

# Children's Book Network

Annual Report 2020

*Founders: Gina Mhlophe, Lesley Beake and Sindiwe Magona*

*Patron: Gcina Mhlophe*



# Children’s Book Network Annual Report for 2020

The year everything changed

Who we are and what we do ... and how we have adapted.

Children’s Book Network (CBN) came from a passion for children and reading – particularly children between the ages of nine and twelve who can read, but don’t.

The methods we have developed during the last ten years are experimental, but they work. Originally designed for workshop situations, this year of 2020, we have had to adapt everything to be suitable for children working on alone, at home. Everything we have developed in this year is available online to those who have internet access. The children we work with in Stanford don’t have any kind of connectivity, so we have printed out and distributed the same materials in the form of 20+ page booklets every week during lockdown.

The children we work with love CBN because we respect them as people and listen to them – and, most of all, because they are motivated to master this mysterious and life-enhancing skill called reading. CBN is also fun.

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## STRUCTURE

*Patron: Gcina Mhlophe (PIC)*

### BOARD MEMBERS

- Anthony Gregorowski (Chair)
- Hildegard Witbooi
- Dave Mohr
- Lesley Beake (Director)

### ADMINISTRATION

- Director Lesley Beake
- Administration assistant Wilien van Zyl
- Trust Secretary Wilien van Zyl
- Local Facilitator Vuyokasi Siza

### Fundraiser

- Local fundraiser Daisy Verburg
- Person to contact local suppliers for donations Daisy Verburg

### Accounts and tax matters

- Book-keeping Elsa Gebhard
- Banking administration and payment Elsa Gebhard

### Information and publicity

- Website (Lesley Beake)
- Social media (Daisy Verburg)
- Local interaction (Explorio local community)
- Stanford Tourism



*Elsa Gebhard*



*Wilién van Zyl*



*Daisy Verburg*

## CREATIVE TEAM

Toolbox and resources team

- Creating new ideas (LB)
- Planning and administration (LB)
- Practical arrangements (WvZ)
- Evaluation and assessment (WvZ)

*We would like to thank Lisa Witherden most sincerely for the tremendous input she made to the lockdown Learning project. She brought skills that were exactly what we needed during this difficult time. She has gone to a full-time teaching job elsewhere, but we miss her cheerful presence.*

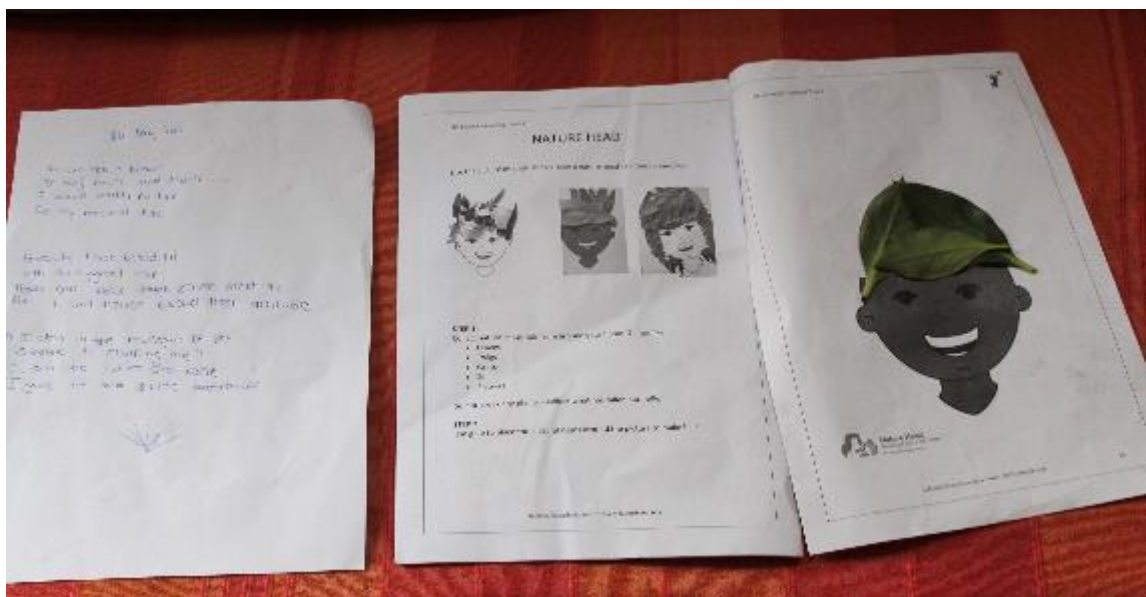
A great deal of work is done voluntarily and a small hourly rate (the same for everybody at R200 per hour) is charged for dedicated tasks.



