

I recently read an excellent comment, something about the best way to deal with a crisis is to be prepared for it. I cannot recall who wrote this but it is so true.

As we enter the second month of lockdown South Africa have 161,004 tests conducted, 4,361 infections and 86 deaths (as at Saturday evening 25 April 2020).

Government has closed some 30,00 ECD centres and about 100,000 ECD workers are at home. A few of these centres will be able to pay staff for the duration of closure but the overwhelming majority will not be able to. This is because the majority of parents are not paying fees and the result is no money for staff salaries and other costs. Up to this point government relief makes no provision for ECD centres at all.



Besides the lockdown affecting ECD centres, ECD NPOs are also severely impacted on. My estimate is that while almost all ECD NPOs will have paid March salaries and perhaps April month too, from May month onwards about three-quarters of ECD non-profits will not be paying their staff. Many of these organisations will also not be able to pay overheads, especially fixed costs. Probably 10 to 15 ECD non-profits, will close as a result of this.

I know of a few organisations that, years ago, took a long view on sustainability. These, perhaps five maximum, will weather the storm of the Coronavirus and will have the reserves to pay salaries and cover overheads. Programme costs will be minimal as programmes are not being implemented.

For nearly two decades we have been advising ECD NPOs to create a substantial reserve or endowment. Few have done this. Some organisations that have been around for decades have little to fall back on. It is short-sighted to live hand-to-mouth. Harvard University, Yale, Oxford, Cambridge, Wits, Stellenbosch and UCT will get through this because they have reserves. If this is appropriate for these universities, why not for ECD NPOs? So, hard as it may sound, the truth of the matter is that the degree to which ECD NPOs will get through this is based on strategic decisions of ten years ago.

On another track, when ECD NPOs are able to return to work, our lives will be very different. So my advice to ECD sector leaders is to take time now to think about and record what you need to take into account when returning to work. We cannot do this on the day that we return. Remember the comment in the first sentence of this editorial. For

example, what are your employment considerations in returning to work; what are your health and safety considerations; and what are your programmes considerations? As ECD NPOs we have to consider these questions now, today. However, it is my view that ECD NPO leaders will not do this. As I type this CECD has 10 Human Resource considerations and 13 Health and Safety considerations that we will be discussing in a teleconference in the coming days. Programme considerations will be more on what do we continue with, what do we drop doing and what new activities do we undertake?

We have also kept our donors informed with a short note on what we are doing during the lockdown. What ECD NPOs should not be doing at this time is asking donors for money to sustain their overheads, that is poor practice. Donors are pouring tens of millions of rand into feeding programmes and will not take kindly to funding requests at this time. The strategic (/ thinking) donors will approach you asking what support you need at this time.

As we move into level 4 lockdown on 1st May (ironically Workers Day), stay healthy and stay safe.

Enjoy this edition of EARLY YEARS.

ERIC ATMORE
Director

FUTURE LOOKS BLEAK FOR ECD OPERATORS

~ Staff Reporter

A report has found that 68% of ECD operators (including ECD centres, playgroups, day mothers and other early learning programmes) are worried that they will not be able to reopen after the lockdown.

Concern has been expressed about the future of early childhood development (ECD) centres following a report that found that 68% of ECD operators (including ECD centres, playgroups, day mothers and other early learning programmes) are worried that they will not be able to reopen after the lockdown.

This is because 99% reported that caregivers have stopped paying fees after the nationwide closures on March 18.

The report, *The Plight of the ECD Workforce*, finds that 83% of operators will not be able to pay full staff salaries and 96% reported that their income was not enough to cover their operating costs.

The report was issued by BRIDGE, Ilifa Labantwana, the National ECD Alliance (NECDA), the Nelson Mandela Foundation, Smartstart and the South African Congress for Early Childhood Development (SACECD). The report is based on a survey of 3 952 ECD operators conducted in mid-April 2020.

On March 18, all ECD operators were instructed by the Department of Social Development to close in order to prevent the spread and acceleration of coronavirus infections. These included ECD centres, playgroups and day mothers.

ECD operators are largely NPOs and micro-social enterprises – most of whom are black women. They provide a service that is needs-based in poor communities with limited cash flows, which places them way below the minimum wage. They operate in a quasi-informal manner and will be severely impacted by the pandemic.

A rapid survey was conducted in April 2020 to understand the impact of the closure.

Responses were analysed from 3 952 ECD operators who employ 24 877 workers and care for 214 277 children. It is estimated that this sample represents approximately 10% of the total number of ECD operators in SA and while not statistically nationally representative, it nevertheless paints a picture of the context which the sector broadly agrees with.

