



9 VOORTREKKER ROAD MCGREGOR
info@mothertongue.co.za
www.mothertongue.co.za
023 625 1010
NPO- 098 736

**THE MOTHERTONGUE PROJECT
ANNUAL REPORT
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NOTE FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

SARA MATCHETT

The formation of the Mothertongue Langeberg Youth Theatre Company in 2014 revealed the necessity for the six company members to share their skills in their respective communities. This led to the decision to mentor the company members in setting up youth drama groups in their communities. The focus of 2015/2106 was thus on developing the capacities of the Langeberg Youth Theatre Company members to set up and run their drama groups. Alongside this, the company created new theatre pieces that contributed to their continued growth in performance skills. At the beginning of 2016, we implemented a series of project management as well as facilitation skills trainings. It became apparent that this was what was needed to assist them in the successful management of their youth drama groups.

We are appreciative of the funding received from the National Arts Council (NAC) and the Department of Cultural Affairs and Sports (DCAS). As in 2014/2015, despite the funding challenges we faced during the year, we steadfastly continued to develop our work in the Langeberg region. The NAC and the DCAS funding enabled us to continue the programmatic work on a relatively consistent basis, but was not enough to implement regular ongoing workshops and programmes. Furthermore it did not enable us to grow the infrastructure of the organisation. At the end of 2015, however, we received notification that we had received funding from the National Lotteries Commission for one year. This enabled us to employ a part time Project Manager, Synnov Skorge as well as a part time Programme Manager, Desiree Stephens in March 2016.

The collaboration with UCT Drama department has become an annual event and serves a vital role in the development of both the students and the youth theatre company members. 2015 saw the fifth instalment. The project is designed as such that we continually invite and assist the students and Langeberg participants to interrogate themselves in terms of what they are doing, how they are doing it, and why they are doing what they are doing. In this way, the project becomes a learning opportunity for the Langeberg participants and the students, where they are able to translate their inputs. For the students this means questioning how they make those inputs translatable to their overall academic course. The reverse also happens, where they bring the pedagogical aspects of their training, on both theoretical and practical levels, from their university courses to the project, and thus have the opportunity to put into practice, that which exists only as abstract cognitive knowledge or that which exists within the relatively safe and sheltered environment of the classroom or rehearsal room on the university campus. Overall, the focus of the collaboration is on the improvement of the self through artistic practice, for the students and Langeberg participants equally.

This annual collaboration with the Drama Department extended in 2015 to include collaborating with The South African Tuberculosis Vaccine Initiative (SATVI), a world leader in TB vaccine clinical research located within the Health Sciences Faculty at the University of Cape Town. Further to this, four recent UCT Drama graduates worked with the youth company throughout the year to create new performances and poetry offerings. This collaboration not only affords the youth company members the opportunity to learn new skills and make new work, it also contributes towards the growth of the graduates as theatre makers and facilitators.

The way forward looks positive for Mothertongue. During the course of 2015/2016, it became apparent that it was very difficult for the company members to balance running their drama groups, working at their respective jobs, and in some instances, running families. This revealed the necessity to work towards employing at least five of the company members permanently. We are happy to announce that as from January 2017 we will be in a position to employ five youth leaders for one year thanks to funding from the DG Murray Trust. We are certain that these contracts will be extended beyond the year, as the reach of the work expands into the region.

I am deeply grateful to the youth theatre company for their commitment to growing their skills and to using the craft of performance to make a difference in other people's lives. Your commitment fuels my spirit! Thank you to the Advisory Board: Makgathi Mokwena, Silvana Dantu, Veronica Baxter, Rehane Abrahams, Nina Callaghan, and Nolufefe Ntshuntshe, your advice and direction are invaluable. To the McGregor Three: Marlene, Synnov and Des, thank you for your commitment to taking Mothertongue to new heights.

I look forward to growing the infrastructural capacity of The Mothertongue Project and am excited to see where the new injection of human energy leads us.



