

A woman with a warm smile is leaning forward, wearing a dark beanie with white stripes and a brown patterned cardigan over a white long-sleeved shirt. The background features a red wall with educational posters, including one titled 'Nosipho siyikili' showing various fruits and vegetables, and another with the word 'SKIT' written on it.

Nosipho siyikili

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I love children and
I love seeing them
learn new things.

Nosipho Siyikili and Elsie Dyasi

The big pink shack in Nolubabalo Street is a welcoming site on a chilly July afternoon. Inside, children sleep on pillows in rows; their brightly-coloured shoes peeping out from under the blankets. Their teacher and principal take this rare moment of prolonged silence to prepare for their afternoon lessons, cutting out shapes and sorting through their teaching materials.

Nolubabalo Preschool in Khayelitsha's Site C is well-known in the community. Parents drop their toddlers off knowing that the principal, Elsie Dyasi, prides herself on creating a teaching environment, not merely a babysitting service. "We have a new curriculum now," Elsie informs us. "The teachers know that the children don't just come here to play, but to learn and get prepared for junior school."

It is under this guidance that Nosipho Siyikili thrives as a teacher. This mother of two boys is responsible for teaching 20

Grade Rs between the ages of four and six. "I have been working here for 18 months and before that I was a char. But teaching is definitely better," she chuckles. "I love children and I love seeing them learn new things."

As a single parent, juggling motherhood and a teaching career requires a well-planned day. "I have to be awake by five o'clock in the morning so that I can make breakfast for my family and go to work at seven o'clock. Then I have to prepare porridge for the preschool before teaching for the day. I get home at five and watch TV to relax."

In May this year Nosipho completed her ECD Level Four Learnership through Qondisa Education and Training Organisation. "It was very helpful, but I'd still like to learn more." Nosipho said she always knew about HIV/Aids, but admits that the course gave her many helpful

Elsie Dyasi

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ways to deal with the disease in her community. "I also learnt about children's rights and how to manage teamwork and learning programmes."

One of the most frustrating aspects for both Elsie and Nosipho is the lack of available funds for the school. "Our community is very poor. The people bring their children to us, but don't always pay school fees," Elsie explains. "It is a big struggle for us because we need that money to pay for food for the children and to pay the teachers." Parents are required to pay R120 per month for babies and R100 per month for toddlers and Grade Rs. The financial pressure is so extreme that Nosipho is paid a mere R800 at the end of each month, excluding the month of December. While most government teachers receive a bonus cheque at the end of the year, Elsie is unable to pay her staff of five a single cent. "The parents take their children out of school for the December holidays, so they don't pay any

fees. I want to ask the parents to keep their children in school for at least half of December so I can pay my staff." It is with a grave expression on her face that Elsie explains how most families buy new clothes and eat good food at Christmas, while her teachers can hardly afford to live for that month.

Besides the school's financial situation, Nolubabalo Preschool also suffers the consequences of high crime in the area. "Just last week someone threw a brick through the school window, but luckily no one was hurt," Elsie explains. "Here, the criminals are never caught because people are too scared to report crimes."

Despite the ongoing struggles and the fact that the preschool is still not registered with the Department of Social Development, Nosipho loves her job and she loves the children placed in her care. "I enjoy our music and movement ring every morning because it gives me an

opportunity to have fun with the children. And I really love story time."

Occasionally during the interview one of the sleeping children raises a head, but Nosipho gently coaxes the child back to sleep. "It is so cold today," Elsie explains, "so we want them to sleep for as long as possible."

If Nosipho and Elsie could ask the Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, for one request, it would definitely be for a larger site for the preschool. "Our plot is so small that we have no space for outside play. It is difficult to keep the children

inside each day because they have so much energy."

The lack of resources doesn't prevent the staff of Nolubabalo from taking pride in their school. Each room is kept tidy and the walls are covered with an assortment of learning material. Elsie shows off the school's graduation photos taken when the children leave preschool for primary school. "The children look forward to their graduation because it means they have passed preschool," Elsie smiles. For Nosipho, she has only 'passed' when her pupils are well-prepared for their school career.



*Nolubabalo Pre-School, Site C,
Khayelitsha*

