

We have now been under Covid lockdown since late March 2020. During this time the non-profit sector has been profoundly affected by the lockdown. We know that a number of NPOs, including in the early childhood development (ECD) sector, have closed. At the same time, some ECD NPOs have thrived.

Reading an article by Karen Bruns, Senior Director of Development at Stellenbosch University, in the Mail and Guardian this past week, got me thinking. The article indicates that the Vice-Chancellor of a university needs to be multi-skilled, playing different roles at different times, and must ensure the financial viability of a University. This is of prime importance. In the NPO world it is usually the organisation's Director that is responsible for the financial viability of the organisation.

The question for us is: given that in addition to the financial viability of the organisation, the Director also carries ultimate responsibility for programme quality, ensuring the highest standards of programmes of the organisation that they lead, do our ECD NPO Directors, have the skills and experience to ensure the financial viability of the ECD NPO, especially at this time?

Speaking with a number of ECD Directors, we find that some NPOs have thrived during this period with increased income and additional programmes especially around nutrition provision and PPE, being implemented. These organisations have been able to continue to pay salaries and some have implemented salary increases and performance bonuses as they would do in a "normal" year. The foundation for this has been the strategic thinking and planning of the organisation leadership over the years prior to lockdown. In some cases, healthy reserves and an endowment has enabled this. Sadly, a number of non-profits have closed or have downscaled significantly. Many have retrenched staff, others have either reduced salaries or been unable to pay salaries during this time.

To return to the Director's responsibility, financial viability of our NPOs depends on the ability of organisations, through its leadership, to raise money. This requires spending much time on this task. If we look at the university environment, a study in the United States showed that University Vice-Chancellors spend around four days a month away from their campus raising funds and even more days in some months. What would be interesting is to work out how many days Directors of ECD NPOs spend on the financial viability of the organisations that they lead.

Enjoy this edition of EARLY YEARS, stay safe and healthy and be Covid-protocol compliant. With vaccinations now available to almost everyone, I urge you to get vaccinated as the scientific evidence tells of the benefits.

ERIC ATMORE
Director



UNLOCKING CHANGE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

~ Nazeema Mohamed

Indifference is eroding Early Childhood Development gains, but a new social justice unit offers hope. The Unit will prioritise education on rights, communication, direct action, policy work, legal advocacy and litigation, lobbying, consultation, and working with and strengthening existing coalitions.



The most vulnerable members of our society, young children, have had their already limited opportunities further eroded by the Covid-19 pandemic and the negligent and short-sighted approach of government.

It is extremely concerning that Early Childhood Development (ECD) is not getting the support and implementation it deserves in South Africa, which is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Our Bill of Rights reflects child rights in the Constitution and South Africa also has the goal of universal access to a full range of ECD services by 2030.

Yet, in practice, ECD is in a precarious situation.

“No child must be left behind,” wrote former Minister of Social Development Bathabile Dlamini in the introduction to the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy document in 2015. “Our goal is that by 2030, a full comprehensive age and developmental stage appropriate package of quality early childhood development services is available and accessible to all infants and young children and their caregivers.”

The South African Early Childhood Review 2019, which examined data for children aged under six years old, showed some progress in that maternal and child mortality rates were on a downward trend. But South Africa was still struggling with nutrition (an alarming 27% of children under five suffer from

stunting) as well as support for primary caregivers, and early learning.

At the 2020 Dialogue Business in Society Virtual Conference in October last year, education experts pointed out that, to meet the 2015 ECD target, South Africa would need more than 100,000 additional early learning teachers and 40,000 new venues for three- to five-year-olds alone.

While the education system in our country has always been fragile for the majority of South Africans, the Covid-19 pandemic has fragmented the system even more. Covid-19 has increased the barriers to education and decreased the quality of its programmes.

Last year, during the first phase of the pandemic, ECD centres were closed temporarily for the safety of children. The centres were deprived of government operational subsidies. Many ECD workers lost their jobs, with those who returned earning less than half their previous salaries. The children’s subsidy was halted.

In a paper entitled A Sector Hanging in the Balance, the global programme Research on Improving Systems of Education (Rise) has estimated that just 13% of South African children aged 0-6 years were attending ECD programmes by mid-July to mid-August 2020 compared to 47% in 2018. The last time that ECD attendance rates were as low as this was in the early 2000s.

Considering that ECD is a Constitutional right, the Centre for Early Childhood Development (CECD), led by Professor Eric Atmore, has been prominent and vocal in the sector since 1994. It has contributed to government ECD policy initiatives and has a history of advocacy and lobbying.

