

Annual Report



2023



Wordworks Team

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“Our generation’s struggle is to ensure that EVERY child learns to read and write so that their lives are enriched and they can reach their full potential”

Shelley O’Carroll

Director's message: A year of growth

In 2023, the South African non-profit sector navigated a challenging landscape in the aftermath of COVID-19. Amidst proposed legislative changes and the persistent need for financial sustainability and compliance, organisations prioritised accessibility, transparency and risk management. These efforts reflected the sector's adaptability and strategic approach to address evolving challenges. Additionally, trends such as digitalization and community-driven philanthropy underscored the importance of innovation and collaboration in achieving long-term goals.

Reflecting on the past year, I am filled with immense gratitude for the journey we've taken together at Wordworks. 2023 was a year of remarkable growth and achievement, guided by our unwavering commitment to changing lives through literacy. Throughout the year, under our current leadership, we experienced flourishing progress across various fronts. Our team expanded, allowing us to extend our reach to more beneficiaries and children across more provinces. As our family grew, so did our resolve for nurturing our team members by prioritising their well-being through enhanced benefits, wellness programmes and continuous learning opportunities. I'm proud to share that these efforts have contributed to a low staff turnover, fostering a strong and dedicated team.

Our board of directors continued to provide invaluable guidance and oversight, ensuring that we remained steadfast in our pursuit of excellence. In 2023, key roles within the board were filled, underscoring their commitment to our vision, mission and values. Their leadership has been palpable in shaping our strategic direction and planning for the future.

We are excited to have embarked on our 2030 strategic plan, crafted through extensive consultations with our stakeholders. This plan sets the stage for transformative initiatives that will further our impact and advance our mission. In the coming year, we will focus on implementing the necessary structures and strategies to bring this vision to life.

A cornerstone of our work has been our dedication to gathering robust evidence of the positive and important lessons from our work. In 2023, we undertook numerous external and internal evaluations that have yielded valuable insights into the impact of our efforts. In 2024, we eagerly anticipate sharing these insights with our stakeholders, advocating for increased support and investment in our sector.

One of the highlights of 2023 was the beginning of the Special Needs Project, expanding the current GDE Grade R Language and Mathematics Improvement Programme to special needs schools. This groundbreaking initiative's intent aligns with our commitment to inclusivity and equity in education. As we navigate this new terrain, we remain committed to learning and growing.

While we celebrate our aforementioned achievements, we also acknowledge the challenges encountered, such as securing adequate funding and the requisite staff capacity to sustain our work. However, I am heartened by the resilience of our team and the measures we are implementing to address these constraints. With unwavering determination, we remain focused on realising the vision outlined in our 2030 strategic plan, enabled by our key stakeholders, chiefly the long-standing and prospective donors.

As South Africa commemorates the significant milestones achieved since the dawn of democracy in 1994, we stand at a pivotal moment in our nation's history. While we celebrate the progress made, we acknowledge that there is still much more to be done, particularly in the realm of education, with a specific focus on early learning and childhood development. As we approach the upcoming elections, we recognize this as a watermark moment for our nation. It is a time when we have the opportunity to shape the future direction of our country, particularly in crucial areas like education. We hope that the incoming administration will demonstrate an earnest commitment to investing meaningfully in early learning education, aligning with the aspirations echoed in the recent State of the Nation Address.

As we navigate this new phase in our country's journey, let us remain steadfast in our commitment to advocating for the rights and needs of our children. Together, let us work towards building a brighter and more inclusive future for all.

The work we do at Wordworks is an active collaboration between our various stakeholders. I thank everyone on our team, our board, our donors, and our school, home and community partners for their continued support, enabling us to make a meaningful impact on early literacy and education. I hope you will delight in reading about our 2023 accomplishments and journey as reflected in the following sections.

