

Annual Report 2024



wordworks
Changing lives through literacy, together

Values

Trust: underpin all internal and external relationships

Integrity: uphold strong morality, ethics and accountability

Respect: promote respect and acknowledge dignity, lived experience and agency of others

Innovation: remain the sector leader through relevance, currency and improvement

Diversity: commit to an inclusive environment, embracing identity, demographic, ability, language and cognitive diversity

Reflection: reflective approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning from data and experience

Quality: commit to high-quality work



Vision

We see a world where all young children have quality early learning experiences so that they develop holistically and grow to their full potential.

Mission

We **advocate** for the importance of **early language and literacy foundations**, offer **programmes** for homes, schools and communities that enable young children to thrive and support stakeholders through **resource-based capacity building; knowledge sharing; and collaboration.**

Wordworks' 2030 strategic priorities

1

Improve early language and literacy development

Through classroom, community and home learning programme design, training and resourcing



Strategic priority:
The Grade R year has been identified as a strategic organisational priority due to its potential to leverage the investment of decision makers and its potential to go to scale within government systems.

2

Increase awareness, uptake and support of early language and literacy programmes

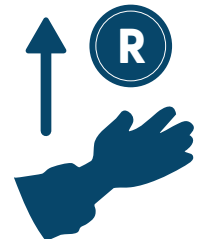
Through knowledge sharing, advocacy and collaboration



Strategic priority:
Advocacy with decision makers has been identified as a strategic organisational priority to expand organisational footprint, system and sector influence.

3

Grow organisational funding, capacity, accountability and efficiencies



Strategic priority:
Core and multi-year funding has been identified as a strategic organisational priority to protect organisational independence, creativity, ability to plan and engender sustainability.

Annual Report

2024

2024 was a year of impact, collaboration, and transformation. Through dedication and shared purpose, we turned challenges into opportunities, deepened our reach, and reinforced our commitment to unlocking potential through literacy. As we reflect on our journey, we look ahead with renewed passion, knowing that every step forward brings lasting change and strengthens our mission of changing lives through literacy.



Director's message: A year of great strides

Greetings to all our stakeholders

It is a great privilege to table our 2024 Annual Report. At the helm, our organisation's board continued to play a strong oversight and governance role in the affairs of Wordworks. We value the board's service as it contributes to our overall performance metrics.

During 2024, we embarked on the process to operationalise our newly-created 2030 strategic plan, including a business plan to guide its implementation and monitoring. Through this process we continued to solidify and streamline our early literacy offerings, while driving our growth strategy. We further created a resource mobilisation strategy to support the attainment of our goals.

Our organisation's team grew by six members, representing the largest intake in one year. To bolster our team capacity, we further partnered with HCI Foundation's internship and the Peace Corps Volunteer programmes. Various team members took advantage of the learning and development opportunities afforded by the organisation to keep abreast of organisational and sectoral developments.

In pursuit of our 2030 strategic priorities, we extended our footprint to new geographies by starting the implementation of the Anglo American South Africa (AASA) programme in the North West, Northern Cape and Limpopo. The programme is managed by Jet Education Services and is in collaboration with RedInk. Furthermore we formalised our partnership with the Mpumalanga Department of Education in collaboration with Penreach, RedInk and Trackosaurus to implement the Grade R capacity-building programme for the province until 2027.

In 2024, we had set ourselves the target of reaching 130 000 children through our early literacy programmes. We managed to exceed this target and reached 178 867 children through our organised early childhood programmes. We continued to provide access and quality resource-based training to our partners who impact children in underserved and under-resourced communities. The growth came largely from the rural areas of the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Northern Cape provinces in partnership with our WordNetworks members.

In 2024, we received a gracious legacy donation from Shine Literacy when they sunsetted. This gift goes towards the development, launch and maintenance of a multi-site website which will provide a platform for corporate communication, a resource hub, data management system and an e-commerce facility. This site will house Wordworks and Shine resources, among others. The website's launch is planned for later in 2025. We are eternally grateful for this legacy that will contribute immensely to our growth and that of our sector.

A significant accomplishment for us in 2024 was the seminal work of adapting our Stellar Home Language resources, and training GDE trainers to meet the requirements of the Special Needs learners in Gauteng. Seeing firsthand the faces of the learners at the Learners with Special Education Needs (LSEN) schools light up when engaging in our Wordworks stories will always have a special place in our hearts.

