



**THE MOTHERTONGUE PROJECT  
ANNUAL REPORT  
2017**



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## **Vision**

We envision a society in South Africa where (self) recognition, (self) honouring and (self) celebration of women, youth and children is commonplace.

## **Mission**

We are committed to offering theatre as a tool for activism and fostering cultural exchange through integrated arts methodologies that celebrate and contribute to positively transforming the status of women, youth and children in their communities.

## **NOTE FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR SARA MATCHETT**

The highlight of 2016/2017 was definitely Mothertongue's introduction of Early Years Theatre into the Langeberg region. The Mothertongue Project has, over the past six years, been implementing a project aimed at developing creative expression, leadership and entrepreneurial skills amongst young men and women in the Langeberg region. 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.

The youth participants have, over the years, been trained in performance skills (acting, voice, movement and theatre making) as well as in leadership development, basic entrepreneurial skills, and participatory facilitation skills. In 2015 the project formed a part-time community theatre company comprising of six young people. Since then the company has been involved in rolling out awareness raising and social justice oriented performances in the region to various schools, community based groups/organisations, health clinics, farms and wherever else the need arises. In addition to participatory performances, the company members have established drama groups with school going youth in the different areas in which they locate.

The work implemented in the Langeberg region by the Mothertongue Project has revealed the necessity to develop the capacities of youth and children in the region, which includes young people and children on farms. This sector has historically been and

continues to be the poorest and most marginalised in the region, with under resourced childcare, school and training facilities. Poverty and high levels of unemployment are the core development challenges of the Langeberg region and its people, particularly the youth. There are practical challenges such as long distances, bad roads, and lack of public transport that make it more difficult and expensive to implement work and development in this region. A prevalence of foetal alcohol syndrome, high dropout rates amongst school goers, teenage pregnancy, gangsterism, drug abuse and a rise in crime are marked in the region. There is a feeling of having been 'left out and forgotten' and a resulting hopelessness. Hence, the work we do has a strong focus on self-development, rejuvenation and creativity.

September 2016 saw the birth of *Early Years Theatre (EYT)* in the Langeberg region. Six students from the University of Cape Town's Department of Drama collaborated with the part-time Mothertongue youth company members to develop 3 pieces of Early Years Theatre for young children aged 2-7. The 3 EYT pieces created by the students and Mothertongue company members were performed to children from various Educare centres in McGregor. At the beginning of this year, with support from the DG Murray Trust, The Mothertongue Project was able to employ five of the six part time company members on a full time basis, which means they come to work everyday and are employed as actors, makers, researchers and facilitators. The focus of the work this year was on developing Early Years Theatre in the Langeberg region, alongside the social justice and participatory theatre work that the company is already engaged in.

Another highlight for me, personally, was working with the company on creating *Umhlaba: in die skoot van die aarde*, for the McGregor 2016 Poetry Festival. I took them through a series of exercises designed to creatively explore notions of land and belonging. I used aspects of my creative research into accessing material from the body; a biography of the body, if you will. The material the company generated, was extraordinary. The process of directing the piece was equally rewarding. The end result was a beautifully crafted piece that left the McGregor Poetry Festival audience feeling transported; some couldn't leave the performance space and expressed how the work had moved them.

I am deeply appreciative of the youth theatre company members: Sandile Skosana, Jaydene Lekay, Ashley Seconds, Khayaletu Mkorwana and Denise Gandu, for your commitment to developing your skills and to using the craft of theatre and performance to make a difference in other people's lives. You inspire me! Thank you to the Board of Directors who work alongside me: Makgathi Mokwena and Rehane Abrahams. Thank you to the Advisory Council: Silvana Dantu, Nina Callaghan, Nolufefe Ntshuntshe and

Veronica Baxter. Your advice and direction are invaluable. To the facilitators, Nolufefe Ntshuntshe and Jason Jacobs, your commitment, creativity, and facilitation skills are the glue that holds it all together. Marlene, Synnov and Isabelle, thank you for keeping the administrative and financial matters in tact. And lastly, a huge thank you to Jennie Reznek and all at Magnet Theatre for sharing the magical world of Early Years Theatre with us.

