



## SHINE LITERACY PACKS REVIEW 2020

11 December 2020



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# INTRODUCTION

Shine Literacy has sought to become an invaluable support for parents, caregivers, teachers and learners. During the Covid-19 pandemic it became even more important for us to find ways to continue to provide our invaluable services and support to communities in need. One such way we can do this is through providing much-needed take-home packs for Foundation Phase children. The need was evident after President Cyril Ramaphosa announced a series of lockdown regulations that meant that children would miss most of the school year. Without access to schools, many children in the communities we serve have very little access to educational materials in their homes and unreliable internet access to be able to access material online.

The shortened 2020 academic year meant that children in the Foundation Phase lost an estimated 32% (65 days) of their school year, when compared to the planned 2020 school calendar. However, school closures were not the only reasons for children losing valued time at school. A combination of scheduling factors and socio-economic factors also contribute to their total days lost. With many schools adopting a staggered approach to reopening classrooms, children are still spending a portion of their school week at home while schools are technically open. Due to this it is difficult to quantify exactly how many days on average were lost per child, outside of the official school closure days issued by the Department of Basic Education.

The government mandated lockdowns left the onus on the respective provinces to come up with a plan and strategy to ensure learning continues through the year. While some did turn to online learning and resources, many simply did not have the ability to make the seamless switch from classroom to online learning. Before the pandemic, many teachers in the country had not received substantive formal technology training, either to support blended teaching and learning or to fully apply online learning. This further compounded the problems faced by teachers and learners and emphasised the importance of physical take home resources. This provided a unique opportunity for Shine to step in and lend a hand to already struggling communities.

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

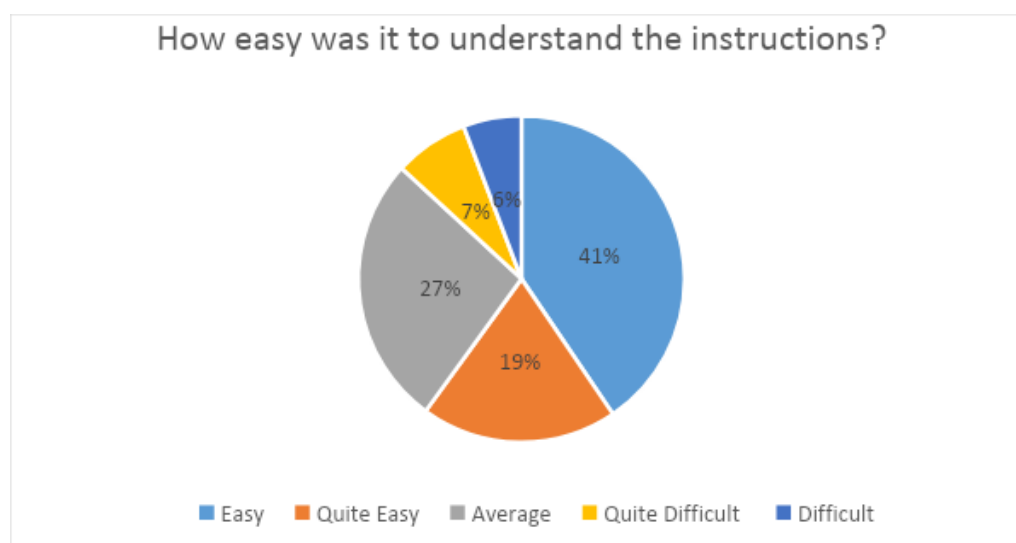
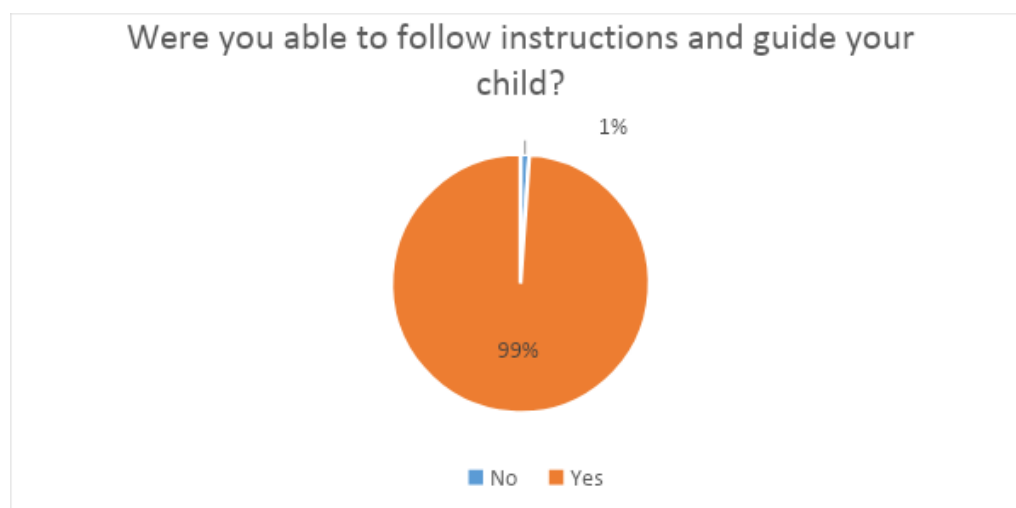
This report will look at the feedback and comments received from parents and teachers about the packs they received. The report adopts a mixed method research design where both quantitative (data analysis) and qualitative (interviews and surveys) methods are used. This multi-method form of research seeks to bring together the best combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods to explore the overall effectiveness of the packs. The combination method strengthens the analysis of the feedback we received, thereby providing useful and informative results.

