

Not only do they sell books...

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Exclusive Books in South Africa is probably what WH Smith and Waterstone are in England - a booklover's dream world. And their business to all intents and purposes is selling - from books to cards, you name it - if it's made from paper, they can probably supply it.

A pleasant surprise it was then to discover that they do more than sell books - they have in place a very active corporate social investment section that aims to 'spread the word' in a non-profitable manner. We asked their corporate social investment manager, Penny Hochfeld, to tell us more about their projects...

In the 17 months since Exclusive Books appointed a dedicated corporate social investment manager, the book chain has undertaken a number of exciting projects working in partnership with the major publishers and with school outreach programmes, community libraries, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other established channels to donate books as widely as possible around the country.

Various metropolitan libraries (Johannesburg, Tswane, Ekurhuleni, Govan Mbeki Library) and community libraries (such as Alexandra) have received donations of up to 65 boxes of books. Other metropolitan libraries will have their turn as books become available.

With the facilitation of Pan Macmillan South Africa, Exclusive Books negotiated the shipment of 26 000 free children's books from Macmillan UK. These books, originally destined for pulping (horror of horrors!), have found a home in the Want to Read Programme of the Johannesburg Library and in their bibliobus, in libraries supported by Biblionef (based in Cape Town), and in various community libraries around the country. A few other publishers have also given generous donations, and others will be nagged to follow suit.

Exclusive Books adopted Project Literacy (an adult literacy organisation of 30 years' standing) a couple of years ago as a partner in their social responsibility efforts. In addition, to mark the book chain's 50th birthday last year, we adopted the Topsy Foundation as a long-term partner. We started by donating a library of over 2 000 children's books to the Topsy Sanctuary in Mpumalanga. We also provided wooden fixtures for the new library, donated money to the nearest public library (in Secunda) to enable them to cover all the books and prepare accession cards, et cetera; inspired the Secunda librarians to run a monthly programme on books and stories for the children at the Sanctuary; and donated a sum of money to Project Literacy to conduct a literacy survey amongst the adult community of Grootvlei, with the ultimate aim of raising the literacy levels of the whole community. Books were donated to both Grassy Park and Retreat Public

Libraries for their Christmas parties, so that each child could go home with a book after the party.

We have entered into a rewarding relationship with the College of Education at Wits University. The third-year students in the Foundation Phase at the College have to produce a Book Sack - a compendium of lessons, games and activities based on a children's picture book. Working with a NGO called Schools' Wider Enrichment Programme (SWEPE), these Book Sacks are used by the student teachers as teaching tools and then donated to schools in Gauteng, Mpumalanga and Limpopo (the Topsy Sanctuary benefitted too this year!). Exclusive Books has given a large number of books to the college for the student teachers to use, and also supplied boxes of books for these schools where the students do teaching practice and where they are helping to establish new libraries.

We have been able to donate books to, amongst others, projects as diverse as Gcina Mhlophe's Nozincwadi Rural Storytelling Project; Penryn College's Outreach Programme which involves more than 50 Mpumalanga school librarians in library training once a term; the annual Apollo Public Speaking Competition in Victoria West; a support programme for pre-school teachers studying through UNISA in rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal; three rural primary schools in Mpumalanga, where the approach was made by a United States Peace Corps worker; and the Friends of Pollsmoor Prison Library.

While we generally donate books in response to appeals, we have also made financial contributions to Hooked on Books, to enable them to do their book-related performances at disadvantaged schools; to the Rally to READ, which places box libraries in rural schools in seven of the nine provinces; to WordFest at the Grahamstown Festival; and to the Sibikwa Storytelling Festival. We have also become the sponsor of the annual essay-writing competition run by SACEE in Gauteng primary schools.

This year, plans are being made to offer some of Exclusive's sale books to certain branches within the City Library Service.

So we do range widely and the opportunity to liaise with amazing people devoting themselves to the upliftment of their communities has been enormously rewarding. Whilst our public image is that of a chain of bookshops catering to a sophisticated reading market, we seriously regard ourselves as partners of all schools and libraries in South Africa in the attempt to make books accessible to the wider population and to encourage the establishment of a reading culture in this country.



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