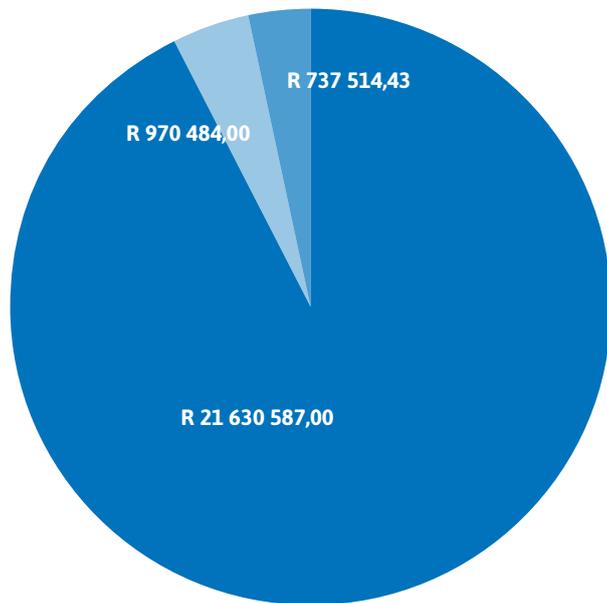
Enkosi, siyabonga, rea leboga, baie dankie, thank you

Mammuso Makhanya

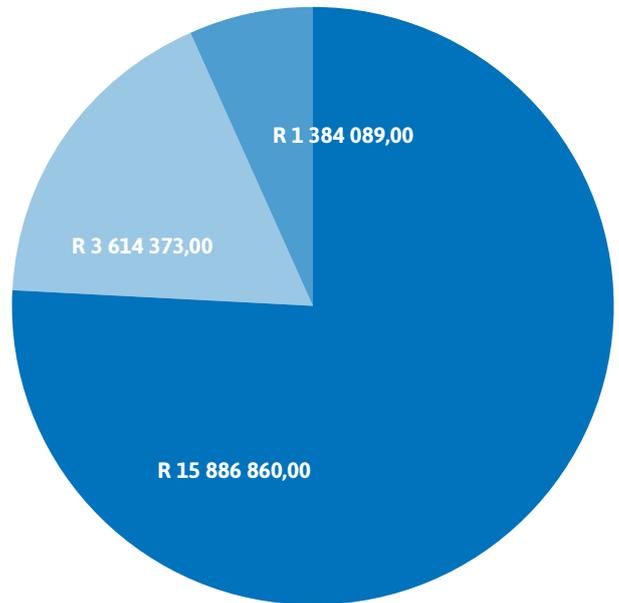


Financial report: With thanks to our donors

Income 2023



Expenditure 2023



Income	2023	2022
Grants and donations	R 21 630 587,00	R 19 742 220,00
Sale of resources and services rendered	R 970 484,00	R 371 767,45
Interest	R 737 514,43	R 354 293,09
	R 23 338 585,43	R 20 468 280,54

Expenditure	2023	2021
Training and capacity building	R 15 886 860,00	R 13 780 817,00
Materials and resources	R 3 614 373,00	R 4 189 204,00
Overheads and office costs	R 1 384 089,00	R 1 432 767,00
	R 20 885 322,00	R 19 402 788,00

Our donors lie at the core of our work. They understand and support our vision, and enable us to accomplish our mission to change lives through literacy. We remain truly indebted to their generosity and unwavering support.



Thank you to the individuals who have donated to our work, some of which include:



Our programmes: 2023 highlights

Wordworks' suite of five literacy programmes continues to fill a vital role in the early years of language and literacy development. We provide high quality multimedia, multilingual materials and training opportunities for use by training and development organisations that wish to integrate early literacy offerings. These materials are also used by a wide range of adults that work with children at home, in the community and in learning centres.



Reach

Wordworks' teams provided high-quality resources and over 500 hours of training and support to 800 active programme partners in 2023. Together with these partners, we are thrilled to report that we reached 3 395 practitioners and over 45 600 children. This excludes children who continue to be reached by the Stellar programme in the GDE Grade R Language and Mathematics Improvement Project and the WCED Emergent Literacy Project. (See our Reach infographic on pages 10 and 11 of this report.)

