

COP MEETING

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LEARNING BRIEF: THE IMPORTANCE OF AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMMES IN NARROWING THE OPPORTUNITY GAP

This learning brief was produced by The Learning Trust in partnership with the After School Game Changer, a priority project of the Western Cape Government.

The After School sector is a critical component in increasing opportunities for learners in low and no fee schools and in providing support to teachers to deliver on quality academic outcomes. We need to continue to build evidence and this starts by sharing stories about how After School programmes have offered individuals that critical next step towards becoming active citizens and fulfilling their own potential.

This learning brief is based on the first Community of Practice held on 27 February 2019. It seeks to clarify what exactly the “opportunity gap” is, introduces an important online tool for assessing and monitoring the status of our youth, and highlights the importance of After School programmes in engaging the whole learner.



Western Cape
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Game Changer

After School



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A EXPLORING THE GAP

Seventy percent (70%) of Grade 4 learners in the Western Cape cannot read for meaning. Less than half the learners who start in Grade 1 will make it through to complete matric. Even for those who do complete and pass the matric exam, there are concerns about the quality of that pass and whether it actually prepares learners for the next stage of their lives. This being, not only about securing employment, but about being a whole healthy member of society.

Many learners from under-resourced communities have limited quality time with positive adult role models, they seldom go on outings beyond their surroundings, and have limited access to After School programmes. The above-mentioned experiences are among those shown to dramatically boost the learners' academic outcomes. By the time learners who have been afforded such experiences reach grade 12, they are a full four years ahead of those who do not. Unequal access to opportunities and experiences means that children inherit the socio-economic circumstances of their

families and communities irrespective of their aspirations. Research shows that participating in an After School programme can help to close this gap.

GABEBA GAIDIEN

is passionate about the ability of After School programmes to close the opportunity gap for learners in the Cape Flats communities. She herself matriculated with eight distinctions from Manenberg High School. Gabeba has since buried five of her high school friends who became involved in gangs. While she believes that learners like herself who achieved against the odds should be celebrated, what is far more important is that every learner gets not just a matric, but finishes their schooling in such a way that they can actually see and grasp the next opportunity to take their lives forward.



B LAY OF THE LAND. THE STATE OF YOUTH IN THE WESTERN CAPE.

The Policy and Strategy Development Support Unit in the Western Cape Department of the Premier has partnered with the University of Cape Town in developing a tool to explore the state of youth aged 15 to 25 years. Initially only available for the Western Cape, this tool in the form of a web-based application now gives access to previously unavailable data on a national scale.

The “**Youth Explorer**” tool brings together different data sets including census data, crime data, educational statistics and health data. These different data sets are collected and pulled together in one place to get the best possible picture of what is happening with South African youth.

The tool can also be used to compare different geographical areas and highlight the “gap” between the state of youth in one place versus another. Take for example Khayelitsha and Rondebosch. In Khayelitsha, 81.6% of learners complete their grade 9 year compared to 94.5% of learners from Rondebosch. Moreover, 43.8% of Khayelitsha’s grade 8 learners go on to pass matric compared to almost double this number in Rondebosch (82.2%).

The average pass rate for matric maths in Khayelitsha is only 22.4% whereas it is 56.4% in Rondebosch.

The Youth Explorer is readily available to anyone with an online connection and it is easy to use. Information is presented in a way that is highly accessible, even to those who may not be comfortable with data and statistics. You can simply use the primary search bar to find the area you want more information about and the tool immediately presents all the relevant information on the youth in that area as well as a map of the area. It also gives the data in an easy-to-understand visual representation.

After School programmes can use the tool to get a picture of the community they are working in and plan their offerings and support accordingly.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

What’s exciting about the Youth Explorer tool is that it is a partnership between government, the University of Cape Town (UCT) and non-governmental organisations. Where else can these kinds of partnerships be created to support children and youth, not just provincially but also locally in the areas where After School programmes are operating?



G WHAT CLOSSES THE GAP?

Ayesha Alawie of Teach Out described a UCT-led academic support programme for high school Maths and English, one of many tutoring programmes operating across the country. She highlighted the importance of the special relationship between the tutor and learner. While this is an academic programme, what is even more important than transferring knowledge is having fun, building confidence and engaging learners. This is what supports the development of young people as whole human beings.

Addressing the holistic needs of the learner was also highlighted by Grant Edmond of Just Grace. Their holistic youth development programme helps to set youth up for life beyond passing matric. **Just Grace** (and many such After School programmes) take care to interact with learners with a full understanding of their home circumstances and life difficulties.

Sihle Tshabalala of **Quirky 30** also talked about the importance of meeting children and youth where they are at, considering

their contextual surroundings, cultural background, language, and learning styles, for example. He cautioned against designing one-size-fits-all solutions as children learn differently and are shaped by their specific context, such as growing up with extended family or being faced with the myriad social challenges that exist in township communities.

The objective of After School is to support young people to get through school, access post-school opportunities and ultimately become meaningful contributors to society. Many young people, however, do not complete this journey due to a lack of critical life skills to navigate their challenges. After School programmes are well placed to instill these critical life skills, including resilience, grit, problem solving, communication skills, conflict management, and managing relationships with others.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

After School programmes can be strict and exclude learners who are not participating. Care must be taken to seek the knowledge of that child's context before making such decisions. Many After School programmes conduct one-on-one check-ins with the learners, home visits, or host parents' meetings to this effect. Consider a girl who lives with her mother and an abusive step-father. Unbeknownst to her parents and other adults around her, her boyfriend forces himself on her. As a result of this trauma, she misses several sessions at the local After School programme. Will removing her from the programme be helpful to her?

D CONCLUSION

After School programmes have huge potential to close the opportunity gap and offer the “ordinary magic” needed for a young person to thrive. This often involves a caring parent, one other caring adult and a modest connection to opportunity at key points in their life. To close this gap, the explicit as well as the more subtle life skills that After School programmes provide, makes a huge impact on the ‘whole’ child. In this way, they are better prepared to take advantage of opportunities available to them.

RESOURCES AND LINKS

- For instant easy-to-access data about the state of youth in South Africa, visit youthexplorer.org.za/profiles/province-WC-western-cape
- To learn more about the holistic approach offered by Just Grace go to justgrace.co.za/team
- To learn more about coding for the future with Quirky 30 go to www.quirky30.co.za
- The opportunity gap starts in the womb and the first 1000 days of a child’s life are critical to later development. To see the CEO of the DG Murray Trust make the “Case for Embrace” go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWNlpneA7Ow

