



ORGANISATION PROFILE

ACTIVE LEARNING LIBRARIES – SOUTH AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

In many parts of South Africa children have no access to pre-school education and have no stimulating toys to play with. Unfortunately, these children also grow up in homes where their previously disadvantaged parents have low levels of education and literacy themselves.

Active Learning Libraries – South Africa (ALL-SA) was started with the intention of

- ◆ providing these children with access to stimulating play materials through toy libraries to help them develop to their full potential
- ◆ providing parents with the information and resources to take an active role in early stimulation from birth

BACKGROUND

The South African Toy and Leisure Libraries Association (SATLLA) was established in 1993 at a meeting of interested stakeholders including toy librarians, teachers from special schools and therapists. The founding meeting was advertised widely, including on "Good Morning South Africa", an early morning news programme.

At that time there were only 21 toy libraries in the country. Since then at least 150 additional toy libraries have been established throughout South Africa

For the first 10 years, SATLLA was run by volunteers. After the 1st National Conference held in 2001, the name of the organisation was changed to Active Learning & Leisure Libraries – South Africa (ALL-SA). ALL-SA was registered with the Department of Social Development as a Non Profit Organisation in that year.

Many projects were undertaken in the early years by volunteers before the organisation finally requested and received funding in July 2003. Important partnerships with other organisations and with local government were established during these projects.

- Various "Toys From Waste (improvised toys) Exhibitions" were held in partnership with organisations involved in Early Childhood Development and with the Department of Social Development. Of special mention was ALL-SA's participation in the World Summit On Sustainable Development, September 2002
- Play sessions were held at various events e.g. during a Sasol Techno Ex exhibition and at libraries during library or science week exhibitions. During these public events we became aware that many high school learners are unable to cope with the problem solving toys that stimulated five year children can manage. This deficit in logical thinking, in most cases resulting from inadequate early play stimulation, is one of the reasons for poor performance in maths and science.

BACKGROUND (cont)

- In 1997, a series of highly successful workshops on the making of toys for children with special needs was presented by Roma Lear, an experienced toy librarian and author from England, in 7 cities and small towns from Tzaneen to Cape Town. The Liberty Life Foundation and the Anglo-American and De Beers Chairman's Fund jointly funded this project. The South African Federation for Mental Health supported the application for funding and their members assisted in the planning of the workshops in several of the centres.

In 2003, the organisation received a grant from the Jim Joel Education and Training Fund to start a Toy Library Training and Resource Centre in Johannesburg. This marked a huge turning point in the development of the organisation. In 2005 ALL-SA was registered as a Public Benefit Organisation with the South African Revenue Service under Section 18A.

A National Executive Committee manages the Association. The Committee consists of 7 elected office bearers and the director of ALL-SA, ex-officio.

Major decisions such as increasing membership fees and the theme of the biennial national toy library conference are taken after consultation with regional representatives.

ALL-SA has regional committees in Gauteng, Western Cape, KwaZulu Natal, Eastern Cape and representatives in Mpumalanga, Limpopo, North West Province and Free State. Regional committee members and representatives are volunteers.

MISSION, VISION AND NEED

Mission

Our mission, as a national body, is to promote the establishment and effective operation of Active Learning Toy Libraries for childhood development through needs- and skills-focused play in support of every child's right to an equal opportunity to reach his or her potential.

Vision

Our vision is to have a quality Active Learning Toy Library within reach of every child.

The Need

ALL-SA aims to address the following pressing needs of children growing up in South Africa today

- ◆ Many families cannot afford to send their children to any pre-school programme. These children are at a great disadvantage when they start school. Research has shown that children that have been stimulated from an early age perform better at school and later in life. Toy Libraries provide a cost-effective solution.
- ◆ The majority of parents in South Africa are not aware of the importance of stimulating a child from birth. ALL-SA has developed an informative, illustrated pamphlet available in 4 languages giving a simple explanation of important skills to stimulate through play with some ideas on how to stimulate babies, toddlers and pre-school children.
- ◆ Many Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centres do not know how to stimulate children through play and do not have adequate play materials for the children. Children attending these centres sadly enter primary school without essential foundation skills. Our training addresses this need. Toy librarians demonstrate the use of toys so the materials borrowed from the toy library are used effectively.
- ◆ Many parents of children with special needs do not know how to stimulate their children. Parents become anxious because of lack of knowledge. Toys that are too difficult frustrate the children. Toy Libraries provide essential information and access to toys at different levels of difficulty and to expensive specialised toys.
- ◆ Many primary and high school children have gaps in their skills and knowledge because of inadequate stimulation in their early years. These children struggle to learn certain concepts – often in maths and science. They lack language skills and good problem solving techniques. Active Learning Toy Libraries provide graded play materials that gradually increase in difficulty, building the child's self-confidence and skills.
- ◆ There is a lack of safe, free play spaces throughout the country which affects not only children's physical development but also their need for relaxation. Tension affects school performance. Lack of stimulating play facilities can also result in experimentation with sex, crime, drugs and alcohol.

