

The Western Cape After School Community of Practice

*A game changing initiative of the Western Cape Government
in partnership with The Learning Trust*

LEARNING BRIEF No.2: Barriers to Success for After School Programmes

July 2016





This Learning Brief has been produced by The Learning Trust, in partnership with the Western Cape Government, as a resource for the After School programme community in the Western Cape (civil society, government and schools). It is the second in a series of four Learning Briefs, each amplifying learning emerging from the Western Cape After School Community of Practice events in 2016.

“The best way to engage a learner is to develop a relationship, head and heart, with them; the least good is to lecture them on their future!”
– Gabeba Gaidien, The Learning Trust

THE AFTER SCHOOL GAME CHANGER

The After School Game Changer initiative was launched by the Western Cape Government in 2015, to strengthen after school services and the outcomes of the sector for disadvantaged and disengaged youth. The goal is:

Western Cape learners’ regular and sustained participation in after school activities which contributes towards positive youth development and improves school outcomes.

The After School space was selected as one of the province’s key priorities – or game changers – as it provides safe and supervised spaces, holistic education, a sense of belonging and positive role models, all of which the province aims to enable through its six game changing initiatives.

THE LEARNING TRUST

The Learning Trust is a non-profit, conduit funding organisation that seeks to extend and improve learning opportunities for young South Africans growing up in conditions of poverty and exclusion, by funding and building the capacity of outstanding, emerging grassroots education initiatives. The Learning Trust works alongside local partners to strengthen governance and improve quality and impact. With a portfolio of more than 60 grantee partners, many of which offer After School programmes, The Learning Trust seeks to champion the coordination of the After School sector in South Africa. It has been appointed as the Western Cape Government’s partner in facilitating this, by building a community of stakeholders interested in collaborating to grow and support the most exciting After School interventions in South Africa.



“NGOs and this Community of Practice bring a whole lot of insights and perspectives that government does not have.”
– Jacqui Boule, Western Cape After School Game Changer

THE SECOND AFTER SCHOOL COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE MEETING

Having considered critical success factors for After School (AS) programming at the first AS Community of Practice (CoP) meeting, the second CoP meeting, held at IkamvaYouth on 15 June 2016, provided an opportunity for civil society and government representatives to unpack and share barriers to success for AS programmes, and begin to explore how to overcome them.

In his welcome, **Charles Ainslie**, Director of The Learning Trust, stated his conviction that, through collaboration, the AS sector has the wealth of experience and the necessary resources to effect change in learning and lives. But government and NGOs must work together, as the AS system can only grow strong and effective if the strengths of both are used. Charles highlighted three important questions that had emerged from the first CoP meeting. These presented as challenges that would need ongoing, collective grappling with to be overcome:

1. Focusing on the individual learner: **what is a learner-centred outcome?**
2. In our different school and community environments, there are complexities unique to those environments, so **how can ASPs respond to the unique environments?**
3. **How do we operate from a deep ethical value base**, where we can work to build real trust relationships with the people with whom we work?

Charles urged CoP participants to be very open about the problems they encounter, unpacking the barriers to the success of AS programmes. The big question would be: how do we overcome these issues? **The next CoP meeting would look at solutions to the challenges and the efficiencies of collaboration.**

Charles emphasised that “we’re looking to take action – what’s the art of the possible about how we can facilitate what’s coming out of these CoP meetings to move things forward?” In order to see change, CoP members would need to focus on thinking about three key factors which would affect AS outcomes:

1. **Advocacy** – how do we strengthen the AS sector through advocacy?
2. **Capacity support** – how can we unlock capacity support in the sector?
3. **Peer learning and assessment.**



AFTER SCHOOL CoP WORKING GROUPS

Charles Ainslie of The Learning Trust announced a new AS CoP initiative: the launch of three CoP working groups

At the first CoP meeting, it had become clear that there were "low hanging fruit": issues that appeared possible to address together. To do this effectively, it had been decided to launch CoP working groups or coordinating forums. The first three working groups would focus on three of the most critical issues for the AS sector:

- 1. Research** – This forum will start to consider how to map out data and research needs and gaps, and how to use research more effectively. In articulating the value of AS programmes, there is a need to demonstrate how we do it, where the gaps are, where resources are. For instance, The Learning Trust is struggling to find organisations that undertake concrete AS work in the arts and culture space – is there a gap there, a lack of skills, do we need to commission research on it? What great research has been done, how do we elevate it and bring it to the attention of government and academics? How can we leverage all the action research happening in AS organisations, as well as other local and international research?
- 2. Advocacy** – This working group will explore critical AS advocacy issues and focus on collaborative advocacy for the AS sector as a whole. Looking at policy, research and data will help focus understanding of where government support is needed and where the AS sector can best support government. Given that AS support is a critical part of holistic and formal education, how is it best possible to package it to explain the value of AS programmes to donors and other stakeholders?
- 3. Peer learning** – One of the CoP's objectives is to professionalise the AS sector, but there is a great deal of standardisation needed: when ten different organisations are asked what they look for in an AS coach, for example, ten different responses might be offered. What do we standardise, what cannot be standardised? What is the career path, what training is required? It is important to give consideration to the idea of assessment in the sector – what are the advantages, how can we use it as a learning experience?

**If you would be interested in joining any of the working groups, please contact
Charles or Gabeba at The Learning Trust: Tel: 021 709 0420
Email: charles@thelearningtrust.org or gabeba@thelearningtrust.org.**



A panel of four key speakers, facilitated by The Learning Trust's Nonceba Mtwana, gave their responses to the question of what they saw as the most prevalent barriers to success for AS programmes, how they have experienced or observed these being overcome, and the opportunities they see emerging from these challenges. Below the panellists are introduced, with the top three barriers they highlighted.

Joy Olivier is Director and one of the co-founders of IkamvaYouth and has been involved in all aspects of the organisation since starting as a volunteer in 2003, working full-time for IkamvaYouth since 2010. Joy has an honours degree in Psychology and a Masters degree in Education and Information and Communications Technology from the University of Cape Town. Previously, in addition to her role at IkamvaYouth, she worked with TEACH South Africa in the Western Cape and as a researcher at the University of the Western Cape, the Human Sciences Research Council and bridges.org. All her work is focused on redressing inequality and injustice in South Africa through promoting equal access to quality education and opportunities. Joy is an Ashoka Fellow and has won a number of national, regional and international awards for her work with IkamvaYouth.

1. Access to learners

CASE STUDY 1: SCHOOL AS PROGRAMMES VS NGO AS PROGRAMMES

Joy Olivier related an issue with learner attendance experienced in Gauteng by IkamvaYouth, which runs AS programmes for Grade 8-12 learners. The Gauteng Education Department made a decision to add more hours to the school day in high schools, to include AS programmes run by teachers, who are paid more to do this. The curriculum is delivered in these AS sessions and it is compulsory for learners to attend. As a result, learners do not have time to attend other, NGO-run, AS programmes.

It is well established that attendance at AS programmes is extremely important. If learners do not attend, it is clear that a quality programme is not being offered. Reasons for not attending range from systemic to environmental challenges and the realities of being a teen. There can also be issues with multiple, non-coordinated, programmes being offered in the same place. Building a culture of learner attendance takes time and requires building trust with learners, parents, teachers and the community: they want to see results and be sure that a programme will be there for the long term.

2. Safety

Safety is a huge challenge for AS programmes, whether they are run on school premises or at other locations, such as community centres. Learners,



volunteers and staff risk physical danger by attending programmes in many areas and it can be difficult to hire staff willing to take such a risk.

3. Lack of access to data

Data is key to the sustainability of AS programmes: it is critical to show proof of impact and that value is being added by AS work, so accessing quality data that actually means something is essential. But gaining access to learners' school marks, from schools, children or parents, regularly proves challenging. Even in no-fee schools, principals may charge extra fees and withhold reports if the fees have not been paid. Then what is the quality of the results? Do they actually mean anything? It seems that it is equally hard for government officials to access internal data.

