



This infographic summarises insights from an external evaluation and internal monitoring data on the project's design, implementation and impact.

Holistic, effective and innovative:

Insights from the collaborative Yizani Sifunde early literacy project



THE PROBLEM

- ▲ When children start school without adequate early language and literacy skills, they are likely to struggle throughout their school career.
- ▲ In the Eastern Cape, only 51% of children in early learning programmes are on track in early literacy and language.¹
- ▲ Most under-resourced early childhood development (ECD) centres do not use a structured early literacy curriculum or have enough resources to teach it effectively.
- ▲ Two-thirds of homes with children under age 10 do not have any picture books.²

THE YIZANI SIFUNDE PROJECT

Yizani Sifunde – isiXhosa for “come, let’s read” – aimed to boost early literacy outcomes at under-resourced ECD centres in the Eastern Cape. It was implemented in three one-year cycles between 2021 and 2023.

The project was initiated and funded by the Liberty Community Trust, and jointly designed and delivered by three literacy nonprofits: Book Dash, Nal’ibali and Wordworks. Khululeka and ITEC supported implementation.

Project design

The model integrated complementary interventions to improve the language and literacy of 4- and 5-year-old children.

In Figure 1 below, core inputs in bold contributed strongly to project impact. Other inputs helped extend reach and support impact.

FIGURE 1: Yizani Sifunde project inputs

		Three beneficiary domains		
		ECD CENTRES / PRACTITIONERS	HOMES / CAREGIVERS	COMMUNITY
‘Triple cocktail’ of inputs	RESOURCES: QUALITY MATERIALS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Book Dash books and Nal’ibali resources - Wordworks Little Stars teaching materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 25-50 books per child to own - Additional books for caregivers attending workshops 	Books and Nal’ibali supplements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Distributed at events & activations - Donated to reading clubs and partner organisations
	TRAINING & STRUCTURED PLANS	ECD practitioners trained to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implement the Little Stars classroom programme - Facilitate parent workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parent workshops encourage caregivers to play a greater role in their children’s language development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Volunteer training to run reading clubs
	SUPPORT & MODELLING	Story Sparkers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Model storytime activities - Support ECD practitioners to run Little Stars 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support to reading club leaders

Reach & scope

Over 3 years, the project:



1 Thrive by Five Index 2022
 2 National Reading Survey 2023

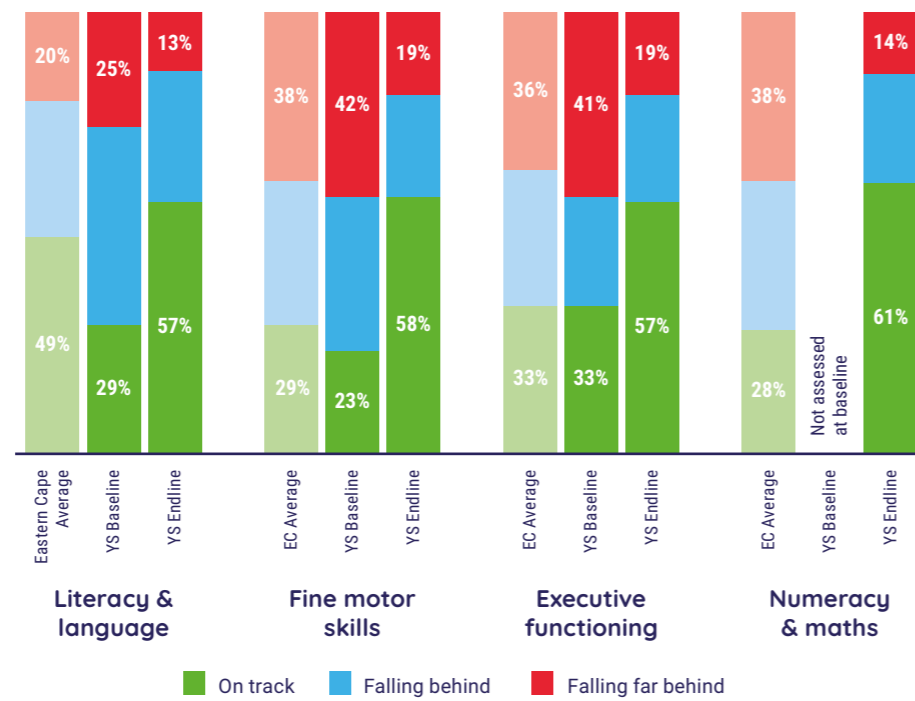
INSIGHT 1 **Yizani Sifunde was effective and holistic:**

Children's literacy and other skills improved significantly.