PRINCIPLES

- **PROVIDE PLAY OPPORTUNITIES**

Our main focus is on providing ALL children throughout South Africa with play opportunities that will

- Enable them to develop the physical and cognitive skills needed for formal learning
- Encourage interactive play between children and also between adult caregivers and children to enhance psychological and social health.

- **SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS**

1. ALL-SA supports the right of children to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to their ages. This right is entrenched by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 31.
2. ALL-SA supports the right of the child to education – Article 28 of the Convention. Active learning toy libraries provide toys, games and activities at varying levels of difficulty that assist children to develop school skills progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity.
3. ALL-SA also supports Article 29, which states that education should develop “the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential”.
4. ALL-SA supports the right of mentally or physically disabled children to have access to toy and leisure library services free of charge in order to assist in their fullest possible social integration and individual development. This supports Article 23.

- **NON DISCRIMINATION**

ALL-SA’s Constitution states that toy libraries should offer integrated services without discrimination based on race, colour, sex, age, language, religion, political or other opinion, nationality, ethnic or social origin, disability, birth or medical status.

- **RECOGNISE THE IMPORTANCE OF EXISTING COMMUNITY STRUCTURES**

ALL-SA recognizes the importance of community structures and will consult with, strengthen and develop them so that adequate play facilities are made available to all persons within the community.

- **TRANSPARENCY**

Our organisation is open to scrutiny.

SERVICES

ALL-SA provides the following services

1. **Access to Play Opportunities** for disadvantaged children:

- We have a model *Come & Play* toy library that is free of charge which
 - offers a wide variety of play materials and a safe place to play
 - covers all skill areas, age groups and levels of difficulty
 - provides toys for children with special needs.

Attendance figures for visits by children to the toy library show its growing popularity: 2004 – 1 165; 2005 – 4 857; 2006 – 4 795
2007 – 7 310; 2008 – 10 929; 2009 – 12 803

- Every week the Toy Library outreach programme provides play sessions to
 - two ARV clinics where children infected with HIV receive their medication. Hundreds of children benefit from this play intervention.
 - a well baby clinic in the area. International research supports our belief that stimulation should start from birth and that parents need to be informed about the importance of early stimulation.

2. **Training**

- **Training courses** include:
 - Setting up and running a toy library
 - Skills development through Play Actions
 - Using toys, games and activities to support the national curriculum (for teachers)
 - Using play actions to identify problem areas in children and using toys and games to strengthen weak areas (This course is currently being developed)
- **Training workshops** include:
 - Making toys from scrap materials
 - Stimulating children through play (for parents)

SERVICES (continued)

3. Information about toy libraries, toys, games and activities, toy suppliers, early stimulation and play. We do this through:

- answering telephone and email enquiries
- our website
- a pamphlet, "Play Today", encouraging early stimulation – available in four languages
- our magazine which is published twice a year
- distributing a resource manual – "Toys, Games and Activities for the Developing Child"
- frequently circulating relevant new information
- National Toy Library Conferences, which are held every 2 years. At each of the four conferences held so far, sponsorship has been raised to enable over 50 needy delegates to attend. The conference programmes focus on skills development. Each Conference has generated renewed enthusiasm in toy librarians. After every Conference, more toy libraries have opened.

4. Quality Assurance and Toy Library Development

- **ALL-SA** has developed a Quality Assurance Programme to assist toy libraries to offer an excellent service. This project, funded by the Jim Joel Education and Training Fund, allows us to visit toy libraries throughout the country.
- We also provide support to toy libraries telephonically, via email and by post.

5. Advocacy focuses on:

- The value of toy libraries in fulfilling the stimulation and recreation requirements of children with and without special needs.
- The importance of early stimulation for all children.
- The value of play in society for the psycho-social health of communities.
- The importance of safe play spaces for all children, especially municipal parks

6. Distribution of donated toys – we sort and distribute excess toys to needy toy libraries, pre-schools and children's homes.

MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS

- **THE 10TH INTERNATIONAL TOY LIBRARY CONFERENCE**
ALL-SA won the bid to host the 10th International Toy Library Conference in 2005. 275 delegates from 26 countries attended. The main focus of the conference was on the value of toy libraries in supporting various needs e.g. children with disabilities, children living in dire poverty in South America, the need to build resilience in children and many others.