Expanding our reach beyond the Western Cape and South Africa

Wordworks' reach now extends into seven provinces: Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Limpopo, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Northern Cape and North West, facilitated through diverse partnerships and programme offerings.

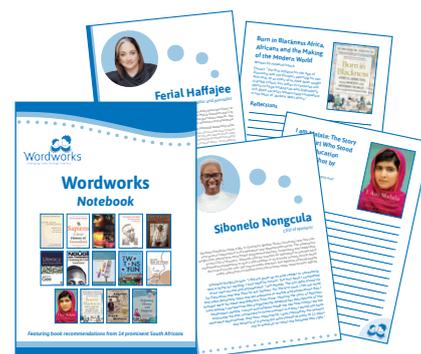
We have been able to work with partners in other parts of the globe, such as Zimbabwe and Sweden, wherein they have adapted our early literacy programmes to their local context. We are learning a lot from these partners and have applied some of these learnings internally.



Advocacy efforts

Over the past year, we have had a number of noteworthy advocacy initiatives:

- Wordworks produced a special edition of the Wordworks Notebook featuring recommended book choices from South African academics, activists, journalists and literacy specialists.
- The Shelley O'Carroll Early Literacy Award, in partnership with LITASA, presented on an annual basis, continues to celebrate contributions to early literacy.
- Two Wordworks Early Literacy Festivals were held to engage parents and teachers, attracting over 450 attendees from various sectors.

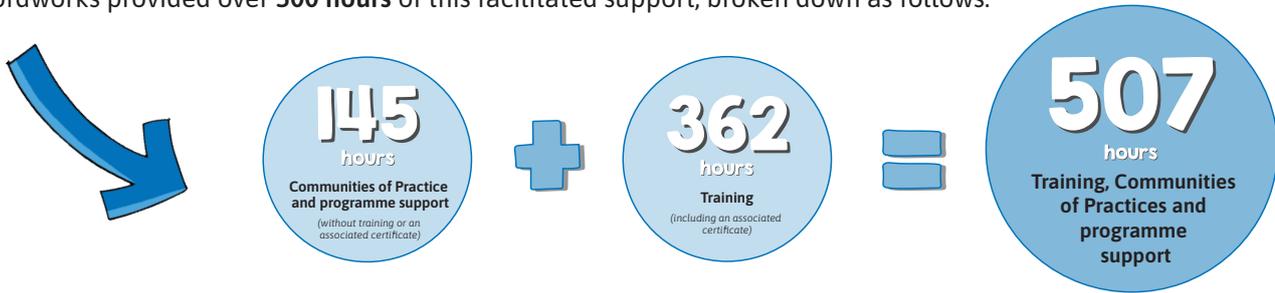


- Our growing social media presence ensures that our messages reach not only our partners, but a wider audience. Here are [links](#) to our social media platforms:



Training and support

In 2023, 2 038 practitioners attended training, Communities of Practice and programme support events. Wordworks provided over **500 hours** of this facilitated support, broken down as follows:



- 947 practitioners received certified training in Wordworks classroom and home learning programmes.
- 59 practitioners received direct training for Early Childhood Development projects, with an additional 81 trained as trainers for the Every Word Counts and Little Stars programmes.
- In response to high demand, especially from the WCED schools, Wordworks provided online Stellar programme teacher-orientation sessions. These were attended by over 600 teachers.
- Despite the programme being unfunded, 95 new teacher-facilitators were trained for the Home-School Partnerships (HSP) programme. They will go on to run parent workshops for parents in their schools, targeting parents of 5- to 8-year-olds.
- Our TIME Home Learning programme received accreditation from the South African Council for Educators (SACE) in 2023, alongside our already SACE-accredited HSP programme.



