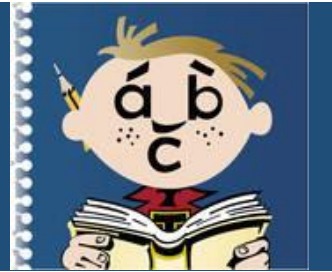


SOUNDS is expanding its footprint

By Robin Jones



A child searches for a letter by touch - a key component of the SOUNDS learning method. The teachers pick it up quickly as well.

The SOUNDS project is funded by Rotary International global grants. Brenda Erickson is the US champion for the SOUNDS project and co-sponsor from the US Rotary Club of Peachtree City. Every now and again, we have the opportunity to expand the programme into new “homes”.

The week of 8 to 12 February proved to be a highlight in this regard and also marked the first visit of Brenda to SA since March 2015. Her busy itinerary commenced on the Monday with a visit to Peace Corps Volunteer, Penny Bennett, about 50km north of Bronkhorstspuit. Penny has introduced the SOUNDS literacy programme to 10 crèches.

There were a total of 17 teachers at the session. One of the teachers we met during a previous visit had proudly brought along her “word” board, a really encouraging initiative, but illustrates the need to be careful with the letter orientation, look at the “m”.

On Tuesday, we visited the new offices of PEN where 16 teachers from 15 crèches attended. PEN has been using the SOUNDS programme since 2012 and each year about 1 400 children benefit.

On the Wednesday, we paid a follow-up visit to the crèche, Little Hearts, which is one of many crèches associated with SA Cares. Our first visit to this crèche occurred less than 2 weeks previously and the two teachers originally trained were able to demonstrate to a group of 12 new teachers from 10 additional crèches what has already been achieved. The outcome of these two visits to Little Hearts has helped establish a strong initial contact with SA Cares.

Thus in the space of three days, 45 new teachers were trained who conservatively each have 20 pupils in their classrooms, thus 900 children brought into an effective literacy programme.

At each venue, the teachers were challenged to have their grade R children achieve goals by year end, goal 1 by three months, the children should sound out at least 11 of the letter sound associations, goal 2 by end of term 2, children should be building simple words and by the end of term 3, some children should be sounding out simple words from text, three key steps to children becoming effective readers.



On Thursday and Friday we visited two schools that were brought into the project at the end of 2015. The training at these sites to both Grade R staff (7 teachers and approximately 210 pupils) and Grade 1 (6 teachers and approximately 300 pupils) was very well co-ordinated and Brenda and I had sufficient opportunity to take the staff through a thorough re-training.

One additional visit on Thursday was to the CSIR Lazer Centre where Clive joined us to see the progress made with the manufacturing of SOUNDS letters. Their initial attempts are a long way from an acceptable final product, but over the coming months it is hoped that they will be able to improve the final product such that it is safe and appealing for children to use.

Two frustrations occurred during the week. Despite many attempts, we were unable to meet with staff of the Gauteng Educational Department and staff at the Peace Corps head office. Both contacts are important and in the coming weeks efforts will be made to meet with these organisations.



The children demonstrate their knowledge of the first six letters taught in the SOUNDS programme



SOUNDS is a very rewarding project with results occurring in front of your eyes. And best of all, the children obviously enjoy it!

The week’s achievements were very gratifying. At every venue, the level of enthusiasm is great, especially in the crèches. Doors are opened for us to effectively have a free hand in training the staff and the challenges made to the staff were well received.

There is no doubt that the team of Brenda and Edie have learnt a few tricks over the years such that the outcomes of our visits are being more and more effective and are being appreciated by both the teaching staff, the management of crèches and the administrators in the schools visited.