

FUNDING INNOVATION IN AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMMES IN THE WESTERN CAPE

Many organisations that work or deliver programmes in the extended education space are hampered by a lack of resources. What interventions and positive changes would these organisations introduce if funding were no longer a constraint? Which existing projects could be leveraged? And how would supporting such projects and interventions improve the numbers of children who successfully finish school?

These are the questions that led to the launch of the Western Cape After School Innovation Fund, an initiative to inspire non-profits to materialise those blue sky projects that could offer the added impact that they have always felt constrained to achieve. The fund is specifically designed to finance innovative ideas that will **expand the cohort of learners** in after school programmes, **improve learner retention** in these programmes and **build a culture of extended education in low- and no-fee schools**. The fund is run by the Community Chest, with seed funding from the After School Game Changer.

In reflecting on why the Community Chest is excited about the Innovation Fund, the CEO Lorenzo Davids enthused that it “offers a unique opportunity for NGOs to pitch their ideas and really build a case, with passion, energy and intelligence – and loads of fun – for new and captivating ideas towards increasing the quality of offerings available in the after school space.”

In the first round of the Innovation Fund in December 2017, eligible organisations working in the extended education sector in the Western Cape were invited to submit applications for funding to test new solutions that will impact the lives of the most vulnerable learners in the Province. According to Davids, “It really excites me to see the depth of the ideas which people are pitching. I’m convinced, given time and support for these new ideas, that the current crop of children in our schools will find that these new ideas will radically impact their educational experience.”

Out of 121 applications received in the first round, four projects were chosen: one which takes reading into the community to recruit learners into ASP, based in McGregor; a province wide timetable challenge; a project based on building staff ability to pick up on psycho social issues and to improve the current online learner management system; and a series of stories that explore the choices learners make in their lives related to making choices that affect their life trajectory.

THE BREEDE CENTRE - GROWING LEARNERS IN THE CAPE WINELANDS

Located in the village of McGregor in the Cape Winelands, the Breede Centre provides afternoon and holiday activity programmes and a Foundation phase reading support programme. The centre caters to an average of 40 children daily, while approximately 80 children attend during the school holidays.

There is a high percentage of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder amongst the learners of the local non-fee government school – along with low levels of literacy and numeracy. According to Katleen Verschoore, Breede Centre Youth Coordinator: “Many more children younger than 6 do not attend a creche or educare centre, making this group ill-equipped when entering Grade R or Grade 1.”

The Breede Centre hopes to increase the number of children who benefit from their programmes through their innovative On the Road project.

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BETTER TOGETHER.



The project consists of three parts:

- Four youth leaders visit a home in the heart of the village two days a week. Here, they gather children in the neighbourhood and for two hours they tell stories, read books, help the children to read, play games, assist with homework and do simple arts and crafts.
- Four youth leaders visit two farm schools in the area twice weekly, offering the same activities as above.
- Four youth leaders set up a few gazebos in the village streets every Friday where local children can come for assistance with homework, reading, storytelling, arts and crafts and games.

The funding will go towards paying the youth leaders, who are unemployed local young people, as well as paying for training, equipment and other materials.

“The intended impact is that many more of the village children, who at a young age are so eager to learn, are exposed to the elements that enhance and stimulate the skills needed to learn well once they enter the formal educational stream,” Verschoore said, adding that the children should especially be exposed to “stories which lead to an interest in reading, crafts which enhance all kinds of fine motor skills, games which enhance gross motor skills and art which allows children to express themselves.”

NUMERIC - DOUBLE THE IMPACT

Numeric provides after school mathematics programmes at primary schools in Khayelitsha, Mfuleni, Mitchell’s Plain and Soweto. The organisation identified two key challenges which they seek to address through their innovation. “While we are a Maths programme, there are a variety of social issues that affect the 1 200 learners we work with and that our part-time coaches and full-time staff encounter on a regular basis. These social issues vary greatly and impact the participation and retention of learners in our programmes,” said Kristen Thompson, Numeric’s General Manager in Cape Town.

