

Gail Isaacs

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Gail Isaacs likes to run. In fact, she enjoys it so much she dedicates most of her free time to training as a track and field runner. Not only has she qualified for the Western Province Track Team; this busy mother of two also qualified for the South African team in 2002 where she became both the four hundred metre and eight hundred metre champion. One may presume that a woman with so many achievements under her belt may need a slice of humble pie, but the woman who greets us at the entrance of Westgate Mall in Mitchell's Plain has her feet planted firmly on the ground.

When Gail isn't going through the drills with her coaching husband, doing the housework, or amusing her 17-year old daughter and four-year old 'laat lammetjie', she can be found in the Grade R classroom of Hazeldean Primary School in Portlands, Mitchell's Plain where she is a dedicated teacher. "When I used to go to Sunday school as a child I would always come home and tell my mother I'd like to be a teacher," Gail smiles. "It is my gift and I have a real heart for the little ones."

Gail has been teaching at various early childhood development centres for 17 years and has learnt a lot from the practical experience of the classroom; however her lack of formal training in the field limited her professionally. "I never finished matric because of all the (Apartheid) riots in our school, so I couldn't really study after school," Gail explains. When Gail was given the opportunity to study Educare at Proteaville College she took it, realising her love for knowledge and studying.

She recently completed her ECD Level Four Learnership training through the College of Cape College, where she excelled in all her learning. "I really enjoyed Level Four. My favourite subject was definitely Facilitating Healthy Development and I also loved learning about the different disabilities that many children have, and how teachers can help those children to succeed at school." Part of the ECD Level Four Learnership includes teaching educators creative learning methods for the classroom. "I love teaching the children through play and especially enjoy our



morning ring time because I get to really know the children then."


Despite feeling more equipped for the classroom, Gail still has many daily struggles. "Many of my children have learning difficulties which are linked to their language barriers," Gail explains (while taking a sip of her Appletizer). Out of the 33 children she has in her class, 23 of them are Xhosa-speaking and struggle to communicate with their teacher in English. "I really want to learn to speak Xhosa so that I can communicate properly with the children. I heard there was a course starting soon, but I just need to check on the expense."

Gail loves the constant buzz in her classroom, but admits that looking after 33 preschoolers single-handedly can be rather daunting. "I wish my class was divided into two smaller groups or that I could have an assistant teacher with me so that more individual attention could be given to each

child. It would also be nice to have some more equipment for our classroom," Gail sighs. Thankfully, she is able to rely on her pupils' parents for support whenever issues arise in the class. "They (parents) are very supportive and always attend our meetings."

The issue of salaries is one that Gail is reluctant to complain about stating that she doesn't do her job for the money, "but at the end of the day we have to pay our bills," she says. She believes her R2500 per month salary is considerably lower than what she had hoped for considering her experience in the field. "I am dedicated to my work. Although my official hours end at two o'clock each day I still help to coach the school's athletics, cross-county and netball team. I believe that R8000 per month is fair."

When asked what message she could impart to other ECD teachers, Gail replied: "They should enrich themselves and go for



the Learnership so that they can be better teachers. We always need better teachers.”

So what is next for this athletic mom? “I’d like to get my diploma and then go to teachers college so I can teach the higher grades too.” If she’s as dedicated to her teaching as she is to her athletics, it’s likely she’ll become a student again in the near future.

*Hazeldean Primary
School, Portlands,
Mitchell’s Plain*