## 2020 SUMMARY:

We will all always remember what happened in 2020, a year of unimagined difficulty, when the children needed us more than ever. The day before the first lockdown began, the CBN team (Lesley Beake, Wilien van Zyl and Lisa Witherden) met to talk about how we could help our young people, out of school, bored and frightened. The result was Lockdown Learning – reading and reading activity packs that we handed out every week for seventeen weeks. We followed that with a more challenging project called the Happiness Project that is still running and will continue until the end of February. Neither of these initiatives could have taken place without the help of our faithful funders, particularly in Germany (Rotweil Rotary) and America (private donor).

With a hundred children taking part in the informal settlement of De Kop, outside Stanford, and the booklets being around 20 pages, that amounted to about fifty-thousand pages of photocopied text and activities. To see the contents of both of these projects, please go to: <https://www.childrensbook.co.za/home-reading-ideas>  
This was an enormous project, put together in record time by a dedicated team with heart-warming support from the community.



We were then able to hand everything over once a week to our stalwart local facilitator, Vuyokasi Siza, and her husband Phumlani. Many litres of hand sanitizer later, and masks for everyone, we can see the results. Hard-cover Happiness notebooks are filled with drawing and writing that reflect the children's thoughts.



It would be difficult to overestimate the effects of this pandemic on children everywhere. It was a time of fearful tension alternated with utter boredom as schools closed, opened ... and closed again. Currently the children are back at

*Vuyokasi Siza*

school, but we are continuing our remote initiatives to get – and keep – them reading.

Education has changed. It was impossible to use our own tried and tested methods. Workshops are not advisable – and that will remain the case for the foreseeable future. Less obvious was the amount of physical contact we all had though games and play around the themed reading. The very popular clapping games are now out of the question. Welcome with a handshake or a hug ... the electric welcome ... none of these fall within the rules. Nor does gathering as a group of like-minded readers on a Saturday or during holidays.

We are currently rewriting the Reading Toolbox contents, drawing on the massive amount of material created for the Lockdown Learning



*Happiness Books*

and Happiness projects and incorporating the existing themed work in the toolboxes previously.

With the children back at school, we are looking into the possibility of holding some small meetings of encouragement with a limited number of children, at schools. The regulations are very strict (temperature recording every day and other precautions that would be difficult for us to maintain in a less regulated environment like a voluntary reading workshop). It would also be problematic under current regulations to feed and transport children as we have always done. This huge responsibility is really beyond resources. Lockdown Learning methods will continue for the foreseeable future.



## CHILDREN

Being in lockdown was hardest of all for those in poverty. The CBN children made heroic efforts to keep their masks on (as seen in the photographs) and stay apart. They enjoyed the occasional treats we were able to send them. They were stoic. But, with the pandemic nowhere near over, they have lost a year of their education.

CBN runs what used to be called – and still remains – an enrichment programme. We don't teach them to read. We try to teach them to apply *imagination* to reading, to increase the level of involvement with ideas. Television doesn't do that, and that is what most children in our group have as a pacifier and sometimes only means of entertainment. The Happiness Project looked successively at the senses and how to sharpen their focus on the world – to think, to imagine, to fly free.

We reached more of them, with this aim in mind. Numbers are presented separately, but the total number of children reached was 9 892, almost treble that of last year. With the last reading packs still to be distributed, that number should top the 10 000 that has always been a goal in our planning. (We base our numbers on number of reading packs and five-day programmes over the whole of Lockdown. Numbers elaborated in the Monitoring and Evaluation report that will be filed separately.)