In all ELOM domains assessed at baseline and endline, including domains the project did not explicitly target:

- ➔ The % of children on track ~doubled
- ➔ The % of children falling far behind ~halved
- ➔ Performance started below provincial averages, and ended above them
- ➔ Endline numeracy was well above the average (although not assessed at baseline)

FIGURE 2: ELOM 4&5 performance at baseline and endline, and vs. provincial averages

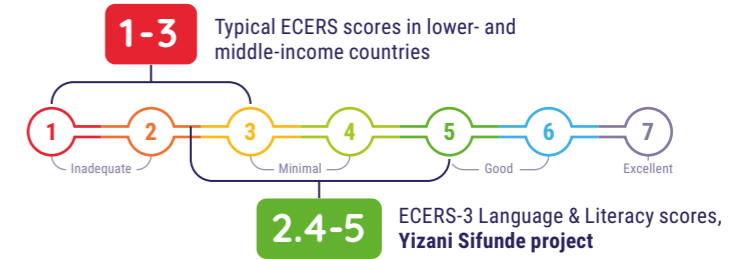


INSIGHT 3 **The project sustainably improved teaching practices and learning environments.**

Though not generalisable, practitioners at 6 case study ECD centres achieved higher quality scores for teaching practice than typically seen in similar contexts.

“The greatest change is in children. Now, they are confident to talk during story time sessions.”
- STORY SPARKER CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

FIGURE 4: Teaching practice scores at case study centres vs. typical scores, using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS)



Across all centres, by year-end:

- ECD practitioners:** were more confident with all practices, especially storytelling, book reading and listening; needed more support with emergent writing.
- Children:** were significantly more engaged; needed more support to use books independently at school.
- Classrooms:** were print-rich, relaxed and calm, with abundant, visible storybooks and enough of most materials; needed more diverse book genres, and help making book corners accessible and inviting.
- Caregivers:** asked more questions about how to help children learn, and complained less; remained challenging to engage with.

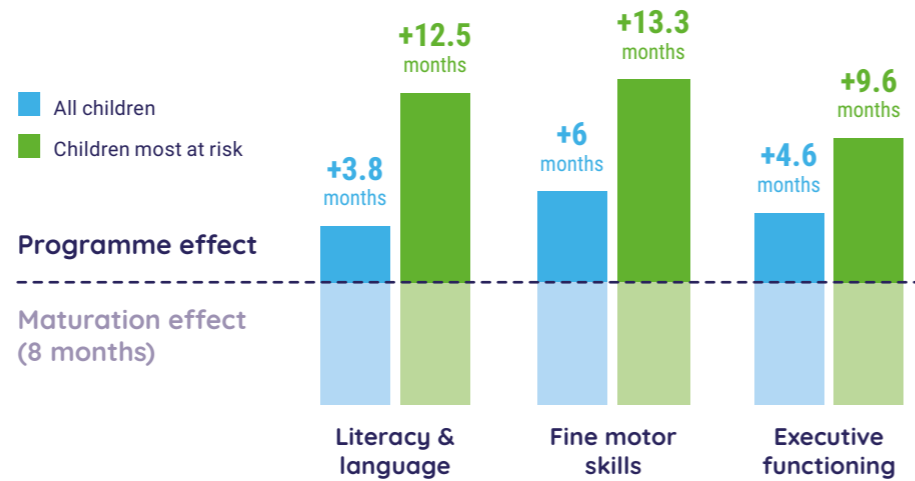
INSIGHT 2 **Yizani Sifunde was progressive:**

Struggling children improved the most.

