

Zimbabwe Reading Promotion 2016: Outcomes and learning

In 2016, Book Aid International piloted a reading promotion programme. The charity provided funding, marketing materials, advice and support to allow libraries to hold reading promotion events on or around International Literacy Day 2016.

Each participating library prepared a report on their activities, learning and impacts as well as their hopes for future reading promotion activities.

The following report was prepared by the staff of Book Aid International partner in Zimbabwe, Edward Ndlovu Memorial Trust (ENMT).

Description of participating library

Edward Ndlovu Memorial Library (ENML) is a public library situated in Gwanda central business district. Its infrastructure is a state of the art building with two separate library wings, one for children and the other for adults. It also has two offices and a reception area. On the outside the library is surrounded by ever green gardens, a combination of trimmed lawns and assortment of flowers and trees. The library has a collection 30,000 books and serves the whole of Gwanda district.

Apart from the library service in Gwanda town ENMT also provides services to rural communities through two programmes. These are the Book Box programme and the Study Circles programme. The Book Box programme provides reading materials to community schools dotted around Gwanda district. The Study Circle programme aims at improving rural livelihoods through income generating projects using a Swedish concept called Study Circle which is a participatory approach to community development.

Gwanda town has a population of 20,227, 38.8% of which are children. It is the provincial capital of Matabeleland South Province and hosts government administration offices. Gwanda is a mining town without any factory surrounded by mines most of which produce gold. This makes the government and the mining sector the major employers. A great proportion of the population is also into informal mining and trade. The town has nine nurseries, five primary schools, two secondary schools, a polytechnic college/teacher training institution, a nursing school and one long-distance learning university. Generally, Gwanda has a youthful population.

The reading promotion event

The staff reported for work at 6am so as to mount a tent and arrange seating as the event was held outside the library as we expected a large crowd. The starting time for the event was 8:30am.

We started off with a march across Gwanda central business district to the library. Over 90 people made up this procession including, school children, parents, library staff, teachers and

the general public. At the forefront we held a banner stating the event and theme. Leading the procession were drummer majorities from St Christopher's Primary school. The Zimbabwe Republic Police provided an escort.

The event started at gam with a word of prayer and national anthem. In attendance was a hired photographer. As Master of Ceremonies was Mrs T. Dube a lecture at the local college.

Welcome remarks and overview of the event were given by the ENMT Director who gave a brief history of the International Literacy Day celebrations and explained the core objectives of ENMT as an organisation. He acknowledged the role played by Book Aid International and other stakeholders in both organising the event and in supporting literacy.



The main event was read aloud sessions from school children and adults

The main event was the read aloud sessions. Each school chose a book from a shelf of selected books and read it aloud to the attendant audience. There were four categories; primary, secondary, adult education and senior citizens.



Schools took it in turns to make presentations

Schools then took turns to make presentations (poems, speeches) on the annual theme of the celebrations 'Reading the past and writing the future'.

The EMNT Director gave a speech on behave Book Aid International.

This was followed by a speech from the Guest of Honour. He gave a definition of literacy from an educationist perspective. He further spoke of the role of guardians in creating a reading generation and went on to talk of the role and the programmes the government has set up to address the issue of non-readers in schools.

The adult literacy group performed a play which left people who attended the event in stitches. The play depicted the importance of education added an aspect of corporate responsibility. This was an encouragement to the community that they can contribute to the achievement of 100% literacy by investing their resources on the young.



The last activity was the awarding of prizes

The last activity was the awarding of prizes to participating schools and individuals. This was set in such a way that every participant was rewarded for their participation. Also given prizes were parents chosen for their involvement in cultivating a reading culture in their children. These parents have been observed coming with their children to the library, assisting them select books and at times sit and read for their children. Two parents Mr Tsikira and Mr Gonha both bring their children at least four times a week and have shown great interest in their children's reading interests.

Closing remarks were given by a tutor from the Gwanda School of Nursing who extended their gratitude to Book Aid International for not only supporting literacy through ENMT but also for the medical books they receive from Book Aid International through the Bulawayo Book Distribution Committee.

The public was then invited for a tour of the library.

Media

We sent invites but they did not attend. But for publicity of the event we engaged a loud hailer and went around the high and low density suburbs the evening before the event notifying the Gwanda community of the event. We were happy with the turnout

Feedback

The Guest of Honour was Mr A. Rupanga- the District Education Officer.

Also present were dignitaries who included the Mayor and Town Clerk and representatives from various institutions in Gwanda and business people.

Attendants were delighted with colourfulness of the children's library, particularly the Children's Corner and the size of the collection ENML has.

Teachers from the invited schools were attracted by the ODC and contemplated creating similar areas in their respective schools.

Children, some of which had not used the library before loved the various games on display at the library (cards, dominos, snake and ladders, puzzles).

Some heads said now had ideas on how to structure their school libraries.

People commended the occasion with some asserting that it was only in Gwanda where you are rewarded for helping your child to develop a reading culture. They also requested that this be an annual event held every year if it be possible.

What has changed?

The event was held less than a week ago and it could be too soon to notice significant changes in attitudes. But library users on the Saturday after the event surpassed any other weekend with over 200 children in the children's library and a full house in the adults wing.

For whom has the change occurred?

Both adults and children.

Is the change significant?

Too soon to comment on significance.

What led to the change?

The invitation to the library through the hailer was a good publicity method which raised public awareness of the library and its services.

The tour of the library made people to appreciate the library and its collection (85% of which are donations from Book Aid International)

Also of significance was the rewarding of participants for their own literacy it was a great motivation for the community (prizes came from Book Aid International)

How would you seek to improve this intervention?

- Make the event a whole day event
- Plan for the day and engage stakeholder well before the event
- Source more funding to make the celebrations bigger
- Make the support for the event an annual one not a once off

Find out more

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Charity no: 313869 Company no: 880754

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