

Case Study 15

BUILDING EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT CAPACITY IN LIMPOPO

THE THUŠANANG TRUST'S APPROACH

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ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

CBO

Community-based organisation

DBE

Department of Basic Education

DSD

Department of Social Development

ECCE

Early childhood care and education

ECD

Early childhood development

EPWP

Expanded Public Works Programme

ETDP

Education, Training and Development Practices

HIV

Human Immunodeficiency Virus

NELDS

National Early Learning and Development Standards

NGO

Non-governmental organisation

NIPECD

National Implementation Plan for Early Childhood Development

NQF

National Qualifications Framework

OAU

Oxfam Australia

QCTO

Qualifications Council for Trade and Occupations

SETA

Sector Education Training Authority

UNICEF

United Nations Children's Fund



Community-based early childhood development (ECD) organisations make a significant contribution to the development of children who might otherwise go without care and stimulation in South Africa.

Many families live in poverty and a number of parents or caregivers who are employed travel long distances between home and places of work on a daily, weekly or annual basis. Numerous families are negatively impacted by the HIV and AIDS pandemic, which has left children orphaned or looked after by grandparents, older siblings or relatives. These factors impact on the daily care of children and their attendance at all levels of schooling – pre-school, primary and secondary levels.

The role played by ECD services in developing young children in South Africa is recognised by government, training organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs), community leaders, and educational and social welfare practitioners. However, the effectiveness of many interventions has generally been limited. This is firstly due to the lack of capacity (training, skills and resources) of ECD practitioners to implement comprehensive services as envisaged in ECD policy. Secondly, it is as a result of many parents or guardians not having the skills to continue the work started in the crèches and by other ECD providers.

1.1. INTRODUCING THUŠANANG TRUST

This case study profiles Thušanang Trust, an NGO based in the Limpopo province of South Africa, which has built the capacity of ECD practitioners through formal training for more than 20 years, and has realised the limitations described above. In response to these challenges, the organisation embarked on a programme to raise awareness and train parents on how to support the work of the ECD practitioners at home, thereby ensuring that the development opportunities for the children involved are maximised.

The purpose of this study is to explore the approach, practice and lessons emerging from the work of Thušanang in building the capacity of ECD practitioners *and* parents in developing young children in rural communities in the Limpopo province. The first section of this publication explores the policy, strategy and challenges of providing ECD in South Africa. The case study continues with an exploration of the approach and practice of Thušanang Trust in building capacity to increase effective ECD services in Limpopo communities. The final section of the publication discusses three emerging lessons based on the Thušanang experience.

It must be noted at the outset that the Thušanang approach recognises that building capacity is not simply about training individuals, who subsequently receive a certificate. Instead the approach is holistic and includes the development of competence of three sectors:

- Individuals, in the form of ECD practitioners,
- Organisations, through the crèche committees, and
- The system more broadly, by strengthening parenting and the community.

All of these components need to be included to ensure that quality early childhood care and education is a reality in South Africa.

1.2. INTRODUCING EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

The conception to age five phase is crucial for the development of children, with the critical period for influencing the holistic development of a child being the first 1,000 days; in other words, from conception to two years. Many of the determinants of a child's growth (for example, physical and mental aspects) take root

during this early period of his or her life. ECD services are increasingly being encouraged in South Africa and internationally to provide comprehensive support and services to young children to promote their development, particularly during this critical phase.

However, the number of South African children having access to ECD services remains limited. As outlined in the box (right), only 35% of children attend ECD centres that are registered, and thereby recognised as formal. Even when children attend informal early childhood care and education (ECCE) programmes, many stay at home after the pre-school activities without being encouraged or stimulated in their holistic development. It is well recognised that the role of parents and caregivers¹ in caring for, and enabling the full development of a child, is an important aspect of equipping a child with the health, well-being and cognitive ability to cope in the family, community and school setting.

1. As defined in the Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005) as Amended, a caregiver is any person other than a parent or guardian who cares for a child and includes foster parents, a person who cares for a child with the express consent of a parent or guardian, care of a child in temporary safe care or a child and youth care facility, the person at the head of a shelter, a child and youth care worker who cares for a child who is without appropriate family care in the community, and a child at the head of a child-headed household.

**STATISTICS:
CHILDREN AND ECD IN SOUTH AFRICA**

NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN SOUTH AFRICA

18,523,745²

including 2,258,337 living in Limpopo (2010 statistics)

NUMBER OF ECD EDUCATIONAL CENTRES IN SOUTH AFRICA

12,593

DSD-registered ECD sites

**NUMBER OF CHILDREN SUPPORTED IN THE
ABOVE ECD CENTRES**

385,000

children between 0 and 6 years (as of June 2008)

CHILDREN FROM BIRTH TO 4 YEARS OF AGE

REPRESENT ABOUT 10%

of the total population (2010 statistics)

32.3%

of 0 to 4 year olds attend a day care, or crèche

650,518

children in ECD sites, which include pre-school programme Grade R children, were supported by DBE in 2006

OF THESE,

176,589

children (from 0 to 5 years) attended registered stand-alone ECD sites that were registered with the DBE

IN LIMPOPO IN 2006,

67,822

children were reached by ECD stand-alone sites registered with the DBE³

NOTE:

Prior to 2010 the age group for ECD was defined as 0 to 5 years, however with more children attending Grade R, the age cohort reported for ECD subsequently became 0 to 4 years.

Statistics obtained from various sources, which are included in the references at the end of this publication.

2. Children are defined as those between birth and 18 years of age.

3. Although not stated in the report, it is assumed this refers to children under the age of 6 years.



UNDERSTANDING EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

IN SOUTH AFRICA



Early childhood development (ECD), as defined in the Children’s Act (No. 38 of 2005), “means the process of emotional, cognitive, sensory, spiritual, moral, physical, social and communication development of children from birth to school-going age” (Section 91.1).