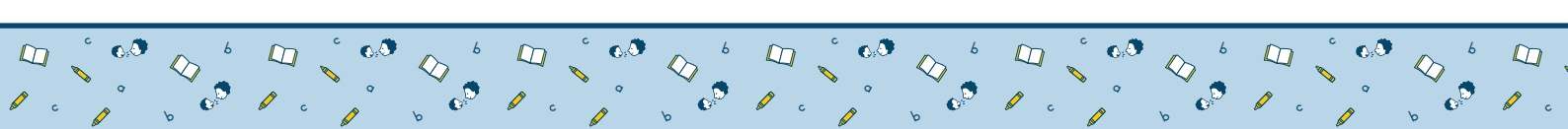
The 2024 financial year represents the most successful year to date in terms of generated income. Our income increased by 33% from the previous year, and our reserves grew by 44% for the same period. This is an endorsement of our work alongside consistent, longstanding funders, as well as new funders whose social investment priorities align with our service offering.

In the midst of the highlights mentioned above, there were a number of areas where we encountered challenges and areas of development as an organisation. As a result of our growth, staff capacity constraints were still a reality. We explored and implemented creative means to address this, and we remain committed to seeking creative means to address staffing capacity challenges.

Another challenge that continues to befall us and similar organisations, was the unexpected reduction of budgets by a couple of funders towards the end of 2024 and going forward. This had a considerable impact requiring us to develop revised project models where online approaches needed to be instituted in place of face-to-face training and/or support. In addition, smaller project budgets meant reduced funds for staffing costs both for dedicated staff on projects and more broadly in the organisation.

Overall we made great strides in 2024 and continued to work towards closing gaps and attending to areas of development. We are very optimistic about the future and attainment of our goals.

We have exciting plans for 2025, such as measuring progress against our 2030 strategic priorities and executing our resource mobilisation strategy. We are also pleased to report that we will be kicking off our 20th anniversary with various celebratory activities to mark our journey so far, and to look to the future.



Additionally, we are looking forward to the launch of our multi-site website, which will serve as a new delivery vehicle for our work going forward.

We owe our past 20 years' accomplishments, tremendous learnings and our contribution to early literacy to the tireless, compassionate former and current staff; to longstanding and new funders who provide the needed financial and strategic support; our committed board members who steer our organisation through all seasons; to all spheres of our education system; our sectoral partners through whom we deliver our services – collectively working towards “Changing lives through literacy”.

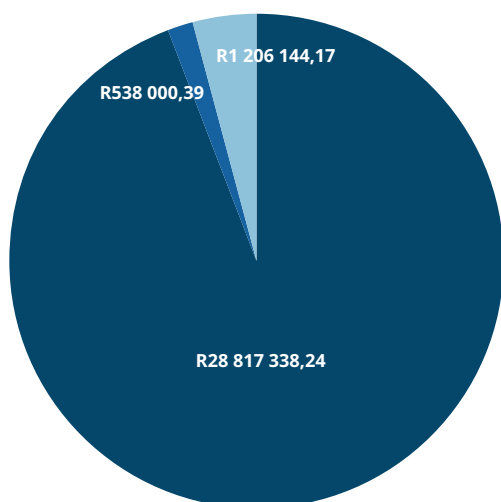
Rea leboha, siyabonga, baie dankie and thank you!

Mammuso Makhanya

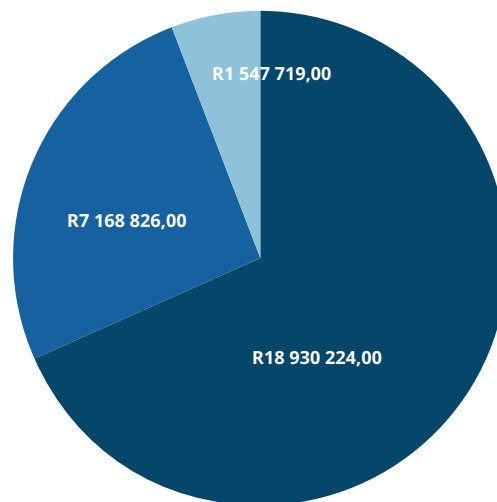



Financial report: With thanks to our donors

Income 2024



Expenditure 2024



Income	2024	2023
Grants and donations	R28 817 338,24	R21 630 587,00
Sale of resources and services rendered	R538 000,39	R970 484,00
Interest	R1 206 144,17	R737 514,43
	R30 561 482,80	R23 338 585,43

Expenditure	2024	2023
Training and capacity building	R18 930 224,00	R15 886 860,00
Materials and resources	R7 168 826,00	R3 614 373,00
Overheads and office costs	R1 547 719,00	R1 384 089,00
	R27 646 769,33	R20 885 321,68

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.

