



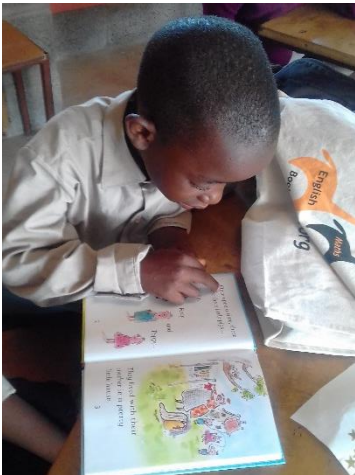
School Aid Reading Clubs

Lesotho 2017

"There were no other books to read before the reading club books."
Mojaje Mosanteli, aged 9, Tseka Primary School

Thanks to the support of Usborne Books at Home, School Aid's first reading clubs in Lesotho were rolled out in five primary schools near the capital, Maseru, in early 2017. In that first term, from January to June, 120 children attended the clubs on a weekly basis, with overall attendance coming out at 95%. That's impressive in itself, but then a further 207 children turned up in their holiday time for reading clubs run at the local bike club.

IN SCHOOLS



Every week, children in the reading clubs come together for an hour and a half after school. Drawn from years 3 and 4, so aged about 8–11 years old, they sign up for a term – and rapidly discover that reading can be fun. And that's the point. Research shows that reading for pleasure plays a vital role in improving educational outcomes, and has also been linked to wide-ranging improvements in wellbeing – so getting these children interested in reading is crucial to their all-round development.

A star on each child's personal bookmark marks their attendance for the week. Then it's time for a story, usually drawn from Usborne's *Illustrated Stories from Around the World*. The simple words and colourful pictures give plenty of scope for participation, through actions, drama and retelling the story. There may then be one-to-one reading, led by the teacher, or the option to draw a picture from the story – which is particularly popular. At the end of the session, children go home sporting stickers awarded for effort, progress and achievement.

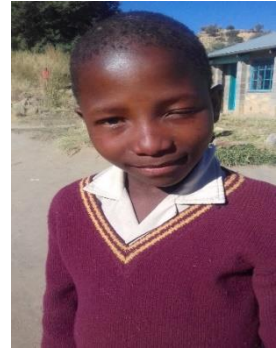
Our man in Lesotho

Moso Ranoosi is full of energy – which is good news for a man who starts each reading club session with an 'energiser'. As School Aid's Project and Reading Club Officer, he has coordinated and run every single reading club since the project began. The energiser, devised to enliven the children after a long school day sitting on hard benches, certainly works – and the children – from tots to teens – love it.



Meet Keketso

Keketso is 11 years old. His parents died when he was very young, so he lives with his grandfather, older brother and youngest sister. Although his grandfather is a chief, and gets some remuneration for his chieftaincy services, life is hard in his family. "Sometimes, I do not eat in the morning when I go to school because grandfather does not give me food." He thinks this is because he failed to take his uncle's animals to the river – something that's not always possible if he gets home late from school.



Keketso attends Leqetsoana Primary School, where he signed up for one of the first School Aid reading clubs. Each week, he enjoyed listening to stories – especially *The Little Giraffe* – and tried his best to read. There was no such time in his school before the reading clubs started.

At first, Keketso's literacy level was very low but his enthusiasm grew, and with support from the reading club his participation – and then his reading skills – gradually improved. And perhaps most important of all, he has learned the joy of reading.

IN THE HOLIDAYS: FUTURE STARS



But what about the long school holidays? This was an opportunity too good to miss! In June, Moso came up with the idea of running reading clubs at a local bike club, Future Stars, where children come in the holidays to go trail biking.

Over six days, 207 children and teenagers turned up at their holiday reading club – entirely of their own accord. They started with an energiser, of course – a way of settling them down after a hard morning on two wheels. Then came the story, and the opportunity to interact with actions and dramatisation. And finally there were pictures – loads of them – with captions written in English.

WHAT NEXT?

For the second term in 2017, School Aid plans to continue the first five clubs, with two of them being run independently, and three with ongoing weekly support from Moso. These, and a further two new clubs, should attract a further 144 children – bringing the year's total to 264.

Expansion will continue into 2018, when we propose rolling out reading clubs in another eight schools. By the end of the year, the number of clubs will have risen to 30, between them bringing all the excitement of reading to another 360 children. And that's without the holiday clubs...

Tricia Hayne
School Aid African Projects Coordinator
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