The CECD has played a critical role in litigation with the Department of Social Development (DSD) to ensure that the full ECD subsidy was paid to ECD centres during Covid, ensuring that the sector did not collapse completely. The actions of Professor Atmore and activists in the sector have alerted us to the fact that building a social justice movement is an important next step to ensure that the rights of young children are protected. This is necessary because it is clear from the events of 2020, that government has dropped the ball and years of work invested in building the sector are in danger of being lost.

The CECD has now formally structured its lobbying and advocacy initiatives in the form of an Advocacy and Social Justice Unit. It has appointed skilled staff, led by attorney-at-law Yusrah Ehrenreich. Inyathelo, the South African Institute for Advancement, hosted the virtual launch of this unit on 23 June, at which sector stakeholders discussed ECD advocacy work to date, and the way forward.

Professor Atmore has emphasised that the unit is not a fledgling ECD organisation, nor is it a single-issue ECD campaign.

“It is a social movement that aims to radically transform ECD in South Africa.”

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We need to rethink our approach to ECD activism and it is everyone's responsibility to do this, he said. "If we are going to improve the situation for young children, we have no choice but to speak out comprehensively and powerfully, and speak truth to power. At this time, we certainly need a shift in how we tackle early childhood development. We must ask ourselves: if not us, then who? If not now, then when?"

The Unit will prioritise education on rights, communication, direct action, policy work, legal advocacy and litigation, lobbying, consultation, and working with and strengthening existing coalitions.

One such topic is the R1.3-billion that government allocated to the ECD sector in October 2020. Over half of this allocation has reverted to the Treasury as there was no coherent and comprehensive implementation plan. It remains to be seen how much funding the Treasury will agree to roll over, but this lack of decisive action has had a devastating impact on children and those who have lost salaries and livelihoods.

Another decision causing concern is that of vaccination. While school teachers may be vaccinated, those working in ECD, which falls under the Department of Social Development, currently do not qualify.

Given the immense challenges facing the ECD sector, Inyathelo wholeheartedly supports the establishment of the new Advocacy and Social Justice Unit. We call on civil society, the ECD sector, parents and others to back this initiative. Our future depends on it.

Article available at:

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2021-07-02-unlocking-change-in-early-childhood-development/>

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT TEACHERS TO MOVE TO BASIC EDUCATION DEPARTMENT FROM APRIL NEXT YEAR

~ Charma du Plessis

From next April, South Africa's early childhood development (ECD) sector will no longer be run by the department of social development, but by that of basic education.

On Wednesday, President Cyril Ramaphosa signed the long-awaited proclamation of the transfer of administration, powers

and functions of the early childhood development sector to the education portfolio. The transfer is set to happen on 1 April 2022.

However, this does not mean all early childhood development teachers will be part of the Covid-19 vaccination drive for educators just yet — most of them have still been left out of the plan for now. Only those who teach grades R to three will be vaccinated at this time; early childhood development teachers who work with younger children (birth to four years) are not part of the roll-out.

Many of the teachers are frustrated with this decision, because they come into contact with children daily, putting them at risk. Vaccinations for teachers and school support staff began on 23 June, with the department of health projecting that about one-million vaccines would be made available.

The decision not to vaccinate all early childhood development teachers makes no sense, in the opinion of Professor Eric Atmore from the Centre for Early Childhood Development.

"Around the country, every day, about 180 000 ECD teachers work with about 2.5-million children; and they are in direct contact each and every day," he said.

The move to the department of basic education would, however, allow early childhood development to be taken far more seriously than it had been to date, he added.

"Since [the Covid-19] lockdown started, and pre-lockdown, the department of social development has been missing in action. The department is uncaring, and has neglected our children, to their detriment," said Atmore.

The ECD's migration to basic education was announced in Ramaphosa's 2019 State of the Nation address, the main reason being to improve the development of children and the quality of early childhood education. The two departments have been working together to create relevant governance structures to ensure a smooth transition. Both have said there will be no interruptions in service delivery during the transition.

To allow the transfer, provisions from chapters five and six of the Children's Act of 2005, as they relate to early childhood development, have been identified.

According to a joint statement in March by the departments of basic education and social development, a proclamation to transfer the powers and functions of early childhood development to the minister of basic education, and one to transfer powers and functions to the relevant MECs of each province, have been made based on the recommendation of the Office of the Chief State Law Adviser.

