Can Art Change Lives



Thea van Schalkwyk



Hello,

May you be inspired by our storytelling and advocacy.

Together we can deliver support and solutions to all.

Warmest regards,

Thea Van Schalkwyk

Geo Creative | Advocating Change through Art-Centred Solutions

www.theavanschalkwyk.co.za

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WE ASKED THE QUESTION:
CAN ART CHANGE LIVES?

Some time ago in a coffee shop, I had a conversation with a fellow creative – an art coffee if you will.

My idea was to start an art school with a difference. The world economy had already hit an air pocket or pothole of note by then and South Africa's prospects or forecast looked bleak. Today, despite all the positivity and pseudo-euphoria, it looks even bleaker. My friend and I wondered if art and the art market as we know it would change or would be able to adjust or absorb the shock.

We asked the question: Can art change lives?

How can art also become a critical necessity – such as food, clothing and shelter? On a metaphorical and overarching practical level, it can also provide this.



I wish to share some of my research, impressions, experience and offer some hopeful solutions.

Amazing how our ongoing quest for needs-meeting solutions started with a simple chat over a cup of coffee.

CAN ART CHANGE LIVES?

Much has been written about related thoughts and variances. Much has been debated. Yet I find that after numerous articles I have read, documentaries I have viewed, perceptions I have contemplated and informal conversations I have encouraged, it has all been too philosophical. These still do not offer practical, real-life outcomes and significant value.

Art and creativity play different roles on different levels in people's lives on all levels of society. Interest in and importance and priority of these vary. For some – you and I – art in all its forms is an integral part of our lives. We simply cannot live without it. We have to breathe it in every day. Others may see it as something almost arbitrary, yet they 'use' it almost daily.

We do not buy art every day or regularly, in the same way as buying food and clothes, paying those bills, maintaining our employment or looking after our cars, critical family and home security issues. Yet, knowingly or unknowingly, we do use a bit of creative thinking or creativity and experience art every day in the examples I shared above.

Traditionally and historically art as we know it has been 'employed' to communicate, document, create impressions, give expression, deliver social commentary and inspire. Since the beginning, of time, art has evolved by redefining itself. By constantly rethinking and addressing the role of art and artists in society, critical real-life needs-meeting solutions were developed.

We have to look at moments in history to start this conversation. Where did visual messaging begin? Within the many mysteries of early humanlike activities and the earliest recorded time, we find clues in engraved drawings and 'notes' on cave walls (e.g. we went hunting for bison *or* where we found berries or shelter). Then art was technologically revolutionary in the shaping of language and communication – perhaps an ancient WhatsApp or Tweet? For us it seems to be primitive, yet it was so advanced. If we think about this, it has actually been equally cutting-edge as a Post-Modern installation such as a 3D laser-projected candy-floss mass hovering in a space, possibly delivering commentary on climate

change, or green house gasses and the latest form of visual and spatial experiences in 4D augmented reality.

Many art movements, artists, schools of thought, genres and niches gained understanding within their context only upon retrospect. We can only contextualise the significance of these and understand now and how these attempted to, and yes, succeeded in changing thoughts and perceptions. Because of the speed of media and information sharing today, we are able to 'live' art in the present state. It may now 'affect', engage and possibly influence our ways of seeing, thinking and doing almost immediately.

A small percentage of the world population is privileged enough to be able to acquire works of art and support other arts-related platforms in their purest form. For them, it is almost a given, something they simply cannot live without.

What about others – the masses – who do not engage with art and creativity daily? Where do we start?

As a geo-creative and educator, Thea Van Schalkwyk developed art-centred needs-meeting programmes and products which may offer surprising solutions.



CAN ART CHANGE LIVES? FOCUS ON CHILDREN.

We continue the conversation about whether art can changes lives and have a meaningful impact.

Let's start with children!

How can reading and art teach young children critical life lessons and also encourage imagination?

Children tend to spend too much time on phones and tablets. It's time to provide a much-needed balance by encouraging them to read more and develop their experience using art materials. Moreover, these products are beneficial and to the advancement and development of neurological wellness and hand fine-motor movement and skills.



We have written a short e-book for primary year learners, '**my precious book of 10 life lessons'.** Perhaps secondary-year learners may also find this book useful. This book will enable them to learn to read a very short fable-like story and do a colour-in exercise. Imagination-centred reading is vital in the educational process. Educational authorities, NGO's and principals of schools passionately emphasize the importance of reading – both quietly and out loud.

