

A Year in the Life of One Small Library, 2015



We are now just over 18 months old, and we have settled firmly into the lives of children from the villages of Ts'eanku, Moreneng, Thoteng, Sekhutlong and Tohlang. They visit our library and play centre regularly, come what may, through rain and shine. We have over a hundred children on our list, but our regular visitors number between 30 and 50, most of whom are between the ages of 8 and 12, and most of whom are girls.



There are four children who left primary school at the end of last year to go to the local Secondary school, and who still visit us when their busy schedules allow. We also welcome back every holiday those children from the valley who attend school in Maseru or Mafeteng. Among these is Daniel, our spunky blind child who lets nothing get in his way! We are always very happy to see them all 😊

We are still in our far-too-little house, but being resourceful Africans, we have adapted well to our tiny work and library space, to cramming ourselves in in creative ways, and to not always having the use of the Secondary school hall. We have a cardboard box storage system, a big shady tree under which we can tell stories, read and play, and it is amazing how many children we can fit into our small office when it rains! But what matters most to us is what we do, and not really where we do it (although we do dream of our having own building one day!)



So what have we done?

We feel that attracting regularly up to 40 children twice a week after school on Wednesdays and Fridays, and our special Leseli group of 12 children every Thursday afternoon is pretty good for a rural valley in the mountain kingdom. To keep this going, we have, with the help of many, many generous and thoughtful people, built up a surprisingly fair-sized pool of books, and our tiny storage space is beginning to outgrow itself with cardboard boxes full of toys and games!

If you have not done so already, please visit our Facebook page 'Paleng' to see more of what we do on our library afternoons, and we will let you know when our website is fit for visitors.



It is still the case that most of the books in our library are in English. However, we are slowly but surely addressing this successfully through our work with the African Storybook Project (ASP). We have managed to put quite a few books written in Lesotho Sesotho (NOT the same as South African Sesotho, although close) into the hands of our children.

We have translated some stories from other parts of Africa, created about 12 of our own original stories, and adapted/versioned at least five from the ASP website. We have also illustrated some of these ourselves.

All of these stories are up on the ASP website (www.africanstorybook.org) or about to make their debut there very soon! Please do go and have a look, It is a very interesting and important project, which we are very proud to be a part of.

This also means that our own Paleng-created stories (available both in English and Sesotho) are now accessible to teachers, librarians, and children all over Africa to translate, adapt and use themselves. Some have already been

translated into other different African languages, including French, and at least one has been versioned into a new story.

We have created and printed our own little bilingual books with two of our own stories. These we have given out to teachers at our workshop, to schools in other parts of Lesotho and sold some to Biblionef at cost to distribute free in Lesotho. Some have even found their way to England and America through visitors. We are overjoyed to see our stories setting out on their travels near and far, bon voyage little books!

We are raising money to print more of these little books, and we would like to have at least five more in print within the next year. Fred and Amy in America are helping us to raise some seed money for this, and you can all expect to hear from us about our crowdfunding campaign early next year. We believe that we can do it, this kind of reading material is desperately needed.



We are delighted to be continuing our work with ASP in 2016. Our plan is to continue to create and translate stories, but we also plan with ASP support to extend Paleng out into villages that are too far away for their children to access us.

To this end we are planning to pilot 'Paleng-nyane' (Little Paleng) in Khorong village, 45 minutes away by foot. We have found an interested local person, and next year we will provide her with training at Paleng, give her a box of books, toys and games and the wherewithal to set up a mini-library, and provide support through monitoring and regular visits to Paleng. There are at least 40 children who will benefit from this, as there are a further three villages close enough to Khorong for children to access this little library.

We are very excited about this, as Bob Parsons and the Rahula Trust in the UK has agreed to fund this pilot project, the parents and children of Khorong have been told, and cannot wait for next year when we open Paleng-nyane there!

We have also been working with an enthusiastic young woman from Leribe, Sebonkile Daniels in Northern Lesotho, to help her set up a children's library there. You can't keep a good library down 😊

So much for picture storybooks.

