

SA Book Week and Book Fair to promote more reading

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THIS week parts of the country witnessed the official opening programme of the eight annual National Book Week (NBW) with several events.

Such the Nelson Mandela Bay Town Hall and the city of Polokwane in Limpopo where National Book Week ambassador Mogau Paulina Motlhatlhi of Skeem Saam fame gave a motivational talk to an audience of grades 4-12 pupils on the importance of reading.

Then there was the event at Matjiesfontein Community Hall in the Western Cape celebrating this year's theme: #OurStories, where Book Week ambassador Keeno Lee gave a motivational talk to adults and students on how books have shaped his life. All these events were aimed at encouraging South Africans of all ages to read more ahead of this year's South African Book Fair (SBF) set for Museum Africa in Newtown from tomorrow until Sunday.

The New Age spoke to Elitha Van der Sandt, CEO of South African Develop-

ment Council, the custodians of both SBF and SA Book Week who said handing out books to far flung communities across the country is not enough to encourage communities to read more.

"We can't just hand out books and think it is enough, we need sustained activities that encourage adoption of long term habits to help grow appreciation of books to communities and citizens of the country.

"It is important for people to see themselves in the stories being told and the books being published and that is why we have adopted the theme: #OurStories as a way to help people identify with the activities," she said.

Participating authors earmarked for the three day SBF which begins tomorrow include acclaimed author Zakes Mda, graphic designer and illustrator Loyiso Mkhize, storyteller Angela Makholwa, founding director of Robben Island Museum André Odendaal, poets Lebo Mashile and Koleka Putuma. Van der Sandt said with the recent statistics showing that South African literacy levels have improved

from 92.9% in 2013 to 96% in 2016, though this is a good victory, more still needs to be done to encourage South Africans to read more books. "Reading is still at the bottom order of priorities for many. We still have over 3.8 million potential readers we have yet to convert if we are to make significant progress in achieving even more healthier levels of literacy," she said.

Van der Sandt encouraged families to come out and support the SA Book Fair and said she and her team have packed the book fair as a lifestyle oriented family affair reflective of the diversity found in the country's rainbow nation.

"We have our own narrative and story to tell, one that has been formed by our diversity and similarities, adversities and achievements.

"Books are the richest format of stories and one of the best ways to let the world know who we are, a way to take Africa to the world and not only bring the world to Africa," she said.

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