The organisation will arrange training for their

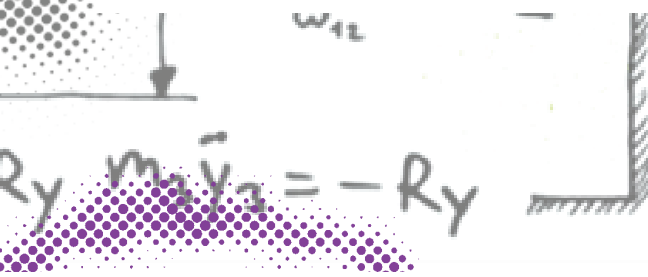
approximate 50 coaches and 10 full-time staff on how to identify, address and/or refer psycho-social issues affecting learners. Numeric believes that this training is an investment in coaches and staff should lead to staff retention. “The psycho-social and mentorship training will develop these skills within our organisation both by equipping our full-time staff to empower and support our coaches and by developing the coaches themselves. We hope these training opportunities will develop resilience and coping skills for our team as well as develop the tools for responding to social challenges in the communities we serve,” Thompson said.


An allied innovation is Numeric’s online learner management system that tracks learner attendance, persistence and performance. “While this is already an effective tool for monitoring progress in our programmes, the platform does not currently provide any easily interpretable graphs, charts or reports. Such features would greatly increase the speed with which we can identify issues and address them, and in doing so, allow us to handle issues of attendance and attrition more effectively.” Thompson said.

The grant received from the Innovation fund will contribute towards the costs of their staff and volunteer training and will help to boost the function of their learner management system.

OLICO: GAMES LEAD TO MATHS GAINS

OLICO offers tutoring and technology maths support for grades 7-12 and runs after school maths clubs for grades 1-6 in five schools in the Western Cape as part of the Year Beyond programme. Last year, the organisation ran a times-table challenge across a selection of high schools on the YearBeyond programme.





Peter Wächtler, OLICO's Western Cape Coordinator explained: "Each week, learners were challenged to master a new times-table by practicing both in the classroom and on OLICO's free online maths tool (learn.olico.org). Learners competed against themselves and other schools and the top learners participated in an inter-school final to crown the times-table champions of 2017. In total, learners submitted 374 740 correct responses on OLICO's online program."

This year, OLICO aims to achieve 1 million correct online responses from participating learners and will run the competition across at least seven schools in the Western Cape. "In the process, OLICO aims to improve the number fluency of learners. In the 2017 edition, learners more than doubled their speed and accuracy (on average) by the end of the challenge. These improvements in fluency contribute enormously towards achieving maths proficiency," Wächtler said.

According to Wächtler, OLICO will use its grant "to invest in further software development to introduce more efficient and real-time scoring and leaderboards for individuals and schools." A portion of the grant will go towards weekly prizes as well as the final competition and prizes for champions and the most-improved.

FUNDZA - TELLING AFTER SCHOOL TALES

Fundza Literacy Trust currently provides language support content for the eight high schools in the YearBeyond programme. As an academic support partner, the organisation is familiar with the obstacles to regular attendance at after school programmes in the Province, such as family responsibilities or even gang violence. One way to counter these obstacles is to provide a different narrative: a series of stories that explore the benefits and opportunities of after school programmes as well as barriers to participation.

"Stories are far more powerful at changing attitudes than merely disseminating information.

Stories touch the heart as well as the intellect. They create opportunities for discussion about issues such as participation, as well as illustrate the long-term benefits," said FunDza Executive Director, Mignon Hardie. "Helping learners to develop a lifelong reading habit is of great benefit to their personal and academic development," Hardie added.

FunDza will commission five short stories as part of the After School Action Series. These stories will be set at local schools and will explore the benefits and challenges to after school involvement in an accessible, friendly manner. Each story will centre on a different after school activity, such as sports, arts or academic interventions and will be accompanied by a more factual piece - a talking point - on the various aspects of after school programmes highlighted in the story.

All five stories will be published on FunDza's mobile platform (fundza.mobi) as well as on the WCED's portals. Three of the stories will be used in the YearBeyond course and two will be printed for distribution at schools.

CONCLUSION

While the Innovation Fund is a once-off grant and not intended to cover core costs of organisational operations, both the Community Chest and After School Game Changer firmly believe that this fund opens up the space for ideas to flourish and provides a valuable support to an incredibly hard working and imaginative sector. When added to the rest of the interventions being created by the After School Game Changer and its partners, Lorenzo Davids summed it all up in saying that by getting behind this kind of work, we are communicating to all our children that "we will do everything possible to make your school years the best years of your life - and to do so with passion."

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