

# Shakespeare

Schools Festival  
south africa

## Annual Report 2025



PREPARED BY EDUCAPE TRUST  
DECEMBER 2025

Please note: In line with the POPIA Act and to safeguard participants, names and identifying photo descriptions have been omitted.

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## One-Page Programme Summary | 2025

The Shakespeare Schools Festival South Africa (SSFSA) is a national arts education programme that uses theatre as a tool for youth development, literacy, and creative expression. Established in 2009, SSFSA works with schools across South Africa to provide learners and educators with access to professional theatre environments, structured creative processes, and mentorship from experienced arts practitioners.

In 2025, SSFSA delivered a multi-provincial festival programme across Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban, and George, reaching learners, educators, emerging practitioners, and audiences from diverse educational, linguistic, and socio-economic contexts. The programme engaged 83 participating schools, supporting 1,301 learners as cast members and involving teachers, directors, crew, guest directors, and volunteers in a collaborative national effort. Across all regions, the festival reached a combined audience of 3,929 people.

SSFSA's model combines abridged Shakespeare productions with targeted workshops for teachers, learners, and emerging practitioners. Teacher-director workshops equipped educators with practical directing tools, confidence, and conceptual clarity, while cast workshops supported learners in text engagement, ensemble work, physical theatre, and performance skills. University partnerships, particularly in Durban and Cape Town, enabled meaningful skills transfer and provided emerging practitioners with hands-on experience in directing, technical theatre, and arts administration.

The 2025 festival demonstrated strong educational and developmental outcomes. Educators reported increased learner confidence, improved communication and collaboration, and enhanced engagement with language and critical thinking. Learners described the festival as a formative experience that supported personal growth, self-belief, and a sense of creative belonging. For many participants, performing in a professional theatre for the first time was both affirming and transformative.

SSFSA also continued to strengthen its institutional systems in 2025. Key learning areas included earlier planning in response to school calendars, improved venue engagement, clearer accessibility protocols, and strengthened registration and payment processes. These insights have directly informed planning and focus areas for 2026, with an emphasis on sustainability, accessibility, and strengthened partnerships.

Overall, the 2025 Shakespeare Schools Festival South Africa reaffirmed the programme's role as a scalable, inclusive, and impactful national arts education initiative, delivering cultural value, educational benefit, and meaningful opportunities for young people across the country.

## About Shakespeare Schools Festival South Africa

The Shakespeare Schools Festival South Africa (SSFSA) was established in 2009 to strengthen the relationship between arts education and youth development. At its core, the festival is an educational programme that uses theatre to develop language proficiency, communication skills, confidence, empathy, and critical thinking among young people.

Through the works of William Shakespeare, SSFSA brings together learners from diverse socio-economic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds across South Africa. The festival provides access to professional theatre spaces, structured creative processes, and mentorship from experienced arts practitioners, many of whom are active educators and industry professionals.

Since its inception, SSFSA has grown into Africa's largest youth drama programme dedicated to Shakespeare. The programme operates nationally, with festival legs in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban, and George, and continues to adapt its delivery model to ensure accessibility, relevance, and sustainability within the South African education and arts landscape.

SSFSA is not simply a performance platform. It is a developmental journey that supports learners, teachers, and emerging arts practitioners in navigating creativity, collaboration, discipline, and self-expression. Each year, the festival strengthens its role as a bridge between education, community, and the professional arts sector.



## Our Objectives and Values

### Our Objectives

The Shakespeare Schools Festival South Africa operates with the following core objectives:

To promote life skills, social cohesion, and leadership

Through collaborative theatre-making, learners develop confidence, empathy, responsibility, and the ability to work meaningfully with others across differences.

To support literacy, language development, and critical thinking

Shakespeare's texts provide a rigorous framework for engaging with language, narrative structure, and interpretation, strengthening both academic and expressive skills.

To expand access to professional cultural experiences

SSFSA creates opportunities for learners from diverse contexts to perform in professional theatre spaces, many for the first time.

To develop educators and emerging arts practitioners

The festival equips teachers, facilitators, and student practitioners with practical tools for directing, facilitating, and delivering arts-based education.

### Our Values

SSFSA is guided by a clear set of values that inform both programme delivery and organisational decision-making:

**Inclusivity** | Creating environments where learners of different abilities, backgrounds, and experiences are welcomed and supported.

**Creativity** | Encouraging imaginative, culturally relevant interpretations and bold engagement with classical texts.

**Accountability** | Delivering programmes with care, professionalism, and a commitment to continuous learning and improvement.

**Resilience and adaptability** | Responding thoughtfully to the realities of school contexts, resource constraints, and changing environments.

## How We Work

The Shakespeare Schools Festival South Africa follows a structured, accessible programme model designed to support schools regardless of their prior experience with drama or theatre. The model balances creative freedom with clear guidance, ensuring both educational value and artistic quality.

**Participating schools** register annually and select from a curated range of abridged Shakespeare plays suitable for primary and high school learners. Each school is supported through a clearly defined process that includes access to educational resources, skills-development workshops, and a professionally managed festival environment.

**Schools receive** abridged scripts, contextual guidance, and support materials that assist educators and learners in understanding narrative structure, character development, and thematic interpretation. These resources are designed to complement classroom learning while supporting the rehearsal and performance process.

**Teacher-director workshops** form a core component of the programme. These sessions focus on directing fundamentals, working with Shakespearean language, staging, and basic technical considerations, equipping educators with the confidence and practical tools to guide learners effectively.