We also believe that when it comes to literacy support and creation of stories and books the sky is the limit.

So ... we are busy setting up a collaboration with a wonderful organisation Children for Health (www.childrenforhealth.org) and we are embarking on a little project to support good health in our children and their families. Children for Health has developed 10 child-friendly messages for each of 10 illnesses that have a major impact on children living in impoverished contexts, targeting in particular those children who take care of other children.

The Children for Health team led by Clare Hanbury is developing these messages into storybooks that will convey these messages in contextually appropriate and fun, interesting ways, using tools such as puppets to support them.

Our work at Paleng is to find out which of these (and/or other) illnesses affect our children here, to help develop story lines and illustrations for the major illnesses in Malea-lea, and eventually to produce little health storybooks that will be given out freely to children and their families. We are working with our local clinic, and Ntate Mabele the Head Nurse is supporting us in this. He will be an important source of feedback on the work, and his clinic a useful point of distribution for these little books.

Leseli la Thutano (the light of our education) is a small group of Grades 5, 6 and 7 children who have built a relationship with the Year 6 children from Eaton Bray Academy in England. These two groups write to each other and send little gifts and videos regularly across the seas. For the children the benefit has been enormous. For our children, their English has improved (to the point where the local Grade 7 teacher remarked on it), they have learned how to write good letters, address envelopes, speak in English on video, complete little craft projects and a host of other skills. Both groups have gained an insight into how other children live; our contexts are so different that everything is new and fascinating. EBA teacher Rekha Slatter and Head Teacher Sue Hounslow have worked hard with us to create and sustain this wonderful opportunity 😊



We have also been blessed with other opportunities this year.

© Ed Morgan made **a little video** of one of our stories 'The Magic Mouse Apples' starring Paleng children who are extremely able dramatic performers (you can find this on our website-under-construction, <http://paleng.weebly.com>)



© Jon and Jaime Mierke (whose amazing father Pieter has been of steadfast support to Paleng,) held a **paper-airplane making afternoon** with 40 very eager would-be pilots!

© Margaret Auerbach and Ruth Morgan ran a **three-day puppet-making workshop** culminating in a homegrown puppet show. There are now many little puppets floating around the villages, who know what they are up to out there?



Our special visitors to Paleng have been:

- ✓ The **ASP team, in 2014 and in particular Sheila from SAIDE** in Johannesburg, which runs the African Storybook Project. Ausi, you have given us unflinching support and encouragement, thank you.
- ✓ **Bernard and Marianne from Austria** who brought us some beautiful toys and games
- ✓ **Angela and Jennifer** and their lovely group from the US who showed such interest, made a generous donation, and took some little books back home with them.
- ✓ **Margaret and Ruth** with a carload of all things puppets.
- ✓ **Edi Morgan** who came to make a video and just be here for us.



✓ **Lou Jones and Michael** who came to take photos and to see what we do.
✓ And last but far, far from least, our great supporter **Julia Childs** from England who has moved mountains to help us, and managed to bring mountains of things through Customs at Moshoeshoe airport last December.

Storytelling and reading has been a core Paleng activity, and we have read stories to, created stories with, told stories with our children every week. We have put stories up on flip chart, illustrated them and adapted them. We have read suitable books to and with each other in small groups, and dramatised stories in various ways. We have had children tell traditional tales and videoed them doing it.



We have added Sesotho to English books by sticking a translation onto the page. We have read books to the children in our local pre-school. We believe that there are endless opportunities for literacy development and support, and we have been hard at work exploring the possibilities, and had a lot of fun finding and creating them 😊



With the grown ups in our valley we have held parents' meetings about our work with their children, and run a teachers' workshop with eight primary schools on using stories in the foundation phase classrooms. Our village chief, 'M'e Mapulane, is a strong supporter of our work and even joined us in a story

creation workshop last year. We also invited the local priest to visit the library and surprised him with a gift of a storybook.