In 8 months, the project delivered an average of:

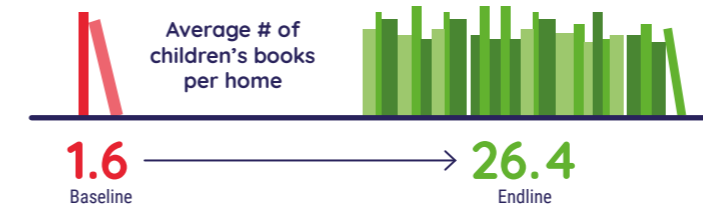
- ★ Up to 6 months of additional learning for all children (above expected age-related gains)
- ★ Up to 13 months of additional learning for children who were 'falling far behind' at baseline

FIGURE 3: Average learning gains in months, above expected age-related gains

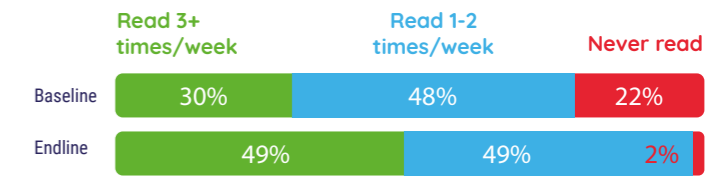


INSIGHT 4 **Abundant books increased reading at home, and workshops increased other positive parenting practices.**

The project radically increased book ownership.



Caregivers read with children more often, whether or not they attended workshops.



Caregivers who attended workshops told stories and drew more often with children.

78% of children shared books with siblings or neighbours.

Reading clubs were well-run, and extended reach to children who did not attend ECD centres.

What moderated and mediated children's learning gains?

While it was not possible to test the impact of each aspect of the model separately:

- Children with **better task orientation** and **more books at home** had higher ELOM scores.
- Learning gains were consistent regardless of context factors including child sex, child attendance, class size, and presence of other interventions at the centre.

“[Before] I did not have time for my child, I would be busy. But after attending the session, I learnt a lot – the importance of reading with my child, and how they become motivated when we are hands on as parents.”
- CAREGIVER FEEDBACK

External evaluation method

- Quantitative**
- 22 ECD centres (Feb and Oct)
 - 99 matched children completed ELOM 4&5 assessments
 - Staff surveys, infrastructure observations, child statistics
- Qualitative**
- 6 ECD centres (Aug and Sep)
 - Teaching practice and reading club observations, 42 stakeholder interviews, sustainability questionnaire

The infographic also draws on internal project data, including 352 home visits in 2022 and 2023.

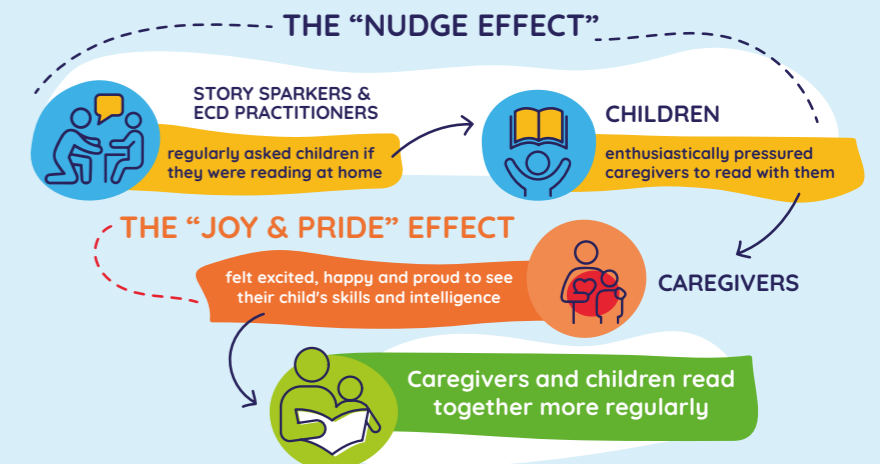
Sustainable change

A year after participation ended:

- ★ Most practitioners sustained or increased all Little Stars activities.
- ★ Storybook reading increased the most.
- ★ Most resources remained at centres.

