

ON OCTOBER 22, South Africa will, through the work done by the After School Game Changer programme in the Western Cape, be joining the 21st annual global Lights On Afterschool celebration.

South Africa's 23 000 public schools and its 12 million learners are of the most at-risk assets in the country. Every year, each of these 12 million learners have to make critical decisions about their futures.

They face a mountain of challenges to get from Grade 1 through to Grade 12. The data shows that only 40% of this group will successfully complete matric.

Behind the scenes, efforts to change this narrative are led by the After School Game Changer programme.

Staffed by diverse practitioners, the group is trained to work in low-fee and no-fee schools at critical levels of weakness in the education system.

Key focus areas are Grade 4 maths and reading skills as well as risk-taking behaviours at Grade 8-10 levels.

#changethestory



LORENZO A DAVIDS

KEEP THE LIGHTS ON FOR BETTER LEARNING

These more than 100 silent heroes are deployed to the poorest schools to assist their learners with after-school

learning support programmes to ensure that they do not become part of the more than 60% of students who drop out of school.

Lights On Afterschool was launched in October 2000 in the US, resulting in more than 8 000 Lights On Afterschool events held annually.

The purpose of the Lights On After-school annual commemoration is to celebrate after-school programmes and their important role in the lives of children and communities. It celebrates the courageous efforts of civil society organisations who daily collaborate to ensure that a vibrant, positive and vision-imparting series of after-school programmes exist for the poorest schools.

From after-school maths tuition to sport through to life skills and mental health, more than 200 civil society organisations have joined hands to build a robust after-school movement. Under the banner of the After School Game Changer programme, it is one of the most innovative South African

interventions in the education life cycle of the child.

You can talk about your emotional trauma and learn to surf. You can explain your difficulties at home and get help with your language skills. You can play with your friends and fall in love with maths and reading.

Cape Town will be the first African city to host the Lights On Afterschool celebration on October 22. The message that will travel from Cape Town to communities all over the continent is that millions of learners need quality after-school programmes.

In 1967, when pre-Grade 1 education was virtually non-existent for children from the townships, I was entered into a programme run by Dr Frank Quint at Hewat Training College, with some 30 other township 5-year-olds.

Based at Hewat, he would personally prepare us for primary school learning while at the same time allowing his students to do their practice-teaching on us. Dr Quint was an

amazing educator.

Each morning he would walk into the class and ask us to close our eyes and tell him what we see. We would laugh at this game and readily shout "we see nothing". After a while, we began to see lights and stars and dancing figures. When we finally began to see things with our eyes closed, Dr Quint stopped and said: "It is important, while learning, that you can see in the dark." That was the most important lesson I have ever had in my entire educational journey.

The over 100 after school game-changer activists are teaching this new cohort of learners the same skill I got taught in 1967 by Dr Frank Quint: the ability to see in the dark.

On October 22, Cape Town will join over 8 000 other communities to call for the lights to be on in our schools, long after the school day has ended, so that these silent heroes can do the work of critical learning support. It is essential to teach our children to see in the dark.