The first 17 weeks of Lockdown Learning featured easier, less challenging, more comforting books and activities. We ramped that up in the Happiness Project where we aimed to stimulate ideas and imagination.





## **REPORT ON THE CHILDREN: WILIEN van ZYL (mid-year)**

I was able to gather some information regarding the feeding scheme and children's mental health.

1. The school feeding scheme is still running, children can collect food daily from 08:00-10:00. Norma and Amanda are running the feeding scheme at the school. The children are given food first, if there are any left the adults can get as well. The teacher will let me know if the school are providing food at upper Stanford (past the taxi rank) and die Kop.
2. The normal soup kitchens run by various organisations in Stanford, are open 3 times a week at the three different points.
3. Mental health and school work:
  - School work is still being distributed to children by teachers.
  - Since the Grade 7's returned to school the attendance was 45-50%.
  - If someone in the community tested positive for Covid, there was a drop in attendance.
  - The daily screening questions contained psychological questions as well.
  - There were some cases that were picked up during the screening that were immediately referred to the school social worker from the WCED.
  - Some of the cases were: Parents that committed suicide, teenage pregnancy and birth.
  - The school is aware of the families that have no income or food and is providing for them individually.
  - The school is focusing on the survival and mental health of the children, rather than academics.

I conferred with Regina of Creative Skills Factory (Stanford organization working with younger children):

1. The feedback that I got from Regina, confirmed a lot that I heard from the teachers.
2. She noticed that when school started the numbers at the food kitchen dropped, but picked up again now that the school is closed.
3. They will continue to serve Stanford South and we serve Die Kop. I told her our numbers will be reduced to 50 children (from 100 that included younger children who don't actually read yet).

Feedback at the end of second lockdown

During the second half of 2020, rules of COVID-19 were still being enforced. Children went back to school, but not in the normal fashion.

Different Grade's went on different days and only half the class was allowed back on those days. The other half would come to school the following day. Break time is spend in individual circles on the playground. Everyone was in their own circle during breaktimes.

Work was send home on the days that, that certain group had to stay at home. The feeding scheme was still running daily and the phycologist that was appointed to the school, still made her visits on a regular basis.

The school year ended on 15 December 2020 for the December Holidays.

## BOOKS

Key to our whole operation are the books we can provide in our book club, read to the children and use in the toolbox materials. We have added some fabulous titles to our collection this year, both from donation and from careful purchase (particularly in sales). But we remain true to the basic premise that only excellence is good enough.

### CBN BOOK CLUB

Mobile Book Club

(By Wilien van Zyl)

February 2021

During lockdown 2020 we realised that there was a huge need for story books. Children didn't have access to them. We compiled a 'Mobile Book Club' container that we stocked with story books from our CBN library.

The Mobile Book Club container held the following:

- 25 story books
- A book title and author list of all the books
- A register that will indicate the name of the child, the title of the book that was borrowed, the in and out date of the book and a rating of the book 1-5 when it was returned.



*Mobile Book Club*

We handed it over to Vuyo, our CBN facilitator at Die Kop in October 2020. She managed the book club from her home where the children could come and borrow the books. We collected the books the end of January 2021 to replace with a variety graded books. The books are discreetly marked with coloured stickers to indicate the level of the book. Children do not know the meaning of the colours.

We would like to expand our Mobile Book Club to other parts of the town. Therefore, we have partnered with The Star program and Creative Skills to make sure we can help where it is needed most.



*Mobile Book Club*

We look forward to running with this program and increasing a love of reading amongst our children.

## **PREMISES**

For four years we have enjoyed office space and the use of a classroom at Norfolk Place. When the building went on sale, the owner (Royd Frith) allowed us to stay on. When lockdown made workshops there impossible, he immediately cancelled the rent. We remain deeply thankful for that kindness.

When the building was sold, we had to move our books and equipment. Kindness again! Friends of CBN (Penny and William Louw) purchased a large garden hut for us, which now stands in Lesley Beake's garden. The rest of the 'premises' are Lesley's home office.

It is too soon to predict what will happen as far as workshops are concerned, but we have some ideas in mind for cooperation with other organizations where we might share premises.