The report will look at 15 partner schools who received school packs in the 2020 year. 265 surveys were received from parents whose children received packs during the year. Further face-to-face interviews and focus groups were conducted with 64 parents of children who received school packs during the year. Unfortunately, due to the continuing pandemic, interviews and focus groups were kept to a minimum in order to maintain safe social distancing protocols.



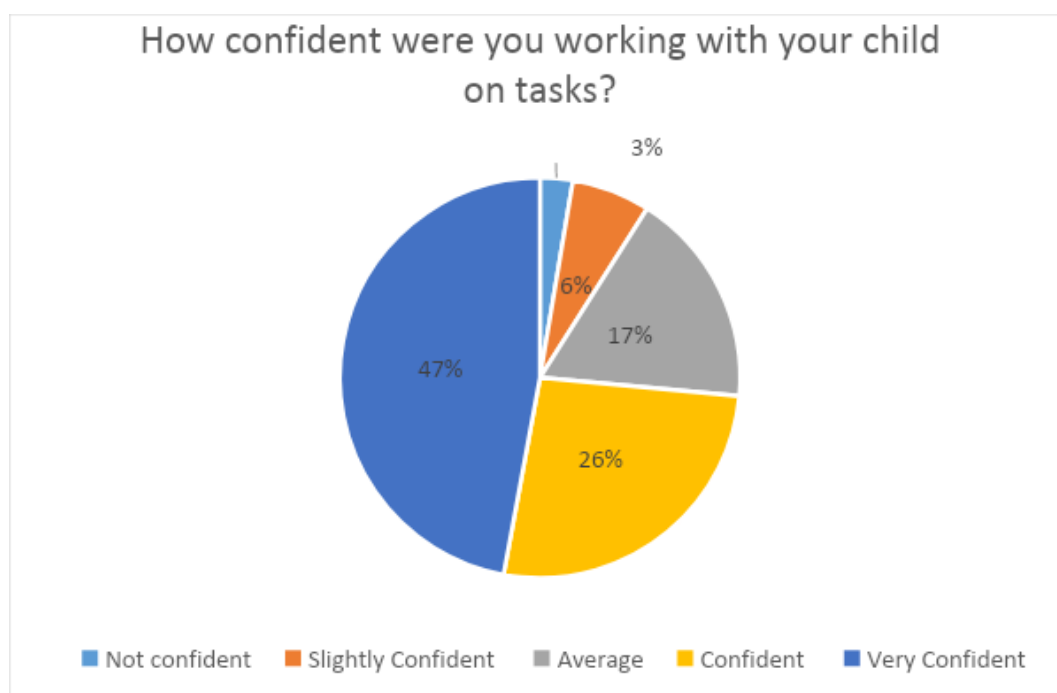
## FINDINGS

The overarching response was positive, with parents and teachers alike reporting that the packs they received were