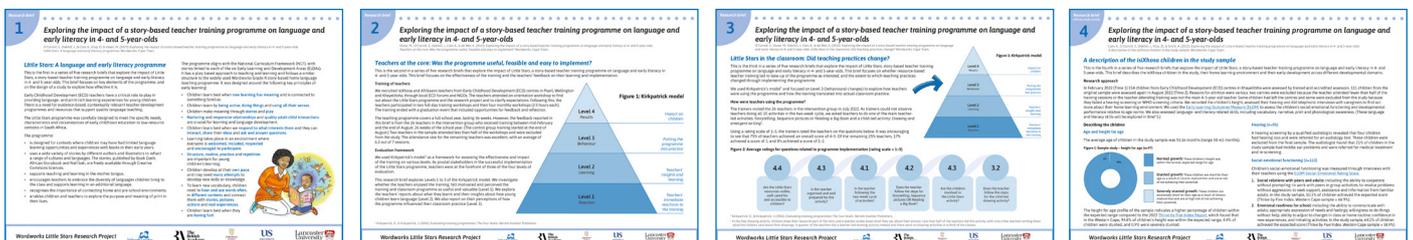
The Train-the-Trainer model within WordNetworks continues to strengthen the sectors' capacity to share and support literacy interventions with practitioners.



Internal and external evaluation

British Academy

In 2023, research briefs were written based on a study funded by the British Academy. The research was conducted by academics from the University of Sussex and the University of Lancaster in the United Kingdom, the University of Stellenbosch and our founder director Dr Shelley O'Carroll. The briefs explore the impact of a story-based training programme on the language and early literacy of 4- and 5-year-olds in the Western Cape. The researchers found that compared to a control group, there was a greater improvement in the quality of teaching if practitioners attended training and implemented the Little Stars programme (on two of three subscales these improvements were significant). Furthermore, in classrooms where practitioners implemented the Little Stars programme effectively, children made greater gains in language and early literacy skills, as well as overall development, compared to classrooms where the programme was not implemented or not implemented as intended.



Gauteng Grade R evaluation (funded by USAID, Zenex Foundation and Gauteng Education Development Trust with JET Education Services as the Project Management Office)

In 2022, the roll out of the GDE Language and Mathematics Improvement Programme in all Public Ordinary Schools in Gauteng was evaluated by independent evaluation agency Kelello.

Next to methods such as case studies and teacher knowledge tests, the evaluation involved baseline and endline assessments of 399 Grade R learners from 58 schools, using the ELOM assessment suite. Comparing the anchor items between baseline and endline, they found a very significant shift in literacy (Cohen's $D = 4.4$ SD) and concluded that "Children in the GDE Language and Mathematics Improvement Programme demonstrate remarkable increase in their literacy skills from the beginning to the end of Grade R".



Yizani Sifunde (funded by Liberty Community Trust)



Yizani Sifunde is a joint project between Book Dash, Nal'ibali and Wordworks. Since 2021, through our local partners ITEC and Khululeka, Wordworks has trained ECD practitioners in Little Stars and Every Word Counts, while young people (Nal'ibali's Story Sparkers) were providing on-the-ground support and Book Dash books was providing abundant storybooks to the ECD centres as well as the homes. In addition to training, Wordworks managed the overall project M&E and oversaw the external evaluation by Social Impact Insights Africa, which will be concluded in the first half of 2024. The report on case studies has already confirmed the quality of the programme's approach and generated some useful insights regarding areas which can be further refined. We are looking forward to sharing the findings of the evaluation in 2024 once it is finalised. This external evaluation, which includes case studies as well as pre- and post learner assessments, will be concluded in the first half of 2024. The report on case studies

has already confirmed the quality of the programme's approach and generated some useful insights regarding areas which can be further refined. Some findings include:

- ECDs now have classroom resources, and practitioners have teaching skills, which help them to create excitement around the reading of stories and to deliver a structured curriculum strengthening the acquisition of emergent literacy skills.
- Caregivers have access to quality isiXhosa books at home, and have become more aware of the role they can play.