DR SARA MATCHETT

THE MOTHERTONGUE PROJECT

VISION

Our vision is a society where we as women and young people have safety in our bodies and our communities and where we have agency over our lives. We envision a society where (self) recognition, (self) honouring and (self) celebration of women and young people is commonplace.

MISSION

The Mothertongue Project exists to promote the wellbeing of those most excluded, and have identified women and young people as groups consistently marginalised in society. We are a collective of women artists, activists and practitioners committed to personal and social transformation through participatory theatre and integrated arts methodologies.

THE LANGEBERG YOUTH ARTS PROJECT

The Langeberg Youth Arts Project started in 2012 in order to develop programmes for the youth and children of McGregor, Robertson, Nkqubela, and surrounding farm community networks.

The work implemented in the region by the Mothertongue Project over the past few years has revealed the necessity to develop the capacities of youth and children on farms. This sector has historically been and continues to be the poorest and most marginalised in the region, with under resourced child care and school facilities.

Poverty and high levels of unemployment are the core development challenges of the Langeberg district and its people. The region has high levels of violence against women and children resulting in an increase in HIV/Aids infections. Concomitant to this is a prevalence of foetal alcohol syndrome, high dropout rates amongst school goers, teenage pregnancy, gangsterism, drug abuse and a rise in crime.

The Langeberg Youth Theatre Company was established in 2014. Six participants from the forty plus beneficiaries originally trained were selected through an interview process. The purpose of setting up the company is to engage the company members in more rigorous training around acquiring performance skills, facilitation skills, writing skills, and arts management skills.

It is especially impressive that the Company achieves so much as most of the members are employed and do much of the Mothertongue work after hours and over weekends. The strength and impact of our work relies largely on their commitment to the vision and mission of the Mothertongue Project. Our work continues to be innovative and unique as it is strongly driven by the Company who are highly motivated to share and expand their skills and work, and in so doing, uplift their communities. Despite the challenges of the long distances between the farms and no public transport, there are visible expansions of our work in the region.

PROGRAMME ACHIEVEMENTS AND HIGHLIGHTS

The Mothertongue Project continued to develop The Langeberg Youth Arts Project as an arts, leadership, and entrepreneurship programme. The programme provides participatory theatre training, which is integrated with leadership development training as well as an entrepreneurial skills training to unemployed youth between the ages of 18 and 30. The programme develops core life skills that prepare participants for possible employment where this is available, and also provides support and basic skills to facilitate them creating their own job opportunities. Furthermore the project draws youth into full participation in the social and economic life of their local communities and wider society using arts activities as the means.

During 2015 the focus of our work was to implement the Langeberg Youth Arts Project on farms in the region. We continued to work with the six youth theatre company members whose capacities were built in the first years of the project. The six members received training in facilitation, project management/literacy, and performance and theatre making skills.

Training workshops

A series of training workshops were held over the course of the year to grow the skills of the members in areas of performance, playmaking, poetry creation, basic project literacy/management and leadership.

➤ **Performance and playmaking (8 -10 May 2015 and 22-24 May 2015)**

Daniel Richards facilitated Performance and Playmaking workshops in McGregor over two weekends. The primary purpose of the workshop was to facilitate and teach participants skills about physical theatre and then apply the learned skills by creating a 10-15 minute production of their own.

➤ **Theatre Adaptation/Theatre Skills Training (26-28 June)**

Jason Jacobs and Dustin Beck facilitated workshops with the aim of sharing skills and building presence in the body as individual performer and ensemble work.

➤ **McGregor Poetry Festival - August 2015**

Poet, theatre maker and performer, Koleka Putuma created a poetry programme with the company as part of the annual McGregor Poetry Festival. Koleka facilitated the creation of a poetry programme for the festival. The self-written material drew from the participants' lived experiences.

➤ **The Beat TB Project – September 2015-March 2016**

The main performance focus for this funding period was on developing and rolling out various performance interventions for the Beat TB Project. From September 2015 to March 2016 the company were engaged in a project with University of Cape Town (UCT) Drama Department, SATVI and Wellcome Trust that dealt with the problems of Tuberculosis (TB) in the broader Cape Winelands region. The objective of the project was not directly health promotion – but rather asks for an engagement with the science of TB presented through theatre performances, visual arts and happenings.