Our programmes: Highlights in 2024

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

0-3
years

4-6
years

7-9
years

Reach

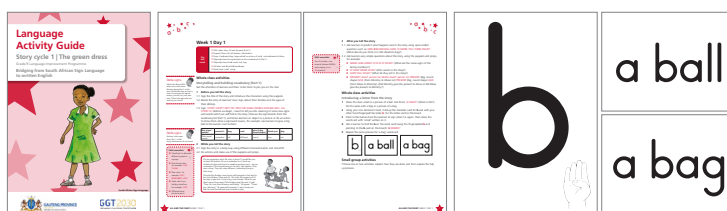
Through the AASA Education Programme, we expanded our national footprint into areas of the North West, Northern Cape and Limpopo. Schools involved in the AASA Education Programme received training on our Stellar Home Language Programme and the TIME Home Learning Programme.

An increase in funding for Little Stars and Every Word Counts (EWC), saw us grow in mostly rural areas of the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Northern Cape through our established programme partners in these regions.



Our open online Stellar teacher orientation sessions for Grade R teachers who were not reached through donor-funded or provincial education projects, was well-subscribed to by teachers in the Western Cape, indicating the continued interest to be trained in the home language classroom programme which has been part of the province's Grade R Literacy Programme, named the ELIT project, since 2015.

For the first time in GDE Special Needs schools, Wordworks-trained trainers completed the training of Gauteng Special Needs teachers on the Special Needs adaptation of the Stellar Home Language Programme. Alongside the training and implementation of the Language Programme for Special Needs Grade R classes, Wordworks planned the Special Needs Maths Programme in consultation with experts in the field. An online orientation to the Special Needs Maths Programme was held at the end of the year in preparation for training and implementation in 2025.



Wordworks entered into a partnership with the Sign Language Education and Development (SLED) organisation towards creating a South African Sign Language (SASL) version of GDE's Grade R Language Improvement Programme. In 2024, a prototype for two-story cycles, including signed storytelling and Big Book reading, was developed.

We continued to partner with Think Equal, an international NGO, to implement their Life Skills programme in 210 Western Cape schools. Their programme, which focuses on the social and emotional learning (SEL) of young children in Grade R, aligns with our interactive, story-based Stellar Home Language Programme.



Training and support

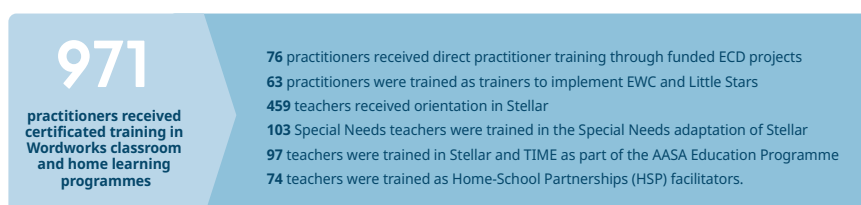
As part of our ongoing commitment to improving early childhood language and literacy development, Wordworks provides comprehensive training and support to trainers and practitioners. In 2024, we focused on enhancing the skills of those within our network and expanding the reach of our programmes.

Here is a closer look at the scope of our training and programme support efforts and the impact they've had.

In 2024, we reached 3 141 practitioners through our early literacy training and programme support events:



Out of the 971 practitioners who received certificated training:



We have reached 178 867 children through organised early childhood programmes.
(See our Reach infographics on page 12 of this report.)

New and ongoing partnerships

In 2024, we formalised a collaboration with the Mpumalanga Department of Education to implement the Mpumalanga Province Grade R (MP-R) Capacity Building Programme to begin implementation in 2025. This collaboration with the department, Roger Federer Foundation (RFF), Penreach, RedInk and Trackosaurus is envisioned to run until 2027, and we continue to seek out joint funding opportunities for this region.