**Cast workshops** are delivered by experienced facilitators and tailored to the specific needs of participating schools. Workshops focus on ensemble building, physical theatre, voice work, and engagement with text, supporting learners in developing confidence, collaboration, and performance skills.

**The programme** culminates in participation in a professionally supported festival, where learners rehearse and perform in a theatre environment. This experience introduces participants to the disciplines of live performance while fostering pride, responsibility, and a strong sense of achievement.



## A Word from Our CEO

Each year, the Shakespeare Schools Festival South Africa reaffirms its belief in the transformative power of theatre as an educational tool. In 2025, learners across the country once again demonstrated how Shakespeare's works remain relevant when interpreted through contemporary South African voices and lived experiences.

The festival continues to create meaningful opportunities for young people to engage with language, storytelling, and collaboration in ways that extend beyond the stage. Through structured creative processes and access to professional theatre environments, learners are supported to develop confidence, empathy, and a strong sense of personal agency.

SSFSA remains deeply committed to accessibility and inclusion. Across regions, the programme works intentionally to ensure that learners from diverse backgrounds and abilities are able to participate fully and meaningfully. These values are not incidental to the festival's work; they are embedded in how the programme is designed and delivered.

I extend my sincere thanks to the educators, facilitators, partners, and funders who continue to support this programme. Your commitment enables SSFSA to reach thousands of young people each year and to strengthen the role of arts education within the broader educational landscape.

With gratitude,

**Kseniya Filinova**  
**CEO and Founder**



## A Word from Our Managing Director

The 2025 Shakespeare Schools Festival South Africa was a year of consolidation, learning, and refinement. Delivering a national programme of this scale requires careful coordination, responsiveness, and a willingness to learn from both successes and challenges.

Across Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban, and George, the festival continued to provide young people with access to professional theatre environments and structured creative processes. Learners and educators engaged deeply with Shakespeare's work, demonstrating confidence, creativity, and a growing sense of ownership over their performances.

The 2025 programme reinforced the importance of strong partnerships. Collaborations with universities, community theatres, and educational institutions played a critical role in supporting programme delivery while contributing to skills development for emerging practitioners. These partnerships remain central to SSFSA's sustainability and long-term impact.

As Managing Director, my focus remains on strengthening systems, clarifying expectations, and ensuring that the festival is delivered with care, professionalism, and accountability. Learning from the 2025 programme has directly informed planning for future festivals, with a clear emphasis on accessibility, early preparation, and consistent support for participating schools.

SSFSA continues to evolve as both an educational and cultural programme. With the continued support of our partners and funders, we remain committed to expanding access to quality arts education and to nurturing the confidence and potential of young people through theatre.

Yours in Arts, Culture and Heritage,

**Blythe Stuart Linger**  
**Managing Director**





## Meet the Team



### **Kseniya Filinova**

Founder of the annual Shakespeare School Festival South Africa (SSFSA) and CEO of Educape Trust. She has a BA Degree in Theatre and Performance from the University of Arts and Culture, St Petersburg, Russia. In 2020, Kseniya relocated back to Russia to focus on growing SSF International reach. Filinova continues to oversee SSFSA as its President and CEO.



### **Blythe Stuart Linger**

Blythe is best described as an Arts administrator. He does everything that requires business, creativity, and administration. As the Managing Director of SSFSA, Blythe looks forward to continuing the festival's amazing legacy while nurturing its growth.



### **Keraleigh Hodson-Ackerman**

Keraleigh began as an SSFSA Admin intern in 2019. With qualifications in Human Resources and Remedial Teaching, she supports the festival with dedication and creativity, bringing her love for photography and crafting to the team.



### **Jade Beeby**

A BA Dramatic Art (Hons) graduate from the University of the Witwatersrand, Jade majored in Directing and Writing. With a passion for working with children, especially in the arts, Jade is the proud SSFSA Festival Coordinator in Johannesburg.



### **Heather Stead**

Heather has been the SSFSA George Regional Coordinator since 2015. With a degree in Applied Drama Studies from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, she also runs the Market Community Theatre and the Let's Go Arts Outreach project, using the arts as a platform for skills training.



### **Dr Verne Rowin Munsamy**

With 23 years of teaching and lecturing experience, Dr Munsamy focuses on Drama, Production Studies, and Gender Studies. As the KwaZulu-Natal Festival Coordinator, he also runs outreach projects across the province, inspiring future generations through the arts.



### **Nkosinathi Sangweni**

The Cape Town Festival Coordinator, Nkosinathi embodies professionalism and artistic excellence. His expertise spans dance education, choreography, and event management, inspiring future generations through his leadership.

## The Transformative Power of Drama: 2025

Drama remains one of the most effective tools for experiential learning, particularly within diverse educational contexts. In 2025, the Shakespeare Schools Festival South Africa continued to demonstrate how structured theatre-making supports young people in developing confidence, communication skills, empathy, and critical engagement with language and ideas.

Through engagement with Shakespeare's texts, learners are encouraged to analyse narrative, explore character motivation, and make interpretive choices. These processes strengthen literacy and critical thinking while enabling learners to connect classical texts to their own lived experiences. Across regions, performances reflected cultural relevance, creativity, and a strong sense of ownership.

For many participants, SSFSA provided a first opportunity to perform in a professional theatre environment. This exposure introduced learners to the discipline and responsibility of live performance, while fostering pride, resilience, and a sense of achievement. Educators consistently reported increased learner confidence, improved collaboration, and greater willingness to participate in classroom activities following the festival.

Beyond performance, the festival creates spaces of belonging. Rehearsal rooms and theatre spaces function as environments where learners are supported to take creative risks, work collaboratively, and be seen and heard. These experiences contribute meaningfully to learners' personal development and overall well-being.



