Bishop TD Jakes said: “Your passion will lead you right into your purpose.” Prince Sbusiso (Sbu) Mhlanga has not only found his passion, but his purpose as well. He works as the toy librarian of the PlayABLE Pickup, a mobile toy library specifically for children with disabilities, run by LETCEE.

Sbu first heard about toy libraries in 2013, after LETCEE opened a fixed toy library in the rural community he comes from. He was so drawn to this work, that he left the city and applied for a job at LETCEE. Seven years later, he runs a programme he dreamt of and now dreams even bigger!

So what is the PlayABLE Pickup? “PlayABLE pickup ensures every child’s right to play is realised - irrespective of his or her condition. It allows everyone, abled or disabled.” But as there are so many other services also catering for children without disabilities, the PlayABLE Pickup specialises in services for children with disabilities.

(Continues on next page)
Sbu attributes their success to the fact that the toy library works hand-in-hand with other stakeholders, like government departments. Once a month he visits local primary healthcare clinics to assist the rehabilitation team with resources like therapeutic equipment and toys for their sessions. When the caregivers request it, he also assists in the home programmes that children get from therapists.

An important function of this toy library is information sharing. Whether this is done in informal discussions or formal training sessions. They share knowledge and skills with community members and challenges some beliefs about disability that are held onto strongly.

Sbu admits that he was surprised that most of the children with disabilities he works with have close to average intelligence. “Their minds are operating like normal children, though they sometimes have delays. I have learnt that it is better to come closer to a person with disability than to just act on assumptions.”

The toy library has shown to numerous stakeholders the power of play. Not only to learn and develop academically, but also socially and physically. “The improvements that I observed with the children also surprised me. The positive feedback from other stakeholders (like DSD, DOE and DOH) is amazing.”

When asked about specific stories that stand out, Sbu recounts of a child previously excluded from mainstream school. They are now, through the toy library’s advocacy and play programmes, included in mainstream school with accommodations. Another is of a girl with cerebral palsy and albinism, previously isolated and overprotected. After daily visits, building of trust, education and lots of play, she is now included in playgroups and has made great progress. And so he can continue for hours, sharing stories of hope.

*All photos shared with written consent from caregivers and assent by children
When asked what keeps him going, he says that other people inspire him. "My ex-superior who is a professional therapist - the way she loves children with special needs, even before PlayABLE Pickup project begin. And one of my female relatives who was born with a disability but she is married and working nice jobs." Everyone has a part to play, and he believes this is his.

I learnt that it is also teaches and prepares normal children too. For them to learn that there are other children who are born different because of their condition or disability, but they are also children who deserve to be treated like them. I also saw that caregivers developed more confidence and strength to support their children with their special needs, through rehab team sessions, disability education I provided during my home visits, gatherings, workshops and support groups organised by the toy library.

TLSA loves seeing the great success that is possible when toy libraries take hands with other local authorities and work together for a better quality of life for children. Toy libraries, providing physical and informational resources, have a crucial and unique role to play in this setting. Well done, PlayABLE Pickup!

Sbu challenges all toy libraries to consider implementing inclusive playgroups in your programmes. If this sounds daunting, why not start with some training on disability and how to use specific toys to address certain problems? TLSA is always willing to organise seminars for toy librarians. If there is enough interest, we will organise something for you, just let us know.

We will be sharing the full interview with Sbu on our social media later this week. Keep your eyes peeled!

Working in the PlayABLE Pickup has changed Sbu. Not only has he attended numerous courses and training to equip him for working in this special field, but he has also grown personally. There has been this “growth of love for working with special needs children and even adults too, in my personal life. And it also made me eager to learn even more about disability, in order to share with others.
Message from ITLA

Dear Toy Librarians,

We are all hard at work as 2021 gains momentum. I want to thank you for being members of ITLA and for supporting our Facebook pages. Please keep sharing the wonderful work you do on ITLA’s Group Page.

ITLA’s board had our first meeting for the year and we are all hard at work on our respective portfolios. We want to share the following important information with you:

- The 16th International Conference in Melbourne, Australia, is postponed to March, 2023 due to the impact Covid-19 is likely to continue having on international travel during 2021 and 2022. We encourage you to start saving so that we can gather in Australia and continue learning about toy librarianship and managing a quality toy library service.

- ITLA’s legal entity is registered in Belgium. Authorities have amended laws governing non-profit organisations which impacts ITLA’s constitution. ITLA’s board has aligned the constitution. The amended constitution has to be approved by members through a special general meeting. We invite ITLA members to a virtual special general meeting on 21 April 2021 at 12:00 South African Standard Time (SAST).