According to the report, it is estimated that as many as 3 000 ECD operators serving poor communities in South Africa run the risk of closure as a result of the Covid-19 crisis.

“This means that up to 175 000 people will be left unemployed and 1.5 million children without early learning services or safe places of daycare. In turn, their caregivers will be unable to participate in the labour market, which is critical for economic recovery.”

The report stated that while the Department of Social Development financially supported a subset of ECD operators that are registered – and are working on continuing this support over the lockdown – this support only reaches around 30% of ECD operators.

“We commend the president’s commitment to ensuring that women and the most vulnerable in our society are supported. The vast majority of at-risk ECD programmes are owned and run

EARLY YEARS

by black women, who are already marginalised because our society equates childcare with low status and low pay," Leonard Saul, the chief executive officer of the South African Congress for ECD, said.

"The operators most at risk of closure are situated in our poorest communities and providing an essential early learning service and safe daycare to the most vulnerable children in South Africa. Therefore, these ECD operators must be specifically targeted for support in the Covid-19 economic and social relief plan."

Saul pointed out that most ECD programmes operated in a semi-informal manner.

"The report found only 45% were registered with Sars (SA Revenue Service), 13% as companies (CIPC), and only 35% of their workforce was registered for UIF (Unemployment Insurance Fund), with most salaries below minimum wage. As a result of straddling the informal economy, ECD operators and their workforce thus find themselves unable to access many of the relief schemes currently on offer."



The report proposes two options for how the state can support the ECD sector during this time: Firstly, in terms of support to the ECD workforce, the report proposes that between 118 000 and 175 000 ECD workers are at risk for losing income to each receive R1 000 a month in income supplementation for a six-month period.

The second option is support to ECD operators, where it is proposed that 20 000 to 30 000 ECD operators each receive R6 000 a month for a six-month period.

This will mean that 20 000 to 30 000 ECD providers will continue operating; between 118 000 and 175 000 ECD worker jobs will be sustained; 1 million to 1.5 million children will have an ECD programme to attend and 1 million to 1.5 million caregivers, primarily poor women, will have childcare available to them to look for income opportunities.

"President Cyril Ramaphosa has taken decisive and fast action

to respond to the spread of the Covid-19 virus, and has been applauded both locally and internationally for his leadership," said Sumaya Hendricks of the Nelson Mandela Foundation.

"We urge him to now extend this action to the people working in the ECD sector who face extraordinary hardship in the months to come. Their role in ECD forms part of the foundation of our education system, the well-being of tomorrow's workforce, and South Africa's joint prosperity in the future."

A Kimberley single mother of two small children said yesterday that she would not be in a position to pay her children's crèche fees at the end of this month after her own salary was cut.

"I am, however, reliant on the crèches reopening when the lockdown is lifted because I have to go to work and there is no one to look after my children. Fortunately I have been working from home this month so I didn't have to find someone to mind them but it is very difficult to try work and look after children, who are also bored at home and craving stimulation and attention," the mother said.

She added that she didn't know what she would do if the crèches remained closed. "I might have to send them away to family but at the moment no one is allowed to travel. It is very concerning and I cannot sleep at night, stressing about what is going to happen."

Another city parent said she had received an SMS from the crèche to state that it would be giving parents a discount for the lockdown period. "Many parents felt that they shouldn't be charged at all as they hadn't received the service. Essentially it means that you are giving them a donation. However, one realises that if we don't pay it will have a ripple effect on both the crèche and the staff they employ, who also rely on their salary to put food on the table for their children."

She said that some parents provided essential services, like nurses, and had to work during the lockdown. "So when the crèche closed, they had to pay someone else to watch their children. They couldn't pay for both, however."

She added that clarity needed to be given on what would happen in the future. "We need to know if the crèches are going to remain closed for a few months so that we can employ a nanny or make alternative arrangements. Not knowing what is going to happen is also stressful."

The owner of a playschool and aftercare centre said on Thursday that she was equally stressed about the future.

"Some of the parents have paid their fees, others have only paid a percentage and others have not paid, arguing that they will not pay because their children didn't attend this month. Usually by this time of the month I have enough money to pay

all my staff, but currently I only have enough to pay about half. I am waiting until the end of the month to see what will happen and how much I can pay the staff. It is very hard because most of them have been with me for many years and I know that they also need the money, but if the fees don't come in, there is nothing I can do."

