



Youth 4 Literacy (Y4L) Programme

Creating a culture of reading in South African schools

Language is essential for development and unlocks the golden key to literacy, which in itself, brings a myriad of new opportunities for learning. Without fundamental language and literacy skills children are likely to battle through their schooling careers while children who become capable readers and writers show an increased self-esteem and a healthy appetite for learning. Children who are capable readers go on to become better students, which permeates through all aspects of their lives. Children who progress through their schooling ranks well are more likely to leave school with qualifications and go on to pursue further education which would ultimately lead to them finding formal employment.

Our approach

Since its inception in 2000, Shine Literacy has taken an entrepreneurial approach to tackling the country's stubborn and unacceptably low literacy rates. With a focus on developing the reading, writing and speaking skills of Grade 2 and 3 children from low-income communities, Shine Literacy aims to support children to engage effectively with learning by the time they finish the Foundation Phase of schooling. At Shine Literacy, we work to inspire and promote a culture of reading in schools, homes, workplaces and communities, thereby improving literacy outcomes for young children from low-income communities. Working hand-in-hand with teachers, volunteers and parents, our evidence-based programmes provide effective and sustained support to children as they learn to read and write, helping to foster a life-long love of books and learning.

Goals and objectives (short, medium and long term)

The Youth 4 Literacy (Y4L) programme aims to address the shortage of reading and writing literacy skills in children in the Foundation Phase (Grades 2 & 3) as well as have a positive impact on curbing the increasing youth unemployment rate in South Africa. The programme seeks to make better, more competent learners and also equip young adults with the skills and knowledge they need in order to become employable and contributing adult members of society. While the focus at Shine Literacy remains on young children flourishing throughout their schooling careers, the impact on unemployed youth cannot be ignored and forms one of the cornerstones of this project.

Expected results

Shine Literacy has been unwavering in its attempt to curb the poor learner reading and writing skills shortage across South Africa. Shine Literacy has embarked on the mission of distributing books and resource packs to all Foundation Phase children in the schools they partner with on a quarterly basis. Through the resource packs, essential reading materials have been provided for the home for all Foundation Phase classes across all schools in its network. The ultimate goal is to continue providing these books in the home on a quarterly basis through 2021 for all children.

The need

The Y4L programme is based on the founding principles contained in both the National Development Plan 2030 (NDP 2030) of South Africa, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as set out by the United Nations. The NDP 2030 seeks to remedy historical racial inequalities in South Africa and states that, “the quality of school education for black people is poor”. The core principles of the NDP 2030 seek to increase the quality of education so that all children have at least two years of preschool education and all children in Grade 3 can read and write. This development goal aligns with Shine Literacy’s purpose and goal to eradicate poor reading and writing skills development in the Foundation Phase. The NDP forms a core part of the South African government’s strategic plans to address youth literacy and is aligned with the Shine Literacy’s mission and vision for the Shine Youth 4 Literacy programme.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals aim to free humanity from poverty, secure a healthy planet for future generations, and build peaceful, inclusive societies as a foundation for ensuring lives of dignity for all. Specifically, the UN’s SDG Goal 4 aims to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. Goal 4 aims to ensure that all people have access to quality education and the opportunity for lifelong learning. The Y4L programme aims to address the very same problems, taking a two-pronged approach to the early reading problem South Africa is faced with.

Literacy levels in South Africa are appallingly low and too many children do not fulfil their academic potential at school. According to the 2016 *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)*, only 22% of Grade 4 children could read for meaning and the country ranked lowest of the 50 countries that participated at a Grade 4 level. Globally, children struggle with the transition from Grade 3 to Grade 4 as there are greater expectations in terms of content, length and linguistic complexity of reading materials.

In the Foundation Phase, the focus is on *learning to read*, and when children enter the Intermediate Phase they are expected to *read to learn*, which requires children to read for meaning. This is a challenge for any child, even more so when – as is the case in South Africa – the language of learning and teaching at a Foundation Phase level shifts from Home

Language to English in Grade 4. At that stage children do not always have the necessary language and reading skills in either their Home Language or First Additional Language.