## **NETWORK**

### **Friends of CBN**

CBN has made many friends over the years and their encouragement is deeply appreciated. A full list of donors is attached separately with our financial report, but – more than financially – their support and belief has made all our work possible. Thank you.

### **Local Network**

Crises makes change – and we looked for support, and to give support, to other organizations working with Stanford's children. Contact was, and will be ongoing, including at the schools where we hope to be represented in future.

We were in close contact with Stanford Rotary and some of the funding from Rotweil Rotary was diverted to their feeding schemes. School feeding was suspended (unbelievably) by government during lockdown. The people of Stanford made sure that nobody went hungry. In fact, Vuyo (who was also part of that project) handed out our CBN materials to children waiting in the queue for a plate of hot food.

We also worked with Creative Skills Factory and our children participated in their Festival during a rare week of opportunity between serious lockdowns, when we all hoped that the worst was over. That, of course, was before the reality of the second wave.

Rotweil Rotary in association with Springfontein Wine Estate in Stanford have been amazing in this time of crisis. Without their help, we would not have been able to reach as many children so

consistently over the last year. We are deeply appreciative of their care and concern for our Stanford children.



*Colouring books donated by Rotweil Rotary*



### **Book Dash**

This wonderful organization – who celebrated their millionth book donated to children under five last year – continue to support us with books that we can give to children to keep for themselves. We were able to give out 800 books in 2020.



## MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Attached separately, are the meticulous reports made every week by Wilien van Zyl. They give an encouraging sense of the commitment children are showing to what we do. (PDF under OUR RECORDS.)

### RESPONSE FROM CHILDREN (Even more important!)

#### Happiness Project Survey

Question 1	Answers
Why do you come to CBN?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Because I love CBN</li> <li>• CBN makes me happy</li> <li>• I like books and papers</li> <li>• I love to go to CBN is it is good to me</li> <li>• I love reading</li> <li>• I come to have fun</li> <li>• I love to read</li> <li>• I love reading</li> <li>• I love everything and reading</li> <li>• I love drawing</li> <li>• I love to read</li> <li>• I love CBN</li> </ul>

Question 2	Answers
What activity do you like best? (‘Holiday’ was a special project for the summer, not days with no reading!)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holiday</li> <li>• Holiday</li> <li>• Swimming</li> <li>• Touch</li> <li>• Holiday</li> <li>• To take photos with a mask with my happiness book</li> <li>• To write in my happiness book</li> <li>• Soccer</li> <li>• Taste</li> <li>• Playing with my friends</li> <li>• Clapping games</li> <li>• Clapping games</li> </ul>



Question 3	Answers
<p>What is your favourite book from this unit and why? (Yhekeyanga is an isiXhosa book about cricket hero Yanga.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flicker and Flash, because I read about different kinds of culture</li> <li>• Charlie and the Chocolate factory, because I like chocolate</li> <li>• Flicker and Flash, because I learn to make things with my hands</li> <li>• Flicker and Flash, because I read about different kinds of culture</li> <li>• The festival of Chariots</li> <li>• An African Mother Christmas, because I love Gcina Mhlophe's stories</li> <li>• The big clean-up, because it shows us to be clean in our community</li> <li>• The street party, because I love parties</li> <li>• The big clean-up, because they are about cleaning the road</li> <li>• The Spring loaded, because my dream is to fly up to the moon</li> <li>• Dudu's Hat, because I love throwing things out the window</li> <li>• My favourite book is Yhekeyanga</li> </ul>

Question 4	Too difficult	Just right	Too easy
Are the stories:			X
	X		
			X
		X	
		X	
		X	
		X	
	X		
		X	
		X	
	X		

Question 5	Taste	Touch	Seeing	Scnt	Holiday	Swimming
Which topic was your favourite?						
	X					
					X	
			X			
				X		
					X	
	X					
						X
				X		
						X
				X		
			X			

Question 6	Answer
Was there any topic you didn't like?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No</li> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• No</li> </ul>

## WORKSHOPS

Vuyo struggled valiantly to fly the CBN flag at all times, allowing small numbers of masked children to come to her home and work there. We are working on a plan to make use of a community hall at De Kop when the pandemic is better under control. For now, we continue with distance learning.