We entered into Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) with programme partners to implement our Little Stars Programme in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, which added to our reach in 2024. Due to this groundwork, we have begun discussions with the Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE) districts in order to strategise how to broaden the work in the province.

We partnered with the South African Parenting Programme Implementers Network (SAPPIN) which seeks to strengthen the voice of civil society organisations working with families through collaboration and shared learning. A partnership with SAPPIN positions Wordworks to strengthen its programme delivery, expand its reach, increase sustainability and contribute to a stronger civil society across South Africa for family and child support.

Continued partnership with LITASA

On the communications and advocacy front, we are delighted to report that we continue to pursue strategic alliances towards brand building, increasing our influence and continuing to advocate for early literacy programmes uptake. In 2024, at LITASA's annual conference we presented an impressive number of papers including collaborating with other partners. It was very inspiring to see the number of sector organisations presenting their work that incorporates various Wordworks programmes and resources.

Wordworks is proud to continue its long-standing partnership with the Literacy Association of South Africa (LITASA), a collaboration that plays a vital role in advancing early literacy efforts across the country.

As part of our ongoing joint initiative with LITASA, Wordworks continues to co-present the Dr. Shelley O'Carroll Early Literacy Award (SoC Award), established in 2021 in honour of our former director. In 2024, the award was divided into two categories: one for well-resourced ECD literacy work and another for under-resourced initiatives. The award continues to recognise outstanding contributions to early literacy. We are proud to jointly manage and support this important initiative.



What we are looking forward to in 2025:

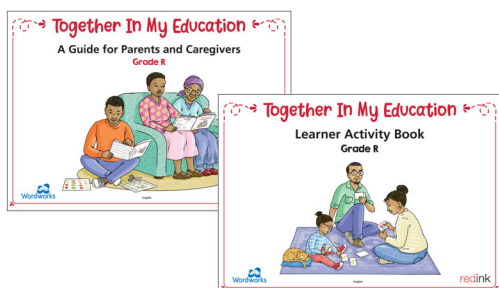
Increased provincial partnerships

The implementation of the Mpumalanga Province Grade R (MP-R) Capacity Building Programme, in collaboration with the Mpumalanga Provincial Education Department (PED), Roger Federer Foundation (RFF), Penreach, RedInk, and Trackosaurus, begins in 2025. Wordworks will train and resource the PED's subject advisors and Penreach change agents on the Stellar Home Language Programme. They in turn, will conduct monthly resource-based Stellar teacher training workshops and support Grade R teachers' classroom implementation in two districts in the province.



Special Needs Project

The directive from the United States President to end USAID funding halted all our work on the Special Needs Project. Wordworks, together with existing and prospective donors, are working tirelessly to ensure that this valuable project is supported and concluded by the end of 2025.



TIME Home Learning Programme

Our TIME reach decreased significantly in 2024. Insights from the field highlighted that factors contributing to this included increasing printing costs affecting print orders, and overstretched teachers and parents were unable to complete the daily activities. As we design our new online resource hub for launch in 2025, we are excited to be able to offer the TIME materials in reconfigured skills packs and give more flexibility for teachers, parents and caregivers to use different components of this valuable home learning resource.

Home School Partnerships Programme

Long-awaited donor funding provided the opportunity to extend the Home School Partnerships (HSP) Programme in the Eastern Cape through programme partners who work in the area. In 2025, they will train teachers to conduct parent workshops for parents of 5- to 9-year-olds. They will also provide homes with the TIME materials to support learning at home.



Little Stars and Stellar online courses

Self-paced online courses for our Little Stars and Stellar classroom programmes will be available on our newly-developed resource hub. Programme partners and provincial education departments will be able to register their own cohorts of trainees on the training platform and have access to the training data in order to track and support completion of the courses.

We are 20!



Wordworks turns 20!

In 2025, Wordworks will celebrate its 20th anniversary, marking two decades of impactful work in early literacy. Since our founding in 2005 by Dr. Shelley O'Carroll, we've made significant strides in supporting young learners, teachers, practitioners and communities across South Africa.

This milestone presents an exciting opportunity to reflect on our growth, strengthen our visibility as a trusted leader in the early literacy space, and raise awareness about the importance of early language development.

