

Corporate Social Responsibility

Ford SA and Rally to Read Bolster Education and Literacy in Nelson Mandela Bay

World Book Day was created by UNESCO on 23rd April 1995 as a worldwide celebration of books and reading. It is marked in over 100 countries around the globe. In celebration of the upcoming day Ford South Africa is highlighting its commitment to education, empowering the youth and caring for the communities in which it operates. Ford recently partnered with the READ Educational Trust and its Rally to Read programme to donate and distribute almost 7 000 books to schools in the Eastern Cape.

Ford has a long association with Rally to Read that spans 23 years, and the latest project is the result of a R1.36-million 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, Ford South Africa. “Youth unemployment is one of South Africa’s most serious challenges, and our involvement with 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.

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.

A solid educational foundation is needed in the early years in 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.

“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,” Pretorius adds. “The formula is straightforward: give our children a chance to learn, retrain teachers to help them, and watch both groups flourish as a result.”

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.

The Rally to Read was a truly heart-warming experience, Buthelezi says. “Funding this project and being hands-on with delivering the books and educational materials to the schools was very special, and we know that this will help create a brighter future for our children.” ■