We have created colour-in images children can relate to. There is much debate on colour-in. Some perceive it passive, yet it carries value for young children in terms of internalising contents.

Let us guide children to love books and libraries, teach them about safety, alert them when introduced to drugs, harness community outreach, taking correct action against bullying and foster an awareness of our precious environment – to name but a few. This book is dedicated to our young community leaders and entrepreneurs.

We are very proud of our **Lucy And The Fairies** series. In a turbulent society which is far away from fairytales, who does not want to escape to a dream world? We must allow ourselves to dream, especially young children, and seek magical and imaginative places.



UNEMPLOYMENT: A PANDEMIC OF ITS OWN?

A talented jobless person may feel lost in a competitive world. We want to help. Art and creative thinking in adapted formats can have a micro-economical impact and open new doors. Our **12 Creative Jobs for Unemployed Youth** is the guideline for a programme we offer. This can also be re-designed to facilitate wider bespoke needs-meeting courses. Looking forward to interacting with you!

In South Africa and many countries around the globe, unforeseen circumstances cause young people to leave school before completing school. Yes, life happens when you are making other plans. They are compelled to find avenues to generate income and are urged to develop entrepreneurial skills. In general terms, also for those who have matriculated and those who were fortunate to graduate from a university or college, entrepreneurial development is vital in a fast-changing world where employment in, for example, the corporate world may be scarce.

Art and creative thinking in adapted formats can therefore have a micro-economical impact and open new doors for a teenager or young adult who may feel lost in a competitive world. It also boosts self-confidence. We read about so many success stories in the media of young creative thinkers who found ways to complete their school career or excelled without it. Even though educators like me see the value of a year 12 and university graduate certificate, we have to be

open-minded regarding lucrative opportunities for those who follow a different path toward success.

In South Africa, the NYP (National Youth Policy) underlines the importance of addressing the challenges the youth faces: unemployment and joblessness, high drop-out rates and inadequate skills development, and, the inadequate framework for youth work.

Worldwide, more so post-pandemic, the percentage of unemployed people is alarming. Some governments and organisations have initiated programmes to address this complex issue.



Our **12 Creative Jobs for Unemployed Youth** could perhaps be helpful to adults of all ages too. This book is the guideline for a programme we offer which could also be re-designed to facilitate bespoke needs-meeting courses.

MORE ATTENTION IS GIVEN TO THE DIFFERENTLY ABLED AS OF LATE. HIGH TIME!

We have read about full music orchestras comprising almost solely of differently abled individuals and some with impairments. Some of these musicians also now compose wonderful music. How can visually artistic individuals empower themselves in terms of employment? So many areas in the visual arts industry have been and can still be redesigned to embrace, for example, those in wheelchairs.

Let's look at a few careers we researched for our ebook **careers for creative thinkers**: graphic designer, art therapist, community arts project manager, illustrator, fashion designer, jewellery designer, textile and product designer, 3D

generalist and web designer or work in studios, an art gallery or museum – to name some. Nothing, except possible terrain accessibility obstacles, can withhold disabled individuals from pursuing a creative career. We can stop perceiving those who are differently abled as such and see them as able. They do!

Art-centred solutions can help to overcome the feeling of being lost or excluded from mainstream society.



MENTAL HEALTH AND REHABILITATION: CRITICAL FOCUS AREAS GLOBALLY

“Are you ok?” – a caring question frequently trending in conversations. Art-centred programmes and activities can help address mental health issues and other difficulties. Art does not only change lives. It can save lives.

Royals, politicians, and captains of industry are throwing their full weight into creating platforms for dialogue to put this under the spotlight and magnifying glass. We know of large corporations who allocate time weekly to 'check on' employees' mental health, viewing this as equally important as building safety and security regulations. Educational institutions do something similar with their students.

Through the support of art-centred programmes and by applying visual storytelling and even acting, mental health issues and other difficulties can be addressed. Here we think for example of depression, the effects of bullying, anxiety, burn-out, joblessness, societal pressure, sexual harassment, abuse and trauma. How does Art change lives here? The 'soft' yet scientific approach in the processes of art

workshops and individual sessions almost counteract the severity of the situations those affected have to deal with.

The creative process plays a critical role in diminishing thoughts of suicide.

