



Adult education

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We would like to tell you about a special group of people in Cape Town City Libraries called the Literacy Interest Group (LIG).

To understand how we came about and where we are now we take you on a trip through time right back to 1987.

Background

There was no structured literacy coordination at City Libraries and no recognition of the vast need in Cape Town or South Africa. Librarians, however, were convinced literacy and librarianship needed to have a connection.

A few of us decided to form a group and the first meeting of the Literacy Interest Group was held in July 1993. Membership was restricted to enthusiastic librarians concerned about literacy, and who would be prepared to work hard in their free time.

Our first priority was to look at what was needed in our library service and to ask management for money to buy adult literacy material for our libraries. R4 000,00 was allocated. We arranged with publishers to display relevant material and invited our book selection committee and branch librarians to examine and select titles.

Our second priority was to encourage as many librarians as possible to involve themselves in literacy work. To create an awareness, workshops were held by specialists to discuss various aspects of adult literacy as well as current developments.

After three years, 12 of our 32 libraries offered literacy classes and four also offered adult basic education classes. As one learner put it, 'I can't eat words'. These four libraries offered classes in vegetable gardening, child care, sewing, traffic officers workshoping learner licences, et cetera.

Soon we felt we could turn our attention to the broader community and decided to work on annual projects.

Highlights

We highlight a few of the projects.

A poster competition celebrated International Literacy Day in 1995. The Cape Town community was invited to create posters pointing out the vital role of reading and writing. There were two age categories (younger than 16 and older than 16) and 350 entries were received.

In 1996 we held a *family literacy project*. Family literacy entails using the family unit to support, develop and encourage each member's potential for reading and writing. The aim of the project was to encourage family members to get together and write stories which could be shared with others. We received 400 hand-written stories and a local publisher produced **Our family story book** featuring many of the stories. It was launched in 1997.

In 1998 we embarked on our most ambitious project to date, the production of a video looking at the role of libraries in adult basic education. We especially focused on what City Libraries was doing. Although a 20 minute video was the intention it ended up as an epic movie! The video has been useful in conscientising students in library schools and in encouraging libraries to initiate literacy classes.

Our next project was a *national symposium* held at the Centre for the Book in Cape Town (September 1999). Two hundred librarians from other parts of the country as well as organisations involved in Literacy and Adult

twinning. Through shared projects they kept in contact with one another for a year.

Meetings were held to introduce twin libraries to each other and at these meetings LIG stressed the importance of adults reading to children. Donated children's books were also handed out to the learners.

A *Celebration of writing workshop* was held in November 2001. It was in response to an adult learner's remark: 'My reading is good but I have trouble with writing.'

The workshop celebrated the history, beauty and fun of writing with adult learners and included papermaking and calligraphers demonstrating Chinese, Islamic and Sanskrit writing. We also displayed various writing tools, for example, wax and clay tablets, papyrus paper, feather quills, et cetera. (Workshops were held during the year during which some of these tools were made.) Participants could take examples home and to their classes.

In November 2002 we decided to chill out a bit and had a *fun day* with adult learners at Cape Town's famous Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens. After a tour of the grounds and a leisurely picnic lunch a few learners shared their own written stories with us. They were also encouraged to draw aspects of the gardens. At home time each learner received an indigenous plant as a gift.

At the beginning of 2003 we decided that we would hold *workshops* for adult facilitators, who wanted more training in different aspects of adult learning. Various workshops such as teaching adults, fundraising and promoting reading were held. The last workshop was held at our stunning Cape Town Aquarium (at the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront).

After ten years our group has made the difficult decision to disband due to the ongoing organisational changes in the Unicity.

The LIG members involved were Theresa Denton, Marjorie Eksteen, Aneesa Hamdulay, Nadia Ismail, Ina Kapp, Bev May, Bongive

Moss, Adelaide Moore, Karen Nefdt, Sharon Roman and Dairmaid Wessels.

We trust this article will inspire other librarians to reach out to those adults who have not had the privilege of literacy and adult education.

Hasta Luego!

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The volunteers decided to disband and end their activities on a high note. A bottle containing the history and achievements of the group was dropped into the ocean. If their research on sea currents proves to be correct, the bottle will wash up on a South American shore

Basic Education were enabled to network, to get to know one another and to exchange practical ideas. The theme of the symposium was *Literacy in everyday life* with emphasis on the practical role of libraries.

An important outcome of the symposium was our *twinning project*. We realised that librarians, especially those in rural communities needed far more encouragement and support for their initiatives.

We arranged that libraries would twin with one another, preferably in town/rural