Replacement materials and top-up training could help sustain impact when trained practitioners leave their centre.

How did owning books lead to more reading?



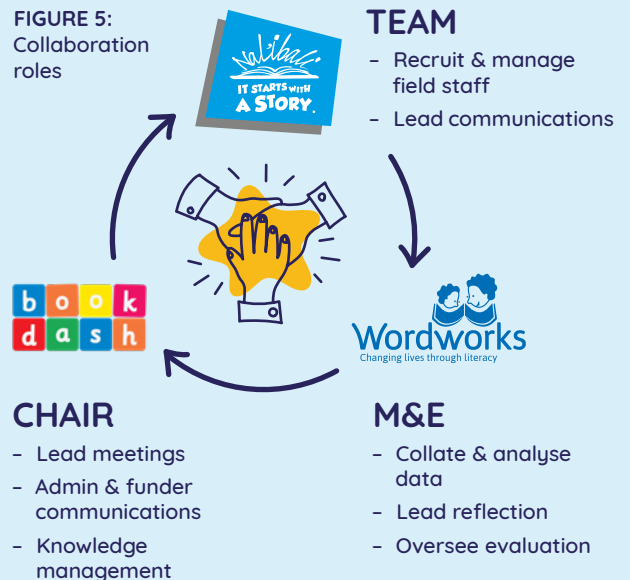


INSIGHT 5 Clear roles, reflective learning and trust enabled effective collaboration.

Factors that supported effective collaboration included:

- ★ **Clearly defined collaboration roles**, separate from project roles.
- ★ **A robust monitoring and evaluation system**, paired with a reflective, learning-focused culture.
- ★ **A decision to monitor and evaluate the collaboration itself**, separate from project delivery, via an in-depth, structured reflection exercise at the end of Year 1.
- ★ **A separate budget for shared project costs** and unanticipated expenses.
- ★ **Hands-on systems and processes** to manage the collaboration, including monthly meetings, joint subcommittees and a Trello board.
- ★ **Trust and goodwill:** partners assumed the best about each other and tackled challenges in a respectful, solution-orientated way.

FIGURE 5: Collaboration roles



Catalytic, pragmatic and trusting: How LCT embodied good funding practice

The **Liberty Community Trust** enabled collaboration and impact by:

- ★ Proactively approaching the partners to design a holistic project
- ★ Encouraging design and budget shifts to better achieve the intended impact
- ★ Trusting the partners to own the collaboration
- ★ Actively participating in “warts-and-all” monthly meetings and problem-solving (rather than expecting sanitised, good-news updates)
- ★ Supporting (and funding) time for planning in 2020, a “learning year” in 2021, and a wrap-up year in 2024 to digest and share evaluation findings
- ★ Mobilising additional funds to ensure a robust evaluation



Primary school teachers [called me and]...asked me what we were using to teach the children, because the ones who were coming from my ECD centre were able to read the words from the get-go.”

- EAST LONDON PRACTITIONER, TRAINED IN 2021

Acknowledgements

This infographic is based on an external evaluation conducted by Social Impact Insights Africa and a series of learning briefs written by Magali von Blotnitz. The project and evaluation were funded by the Liberty Community Trust.

Suggested reference: Yizani Sifunde (2024): Holistic, effective and innovative: insights from the collaborative Yizani Sifunde early literacy project. Based on an external evaluation by Social Impact Insights Africa and funded by the Liberty Community Trust. Cape Town.



Read the full reports:

von Blotnitz, M. (2024). Exploring the impact of a collaborative, multi-pronged early literacy intervention on 4- and 5-year olds.

Polzer Ngwato, T. (2024) Closing the ECD gap: the impacts of a multi-partner approach.

Zhou, T. & Shilakoe, L. (2024). How to close the ECD gap: process lessons from a multi-partner approach.

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