As we look to the future, we are committed to continuing our work and expanding our reach to further benefit under-resourced communities and the broader education sector.

Our 20th anniversary will serve as a platform to celebrate past successes, honour key partners, and set the stage for the continued growth and impact of Wordworks in the years ahead.



Communications:

Despite some structural changes within our Communications Department, the unit remains focused on increasing Wordworks' visibility and strengthening its brand as a leader in providing quality learning experiences for children and communities across South Africa.

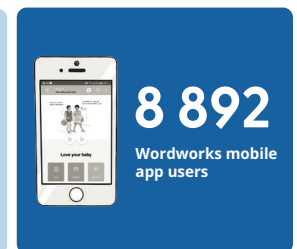
In 2024, Wordworks had the honour of collaborating with the internationally acclaimed Turn on the Subtitles (TOTS) campaign. This initiative highlighted the work of nonprofits and NGOs at the grassroots level which are focused on improving early literacy in South Africa. Through this campaign, Wordworks produced a video showcasing our work that garnered over 4 000 views and reached over 17 000 people, introducing the organisation to a wider audience and further solidifying our impact in the literacy space. This partnership directly supports Wordworks' goal of increasing awareness of the importance of early childhood literacy and the role of local organisations in achieving this goal by 2030.

Celebrating inclusivity: A new photo bank

For the first time in 2024, Wordworks launched a photo bank that includes images of learners with special education needs. This addition is a testament to our commitment to inclusivity – not only in our training but also in how we communicate our mission to the world. It reflects our dedication to supporting under-resourced and marginalised communities, ensuring that our message reaches everyone. Through this initiative, Wordworks also upholds its vision of an inclusive and equitable education system where every child, regardless of ability or background, is given the opportunity to thrive.

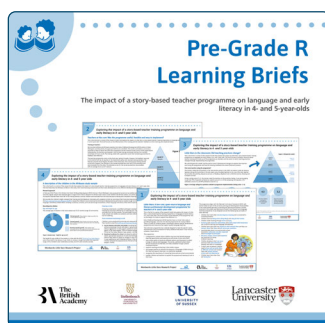
Online community

Wordworks is committed to building meaningful connections online. Through our ongoing efforts, we're reaching a growing audience across different platforms. To get a sense of how we're doing, here is a snapshot of our latest social media and website statistics, which show how we're connecting with and engaging our community.



Internal and external evaluations:

In 2024, Wordworks concluded several key evaluations, including the British Academy Study on Little Stars, the Yizani Sifunde evaluation, the TIME longitudinal study, and the Stellar programme evaluation in Gauteng. Conducted by external evaluators in collaboration with the Wordworks team, these studies provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of our programmes and their impact on children's early literacy development.



The **British Academy Study** (BA Study) conducted in various ECD centres implementing Little Stars in the Western Cape confirmed that children in the programme made significant gains in their Early Learning Outcomes Measure (ELOM) scores, with more children "on track" and fewer falling behind, achieving approximately six months of additional progress. The study also found high teacher engagement, with most rating the training as excellent and valuable, leading to greater confidence in delivering literacy-rich activities and improved classroom practices. While emergent writing showed limited improvement, and some teachers faced resource constraints, the study affirmed that Little Stars remains a feasible and impactful programme for strengthening early literacy in under-resourced ECD settings.

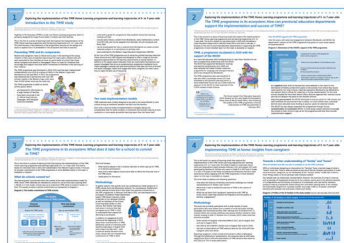
The **Yizani Sifunde evaluation**, conducted in the East London and greater Queenstown areas of the Eastern Cape further validated the effectiveness of the Little Stars Programme in ECD settings. The findings highlight the impact of the multi-partner approach, with Book Dash, Nal'ibali and Wordworks collaborating to provide high-quality resources, train ECD practitioners and engage caregivers. Practitioners reported increased confidence in delivering literacy-rich activities, and children showed greater engagement with books and storytelling.



ELOM assessments recorded significant learning gains, with children achieving 3,8 to 6 months of additional progress beyond expected maturation, while those who started far behind caught up by as much as 13 months. The evaluation also noted moderate improvements in learning environments and teaching quality, with structured learning programmes proving most effective. Key recommendations include strengthening parental involvement, enhancing practitioner training in emergent writing, and increasing community participation in reading clubs to sustain and expand the programme's impact.

