

THE STORY OF THE OTTO FOUNDATION

Changing the world book by book



THE DREAM



Improve early literacy by encouraging children to read for enjoyment

The Otto Foundation creates school libraries to provide access to books in safe, child-centred spaces.

We implement reading programmes to enable self-directed reading, and foster healthy self-exploration through creative expression.

We partner with schools to encourage positive engagement around books between children and their families/caregivers to involve the whole school community in early learning.

The thread that binds everything we do is the intention to spark and tend the hopes and dreams of children through the wonder of books and stories.

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1. The Otto Foundation

How did it start?

The Otto Foundation is the philanthropic trust of the Otto family. The trust was established by Chris Otto and his daughter, Zephne Ladbrook, in 2016.

Our strategic focus

The Otto Foundation aims to improve early literacy by:

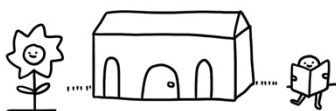
- fostering a love of reading,
- promoting access to books, and
- developing and promoting contextually relevant reading materials for South African children.

Our strategic focus is a response to South Africa's literacy crisis. 'Progress in International Reading Literacy' (PIRLS) studies indicate that 4 out of 5 Grade 4 learners in South Africa are unable to read with comprehension in any language – and thus lack the foundational literacy required for their education journey¹.

Our theory of change

Input and Activities

The time, skills and financial resources of the Otto Foundation are used to:



① Establish school libraries

② Provide support to school library assistants

③ Implement school-based programmes to promote reading for enjoyment

Target Audience

Our stakeholders. The people our work serves and supports:



Educators

Learners

Parents and caregivers

Output

Accessible school libraries and actively managed reading programmes providing:



Access to books

+

Safe, comfortable reading spaces

+

Choice in reading material

+

An environment in which reading is valued

+

Reading role models

Outcome

An increase in reading for enjoyment

Impact

Improved reading skills and ability to read with comprehension

¹ Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). 2016. 'South African Children's Reading Literacy Achievement'. Available. [Online]: https://www.up.ac.za/media/shared/164/ZP_Files/pirls-literacy-2016_grade-4_15-dec-2017_low-quality.zp137684.pdf

The rationale behind the focus on reading for enjoyment

There is strong research evidence linking reading for enjoyment (or “voluntary” or “independent” reading) to improved literacy outcomes.

Children who read for pleasure perform better on reading tests, and the amount of time spent on independent reading has been identified as one of the best predictors of the gains made in reading achievement between the ages of 8 and 11².

Reading for enjoyment is also more important for children’s educational success than their family’s socio-economic status³ - a crucial finding for the South African context, where income inequality is high, and education outcomes are so often correlated with household income.

2. Our library projects to date

The Otto Foundation has established three full school libraries and a reading and therapy room serving five schools in the District Six area in Cape Town⁴.



Photo: The Protea Library at Walmer Estate Primary School

We take great care in the design of the libraries to ensure that they are safe, beautiful, child-centred spaces that celebrate children and their creativity, and encourage holistic development.

² Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding. 1988. ‘Growth in Reading and How Children Spend Their Time outside of School’, Reading Research Quarterly, volume 23(3). Available. [Online]: <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ373263> (March 2022)

³ OECD (2002) in UK Department of Education. 2012. ‘Research evidence on reading for pleasure: Education standards research team’. Available. [Online]: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/284286/reading_for_pleasure.pdf (March 2022)

⁴ Zonnebloem Girls Primary School, Zonnebloem Boys Primary School, Walmer Estate Primary School, Holy Cross RC Primary School, and Zonnebloem NEST High School.

