

Ford SA and Rally to Read bolster education and literacy in Nelson Mandela Bay

 By Naresh Maharaj

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Ford South Africa has strengthened its commitment to education, empowering the youth and caring for the communities in which it operates by partnering with the Read Educational Trust and its Rally to Read programme. Together with motoring journalists and other volunteers, we rolled up our sleeves, got dusty from really 'off the beaten track' roads, to donate and distribute almost 7,000 books and other study paraphernalia to schools in the Eastern Cape. It was a most humbling exercise I have been involved with. To see the glee in the faces of these underprivileged scholars, and then that sparkle in their eyes really touched my heart in many ways and I was just happy to be a part of a most deserving cause that started decades ago.



Image credit: Naresh Maharaj

But Ford SA must take the credit here. They have a long association with Rally to Read that spans 23 years, and the latest project is the result of a R1.36m grant by Ford SA aimed at bolstering education and literacy in the province. As a three-year initiative, the Rally to Read will benefit around 4,100 primary school learners at eight schools in the Nelson Mandela Bay metro. The focus during the first year is on the Foundation Phase, from Grade R to Grade 3, followed by the Intermediate Phase learners, from Grade 4 to Grade 7.

“With South Africa’s high levels of poverty and unemployment, the most important tools that we have to empower and uplift the people of this country are education and literacy,” says Esther Buthelezi, government affairs and transformation director of Ford South Africa.

“Youth unemployment is one of South Africa’s most serious challenges, and our involvement with the Read Educational Trust and the Rally to Read plays an important role in our efforts to tackle these issues head-on.

“We are delighted to once again support the amazing work that Rally to Read does across the country, and it is wonderful to focus this year on Nelson Mandela Bay where Ford South Africa’s legacy started in 1923, and where our Struandale

Engine Plant is located in Gqeberha,” Buthelezi says.

Solid education

According to Read, the Eastern Cape was selected for this year’s Ford-sponsored Rally to Read as the province traditionally has the lowest Matric results in the country, and many schools remain under-resourced with a shortage of textbooks and learning material well into the 2022 academic year.



Image credit: Naresh Maharaj

A solid educational foundation is needed in the early years of formal schooling, and should then be cemented and strengthened through the rest of primary school. When learners enter high school, learners need academic as well as the conversational English language skills to cope with subject learning. The Rally to Read aims to provide this foundation for teachers and learners to build on during the three years that it will support the language and literacy teaching in the schools.

The Rally took place on 25 and 26 February 2022, with Ford staff and media representatives loading educational toys, books, games and box libraries into the 16-strong fleet of South African-built Ford Ranger pickups and Everest SUVs. The much-needed educational materials were then delivered to the eight schools located in underprivileged areas in Gqeberha (formerly Port Elizabeth), Kariega (Uitenhage) and Despatch.

An enabling gift

“Ford’s involvement with Rally to Read dates back to 1999 and this has enabled the Rally to continue working in rural communities in the belief that literacy goes beyond the four walls of the classroom,” says Brand Pretorius, steering committee member of the Rally to Read.

“Ford’s contribution has given children the knowledge, confidence and skills to be active citizens that contribute to society, and that is priceless.”

“Rally to Read enables children to bridge the reading gap and progress to high school and even, in increasing numbers, to university. The formula is straightforward: give our children a chance to learn, retrain teachers to help them, and watch both groups flourish as a result,” Pretorius adds.

Back to school

Covid-19 had a significant impact on teaching over the past two years, with rotational learning and social distancing severely constraining an already challenging educational environment. Now that schools are back full time, teachers will have a mammoth task in ensuring that learners catch-up any lost skills.

Accordingly, the Rally to Read programme will support teachers in identifying the gaps in the classroom and finding strategies to address these gaps. “More than ever, teachers will need support to accomplish the task before them, and the right books and approach will make this achievable,” Pretorius says.

It was good to see how many of the media journalists, including myself, who dipped their hands into their pockets to make a contribution. The aim is to reach a level that will support a school for one year with the necessary books etc. Should members of the public want to contribute, the account details are as follows:

Rally To Read

First National Bank

Account No 61054020907

Branch Code 254205

Or visit www.read.org.za and click on the Donate Now tab.

ABOUT NARESH MAHARAJ

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