

Help2Read is a registered non profit public benefit organisation committed to building literacy to support effective education in poor and disadvantaged children in South Africa

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Developing work readiness and access to opportunity for South Africa's township youth whilst building literacy skills in primary school learners

The help2read Literacy Tutor Programme: Providing crucial literacy skills development and reading help to primary school learners using South Africa's literate but unemployed township youth

September 2016

"Literacy is essential to the development and health of individuals, communities and countries. It is a condition for people's effective participation in the democratic process. It is the basis for the written communication and literature that have long provided the main channel for cross-cultural awareness and understanding. And it is the most precious way we have of expressing, preserving and developing our cultural diversity and identity. Literacy, in short, is a prerequisite for peace." – Kofi Annan

"There is no more important group than young people, [young people] whose social and economic distance from the mainstream means they cannot participate fully as citizens of their countries and the world. By ... developing their ability, we can build ... strong leaders grounded in local realities." David Harrison, The DG Murray Trust

Executive summary

There is an enduring crisis in South Africa, the effects of which will be felt for decades to come. Its impact is far reaching, from sprawling city to rural farmland. It does not discriminate against age, race or class, but its destruction is felt most deeply among the poor. It is a crisis that perpetuates inequality and poverty, and has the power to bring the country to its knees. The crisis? Illiteracy. According to recent research, 58% of Grade 4 learners in South Africa cannot read for meaning, while 29% are completely illiterate¹. This confirms research findings gathered by NEEDU in 2013 which show that of 1,772 rural Grade 5 learners, 41% read so slowly that they were considered non-readers in English, while 11% could not read a single English word from the passage used to assess their reading fluency. Illiteracy breeds exclusion in every area of society, and it comes at a significant cost. In 2010, it was estimated that illiteracy costs South Africa R450 billion² each year. Between 2010 and 2015, only half of the learners that began school in Grade 2 reached Matric³. Although there are a number of factors that contribute to the high dropout rate, illiteracy is a huge contributor. The lack of productivity as a result of unemployability places significant strain on South Africa's resources and it is estimated that South Africa's GDP would be 23% – 30% higher if the population was fully literate⁴.

A dual approach to the challenges of unemployment and illiteracy

help2read is an educational programme that revolutionises the development of literacy and reading in public primary school learners, so enabling them to maximise their potential to benefit from formal education. We operate a dual strategy to address low levels of literacy and poor educational outcomes in township schools, one that simultaneously seeks to improve employability and access to opportunity for young adults. By developing and deploying the skills of literate but unemployed members of local communities to provide supplementary one-on-one reading assistance and literacy skills development, we both improve the employability of young adults and deliver on our mission. This dual approach to enhancing education and employability builds strong, cohesive and empowered young people, improving economic prospects for them, their families, their communities and the country.

¹ Spaul, N. (2016a). *Learning to Read and Reading to Learn*. Policy Brief. Research on Socioeconomic Policy (RESEP). (Online). Available: www.resep.sun.ac.za

² Gustafsson, M., van der Berg, S., Shepherd, D. Burger, C. (2010). *The Costs Of Illiteracy In South Africa*. Stellenbosch University. (Online). Available: <https://ideas.repec.org/p/sza/wpaper/wpapers113.html>

³ Equal Education (2015). *PRESS STATEMENT: Upcoming 2015 Matric Results Require Careful Scrutiny!* (Online), Available: <https://www.equaleducation.org.za/article/2016-01-03-upcoming-2015-matric-results-require-careful-scrutiny>

⁴ Gustafsson, M., van der Berg, S., Shepherd, D. Burger, C. (2010). *The Costs Of Illiteracy In South Africa*. Stellenbosch University. (Online). Available: <https://ideas.repec.org/p/sza/wpaper/wpapers113.html>

Since we first began at Muizenberg Primary in 2006, we have worked in over 200 schools and served more than 13,000 primary school children in South Africa with exceptionally positive results. Assessment of our learners shows that after a typical school year intervention period of 7 months of contact time, primary school learners have been able to increase their reading age by an average of 14.4 months. Across the board educator reports point to simultaneous and significant increases in confidence and self-esteem.

What we do

Adapted from the Volunteer Reading Help Programme in the UK, help2read is a non profit organisation that works to develop literacy skills in primary school learners in the Foundation Phase (grades 2-4). We provide one-on-one literacy interventions by (i) using volunteers to provide consistent reading and literacy support for at least two half hour sessions to each child each week of the school year; and by (ii) using literate but unemployed Literacy Tutors drawn from local township communities who are trained and paid a stipend to deliver our programme in township schools. We also provide crucial grade and age appropriate quality reading resources and literacy learning aids to schools, without which reading wouldn't be possible. By matching learners with committed and trained literacy tutors and volunteer reading helpers who provide crucial support and literacy resources, help2read is addressing the problem of poor literacy levels and ensuring that academic performance overall will improve. Ultimately we believe learners who are literate will be able to make the most of, and better benefit from formal schooling opportunities.