Art can *save* lives.



HOW DOES ART MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES AND MINDS OF CHILDREN FROM DIVERSE CULTURES?

At an international school where Thea Van Schalkwyk taught art, she experienced how two children from countries who were in conflict with each other, shared a jar of water and a tray of paints. This showed tolerance, forgiveness and basic kindness.

Not only does art have the ability to give students excitement and joy, but it also opens their visual minds in terms of critical thinking. Thoughts by some of the students on how they perceive art and creativity still amaze.

Here are some of those:

"Art is like the Matrix – you do not know where to begin"
Grade 7 student from the USA

"Imagination + Creativity = Art"
Grade 8 student from Japan

"Art is Heart"
Grade 3 student from Chad

"Art is part of culture – make something beautiful to remember"
Grade 12 student from Oman

"It is important to learn new things from artists"
Grade 5 student from the DRC

"An art treasure is something that is precious and valuable"
Grade 10 student from Kenya

"Art had to start somewhere!"
Grade 6 student from Poland

"Art is a way that you can be yourself and be creative at the same time"
Grade 5 student from South Africa

"Technology helps us to look at art treasures in a better and new way and to appreciate them all over again!"
Grade 12 student from France

"Entertainment is in art, like color in pictures"
Grade 6 student from Iraq

"You need to have a sight in mind (with your art)"
Grade 5 student from Denmark

"Leonardo da Vinci's art is still alive and that is [through] us – we should make art and be proud of ourselves..."
Grade 6 student from Pakistan

"Art is the symbol of life and everything you see"
Grade 6 student from the Caribbean

"Art is your soul"
Grade 2 student from the USA

"You cannot rush art"
Grade 6 student from Brazil

"Art is a message from the past"
Grade 6 student from Syria

"The principles of design is the engine of an artwork"
Grade 4 student from Angola

"Is handwriting Art?"
Grade 7 student from Canada

"Art has no mistake"
Grade 5 student from Belgium

"Everyone has a talent – you can show that in Art"
Grade 7 student from India

"When you mix paint, you make a new colour, and when you mix courage and hard work, you get a nice painting"
Grade 5 student from Sudan

"The main source of history is Art"
Grade 7 student from Jordan

"Art is everything! "
Grade 7 student from Spain

In many instances, language was an obstacle as some students could not speak English at all. Thea Van Schalkwyk developed a communication model that had mind-blowing outcomes.

This model can also be useful for those who wish to go teach English abroad.

Empowerment is key – both for the teacher as well as the needs and growth of the students.



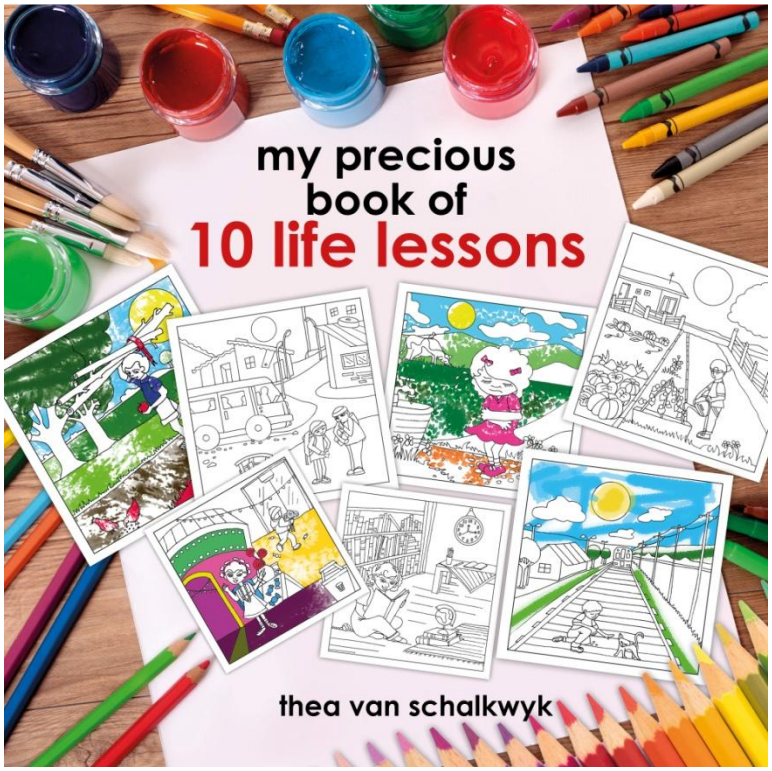
READING FOR MEANING: *my precious book of 10 life lessons©*

A reading and creative activity

The aim is to inspire; to encourage self-expression and self-confidence; to ignite hope for new possibilities in terms of personal and societal growth; to underpin individual and collective well-being; and to help create a harmonious world.

