

Growing Confidence Through Consistency: The Impact of Two Years of PaL at Butterfly House

By **Carla Pienaar**

When we first became involved at Butterfly House, it was a challenging environment to enter. Many of the children attending the programme come from extremely difficult socio-economic circumstances. They often have complex emotional, developmental, and educational needs. Building trust and creating space for PaL therefore took time, patience, and perseverance. We started with only one group. Today, we are proudly running four groups at Butterfly House. This is a tremendous sign of the strong partnership and trust that has developed over time.

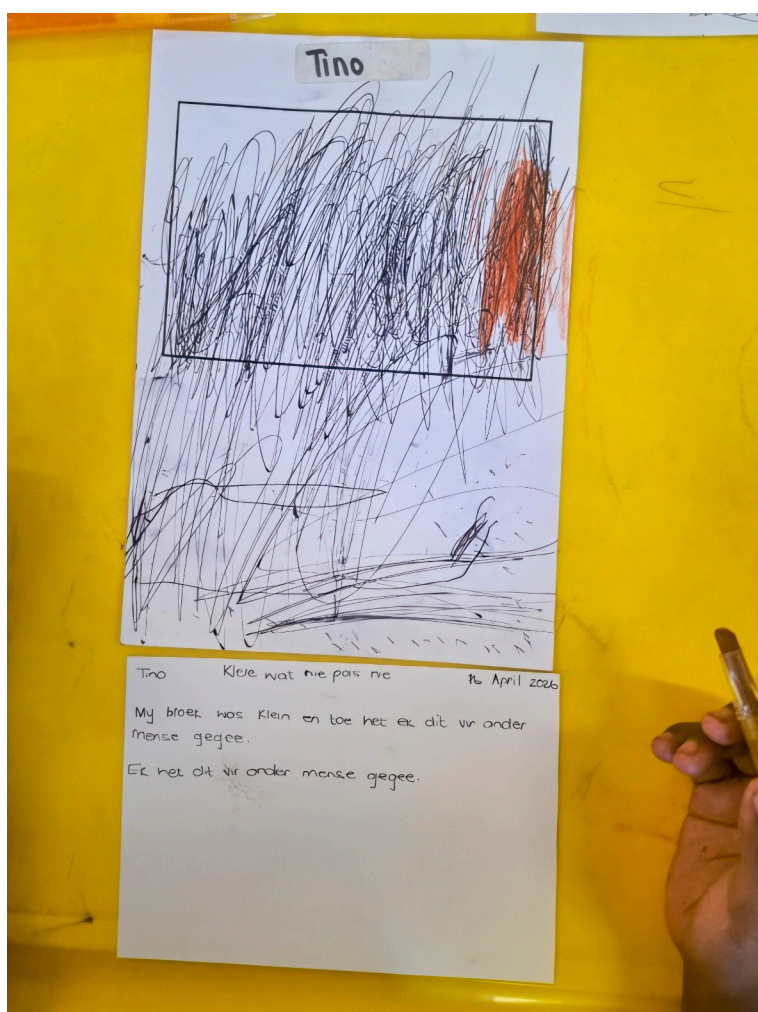
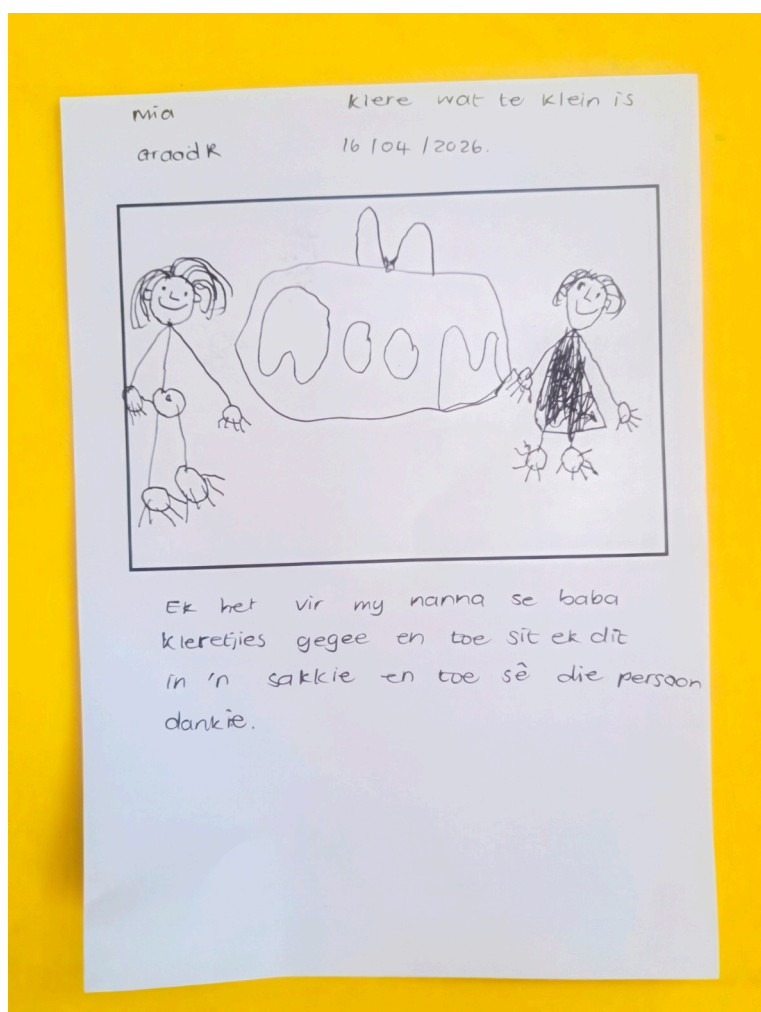
This year also marks a first for our programme. For the very first time, we are working with the same group of children across two consecutive years. The children we met as 4–5-year-olds last year are now in Grade R. Observing their progress over time has been one of the most affirming experiences for our team. It has given us a powerful glimpse into the long-term impact of consistent exposure to PaL activities.