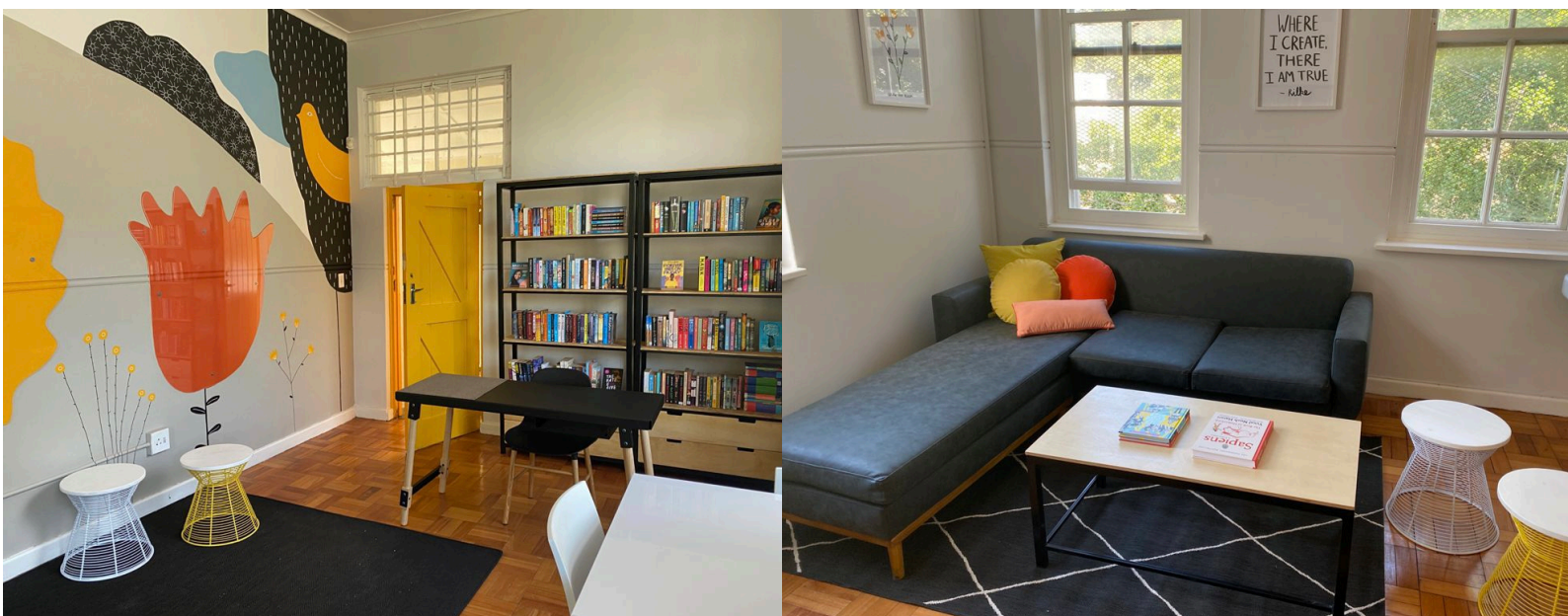


Photo: The Liyabona Library at Holy Cross RC Primary School



Photos: The Sunflower Learning Centre at Zonnebloem Girls' and Zonnebloem Boys' Primary Schools

We maintain active involvement in the management of the libraries, providing training and support to the full-time librarians, and running an on-going programme of initiatives to deepen the culture of reading at the schools.



Photos: The Reading and Therapy Room at the Zonnebloem NEST High School

3. Core elements of our reading for enjoyment programme

Our library assistants host **weekly library lessons** for every class/ grade in their schools. The lessons are informed by the reading and writing related outcomes in the CAPS (Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements) and aim to integrate and consolidate the learning that happens in the classroom.

Learners are encouraged to be **reading role models** for each other. Each school appoints a group of learners as library monitors. These monitors (called Reading Champions) co-ordinate quarterly Book Buddy sessions in which older learners read with younger ones.



Photos: The Book Buddy programme

We continue to invest in the library catalogues to ensure that learners have access to a variety of reading material. Our team works with a network of local publishers and booksellers to ensure that the books in our libraries are both representative of the lived experiences of the learners who use them, and are varied enough to expand the knowledge and world view of learners.