## Regional Breakdown and Impact: 2025

In 2025, the Shakespeare Schools Festival South Africa reached learners, educators, practitioners, and audiences across multiple provinces through its national programme. The participation figures below reflect consolidated data from all regional festivals.

- **Participating schools: 83**
- **Learners engaged (cast members): 1,301**
- **Teachers and directors: 101**
- **Crew and student practitioners: 159**
- **Guest directors: 68**
- **Volunteers: 12**
- **Audience reached: 3,929**

These figures demonstrate SSFSA's continued ability to deliver a large-scale, multi-provincial arts education programme while operating within the constraints of school calendars, venue availability, and resource realities. Participation data is reviewed annually to inform programme planning, accessibility strategies, and future growth.

### Cape Town

The Cape Town festival took place at the Homecoming Centre over an extended festival period, accommodating a large cohort of participating schools. In 2025, 46 schools participated in the Cape Town leg, making it the largest regional programme within the national festival.

The scale of the festival required close coordination between schools, facilitators, and venue staff. The Homecoming Centre proved to be a responsive and collaborative partner, particularly in addressing accessibility needs for learners with disabilities. Joint problem-solving between participating schools and the venue resulted in improved stage access and holding areas, reinforcing SSFSA's commitment to inclusive and equitable practice.

Cape Town's 2025 festival further highlighted the importance of adaptability within large-scale programmes. The ability to respond swiftly to logistical challenges ensured that learners' experiences remained positive, well supported, and professionally managed throughout the festival period.

- **Schools: 46**
- **Cast members: 752**
- **Crew members: 97**
- **Teachers and directors: 109**
- **Audience: 2,417**

## Johannesburg

The Johannesburg leg of the Shakespeare Schools Festival South Africa took place at the Joburg Theatre from 8 to 13 September 2025. The festival brought together a diverse group of primary and high school learners, offering participants the opportunity to perform in a professional theatre environment.

The programme was marked by strong audience engagement and a wide range of performance styles. Several productions stood out for their emotional depth and confidence, reflecting learners' thoughtful engagement with Shakespeare's texts and themes. The festival provided a valuable platform for schools from different contexts to share work and learn from one another.

Despite the complexities of operating within a large metropolitan venue, the Johannesburg festival was delivered successfully, ensuring that learners and educators were supported throughout the rehearsal and performance process. The week reaffirmed Johannesburg's role as a vital regional pillar within the national festival.

- **Schools: 17**
- **Cast members: 146**
- **Crew members: 32**
- **Teachers and directors: 13**
- **Audience: 882**



## Durban

The Durban leg of the Shakespeare Schools Festival South Africa was hosted at the Courtyard Theatre at Durban University of Technology. The festival continued to benefit from a strong partnership with the university, enabling both school learners and DUT students to engage meaningfully in the programme.

A defining feature of the Durban festival was its emphasis on skills development and mentorship. University students supported the programme as directors, technicians, and facilitators, gaining hands-on professional experience while contributing to a supportive and well-managed environment for participating schools.

The festival created valuable opportunities for learners from outreach schools to access a professional theatre space and to engage in structured creative processes. This integrated model strengthened intergenerational learning and reinforced SSFSA's commitment to sustainable arts education pathways.

- **Schools: 12**
- **Cast members: 250**
- **Crew members: 25**
- **Teachers and directors: 28**
- **Volunteers: 8**
- **Audience: 450**



## George

The George leg of the Shakespeare Schools Festival South Africa took place at the Market Community Theatre following a late venue change. While initially challenging, the shift ultimately strengthened the festival by creating a more intimate, community-centred environment for learners and audiences.

The venue allowed for greater flexibility in scheduling and rehearsal time, supporting learners to feel confident and prepared in the performance space. Audiences responded positively, with strong attendance across performances, many of whom were engaging with live theatre for the first time.

A defining feature of the George festival was its emphasis on integration and community engagement. Schools from different areas were intentionally programmed together, fostering interaction, shared learning, and a strong sense of collective experience. The festival reinforced the value of community-based venues in expanding access to meaningful arts experiences.

- **Schools: 8**
- **Cast members: 153**
- **Crew members: 5**
- **Teachers and directors: 19**
- **Volunteers: 3**
- **Audience: 180**



## Cumulative Impact: 2025

Across all regions, the 2025 Shakespeare Schools Festival South Africa demonstrated the strength and reach of a national arts education programme delivered through consistent systems, strategic partnerships, and responsive planning.

Collectively, the festival engaged learners from a wide range of educational, linguistic, and socio-economic contexts, providing access to professional theatre environments and structured creative processes. Participation across regions reflected sustained demand for the programme and reaffirmed the relevance of Shakespeare as a tool for learning, expression, collaboration, and critical engagement.

Beyond performance outcomes, the festival generated clear developmental impact. Educators reported increased learner confidence, improved communication skills, and stronger collaboration within casts. Learners described gains in self-belief, public speaking, and their ability to work creatively with peers. For many participants, the festival represented a formative educational experience that extended beyond the stage into classroom learning and personal development.

The programme also continued to function as a skills development pipeline. Emerging practitioners gained practical experience in directing, technical production, facilitation, and arts administration, strengthening pathways into the creative industries while supporting high-quality festival delivery across regions.

Taken together, the 2025 festival reaffirmed SSFSA's role as a scalable, inclusive, and impactful national programme that delivers cultural value, educational benefit, and meaningful opportunities for young people across South Africa.