An *ECD Centre*, according to the *Department of Social Development Guidelines for ECD May 2006*, refers to: “Any building or premises maintained or used, whether or not for gain, for the admission, protection and temporary or partial care of more than six children away from their parents. Depending on registration, an ECD centre can admit babies, toddlers and/or pre-school aged children. The term ECD centre can refer to crèche, day care centre for young children, a playgroup, a pre-school, after school care etc. ECD centres are sometimes referred to as ECD sites”.

However, recent policy and strategy developments in South Africa indicate that ECD, and the provision of comprehensive ECD services, is broader than the Children’s Act definition. The following definitions are now being used to guide strategies and practice:

- **Early childhood development services** refer to ALL services that promote or support the development of young children. This includes infrastructural provisions, social security, birth registration, health services, day care and educational stimulation in centres, home and community based centres.
- **Early childhood care and education (ECCE) services** are one aspect of ECD. These refer to services and programmes that provide developmentally appropriate care and educational stimulation for groups of young children in centres based in communities or at home.

Numerous legislative policies highlight the importance and need for ECD services in South Africa. The lead responsibility for ECD in South Africa is currently jointly vested in the Department of Social Development (DSD) and Department of Basic Education (DBE), while the role of other departments, specifically the Department of Health, and other sectors are also recognised.

The following documents provide the policy frameworks for the delivery of ECD in South Africa:

- *Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development*, which is dated 2001;
- The *Guidelines for Early Childhood Development*, published by the Department of Social Development and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in May 2006, provide guidance to ECD sites for the registration and standardisation of ECD services, and guidelines for after-school and family care;
- *White Paper for Social Welfare*, which was published in 2007;
- The *National Early Learning and Development Standards (NELDS) for children from birth to four years*, which was published by DBE and UNICEF in 2009, provides stated developmental expectations in children.

The *Draft White Paper for Families in South Africa (July 2010)*, which at the time of writing is still a draft, is based on the ‘social development approach’. The draft white paper contains a reference to the book *Social Welfare and Social Development in South Africa* by Professor Leila Patel that states: “The social development approach recognises that the family is the basic unit of society and plays a key role in the survival, protection and development of children. Its rationale is that families should be supported

and their capabilities have to be strengthened for the purpose of meeting the needs of members. Theories encompassed in this approach recognise that families require a range of supportive services in order to promote family life and development. Over and above the foregoing, certain families may require additional supportive services so that they can solve problems in human relations such as conflict, communication, parenting, substance abuse and family violence, as well as address problems arising from life changes and events.”

The White Paper is based on the following three principles:

1. Promoting healthy families;
2. Strengthening families; and
3. The preservation of families.

One of the recommended strategies within the second principle is to “strengthen and support child care capacities by improving the quality and accessibility of government-promoted schools, pre-schools, aftercare services, and social welfare services, as well as bringing to scale community-based efforts to strengthen support”.

The *National Implementation Plan for Early Childhood Development (NIPECD)* provided the framework for an integrated and comprehensive service and aimed to improve the quality and access to ECD from 2005 to 2010 (at the time of writing there is a new plan being developed in South Africa, but it is not in the public domain). The NIPECD recognised service delivery across home, community and the formal school setting.

Of importance, the NIPECD identified the need at the home and community level to link ECD programmes to broader families, household and community services. In its vision, the document stated that the NIPECD would ensure that “families are recognised as the first and main providers of early childhood care and stimulation and have access to ECD programmes that are affordable and of high-quality, and are participants in the education and well-being of their children through family involvement in programmes and schools, as well as opportunities to increase their educational attainment”.

In addition, the plan identified the need for a larger skilled workforce to fulfil different roles. ECD consequently was included as a sub-programme in the government’s Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), which aimed to increase the cohort of newly trained ECD practitioners to 19,800 in a five year timeframe. Parents, caregivers, unemployed and under-employed people were the primary target audience to be trained as part of this programme. This built on the approach in the *White Paper for Social Welfare* which placed ECD in the family environment.

More recently, the *Children’s Act (No. 38 of 2005)* makes provision for ECD services and centres in South Africa. Chapter 6 of the Act provides for the provision of ECD programmes and services; mandated the Minister for Social Development to determine norms and standards and establish processes for the registration, renewal and cancellation of ECD registration; and states the mandates of the national, provincial and municipal functioning of ECD services. As a result of the Act, the DSD developed, in consultation with other government departments and civil society, the *Norms and Standards for Early Childhood Development*.



These *National Norms and Standards* aim to provide the regulatory minimum norms and standards to guide ECD centres and government organisations in the provision of a range of services. The norms and standards cover the following elements:

- The application for registration of ECD programmes;
- Consideration of applications for ECD programmes;
- Appeals against certain decisions;
- The required qualifications, skills and training required for practitioners to deliver ECD programmes;
- The assessment and compulsory monitoring of ECD programmes;
- The assignment of functions to municipalities, provincial and national departments.

In addition to the *Norms and Standards*, the South African ECD guidelines published by DSD in May 2006 identify the following areas for family and home-based services to address when providing ECD and family care for children in their early years:

1. The home must be a safe place for young children;
2. Toilet facilities must be safe for children;
3. The health of children should be protected and illnesses dealt with quickly and correctly;
4. Children must be immunised;
5. Diarrhoea must be dealt with correctly;
6. Children should be kept safe at all times and their rights protected;
7. The importance of learning through play must be understood and supported;

8. Children should be helped to become emotionally strong;
9. Children should be helped to become independent and confident.

The government has prioritised ECD and the provision of ECD has been included as a national priority since 2008. The focus has been on expanding the number of trained staff, doubling the number of ECD sites in both the formal school setting (for Grade R), as well as in the community setting through DSD, and increasing access for young children. However, despite the focus on ECD, there has remained a disjuncture between policy and practice, as highlighted in the *Buffalo City Declaration*.