a great help during the 2020 year. Most parents found the packs simple and easy to use and were able to easily guide and instruct their children in order to work through the packs. An overwhelming 99% of respondents responded 'Yes' when asked if they were able to follow instructions and guide their children and a 87% of respondents found the instructions relatively easy to understand. It is important for the parents, as the teacher, to be able to easily follow instructions and understand what is required in order to guide and assist the child.

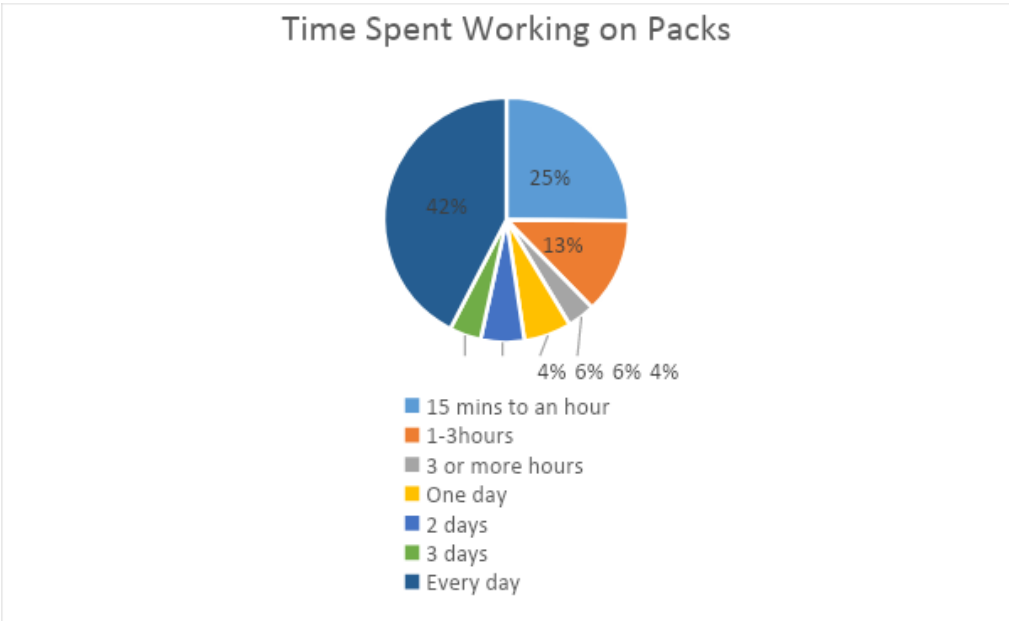
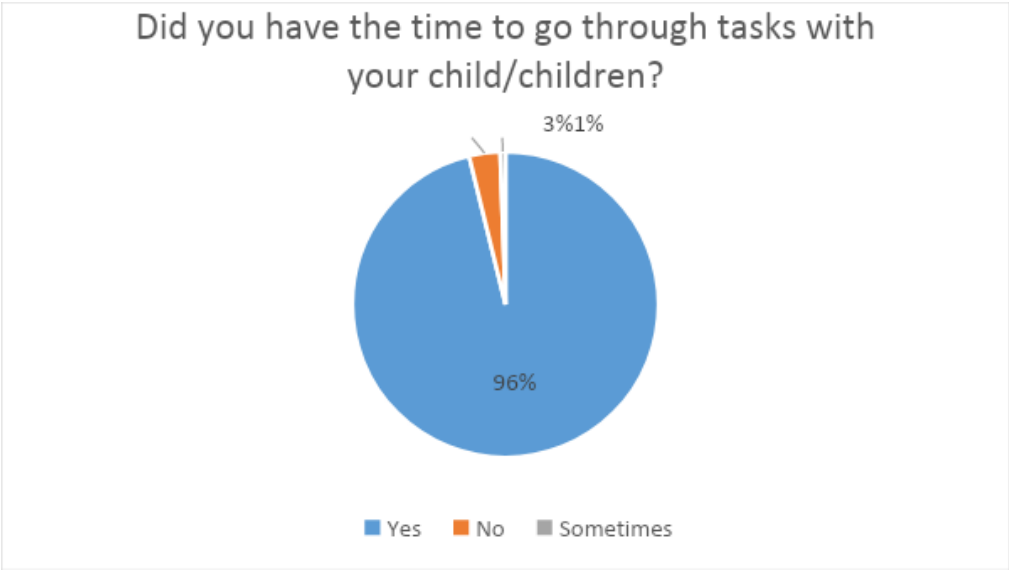