## Detailed Impact Statistics: 2025

SSFSA's impact in 2025 is reflected across four regional festivals, illustrating both the geographic reach of the programme and the scale of national participation.

### Cape Town

**Schools:** 46  
**Cast members:** 752  
**Crew members:** 97  
**Teachers and directors:** 109  
**Audience:** 2,417

### Johannesburg

**Schools:** 17  
**Cast members:** 146  
**Crew members:** 32  
**Teachers and directors:** 13  
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### George

**Schools:** 8  
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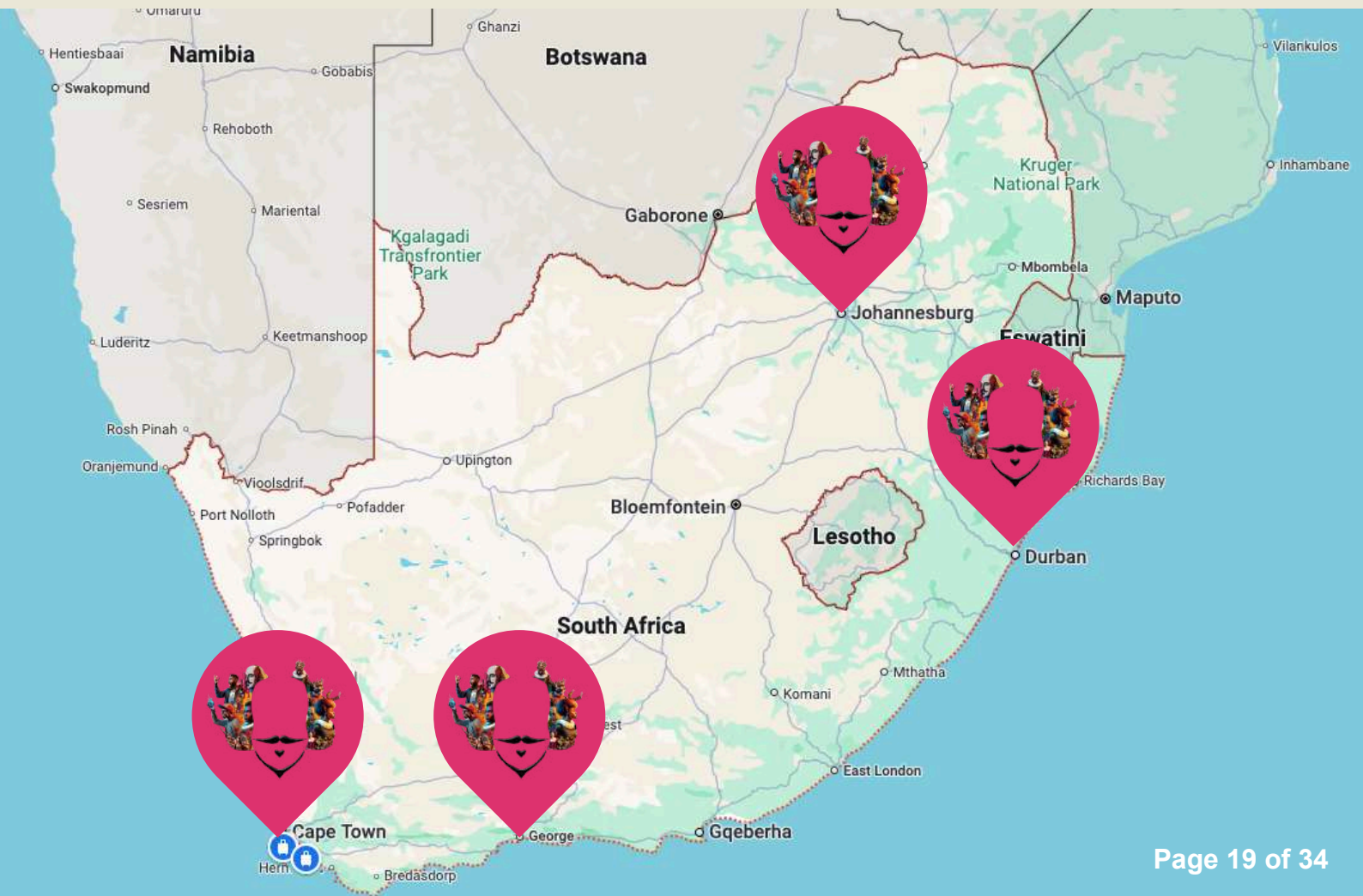
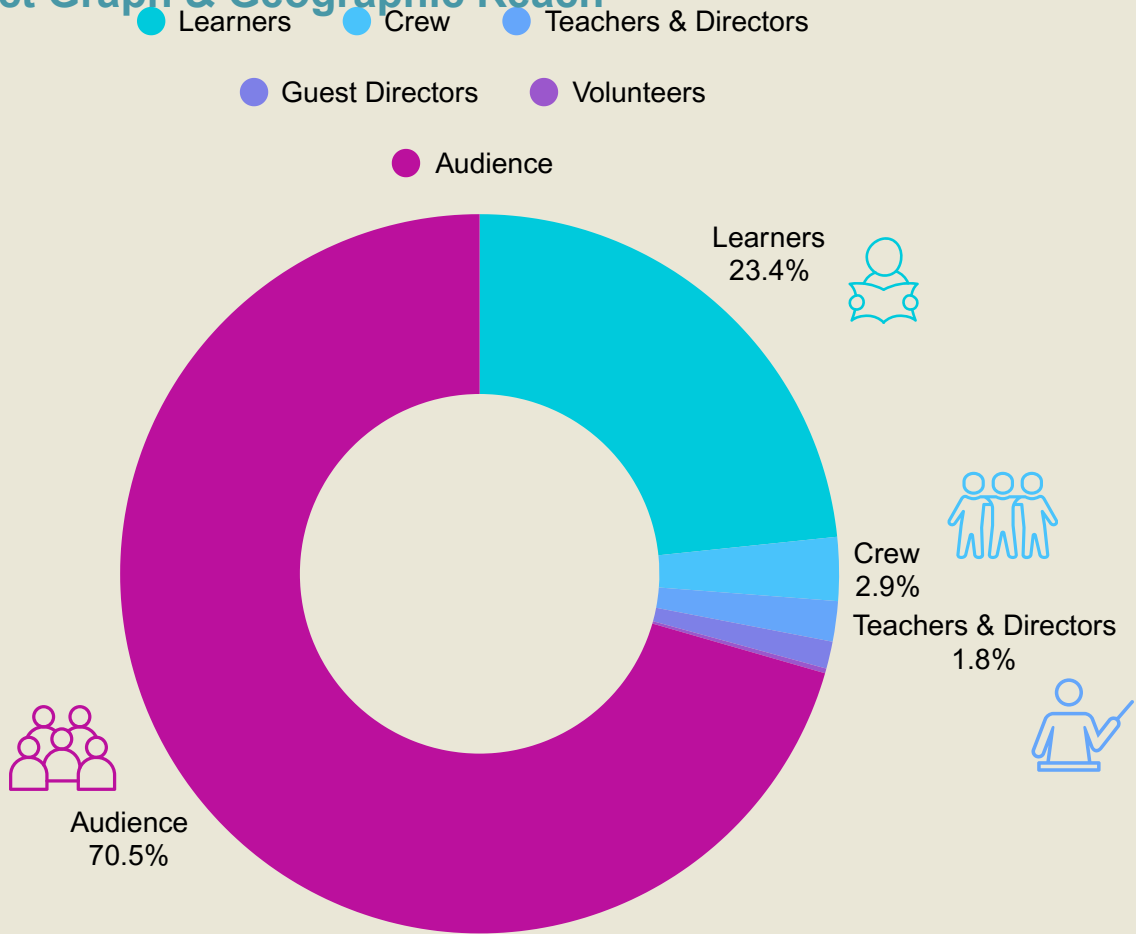
### Durban