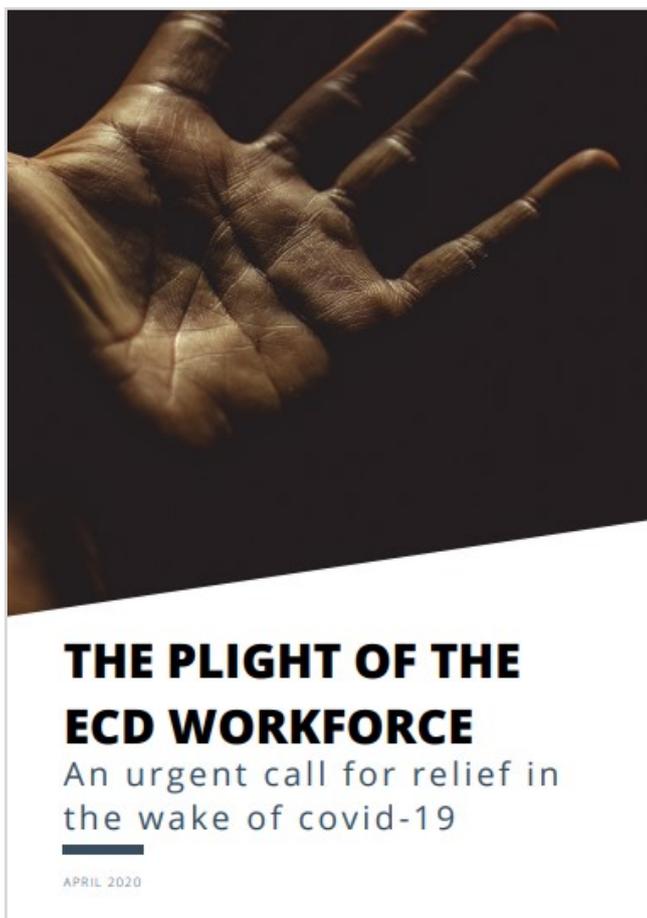
She added that most of the people who paid were government employees. "It seems like they are the only ones who haven't been affected by cuts. Everyone else is struggling."

The owner said she would also have to make a decision going forward on whether she would need to retrench staff. "I applied for UIF funding for my staff but I haven't heard anything yet. "It's a terrible situation and I don't know what we are going to do."

Article available at
<https://www.dfa.co.za/news/future-looks-bleak-for-ecc-operators-47134918>

The full 'The Plight of the ECD Workforce' report can be found here:

<https://ilifalabantwana.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Final-report-The-plight-of-the-ECD-workforce.pdf>



A two-page summary of the report can be found here:
<https://ilifalabantwana.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-ECD-relief-report-short-final.pdf>

COVID-19 RESOURCES FOR ECD CENTRES, PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN

During this challenging time of the COVID-19 pandemic, we all need to do our part to keep everyone safe in South Africa. As such, CECD has created a webpage with relevant links to articles, government statements, and resources to assist ECD centres, parents, caregivers and their children during this time, and going forward.

The webpage can be found here:

<https://cecd.org.za/news/covid19resources/>

Along with at-home resources for parents and children, such as free books, audio books, games, puzzles etc. as well as government statements and health advice, an important section on this page is a post on "Key support and grants that may be applicable to ECD centres and parents". An extract from this post follows.

With recent announcements from South African president Cyril Ramaphosa on Tuesday 21 April 2020, the following relief measures are now in place which can assist ECD centres and parents during this time:

1. ECD centres that are registered with SARS and have been paying UIF and who are unable to pay the full salaries of their teachers can apply for COVID-19 Temporary Employer-Employee Relief Scheme. The document that outlines the scheme and how to apply can be found here: https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202003/43161gen215.pdf
2. ECD centres that are a registered company can apply for relief as a SMME from the Department of Small Business Development. The outline to the Covid-19 SSME Relief funding scheme can be found here: <http://www.dsb.gov.za/?p=3399>
3. Increase of grants: the Child Support Grants has increased by an additional R500 (R300 increase in May and from June to October an increase of R500) and other grants have increased by additional R250 per month for the next 6 months.
4. The introduction of the Covid-19 Relief of Distress Grant for those unemployed and not receiving any grant or UIF (R350 per month for next 6 months). DSD will issue requirements needed to access and apply for this funding. For more information on how to access this grant, click here: <https://ireportsouthafrica.co.za/2020/04/22/how-to-claim-r350-unemployment-grant-during-lockdown>
5. The National Lotteries Commission has set up a COVID-19 Relief Fund specifically for NPOs in South Africa. This would also be applicable to ECD centres registered as NPOs. Click here for more details: http://www.nlcsa.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/NLC-sets-up-R-150-million-Relief-Fund-to-Ease-Impact-of-Covid-19-on-NGOs_22-April-2020.pdf