



THE LEARNING TRUST

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

:: QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER ::



Taking Better Care of Ourselves to Better Care for Others

As a sector that works to support, develop and improve the lives of children, youth and communities, we are always ready to serve others, particularly in times of despair and crisis. However, there's a collective sentiment that has revealed how this work and its pressures have multiplied during the pandemic and, as a result, left many feeling stressed, frustrated, over-stretched and jaded.

How do we take care of our own mental and emotional well-being in these times, when the weight of responsibility to support others is so heavy? And how do we ensure our organisations foster healthy and supportive working environments?

This past quarter, we held two events that sought to centre the emotional and mental well-being of organisational leaders and practitioners on the frontlines. The first event was part of our webinar series and asked, 'Who takes care of the carer?' in an attempt to determine the ways in which organisations can implement care-practices to support staff. The second event was part of our 'After School Action Programme' from the Makhanda Community of Practice, which focused on, 'How to process trauma/anxiety in a working environment during Covid-19'.

The sessions gave our grantees and partners the rare opportunity to reflect on the past few months, talk about the ways the lockdown period has affected them emotionally, and share what they've done to cope with some of the stress and anxieties that have heightened in this period. It quickly became apparent in the open discussions that grantees struggled to prioritise their state of wellness above that of their colleagues and beneficiaries. The reality is, managers and practitioners from different organisations rarely get an opportunity to meet, introspect on their well-being, and express these feelings in the context of work. Our sessions provided a safe, non-judgemental and comforting space to allow for free expression and collective guidance. In addition to the value of such sessions on the self, there is [research](#) that reveals that once practitioners take better care of the inner-self, they gain an enhanced ability to have a profound impact on the developmental work they do.

There were a number of important insights and lessons that arose from the wellness sessions, focusing on individual wellness and organisational practices to support the well-being of staff:

Wellness for the self	Wellness in our organisation
Achieving a healthy well-being is a journey and requires commitment and significant effort.	Regularly connect with partner organisations. Talk about challenges, what works, what doesn't, how to support and learn from each other.
Practice self-care activities like meditation, yoga, journaling, walks/jogs, cooking/baking, art making.	Hold longer check-in/reflection/feedback sessions to find out how staff is really doing, beyond work.
Take a break from frequent news updates and social media engagement – manage your screen time.	Taking care of individual staff needs produces a ripple effect, resulting in higher drive, a sense of purpose, openness and greater collaboration.
It's okay not to feel in control. You don't always have to be strong. Ask for help when overwhelmed.	Develop well-being plans collectively with staff, and find out what they feel is lacking in support systems.

If we are to dedicate ourselves to the essential work of supporting our learners and their communities, then we need to move away from the traditional 'heroic' and 'sacrificial' approach we take to our work. The danger of this approach is that it requires us to negate our own mental and emotional health in perpetual service of others. Instead, taking care of ourselves and creating a human-centric culture in our organisations plays an essential and more significant role in ensuring that our work achieves the impact we desire.

The Future of our Webinar Series



With some organisations opening their onsite After School Programmes (ASPs), it's important to adjust to the new state of things.

We ran a survey on participants of our webinars that has helped to inform our future webinars. According to our survey results, the topics of mental health and wellness (for learners and grantee staff) have been the most favoured themes from the 6 webinars held in the past 3 months, especially due to the conversational and discursive approach they took.

We plan to factor these thematic and format elements in future webinars, as grantees are eager to see the continuation of the webinar series even as ASPs reopen. With this considered, our webinars will now occur once per month instead of twice.

Safety Guidelines for reopening After School Programmes



The debate around safety concerns with regards to the reopening of schools remains a prominent one for government, communities, schools, and After School Programmes (ASPs).

While these conversations continue, it is important to ensure that ASPs take necessary measures to lessen the worries and health concerns that practitioners, parents and guardians might have about the opening of programmes. There are a number of practices and safety considerations that ASPs will have to consider in this regard. To support these plans, we have curated a comprehensive list of safety [guidelines](#) that organisations can use.

Feel free to download the document, share with your team and use it as a checklist to ensure your organisation is well prepared when reopening.

The Treasure Box Activity Packs reach over 100 000 learners across the country!



In March, we launched the [After School Treasure Box](#) – a collaborative project between partners working in the After School space. The initiative began as an attempt to provide an online resource portal of engaging home-based activities for learners during school closures and lockdown. By May, the Treasure Box partners had begun to curate and package content from these resources into printable activity packs that would be distributed by multiple organisations, reaching children in communities with limited access to the internet.

The first volume of our printed [Treasure Box Activity Packs](#) was translated into 5 languages. It contained activities and challenges tailored for grade 1-5 learners; from instructions on how to make your own mask, and a boardgame with ways to keep healthy and safe from Covid-19, to challenges that help children grow their minds, get creative, stay fit & strong, and take care of their emotions. With the help of over 100 non-profit organisations and schools in the Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Gauteng, we've distributed over 100 000 copies of the packs from the first volume.