**Schools:** 12  
**Cast members:** 250  
**Crew members:** 25  
**Teachers and directors:** 28  
**Volunteers:** 8  
**Audience:** 450

**Total audience** reached across all regions:  
 3,929



# Impact Graph & Geographic Reach



## School Break Down

<b>KWAZULU NATAL</b>	MARIS STELLA SCHOOL
	DURBAN GIRLS SECONDARY SCHOOL
	WESTVILLE GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL
	HUNT ROAD SECONDARY SCHOOL
	ISIBONELO HIGH SCHOOL
	DUT/EDUVOS GROUP ONE
	DUT/EDUVOS GROUP TWO
	BUHLEBEMFUNDO SECONDARY
	PORT SHEPSTONE HIGH SCHOOL
	MAFUMBUKA HIGH SCHOOL
<b>GEORGE</b>	Bramble Hill International School
	Glenwood House College
	Inkcubeko Youth and Science Centre
	JONGA HIGH SCHOOL
	Heidedal Primary
	Thyolora primary school
	Themba lethu Primary School
	Imizamo Yethu High
<b>GAUTENG</b>	Parktown High School for Girls
	St Dunstan's College

<b>GAUTENG</b>	Woodhill College High School
	Curro Academy Wilgeheuwel
	Xanadu Private School
	Mondeor High School
	Khula Unqobe Creative Art(Protea Glen)
	Buckingham Academy Collegiate
	Buckingham Academy Preparatory
	Curro Academy Savanna City
	Lalela - Johannesburg
	Sebetsa O Thole Moputso
	Curro Aurora Primary School
	Buckingham Academy Collegiate
	St. Dunstan's College Preparatory
	Adelaide Tambo Special School
Curro Aurora High School	

<b>CAPE TOWN</b>	Springfield Players
	Generation Schools Imhoff Campus
	Wynberg Girls' Junior School
	Parklands College
	Abbotts College ROndebosch
	International School of Cape Town

**CAPE TOWN**

Westerford High School

Norman Henshilwood High School

Athlone High School

Curro Century City

Oakley House High School

Vista Nova High School

Worcester Gymnasium

Hermanus High School

Paarl School

Fish Hoek High School

NatureLore

Hout Bay International School

De la Bat School

Skylarks Drama Group

Kids Theatre Academy

Evolve Academy

Swartland High School

Generation Sandown Institute

Silvermine Academy

Pioneer School

Lalela Cape Town

St Cyprian's School(Grade 10)

St Cyprian's School(Grade 8)

<b>CAPE TOWN</b>	Wynberg Boys' Junior School
	Leiden High School
	TSHS Performance Group
	Mitchell's Plain High School
	Oude Molen Technical High School
	H/s Jan van Riebeeck
	School 1306, Moscow
	Grassdale High School
	Groote Schuur High School
	Blue Moon Montessori School
	Herschel Girls School
	Wynberg Boys' Acting Association
	Westlake Primary School

## Participant Feedback

"This festival has given our learner a huge boost in confidence. The change in her since the performance has been remarkable."  
(Educator)

"The opportunity to perform in a professional theatre space gave our students a once-in-a-lifetime experience."  
(Educator)

"It was scary at first, but I managed to perform well. Shakespeare helped me shape my future."  
(Learner)