This 22-page book encourages primary year learners to get away from phones, tablets, games and watching TV. The book supports reading for meaning, literacy, entrepreneurship, and community leadership. It offers solutions in a creative thinking format.

Ten one-page stories each carries a message of an important life lesson and has a colour-in exercise. Learn about responsibility, safety, community, kindness, environmental issues, health, entrepreneurship, respect, bullying and more. Imagination-centred reading and visualization are vital in the educational process.



THE MICRO-ECONOMICAL IMPACT FOR CRAFTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Sifiso Skenjana, a respected economist, recently stated in Fin24, “Within the global context on investing in the creative industries, these have increasingly been recognised as growth sectors and that the lack of transformation in the industry is holding the country back from realising real economic growth from the sector.”

As shared in our very first post as an introduction to our Communication Platform, art-making can provide for critical necessities such as food, clothing and shelter. The craft industry in South Africa is a ‘vital organ’ to generate income from tourism specifically.

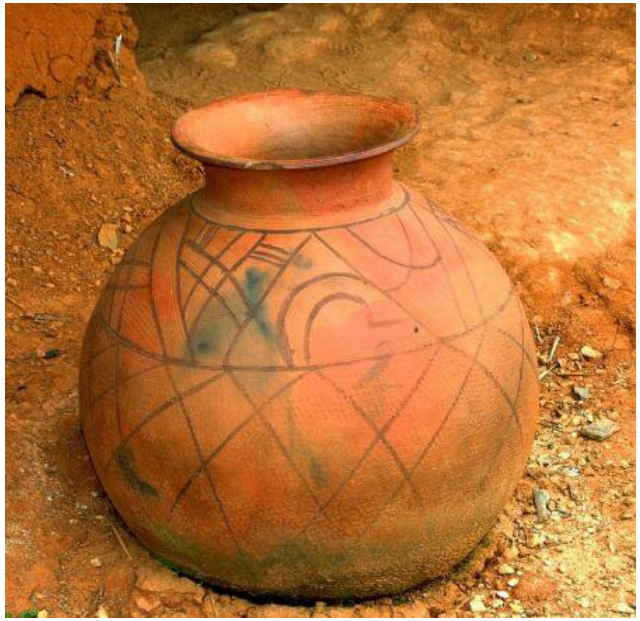
Arts and crafts can play integral roles in job creation. This is aligned with our vision of jobs for the unemployed.

African artefacts and relics have become sought-after commodities worldwide.

We can assist with valuations if you have pieces in your collection.

As a reliable geo creative business, we reach out with our art and creative thinking experience and skills to deliver needs-meeting, relatable and relevant services and products to all, not just to art connoisseurs.

Please have a look at our Specialist Valuations page on our website.



THE IMPACT OF ART IN OUR LIVES

LET'S ENJOY A MOMENT OF PURE ART APPRECIATION.

Art can ask you: just find beauty, harmony, balance, rhythm and the surprise moment when experiencing a new colour – to name but a few. Through art, we can experience profound storytelling, mystery and expression, just as in music, literature, poetry and performance. Sometimes it could just be an almost serendipitous and spontaneous expression and sharing of the imagination and a fleeting thought. Yet, it may also be a deliberate statement and stern message.

As we know, the global market comprises a marginally small segment of discerned art buyers. For others SA art is surprisingly becoming a 'curiosity' worth investigating and pursuing. Our country's enduring narrative invites enquiry – from our pioneering masters to our ever-questioning cutting-edge creatives. Our art challenges the norm and encou rages contemplation. It's no surprise that platforms globally receive our art with much acclaim.

Art as we experience it in our homes, offices and public spaces has the ability to transcend us into another world. It almost becomes a form of meditation and escape – a painting hanging on a wall, a sculpture resting on a table, a ceramic or glass vase on a shelf or a mobile hanging in a window. Their role in our lives cannot be ignored. Yes, we invest in art for financial and prestigious reasons, but we also invest in it because of the enduring value it adds to our lives.