Looking ahead ...

We hope that **Kyoko from Origami For Africa, Cape Town** will be coming to enfold us in her origami magic early in 2016.

We also look forward to a possible visit from **Miranda in England** who may come to help us with English teaching work through play.

We also plan to celebrate both **World Book Day and World Health Day**.

And that is just the beginning ☺

We are proud of our library and our smart, funny, creative children who do such nice things in it, and we look forward to another Great Big Year of reading, story telling, playing and learning in 2016.

But, as in all things, we could not have done any of this without help.

So we would like to thank all of these wonderful people for helping us in myriad ways:

For **funding and donations and all things monetary** (in no particular order, you are all very close to our hearts): Bob Parsons and the Rahula Trust, Fred, Amy, Nonyana and Chandwen, Jennifer and Angela from Building a Global Community, Ntate Harlan Mokete, SAIDE, Children for Health, Marcus, Sandy and Leona in Germany, Emme Reyneke.



For (among other things too numerous to mention) **books, toys, paper, games, footballs and the Manchester United Kit** (that everybody envies so!) **stationery, bicycles, cellphones, clothing ...** : Derrick Williams and KitAid, Julia Childs, Marthie Cilliers, Ora Morgan and the children and parents of the Rosabella Klein Nursery School,

SAIDE, Clare and Richard Drew, Gila Carter, Ruth Morgan, Meryl Glaser , Linda Juniper, Casper and Chevonne Badenhorst, Lesley Flax, Bonni and Clare and the girls, Mick Jones (and friends), Megan and Felicity Hart, and the Clothing Queen Diane.

For **buying some of our little books and helping to get them out there into the hands of Basotho children**: Jean Williams and Biblionef.



For the **lovely 'Mouse Apples' video, helping us with the website, logo and a hundred other little things**: our very big-hearted Edi Morgan.

For **endless encouragement and long distance help with stories, illustrations, translation and website matters**: Lorato Trok, Sheila Drew, Tessa Welch and Lisa Treffrey-Goately.

For **designing our little books, help with their printing, endless encouragement, cookies and fudge**: Lydia Ovenden.
And for **printing the little books, Mario at Wits Jetline**.

For **stunning photographs of our 'Leseli la Thutano' group of children**: Lou Jones and his assistant Michael.

For **time, ears, patience and many forms of moral support**: our Paleng Friends (Maggie Tshule, Nadia Pandit, Lydia Ovenden, Ruth Morgan, Sheila Drew, and Megan Hart), and from far away, Justine Wyllie, Ausi Rethabile, Megan Moll, Jenny Giddy, Clare Venter, Liz Parry, Julia Childs, Tim and Megan, Diana Cucarollo.

For **help with our solar system** without which we would *still* be walking up and down hills to charge up: SAIDE, Ivan Yaholnitsky, Jon Mierke and Pusetso.

For **help with banking, scanning and printing, tea and chats, and endless, endless support and patience**, Oom Ts'epo Piet, 'M'e Keila, Jon and Jaime Mierke.

For **the use of our little office and the school hall**: 'M'e Masechaba and the staff of Malea-lea Secondary School.

For **helping to keep watch over our precious library at night**: Ntate Maseribana, and for **helping Khothatso in the library** when Marion was in Johannesburg: Mamatete Mporoane.

In absentia (he's just not here) for having given Marion a long time ago, such **excellent book keeping training** that she has remembered at least (the important) half of: Andrew Lim.

Thank you all for being so ready and willing and generous, so thoughtful and clever and kind.

We wish you all a very happy festive season, and look forward to doing it all over again next year!

PS Of course we didn't let 2015 creep out quietly after all our hard work with her, so we sent her on her way with a special Paleng Party Number Two last week (known as a *moketi* in Sesotho). Our children prepared the food, sang, danced traditional dances (as well as their own creations) played games and read stories for us.

It's going to be even more fun next year. You are of course, all invited ☺

Our very best wishes
Khothatso and Marion