- Connecting and learning online is the order of the day. ITLA’s board will be hosting a series of webinars in 2021 and 2022. The first webinar will take place on 21 April 2021 at 12:30 South African Standard Time (SAST) just after the general meeting.

- We will be launching a members’ survey in March 2021 to find out how we can better serve you. We also plan to create an international directory of toy libraries on ITLA’s website. Please do participate and help us put every toy library on the map!

We are very proud of every ITLA member who manages or leads a toy library. Thank you for providing a quality service that makes such a meaningful difference in the lives of children, their parents, and the community. You are all heroes!

Toy Library Greetings,

Dr Monica Stach
ITLA President
Meet our new Team Member!

Membership Manager

Melody Nyathi

TLASA Membership updates

TLASA wants to welcome our new Committee member, Melody Nyathi! She has taken over the portfolio of Membership Manager. She has experience in managing a toy library and is also currently a mentor for the NVC Toy Library Skills Programme. Read more about her experience as a mentor on Page 8.

We are grateful for your commitment to toy libraries and TLASA and have already been so impressed with your skills. Welcome to the team!

TLASA has moved our membership renewals and applications online! Having an automated process saves the committee valuable time and also allows for extra features, like mapping - see below. Renew your membership now to be on the map!

We kindly ask that you bear with us while we get this process running smoothly. Please do not complete paper application forms. If you have any problems, Melody and Annika are always available to assist.

TLASA currently has:
- 12 Active members
- Representing 41 toy libraries
- 7691 Direct beneficiaries
- 9448 Indirect beneficiaries
Jim Joel Fund Sponsorships: NVC Toy Library Skills Programme

At the AGM last year, TLASA announced the exciting new accredited online toy library training that is being offered by our training service provider, Cotlands. With financial support from the Jim Joel Fund, TLASA was then able to offer 10 members a full sponsorship to complete this 6 month course! After we received 26 online sponsorship applications, the TLASA Committee voted and awarded the sponsorships on 1 Dec 2020. We want to share the recipients’ learning journey with you.

Sponsorship recipients

4 PROVINCES

RECIPIENTS FROM:
RUSTENBURG, NW
WHITE RIVER, MP
GREYTOWN, KZN
DURBAN, KZN
ADELAIDE, EC

Thembelihle Mbhele
TREE ECD

Sinqobile Khuboni
TREE ECD

Thulile Ngcobo
LETCEE

Ronelle v Vollenhoven
DSACR

Sibusiso Mhlanga
LETCEE

Shirley Nkuna
Ntataise Lowveld

Lindelwa Zakwe
LETCEE

Sonia Mboyiya
Thembelihle Foundation

Kwanele Manzi
TREE ECD

Phumelele Ndlovu*
LETCEE

*No photo received
NVC Toy Library Skills Programme: Shirley's Journey

We asked two of our sponsorship recipients to share more with us about their learning journey so far. The first one is by Shirley Nkuna from Ntataise Lowveld.

The fulfilling NVC content

I was a bit nervous about this course at first, and that is normal in human nature. The content is clear and understandable, but challenging at the same time. It is about developing skills on how to start running a new venture on your own... it’s a great opportunity isn’t it?

Most businesses don’t last because of lack of knowledge, e.g. in writing a proper business plan, doing research, conducting needs assessment and keeping record of financials. But in this programme we acquire skills on how to write a proper business plan. This requires time management and extra efforts in order to put a full slice on the plate... you have to think out of the box and produce results.

The power of technology in learning

It is incredibly interesting to be able to discover your potential in technology. In the NVC programme, that’s where you find a platform to learn how to use learning platforms which is Ignite and P4P. It’s a bit confusing context until you put your hands on it. It is a tool box of the content of the programme, where you embark on the journey for learning step by step. The online platform contains all the guided information on how to build our minds in order to create our own ventures. More fascination, downloading, completing, adding and uploading are the keys of the content. Skills development is encountered during the journey by asking us to complete a portfolio of evidence of all the practical work we do.

Hands-on is the best way of learning in adults

It’s hard to crack it until it’s in your hands, same as doing things practically. Theory is good, but practical is the best. Creating something, bringing it into existence, requires skills that no one can unpack or have experience with until an opportunity present itself. That’s when you will work your magic to success. We’re given practical activities to trigger the creativity that rusted ages ago... Although it is only the start of the journey, I have already learnt something crucial: “It will remain difficult until you try and put your hands on it”.