Please have a look at our Specialist Valuations page.



A GEO CREATIVE'S PRAYER FOR EARTH

Surprisingly, geography was the subject at school that Thea Van Schalkwyk enjoyed most. If she reflects on her career and reviews the services and products her business offers, she views her activities and outputs more as geo creative than purely that of an art specialist as she became known. Intuitively and perhaps subconsciously, geography as her predominant interest – both the physical and human strands – transpires almost spontaneously in her art-centred activities, services, programmes and products.

As a geo creative she is fascinated by the phenomena of nature, yet concerned about the state of our lovely and precious planet – both as a result of the neglect by humankind and geo societal and geopolitical chaos.

"My artworks arise from the deep-structured circles of my wandering and wondering mind. I see them as suggestive or evasive scenes or as pictured views detached from landscapes, seascapes, skyscapes and still lives. They are stories of imaginary moments, images and objects in creation. I deviate from the obvious and invite the viewer to find stories or visual messaging in these almost vernacular pieces – in a sense a form of visual meditation."

Agia – A Prayer for Earth has been inspired by altarpieces in churches, cathedrals and museums Thea Van Schalkwyk admired during her travels. This piece is a call or plea to action to take care of our planet.



RENEWED THINKING IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

"We sense that 'normal' isn't coming back, that we are being born into a new normal, a new kind of society, a new relationship with the earth, a new experience of being human" – Charles Eisenstein

We all experienced an almost ideal life and a familiar world before Covid-19 arrived. It shook our lives and livelihood, it challenged our jobs and the way we had to work, our mental health, and resilience. It took loved ones. For many, it created anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder as well as fear of the unknown.

Post-pandemic we all had to adjust and renew with courage – almost like rebooting, restarting, or reprogramming our computers. We had to change our thinking. Daily, in a sense, we are moving in multiple parallel universes. Some things feel somewhat the same as before the pandemic, while our social relationships may have changed to a small degree as well as our connection with nature.

Thea Van Schalkwyk's tessellation ***New Genesis*** is an intimate narrative and adaptation of the primal beginning and creation of the world. The four panels can interchange in the process of storytelling, visual meditation, and renewed thinking. Artistic storytelling is a most useful tool for venting and healing.

Even though this artwork, or rather geo-creative expression, was created a few years ago during Thea Van Schalkwyk's journey in developing and growing her brand it may surprisingly have been 'accidentally' visionary of the times we are living in now – perhaps more relevant and relatable.



FOUR VITAL ELEMENTS FOR SURVIVAL

Let's return to our introductory article of 23 August 2022 for a moment. It referred to a coffee shop meeting. We asked the question: How can art also become a critical necessity – such as food, clothing, and shelter? On a metaphorical and overarching practical level, it can also provide this.

Fire Earth Water Air became a metaphorical narrative of our vital elements for survival.



As in ***Agia | A Prayer for Earth*** , this geo creative expression draws attention to the way in which we interact with our planet and that we have to respect this landscape as we depend on it for our basic needs.

It goes without saying that we need these basics to be a prosperous society. Yet simultaneously we cannot ignore climate change and its complexity. Wildfires, flooding, migration, food security, pollution, conflict, and the ever-changing geo-political landscape, AI, among others, are also cases in point. Amid these alarming and uncertain challenges, humans have to find creative navigating ways to continue to survive.

As we advocate art-centred solutions, we have already introduced a few areas wherein art and creative thinking can help to change and improve lives. We believe that these suggestions can provide for basic needs.

EXPLAINER – ADVOCATING CHANGE THROUGH ART-CENTRED SOLUTIONS – PART 1 OF 2

Someone asked the other day for a quick explainer about our passion and advocacy.

As we all know, advocacy implies to publicly support an idea, development, or way of doing something.

In our case, it is all about change and help to all. Thea Van Schalkwyk used to work exclusively for art connoisseurs in the commercial, corporate, and private sectors. She also mostly taught art to privileged children. She felt so much more could be done to change perceptions of art and to encourage the involvement of a greater audience.

We have already suggested some areas where we can deliver critical help with art-centred solutions and creative thinking in previous articles.

We have chosen these topics as points of departure to engage in mutually meaningful conversations with the view of partnering.

