

DONATIONS CAN HELP LESS FORTUNATE KIDS TO BETTER LIFE

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LEARNING to read is something many parents automatically assume their children will be able to do.

From the day their offspring arrive, they buy them books. And once they go to school, they get textbooks given to them by the school, or bought by parents, eager to make sure they succeed.

In southern Africa, things are not so easy, which is why a team of volunteers in Wivenhoe is launching a new charitable trust.

Educational Aid for the Children of Southern Africa plans to collect books and send them to children in the region who don't have the advantages of youngsters over here.

For such children, having books is vital – it means they can learn to read, and with it, get a better start in life.

Children in the region may speak any one of nearly 100 languages, so they learn English as a common tongue, making books in English a useful commodity.

For its first project, the charity is collecting undamaged English-language children's books to ship to the University of Johannesburg, in South Africa.

Jackie Riley, one of the volunteers, said the books were destined for places where there were no libraries and the families were too poor to buy books.

She explained: "The thing many people don't realise is the best thing for the children is to learn English.

"They have to learn English first and then learn to read, but can you imagine your children learning to read without books? It is virtually impossible.

"They need to have something to practise on."

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uals, inspired by lecturer Max Bergman, who was based at Essex University but is now at Basel University, in Switzerland.

Prof Bergman heads research projects looking at the effectiveness of teaching in South Africa and on visits to schools, was shocked to find they often had no resources beyond an old and often incomplete set of Encyclopaedia Britannicas.

The trust's founding trustees include retired banker Jackie, Hilary Baic, Prof Bergman, Lord Aberconway, Stephen Chadwick and Stuart Allen.

It has already completed its first book collection, at St Mary's School in Lexden Road, Colchester, via an appeal to pupils to bring in their unwanted tomes.

Mrs Riley said: "The response



■ Helping – St Mary's School pupils Jena Joyce, Jessiça Vasili, Lucy Muir and Claudia McKell with some of the books they collected for children in South Africa, inset Picture: NIGEL BROWN 31JUN_2

Book aid: How we can all help Africa to read

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From Colchester, the books will be sent on to the townships, refugee camps and communities of southern Africa.

As well as asking people to donate books, the charity needs volunteers to collect them and raise funds for their despatch.

The charity's official launch, on April 16, will see it working harder than ever to raise £1,200 to ship the first consignment and

then follow that up with regular shipments.

Mrs Riley said: "We have only been going about six weeks and we are thrilled with how it is going, but really, raising the money to cover the shipping is the big thing. That's so important.

"We hope we will be able to sign up people as members of the trust for £10 a year to help raise money, though we will welcome donations, too.

"We want this to become a

national charity, with people collecting and donating books across the country.

"It really will make such a massive difference if these children can learn to read from an early age. It will make their lives so much better.

"No other European country can really help like we can, because their books aren't in English, so it's so important we do something here, if we can."

● For more details of how to help, go to eachsa.org.uk