



Thirteen-year-old Amanda Silekwa (left), and 12-year-old Sandile Mkonto, who are both in Grade Seven at Rondebult Primary School, demonstrated how to use the portable Tutudesks that were donated to the school.

Tutudesks continue to make a positive impact

Leigh Hodgson

The children of Rondebult Primary School were thrilled to receive a visit from the Tutudesk campaign, on Thursday, May 22.

The most important message of the day was that all children in South Africa have a basic right to an education.

The problem is that a lot of schools do not have the practical tools to deliver the best learning environment for their pupils.

An often overlooked factor is the absence of a proper desk and, without a school desk these children will struggle to find a solid surface on which to practise their writing and do their school work.

This can impede the learning process and affect class discipline, writing skills and even a child's basic literacy skills.

It was from this need that the Tutudesk campaign was born.

Named after Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, the campaign provides portable Tutudesks, which provide a stable work surface, to impoverished schools with little or no permanent facilities.

The campaign is supported by Amway South Africa, and aims to provide 20 million children with school desks by the end of 2015.

Thandeka Tutu-Gxashe, daughter of Archbishop Tutu and director of the Desmond Tutu Tutudesk Campaign Centre, attended the event with her sister, Naomi Tutu.

When asked about the project she said: "It is important to remember

that it is not where you come from, but where you end up.

"Even people from humble beginnings have the chance to become great, if given the right tools.

"There needs to be a major shift in prioritising the education agenda in our country.

"We have teachers and pupils who are committed, however, that's not sufficient if they are in need of infrastructure.

"We are grateful to Amway for their contribution to the Tutudesk campaign and look forward to partnering with more private companies, who can certainly take the lead from a company such as Amway."

Amway is an international company with branches in 100 countries worldwide.

It has invested over R2.2-million in an effort to provide Tutudesks for underprivileged schools, and to date has handed out over 14 000 desks to pupils all over South Africa. The GCN had an opportunity to speak to Raj Parshotam, general manager of Amway South Africa.

Parshotam, who is very happy with how this campaign has taken off, told the GCN: "The future of our continent depends on the level of education our children receive and, without the basic facilities, like desks, our pupils are facing an uphill battle.

"By providing this simple, proven solution, we aim to inspire and give these pupils a head start."

An independent survey conducted by the Tutudesk campaign demonstrates the impact that something as

small as a desk can have on children's education.

It was noted that the pupils' handwriting was easier to read, their homework delivery had improved, pupils were able to write more during a lesson, their concentration had improved, they were able to interact better with their peers and their classrooms were better organised.

"In an environment where children are sometimes taught outside, pupils resort to writing on the ground.

"Their only alternative is to rest their work on the back of another child, or use what they are sitting on with limited space," Parshotam continued.

"For us, it's about more than just making a difference for one day.

"We believe that, by supporting these school pupils at this early stage, the impact will be far reaching.

"By investing in our children we are investing in our future.

"We look forward to hearing the children's success stories.

Rondebult Primary School received a total of 1 529 Tutudesks, sponsored by Amway South Africa.

The headmistress of the school, Nozuko Kenyana, was thrilled to receive the Tutudesks.

"Thank you to the Tutudesk campaign and Amway South Africa - you have made such a difference.

"The desks will alleviate the pressure and improve our results.

"I believe our pupils will be eager to come to school knowing that they don't have to share a desk."

For more information on the project visit www.tutudesk.org.