TIME longitudinal study (funded by DGMT)

Internally we concluded the data collection part of the TIME longitudinal study of children exposed to the Grade R and Grade 1 TIME Home Learning programme. The study tracked 27 children and their families over two years and gave us a rich understanding of how the TIME programme plays out in the homes, how teacher mediation matters, and how children's learning develops over the first two years of their schooling careers. Qualitative evidence from caregiver and teacher interviews confirms the wide range of benefits drawn from TIME. Quantitative child assessment results are still being analysed, but it is already evident that the children in the sample achieved far better literacy levels than what has been observed in other studies at Grade 1 level. By design, the study will not be able to yield unequivocal evidence of TIME's impact on child learning. Rather, it will help refine the team's understanding of how children's skills build over time and how to support their learning in the various language groups.



The data analysis and interpretation will be concluded in 2024 with the publication of a series of learning briefs that sum up the main insights gained from the study.

Overall, these evaluations yielded positive results for our programmes.

Key partnerships



Wordworks forged strategic collaborative partnerships with various organisations to advance literacy and education across South Africa. These include:

- A collaboration with Think Equal to implement a Life Skills programme aligned with Wordworks' Stellar programme, supporting Grade R teachers in 194 WCED schools.
- A partnership with Citizen Leader Lab in the facilitation of an online course for teachers, "Laying the foundation for functional literacy in the early grades". The course, facilitated by Wordworks and managed by Citizen Leader Lab, is SACE accredited and awards teachers who have attended the four-session course, 10 professional development points. Through this initiative, we are now able to offer the course to our own network of partners.
- A partnership with RED INK and JET, for Home Language and Mathematics intervention in the Grade R component of the Anglo American South Africa (AASA) Education Project. This project focuses on expanding educational outcomes within the mining communities of Anglo American South Africa.

- Collaborative engagement with the City of Cape Town, Library and Information Services (LIS).
- A collaborative partnership with the Do More Foundation where 16 practitioners have been trained in the principles of the Every Word Counts programme.
- Between 2021 and 2023, the collaborative Yizani Sifunde project (see p. 8) has impacted 126 ECD centres in the communities around East London and Queenstown and over 3000 children. 2023 was our final year of on-the-ground implementation of the project and has confirmed the effectiveness of this model, which we are hoping to replicate in future iterations.



These partnerships reflect Wordworks' dedication to enhancing literacy and education in South Africa through collaborative and innovative programmes.



Looking ahead to 2024

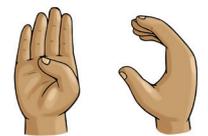
The GDE Grade R Language and Mathematics Improvement Programme: Special Needs Project



Wordworks (in partnership with the GDE and JET Education Services) embarked on a research and development project with the aim of creating a special needs adaptation of the Public Ordinary Schools programme. The adaptation covers four special needs modalities: blind, hard of hearing, physical, and neurological and cognitive disabilities. The writing and development of the materials began in 2023. This will continue in 2024 alongside the training of Special Needs Trainers and teachers to enable them to implement the adapted programme in their classrooms. The Special Needs Project has catapulted Wordworks and the sector into a new and underexplored area.

The GDE Grade R Language and Mathematics Improvement Programme: South African Sign Language Project

Aligning with the decision to make South African Sign Language (SASL) the twelfth official language in South Africa, Wordworks entered into partnership with the Sign Language Education and Development (SLED) organisation towards creating a two story-cycle prototype of the South African sign language version of the GDE Grade R Language Improvement Programme. This will include a series of videos showing signed storytelling and signed shared reading of the Big Books.



Anglo American South Africa Education Programme: Grade R Language and Mathematics initiative



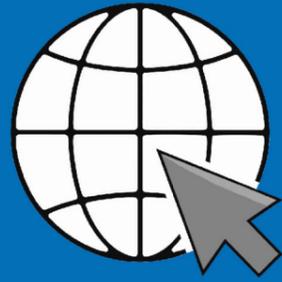
Schools from the Anglo American South Africa (AASA) Education Project (Grade R component) will receive training and support to implement the Stellar Home Language programme and Maths. Teachers who have been trained on how to use the project will be supported to mediate the TIME Home Learning programme with parents.