The company were involved in creating and performing invisible theatre interventions around issues related to TB. Performances took place on minibus taxis in towns in the Langeberg region. The interventions encouraged passengers to discuss issues related to TB in their respective communities. Various Beat TB performance took place in schools, clinics, farms and at community centres in and around the Cape Winelands area.



➤ **September 2015**

Seven students from UCT's Drama Department spent a week in Worcester, working alongside the youth theatre company members. The focus of this collaboration was on reworking a script entitled "Lienkie se Longe". The project culminated in performances in Worcester, more specifically at SATVI research centre and in various suburbs such as Avian Park and Roodewal in Worcester.



Creation of new performances

Theatre maker and actor, Jason Jacobs worked with the company on developing two performances. The first focuses on Gender Violence and the second on HIV and Aids. These were created specifically for the following events:

16 Days of Activism- Dec 2015

The company were invited by Counsellor Devon Hull to launch the Langeberg Municipalities 16 Days of Activism Campaign in McGregor. The event took place in the McGregor Community Hall.

Project Management Workshops

The company received training in basic project management skills to facilitate the setting up and running of their community youth groups in their respective areas. The first set of training took place on 16, 17, 30 January and 6 – 7 February 2016. The training covered developing a vision and a mission (understanding who the participants are, the need for the project and how it will run), drawing up budgets, reporting and basic Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E). These workshops were facilitated by Nina Callaghan and Sara Matchett.

Leadership Development Session (27-28 February)

Board member, Makgathi Mokoena facilitated a weekend workshop with the Youth Leaders which focussed on the 7 habits of highly effective people by Steven Covey. These sessions included yoga and self- examination. The group also explored what leadership means and assessed their display of leadership behaviour.

PRODUCTIONS AND PERFORMANCES BY THE LANGEBERG YOUTH THEATRE COMPANY

The Company continued to make new awareness raising performances around issues and challenges that pertain to young people in the region, including TB, HIV/AIDS, teenage pregnancy, gender violence and substance abuse. The performances were successfully rolled out in McGregor, Robertson, Nkqubela, Worcester, and on Le Chasseur and Takkap Farms.

2015 PRODUCTIONS

LIENKIE SE LONGE



This performance was developed and produced in partnership with South African Tuberculosis Vaccine Initiative and UCT. The aim was to inform the public around the prevention and treatment of Tuberculosis.

The Youth Company performed 'Lienkie se Longe' at many venues and to diverse audiences, including clinics, prison, malls, taxi ranks and in taxis.

The Mothertongue Project's use of participatory theatre has had positive outcomes in Mothertongue awareness programmes as they offer new ways of messaging information about TB and Hiv/AIDS - information is widely available but in ways that have been over-used. Children and youth become bored and therefore we revitalise and renew critical information.

Thanks to Veronica Baxter and Michele Tameris for their valuable contribution.

MAMA RUBY



Mama Ruby was developed to highlight the multi challenges that families face, including teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, and gender-based violence.

The participatory theatre performances invited the audiences to offer opinions of various outcomes to family issues and highlights attitudes and prejudices on the topics raised.

The Mothertongue Project's use of participatory theatre and dialogue groups is effective in raising awareness as this method facilitates that the audience/participants frame the information so that relevance and applicability strengthen. The fact that the productions and discussions are led by young people that speak the 'language' and are part of communities is powerful. The productions are also effective as they are taken to places and a wide range of audiences –outside shopping centres, taxi ranks and youth festivals.

A heartfelt thanks to Jason Jacobs for his sterling work with the Youth Company.

World Aids Day-December 2015



The company performed at the Callie de Wet Stadium in Robertson as part of a World Aids Day event organised by the LMSAT – Langeberg Multi Sectorial Task Team

Youth Theatre Groups

During 2015, the six theatre company members started running their own drama groups.