In March 2012, a national ECD Conference held in the Eastern Cape resulted in what is known as the *Buffalo City Declaration*, which is essentially a commitment between government and civil society to accelerate action in the ECD sector. The conference resolutions, which indicate the challenges in the sector, called for:

1. A comprehensive review and harmonisation of policy and legislation;
2. The development of a coordinated approach to the effective provisioning of ECD services by government, NGOs, civil society and business;
3. The strengthening of the role of parents, caregivers, families and communities in the provisioning of ECD services;
4. The inclusion of children with special needs and the extension of ECD services to children in rural areas;

5. Adequate resourcing of ECD services including infrastructure provisioning;
6. Working towards professionalising and accrediting the training of ECD practitioners and promoting the *Basic Conditions of Employment Act* in the ECD sector;
7. Streamlining the registration process and standardisation of ECD services to improve quality, and
8. The development of a programme of action with clear targets and outcomes for the identified focus areas.

The 2012 declaration provides a commitment to the way forward. It is being taken seriously and enormous efforts are being made to implement the recommendations. Critical to the future of ECD in South Africa is the need for ECD practitioners to be viewed and recognised as professionals. The challenge is that there is no clarity as to exactly where ECD 'fits' in government as DBE is responsible for Grade R upwards, and DSD is responsible for children from birth to four years. However, both of these age groups fit within ECD. Furthermore, this affects the development of a professional board for ECD practitioners as there is no single lead department to drive this initiative. The role of such a board would be to regulate, develop and promote ECD as an occupation and to build professional practice. In addition, South Africa has a regulated National Qualifications Framework (NQF) that, through the Qualifications Council for Trade and Occupations (QCTO), guides, regulates and monitors the training of all qualifications. Therefore, building capacity

of practitioners in the ECD sector requires coordinated leadership from the Professional Board, the QCTO, DBE and DSD, and training service providers.

Finally, research on ECD stresses the importance of ECD and indicates that a comprehensive range of ECD services that are, according to a 2003 article in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, "designed to improve the cognitive and social-emotional functioning of pre-school children ... in turn, influences readiness to learn in the school setting." A recent study in four South African provinces, entitled *SA's Young Need a Solid Start in Life*, stated that "if all young children are to realise their potential and right to development, we need to invest in young children and ensure that these services reach those children most in need". This study further found that "the youngest children, and those least likely to access services, are best reached through programmes that work with families, either at home or in the community" and that "these programmes have been effective to link children to services, and support early stimulation and responsive parenting".

The approach of Thušanang Trust in achieving these outcomes is explored in the next section.



THE THUŠANANG EXPERIENCE:

BUILDING ECD PRACTITIONERS' SKILLS TO ENGAGE PARENTS, CAREGIVERS
AND COMMUNITIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN

Thušanang Trust, an NGO based in Limpopo, South Africa, has worked in the field of ECD with rural communities in the Mopani and Capricorn districts for over 20 years, and more recently in the Vhembe District.

Thušanang Trust is registered with the relevant training authorities in South Africa to provide nationally recognised certificates for practitioners working in ECCE sites. However, the aim of their training programmes is not only to provide accredited training, but also to make a significant contribution to the *capacity* of these practitioners to provide an effective range of services to young children that contribute to their development, well-being and long-term educational goals. In addition to the work that the organisation does with practitioners, another objective of the Trust recognises the importance of the home environment and is concerned with helping primary caregivers to provide responsible parenting and practical developmental support to young children. This includes a focus on building the capacity of parents to monitor their children's growth and development, promote and support the child's development, highlight the importance of language and play for educational stimulation, and raise awareness of the adverse effects of harsh punishment, not addressing developmental issues early on and neglect on child development.

3.1. BUILDING CAPACITY OF ECD PRACTITIONERS

In alignment with the legislative and policy framework of South Africa, the accredited training provided by Thušanang Trust aims to develop the professional practice of ECD practitioners. In addition to the training of the practitioners, the primary focus is to strengthen the functioning and effectiveness of crèches as ECCE sites in rural Limpopo. The goal is that children will be cared for in a safe and nurturing environment that supports their development. This is achieved through formal training, mentoring of ECD practitioners in a crèche setting, and building capacity of crèche committees to manage centres. All these activities contribute to the development of ECD practitioners who are responsible for implementing effective ECCE programmes in a crèche.

The benchmark used by Thušanang for quality ECD services is the NELDS framework, which is described in the box below.

NATIONAL EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

The *National Early Learning and Development Standards* (NELDS) indicate the desired competencies that children should acquire and develop through planned and unplanned programmes and activities in the home and in educational environments. For children to reach their full potential, they need the support of adults in their homes and childcare environments. The desired results are aimed at:

- Assisting to ensure that children learn in an integrated way;
- Enabling parents, practitioners and other caregivers to provide appropriate programmes and strategies to support children's learning activities; and
- Providing the basis for lifelong learning.

The desired results are:

- Children are learning how to think critically, solve problems and form concepts;
- Children are becoming more aware of themselves as individuals, developing a positive self-image and learning how to manage their own behaviour;
- Children are demonstrating growing awareness of diversity and the need to respect and care for others;
- Children are learning to communicate effectively and use language confidently;
- Children are learning about mathematical concepts;
- Children are beginning to demonstrate physical and motor abilities and an understanding of a healthy lifestyle.

The courses offered by Thušanang to achieve these standards and results include pre-school orientation programmes to give a background of ECD before embarking on formal training; the NQF accredited ECD qualification; early numeracy and literacy programmes to build the skills and knowledge that ECD practitioners have already acquired; and various workshops covering topics such as different themes to run during the year, the Children's Act; and first aid courses at two levels.

Thušanang Trust provides training for ECD practitioners for the Further Education and Training Certificate: Early Childhood Development at NQF level 4 (SAQA ID 58761). This qualification is registered with the Education, Training and Development Practices (ETDP) Sector Education Training Authority (SETA) for the skills development of ECD practitioners in South Africa.

As a member of the Ntataise Trust network⁴, Thušanang uses the network's materials, which were designed to conform to the requirements for the Level 4 certificate mentioned above. These materials are intended for pre-schools in rural areas of South Africa. Thušanang supplements these materials with other resources.

