

# The SOUNDS Project



The week of 24 November proved to be a very productive 5 days for Brenda Ericson (the US champion for the SOUNDS project), her partner Norman and Robin Jones of RCPE. The SOUNDS project, funded by Rotary International global grants, is a joint project between the RCPE, our District 9400, the Rotary Clubs of Pretoria West, Waterkloof, two clubs in Atlanta USA, namely Peachtree City and Smyrna, their District 6900 and the Rotary Foundation.



Brenda Ericson and her partner Norman were in SA from 24 to 28 November 2014 to continue work on the SOUNDS project



Robin Jones and Brenda Ericson (left), the champions for the SOUNDS project, at the Makotse Women's Club near Polokwane

The project provides literacy materials to pre-school crèches and Grade R classrooms in primary schools in Mamelodi and surrounding areas. The materials consist of a set of letters that is used by teachers to introduce the phonic sound of letters to children.

Emphasis is placed on the sound, shape and feel of the letter as the foundation for the first steps in literacy. Each letter also has the appropriate Braille character on the base of the SOUN letter to ensure correct orientation of the letter.



Day one, they visited three schools; Day two was a field trip to Makotse Women's Club near Polokwane, where they met up with two Peace Corps volunteers at a very well-organised shelter similar to the Winterveldt site, but with a crèche also attached; Day 3, they visited two schools and met with our potential M Ed student; Day 4, took them to two crèches and on Day 5, they rounded off with visits to three schools and the US Peace

Corps offices. Three other RCPE members, Connie, Clive and Sharon also joined the group on one of the days.

Every one of these visits brought out something new. Overall, they were impressed with the generally improved level of professionalism showed by school principals, their HODs and the teachers. At several of the original schools, established teachers have acted as amazing trainers of new staff, not only passing on the ideas of the Rotary group, but incorporating their own innovations and successes.

One teacher at Sunsparrows crèche is using the programme on 1 to 2 year olds with amazing success. At



the Makotse crèche, the staff members were not only interested to see the programme in action, but there were many parents attending who were equally keen.

The visits to schools occurred during the closing days of the academic year, but teachers have all learnt that they pick up useful ideas from Brenda and are therefore very welcoming. At one school, the comment was made how the teachers appreciated that visits take the form of workshops and not lectures where the lecturer leaves directly after the presentation.



Sharon also attended the literacy training session for the youngsters



US Peace Corps Volunteers assist Brenda Ericson in the classroom

At Legora School two new grade R classrooms were opened this year and the original Grade R teacher, one of the best, has passed her enthusiasm and expertise to two new teachers and a trainee teacher who wants the programme at her new school next year.

At Sunnyside Primary, one grade 1 teacher asked some of her pupils to read to the classroom. She was requested to ask one of the weaker children to also read and that child was able to read from one of the books from Books in Homes, albeit slowly but correctly, sounding out words with which he was not familiar. The tales go on, the programme expands, the teachers' skills improve and an increasing number of children are entering the realm of confident readers.

Once learners have mastered 12 to 15 sounds, the learner is then introduced to the building of words (the first step to writing) and then to sounding out words, (the first step to reading).

So far the project has been introduced to 12 schools in Mamelodi with the support of the Gauteng Education Department, 125 crèches with the support of the SA Congress of Early Childhood Development, the US Peace Corps Volunteers in 88 classrooms, University of Pretoria outreach students and PEN, a grouping of 21 inner city crèches in Pretoria. In total, an estimated 15 000 learners are reached every year with the 380 sets already distributed.