What stands out most is the dramatic change in the children themselves.

During opening circle discussions, the children are now far more confident in sharing their ideas and answering questions. Their responses are more thoughtful and coherent. Instead of impulsively shouting out the first thing that comes to mind, they pause, listen and think before they speak. It sounds like a small change, but it reflects significant development in language processing, listening skills, and communication.



The impact on language development has been especially noticeable. Vocabulary gains, in particular, have been striking. In one session centred around clothes that no longer fit us, new words such as donate and sell were introduced. Not only did the children remember these unfamiliar words, but they also began explaining them to one another. They reminded peers of the meanings and using the new language in context. The session naturally became a peer-learning moment driven entirely by the children themselves.



Creativity and independence have flourished alongside language development. The children have become far more confident in making creative decisions without constantly seeking reassurance from the teacher. They now choose their own materials, try new approaches, and encourage one another to experiment. Even the quieter children participate more actively. They often surprise us with the originality of their ideas once given the space to explore.

One of the most encouraging developments at Butterfly House has been the growing partnership between the PaL team and the teachers involved in the programme.

In the beginning, it was difficult to find teachers who could consistently commit to the sessions alongside their existing responsibilities. Today, the relationship between the programme and the Butterfly House staff looks very different. Butterfly House has not only continued with the programme, but has also enrolled two new teachers this year. Staff and management witnessed firsthand how the approach positively influences both the children and the classroom environment. As teachers became more engaged, applied the strategies consistently, and embraced the modelling provided during sessions, the changes in the children became increasingly visible. The children are more confident, engaged, creative, and independent in their thinking and interactions. Seeing this shift, from early challenges and uncertainty to enthusiastic participation and programme expansion, has been an important milestone for PaL at Butterfly House.

What we are seeing at Butterfly House is proof of something we believe deeply: children do not simply benefit from a single good experience. They grow through repeated, meaningful, play-based learning over time. Working with the same group across two years has shown us just how much is possible when a programme is given the space, consistency, and support to truly take root.

(Teacher Lee-Ann and Jacinda have been with the programme from the beginning, and this year Zimkitha and Cleo have joined them for training.)