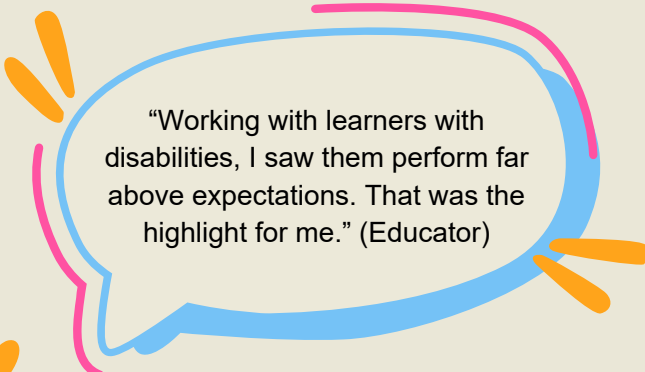
"The professionalism, preparation, and support were outstanding. The focus was always on the learners."  
(Educator)

"This festival helped me overcome stage fright. I can now speak confidently in front of my class."  
(Learner)

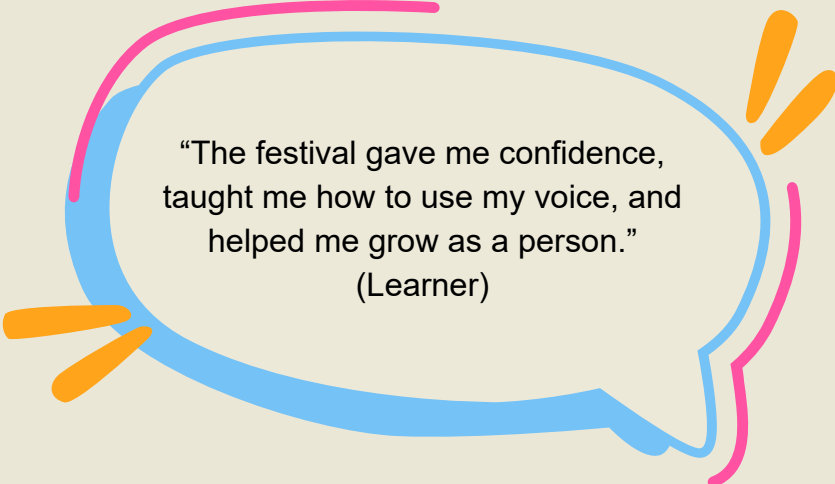
"Engaging with Shakespeare builds confidence, collaboration, and critical thinking. The benefits go far beyond the classroom."  
(Educator)

"Performing on a real stage made us believe in ourselves. It showed us what we're capable of."  
(Learner)

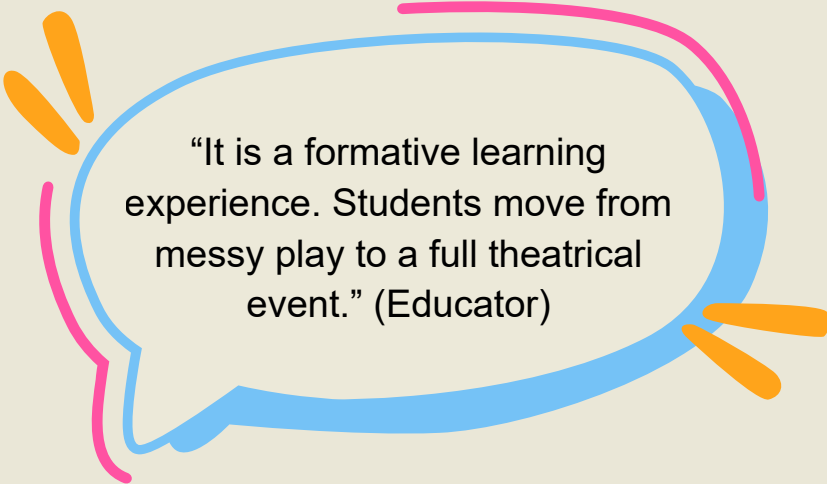
"The inclusivity of the festival is what impressed me most. It gives all students a chance to be seen."  
(Educator)



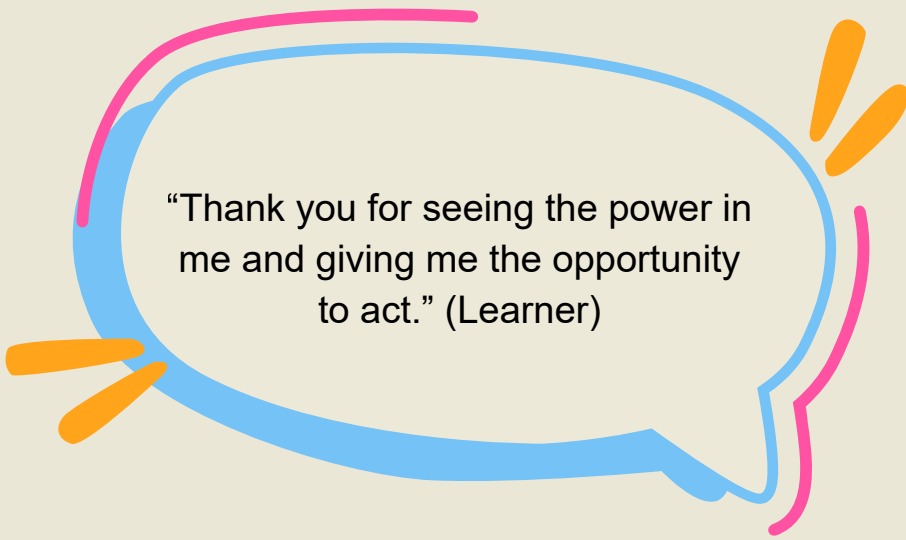
“Working with learners with disabilities, I saw them perform far above expectations. That was the highlight for me.” (Educator)



