

Report on the International Literacy Day HCL/Grosscare Commemoration

Introduction

International Literacy Day is 8 September. As Harare City Library we chose 12 September and scouted for partners to help sponsor the commemorative event and Gross Care International embraced our initiative. We chose 12 September so that we could involve school children when they had started their 3rd term in school. We made a conscious decision to involve Grosscare as they specialize in gadgets and equipment for the handicapped especially the visual impaired so that we could come up with an inclusive literacy programme. The International Literacy Day theme for 2018 was “Literacy and skills development”. For our HCL and Grosscare joint celebration the theme became “[Literacy and skills development](#) with emphasis on the visual impaired members of society”. Unfortunately due to the national commemoration of the same day being scheduled for Friday 14 September (just 2 two days after the one at Harare City Library) at St.Alberts in Centenary, UNESCO and the ministry of primary and secondary education could not attend as they were preparing for the national commemoration. The programme was largely successful.

The celebration

The day began with the national anthem, prayer and introduction of guests. The stand in chairman for the Harare City Library, Mr. Munyavi, gave welcome and opening remarks. After the remarks by Mr. Munyavi, a school child from Selborne Routledge School did a poem along the theme of the day. After the poem there were addresses by the representative of the Mayor of Harare and the Master of The High Court of Zimbabwe, the two being the Harare City Library trustees. Then Dorothy Duncan library director, Mr. Mutambisi, made a presentation on the production of Braille books. An introduction and demonstration of e-gadgets used by various people with visual impairment followed Mr. Mutambisi’s presentation. This was done by Grosscare International, partners to the library in this commemoration. After the demonstration by Grosscare the plenary session commenced. This was a lively session which involved a representative of the disabled in the new parliament of Zimbabwe, a representative in the old parliament, the master of the High Court, the mayor’s representative and various people in the audience. Time became scarce as the arguments and counterarguments (especially on the Marakash Treaty) flew from one person to the other. The MC, Mr. Abraham Mateta, did a great job in balancing the views and making sure the programme remained within its time limit. He was very participative himself in the issues raised and offered information about how he grew up as a visually impaired person and on the efforts he continues to take to fight for his rights and the rights of all the visually impaired and other people living with disability. The day was capped by a feast of snacks that Grosscare International provided for everyone. The programme ended at 1pm.

Major Highlights

1. The programme was well attended. The joint organizers were not sure what to expect but were pleasantly surprised when many invitees showed up. All members of staff of Harare City Library were present. Mr. Munyavi represented the management committee chairman very well. The chairman himself showed up, though a little later. Mr. Malaya was present throughout the programme. It was good to have some committee members present at such a programme. The master of the High Court was himself present as a library trustee, which was a good thing. The mayor, the other library trustee, could not attend as he was said to be attending to the cholera outbreak in the city. He was represented by Councillor Jacob Mafume. Hence the library was relatively well-represented.
2. Stakeholders in the International Literacy Day, UNESCO and the ministry of primary and secondary education, were unfortunately conspicuous by their absence. The reason for their absence was presumably the fact that they were preparing for the national commemoration of the day that was scheduled for two

days after the one at Harare City Library. However, Higher and tertiary education was represented. The programme had to be changed to reflect this development. Several schools attended the programme and some pupils staged performances.

3. Stakeholders in the community of people living with disability (PLWD) were well-represented. Grosscare International had a good team that demonstrated the use of various e-gadgets used by PLWD. They had great rapport with many PLWD as they have worked with many of them before. The master-of-ceremony was Mr. Abraham Mateta, a visually impaired practicing lawyer who is spearheading efforts for literacy inclusion for PLWD among other areas. One of the two members representing PLWD in the Zimbabwean senate was at the high table and was one of the panelists in the plenary session. One of the two members representing PLWD in the old Zimbabwean senate was among the audience and was contributing intelligently. There were several PLWD organizations present represented by members of staff and, in some cases, pupils and students.
4. The programme came at financial cost to both the library and Grosscare. While Grosscare provided food and cleaning detergents, the library provided the cleaners, public address (PA) system and the banner for the event. A cost/benefit analysis will, however, show that we gained more than we lost overall. It is one of the library's expected **key** functions to commemorate events of a literary, cultural and educational nature. Such events bring into focus advocacy areas of interest to the library. We therefore lived up to our responsibilities. Besides we developed a good relationship with our partner Grosscare through whom we were also able to interact with other organizations and people that we can build win-win partnerships with going forward.
5. We have developed a close relationship with Grosscare International to such an extent that we have tentatively agreed to co-host and celebrate Braille Day International in January 2019 and, also, intend to do other activities like mobile libraries together.

Recommendations

1. Attendance by committee members at such events as this one is of paramount importance as it allows members to appreciate more the library's activities and partner organizations.
2. Robust engagements with organizations that we can work with in various activities and events that may bear fruitful benefits for the library.
3. Working with the ministry on national literary events to be embarked on to make sure that it gives priority and recognizes us as an equal partner.

Conclusion

We thank the committee for attending and by giving financial support. We were happy to do our part to bring together a sector of people that was previously seemingly neglected. Discussions that took place brought to the fore concerns of the PLWD community. The library should take its rightful place in addressing some of those concerns. The event was a great beginning along that path. We made sure that the event did not take the whole day so as not to deprive our patrons of the use the library. If we continue being considerate like this it will be appreciated by everyone involved.