

MERRYDALE

Mindful solution for kids

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Grade R learners at Merrydale Primary joined thousands of others worldwide in commemorating Mindfulness Day this month.

Facilitated by new Cape Town-based NGO, Wellbeing in Schools and Education (Wise), learners observed the event, which is a day to highlight the health and wellbeing benefits of practising mindfulness.

Wise focuses on teaching mindfulness to children in schools.

“The first Wise pilot programme kicked off in July last year in the Garden Route. We are still in the pilot phase, currently active in various schools in the Western Cape. The need for the programme was realised when myself and Carmen Clews – co-founder of Wise – were visiting local schools. We noticed the aggressive way in which children were communicating and high incidents of bullying. We also witnessed the high stress levels of educators – who themselves also struggle with many daily challenges – which in some cases leads to teachers lashing out or hitting the children. Our programme therefore also focuses on empowering teachers and childcare workers, to help them to first deal with their own stress so they can better understand and manage learners who are acting out,” says co-founder and psychologist, Carol Surya.

The initiative was taken to the school on Wednesday 12 September on international Mindfulness Day.

Research shows that children who are stressed can't learn well.

Most of the children they visited have had a difficult start in life, says Gadija Sait, Wise facilitator.

“Yoga, play and interaction with children can have so many healing and health benefits. Teachers have also reported less aggression and bullying among learners since introducing mindfulness practice,” says Sait.

Surya says Merrydale Primary was chosen as it is in the heart of Mitchell's Plain.

“[This] is a community consumed by gang violence and poverty. Opportunities for South African schoolchildren in high-risk areas are often few and far between. A lot of these children experience harsh conditions outside of the home, and the aim of the Wise mindfulness activities is to help children to feel more confident and learn to express themselves.

We unfortunately can't change their environment, but we can help change the way they cope with it,” she says.

Sait is involved with various outreach programmes, and was informed

about Merrydale Primary through Disciplined to Dream.

“We have developed a unique set of tools that offer a positive psychology-based approach to helping learners become more mindful, confident and happy. The InnerMagic children's self-esteem game is a fantastic way to encourage children to manage behaviour while helping to teach expression of feelings, while the Magic Mat teaches children relaxation and meditation techniques in a way that's fun. The third activity is the *Planting Seeds for Life* book which includes 25 lesson plans in the form of stories, designed to improve children's wellbeing while encouraging them to contribute to their communities,” says Surya.

They hope to get support and funding to roll out the programme nationally.

► Visit www.raisingkidspositively.com/wise/ for more information.



Grade R learners during an exercise.