

Konica Minolta helps schools overcome library problems

Last year Konica Minolta South Africa converted a light commercial vehicle into a mobile library, providing children and communities in the Gauteng area with access to books, thus giving them the opportunity to improve their literacy skills. But the company's dedication to education and literacy did not stop there.



"After the success of the mobile library, we were inundated with requests from schools lacking a functional library, or with no library at all," said project initiator Laetitia Coetzer, special projects manager of Konica Minolta South Africa.

"International research indicates that one way to improve literacy and the overall academic performance of learners is for every school to have a well-stocked library."

At present, only 8% of schools in South Africa have a functional library, with just one library costing R2.5 million to set up, something for which neither the schools, nor the Education Department, have the money.

Bizbook corners born

"We wanted to do more, so engaged in discussions with Daleen Havenga, founder of The Edu-Care Foundation, with whom we had worked previously on the mobile library. Together, we came up with the idea of resurrecting the tradition of reading corners, specifically designed for ground-phase learners. We wanted to establish a special space, away from the normal classroom environment, where the children could sit or lie down on carpets and pillows and listen to a story being told, or to simply leaf through the pages of a book. From this, our bizbook corners were born," explained Coetzer.

In this 2012/13 financial year, Konica Minolta South Africa's bizbook corners have been implemented at the Toekomsrus Primary School in Randfontein; the Roodepoort Primary School, Joshua Naude Primary, Dr Havinga Laerskool and Horizon View Primary Schools in Roodepoort; the Unified Combined School in Maraisburg; the Westrand School for the Disabled, at which additional reading material was provided for special classes; and the Mould Empower Serve (MES) centre in Kempton Park for its after-school centre.

Many of the schools are already seeing a direct impact on literacy. "The use of our new library has lit up the faces of our bookworms," said NL Henney, principal of Toekomsrus Primary School. "When you enter the library you have no choice but to take a seat and read, it is contagious, so much so that the language for our Annual National Assessment (ANA) has improved far more than we anticipated by up to 60%."

Best reader programme

The school also launched a best reader programme for the Grade R to Grade 7 classes, to encourage all learners in those classes to use the library to the fullest. The school used reading fluency, reading comprehension, the number of books read, vocabulary and language improvements as measurements to judge who the winners would be.

In November, two to three learners per class were announced as winners at the school's annual prize-giving ceremony. They each received books as prizes, sponsored by Konica Minolta South Africa. The company also sponsored books as prizes for the most improved ground-phase readers at Joshua Naude Primary, Dr Havinga Laerskool and Horizon View Primary Schools.

The Horizon View Primary School has also seen a vast improvement in its foundation phase and "intersen" phase English ANA results, thanks to both the bizbook corner and the regular visits from the mobile library.

"The bizbook corners are a natural progression from the mobile library. Currently, the mobile library services grade four to grade seven, but the grade R to grade three learners are still learning how to read, and need special attention and books, hence the evolution of bizbook corners," explained Coetzer. "We are delighted that Konica Minolta South Africa is part of finding innovative solutions to South Africa's literacy problem."

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