ALL-SA also used the opportunity to promote:
 - The value of indigenous games through a social function sponsored by the Mayor of Tshwane
 - South African toy manufacturers
 - The training of unemployed people in the making of toys that reflect South African life and culture as a viable income-generating opportunity
- ALL-SA training courses have been held successfully for government staff from the Departments of Education in the Free State and KwaZulu Natal and for the Department of Sport, Art and Culture in North West Province. Each of these government departments has opened toy libraries. In North West Province, 76 community toy libraries now offer a toy library service and the building plans for new libraries automatically include space for a toy library.
- ALL-SA has trained trainers from various organisations involved in training teachers working with young children in all 9 provinces. This project was sponsored by the D.G. Murray Trust. Knowledge about using toys, games and play activities to develop skills in children has been spread throughout the country. Thousands of children are benefiting from the active learning approach.
- ALL-SA has developed a very highly praised pamphlet "Play Today" which educates parents and teachers about important areas to focus on when stimulating young children. This pamphlet is part of the "A Chance to Play" project, which is sponsored by the Volkswagen Group Works Council and terre des hommes. 200,000 pamphlets in 4 languages (English, Afrikaans, Sesotho and isiZulu) are being distributed in all 9 provinces.
- ALL-SA managed to assist 8 toy librarians from previously disadvantaged communities to attend the 11th International Toy Library Conference in Paris in 2008 thanks to the support of the Jim Joel Fund which partially subsidised airfares. The conference organisers waived the conference fees and French toy librarians provided accommodation. Our training manager, Noloyiso Novukela, presented a paper at the conference.
- ALL-SA's director, Cynthia Morrison, was elected to a 3rd term of office as the President of the International Toy Library Association. Desiree Mtshweni was elected onto the board of the Association.
- ALL-SA has successfully promoted **World Play Day (WPD)** in South Africa, which is celebrated on 28 May by toy libraries around the world. Many toy libraries and other organisations in South Africa arrange play events to celebrate **WPD**.

CURRENT SPECIAL PROJECTS

1. Enrichment Training of 30 Early Childhood Development Practitioners near Secunda funded by the D.G Murray Trust.

Practitioners with a Level 4 ECD qualification generally lack knowledge about how toys support child development. The aim of this project is to encourage a results-based approach to the use of play materials that will enrich the quality of the stimulation programmes offered by the 30 ECD practitioners

In September 2009, the practitioners received training on the Play Actions Approach to Skills Development. They are presently implementing their training and are able to make good use of toys from the toy library and their own toys. The effectiveness of the training in improving their programmes will be assessed in mid 2010.

2. A "toy-sharing" project for 10 practitioners in Klipfontein, Midrand, also funded by the D.G. Murray Trust. This project holds great promise for achieving ALL-SA's vision of a quality Active Learning Toy Library within reach of every child

The aim of the project is to improve the quality of the ECD programme offered by 10 ECD practitioners who have few or no learning support materials, through a toy library-based "toy-sharing" programme

The 10 practitioners in this project were trained on "Skills Development through Play Actions" in 2009. The 200 toys have been purchased and are currently being catalogued, marked and protected by the practitioners with the support of a toy librarian. 10 Toy bags containing toys carefully selected for optimal skills development will be circulated monthly amongst the 10 neighbouring crèches. The progress of the children attending these crèches will be closely monitored to assess the effectiveness of the project in holistically benefiting the development of the children. Children not attending Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes will benefit by being accommodated at afternoon play sessions. This will increase access to ECD stimulation for children whose families cannot afford to pay for them to attend regular ECD programmes.

If the expected benefits are realised, these projects demonstrate extremely cost effective methods of assisting children in poor and remote areas as well as overcrowded urban areas to overcome the educational disadvantages of living in poverty.

3. Development of an active learning toy library at the Tshepang Project near the Princess Informal Settlement in Roodepoort, largely for orphans affected by the HIV pandemic – on behalf of the Hollard Foundation.
4. Development of an active learning toy library in Alexandra at the Thusong Youth Centre on behalf of Neotel.

THE FUTURE

Realising the Vision

- ◆ The ***Enrichment Training and Toy Sharing Projects*** constitute a blueprint for future development. The ultimate aims of these projects are to improve children's performance
 - By laying the foundation for formal learning, literacy, maths and science
 - By developing life skills such as problem solving, resilience, concentration and perseverance which impact on general school performance and future success

Funding is required for

- Formal research to document the impact of the 10 practitioner toy-sharing project
- Implementing similar low cost-high impact toy sharing projects throughout South Africa.