CASE STUDY 2: UNINTERESTED TEACHERS AS BARRIERS

Xolisa Gulisa highlighted the challenge presented by teachers' lack of involvement with the AS literacy programmes she ran in primary schools. Following the switch from learning in mother tongue to English in Grade 4, there is often a slump in children's literacy, so it is important for them to have extra support with AS programmes. But Xolisa had often found that, while Foundation Phase teachers were interested and keen to be involved in such programmes, Intermediate teachers were not. So there was a challenge in working with children in Grades 4-6 if the teachers were not involved and motivating children to participate. Part of Xolisa's work was to train and mentor teachers and create a community of practice in schools, in order to support children's literacy, but the barrier presented by Intermediate teachers' lack of interest made it difficult to achieve this.

Xolisa Guzula is a biliteracy teacher and community trainer, researcher, storyteller, emerging author and translator of children's literature. Having worked for both PRAESA and the Nelson Mandela Institute for Education and Rural Development, she became one of the founders of the network of community literacy clubs emerging across South Africa and a proponent of bilingual education and biliteracy development. She is currently a doctoral student at the University of Cape Town, focusing on bilingual literacy practices.

1. Lack of buy-in from school staff

Principals may be keen on having AS programmes in their schools, but not teachers, or vice versa. When teachers are overworked and over-workshopped, any add-on is seen as an overload, so they do not want to be involved with AS programmes. It is important to talk to schools about how AS programmes will help them. Schools need to want to do something about their issues, then they will approach or receive AS



providers positively, rather than feeling that a programme is being forced on them. It is critical to gain buy-in from a school and to work with school management to ensure that AS programmes are part of the school's annual strategy and seen as integral to the school's learning and teaching work. MOUs between schools and AS programmes could be used to enable this.

2. Communication problems with schools

A real challenge is that many schools do not communicate well with AS programmes. They may not respond to emails, smses or WhatsApp messages and, in turn, do not alert AS programmes to changes in school timetables, plans, etc.

3. Access to facilities

As school premises do not belong to AS programmes, there are often challenges with gaining access to facilities, even when plans to use particular rooms and resources have been agreed with school management. AS teams may arrive at schools to find that premises are locked, resources are behind a locked door, no keys are available and the caretaker is not on site. This may again be due to lack of school buy-in or poor communication within the school. Some AS organisations find it beneficial to use non-school premises, such as community centres or churches, while others have been successful in erecting prefabricated buildings or tents in school grounds, dedicated to the AS programme.

Mario van Niekerk is an active citizen in the Heideveld community who lived the brutal reality of the consequences of a marginalised context with limited opportunities. Mario was a gang leader and worked his way out of that challenging context to create something that would prevent a similar fate for the youth of Heideveld. He is widely acknowledged for having founded a community movement – Great

CASE STUDY 3: GCU TURNS A BARRIER INTO A SOLUTION

Mario van Niekerk spoke of how the many gangsters in Heideveld had been seen as a problem for many years, a barrier to many children and young people completing their education and fulfilling their potential. This was the result partly of a negativity endemic to a community with access to very little. When he set up Great Commission United (GCU), however, Mario realised that, rather than a barrier, he could use his knowledge of gangsterism to create an opportunity, using the model of how gangs think and operate as a way of attracting and retaining children on AS programmes. With more than 20 gangs in Heideveld, he knew that gangs attract young people with a range of offerings, so GCU was designed to offer a variety of sport and educational opportunities. GCU purposefully aims to redirect the cycle of crime, by recruiting troubled youth to give them opportunities away from gangs and to inspire other children and young people. 4,000 learners are now enrolled in GCU's tutoring programmes in five schools.



Commission United (GCU) – that provides a range of in-school and After School opportunities in the form of literacy coaching, sports activities and life skills empowerment for school-going youth at five schools in the Heideveld area. GCU is notable in working successfully in partnership with government, being contracted by the provincial Department of Cultural Affairs & Sport.