The establishment of drama groups was a project that was initiated by the youth leaders.

Incredible 5 (Jaydene Lekay), *Curtain Call* (Sandile Kosana), *Changing Lives* (Ashley Seconds/Melenie Jakobs) and *Take 2* (Denise Gandu). These groups ran as projects for the youth leaders who applied their practical knowledge acquired through project management and leadership workshops. They developed and accounted for budgetary items as well as collecting feedback from their groups.

The project addresses the need, as expressed by the youth of the region, for the creation of dialogue groups for young men and women, and the imparting of leadership development through life skills, communication training, and self-management skills. It is envisioned that intervention strategies that address these will result in an increase in self-confidence and esteem, which in our experience, motivates and assists participants in imagining and actioning a different, more productive life for themselves where they are active agents in the choices that they make. Another need that the project addresses centres around poverty and a lack of work opportunities in the area through the inclusion of performance, facilitation, leadership, and entrepreneurial skills training. While these may not directly create jobs, they do provide a critical set of skills to enhance job creation opportunities.

The Mothertongue Project IN THE NEWS

Photographs and articles courtesy of the Langeberg Gazette , The Worcester Standard and the Cape Argus.



The above skills training and productions were made possible by the facilitators mentioned above, the hard work and enthusiasm of the youth leaders and the generous support from our donors: the National Lotteries Commission, The National Arts Council, The Department of Culture, Arts and Sport and Beat TB Foundation.

THE WAY FORWARD

Despite the many challenges faced by the communities that we work with in the Langeberg district and the practical implications of long distances between farms and no public transport being available, we are pleased with the progress and visible expansion to our work.

The dedication of the members of Theatre Company is inspiring and we plan to employ at least five of these exceptional young men and women that are such an integral part of the success of our vision and work.

With an increase in the number of dedicated trainers we plan to train more youth and establish more school drama groups.

The Mothertongue Project will continue to develop performances as the use of participatory theatre has had positive outcomes in our awareness and outreach programmes as they offer new ways of messaging information about issues such as Hiv/AIDS and Tuberculosis - information is widely available but in ways that have been over-used. Young children and youth, become 'bored' and are easily overlooked. We work with the need to revitalize and 'renew' critical messages, and to allow our participants themselves to frame the information so that relevance and applicability strengthen. The fact that the productions and discussions are led by young people that speak the 'language' and are part of communities is powerful. The productions are effective as they are taken to places and a wide range of audiences – examples of this are working in partnership with the Department of Health and South African Tuberculosis Vaccine Initiative in rural clinics, taxi ranks and youth festivals.

Another programme area that Mothertongue will be expanding, is to work with very young children by developing our Early Years Theatre Project.

The Western Cape Province's First 1000 Days campaign was launched on 17 February 2016 emphasizing that both the physical and mental development of infants develops rapidly during the 1000 days period, and that the 3 most important aspects of the first 1 000 days are:

- health and nutrition,
- love and attention
- play and stimulation.

Early Years Theatre work has proven to make a positive difference in the well-being and development of babies and children. There is strong evidence of creative arts activity supporting the development of social and emotional skills, sensory and motor skills and communication skills; creativity, of strengthening parent-child relationships and community cohesion, and building positive respectful relationships; of developing linguistic ability, as well as self-expression, self-identify and self-esteem.

Furthermore, the Early Years Theatre work that we are implementing has a strong advocacy component as we are working with parents/ caregivers and Early Childhood Development practitioners. The focus of the 'first 1000 days' is often on questions of nutrition, parent and guardian health and education, and upon the critical relationships between children, caregivers and teachers. Mothertongue's core approach involves the idea that 'a child' is not an independent individual but someone whose well-being demands understanding complex community dynamics, especially at the micro-level of the family. The activities of the Early Years Theatre work will strengthen the parent-child bonds and engage families in their children's learning and in rural setting especially these bonds may be deeply stressed due to issues of unemployment, crowded living spaces, and other challenges.

THANK YOU