The training, however, is only part of the capacity building approach, as Thušanang's ECD trainers continue to provide support to the practitioners in crèches after qualifications have been achieved. The Thušanang approach involves providing holistic and integrated support including conducting site visits, providing materials based on themes for implementation in the crèche, offering advice on how to strengthen practice, supporting practitioners in identifying referral services for children with particular needs, strengthening crèche management through committee training (this is discussed later in this case study) and providing encouragement through ongoing mentoring and sharing the passion of trainers for the development of young children.

4. Ntataise (meaning to lead a young child by the hand and pronounced n-tata-ee-se) is an independent not for-profit organisation founded in South Africa in 1980 to help women in poor rural areas gain the knowledge and skills to establish ECD programmes for children in their communities. Over 10,000 women, reaching more than 300,000 children, have benefited from Ntataise's training and support to date – support which has given them the capacity to help themselves. Ntataise serves as a central training agency, offering its professional training programmes and courses, materials, assessments and monitoring services. For more information see www.ntataise.co.za.





The training has changed the way that crèche supervisors and staff operate. As one crèche supervisor and ECD practitioner, Moyahabo Malatji, indicated:

“THE TRAINING OPENED MY MIND ABOUT RUNNING A CRÈCHE. TO BE HONEST WITH YOU BEFORE I WENT FOR TRAINING, I DIDN’T KNOW MUCH ABOUT RUNNING AN ECD CENTRE EXCEPT GIVING THEM FOOD AND LETTING THEM SLEEP UNTIL THE END OF THE DAY WITHOUT TEACHING THEM PARTICULAR SKILLS. CHILDREN END UP FEELING BORED IN A CRÈCHE. BUT NOW I KNOW THAT WE NEED TO FOLLOW A PARTICULAR PROGRAMME SO THAT CHILDREN CAN SOCIALISE WITH OTHERS AND GROW. I HAPPENED TO LEARN A LOT ABOUT HOW TO RUN A CRÈCHE, WAYS OF TREATING A CHILD AS WELL AS DEALING WITH A PARENT.”

As a result of the training the activities at the crèches are more structured in the form of a daily routine. It is described by practitioner Julia Mothapo as follows:

“OUR DAILY PROGRAMME STARTS WITH INSPECTING THE YARD FOR SAFETY REASONS, CLEANING THE YARD WHILE OTHERS ARE CLEANING THE CLASS AND ONE IN THE KITCHEN. CHILDREN NORMALLY ARRIVE AT SEVEN O’CLOCK. WE DO THE MORNING RING. WE CONDUCT HEALTH CHECKS AND ADMINISTER TREATMENT TO THOSE WHO NEED MEDICATION. WE TAKE THEM TO TOILETS, HAND WASHING, AND THEN GO BACK TO THE CLASS FOR

DIFFERENT CREATIVE ACTIVITIES. WE ALLOW TIME FOR EATING MORNING SNACKS. THEN THERE ARE OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES WHILE WE ARE OBSERVING THEM.”

ECD practitioners, who have received support from Thušanang and who work at primary schools in the two districts where the organisation has supported crèches for the past two decades, are positive about the training and have received good feedback from Grade R and Grade 1 teachers, according to the practitioners themselves, as well as the ECD trainers. These teachers note a marked difference in the confidence, ability and development of children who have attended “a good crèche”.

Practitioner, Sophie Mangena, describes some of the activities done with the children:

“WE ARE TEACHING THEM PRE-LITERACY SKILLS. CHILDREN ARE DOING PRE-WRITING SKILLS, DRAWING, PAINTINGS AND, AS A RESULT OF THE ENRICHMENT PROGRAMME WE RECEIVED, WE TRAIN CHILDREN TO BE ABLE TO COUNT NUMERICALLY, IDENTIFY MONTHS AND SEASONS OF THE YEAR. BECAUSE IN OUR CRÈCHE, WE TEACH CHILDREN A LOT OF THINGS, SUCH AS RECITATION, WRITING, DRAWING USING CRAYONS AND [WE] ENCOURAGE THEM TO TAKE THEIR TASKS HOME TO SHOW THEIR PARENTS.”

There are many benefits for children who receive a quality early childhood experience at crèches such as those supported by the Thušanang project. These are especially evident for an ECD trainer, who indicated that a primary

school teacher has recommended to parents in a few cases that children spend six months to a year at a crèche before attending Grade R or Grade 1 as they were not ready for school. The importance of active participation by parents and caregivers and Thušanang's activities in that regard is covered in section 3.3 of this publication.

Children who have not attended a crèche at all are usually unable to socialise with other children, cannot answer questions from the teacher, cannot talk to an adult, are unfamiliar with the learning process or unable to identify shapes and numbers, and are unable to listen to other children, or ask questions. In addition, the physical development of the child is also important and a child who has jumped, run, used hoops, climbed jungle gyms and moved to music is more coordinated and has the fine motor control needed for learning to read and write.

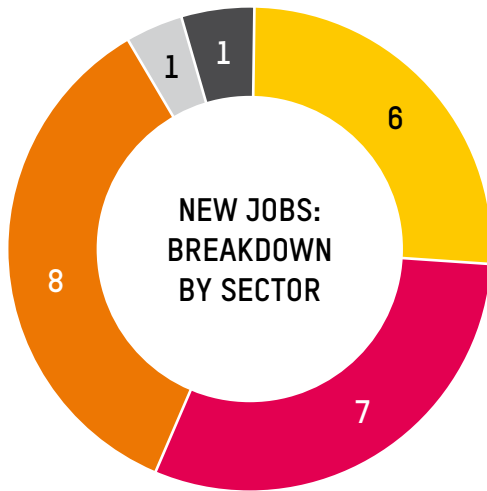
As an additional advantage for ECD practitioners, primary schools have started to recognise the skills and qualifications of the practitioners who have achieved the NQF level 4 qualification. Instead of allocating primary school teachers to be Grade R teachers, they are appointing ECD practitioners. Thušanang ECD trainers pointed out that this is a great opportunity for ECD practitioners to be recognised as a professional, earn a salary, continue to develop young children, and engage with families. Although it does mean that there is a constant need to train ECD practitioners, Thandi Mlambo, a senior ECD trainer, stated that some of the practitioners are "strong enough" and passionate about the crèches and therefore choose to remain at their centre, turning down the offer to work at a primary school, which would entitle them to a higher salary.