“The festival gave me confidence, taught me how to use my voice, and helped me grow as a person.” (Learner)



“It is a formative learning experience. Students move from messy play to a full theatrical event.” (Educator)



“Thank you for seeing the power in me and giving me the opportunity to act.” (Learner)

## Festival Highlights 2025

The Shakespeare Schools Festival South Africa (SSFSA) 2025 demonstrated the transformative power of theatre by engaging learners and educators from 83 schools across the country. The festival celebrated youth creativity, cultural diversity, and the continued relevance of Shakespeare's works within contemporary educational contexts. Through innovative abridged productions, learners explored themes of love, power, identity, and justice while building confidence, collaboration skills, and artistic discipline.

### Cape Town

The Cape Town leg of the Shakespeare Schools Festival South Africa remained the largest and most diverse regional programme in 2025, hosting a significant number of schools over an extended festival run at the Homecoming Centre. The festival showcased a wide range of interpretations across age groups, languages, and performance styles, reflecting both artistic ambition and strong educational engagement.

A key highlight was the festival's responsiveness to accessibility needs. Through collaboration between schools, facilitators, and the venue, practical solutions were implemented to ensure that learners with disabilities could participate fully and confidently. This collective problem-solving reinforced SSFSA's commitment to inclusive practice and demonstrated how accessibility can be meaningfully embedded within large-scale arts programming.

Cape Town's festival affirmed the strength of SSFSA's systems when operating at scale, while maintaining a learner-centred, supportive environment that prioritised both artistic quality and participant experience.

### Johannesburg

The Johannesburg festival took place at the Joburg Theatre from 8 to 13 September 2025 and offered a powerful illustration of the emotional and social impact of youth theatre. The programme featured a strong mix of primary and high school productions, with several performances standing out for their sensitivity, confidence, and depth of interpretation.

One of the most significant highlights was the response from audiences, particularly during performances that foregrounded inclusivity and representation. These moments reinforced the role of the festival not only as an educational platform, but also as a space for shared reflection and empathy across school communities.

Despite the operational complexities of working within a large metropolitan venue, the Johannesburg leg successfully delivered on its core purpose: providing learners with access to a professional theatre environment and a public platform to engage with Shakespeare in ways that were meaningful, contemporary, and grounded in lived experience.

## Durban

The Durban festival, hosted at the Courtyard Theatre at Durban University of Technology, was distinguished by its strong university partnership model. This collaboration enabled learners from participating schools to benefit from the mentorship and support of DUT students, who were actively involved as directors, technicians, coordinators, and facilitators.

A key highlight of the Durban leg was the depth of skills transfer that took place across generations. University students gained hands-on professional experience, while school learners were exposed to new ways of working, thinking, and collaborating within a theatrical context. Outreach schools, in particular, benefited from this structured support, gaining access to a professional stage and a well-resourced performance environment.

Durban's festival demonstrated the value of integrated education partnerships in delivering sustainable, high-impact arts education programmes that support both learner development and emerging practitioner pathways.

## George

The George festival experienced a late venue change that ultimately became a defining strength of the programme. Hosted at the Market Community Theatre, the festival benefited from a more intimate, community-centred environment that enhanced learner confidence and audience engagement.

The smaller venue allowed for increased rehearsal flexibility, deeper interaction between schools, facilitators, and audiences, and a heightened sense of shared experience. Performances were well supported, with strong attendance from parents and community members, many of whom were engaging with live theatre for the first time.

A defining highlight of the George leg was its commitment to integration, intentionally programming schools from different areas together. This approach fostered meaningful interaction between learners and reinforced the festival's role in building social cohesion through the arts.

## Workshops and Skills Development

Workshops remain a cornerstone of the Shakespeare Schools Festival South Africa's educational model. In 2025, SSFSA continued to invest in structured skills development for teachers, learners, and emerging arts practitioners across all participating regions, ensuring that festival participation was supported by meaningful and practical learning opportunities.

### Teacher-Director Workshops

Teacher-director workshops were delivered across all regions and focused on equipping educators with practical directing tools, conceptual clarity, and increased confidence. These workshops addressed core areas essential to school-based theatre practice, including:

- Understanding Shakespearean language and narrative structure
- Blocking and spatial awareness
- Developing a clear directorial concept
- Introduction to basic lighting and technical considerations

Workshops were deliberately scheduled during school terms to maximise attendance and to enable educators to apply learning directly within rehearsal processes. Participants consistently highlighted the value of these sessions in demystifying directing and strengthening their ability to guide learners through both interpretation and performance.

In regions with university partnerships, workshops also facilitated knowledge exchange between school educators and higher education practitioners. This cross-pollination strengthened professional networks, supported shared learning, and contributed to more cohesive and well-supported festival productions.



## Cast Workshops

Cast workshops were tailored to the specific needs of individual schools and varied in focus according to experience level, language context, and production scale. Facilitators delivered workshops directly in schools, community venues, and partner theatres, ensuring accessibility and contextual relevance.

### Core focus areas included:

- Text analysis and character development
- Physical theatre and embodied performance
- Ensemble building and active listening
- Improvisation and collaborative storytelling

Facilitators drew on established theatre practices to support learners in engaging meaningfully with Shakespeare's texts while encouraging creative ownership of the material. Across regions, workshops consistently fostered increased confidence, discipline, and collaboration among participating learners.