## **READING TOOLBOXES**

This major project is having a complete revamp to adjust to current conditions. We are looking for funding for each of the three reading toolboxes on an individual basis:

Red Toolbox	Books and Stories (age about ten)
Green Toolbox	Environment (age about eleven)
Blue Toolbox	Time and Landscape (age about twelve)

More details at:

<https://www.childrensbook.co.za/reports/toolboxes>

## **MITCHELL'S PLAIN**

This long-planned outreach programme, begun so optimistically at the end of 2019 has had to be put on hold. In January 2020 we held three workshops in Mitchell's Plain with local organizations working with children and reading. All further work had to be cancelled. We hope to be able to revive this important part of CBN's delivery to communities.

## **FRANSCHHOEK LITERARY FESTIVAL**

The long-established FLF children's book event was cancelled during the pandemic. Plans to have a day of reading activism with our Mitchell's Plain colleagues have also been put on hold.

## **CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS**

We gave support in the form of endorsement of their Rainbow Reader programme and are currently talking to them about further involvement with the toolboxes.

## **OTHER PROJECTS**

So many projects had to be abandoned after last February – the IZIKO music projects with VOX Cape Town, Franschhoek Book Week cancelled, Mitchell's Plain only just launched ... and cancelled. But we have stayed in touch with all of these and will revive when it is possible. Our training programme for more local facilitators had to be cancelled too.

## **NEW PROJECTS**

- Book Club extension
- Back-up to other projects and schools
- Training for facilitators in Stanford South
- Audio visual project in Stanford South and De Kop informal settlement

## **WEBSITE**

The website was updated early in January 2021, but other projects have got somewhat in the way (particularly the revision of the toolbox project). We also hope to revive the newsletter. There are only three of us, working at other jobs as well, and sometimes, something has to give!

## **SOCIAL MEDIA (BY Daisy Verburg)**

Daisy Verburg our new social media and fundraiser joined CBN October 2020. An interesting time it was to try and get funding and hold fundraisers to raise money as the pandemic made it extremely tough to do this. Our social media platform was our main focus for the last couple of months, mainly Facebook and Instagram where we could keep our local friends and community up to date with all the projects and activities we were doing with the children. We got money and appliances we needed donated to us, - social media does help to get our message and our initiative out there. I thank all of our followers, donators and funders for all their help. Without you all CBN would not be where it is today even in the circumstances we have faced. Keep sharing our stories and spreading the love and commitment to a great cause, and we will keep sharing our happy children learning and reading to you.

## **FUNDING**

Full report in a separate PDF with our financials. Fund-raising has now been taken on by Daisy Verburg, who is working hard on this difficult task.

### **Funding Ambassadors**

Nyasha Makwarimba (United Kingdom)  
Anele Mhlahlo (Canada)  
Nhlanhla Dlamini (Switzerland)

Our ambassadors have during this financial year, raised a total of \$2 000

## DONORS IN KIND

Penny and William Louw for a wooden hut to store our equipment in.  
Hugh Clarke for constant help with computers  
Rashid Khota for a most generous donation of children's books  
Caro Swartz for chocolate treats at Christmas  
Hildegard Witbooi for facilitating the biggest teddy bear of all  
Regina Broenner for cooperation on Book Club and for inviting CBN children to be part of the Stanford Festival  
Various anonymous people who gave us used audio visual equipment

## FINANCIALS

To be added after audit by end March. We have around R90 000 in the bank.

Details of our funding proposal are at:

<https://www.childrensbook.co.za/sites/default/files/resource-documents/cbn-funding-proposal-2020.pdf>

Please consider forwarding to anyone you know who might be interested.

To end on a positive note, just look at the photographs of the children we work with.

We cannot fail them.













#### Note on Photographs

All children have masks and we provide hand sanitizer as well as books. There are a few photographs from the start of lockdown where children are not masked. It took them a little while to adapt. We miss seeing their smiles. On the website, all photographs of unmasked children are from previous years.