Photos: The Pen Pal Project and reading and writing competitions,

We celebrate and recognise reading as a valued activity through our annual reading relay and book quiz.

Learners are encouraged to voice their own opinions and write their own stories through our pen pal project, book review competitions and annual writing competition.

We host regular author readings to deepen our learner's appreciation for books and the process through which books are created.

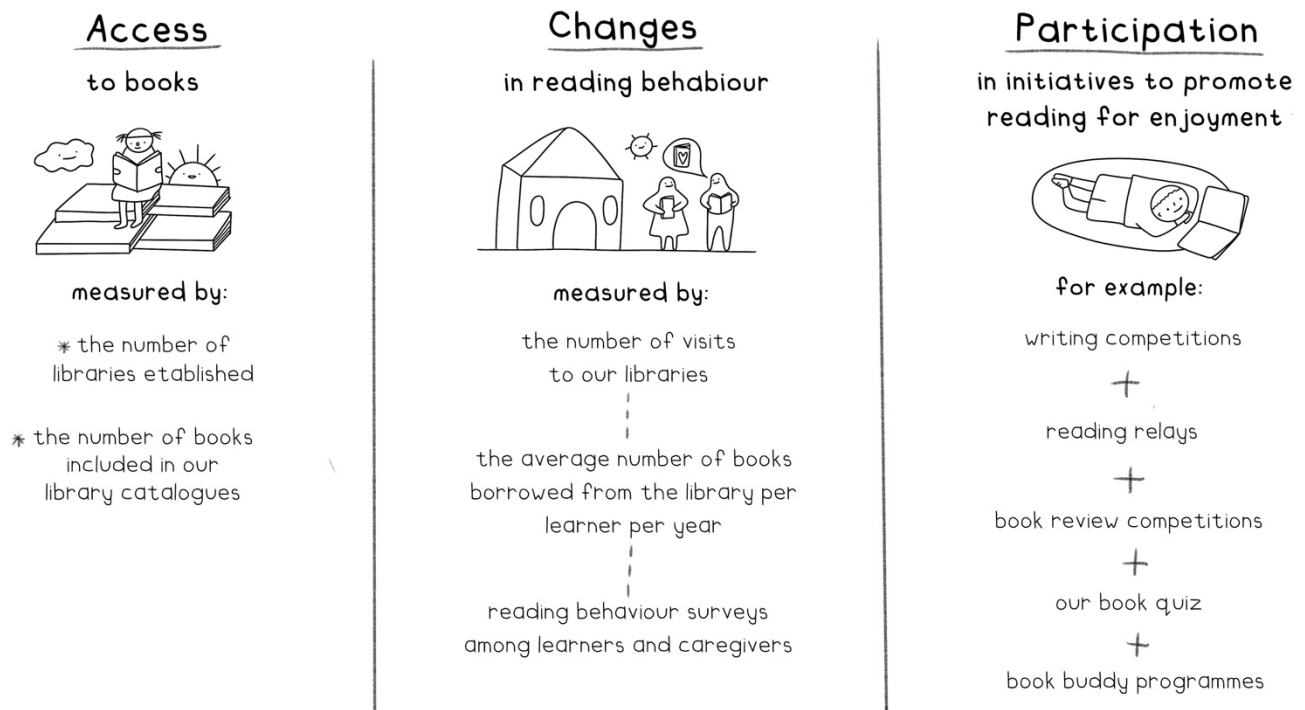
We have created a reading journal for children to provide learners with a roadmap to explore the world of words and books.

We create worksheets with book-/ story-based activities and conversation prompts for parents and learners to go through together. The aim is to encourage reading and conversations about stories in the home.

4. How we measure success

The research regarding the correlation between increases in reading for enjoyment and improved education outcomes is unequivocal.