I look forward to what the new year brings!



DR SARA MATCHETT

## **The Langeberg Youth Arts Project**

This reports reflects on the work achieved during 1 April 2016 to 30 March 2017. The project has grown tremendously in terms of the scope of the work. The Mothertongue Project has expanded into Early Years Theatre and we are now reaching many more people in the Langeberg district. The Project works with small babies, ECD practitioners, parents, farm communities and their children; primary schools and primary teachers, and adolescents in community drama groups.

## **Participatory Performances**

The Mothertongue Youth Theatre Company was initially formed as a part time theatre company in 2014. Since January 2017 the company members have been employed on a full time basis. The company raises community awareness on current social issues using theatre performances. This year saw the development of two play: *Mama Ruby* and *Choices*.

*Mama Ruby* highlights a family in serious trouble: the father is an unemployed abusive alcoholic, and the mother supports her two school going children; the son deals and uses drugs when he is supposed to be at school and the daughter is HIV positive and pregnant. They all deal with their problems in different ways. The play was performed in diverse settings including Le Chasseur Farm, and at the Robertson Taxi rank. *Mama Ruby* was also invited to perform at the African Women's Playwright's Symposium that was held at the Theatre Arts Admin Collective in Observatory, Cape Town, in March.

*Choices* was performed for World Aids Day at the Ashton Town Hall as part of by the Langeberg Municipality programme.. *Choices* highlights the importance of the first 1000 days of a child's life, the detrimental effect of substance abuse, violence against women and the role of communities in addressing these issues.

A highlight of the company's performances was *Umhlaba - in die skoot van die aarde*. The production comprises a gripping collection of poems written by each member of the theatre company. The poems reflect and question their ancestral heritage through childhood memories and specifically explore ideas around land and belonging. It was performed at the McGregor Poetry Festival 2016.

## **Youth Drama groups**

The company members started setting up and implementing community youth drama groups in 2015. They focused this year on developing their capacity to run and mentor other drama groups in their local communities and created new theatre pieces. The groups are: Incredible Poets (McGregor) and Curtain Call (Nkqubela, Robertson).

The youth drama groups performed at the Callie De Wet Hall, Robertson and at a church fundraiser in McGregor.

The Youth Theatre Company also provided training to support the Breede Centre youth in McGregor, to include drama in their after care and holiday programmes.

## **Early Years Theatre**

The Early Years Theatre Project is for children aged 0-7 years, living in rural and peri-rural areas of the Langeberg region. The theatre and expressive arts therapies support children in their cognitive, physical, emotional, spiritual, linguistic and creative development. The programme includes parents and strengthens parent-child bonds and engages families in their learning. Early Years Theatre aims to impact positively on confidence, self-esteem, personal, social and emotional development, breaking down societal differences, and leading to decreased social problems, reduced inequality and increased creativity.

The company members received training together with drama students from the University of Cape Town in performance theatre, and furthermore in project literacy and management skills training. They created five Early Years Theatre pieces: "Tinnetjies"; "Pampiri"; "Pieces of Wood"; "Fountain of Stones" and "In2Out".

The Early Years audience groups consist of both groups of children, and groups of babies with their parents/caregivers. The Langeberg Region has a high rate of teenage and single mothers, and priority is given to working with these families to strengthen and

support parent-child bonds. The communities are reached on farms, community ECD centres/sites, preschools and primary schools. The Project mobile tent is used where needed.

During the month of February and March, we reached 282 children between 4 and 7 years old, through the performances.

ECD practitioners value the practical creative ideas: “I will use the songs and the way they played with the stones and paper in my class”; “ It is good for children to play while they are learning - it helps them to focus” and “ It teaches them to play as a group, to share, and to explore more”.