The Treasure Box initiative has reached wide coverage across multiple [print](#) and [broadcast](#) media channels, with people particularly excited about the supplementary role that the packs have played in supporting learners at home. The Treasure Box also comes to life every Tuesdays and Thursdays with a 30 minute midday slot on [Radio Atlantis](#), with the narrative characters of Florence and Watson played by two young students from Atlantis, WC.

We are thrilled to be producing the second volume of the Treasure Box Activity Packs with even more educational challenges and games to play at home with family, as well as social distancing games to play at school with friends. This volume will be distributed across the country in the month of August, and targeted for grade 1-5 learners.

Art organisations collaborate to promote psychosocial health and well-being



The development of a child's physical and mental well-being begins early in life, and is often enhanced by numerous environmental factors and support structures. Art is one of the activities that has been shown to impact positively on early childhood development, enriching children's emotional, social and cognitive states.

For many public schools, Art does not feature prominently in the curriculum, nor is it facilitated effectively. After School Programmes offer children the exposure to art practice and often help children uncover hidden skills, creative talents, and other times, repressed trauma.

Through a virtual collaboration, [Music Works](#) organised a Community of Practice under the theme “Arts in Psychosocial Support,” as a means to engage Art-based organisations to promote the psychosocial health of communities and youth during lockdown. Led by a panel of speakers from various Arts & Culture organisations, this session proved that collaboration unifies and strengthens our voice as After School Programmes. The Community of Practice tackled difficult conversations relating to the stigma often associated with mental health and psycho-social issues impacting learners and communities.

In these times of uncertainty and great anxiety, these collective conversations are desperately needed to increase awareness, share lessons, and co-construct practical solutions.

Matric learners at Mamelodi Initiative receive 60 iPads with curricular toolkits



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Matric learners have been significantly affected and inconvenienced by school-closures and lockdown restrictions in the past quarter. E-learning was promoted by the Basic Education Department as the main alternative platform of learning for Matriculants across the country, negating the reality of millions of learners who lack access to devices, data, and resource moderation and support.

Recognising this great need, [iSchool Africa Education Trust](#) created a #MyFutureMatters programme that aimed to assist 10 000 matric learners with a digital toolkit. The toolkit consisted of iPads, containing zero-rated, high-quality curriculum content, national and provincial academic resources, and live study sessions with teachers and fellow matric learners. When iSchoolAfrica reached out to TLT to ask us to partner them with an After School programme that would benefit from this initiative, [Mamelodi Initiative](#) in Gauteng was an obvious choice.

Mamelodi Initiative has received 60 refurbished iPads from the programme, all sponsored by [Iress SA](#). The sponsors plan to use their entire investment to fund the Mamelodi and help them support their matric learners for the rest of this year!

The Answer Series offers book discounts to After School programmes

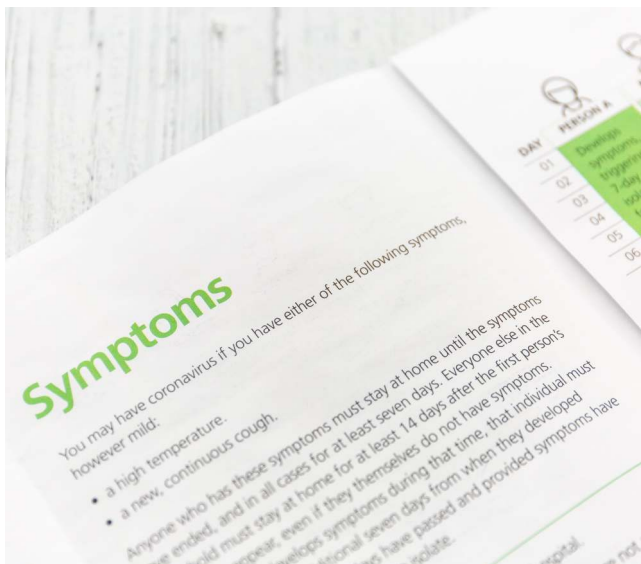


There is growing uncertainty over when schools will open again - beyond the 4 weeks communicated by President Ramaphosa - especially in the context of the ever-increasing cases of Covid-19. This uncertainty extends to After School Programmes that had plans in place for opening with schools.

As such, a number of online resources to support learning have been made available in this time. Through our engagements with the Answer Series team, we realise the need to support more ASPs with learning material in line with government requisites.

The Answer Series is offering discounts on a wide range of e-books and printed textbooks to ASPs. Visit their [website](#) for more details on the various subjects and titles.

A guide to managing mild cases of COVID-19 infection at home



There is an overwhelming amount of information around Covid-19 prevention and natural home treatments proliferating social media platforms.

We encourage our After School family to be discerning about the information they consume and share with their partners and beneficiaries, especially around recommended hygiene and health measures from unaccredited sources.

In an effort to offer a comprehensive guide to COVID-19 symptoms and ways to manage a mild case of the virus at home once infected, we support this "[Coping with Covid](#)" guide put together by two accredited doctors.

Feel free to download and share with all your networks. Let's keep each other safe and well-informed!

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