The job opportunities for ECD practitioners, which sometimes arise from the recognition of their work, lead to a challenge for the crèches and Thušanang because it means that people leave and new individuals need to be trained. For example, a follow-up study conducted by Thušanang of 23 of their 2010/2011 graduates indicated that eight had moved into the primary schools to teach Grade R. This is illustrated in the graph (right). The graph further indicates that other job opportunities are created in the farming and NGO or health sector, particularly in responding to the HIV pandemic in the province. Encouragingly, 13 of the graduates have remained in ECD work.

In some situations younger people, who are not as settled in their positions in the crèche and in the community as are the older practitioners, may also leave the sector. Statistics show that these graduates take the job less seriously as there is no evidence of them moving to other jobs or careers. ECD trainer, Rosina Masipa talked about this challenge:

"WE DO HAVE YOUNG PRACTITIONERS IN THE ECD CENTRES, BUT THE PROBLEM IS THAT THEY DON'T TAKE THIS JOB SERIOUSLY OR AS A PROFESSIONAL JOB, SO THEY END UP LEAVING THE CRÈCHE. WE HAD TO TRAIN OTHER PEOPLE TO REPLACE THEM. BUT PEOPLE OF MIDDLE AGE AND SENIORS HAVE A SENSE OF MATURITY AND BELONGING SO THEY STAY FULL TIME IN THE CRÈCHES."

**THUŠANANG TRUST TRACKING STUDY:
2000 – 2011 STATISTICS**



NEW CRECHE	ECD WORK	GRADE R TEACHER
HIV/AIDS WORK	FARM EMPLOYEE	

Since providing the support for ECD practitioners, Thušanang has identified the need for a peer-to-peer ECD practitioner mentorship programme. As a result, the organisation started the process of developing such a programme that will work in the rural Limpopo setting. The aim is to build the knowledge and skills of ECD mentors to motivate, support and help ensure continued quality of learning programmes.

3.2. BUILDING CAPACITY OF CRÈCHE COMMITTEES

The norms and standards document for ECD in South Africa indicates that all ECD centres, including crèches, should have a management committee. The Thušanang experience is that committees require training on, amongst other topics, the role of members, engagement with parents, chairing and minute taking, and financial management. As a result Thušanang supports the development of crèches by training the crèche committee, supplying educational and consumable resources, assisting with the registration of the crèche with DSD, and improving facilities at crèches, which could include building toilets, starting food gardens and planting trees. The aim of training the crèche committee is to establish and maintain a functioning committee for the sustainability and good management of the ECD centre.

The committee training is for the crèche chairperson, treasurer, supervisor and one other committee member from the community (who ideally is a parent of a child in the crèche). The supervisor is the ECD practitioner, who as part of their accredited certificate programme is also trained on the management of the crèche.

Many of the communities in which the crèches supported by Thušanang are based have come to recognise that ECD practitioners have a set of skills that are valuable for assisting in the development of young children, as well as helping parents and families. As a result they have also found that the ECD practitioners can add value to the broader development of the community. In some municipal districts and village committees, for example, ECD



practitioners have been invited to participate in community structures because they bring an understanding of the developmental needs of families, and they are able to chair meetings due to the crèche committee training. Particular skills that are recognised as valuable in the community structures include:

- recognising that everyone has valuable contributions to make and therefore listening to everyone;
- understanding that someone may disagree, that different opinions are acceptable, and that it is important to ask why a person disagrees; and
- knowing how to handle and control a meeting so that all participants can work together towards an agreed goal, rather than fight with one another.

A key element to the success of sustained crèche management is for good management practice to be entrenched in the crèche constitution. Thušanang Trust trainer, Thandi Mlambo raised this point:

“WE NEED TO LOOK AT THE CRÈCHE CONSTITUTION SO THAT THE MAIN PEOPLE ON THE COMMITTEE REMAIN AND DO NOT CHANGE ANNUALLY. FOR EXAMPLE, THE CHAIRPERSON, TREASURER AND SECRETARY. IT IS A PROBLEM IF THE CONSTITUTION INDICATED THEY MUST CHANGE EVERY YEAR BECAUSE ONE IS NOT ABLE TO BUILD THE CAPACITY OF THE COMMITTEE OVER TIME.”

With regard to facilities, there has been a huge improvement in infrastructure and accessibility to and from deep rural areas (primarily through the government’s development and infrastructural programmes in rural areas). However, working in a rural setting continues

to bring challenges to childcare in crèches, as well as at home. One of the biggest challenges Thušanang has experienced in supporting the development of crèches to meet the minimum norms and standards is the availability of water and how crèches access water. Access to water, appropriate sanitation and hygiene are important elements in the holistic development of a young child. Consideration has to be given to aspects such as the following:

- How to give a child clean water to drink;
- Whether child-sized toilets are available;
- How children can wash their hands, and how ECD practitioners teach basic hygiene, when there is no water;
- How good nutrition and vegetable growing can be promoted when no water is available even though municipal taps may be provided; and
- How nappies can be disposed of at a crèche.

In some crèches children bring a two-litre milk bottle containing water every day so that they have water to drink and use. To obtain the water, caregivers have often had to walk a long distance and wait for water to be turned on, or may even have had to dig a hole in the river, wait for the water to come up, and then fill a container before going home to treat the water to ensure that their children have water to drink the next day at school.

In order to address this challenge, Thušanang Trust is encouraging the crèches to engage with community structures and local authorities to increase access to available water, training practitioners on how to include hygiene practices into the daily activities with children, and to encourage crèche committees to provide appropriate sanitation for children.

3.3. STRENGTHENING THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN THROUGH PARENTING

In addition to building the capacity of ECD practitioners and crèche committee members, Thušanang Trust also assists parents to recognise the characteristics of ‘quality education’ and understand the importance of children being given opportunities for physical, emotional and social development from birth. Thušanang’s staff members are of the view that it is important for parents and community members to recognise that a good crèche or pre-school can be one of the building blocks of the holistic and full development of a child. In addition, parents and community members should be aware that they have the right to raise concerns and ask questions in regard to concerns that a school is not maximising a child’s chances for life-long learning.