Shine Literacy partnership and collaboration

Shine Literacy and Wordworks have had a longstanding partnership and collaboration toward their mutual goals of literacy improvement in South Africa. In light of Shine Literacy's intention to close its operations at the end of March 2024, Wordworks was selected to be the long-term custodian of its resources and to support Shine Literacy's legacy. To enable Wordworks to fulfill these objectives and to enable the integration of Shine Literacy's resources into Wordworks' existing repository, Shine Literacy has approved a distribution of funds to Wordworks. These funds will allow for a website overhaul to ensure Wordworks' and Shine's resources are updated, widely accessible and user friendly.



Wordworks Reach 2023



58 048

Website Users



36 242

User Engagements with Programme Resources



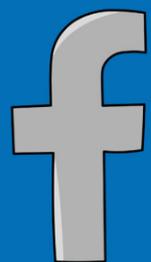
979

LinkedIn Followers



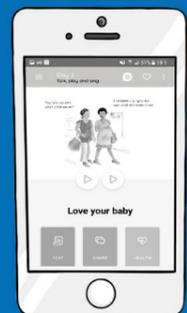
1 453

Instagram Followers



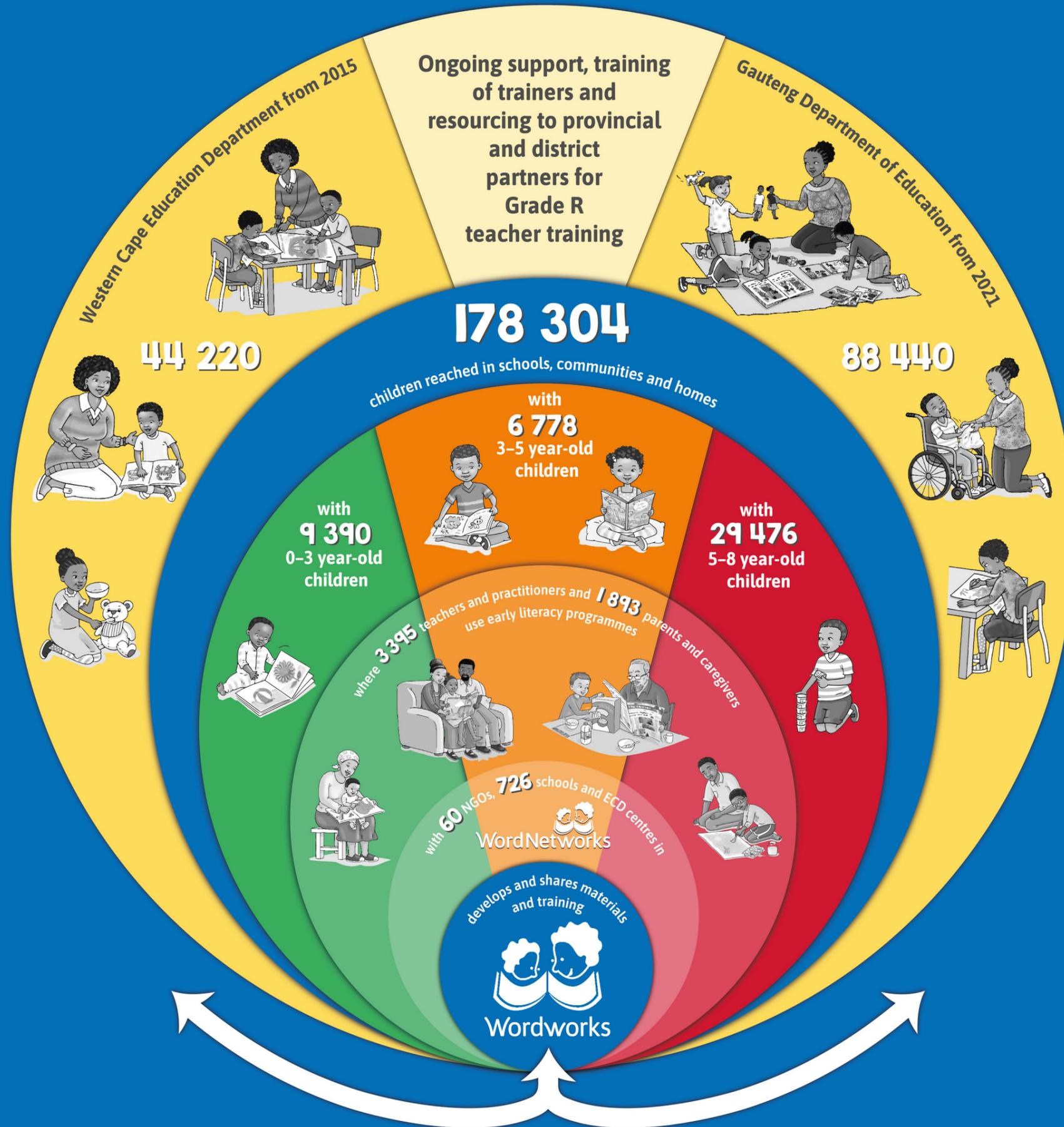
5 926

Facebook Followers



1 094

App Users



Mpumalanga Province Grade R Maths and Language Improvement Programme (MP-R) - Collaboration

A collaboration between Wordworks, RED INK, Trackosaurus and Penreach provides the opportunity to build a strategic partnership with Mpumalanga Provincial Education Department to implement the Grade R Stellar Home Language and R Maths programmes.



Our team and board: *Hello*s and *goodbyes*

We are pleased to report that our staff turnover was 0% in 2023 – we had no resignations in the 2023 financial year. Despite the pressure from the growth in the number of grant-funded projects, which placed strain on our human resource capacity, this has indeed been a year of building staff cohesion. Recruitment efforts focused on filling positions for grant-funded projects and expanding our team to support various initiatives.

Hellos