- ◆ Our ***advocacy and information services*** are essential to reaching our vision of "A Quality Active Learning Toy Library within reach of every child"

Funding is required to

- Continue with advocacy initiatives and information services
- Print and distribute thousands more of the "Play Today" pamphlets

- ◆ We need to start a ***Toy Library Development Division*** which will work hand-in-hand with our Quality Assurance and Training Divisions

We receive more requests than we can manage from people wanting to start toy libraries. The information documents on our website are quite comprehensive. However many people require the hands-on assistance provided by our multi-lingual staff. We need a new staff member to run this division.

Training

Our unique training course "Skills Development through Play Actions" enables educators to use play materials in a results-based programme to ensure that children develop essential foundation skills through play.

In our experience, most educators have no idea of how to use play materials effectively. Those that have attended our course show a marked change in approach – children start learning through experiential play.

Funding is required to subsidize the training costs for educators working in impoverished areas.

THE FUTURE (cont)

Play Sessions at the Come & Play Toy Library

Our toy library is a safe haven of fun, stimulation and friendship for children living in difficult circumstances in the high crime, high density and poverty-stricken areas of Hillbrow, the Inner City, Berea, Yeoville and surrounds.

When children are denied access to their school for whatever reason (sometimes when school fees are not paid), they come to our Toy Library. We provide a refuge for children when their teachers go on strike.

We have had children coming to the Toy Library for comfort when a parent has passed away. During school holidays, we are inundated by children. We are expecting large numbers of children in the extended holiday period during the Soccer World Cup.

We need additional sponsors for the children's play sessions.

Extreme Makeover of the Come & Play Toy Library

After being in operation for over 5 years, The Come & Play Toy Library is in need of revamping. Last year alone, we had 12,803 visits by children for 2 hour play sessions.

Besides needing painting and changes to the toilet area including a toilet for children in wheel chairs, we want to create a separate area for toddlers, an area for computer literacy and educational computer games, a music area and a place for children to safely store their school bags. We'd like to get more toys for children with special needs and some large muscle soft play equipment. A few well-placed sofas for parents will bring them much closer to where their children are playing. And then, to fine tune the capturing of statistics, we're hoping for a bar code / fingerprint identification system so we can track how often each child visits the toy library.

We are hoping to find donors for the Extreme Makeover

Hungry Children

Many of the children that come to the Come & Play Toy Library after school are hungry.

We have a sponsor for healthy mineral water.

We need sponsorship for nutritious snacks that do not need any preparation.

BEE RATIOS

	Women	African	Coloured	Asian	Caucasian
Staff no.	11	8	1	0	2
Percentage	100%	73%	9%		18%

Of the children that visit our Toy Library 92% are black children, 6% are Indian children, 1% are coloured children and 1% are white children.

In conclusion

For every active learning toy library that opens, an average of 1000 children benefit from stimulation through play. In 1993 there were 21 toy libraries. About 21,000 children benefited. Now there are over 170 toy libraries. 170,000 children are benefiting. In the first quarter of 2010 alone, two new toy libraries are being established in Gauteng.

For every educator that we train, approximately 50 children per year have a better chance of developing essential foundation skills leading to improved performance at school. We have trained hundreds of educators over the past five years and many of them have shared the knowledge with others in their community. Thousands of children have benefited.

Please join us as a partner in giving all children an equal opportunity to develop to their full potential.

CURRENT DONORS

The National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund (Resource Centre)

Jim Joel Education and Training Fund (Quality Assurance Programme)

D.G. Murray Trust (Enrichment Training and Toy Sharing)

The Volkswagen Group Works Council and terre des hommes (Play Today pamphlets)

Hollard Foundation (Sizanani and Tshepang Active Learning Toy Library Projects)

Neotel (Thusong Active Learning Toy Library)

Ken Mann & Son (healthy water fountain for the children)

Think Toys (toys for our Christmas Party)

Toy Zone (toys for our Christmas Party)

HB Sport (toys for our Christmas Party)

Just Fun Toys (Scrabble Games from the Celebrity Scrabble Challenge)

Kiddie Junction (Toys)

Ladder of Learning (Toys)

Shoprite Checkers - Hillbrow (food for the children for one of our functions)

Woolworths - Hyde Park (Easter goodies for our annual Easter Egg Hunt)

Many individuals have given us gifts-in-kind, financial contributions and their valuable time to assist us with our projects.

We would like to make a special mention of

- HHP, South Africa's best known hip hop star, who made ALL-SA the beneficiary of the Celebrity Scrabble Challenge which was held for the first time in 2009 and is to become an annual event. It is held close to 28 May, providing us with an ideal opportunity to capitalise on media exposure to promote World Play Day and the importance of play in the lives of both children and adults.
- Roedean School – the learners help to provide Easter eggs for our annual Easter Egg Hunt and they decorated the walls in our toilet area with beautiful murals
- Johannesburg Mini Councillors who have held several fun activity days for the children at the Toy Library

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