It is also important for parents to feel confident in their new roles as their child's teacher. It is imperative that they are equipped and feel empowered as this will have positive knock-off effects on their children. While many may not think so, children are also very intuitive and can easily sense if their instructor is not confident in what they are teaching.

Thankfully, 73% of respondents were confident in their abilities to guide their children through the packs. 18% of respondents reported their confidence level as "Average" and only 9% did not have confidence in themselves as teachers. The Shine pack included a Support Learning at Home Guide for this very purpose. The guide was aimed at equipping and supporting parents as well as providing other information related to navigating through to the Covid-19 pandemic.



Another important consideration is whether or not parents had the time to work through the packs with their children. Many parents in the communities we serve for part of the essential services workers who were required to continue working throughout the lockdown. This means that finding time may have been a struggle for those who do not have other family members in the household who can help. 96% of respondents did have the time to work through the packs with their children, with only 4% reporting not being able to find the time.



The time spent on the packs gives us an idea of how effective the packs were in keeping the children occupied and continuing learning outside of the classroom. Lockdown measures have meant that for the most part and as far as possible we are all required to stay safe at home, which means children at home also need to find ways to stay engaged in their learning. 42% of respondents reported doing some work on the packs every day, which means they were able to pace and apportion the activities in the pack in order to make sure their children had something to do every day. 25% of respondents reported spending 15 minutes to an hour working on the packs daily and 13% report spending between 1 and 3 hours on the packs daily.



While a child's normal school day may be between 5 to 7 hours (including breaks but excluding extramural activities), this is not going to be the case when children are learning from home nor does it need to be. Living through a global pandemic means that stress levels are high for all, including children. Therefore, it would not be helpful to overload a child's school day. It is also important to remember that learning does not only happen in workbooks. With a little bit of innovation and applying your mind, ordinary daily chores also provide a learning opportunity. Simple activities such as baking, cleaning and gardening allow children to apply their mathematical skills in measuring and pouring as well learning some valuable life lessons that may not necessarily be taught in the classroom.

Many have heralded the use of online resources and online learning. However, for many the switch is not as easy as opening up a laptop and connecting to the internet. Internet access for many children in these communities is still not guaranteed. Furthermore, access to a laptop or tablet that the child can use to access these online resources is even more scarce as these luxuries are simply not freely available in these communities. While most families do have internet access through a smartphone, in most cases this phone still needs to serve the needs of all family members in the household. 82% of respondents reported having internet access through the use of a smart phone with a mere 6% having internet access via a laptop. 12% of respondents did not have any internet access at all, whether through the use of a smartphone or laptop.



*Volunteer works with child during SLH (\*photo was taken pre-covid)*

However, all is not lost when it comes to access to online resources. South African telecommunication networks have zero rated many learning sites, meaning materials can be downloaded for free. This is a great help to many parents who may have limited budgets and cell phone data as they would not need to worry about this additional cost of accessing resources. During 2020 Shine Literacy's own website also converted to a zero-rated one, making access to our resources and archives free. One telecommunications network, Vodacom, even went as far as providing a comprehensive zero-rated e-school platform with extensive learning content for children in Grade R right up to Grade 12. Many other NGO's in the educational sector have also zero- rated their websites. One such example is Nalibali.org whose website has a host of multilingual children's stories, including audio stories.

