

OLICO Maths Education makes maths make sense for SA learners

By  Sindy Peters

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Maths intimidates a lot of people. Even into adulthood many of us shudder at the mere mention of trigonometric identities, logarithms and the Binomial Theorem. It's made even more intimidating for many learners when they don't have access to the necessary after-school resources to help them wrap their heads around what's been taught in the classroom.

And while there are many careers that don't necessarily need you to have aced high school maths, having a good grade under your belt can help open up many, many more career possibilities.



Image source: [Facebook](#)

Enter [OLICO Maths Education](#), an organisation that utilises technology and tutoring to make maths make sense to learners attending under-resourced schools. OLICO is one of this year's five beneficiaries of the 5 For Change black tie event set for Saturday, 27 October, at The Station in Newtown, Joburg.



Get ready to dress up to the nines for #5ForChange

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As part of our #5forChange series, we chatted to Kerry Hibberd, marketing and volunteer manager at OLICO Maths Education, to find out more about the organisation's beginnings, how its programmes are tailored to the South African context, and what it plans to do with the proceeds from the [#5forChange event](#).

■ What prompted the launch of OLICO Maths Education?

Hibberd: OLICO Maths Education was started 11 years ago as an after-school, homework programme. However, the team started noticing that maths was the biggest challenge for learners and that most of the learners were three to four years behind where they should be – a fact that puts learners at a considerable disadvantage when they try to achieve their

dreams after school.

So OLICO shifted direction and launched a project that would make maths make sense to the learners who need it most. They got maths professors on board and started creating a massive online programme specifically designed to move kids along the learning curve so they could keep up with the curriculum.

Over the years, the team have refined their programme so much so that the online resource now has 22,500 questions, over 300 videos and tons of downloadable resources. And we're seeing the improvement in our learners marks – often as much as 35 percentage points – an impact which is super to see and experience.



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OLICO aims to be the 'go-to maths resource' for a number of stakeholders. How is it striving to achieve this goal?

We have begun many streams of work that allow for other stakeholders to replicate our model and use our materials so that they can begin to make maths make sense in their own environments:

- We provide custom training to partners who wish to use our online system where we teach teams how to best utilise it and the kind of tutoring needed to make it really impactful for high school learners.
- We do quarterly training days for teachers and facilitators wanting to learn how to start a maths club – the programme we follow for our primary school learners.
- Our maths coordinator, Dr Lynn Bowie, contributes to various publications and has written articles for *The Teacher* newspaper as well as for academic journals. She works for Umalusi providing analysis of the mathematics curriculum and examinations. She is a sought-after thought-leader in the industry and is an active contributor to teacher education.
- How-to booklets are available to anyone wanting to run events like ours – for example we run an annual winter school for our high school learners where they receive a week of boosted maths tutoring. Anyone looking to start their own event like this can download guides on how to run the event as well as the maths material we use in each session.

We have also just started a [monthly podcast](#) where we interview lecturers, teachers and grass-roots facilitators at NGOs to talk about everything maths.

- We have begun to send out monthly newsletters full of curated content for teachers such as activities for the classroom, case studies to read etc. Sign up [here](#)!



Kerry Hibberd, marketing and volunteer manager at OLICO Maths Education

How is OLICO Maths Education tailored to the South African context?

Our programmes are aligned to the CAPS curriculum – CAPS being the South Africa Curriculum Assessment Policy – which means our work adheres to national guidelines, learning areas, and subject curriculums per grade. Our work in younger grades – the Maths Clubs - has been created in collaboration with the SA Numeracy Chair as well as partners at Wits University, Axiom Education and Kellelo.

Importantly, all our work is available to learners for free as we have an open-source policy. This means that any learner, no matter their background, can access the content. We are working on getting our site zero-rated as well so that not even data charges can get in the way of learning. So if you know a zero-rating opportunity, let us know!



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What would you say has been OLICO's most significant achievement over the last 11 years?

I would say that the biggest achievement has been that our learners consistently perform in the top 20% of maths learners in the entire country – every year! And the reason I say that is because the majority of our learners begin working with us when they have marks as low as 12% for the subject. Just thinking about how those learners' futures have changed gives me goosebumps.

OLICO Maths Education has been selected as a 5 for Change beneficiary - what will you do with the proceeds?

Our team have a Big, Hairly, Audacious Goal for 2020 and that is to scale the number of Maths Clubs in Diepsloot from 18 clubs to 100 – which in turn, allows 1,000 new learners to attend our programmes. It costs roughly R100 per month for one learner to be involved in a maths club so the proceeds from the 5 for Change event will kick off this initiative. I am so excited to see how many kids we can sponsor from this one 5FC event!



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What is the long-term vision for OLICO Maths Education?

In the short term, the team will be focused on scaling their Maths Clubs to 100 clubs by 2020.

In the long term, we hope to increase the training aspect of our organisation and be able to provide certificates and perhaps even formal certification for people who learn how to use the OLICO model and resources. Offering this to other, established organisations will be the quickest way to increase our impact by reaching more learners. And why stop there? We know that when learners have good maths marks, their chances of accessing opportunities after matric is much greater. So, our ultimate dreamshot is to help any child, no matter their background, have the right skills to be whatever they dream of being after school.

Keen to attend #5forChange and support this year's five beneficiaries? Go to www.5forchange.co.za. Tickets are available [here](#).

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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