### Student and Emerging Practitioner Development

A significant strength of the 2025 programme was its emphasis on developing emerging practitioners. University students and recent graduates were actively involved in the festival through roles including:

- Assistant coordinators
- Student directors
- Technical crew members
- Stage management and front-of-house support

These opportunities provided hands-on professional experience, bridging the gap between academic training and industry practice. For many participants, SSFSA served as a first entry point into large-scale arts administration, directing, and technical theatre work, supporting longer-term pathways into the creative and cultural sector.



## Participant and Educator Feedback

Feedback gathered throughout the 2025 festival consistently affirmed SSFSA's educational, personal, and professional impact across a wide range of school contexts.

Educators described the festival as a platform that:

- Builds learner confidence and self-expression
- Enhances language engagement and comprehension
- Encourages teamwork, discipline, and accountability
- Provides meaningful professional development for educators

Teachers frequently noted the value of performance-based learning in supporting curriculum outcomes, particularly in relation to language, interpretation, and critical thinking. Many highlighted the practical benefit of being able to apply directing, staging, and textual analysis skills directly within rehearsal processes and classroom teaching.

Learners described the festival as a space of creative belonging and personal growth. Common reflections included overcoming fear, building confidence, improving public speaking skills, and developing a stronger sense of self through performance. For many learners, particularly those from under-resourced or marginalised contexts, the experience of performing on a professional stage was described as both affirming and transformative.

Emerging practitioners and student directors identified the festival as a pivotal developmental experience. Feedback emphasised the importance of mentorship, hands-on learning, and opportunities to translate theory into live performance contexts. Several respondents reflected on how participation in SSFSA strengthened their confidence, clarified career aspirations, and deepened their commitment to theatre and arts education.

Across regions, the festival environment was repeatedly described as supportive, challenging, and affirming. This balance reinforced SSFSA's role not only as a performance platform, but as a structured developmental programme that nurtures confidence, creativity, critical thinking, and a sense of purpose among participants.



## Challenges and Institutional Learning

Delivering a national programme of this scale requires continual reflection and adaptation. In 2025, several key areas of institutional learning emerged, informing improvements to planning, partnerships, and programme delivery.

### Scheduling and School Calendars

School holidays, examination periods, and academic commitments affected participation in some regions. These constraints highlighted the importance of earlier planning, clearer timelines, and strengthened communication with participating schools.

### Venue and Infrastructure

While partnerships with theatres and community venues were largely successful, limitations related to dressing room capacity, accessibility, and holding areas underscored the need for earlier venue engagement and more detailed technical planning. These insights are being integrated into future venue selection and contracting processes.

### Accessibility

The 2025 festival reinforced the importance of embedding accessibility considerations into programme planning from the outset. Collaborative solutions implemented during the festival have directly informed the development of clearer and more robust accessibility protocols for future editions.

### School Commitment and Registration

Delayed registration and incomplete payments from some schools affected planning and resource allocation. In response, SSFSA has strengthened participation conditions, registration processes, and payment timelines to support more effective and sustainable programme delivery.

These challenges have been approached as opportunities for learning and refinement, contributing to more robust systems, clearer expectations, and improved sustainability for future festivals.

## Focus Areas for 2026

As SSFSA looks ahead to the 2026 season, the organisation is committed to building on the successes and institutional learning of 2025 while addressing key areas for growth and refinement. The following focus areas will guide programme development, sustainability, and participant experience in the year ahead:

- Earlier school commitment and payment timelines to support improved planning, budgeting, and resource allocation
- Strengthened university and community theatre partnerships to deepen skills transfer, mentorship, and access to professional performance spaces
- Expanded accessibility planning and infrastructure support, embedding inclusive practice across all stages of programme delivery
- Continued investment in teacher and facilitator development to strengthen educational impact and school-based leadership
- Refined audience development and revenue diversification strategies to support long-term sustainability and public engagement

These focus areas reflect SSFSA's commitment to sustainability, quality, and inclusive growth, ensuring that the festival continues to respond effectively to participant needs and the evolving arts education landscape.

## Conclusion

The 2025 Shakespeare Schools Festival South Africa demonstrated the programme's resilience, relevance, and continued impact. Through strong partnerships, adaptive planning, and a sustained commitment to educational excellence, SSFSA reached thousands of learners, educators, and audience members across the country.

Looking ahead, the organisation remains focused on deepening its impact, strengthening its systems, and expanding access to meaningful arts education. With the continued support of funders, partners, and communities, SSFSA is well positioned to continue empowering young people through creativity, collaboration, and the enduring power of theatre.

## Special Thanks

We extend our sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to the success of the Shakespeare Schools Festival South Africa 2025.

To the educators who guided, supported, and inspired their learners throughout the process, your commitment and leadership remain central to the programme's impact. To the learners who brought Shakespeare's words to life with creativity, courage, and dedication, you are the heart of the festival.

We are deeply grateful to our sponsors, partners, and funders for their continued support and belief in the transformative power of arts education. Your investment enables meaningful access, skills development, and sustained programme delivery across regions.

To our facilitators, volunteers, theatre staff, and venue partners, thank you for your professionalism, adaptability, and tireless work behind the scenes. Your contributions ensured that each festival moment was carefully supported and professionally delivered.

Finally, we thank the parents, audiences, and communities who showed up, encouraged, and celebrated these young performers. Your support amplifies the impact of the festival beyond the stage and into the wider community.

Together, these collective efforts made the 2025 festival a year of creativity, connection, and shared achievement.