Mmatsetshuweu Ruby Motaung, the director of training and



resources in early education for the National Early Childhood Alliance, told the Mail & Guardian on Thursday that those members of the early childhood development workforce who fall under basic education, have been included in the vaccine roll-out plan, whereas the early childhood development teachers who are still under the social development department have not.

As a result, only 40 000 of the 180 000 early childhood development teachers will be vaccinated.

“As if that’s not enough, the very same group that is provided for in the roll-out [work at institutions that have] been declared to close during level four [of the Covid-19 lockdown]. The education staff who received the vaccine are to get a two-week holiday. The ones that never qualified for the vaccine are going to continue working,” Motaung said.

“This implies a circle of vulnerability, as the teachers and children are the most vulnerable, and there is a dire need to keep centres open.”

Minister of Social Development Lindiwe Zulu is set to brief the media on Friday on the department’s response to the Covid-19 and the level four risk-adjusted strategy recently announced by Ramaphosa. She will also outline compliance measures and provide an update on early childhood development, old age homes, and community nutrition and development centres.

Article available at:

<https://mg.co.za/education/2021-07-01-early-childhood-development-teachers-to-move-to-basic-education-department-from-april-next-year/>

ECD RELIEF FUND APPLICATIONS REOPEN FOR A SECOND CHANCE

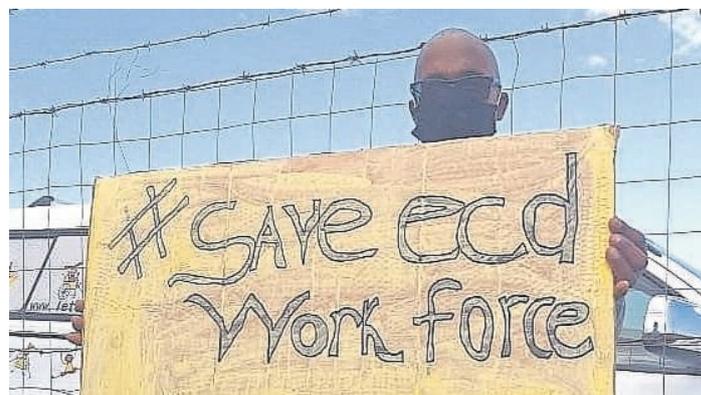
~ Nettalie Viljoen

Early childhood development (ECD) services that captured their details incorrectly during the first leg of applications to the Early Childhood Development Employment Stimulus Relief Fund (ECD-ESRF) have been given a second chance.

Speaking during a virtual media briefing on alert level four of the risk-adjusted strategy on Friday 2 July, the Minister of the Department of Social Development (DSD) Lindiwe Zulu announced that the system was opened again for all ECD services and practitioners who have received text messages to correct their information. “We appeal to them to do so as urgently as possible as this will not be open for a long period.

This will assist in fast-tracking all the outstanding applications and verification process to be run and payments accordingly done,” said Zulu.

Applications for ECD-ESRF closed on Friday 26 February. At the time, the DSD reported that 28 283 applications were received from ECD services for 126 125 employees. After validation of employees, the number reduced to 116 578. The deadline for payments was to be the end of March.



In a written reply to a parliamentary question, the department indicated that of the applications received by ECD centres, only 23 079 ECD employees have been paid despite the targeted amount for the ECD-ESRF being 108 833.

According to Alexandra Abrahams, Democratic Alliance (DA) shadow deputy Minister of Social Development, provinces such as KwaZulu-Natal are sitting on R91,242 million meant for ECD-ESRF with Northern Cape on R39,300 million, Free State on R38,880, North West on R28 million and Mpumalanga on R30,495 million.

Zulu said the DSD was aware that they did not complete payment through the stimulus package to all qualifying applicants at the end of March. “All provincial departments have applied for the rollover of funds as per the budget process. Let me take this opportunity to assure all qualifying ECD services that they will definitely receive their payments. Provincial Treasuries are seized with this matter and we expect payment to be made within the next few weeks upon receipt of the confirmation letters from provincial treasuries,” Zulu said.

Under the current alert level, all ECDs remain open and in full operation in compliance with all Covid-19 protocols and guidelines as previously provided to the sector. Zulu said provincial departments would continue to pay subsidy to ECD programmes.

ECD services can access their ECD-ESRF applications via the website www.ecd.gov.za.

Article available at:

<https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/local/peoples-post/ecd-relief-fund-applications-reopen-for-a-second-chance->