1. Lack of community involvement

A significant problem in the AS sector is that opportunities are not offered to communities to become involved in AS programmes, which leads to the challenge of lack of local interest and trust in programmes. If AS programmes do not involve the community, opportunities are also missed for increasing the numbers of programme volunteers. With no services provided for the Heideveld community, GCU saw the value of rousing local people to assist in schools and with its programme. More than 50 local people are now volunteering in local schools.

2. Safety and security

The safety and security of learners and adults on AS programmes, as well as the school premises in which programmes happen, are an ongoing concern. A solution is to hire community members to take care of security, with the understanding that local people “look after their own”. Changing the school environment, beautifying school grounds and starting gardens – again with community involvement – also help to embed a sense of pride and shared ownership, which, in turn, creates a safer environment.

3. Retaining learners

Many programmes find it challenging to retain learners. The drop-out mentality in many communities of children as young as Grade 1 is an endemic factor. Building a sense of trust in the people running an AS programme is critical to inspiring and retaining children, as is offering consistency of staffing and routines. In contexts where families are dysfunctional, consistency is an important feature for children. Experience shows that, eventually, trustworthy and consistent programmes should not need to recruit children, as learners become the best recruiters, by telling other children about their positive experiences.

“We’ve been lucky, we had two evaluations done and the Western Cape Education Department availed data, because of the Game Changer and Year Beyond, and government officials assisted us to lobby for data internally. But what hope do we have if government itself is struggling to access data?”

– Joy Olivier, IkamvaYouth



Lisa Garson is a respected leader in the NGO sector who literally wrote the manual on recruiting and empowering youth volunteers in the South African context, as the founder and current Director of Action Volunteers Africa. She has had years of experience as a businesswoman in her capacity as the founder of Action Appointments, a recruitment agency that specialises in the recruitment and training of staff for the non-profit sector. Action Volunteers Africa, under Lisa's guidance, is one of the Western Cape Government's implementing agents for the school-based academic support programme, Year Beyond, known as YEBO.

1. Untested assumptions

It is necessary to have a set of assumptions (e.g. about what is needed, what impact will be made), in order to start an AS programme. But if assumptions are not tested, before launching and on an ongoing basis, there is a risk of programme failure. Many AS organisations assume that learners will want what they offer, but do not first ask learners what they want or what an attractive AS programme should look like, then find their programmes are ill matched to the users.

2. Lack of coordination and relationship-building

When working with a number of different AS partners, it is wrong to assume that all models will work well together. It takes time and capacity to coordinate programmes, avoiding duplication and a sense of competition. It is important to build allegiances between programmes, as well as with schools and the local community. When under pressure to roll out a programme, it is difficult to find time to organise events such as partnership and stakeholder workshops, but time invested up-front in doing this results in ongoing gains. If efforts do not succeed, it is important to learn and keep trying different approaches.

3. Defining AS programming success

Defining success is a barrier that needs continual interrogation. It is counter-productive to have rigid assumptions about what success means, when different programmes and different contexts or external factors result in varying outputs and outcomes.

***“Funding is always a big challenge. It’s a sore point in our sector!”
– Mario van Niekerk, GCU***



KEY BARRIERS TO AS SUCCESS EMERGING FROM THE CoP MEETING

“This is often a messy environment – it’s not plain sailing.” – Charles Ainslie

The CoP process finished with a **group exercise**, in which delegates worked collaboratively to unpack barriers they have experienced to successful AS programming and what happens when such challenges cannot be overcome. Groups' thinking was then shared with the meeting during a final **discussion facilitated by Gabeba Gaidien of The Learning Trust**. The key barriers to AS success aired throughout the CoP meeting are summarised here. (Insight into how AS programmes have been able to break down barriers and move forward will be the focus of the third CoP Learning Brief.)

Fluctuating access to learners

- Lack of learner interest, competing demands, or lack of transport, leading to poor attendance.
- Failure to look at children's point of view and gain their buy-in.
- Failure to understand the particular interests of teenagers, with programmes not feeding into those interests.
- A culture of learner drop-out, which is slow to overcome.
- Difficulty in communicating effectively with learners, not taking advantage of technology and social networking.