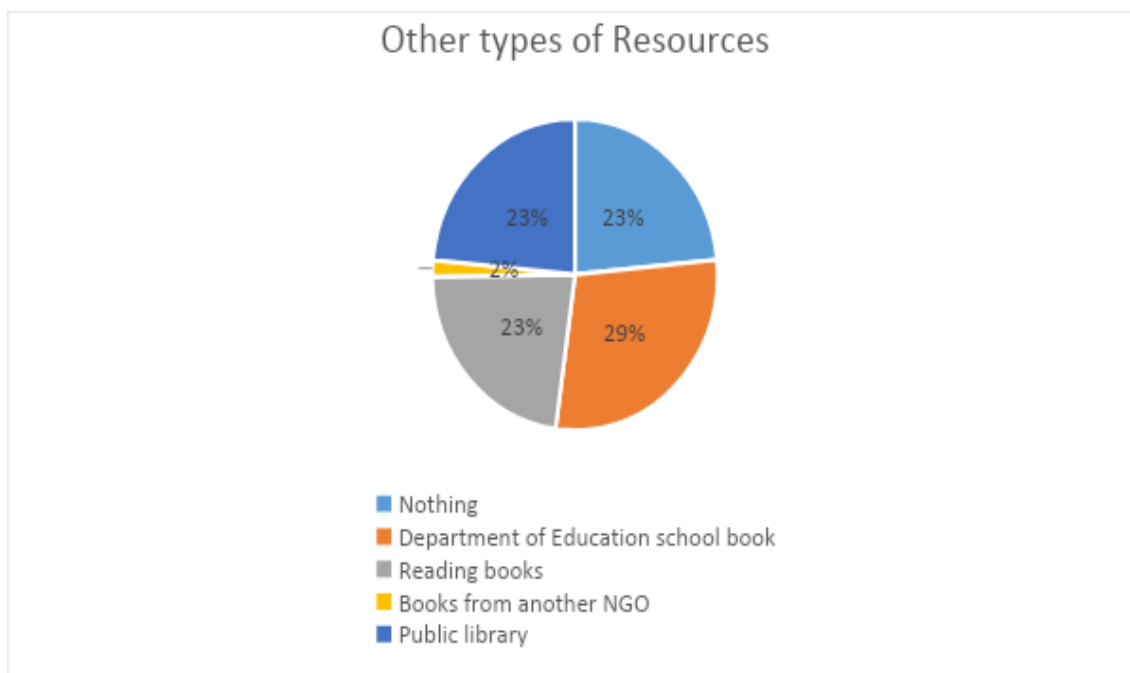


*Volunteer engaging with child during SLH (\*photo was taken pre-covid)*

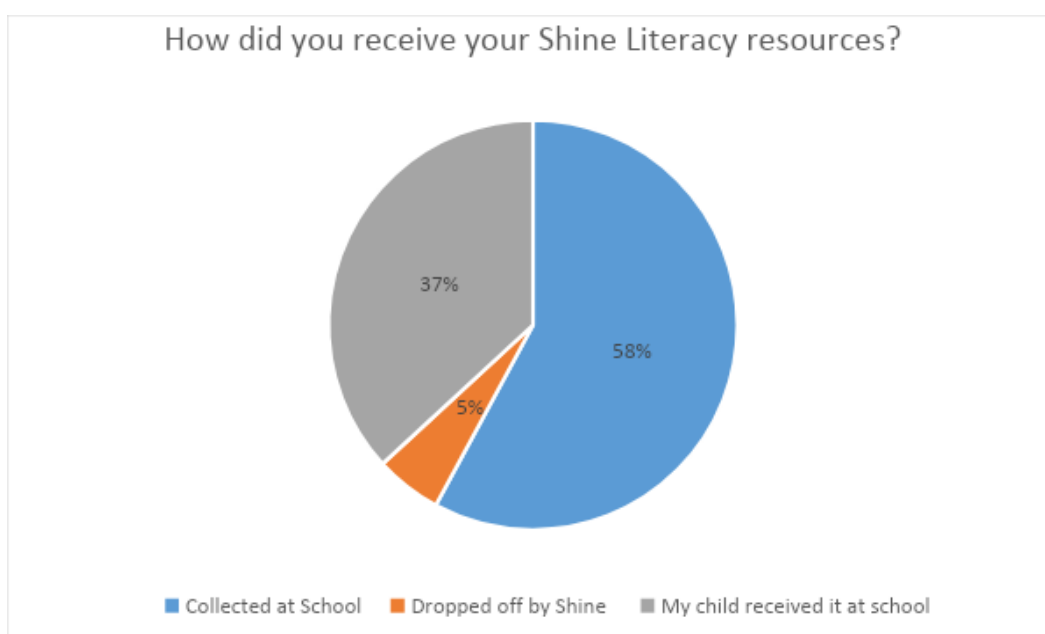
The prevalence of limited internet access amongst our communities means that many families are still relying on physical resources to support children's learning.

