what some of the Wordworks team members have to say about their experience of developing and sharing the resources across our networks.*

*"I've learned so much about technology and being more connected to people I wouldn't ordinarily have been in touch with.*

*Watching how everyone teams together... sparks you to try to do your best.*

*I liked the quality of the activities we were doing, yet it was simple enough for people to understand.*

*As a new kid on the block, I learned a lot about the different Wordworks programmes and the actual content we send out.*

*A period of personal growth... You did things you would not ordinarily have done.*

*I learned more about my own language. I had to think how can I articulate ideas best in my language.*

*Initially it was going to be a small project with a few activities. Slowly we extended our team... everybody was ready to jump in and support one another.*

*We had a goal that children out there would benefit, but as a team we also developed.*

*There were no big egos... it wasn't about what you could do, it was about the quality of the work.*

*I realised how complex languages are (doing translations)."*