We focus our monitoring and evaluation on the measurable elements associated with creating an environment in which a culture of reading can be nurtured, including:



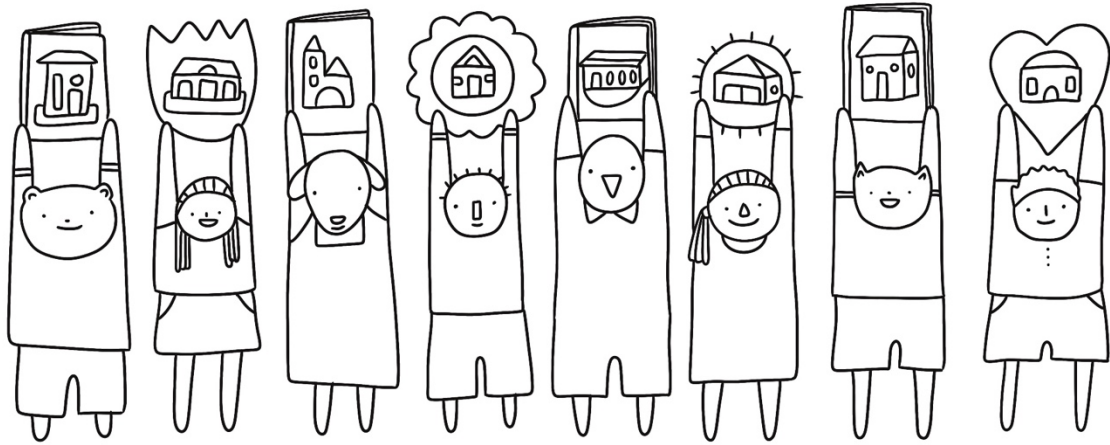
We monitor improvements in literacy outcomes through the language scores of participating schools in the standardised tests of the Western Cape Education Department for Grade 3 and Grade 6 learners. There are, however, a variety of variables that impact on these test scores. We therefore consider our impact on these results to be contribute rather than attributive.

5. Our plans for the next five years

Expanding our library family

We have set a goal for our team to add five new libraries to our library network over the next five years, starting with the Sunbird Library that will be opened at Chapel Street Primary School in 2022. The Sunbird Library is being developed and funded through a partnership between the Otto Foundation, the Western Cape Education Department, and the Waterfront Rotary Club.

Our team is geared for both the establishment and ongoing support of this growing network of libraries. We have optimised our internal operations and project management and have developed in-house expertise in child-centred design and literacy support.



Establishing a platform to share high-quality library resources

We are also working towards the development of a platform through which the visual and academic resources created for our libraries can be shared for use by other schools, libraries and literacy organisations – thus expanding the reach of our programmes aimed at promoting reading for enjoyment.




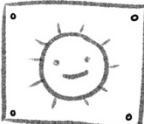
6. Partnership opportunities

Our fundraising focus

Operational costs associated with the Otto Foundation itself (including Otto Foundation staff costs) are covered by the Otto Family. All new funding goes towards projects on the ground that directly benefit children - thus: either building libraries or running the reading programmes that builds the culture of reading in the school communities where we work.

The partnerships we are looking for

We value partnerships, and are continuously seeking collaboration with other organisations interested in funding and implementing programmes aimed at promoting reading for enjoyment.


 **Get in touch if you...** 

Want to contribute to:

- * Improving access to books
- * Behavioural change that supports reading
- * The sharing of high quality library resources

Are interested in:



- * Raising a generation of readers
- * Getting local stories told
- * A holistic approach to literacy development

 Have ideas for:

- * Literacy support for schools
- * Empowering children to author their own stories
- * Nurturing empathy and mindfulness through reading

Would like to invest in:

- * Creating beautiful libraries
- * Curriculum aligned library programmes
- * Training opportunities for librarians
- * Promoting local literature

7. Follow our work and contact our team

Visit our website at www.ottofoundation.org

Follow us on social media: @ottofoundation (Instagram) or @ottofoundationSA (Facebook)



Get in touch with our team (from left to right: Chané, Zephne, Xanelé, Nonikiwe, Frouwien, Pam)

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