Lack of parental involvement

- Parents and caregivers are not involved, so are not motivating their children to attend or supporting and motivating for the programme.
- Ineffective communication with parents.
- Key documents, such as indemnity forms are not read or sent back.

Poor school involvement

- Lack of school buy-in and failure of the school to take responsibility for a programme as an integral part of its teaching and learning.
- Failure to build effective relationships with the school management team and teachers.
- Staff with whom a programme has built relationships leave the school.
- Finding the right person to communicate with in schools.
- Problems with communication – when schools are notified about programme information but teachers do not communicate it to learners.

Poor community involvement

- Failure to ask communities what they want before bringing programmes into communities.
- Failure to understand the community's mindset.
- Poor communication with communities, resulting in lack of buy-in.



- Failure to engage with community structures and decision-makers.

Issues with school premises

- The physical school environment can be a barrier, as some schools are built like prisons, fields have dry soil: without conducive surroundings, it can be hard for learners to stay engaged.
- Ownership issues, when not having dedicated spaces for programmes in schools can lead to a sense of instability and challenges in use.
- Lack of space to run programmes effectively.
- Challenges with access, due to lack of involvement of, or poor communication with, caretakers and other school staff.
- AS implies that all activities need to happen at school, but learning is not limited to school, so there is a need to consider out of school facilities for AS programmes.

Safety and security risks

- Community specific risks to the safety of learners, staff and volunteers.
- Gangsterism.
- Poor security at AS sites.

Inadequate programme quality

- Poor quality programming, not implementing good practices.
- Inadequate dosage and contact time with learners, resulting in lack of impact.

- Lack of programme standards and standardised impact indicators.
- Allowing scale to compromise quality, as funders want scale.
- Rolling out programmes before learning effectively from pilots and with small groups of learners.

Staffing challenges

- Poor staff retention and high staff turnover.
- Lack of volunteer consistency and commitment.
- Insufficient attention paid to the quality of tutors, facilitators and coaches.
- How to keep poorly paid coaches motivated if not offering pay and conditions that will keep them?

Poor access to data

- Challenges with data collection from learners and parents, such as school reports.
- Unwillingness of schools to share assessment data.
- Lack of access to data held by government.
- Lack of research on effective AS programming and impact.

Lack of coordination among programmes

- Multiple programmes can be run by different organisations in the same schools, with no coordination or management by schools.
- Competition between programmes overrides focusing on the benefits of collaboration.

The After School Community of Practice Learning Brief No.3, highlighting learning from the third CoP meeting (to take place in September 2016), will focus on considering ways to overcome barriers to the success of AS programmes, as well as potential opportunities emerging from such challenges.



THE VIEW FROM PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

Jacqui Boule, programme manager of the provincial After School Game Changer, introduced government's views on critical challenges to AS programmes and called for NGO engagement with the Game Changer.

Echoing the experience of NGOs highlighted in this learning brief, Jacqui reported on major barriers to AS success witnessed by government:

- **Many AS providers are isolated**, not communicating or collaborating. There is a lack of coordination in schools and a need to pool resources and work together.
- **Attendance** – there is a large catchment of learners, but significant lack of retention, particularly in Grades 6-9, when learners are most at risk of dropping out of school.
- **Limited HR capacity** – there is a high turnover of personnel, an absence of professional development opportunities and of professional guidelines for youth work, including a lack of legal training on obligations when working with children.
- **Research and data** – there is a lack of data on the impact of AS programmes, lack of standardised indicators and learner level assessment data, challenges around access to data and lack of research into learner needs and preferences.

Jacqui emphasised the importance of the AS Game Changer audit and review process of government AS sites and using this to agree on norms and standards and a quality framework. She encouraged CoP members to take on their own process of self-assessment and peer learning, utilising and helping to refine the framework used in the Game Changer audit. This process and local and international evidence of best practice would be used to inform the development of:

- A **code of conduct** for all working in the AS space;
- AS **norms and standards**;
- An AS **evaluation framework** and indicators; and
- AS **professionalisation** and a **training programme** targeted at the sector.

