FUNDING THE TOOLBOXES: BRIEF BUSINESS PLAN

Given the severe difficulties of fundraising in the current geopolitical and economic global situation, it is necessary to give a careful rethink to the way we approach this critical issue. We are about to launch a funding initiative that aims to raise R1m to complete the Reading Toolbox project and get it where it belongs. With the children.

Our long-term plan has always been (as was initially suggested by Rotary Newlands, who provided three of our early board members), to have a product to make CBN financially viable and less dependent on the generosity of others in difficult times.
We have such a product, nearing completion. It has been funded almost entirely by American friends who saw the importance of what we do, attended workshops for practical demonstrations and committed to help. It is the Reading Toolbox Project. www.childdrensbooks/toolbox.co.za

FIVE YEARS OF READING

This plan has taken a decade of hard work, voluntary passion and enthusiasm to complete. The Red Toolbox was launched in December 2025. The Green Toolboxes (2 of them) are in development. The Blue Toolboxes (also 2 of them) could be printed by early 2027. Between them they span 15 terms of reading and related activities and imaginative thinking spanning reading ages of between 10 years and 15 years.

There is a themed Reading Guide with for each of the 15 themes. Each guide has over 100 pages – making a total of over 1,500 pages of new, specially created material that has been exhaustively tested with children. It works.

With each Reading Guide comes a mini-library of themed books, both fiction and non-fiction – all contained in a Bookbag for ease of storage, which in turn fits into a sturdy wheeled box.

We have worked hard on a method of making both reading and creative writing attractive to children and young people. The key is to provide reading material – fiction and non-fiction – that catches their attention, interests and amuses them. It must be fun, fast paced and give a sense of

achievement. Readers need to succeed in reading before they will spend time working on being able to read more effectively.

THE TEST PROJECT: A YEAR OF READING

Initially, the Reading Toolboxes were intended for use by after-school groups, reading clubs, libraries and home schooling. Recently, we have been asked to help with reading in schools. Currently, we are running two projects in rural, under-resourced schools in Calitzdorp High School (Klein Karoo) and Okkie Smuts Primary School (in Stanford in the Overberg where we are based). This involves a total of 100 children and is causing some excitement, including spontaneous community fundraising for new books in Calitzdorp.

The project works because it involves minimal extra work by over-stretched teachers and is child-centred – written to *children* and not their facilitators. The reading guides in each themed bookbag treat readers as being full of possibilities, able to do anything if they are just given the reading ability and interests. That understanding is the key to a better future.

COSTS THUS FAR

All of this, plus printing the Red Reading Guides, has been independently funded and has cost R750 000 over 5 years.

FUTURE COSTING

By keeping the development costs out of the equation, we have brought down the current cost of each toolbox. Costs are in the Toolbox (optional) and the bookbags, printing the Reading Guides and – most importantly – the themed BOOKS that are provided in each bag. They are the most exciting and attention-grabbing books we can source and they really make a statement about the importance of the right books at the right time – on the right topics.

TRIALING MATERIAL

Generous Rotary and private sponsorship for workshops in Red Hill Informal Settlement (2012 to 2014), Clanwilliam (2015 to 2020) Stanford and Hermanus (2021-2026) and Calitzdorp (2025 and 2026) have enabled us to test all our material with underprivileged and under-resourced readers. We have given hundreds of workshops to thousands of children. All (until 2025 when we started working in schools) have been on a child-volunteer basis at weekends and in school holidays – and we are always oversubscribed.

FUNDING
POTENTIAL FOCUS FOR FUNDRAISING
1
NATIONAL GOVERNMENT:
Most national funding is directed at early learning. While we totally agree with the importance of beginning where education starts, this policy mostly excludes the next level from additional reading help. From Grade Four (10-year-olds) there is little support currently available.
2
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
There is more hope of funding here. The problem lies in the vast amount of time involved in applications. Our focus has been developing new reading materials, and we need to find a fundraiser who can devote the time needed for this.
3
TRUSTS AND FOUNDATIONS
We have not had much success with these, and again, the colossal amount of admin is beyond our scope.
4
PRIVATE INVESTMENT
We have been extremely fortunate in the generosity of several patrons over the years, people who believe that reading is the key to a future of any kind for the current generation of school-going children beyond Foundation Phase – those who are currently 10-years of age and beyond.
5
ROTARY both in South Africa (Cape of Good Hope, Newlands and Stanford) and overseas (Rottweil in Germany) and (Skelleftea in Sweden) have been incredibly supportive and generous. They have almost exclusively funded the whole workshop project from the beginning.
6
PRIVATE Internet-generated donations through GivenGain and private donations. We are about to launch our fund-raising project – The Book Whispering campaign- to bring this project more to public attention.

COMMERCIAL INVESTMENT

There is a business opportunity here and scope for social investment and job creation. One advisor that Lesley spoke to, at a function organized by

the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, asked: ‘Why don’t you do that yourselves?’

There are several answers to that.

We don’t have the expertise
We don’t have the capital
BUT
We do have the product

What we need
is a business or social responsibility partner who could take the fully developed product and get it out there to children in desperate need of exactly what we have in our office. Reading.

***