As a result of this need the practitioners are trained by Thušanang to include parents in the activities of the crèche, as well as to provide them with skills to enhance a child’s development at home and in the community setting. Thušanang’s training covers the topics of the importance of including parents in the development of children and provides suggestions regarding how ECD practitioners can facilitate this process in the community. ECD practitioners are expected to be able to engage with parents and the crèche community in an effort to address issues that impact on the development and welfare of young children.

In addition to the work of the ECD practitioners including parents and caregivers in the daily development of the child, Thušanang offers the Developing Families

Project, which builds the knowledge and skills of parents on how to be better parents. Topics covered in this programme include:

- Understanding what babies need;
- Understanding how babies develop;
- Getting and giving support to their families and communities;
- Understanding the challenges and problems of the HIV and AIDS epidemic and how it affects families; and
- Understanding the role of a caregiver and the role of a crèche teacher in looking after babies and toddlers.

In addition, the Parent/Primary Caregiver Capacity Building Training, which was designed by DSD in collaboration with UNICEF South Africa, covers a range of topics that address the development of the child (including physical, emotional, social, health, creativity, intellect and language aspects), healthy family relationships, child safety and protection, positive discipline, grief and bereavement, children’s rights, HIV and AIDS awareness, and the well-being of the caregiver.

Thušanang also hosts information sharing sessions for parents and community members. Topics covered in the past include human rights, children’s rights and caregiver responsibilities, HIV and AIDS, parent-child relationships, financial life-skills, and alcohol and drug abuse. The focus of these sessions is on building community members’ knowledge, increasing access to information and services that are of benefit to them, and the well-being of both the children and the community as a whole.

Parent programmes focus on topics that build the essential skills, knowledge and attitudes that are important in raising babies and young children. The aim is to encourage parents and caregivers to become more involved in the development of their children and improve their capacity to cater for their child's well-being. This includes a focus on health, on the child as an individual, and their emotional, cognitive and spiritual well-being. A grandmother, who has been involved in these programmes, Albertina Lethetele, described some of the information she had obtained:

"WE HAVE BEEN TAUGHT HOW TO TAKE CARE OF A CHILD, TALKING AND HANDLING OF A CHILD. EVEN IN TERMS OF FOOD – INSTEAD OF FORCING THE CHILD TO EAT PORRIDGE ONLY, WE HAVE LEARNT OF THE NUTRITIONAL VALUE OF DIFFERENT FOODS WHICH HELPS IN THE GROWTH OF THE CHILD."

Parents are given suggestions about how they can contribute to the development of their children by, for example, asking what activities they did at crèche that day, or improvising by using items such as cardboard boxes or wood that replicate daily objects, or telling stories and encouraging children to share their thoughts and feelings. These approaches help children to develop and prepare them for school and engaging in social interactions. The benefits of the information are described by Albertina Lethetele as follows:

"OUR MINDS WOULD BE SO BLANK, AND THE WAY WE REAR OUR CHILDREN WOULD BE INAPPROPRIATE DUE TO LACK OF KNOWLEDGE. BECAUSE OF TRAININGS AND KNOWLEDGE WE HAVE ACQUIRED, WE HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED AND TRANSFORMED AS WE NOW HAVE THE KNOWLEDGE OF DEALING WITH CHILDREN."

The parenting training has influenced how some caregivers manage their household, and relieved the burden of care many grandparents felt. Describing the situation before taking her granddaughter to crèche and receiving training, Albertina Lethetele said:

"IT USED TO BE CHAOTIC AT HOME BECAUSE I SPENT ALMOST ALL MY TIME CONCENTRATING ON THE CHILD. ONE CANNOT EVEN HAVE ME TO PERFORM HOUSEHOLD CHORES BECAUSE OF [THE] CHILD CRYING AND DEMANDING YOUR ATTENTION. BUT HAVING TO TAKE THE CHILD TO THE CRÈCHE HAS RELIEVED THE BURDEN OF CARE. NOW THE CRÈCHE CHILDREN GET ENOUGH TIME TO PLAY WITH OTHER CHILDREN WHILE LEARNING AND DEVELOPING."

The change in understanding of child development is freeing the caregiver to do household chores or attend work, and provides knowledge on "how to care and develop children who need to be understood as human beings who are learning and developing", as described by Thandi Mlambo, the senior ECD trainer.

Another parent, Sophy Masekwanmeni, described the efforts of ECD practitioners in providing information about the child in the crèche setting, while also offering information that will assist caregivers outside of this environment:

“WE COME TO THE CRÈCHE AND WAIT FOR THE CRÈCHE TEACHER TO FACILITATE FEEDBACK WITH US ABOUT THE PROGRESS OF OUR CHILDREN AND TO TRAIN US ON HOW WE SHOULD HANDLE CHILDREN AT HOME.”

As a result of the training parents and ECD practitioners gained new information about taking care of babies. In addition to them needing a nurturing and safe environment, the importance of understanding how babies learn and the experiences that they need to stimulate development was recognised through the training.

Thušanang trainers stated that they have observed the development and growth of parents or caregivers, along with the children, as the support from the ECD practitioners progresses. David Makhafola, a Thušanang community development trainer said:

“PARENTS MUST BE ABLE TO SEE THE DIFFERENCE IN A CHILD AT THE CURRENT MOMENT AND PREVIOUSLY.”

The need for close collaboration between the parents and the ECD practitioners at crèches is evident in the following statement by trainer, Thandi Mlambo:

“WE SHARE WHAT A CHILD CAN AND CANNOT DO. FOR EXAMPLE, A CHILD USES A GLASS AT CRÈCHE, BUT ONLY PLASTIC CUPS AT HOME AND THE PARENT WILL SHOUT AT THE CHILD NOT TO TOUCH THE GLASS. THE REACTIONS ARE DIFFERENT BECAUSE AT THE CRÈCHE THE CHILD IS AFFIRMED, BUT AT HOME IS SHOUTED AT AND UNDERMINED.”