Lessons learnt from the TIME study

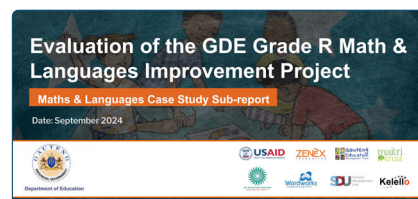
Exploring the implementation of the TIME Home Learning programme and learning trajectories of 5- to 7-year-olds



The **TIME longitudinal study** conducted in the Western Cape was undertaken to gain a deeper understanding of how the Together In My Time (TIME) programme was being embedded in the Western Cape education landscape, how the various categories of users were feeling about the offering, how well it was being taken up in homes, and what benefits it was bringing to the various categories of users. The study reinforced the importance of structured home-learning activities in early literacy development. Findings show that children whose families consistently engaged with TIME activities, demonstrated measurable improvements in language skills and school readiness. The study highlights the critical role of family involvement in supporting early learning outcomes.

The Stellar programme evaluation in Gauteng (GDE Kellelo evaluation)

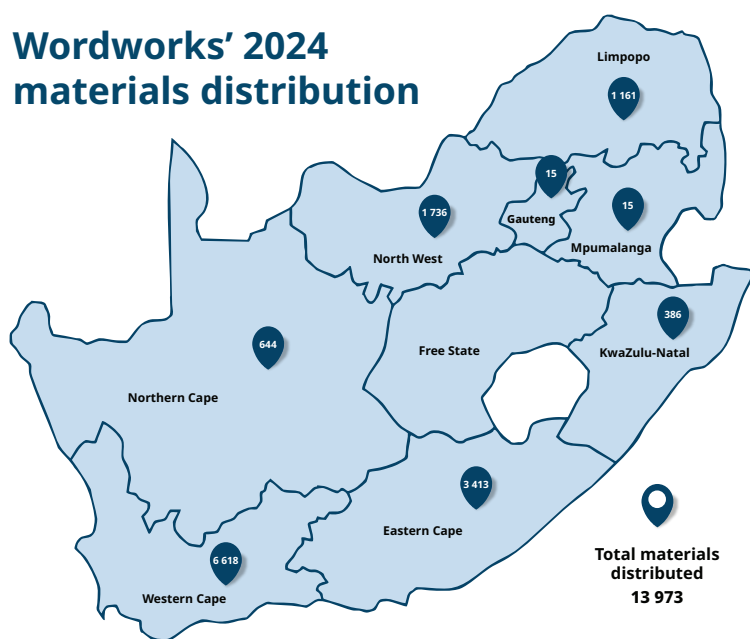
examined the impact of the Grade R Stellar classroom programme as part of the Gauteng Education Department (GDE) Grade R Mathematics and Language Improvement Programme. Initial results suggest that teachers implementing Stellar developed stronger literacy teaching practices, and children in these classrooms demonstrated improved early literacy skills. The evaluation also highlighted implementation challenges, such as varying levels of teacher confidence and resource availability, which will inform future refinements of programme delivery.



To ensure these findings reach key stakeholders, Wordworks has produced and is disseminating learning briefs summarising insights from these evaluations. These are being shared through presentations, sectoral networks, conferences, donor community and public platforms to contribute to the broader body of knowledge in early language and literacy. By prioritising dissemination, we aim to inform policy and practice while driving continuous programme improvement across early childhood and foundational literacy interventions. The feedback we are receiving on the learning briefs is highly encouraging from stakeholders such as DBE and certain donors.

Materials:

Wordworks' 2024 materials distribution



Thanks to generous donor support, in 2024, we distributed Wordworks' materials to 24 organisations and 156 schools, reaching under-resourced communities across eight provinces. A total of 13 973 materials were strategically allocated to areas with the greatest need. The Western Cape received the largest share (47,3%, 6 618 materials), followed by the Eastern Cape (24,4%, 3 413 materials) and North West (12,4%, 1 736 materials). This targeted approach aims to strengthen literacy development and improve educational outcomes in underserved communities.

