

A million lap desks donated to kids

Pupils from disadvantaged schools benefit from the Tutudesk initiative – and improvement in school work has been recorded

WORKPLACE STAFF

ALL SOUTH Africans have a basic right to education, but a lot of schools do not have the practical tools to deliver the best learning environment for pupils.

Factors such as the absence of desks can impede the learning process, from class discipline to basic literacy. Without school desks, children struggle to find a solid surface on which to practise their writing and do their homework.

With this in mind, the Tutudesk Campaign, supported by Amway South Africa, aims to provide 20 million African children with school desks by the end of 2020.

Named after Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, the portable Tutudesks – lap desks – provide a stable work surface for pupils who attend impoverished schools that don't have adequate facilities or equipment such as desks and chairs.

"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," says Thandeka Tutu-Gxashe, director of The Desmond Tutu Tutudesk Campaign Centre.

Just over 1 million desks have been distributed to date. Last week it was the turn of the pupils at Rondebult Primary School to receive 1 529 of the desks.

Amway has invested more than R2.2 million in an effort to provide Tutudesks for underprivileged schools, and to date has handed out more than 14 000 desks to pupils all over South Africa.

Nozuko Kenyana, headmistress of Rondebult Primary School, expressed her gratitude for the Tutudesks.

"Thank you to Amway South Africa, you have made



NOTEWORTHY: Handing out Tutudesks to the pupils of Rondebult Primary School in Germiston last week are Karin Schmid (Amway CSR manager, Europe), Naomi Tutu (Tutudesk Campaign), Jeff Terry (Amway Global CSR manager), Thandeka Tutu-Gxashe (director Tutudesk Campaign Centre), Raj Parshotam (Amway general manager SA) and Sean Henderson (Amway business owner).

such a difference. The desks will alleviate the pressure and improve our results," she said.

"Our learners will be eager to come to school knowing they don't have to share a desk."

"The future of our conti-

nent depends on the level of education our children receive and without basic facilities such as 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," said Raj Parshotam, general manager of Amway South Africa.

An independent survey conducted by the Tutudesk campaign with 426 teachers from

52 schools in 2012 demonstrates the impact that something as small as a desk can have on children's education: Their handwriting was easier to read, their homework delivery had improved, they were able to

write more during a lesson, concentration had improved, they were able to interact better with their peers and their classrooms were more organised.

"In an environment where children are sometimes taught

outside, learners 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 said.

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

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

Tutudesk Campaign

What it is about:

Started in 2004, the Tutudesk Campaign provides portable school desks (Tutudesks) to children in sub-Saharan Africa, where more than 95 million schoolchildren don't have the benefit of classroom desks. The lack of a desk, a writing surface, affects handwriting, concentration and overall academic performance. To date, more than 1 million desks have been distributed. The Tutudesk Campaign aims to provide 20 million desks to 20 million children by 2020.

Why it is important:

According to research (in 2012; 426 teachers surveyed), having a desk makes the following impact:

- Pupils concentrate better – 69 percent.
- Pupils are more motivated – 76 percent.
- Handwriting improves and is easier to read – 80 percent.
- Pupils write more during class – 72 percent.
- Homework is in better quality – 65 percent.
- Pupils are more organised in class – 80 percent.
- Discipline in the classroom improves – 70 percent.
- Teachers' overall classroom experience improves – 73 percent.

A Tutudesk is:

- A writing surface for any situation. The desk rests on the child's lap, providing the child with a surface to write on. It is:
- Lightweight, each desk weighs less than 1kg.
- Portable: the desk has a handle.
- Durable: the desk is designed to last five-plus years (the print will last for three years).
- Child-safe: the material is a mixed polymer that gives it flexibility, meaning it won't

shatter like some other plastics

- 100 percent recyclable.

Why not rather supply 'traditional' classroom desks?

● Traditional desks are not feasible for schools that don't have formal classrooms. In many cases children sit under trees. Traditional desks can only be utilised in classrooms containing up to 40 children. Unfortunately, across sub-Saharan Africa, it is common for children to be taught in overcrowded classrooms where pupil numbers far exceed this.

● Pupils can take their Tutudesks home where the entire family can also benefit from using them.

● Tutudesks are significantly cheaper than traditional desks, which means more desks are made available for the same amount of investment.

● Tutudesks are cheaper and easier to transport across the continent.

How to identify schools that need Tutudesks:

The campaign provides Tutudesks to schools where 30 percent or more of the children do not have a classroom desk to use. There are 4 ways in which a school could be identified to receive desks:

- Through research conducted by Tutudesk or one of the campaign partners such as World Vision.
 - The principal of the school can write a letter of request.
 - A sponsoring company or individual may have specific schools they want to support.
 - A government or education authority may request assistance for priority schools with the greatest need.
- For more information or to get involved, visit www.tutudesk.org or e-mail info@tutudesk.org.