In 2023, Wordworks embraced a new wave of talent, enriching our team and empowering our programmes. Notable additions include Alexandra de Wet, appointed as Materials Design Officer, addressing critical capacity gaps within our Materials Design Unit.

The inception of the Anglo American South Africa (AASA) Education Project prompted the enlistment of skilled and dedicated staff, led by Sindisiwe Molefe as AASA Senior Project Manager, alongside a team of AASA Education Coaches: Nomfundo Mkhathswa, Matlhale Lucy Raludzwidzwo, Adell Lebabo and Norah Mercy Resoketswe Mobayi.

Governance



Jalal Razavi
Chairperson



Jennifer Khumalo
Member



Mavuso Shabalala
Member



Peter Mazunga
Treasurer



Nangamso Mtsatse
Member



Mammuso Makhanya
Wordworks Director

Our board underwent pivotal changes with new appointments in key roles. Jalal Razavi assumed the position of Chairperson, bringing vision and experience to guide Wordworks' strategic direction, while Peter Mazunga stepped in as Treasurer to ensure our financial integrity. See more about our board members on our website.

We bid farewell to Babalwa Molate, a longstanding board member, as we embark on recruiting a new member with deep resource mobilization networks to enhance our strategic partnerships.

Goodbyes and changes

We extend our gratitude to departing colleagues for their invaluable contributions.

Sue Setton retired from Wordworks after 11 years of service. Sue, former Programme Manager, was instrumental in the development of our programmes and training materials, further enriching our organisation's impact and legacy.



Former full-time team members, Elaine Josias (Programmes Administration), Kirsten Deane (Communications) and Jane Coombe (Head of Programmes), have transitioned into contractual roles, continuing to enrich Wordworks in their new capacities.

Our partners: 2023 partnerships





Changing lives through literacy.

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