



## FLP DIRECTOR'S UPDATE March – May 2013

By Lynn Stefano

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This quarter has been very busy, with lots of travel and visitors, and new partnerships extending our work in new ways. And as you may know, I resigned in April, so we are in the midst of finding a new director. All this as our core work continues apace.

### **PARTNERSHIPS**

Wherever one turns in the NGO sector, there is talk of collaboration and partnerships. I am not sure whether this is a result of the funding crisis that the sector has faced in the past few years or not. What I do know is that our work would not be as varied and far reaching if we did not team up with other NGOs. So there is much to gain and learn. One thing we are finding is that while there is the view that partnerships cut down on admin and personnel costs, the time and resources spent on managing the relationship with another organisation is considerable. It has also been quite challenging in some cases to work with organisations whose culture and systems do not match ours. We now have partnerships with the following organisations or projects:

**Nal'ibali reading for pleasure initiative** – FLP has 20 children's reading clubs and 1 teen club for research purposes. Children love making their own books from the Avusa supplements, and Phumy Zikode, our literacy coordinator, uses information from the supplements to produce learning units that our facilitators use for their sessions. The Nal'ibali website and the supplements are choc-a-block with ideas on how to get children reading, writing and telling stories.

**Tembaletu and Aids Foundation of South Africa** – We are training 175 women as home visitors in Sisonke District in the Community Works Programme. We are reaching really vulnerable children through this work and feel quite alarmed that there are still so many children who are living in extremely difficult circumstances in our district. We train small groups of 15 women once a month, so we have opportunity to work closely with them over time to ensure they are learning, developing, and constantly improving the quality of their work with families. Jill Frow, Zimbili Dlamini and Florence Molefe are doing a sterling job working with these women who have no ECD background, and also in these partnerships which are to a greater or lesser degree quite demanding.

**African Storybook Project** - Judith Baker and her team have come up with a novel way to address the dearth of reading materials in African languages. The project will make available on their website African stories that can be translated and versioned to meet local needs. The initial phase will take place in South Africa, Kenya and Uganda. We are really pleased to partner with ASP – we will set up a pilot site (which will involve gathering stories, testing technology and doing research) for this project and have given them our three children's books to post on their website. I attach to this report a document providing an overview of the project.

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FAMILY LITERACY PROJECT (RF) NPC

**Durban office:** Box 441, Hillcrest, 3650, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

**Resource Centre and office:** 11 Bowling Club Lane, Underberg

Landline +27 (0)33 7011011

VAT registration no 4410259560

Registration no: 2000/005099/08

Cell ph +27 (0)82 3742276

Box 896, Underberg 3257 KwaZulu-Natal

website: [www.familyliteracyproject.co.za](http://www.familyliteracyproject.co.za)

NPO Certificate 012-450-NPO

BEE Certificate PVC\_1210001

**Khululeka integrated ECD model scale up** – we are coming to the close of this 15 month project where we trained 10 ward committee members in family literacy and Integrated Management of Childhood Illness (IMCI) and set up box libraries in 10 villages. The project was slow to start and working through a municipality has unique challenges. Being a pilot there understandably have been significant learnings for ourselves and the communities involved. One example is that there is now recognition by local leadership that people who are appointed as record keepers need to be functionally literate to be able to fulfil their duties ... something that was not recognised before FLP introduced the family literacy in the area.

**The Valley Trust** – we have been asked to train a coordinator and 12 facilitators to run adult groups in their catchment. They groups will be trained family literacy and the Reflect approach, to equip them to work with adults, and Chris Gibson will cover the IMCI materials.

**Save Act** - We continue our very solid relationship with Save Act as they start training a further four FLP groups in the Bulwer area. Five FLP network groups have been successfully running their savings club for the past three years.

**Africa!ignite Story Tents** – This innovative project will travel around KZN visiting provincial libraries, erecting a story tent for a week at a time, to encourage people to visit the libraries and participate in a variety of literacy related activities. FLP will train their staff to read to children.

## **PREPARE FOR LIFE: RAISING AWARENESS FOR EARLY LITERACY EDUCATION**

I was very fortunate to be invited to present our work at this conference in Leipzig, Germany in March, hosted by Stiftung Lesen. Thirty five countries were represented, which made the content varied and interesting. One of the key themes that came out of the conference was the impact that listening has in developing the language and literacy abilities of children from birth. We need to emphasise listening and responding rather than always focus on teaching in these early years. I attach the recommendations that came out of the conference.

## **UTHANDO DOLL MAKERS**

Georgia Efford, the founder of Uthando Dolls, with six Australian doll makers visited FLP in May as part of their tour of organisations they support in KZN. We were delighted to host them at our new centre, and to spend a day with them making dolls at Ndodeni community library with 19 local women. They brought many gifts including literacy materials, dolls and materials, and donated over R4000 for eight women to attend a Dlanathi Play 4 Communication workshop. They women will share with their groups what they have learned, and plan to start making dolls to be used in FLP's work. We were deeply touched by these wonderful doll makers, representing many others in Australia, who give freely of their time and resources to make beautiful, soft black dolls for our children, expecting absolutely nothing in return. This is a rare quality in the world today that is so driven by money and recognition.

## **STAFF CHANGES**

After 7 years with FLP, and 5 as director, I will be leaving at the end of September when my husband transfers to Cape Town. This is a bitter-sweet change for me – our son lives there and it was our home for 8 years so we have close ties with and love the

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mother city. But I am also deeply committed to our work, and have developed a taste for rural life! I am sure I will need time to adjust to my new environment. I have given FLP 6 months' notice so that we have time to find a suitable replacement for me and I can properly hand over my work.

It is very disappointing that our new M&E coordinator left after 3 months. We always say that rural development work is not for the faint-hearted. Sadly she did not feel safe travelling on the roads in our district - no doubt there were other issues that she never acknowledged. This has been a blow for us, as I took 2 years to find the funds for this senior post, and three months orienting and training her to a point where she was just about to introduce a major new monitoring process to the team. We are now hoping that we can replace her quickly with someone with M&E background who may have applied for the director's position but doesn't have the management skills. This is not the first time that we have had problems with employing someone from outside of the district ... it really is one of the challenges of working so remotely.

### **ON A POSITIVE NOTE**

Our fourth library playground is being installed this month, we have just purchased new books for our literacy groups and toys and books for the home visitors, and our facilitators have started doing monitoring visits to support home visitors to cover all aspects of our programme with the families they visit.

### **PLANS FOR THE NEXT QUARTER**

- Appoint a new director and M&E Coordinator
- Attend Nal'ibali training
- Host Reflect training
- Celebrate four literacy groups joining the Family Literacy Network
- Five staff will attend a Curriculum Development Programme workshop on 'Family enrichment for 0-6 year olds'
- A celebration to open our new Centre, welcome our new director, and for me to say goodbye.