



*#LightsOnAfterSchool*

Partners in the After School sector, including grant-making and educational support organisation, [The Learning Trust](#) (TLT), the Western Cape Government's [Youth and After School Programme Office](#) and the [Community Chest](#), are putting the spotlight after-school. For the first time this year, South Africa is joining [Lights On Afterschool](#), a 20 year old international movement aimed at increasing awareness of the after-school sector and its impact on improving learner outcomes and education as a whole. This is a call on all after-school organisations in South Africa to participate on 22 October 2020.

*“Participating in this movement comes at such a pivotal time, as South Africa’s most vulnerable children have suffered through tremendous learning challenges this year. Continued support for the South African after-school sector is essential if we are to mitigate the impact Covid-19 has had on learning, and the #LightsOnAfterSchool campaign highlights the critical role these programmes play in providing equal access to educational as well as psycho-social support,”* says Sibongile Khumalo, Executive Director of The Learning Trust.

After School Programmes (ASPs) are organised activities for children to participate in at the end of their formal school day, to include homework assistance and dedicated tutoring, higher institution and job readiness programmes, arts and culture, physical movement, music programmes, feeding schemes, sports and more. Many ASPs also run facilities that offer computer and data access to learners.

*“For too long the amazing humans who provide learners with access to these programmes after formal school hours have been hidden. Their critical role in the education system has not been recognised. It is time to shine the spotlight on the amazing work being done to enable every learner to access a rounded education*

*and caring humans behind the work, the Humans of the After School sector,” says Boulle, the Head of Youth and After School in the Western Cape Government.*

### **ASPs influential in bridging the learning gap in lower quintile schools**

According to a 2018 Western Cape Government After School [report](#), the education gap in SA is between 4 – 6 years. This means that in a lot of instances, grade 8 learners are working at a grade 4 level. After-school programmes spread across townships, peri-urban and rural areas, serve young people living in poverty and exclusion and work to minimise the access gap of quintile 1-3 schools, which make up approximately 90% of all public schools.

Research reveals how ASPs have been one of the most influential players in minimising the learning gaps of the educational system in these lower quintile schools which are said to experience the highest number of grade repetitions and drop-outs annually.

*“There is an undeniable need to show the difference that ASPs make in improving learning potential of vulnerable children. The evidence from our international counterparts is solid and we are continuously working to undertake and present local research that reinforces the data of the educational gap in SA. In order to produce significant improvements in public schooling and overcome our socio-economic inequalities, it is necessary to look at how change can be affected beyond the classroom. This is where initiatives like #LightsOnAfterSchool become important, as a tool to help highlight the positive impact of the after-school sector,” says Khumalo.*

### **The first #LightsOnAfterSchool campaign in South Africa**

The #LightsOnAfterSchool campaign was launched by the non-profit US-based organisation [Afterschool Alliance](#), in October 2000, and is chaired by Former California Governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger. The organisation calls on ASP partners throughout the world to generate awareness of equal and quality access to learning programmes. This year’s 21<sup>st</sup> annual campaign is dedicated to shining a light on everything ASPs have done in an unprecedented year and will involve hosted events as well as roundtable discussions with policy makers, local community leaders and educational institutions.

*“We are excited to partner with the Afterschool Alliance to drive the first #LightsOnAfterSchool campaign in South Africa and are encouraging as many NGO’s as possible to get involved. ASPs can celebrate in any way they’d like and get creative by way of writing a poem or a piece of music or hosting a small event in their local community showcasing the work they do,” says Khumalo.*

[The Advance Edukos Foundation](#) in Strandfontein, Western Cape is showing their support for the campaign by hosting art hubs every Friday in the month of October. Programme Director, Wendy Abrahams says *“We are 100% behind the #LightsOnAfterSchool campaign, because for too long educational stakeholders have not seen the value that these programmes offer. Our art sessions not only teach artistic skills but provide a platform for youth to be vulnerable and experience healing. It is a safe space for experimental and expressive learning as well as a place where youth can have a sense of belonging. After-school programmes bridge the gap between school and the home.”*

### **Future of the after-school sector**

According to Khumalo, there is an incredible task ahead to shape a post-pandemic world where children can thrive. The funding climate in the non-profit sector remains unfavourable, especially for the emerging grassroots organisations that TLT supports. But despite this, they intend to continue being a funder that provides a safety net for their grantee partners. She adds that collaboration and accessibility are

key. *“In a time of perpetual uncertainty, technological innovations and interventions are pointless if they are not accessible to learners from under-resourced and poor communities. ASPs have to be the conduit for diverse learning opportunities, so they can continue to be a powerful player in meeting the needs of millions of underserved children.”*

Community Chest CEO Lorenzo Davids says that the key to healthy and successful afterschool programmes is to seek collaborative solutions to social challenges. Crowding in learners, parents, teachers and civil society organisations into an exciting and learner-friendly space to support the Afterschool Programme ecosystem, is the only way to increase learner outcomes.

"Afterschool programmes are essential to achieving the impact required to turn around South Africa's negative educational trajectory. The research is clear that providing children with professional, safe and engaging afterschool programmes measurably increase their resilience to circumstances heavily stacked against them", says Davids.

"Children in our target schools live in unsafe and often dangerous environments and homes without adult supervision after school hours, fuelling high risk of destructive and anti-social behaviour. Providing quality afterschool care empowers them to make better choices, increases learning ability, sets them on a path to better educational outcomes and resultant employability, ultimately leading to healthier families and safer communities", Davids further explains.

After-school partners intend to drive policy development in the area of extended learning, by encouraging and supporting government to issue policy guidelines around incorporating co-curricular activities as part of a full school day. The work of the Western Cape Government is an example of how provincial departments can partner with NGOs to deliver after-school activities in marginalised schools and communities.

On 22 October 2020, at 8pm, educational roleplayers will gather at ..... to light up ..... to celebrate the work being done by the South African afterschool community. /ENDS

*Source: The Learning Trust*