Growth can only continue to happen if there is continuous engagement and collaboration between the crèche and the parent or caregiver, as pointed out by grandmother Albertina Lethelele:

“IT IS QUITE VITAL THAT PARENTS SHOULD KEEP REGULAR CONTACT WITH THE CRÈCHES TO PARTICIPATE IN THE UPBRINGING OF THEIR OWN CHILDREN.”

Thušanang staff members have found the engagement with parents to be challenging at times. It requires outreach, communication skills and engagement with parents in a process over time. In particular, many parents are not interested and do not want to be involved in



the development of their children or participate in early educational activities. David Makhafola highlights the challenge:

“THERE WILL BE LESS THAN 50% OF PARENTS NOT REALLY INVOLVED BECAUSE, FOR THEM, WHAT THEY CARE ABOUT IS THAT THE CHILD IS THERE, AT THE CRÈCHE. THEY THINK: ‘I’LL TAKE THE CHILD TO AND FROM THE CRÈCHE’. AND THEY THINK THAT IS ALL THEY ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR. THERE ARE PARENTS WHO WON’T BUDGE, AND I ALWAYS TELL THEM DURING MY TRAININGS THAT ‘YOU CAN’T CALL YOURSELF A PARENT IF YOUR CHILD IS AT THE CENTRE AND YOU HAVE FINISHED A MONTH WITHOUT CONSULTING A TEACHER TO ASK ‘HOW IS MY CHILD DOING?’ EVEN WORSE, AS TIME GOES, THE CHILD WILL LEARN THEIR OWN WAY TO SCHOOL, AND THE PARENT WON’T EVEN TAKE HER HALFWAY TO SCHOOL. AND YOU WILL NEVER SEE THE PARENT. A LOT OF PARENTS ARE NOT REALLY INVOLVED IN THEIR CHILDREN’S EDUCATION, BUT YOU STILL FIND PARENTS WHO ARE COMMITTED SUCH [AS] THOSE WHO ARE IN COMMITTEES.”

Trainer Thandi Mlambo further indicated that “people don’t want to be responsible ... some parents think that ECD is not important so they lock children in their house”. This is particularly the situation with children who have special needs who are “kept behind doors so that people outside might not see that they have such a child,” she said.

Throughout the training provided by Thušanang to ECD practitioners and parents, it is necessary to confront these perceptions and encourage access for all children to crèches and, in turn, to opportunities for holistic development and growth.

A further challenge in engaging both parents in the development of young children in communities, relates to gender norms and perceptions. Trainer David Makhafola shared his experience:

“THERE IS THE BELIEF THAT TAKING CARE OF CHILDREN IS A WOMEN’S RESPONSIBILITY, WE DON’T EXPECT MEN TO CHANGE NAPPIES, FEED THEM, AND WASH DISHES. MAYBE WHEN WE GROW WITH TIMES MEN WILL BE ABLE TO DO SUCH THINGS.”

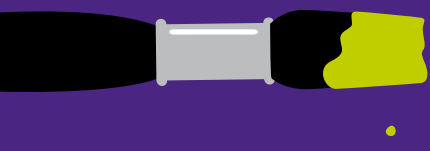
Similarly, not all fathers and grandfathers feel 'free' to play with their children, even though in some families a mother does not have time or natural aptitude to play with a child. The ECD trainers indicated that it is "wonderful" to have men present in the training and that it still allows "men to say what men say and women to say what women say". There is the added value of people sharing ideas and discussing ECD issues and child rearing practices between all participants and genders. This point was highlighted by Thandi Mlambo who reported that one elderly man in a training said that he was "not aware of this child development and that he now had to go home and talk to all his family, including his sons, about what they must do as fathers".

HIV issues are included in most of the programmes offered by Thušanang. Given the HIV pandemic, the organisation regards it as important to mainstream HIV and AIDS in training and awareness-raising relating to the health and well-being of children and families and in caregiving. One of the parent sessions includes HIV, and this was hugely beneficial as it gave parents the space to discuss issues about which they otherwise may not have spoken or thought about in relation to bringing up children. In one group discussion, a man indicated that he was HIV positive and shunned by the community. Despite this he came to the workshop and said it was amazing to be accepted by the women who were also attending because it was the first time he had any support from his community.





EMERGING
LESSONS



The Thušanang experience highlights three key lessons for ECD training and practice, and the process of engaging parents and caregivers in the holistic development of their children.

4.1. LESSON 1:

THE TRAINING OF ECD PRACTITIONERS IS A PROCESS BASED IN THE CLASSROOM AND ON-SITE IN A CRÈCHE.

The training and development of ECD practitioners takes time, particularly when the focus is not only on the achievement of an accredited certificate, but also on sustaining classroom competency, effective crèche management, building the caregiving abilities of parents, and impacting on community challenges that influence child development. This approach requires ECD practitioners who have an affinity and vocation to work with children in the early years of their development and who are prepared to engage with parents and community members. Such practitioners are like Emily Ramolotja, who was asked what motivated her to start a crèche in her community, and who answered: “Because I love working with children.”

Providing accredited training is not easy for a number of reasons, firstly, due to the regulatory demands of the formalised skills sector in South Africa. The registration and verification requirements of the NQF quality assurance bodies need to be met and maintained. This requires strong organisational management, experienced and qualified trainers, a good working relationship with government agencies, and staff who are committed to the goals of an organisation, who are able to be flexible, and are passionate and responsive to both the regulatory requirements and the needs of practitioners based in crèches.

Secondly, there are challenges to working in the rural setting. For example, the distances that must be travelled by Thušanang facilitators and learners in Limpopo are vast, and therefore the course cost per learner is higher than it would be in another setting. In addition, if someone does not arrive for training, it is not possible to give that space to another ECD practitioner as the distances are too far for another person to come and fill the space on that day.

Emerging practice highlights the importance of ECD practitioners providing mentoring for other practitioners. For example, a more experienced ECD practitioner is able to guide a recently qualified practitioner in being able to respond more effectively to the creativity and developmental needs of the child.

