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## **NATIONAL BOOK WEEK HIGHLIGHTS NEED FOR LIBRARIAN TRAINING**

More than 22 000 children living in some of the most impoverished areas in South Africa have been reached as a result of the Mandela Day Library container initiative. Launched three years ago by the Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory and Cape Town based NGO Breadline Africa; the project has rolled out just under 40 library containers to schools in all nine provinces. To celebrate National Book Week, Breadline Africa will launch two fully equipped libraries in Mpumalanga and the North West, both of which have been sponsored by the Woolworths Trust and MySchool, MyVillage, MyPlanet fundraising programme..

“Literacy is one of the most pressing needs in South Africa, it is crucial that this project remains sustainable,” Puleng Phooko, programme manager for Breadline Africa said. “Our biggest challenge is ensuring the librarians are adequately trained and the libraries themselves equipped with the correct reading material. We are grateful for the support received from corporates; ultimately this will ensure the long-term success and sustainability of the initiative.”

An annual national assessment report on junior education revealed that over half of grade three and six pupils in South Africa are performing at a level below par with the curriculum requirements per grade. According to the 2011 report, the national average performance in literacy stands at 35% among grade three pupils and at 28% for grade six.

The libraries are in need of strong support systems; “By providing training for school librarians we are not only empowering local staff members, but we are increasing the longevity of the libraries themselves and the library container project itself,” Phooko said of a librarian training programme taking place later this month in Cape Town and Johannesburg. Training will focus on improving management systems and the stewardship of books. The Woolworths Trust has sponsored librarian training for the two schools being refurbished with libraries.

Since 2011 Breadline Africa has successfully provided Mandela Day libraries to schools across the country. Each library, which is recycled from a disused shipping container, costs on average R200 000 to refurbish; this excludes books to fill the library.

### **Opening Imagination • Enabling Futures**

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“A pilot monitoring and evaluation system assessment is currently being led by Breadline Africa on the level of literacy amongst learners in South Africa. Once this is properly in place, we will be able to have case studies that speak to the success of the project,” Phooko said. “As it stands, we need around 140 000 books to ensure the libraries are being put to their optimal use.” A study on school libraries conducted by UCT showed illiteracy is not only a result of too few functional libraries, but that the teachers themselves are not familiar with how best to make use of libraries. Access to relevant reading material created a huge barrier to entry.

“National Book Week is an excellent opportunity to drive awareness around our Mandela Day Library project and the need for access to books, training and increased literacy at schools,” Phooko concluded.



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