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Copies of this Learning Brief have been circulated to all members of the Western Cape After School Community of Practice. To obtain a copy, please email Gabeba: gabeba@thelearningtrust.org



USEFUL ONLINE RESOURCES

To help you learn more about the potential barriers to AS programme success and ways to overcome them, here is a short list of free resources that can be accessed online.

1. The Wallace Foundation Knowledge Center presents a short research series with papers by three experts in AS learning on the major organisational obstacles to lifting the quality of AS programmes, as well as possible remedies:
<http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Pages/Strengthening-Out-of-School-Time-Organizations.aspx>
2. This 2014 report, published 15 years after the launch of the New York City-based ExpandedSchools (previously The After School Corp), reflects on challenges faced and lessons learned in AS programming:
<http://expandedschools.org/policy-documents/after-school-and-beyond-15-year-history-after-school-corporation#sthash.EHq4oK78.dpbs>
3. As part of an online professional development workshop on Afterschool Programs - From Vision to Reality, provided by the award-winning Education Department of US public broadcaster, WNET, this page explores potential challenges or obstacles in setting up AS programmes:
http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/concept2class/afterschool/exploration_sub5.html
4. Jean Baldwin Grossman, Karen Walker, Rebecca Raley. 2001. *Challenges and Opportunities in After-School Programs: Lessons for Policymakers and Funders*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures:
<http://crcw.princeton.edu/jgrossman/chall%20and%20opp.pdf>
5. This brief from the Massachusetts Special Commission on After School and Out of School Time on overcoming barriers to getting youth "in the door" has some useful learning for programmes beyond the US context:
<http://massafterschoolcomm.org/downloads/Access%20-%20Final%20-%20Little%20Fall%202007.pdf>
6. Young people's perspectives on barriers to youth attendance in AS programmes are discussed in this paper from the US-based nonprofit research centre, Child Trends:
<http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/6.pdf>
7. Sherri Lauver, Priscilla M.D. Little, Heather B. Weiss, Harvard Family Research Project. 2004. *Moving Beyond the Barriers: Attracting and Sustaining Youth Participation in Out-of-School Time Programs*. Cambridge: Harvard Family Research Project:
<http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/moving-beyond-the-barriers-attracting-and-sustaining-youth-participation-in-out-of-school-time-programs>



THE AFTER SCHOOL COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

The **After School Community of Practice** was launched in Salt River on 30 March 2016, by **The Learning Trust**, in partnership with the **Western Cape Provincial Government After School Game Changer**. Four planned CoP events in 2016 will be supported by a pending online facility.

The objective of the CoP is to strengthen the outcomes of the sector through strategic collaboration models that are able to take best practice methodologies and programmes to scale. This objective feeds into the provincial government's larger strategic framework for the AS sector.

The **aim of the CoP** is to create space for:

- 1) **Showcasing** best practice models and potential for collaboration models;
- 2) **Sharing and learning** about successes and setbacks of models, to strengthen programmes;
- 3) **Advocacy** to showcase the potential of the sector for formal partnership with local and provincial government authorities and collaborations with civil society; and
- 4) **Collaboration** in content and information that will leverage the quality of programmes and also create opportunities for partnerships and collaboration in the sector.

THANK YOU!

We are grateful to all the representatives of the following organisations who participated in the second After School Community of Practice meeting:

Action Volunteers Africa, Amanda Development, Amandla Edufootball, Amy Biehl Foundation, Beautiful Gate, BoxGirls SA, Community Chest of the Western Cape, Click Foundation, Dream Factory Foundation, Educape Trust, Emaqabini Educational Academy, EMEP, eYona, Fight for Peace, Fundza Literacy Trust, Gold Peer Education Development Agency, Great Commission United, iKamva Labantwana, IkamvaYouth, Just Grace, NELL, Olico, PASCAP Trust, Social Project, The Learning Trust, The Sozo Foundation, University of Cape Town, Vision Afrika, VPUU NPC, Vulisango, Western Cape After School Game Changer, Wordworks.

If you would like to find out about joining the CoP, please contact Gabeba at The Learning Trust. Tel: 021 709 0420, email: gabeba@thelearningtrust.org.