"Practice what you preach" – a well-known saying. This is what we do. This is also where our question of 'Can Art Change Lives?' entered the picture and debates and discussions followed as shared in our second article of 23 August 2022.

Let's meet for a moment in our geo-creative landscape and proverbially stand on the sidewalk of a busy city street surrounded by masses of people and noise or perhaps rather under a tree, on the beach, or on a rock viewing sunrise or sunset and listen to the peaceful sounds and voices of nature.

We contemplate – Who am I? What really interests me? What can I do by using creative thinking to improve my life and that of my community, a person in need, and the causes I am passionate about? How can I learn a new skill? How can I play a role and be part of the solution?

Thea Van Schalkwyk asked herself these questions while meditating at a ‘Monet pond’ she discovered in the African bush. In Part 2 we look at how anyone can benefit from a little bit of creativity.



EXPLAINER – ADVOCATING CHANGE THROUGH ART-CENTRED SOLUTIONS – PART 2 OF 2

An excerpt from an article on *Big Think* continues the conversation.

“With engagement rates in the workplace continuing to plummet over the past two decades and only being exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the time for change is now. We are dealing with the global failure of leadership that has affected the mental, emotional, creative, intellectual, and even physical health of human beings the world over. It’s time to get rid of our old ways of thinking about leaders and leadership.” – *Kyle Buckett and Chris Mefford, Leadership Overrated, © 2023*

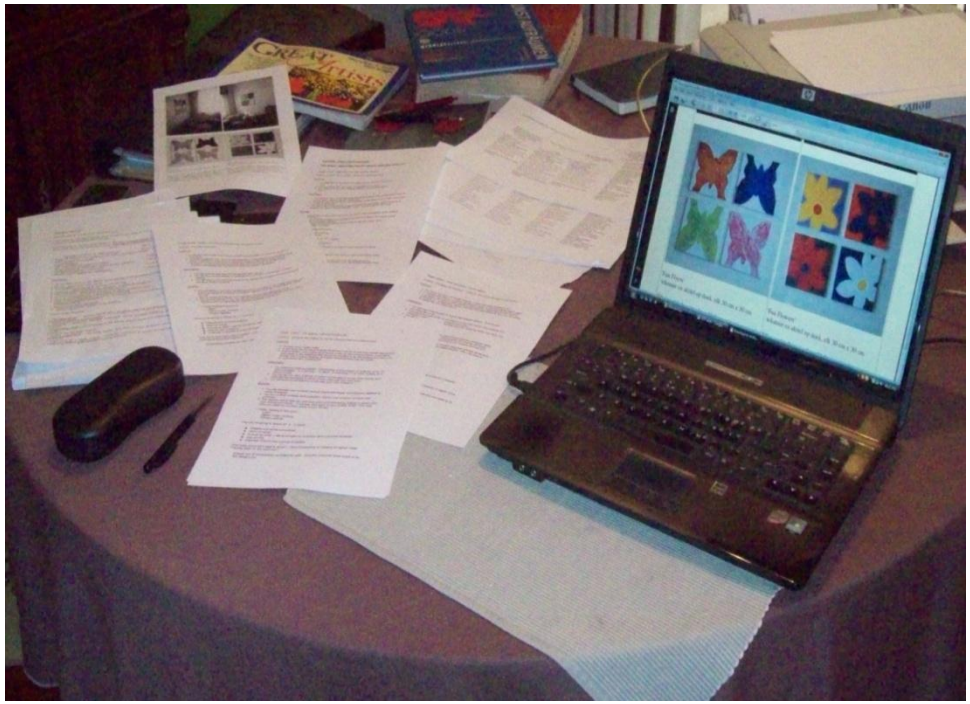
As a friend said the other day, “The macros of the world change constantly, sometimes in a blink, and may impact our plans and dreams”.

Perhaps part of the change is to become the boss of your own life and direction. Pre-pandemic we often used the phrases “be positive” or “I am positive of a good response or outcome”. That has changed. Instead, we have to be realistic and practical.

But how do we bring this to action, you may ask?

In Part 1, we referred to articles about areas where we could offer critical help. We have done extensive research to develop programmes and products. Some are already advertised here on our website.

The accompanying visual to this post gives you a glimpse of what it takes to realize these outcomes. A dining room became an incubator abuzz with ideas, concepts, and planning and every available wall space had sheets of paper pasted onto them with diagrams, images and large sticky notes. We will be sharing programmes and courses for individuals and groups soon. By engaging with these, you can be part of the change and the solution. You will unleash the power within you. As the saying goes, **“Be the CEO of your own life”**.