Shine Literacy was obviously not the only provider of such materials as some schools along with the Department of Basic Education did attempt to distribute their own worksheets and workbooks amongst learners. However, many parents did rely solely on the Shine packs they received with 23% of respondents reporting they received no additional resources from other sources. 29% of respondents reported receiving resources from the Department of Basic Education, 2% received resources from other NGOs and 23% had access to additional resources in the form of reading books. 23% of respondents received resources

from their local libraries, however many libraries were closed during many levels of the lockdown which meant access to all was not guaranteed.



Most of the packs distributed to parents were either collected by the children or parents at school as 95% or respondents reported, with only 5% of the packs being dropped off by Shine staff by special arrangement.

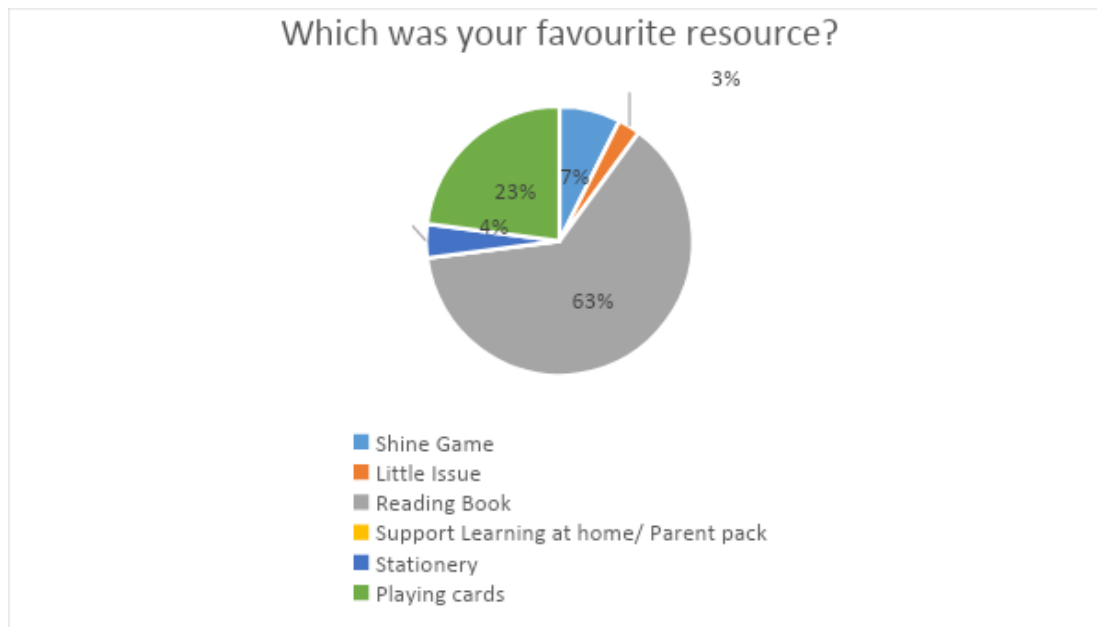


Comprehensive learner packs were distributed to all Grade 3 learners in school's partnered with Shine Literacy either through our Khanyisa Project or with links directly to Shine Centres. The packs were carefully curated by Shine literacy staff, who themselves have extensive experience in foundation phase education, in consultation with teachers and some parents. The packs were compiled in three languages, English, IsiXhosa and Afrikaans, which also form the three official provincial languages of the Western Cape. The packs contained a reading book, a Shine Game, Little Issue magazine, playing cards, stationery and a Support Learning at Home pack. The variety of resources included in the packs was aimed to stimulate and entertain children as much as possible. While the packs were intended for the child recipient, we found through our interactions with families that packs provided hours of education and entertainment for the whole family. Many families reported sharing the packs with their children's siblings (both