Thušanang has found that it cannot leave a crèche to continue the momentum on its own because over time crèches often seem to degenerate despite the training, if they are left unsupported. This is a huge challenge as Thušanang must continue to provide assistance. As a result, the focus for some crèches is now on working towards a peer and mentor programme. Many crèches are at a stage where they only need one visit per month, but due to the distance and costs of travel, this is an expensive undertaking for Thušanang. Therefore the focus is on developing clusters or peer groups of practitioners and identifying leaders within those groups to be trained as mentors. These leaders will then mentor the peer groups. The clusters will continue to run and meet on a regular basis. The peer group will meet regularly to share ideas, resources, challenges and successes. Empirical evidence from Thušanang trainers and facilitators indicates that the main issue that stops ECD practitioners from maintaining momentum is that they feel isolated. The goal of this initiative, therefore, is that the creation

of these care groups, which will meet at a different crèche each month, will result in a greater possibility of development being sustained through peer support and positive pressure or reinforcement from peers. This will enable Thušanang ECD trainers to focus on crèches where all the practitioners in the centre are still being trained, or training other crèches that have recently joined Thušanang.

4.2. LESSON 2: THE TRAINING OF ECD CRÈCHE COMMITTEES FACILITATES PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN HOLISTIC CHILD DEVELOPMENT.

Managing an ECD centre is an important element of providing a quality and holistic ECD experience to children. As illustrated in this case study, the training provided by Thušanang is valued by the crèche practitioners, and has had unexpected benefits in the broader development of the community. However, the training is only one part of facilitating effective management in the crèche. Thušanang ECD trainers need to work hand in hand with practitioners in the crèches to improve and sustain practice over time. The aim of training the crèche committee is to embed what is taught as part of the supervisor's classroom based training through increasing committee practice to manage the crèche. Critical to this is ensuring that the parents and community are represented, and participate, in the crèche committees. In addition, it is essential that good management practice is entrenched in the crèche constitution.

This case study illustrates the importance of providing training to committee members, as well as building the capacity of committee members to engage with the other parents and caregivers to increase their participation

in the life of the school. This approach provides an opportunity for other parents and caregivers to understand and recognise the importance of participating in the development of a crèche. Furthermore, these committee members are able to encourage other parents to become more involved in the development of their children by acting as parenting role models.

4.3. LESSON 3: PARENT AND CAREGIVER INVOLVEMENT COMPLEMENTS THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN AT A CRÈCHE.

The role of an ECD practitioner is vital in the development of a child and prepares children for lifelong learning. However, without continued development in the home and community environment a child may not develop the necessary competency to fulfil his or her potential later in life. Therefore the inclusion of building the capacity of parents and caregivers to complement and reinforce the learning that takes place in the crèche is an important step in the journey of the child's development. In addition, the training of parents is contributing to positive parenting skills, improved baby care and, importantly, the holistic development of the child in the home setting. The focus is on strengthening what is taught in the crèche with practice in the home.

Thušanang ECD trainers indicated that a key to engaging parents is during the time when the ECD practitioner in a crèche gives feedback to a parent on the progress and development of his or her child. This process is part of the practitioner's assessment of the development of the child, which is done against the expected age appropriate ECD outcomes. The purpose of this interaction is to give specific feedback on the child, raise any potential problems, and discuss how the parent can stimulate the

child at home. During this engagement the parents and practitioners are able to share about the progress of a child and raise concerns or problems, the parent and child can be referred to additional services (such as eye screening at a health facility), and the practitioner can influence ECD practice at home. This may be done by, for example, asking a parent to encourage a child to tie his or her own shoelaces, rather than this task being done by the adult.

Feedback from the Thušanang trainers indicates that as a result of this engagement between the ECD practitioner and the parent, an adult looks at his or her child as an active “human being” and over time parents develop their own skills to observe and note the holistic development of their children, and they are more competent in strengthening this development in the home setting.

This process also indicates to Thušanang trainers the level of competency of the ECD practitioners because good practitioners are able to identify children that may be slower learners or who are having difficulties. The practitioners are then able to work with the caregiver in referring the child for assistance from the right person at an early stage. In the words of Julia Mothapo:

“OUR WORK IS NOT ONLY ABOUT WORKING IN THE CRÈCHE; IT IS ALSO ABOUT EXPLAINING THE CHILD’S GROWTH AND WORKING WITH PARENTS.”



FIVE
5

CONCLUSION

The Thušanang case study illustrates the importance of a well-trained, supported and motivated ECD workforce that facilitates the holistic growth and development of children in crèches.

It also recognises that there is a need for ECD practice that is seen as an occupation that is instrumental in developing parenting and strengthening families and one that is making a valuable contribution to the development of communities in South Africa.

As is illustrated by the Thušanang experience, building the capacity of ECD practitioners benefits children, parents and caregivers, and the community. As advocated for by Thušanang, ECD practitioners are encouraged to engage with parents and to encourage them to actively support and enhance the development of their baby or child. This is not easy, but it is vital in the development of the child and their own parenting abilities.

The developmental process Thušanang has already undertaken and the successes achieved to date need to be enhanced by the professional development of ECD practitioners, and by the strengthened implementation and roll-out of regulations provided by a coordinated government response.

An investment in children's development and ability to engage actively as young people and adults involves strengthening the family environment to support the physical, emotional, psycho-social and cognitive development of the child. This cannot be left to ECD practitioners alone: it requires the united efforts of parents, caregivers, community leaders, ECD crèche management committees, ECD practitioners and ECD trainers in South Africa.

The approach of Thušanang Trust, as illustrated in this case study, recognises that building capacity is not only about the certified training: it is also about strengthening the capacity of the institution through an informed, skilled and competent committee and through strengthening the family and community within which a child grows and develops. Making this approach a reality requires coordinated interventions at each of the three levels, facilitating partnerships with various individuals and organisations, and mentoring and encouraging individuals to actively make quality childhood care and education a reality in South Africa.

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