Grade repetition in South Africa is high during the Foundation Phase, with associated costs for children's self-esteem and motivation to learn, and for the education system as a whole. There are already strong indications that the majority of children will be promoted to the next grade in 2021 not having mastered the skills needed for the previous grade. Many children face multiple deprivations from birth, which directly impact on their ability to learn. These include poor nutrition, disease, violence, abuse and impoverished living conditions.

Parents and caregivers tend to undervalue their role in their child's education and remain South Africa's most under-utilised educational resource. Crucially, parents/caregivers lack opportunities to gain the confidence, knowledge and skills to enable them to support learning in the home and help their child reach their fullest potential. In the schooling system, class sizes are large - often in excess of 40 children - and many teachers are overwhelmed, without adequate support and resources. Consequently, it can be a struggle to establish daily opportunities for children to read for pleasure. The view that reading is something *in addition to* school work, or a luxury only afforded to children when their schoolwork is done, requires shifts in beliefs and ways of doing things, as reading is *the core* of what Foundation Phase children learn.

Our theory of change

If we deliver programmes that support literacy learning at home and school, we will help to increase children's access to quality literacy learning opportunities and resources, and equip parents and communities to play an active role in promoting early literacy. This will result in more children reading and writing at an appropriate level and, ultimately, in improved educational outcomes. While systemic change is required, it is also important to acknowledge that changing teachers' practices in the classroom can be achieved through smaller, more focused interventions.

Short summary of the description of project/activities

In 2017, Shine Literacy piloted an exciting innovative project, Khanyisa (meaning 'to spark' or 'to ignite' in Xhosa), in partnership with the Western Cape Education Department, in 24 primary schools across the Cape Metro, targeting schools with the lowest literacy profile in the Western Cape according to systemic testing. This successful format gave birth to the renewed version of the programme called the Y4L programme.

The core principles of the project aim to emphasise the importance of creating daily opportunities for all children to engage with exciting reading material and to focus on dedicated structured reading time within the classroom and school. Participating schools are provided with a package of support and resources, a trained youth reading partner, a youth facilitator to oversee the running of the programme in the school and a reading corner

equipped with cushions and reading materials. The key elements of the programme revolve around the training of local unemployed matriculants as *Y4L Reading Partners*, using Shine Literacy's proven methodology.

The Y4L programme aims to train unemployed matriculants as volunteers in early literacy tuition, provide supervision and support to volunteers and develop children's reading and language skills through paired reading sessions and daily story reading sessions. The programme aims to provide literacy support through paired reading for Grade 2 and 3 children and also facilitate personal development training and refresher sessions for volunteers who will participate in the project. It seeks to expose children to increased opportunities to read, increase children's opportunities to develop language and language skills, increase children's confidence in their reading and writing abilities which will ultimately equip children to pass language development tasks and equip children to pass literacy assessments at Grade 6 level.

The South African unemployment rate reached record highs in 2020 with a whopping 30.1% unemployment rate. With the national unemployment rate excessively high, the youth unemployment rate paints an even more desperate picture with an estimated 59.0%. Simply put, almost 60% of the youths in South Africa are unemployed without any immediate or serious prospects of work in the near future. These dire statistics have only been made worse by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been a shutdown of economies and employment opportunities not only in South Africa but across the world.

In unstable Covid-19 times, delivering well-resourced reading support at homes and at schools provides caregivers and children with invaluable tools to help reduce the literacy gap between high and low achieving learners. In keeping with our organisational goals, Shine Literacy seeks to create a culture of reading in South African schools, homes, workplaces and communities, thereby improving literacy outcomes for young children from low-income communities. It is through our collaborative partnerships with teachers, volunteers and parents, where we endeavour to provide effective and sustained support to children as they learn to read and write, helping to foster a life-long love of books and learning.

The Y4L programme provides an opportunity for both youth volunteers and children to reap the unimaginable rewards associated with the participation in a paired reading programme. Children are the obvious beneficiaries of such a programme, with immediate benefit derived from their participation in the paired reading and story-telling activities of the programme. Youths, however, also benefit immensely as this programme allows them the opportunity to hone and improve their skills as reading partners and become overall more productive members of their communities with an increased knowledge of the societal issues faced by their communities. The programme offers youth an opportunity to address the shortfalls that are often so rife amongst their very own communities and become active participants in the betterment of their livelihoods.