older and younger), other family relatives in a similar age group, other children in their communities and even adults in the family, all benefited from using the Shine packs. This unintended spin-off shows the importance of the work we are doing at Shine as the impact is felt not only by members of one household, but the benefits can spread throughout greater communities.

63% of respondents reported the reading book as their favourite resource in the packs, an overwhelming majority. However, it is important to note that many parents interviewed reported the stationery included in the packs as extremely useful and helpful. This is because many children do not have access to stationery at home as these are usually under the care of their teachers at school and many families simply cannot afford to buy stationery for their children at home. The inclusion of stationery results in an overall enhanced reading experience for children as they listen and participate actively and intently in order to draw their favourite stories in their drawing books afterwards. While the children enjoyed the fun and creative element of the stationery, many parents were grateful for the financial relief that came through the provision of free stationery.

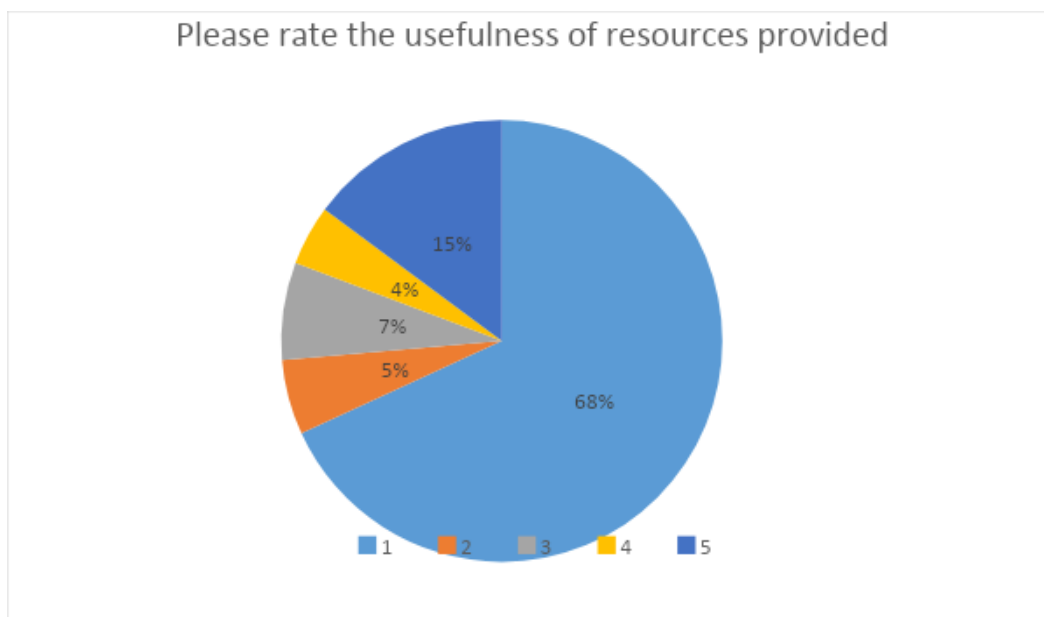
23% of respondents reported the playing cards included in the packs as their favourite resource as they provided hours of fun and entertainment for the whole family. Playing cards are another example of practical learning opportunities as they develop mathematical skills in children along with enhancing social skills through playing games in groups. The cards also provided a way for families to bond together during tense and stressful times. One parent said "I had forgotten how fun it is to play crazy 8 and I am

happy I got to teach my child the same games I played growing up”. 7% of respondents reported the Shine Game as their favourite resource, once again highlighting the importance of activities that are inclusive for the whole family.