NVC Toy Library Skills Programme: Ronelle's Journey

We asked two of our sponsorship recipients to share more with us about their learning journey so far. The second one is by Ronelle van Vollenhoven from the Northwest Department of Sports, Arts, Culture and Recreation.

Learning by doing

I was so excited to be one of the chosen few to be the guinea pigs for this new venture. On the 10th and 11th of February 2021, the journey for the NVC course started with an orientation session. It was soon clear that this whole programme is more challenging than I envisioned at the beginning. The technology is a big challenge for me, and connectivity problems. But this is also teaching me to cope with the 4th Industrial Revolution that we are forced into due to the COVID virus. I am learning by doing.

A full plate

The course itself is very interesting and I am still learning a lot about toy libraries and the development of children. With this programme, I really have to work hard, because the course is challenging. You have to do a lot of research also to be able to submit your assignments (workbooks). Your plate will definitely be full when enrolled in this course.

Juggling work and study

I am one of the lucky ones. My supervisor at work understands and supports me with this training, every step of the way. Due to the workload and content of the programme, your supervisor/employer needs to understand that you have to be given some time at work to work on your workbooks and research. We also have mentoring groups during working hours that we need to attend. The journey is not yet finished, I am looking forward to the next few months.
NVC Toy Library Skills Programme: Mentorship of toy librarians

Melody Nyathi, TLASA’s Membership Manager, is performing the role of Mentor to the group of students who started the NVC course at the beginning of the year. This group includes our 10 JJF Sponsorship recipients. We found out from her what it is like mentoring toy librarians through this new online course.

Mentor Melody

I started the NVC learning journey with the Jim Joel Fund Sponsorship learners at the beginning of February 2021. When I started with the first communication with the learners that was the time I started to know and understand each learner.

What it entails

I conduct weekly Mentor contact sessions with the learners every Thursday afternoon. This is when the learners share their achievements, challenges and I guide them through compiling and completing their Unit Standard portfolio of evidence.

The Sponsorship recipient learners are fully participating in this skills development training. They communicate with me any time when they have challenges or even achievements. Knowing and understanding each of their learning styles has also made it easy for me to mentor them.

I am looking forward to continuously mentoring these learners until they are all competent in the New Venture Creation Skills Development.

If you are interested in this accredited, online course, please email Venessa at info@tlasa.org for more information. The course runs over 6 months and would cost around R10 000 pp.
World Play Day 2021
Theme: Playing is healthy

28 May
In celebration of World Play Day, TLASA will be hosting a 1-hour play together webinar. Details to follow.

What are your plans for this year’s WPD? Upload your plans for the day on our website (tlasa.org/wpd) to stand a chance to present your ideas at our next seminar. We would love to learn from you.

Competition time!
TLASA would like to name our quarterly newsletter. “Newsletter” just sounds a bit boring, don’t you agree? But with online conferences and webinars, and finding new ways to do what we do, our brains are drained of creativity. We need your help!

Do you have a bright idea for a name? Send it our way, and you could be the winner of a free toy for your toy library as well as a mentorship session with a TLASA Committee member. Email your suggestions for a newsletter name to Annika: marketing@tlasa.org

*Only open to TLASA members. Winner will be chosen by the TLASA committee. We reserve the right to not rename if no suitable suggestions are found. Judges decision final.

Visit our website
When last did you visit tlasa.org? Our members-only page has been updated and you will find interesting documents and links there. The documents referred to in our last webinar (Registering a toy library with DSD) are also loaded there. Happy browsing!
Upcoming events

4-6 May 2021: Toy Library setup and administration training (online)

- 3-day webinar: 9am-1pm live online; 2pm-4pm practical homework in the toy library
- Presented by our training service provider, Cotlands
- R2 435pp (TLASA members pay R1 950pp; 20% discount)
- Book your spot by emailing Venessa (info@tlasa.org) by 15 April 2021

18 May 2021: TLASA Webinar (14:00-15:00)

- Sharing World Play Day ideas and plans
- Networking and having fun with other toy librarians
- Free for members, R100pp for non-members
- Register now: tlasa.org/may-webinar

28 May 2021: World Play Day
International Toy Librarians’ Day

13 July 2021: TLASA AGM (14:00-15:30)

- We are in the process of revising the constitution. New constitution to be voted in at AGM
- Current Committee Members’ term ends in July 2021: Send nominations/request to info@tlasa.org by 30 April. Will receive feedback by 17 May
- Members will receive email invitation on 22 June 2021 with nominees and revised constitution

12-13 October 2021: National Toy Library Conference

- Will take place online again
- More details to follow

Follow us on social media

tlasa.official  tlasa.official