VALUABLE FEEDBACK ON OUR EDUCATIONAL BOOKS

We wish to share some comments we received so far on our educational books.

Sharon (Grade 1 Sunday school teacher): ‘Love the positive light books are written in. Uplifting!’

Tamryn (Grade 2): ‘More space to draw please.’

Keanu (Grade 1): ‘More stories please. I love fairies. I look for them every day!’

Ramos (Parent): ‘These books by Thea Van Schalkwyk were the perfect way for my little one to learn English and to learn life lessons while having a lot of fun creating her own artwork! Highly recommended!’

Thank you so much, Sharon, Tamryn, Keanu, and Ramos!



OUR WORKSHOPS FOR CHILDREN

The accompanying combined image tells the story of recent bespoke workshops for children.

Some classes were presented at their homes – more convenient for the parents.

Others were held at a school. The emphasis here was teamwork – from Kindergarten to the older kids. One of the project briefs was that they had to use found material. They had to repurpose these to create attractive visual narratives in collective projects. These projects aligned with our workshops for children.



OUR COMBINED WORKSHOPS FOR SENIOR CITIZEN GROUPS OF FRIENDS

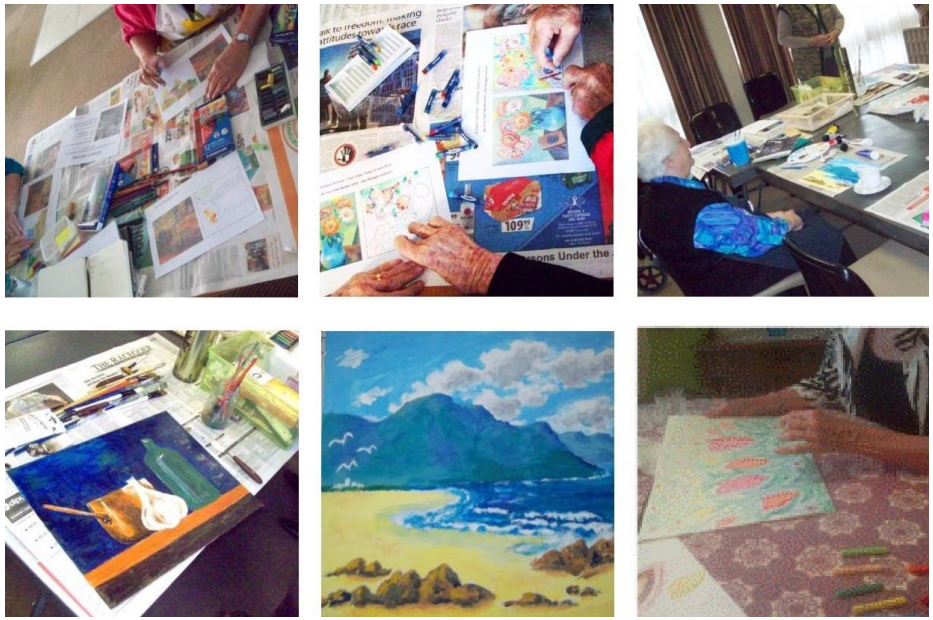
The accompanying combined image tells the story of be-spoke workshops we facilitated for senior citizen groups of friends.

We worked at two retirement centres. These were the high-lights of the week for these beautiful people. Some have never done art before. This was so enjoyable with a cup of tea and a catch-up as well as the amazing life stories they shared.

Some retirees are quite lonely – with several children who have emigrated. Thea almost felt like a proxy daughter. She found this very special.

A lady reached out and requested a private session. She is introverted and also hasn't done art before. She had a wonderful time exploring art techniques.

These classes aligned with our vision for our workshops for senior citizens, groups for friends, and homemakers.





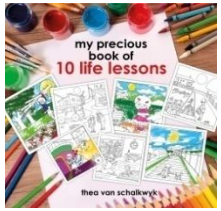
















BE INVOLVED

BE CREATIVE

BE THE CHANGE YOU ALWAYS DREAMED OF

MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

BE PART OF THE SOLUTION

We proudly deliver

ART-CENTRED WORKSHOPS FOR ALL

https://theavanschalkwyk.co.za/art-workshops/

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