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PRESS RELEASE

FAST Heroes Southern Africa Celebrates a Landmark Year of Impact, Recognition and Global Collaboration

More than 54 000 learners reached since launch in South Africa, with nearly 18 000 learners participating across South Africa and Namibia in the past year alone

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FAST Heroes Southern Africa is celebrating a remarkable year of growth, impact and international recognition, marked by the expansion of its life-saving stroke awareness programme, prestigious global speaking opportunities and the recognition of outstanding educators and advocates through the 2026 FAST Awards.

Since its launch in South Africa in 2020, the FAST Heroes programme has reached **more than 54 000 learners**, equipping children with the knowledge and confidence to recognise the warning signs of stroke and act when every minute counts. In the past year alone, the programme engaged **nearly 18 000 learners across South Africa and Namibia**, reflecting the growing interest and momentum of the initiative throughout the region.

By teaching the simple but powerful FAST message, learners are helping to spread awareness of stroke symptoms and the importance of acting quickly by calling **112**, South Africa & Namibia's emergency number, when a stroke is suspected. FAST Heroes links stroke recognition with an immediate call for emergency medical assistance, helping families understand that every minute counts to save brain functioning.

Southern Africa Showcased on the Global Stage

A standout achievement of the year was FAST Heroes Southern Africa's participation in the **World Stroke Summit**, hosted by the **World Stroke Organization (WSO)** in collaboration with the **South African National Department of Health**.

The invitation provided an opportunity to showcase the programme's impact to an international audience of healthcare leaders, policymakers, researchers and stroke experts. Presenting immediately after South Africa's Minister of Health, the FAST Heroes team highlighted how school-based health education can drive meaningful behavioural change and improve community awareness of stroke.

One of the most memorable moments of the Summit was the participation of FAST Heroes' own **Small Heroes**, who demonstrated the programme in action and shared how they had taught their families to recognise the signs of stroke using the FAST message. Their confident presentations offered compelling evidence of the programme's effectiveness and reinforced the unique role children can play in delivering life-saving health messages across generations.

The Summit presentation further highlighted Southern Africa's contribution to global stroke awareness efforts and demonstrated the value of empowering children as catalysts for health education and community change.

Celebrating Champions of Stroke Awareness

The annual international **FAST Heroes Awards** recognised individuals who have made an exceptional contribution to advancing stroke awareness education in their schools and communities.

FAST Awards 2026 Winners for South Africa:

 **Top Teaching Child Award - Robert Hurly**

 **Adult Advocate Award - Loandi le Roux**

 **Highly Commended Teacher Recognition - Lonel Carstens ("Amazing Teacher category")**

These award recipients exemplify the spirit of the FAST Heroes programme through their dedication, leadership and commitment to empowering children and families with life-saving knowledge.

"This year has been a remarkable one for FAST Heroes Southern Africa. Beyond reaching nearly 16,000 learners in the past year alone, we had the privilege of sharing our experiences at the World Stroke Summit alongside global leaders in stroke care and prevention. Seeing our Small Heroes confidently demonstrate the FAST message on an international stage was a powerful reminder that children can be catalysts for meaningful health behaviour change. Importantly, the programme not only teaches children how to recognise the signs of stroke but also reinforces the life-saving message that suspected strokes require an immediate call to 112. We are incredibly proud of our teachers, learners and partners who continue to make this impact possible."

said **Renathe van der Merwe, FAST Heroes Southern Africa Coordinator.**

Collaboration Driving Impact

The success of FAST Heroes Southern Africa is made possible through strong partnerships and a shared commitment to improving stroke awareness and prevention throughout the region.

FAST Heroes Southern Africa acknowledges the invaluable support of the **Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa (HSFSA)**, whose leadership in cardiovascular health promotion and public education continues to strengthen the programme's reach and impact.

Prof Pamela Naidoo, CEO of the Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa states that targeting young children as vehicles of stroke prevention and timeous treatment in adults is a highly creative and innovative strategy given that children are surrounded by potentially vulnerable adults. FAST Heroes also empowers children with health knowledge and gives them the confidence to make a difference and save a life if they are faced with an individual suspected of having a stroke.

The programme also values its ongoing collaboration with the **Stroke Survivors Foundation**, whose advocacy efforts and commitment to supporting stroke survivors and their families help ensure that awareness messages remain grounded in lived experience and focused on improving outcomes for those affected by stroke.

Together with healthcare professionals, educators, school leaders, government stakeholders and community organisations, these partnerships have enabled FAST Heroes to extend its footprint, engage more families and build greater awareness of stroke prevention, recognition and response.

Looking Ahead to World Stroke Day 2026

As **World Stroke Day on 29 October 2026** approaches, FAST Heroes Southern Africa is preparing a Webinar specifically aimed at **educators and teachers** in the Primary and Pre-Primary School space.

This will take place **on 27 October 2027 at 17:00**. Click on this link to register:

<https://webapp.spotme.com/login/angels/fast-heroes-stroke-webinar-teachers-training>

The upcoming webinar will explore topics including:

- "The Brain, the Basics & Being FAST" (Basic stroke information)
- The Voice of the Stroke Survivor.
- "Healthy Habits, Happier Brains! (Stroke Prevention & Risk Reduction)
- Introduction to the FAST Heroes programme and practice sharing from one of the Ambassador Teachers.

Teachers, schools, parents and members of the public are encouraged to follow FAST Heroes Southern Africa on social media for updates & speaker announcements.

Join the FAST Heroes Movement

Stroke remains one of the leading causes of death and disability worldwide, yet many strokes are treatable when recognised early and managed urgently. Through education, awareness and collaboration, FAST Heroes Southern Africa is helping to create a future where more families can recognise the signs of stroke and act FAST when it matters most.

For updates on upcoming webinars, World Stroke Day activities and inspiring stories from schools across Southern Africa, follow FAST Heroes on social media:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/FastHeroesSouthAfrica/>

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/fastheroes_southafrica/

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/fast-heroes-southern-africa/>

TikTok: <https://www.tiktok.com/@fastheroessouthafrica>

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About FAST Heroes

FAST Heroes is a globally recognised stroke awareness initiative that educates children aged 5 to 9 years to recognise the signs of stroke and share this life-saving knowledge with their families. By empowering children as health ambassadors, the programme helps improve stroke awareness, encourage timely emergency response and ultimately save lives.

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