## **Training**

The Youth Company members received a range of training to increase their capacity to project manage, to manage finances, and computer literacy as well as in personal and leadership development and skills in mentoring youth drama groups.

A member attended a Cape Winelands script writing workshop which resulted in a new play called “The Shoe”. Other specialist training included intensive Early Years Theatre training and a weeklong Digital Storytelling workshop co-ordinated by SATVI.

## **Networking and advocacy**

The Mothertongue Project is an active member in a number of community forums: Langeberg Multi Sectoral Action Team; The Department of Health; the Cape Winelands Cohesion Conversation; the Langeberg Substance Abuse Group and the McGregor Poetry Festival group as well as the McGregor Tourism Forum.

## **The way forward**

### **Early Years Theatre**

Our overall aim is to develop the reach and scope of the Early Years Theatre (EYT) work in the Langeberg region. Currently the programme is being piloted in four Early Childhood Development Centres in four areas in the Langeberg region: McGregor, Robertson, Nkqubela and La Chasseur. The work is being continuously monitored and documented. In the following two years the activities and outputs will include: Creating and rolling out more performances aimed at children between the ages of six months and seven years old in the Langeberg region, including early childhood care centres on farms. Fully conceived and developed work has, in the first phase of the early years theatre project (first half of 2016), also proven to align with curriculum in all four

Early Childhood Development centres that the Mothertongue company has performed in. This has provided added value for the educators as a way to support their learning programme with the children. This will continue into the next phase and preliminary research into learning areas will be done prior to developing the new work. We intend to engage eight additional Early Childhood Development centres, taking the total to 12. The plan is to extend the reach of the project to include the other towns in the region: Ashton, Montagu and Bonnievale.

### **Early Years Theatre Toolkit**

We will focus on developing a draft toolkit for Early Childhood Development (ECD) educators and caregivers in the region. The draft toolkit will focus on methodologies employed by EYT. The draft toolkit will propose innovative ways of working with materials, rhythm, pattern and repetition to engage the children's imaginative and creative abilities and will be piloted through workshops with Early Childhood Development workers and caregivers from four educare centres in our pilot areas (McGregor, Nkqubela, La Chasseur and Robertson). The purpose of the pilot will be to refine and edit the toolkit before it is designed and printed. Once the toolkit has been published, Early Childhood Centre educators and caregivers from the 12 educare centres will be trained to implement the toolkit. The toolkit is envisioned as a resource for educators and caregivers to arouse wonder and play instead of using didactic methods to convey ideas and instruction.

### **Youth Drama Groups**

We intend to focus on developing the capacities of the Mothertongue company in managing and running their drama groups in their respective areas. They will be supported to develop a clear learning journey for the participants, working towards a showcase of this project through a mini drama festival. The weekly work with these drama groups forms part of the intern working hours. Currently, there are two drama groups that seek to:

- Increase the number of local young people participating in the groups
- Increase the number of facilitators and group leaders through nurturing the more senior drama group participants and developing leadership capacity
- Advance and build participants theatre and performance skills
- Plan and host a mini drama festival that showcases the work of the drama groups

### **Participatory Performances**

We will continue to roll out participatory performances that speak to challenges that youth face in the region. These performances will continue to be aimed at raising awareness and mobilising communities around social justice issues such as gender

equity, access to health services, opportunities for young people, and the like. These participatory theatre plays will be performed at schools, community centres, clinics and public spaces in the region. They follow a format of audience interviews post performance, with leading questions stimulating discussion and debate around the provocations raised in the plays.

We intend to extend the reach of the performances to include other towns in the region: Ashton, Montagu and Bonnievale.

## **Funding partners**

The Mothertongue Project wishes to thank our funding partners for their generous support: The National Lotteries Commission, The DG Murray Trust, the Maria Marina Foundation, The Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) and the McGregor Poetry Festival which sponsored a new computer.

## **Financial statement**

See attached Audited Financial Statement