We asked respondents to provide feedback on the effectiveness, usefulness and quality of the Shine resources they received. An overwhelming majority were very happy with all of the abovementioned criteria and only wished there were more resources on offer. When asked to rate (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being extremely useful and 5 being not very useful) the usefulness of the packs they received 68% of respondents rated the packs as extremely useful, 6% as very useful and 7% as useful. This further speaks to the quality and time spent in creating the Shine packs.

Parents were almost unanimous in the feedback about the packs saying “I love the packs as they gave my child something to do” and “I am not sure what would have happened to my child’s education this year without that pack”.



Most of the parents and caregivers surveyed had positive sentiments to share about the Shine packs they received. One parent even mentioned how reading books and activity books have become prized possessions for her children. She went on to say “Now they’re not fighting over the remote or toys anymore, they’re fighting over the books. Still noisy but it’s better they fight over things that matter!” Some respondents were also very impressed with the quality of the content and enjoyed how they challenged their children to learn and read more. “There were some words there I had to Google for myself but I’m glad because now I am also learning”.

Many respondents also mentioned that they would like to receive the packs in all 3 languages, if possible. This important feedback reminds us that we need to ensure that children are able to learn the languages that will not only help them pass exams at school, but to also be able to be functioning members of their communities. “My child speaks Afrikaans at home, English at school then Xhosa when she plays with her friends in the neighbourhood”, said one parent. A reminder that mixed language packs may be very useful in the future.



*A child reading in class (\*photo was taken pre-covid)*

## OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER

Many families were battling myriad issues both before and during the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns. When respondents were asked to describe their family situation prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, very few could describe their situation as “Very stable, with few issues such as finances, health and work”, meaning the staggering majority of families faced additional pressures during the lockdowns. Some respondents reported that the breadwinner in their families had either lost their jobs completely or faced a substantial salary cut and other respondents reported having a family member contract and passed away as a result of Covid-19. This paints a grim picture as households are having to balance the prioritisation of their children’s education with their health and financial needs. When we consider that the communities we work in are also plagued with other socio-economic issues such as crime, gangsterism and high unemployment, we are reminded of the importance of the work we do at Shine. During an interview with a school principal she shared some insights on working in a poverty stricken and gang-ridden community.

**“We work 7 days a week because we have a nutrition program here at the school. So I am here every day with my staff helping where I can, even if it means chopping onions. During the lockdown things got very bad for people in the community as many of them couldn’t work and lost**

their jobs. So then what started to happen was that even the members of the community started coming to the school for the feeding scheme. We had whole families here queuing and hoping to get some food. We even ended up working with the gangsters sometimes and they would help us marshal the lines because now we needed to have 3 separate lines. One for kids, one for the elderly and one for community members. The gangsters themselves would also be in those queues sometimes. It showed us that we really can pull together when we need to.”

We heard many such stories from teachers, parents and principals during the interviews we conducted, however, the prevailing tone is one of hope. In most cases communities are working together with the little they have in order to weather this pandemic. Whether it be through sharing their packs and resources with other children or extending their nutrition programs to feed the whole community, teachers are doing their level best. One should also take a moment to consider the long-term effect and toll this will have on teachers, who are likely expected to cover even more material in the 2021 school year to make up for losses in 2020. The pandemic is nowhere near over and its effects will be felt for many years to come. It is important that we formulate targeted support strategies that will address the needs of children, both current and those that may arise in the near future.

## CONCLUSION

The overwhelming response to the Shine packs distributed throughout the year is positive and confirms the need for more of this kind of intervention in the future. One parent said “I just so wish there was a pack for every child in my house”, which speaks to the importance of trying to spread our support across the entire Foundation Phase. Parents and caregivers found the packs to be extremely helpful, effective and useful in supporting their children’s learning at home. The future has always been uncertain, however in these trying times it seems to be even more stressful than ever. It is imperative that we continue to provide support through initiatives such as these in order to ensure our children are equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to make sure they have a fighting chance in life.

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