The project

This proposal seeks to scale the extent and reach of services provided by our Literacy Tutors in under-resourced impoverished township schools, to increase the number of youth participating in meaningful employment readiness and personal/professional development support whilst growing the number of children able to benefit from dedicated, effective one-on-one reading help and literacy skills development during the school day and expanding our activities to create safe community reading and educational afternoon clubs where family literacy can be promoted. Literacy Tutors commit to a full school year during which time they serve 15 children during the school morning, meeting each learner twice a week for a dedicated thirty minutes each session to build their reading abilities. In 2017 youth will focus their afternoons on operating community reading clubs for all children, seeing at least 20 children each afternoon – with 60 literacy tutors hoped for in 2017 that is a lot of afternoon reading happening! The balance of the time is spent in personal and professional skills development and work readiness activities designed to enhance their own skills and employability. The majority of our tutors hope to find full time employment or access further education and training opportunities after their year with the programme, enabling us to not only improve the opportunities for primary learners but also contribute to community upliftment.

2017: Expanding training & starting community reading clubs

In 2017 we would like to extend both our reach and our depth by increasing the number of tutors we are able to train and by increasing their responsibilities and experience in the world of work. To this end we have initiated a collaborative relationship with Nali'Bali, to train our Literacy Tutors in how to engage with and establish children's reading clubs in, the communities in which they reside. This will give them experience of operating a small initiative (the reading club) and provide a safe space with educational reading time for younger children in the community, including pre-school children, outside of school hours, thereby hopefully beginning to address an even earlier origin of the problems associated with low levels of literacy. It will also ensure that Literacy Tutors have additional skills at their disposal. Most importantly, we believe this could be a means through which tutors could potentially earn an income, providing a crucial educational and recreational resource in communities where it is lacking.

Conclusion

Without the ability to understand what they read in English, primary school learners are unable to engage with what is being taught and as a result, are "silently excluded", their access to education effectively becoming meaningless. Sadly, this exclusion impacts every aspect of the formal curriculum, which from Grade 4 presupposes both the ability to decode (read) independently and the ability to read for meaning. With every school day spent struggling unsuccessfully, these learners lose learning time and fall behind. The texts become more complicated, and the gap widens. Evidence shows that students who have fallen behind by Grade 4 struggle to achieve educational outcomes by Grade 12⁵. Unlike many of South Africa's other crises, however, illiteracy is firmly within our power and resources to address quite quickly – and in doing so, we'll address some of the more intractable crises, like unemployment, at their roots. We believe that, with your support, scaling the literacy tutor programme will enable significant improvement to be made towards achieving this goal. We cannot afford to settle for slow progress any longer.

⁵ Van der Berg, S. (2015). What the annual national assessments can tell us about the learning deficits over the education system and the school career. *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 5(2): 28–43.

Appendix 1: Programme budget per centre

LT Programme budget – 20 youth / 300 learners

Description	Cost (ZAR)	Cost (USD)	Explanatory Notes
Literacy Tutor Recruitment			
Volunteer recruitment	15,000	1,155	Literacy Tutor recruitment: Advertising, screening, interviewing, criminal background checks. An average of 2x the number of applicants are evaluated from those selected for participation.
sub-total	15,000	1,155	
Literacy tutor training (programme)	25,000.00	1,925	Training in pedagogy and delivery of the help2read method to develop the skills of Literacy Tutors and includes regular additional training sessions in different subjects in the year
Literacy Tutor training (personal development) R1,000 pp x 20 tutors	20,000.00	1,540	Personal development training for the Literacy Tutor's: Professionalism, CV writing, financial management skills, communications, personal & professional effectiveness
Support worker activity wrt programme monitoring, LT weekly sessions; teacher/school meetings (travel and implementation)	9,000.00	695	Training & Programme Coordination of the programme including weekly support sessions, tutor book club operation & oversight
Materials - training support handouts & programme manuals	10,000.00	770	Printing of training materials for the year- all training, notice boards and stationary for Literacy Tutors
Communications	7,500.00	580	Communication with Literacy Tutors: Includes newsletters, training tips, tutor of the month activities etc.
Stipend (R1,500 per person, per month for 10 months)	300,000.00	23,080	20 literacy tutors for 10 months
Senior Literacy Tutor Stipend (R2,500 per month for 10 months)	25,000.00	1,925	Stipend for a Senior Literacy Tutor (selected from LTs in the programme) for 10 months. The SLT is responsible for day-to-day programme coordination in schools in addition to tutoring.
Monitoring and Evaluation	25,000.00	1,925	Impact performance assessment including baseline evaluation on commencement; quarterly monitoring, end of programme performance evaluation and analysis of programme strengths / weaknesses / improvement with schools, LTs, learners, parents
sub-total	421,500.00	32,440	
Sustainability			
Community reading clubs including training to parents and librarians	25,000.00	1,925	Community trainings will given to parents of 300 learners, and includes venue hire; and training to librarians
Book boxes: (books, games) @ R6000 / box.	60,000.00	4,615	5 book boxes for 30 Literacy Tutors and 5 book boxes for 5 reading club centres with each box costing R6000.. These include age and grade appropriate material to be used during sessions
sub-total	85,000.00	6,540	
Administration, Governance, Oversight, Audit & Accounting.	20,000.00	1,540	Costs associated with administration and overall management of the programme
Office rent contribution	28,600.00	2,200	Office rental & overheads
Dedicated Support Worker	39,000.00	3,000	20% of Support Worker Salary to ensure implementation and overall management of Senior Literacy Tutor
sub-total	87,600.00	6,740	
Year Total	615,100.00	46,875	\$156 per learner per month for the year!