Hellos and goodbyes:

Team and board members

New team members in 2024

In 2024, Wordworks welcomed four talented new staff members, each bringing valuable expertise to the organisation. Capacity in our Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning (MERL) team was boosted by enlisting a MERL Manager, Thabisile Seme, and a MERL Officer, Naazneen Kola. To address much-needed capacity on new projects, Omphemetse Sephai joined as a Grade R Setswana trainer, and Barati Mokgwadi served the Northern Cape as an Education Coach on our AASA Education Programme.



Funded by the HCI Foundation, we had the opportunity of hiring an intern, Zokwanda Femele, from mid-2024 to mid-2025. In addition, we secured the services of a Peace Corps volunteer, Madison Coakley, who joined our MERL team.



Farewell and gratitude

Governance

With gratitude and well wishes, we bid farewell to Jennifer Khumalo, who completed her tenure after four years of committed service to Wordworks.

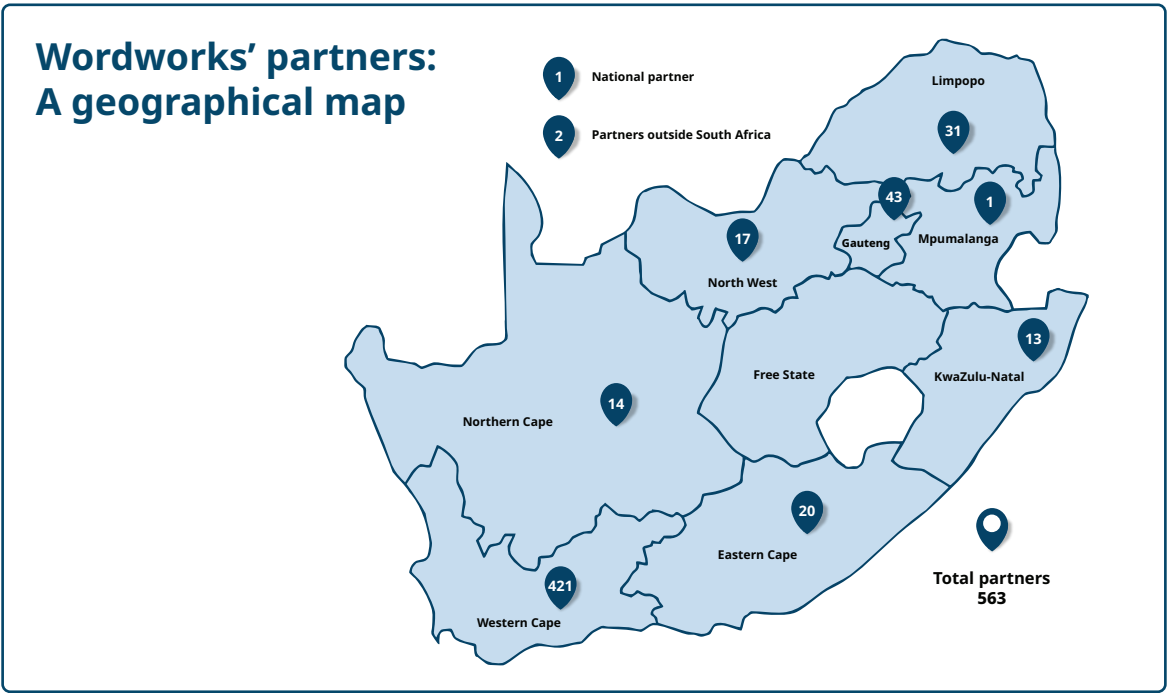


Staff

We are also thankful for the contribution of staff during their tenure who exited in 2024. These include Andrea George (former Communications Manager, who retired after 7 years at Wordworks), Nomfundo Mkhathswa (AASA Education Coach, Northern Cape), Katherine De Wet (MERL Officer) and Asanda Mpahla (Early Literacy Specialist).



Our reach in 2024:



Our 2024 partners:



Literacy Bridge



Trackosaurus



ECD Moms



Greyton Transition Town





Changing lives through literacy

T: +27 (0) 21 788 9233 • A: 46 Main Road, Heathfield, 7945

E: info@wordworks.org.za • W: www.wordworks.org.za

S: Facebook: [facebook.com/wordworksSA](https://www.facebook.com/wordworksSA) • Instagram: WordworksZA

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