

We are fast approaching the end of the work year for 2021, and what a journey it has been. The country has been significantly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and we have bounced around at various lockdown levels. This has had an effect on the funding of non-profits. I have two Masters students that will be reporting early in the new year on their research on how Covid-19 has impacted on the non-profit world.

In the ECD sector, organisations have continued working, albeit in a different manner. Some of the more prominent ECD NPOs have increased programmes, and their funding, over lockdown but the majority have been negatively affected. An interesting study would be to explore which organisation factors and actions enabled ECD NPOs to increase funding over lockdown.

The year also saw continued ECD activism and social justice initiatives. Our Advocacy and Social Justice Unit was launched early in the year under the leadership of attorney Yusrah Ehrenreich. She has put together a team of attorneys and activists that are doing excellent work. We are getting through to decision-makers and are having an impact. The Western Cape Premier has hosted a two-day ECD initiative and we managed to get the four major political parties, and Cape Town Mayoral candidates, to put their plans for ECD on the record. We will now hold the newly elected Mayor of Cape Town to this.

We also began legal proceedings again against the Minister of Social Development (for the third time, having won the previous two cases) for her total incompetence and lack of care in spending less than 80% of the Presidents Stimulus Package and for having to send funds back to the National Treasury in March 2021, equating to hundreds of millions of rands. Fortunately, National Treasury allowed some of that funding to be rolled over but the danger now is that March 2022 is fast approaching and very little of the rollover has been spent. This lack of action is all in the face of huge poverty in the ECD sector and is significantly affecting desperate ECD workers.

A disappointment is that the ECD NPOs, almost all, have been silent on this as have the two so-called national ECD organisations. It is apparent that a large portion of the ECD sector is not being vocal on this matter. The ECD NPO sector has to be vocal and active – silence is not an option.

This is the final EARLY YEARS for 2021 and we wish all our colleagues a long, happy and safe holiday. May we all return to work in January 2022, energised and ready to put young children first. In 2022 we need to be active, fearless and not intimidated or captured by forces that do not respect the ECD sector and children.



ERIC ATMORE
Director

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONERS – IMPORTANT FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR SOCIETY AND YET OVERLOOKED

~ Khanyisa Mkhabele

We recently celebrated World Teachers' Day to commemorate the anniversary of the recommendation made in 1966 by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco), which sets benchmarks regarding the rights and responsibilities of teachers, from employment and recruitment to teaching and learning conditions.

Over the years, we have learned that teachers play a critical role in shaping a child's future, by providing them with a solid educational foundation and the encouragement they need to attain their future goals. While we continue to celebrate our heroes and heroines, we acknowledge that early learning plays a critical role in a child's development, as it deeply affects their future physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development.



Apart from the learning experience that children receive from their primary caregivers/parents, Early childhood development (ECD) facilities are a foundation phase for a child's development. According to a 2020 survey, South Africa's access to early learning centers has continued to increase over the years.

The survey also revealed that in 2018 about 70% of children up to the age of four years were attending ECD centers, and, as many as 3.8-million children aged up to six years old were enrolled in ECD programmes. Apart from ECD facilities providing a safe and nurturing environment for children, ECD facilities play a significant role in preparing a child to thrive in primary and higher education.

During the survey in October 2020, it was further revealed that many ECD facilities have been closed due to the Covid-

19 pandemic, limiting children's access to ECD programmes. To further understand why those centres were closed, the survey revealed that 48% of respondents said they could no longer afford to pay ECD fees primarily due to their socioeconomic status.



The high rates of dropout and non-payments have a direct implication on the ECD practitioners whose income is heavily reliant on parents/caregivers paying fees. For ECD programmes to improve and be sustainable, there is a need for wider and deeper public financing, along with an improvement on parents and caregiver socioeconomic status.

While the government shows some sort of commitment to assist the ECD sector, ECD practitioners continue to be sidelined or excluded. For instance, when the roll-out of Covid-19 vaccines was opened for front-line workers and teachers, ECD practitioners were excluded. Given the limited support the ECD sector receives, ECD programmes like Seriti's aRe Bapaleng are instrumental in helping communities meet the growing demand.

The aRe Bapaleng ECD programme provides caregivers and parents with the necessary knowledge, tools and resources to better play their role in their facilities and communities at large. While not specifically targeted at them, ECD practitioners, ECD assistants and day mothers have also benefited from the programme as they are not getting this kind of support elsewhere.

Since this programme's inception in 2020, over 100 ECD practitioners, ECD assistants and day mothers have been trained across Gauteng through active learning workshops. Each practitioner has undergone a free five-day training workshop where they are exposed to different activities that stimulate learning through play, such as book sharing and using Lego bricks to facilitate numeracy and literacy, to name but a few.

During these workshops, the programme participants share the challenges they face in this sector and the main challenge cited is poor support from government institutions. There is a lack of training and capacity-building programmes provided for ECD practitioners especially in vulnerable communities, where training is most needed to enable them to run their facilities

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effectively. Through the aRe Bapaleng programme, we at the Seriti Institute want to continue working with ECD practitioners as we understand the role they play in the education sector and communities at large.

Our objective in the medium to long term is to ensure that a stronger community caregiver ecosystem is in place resulting in an increased number of children having access to higher-quality ECD support. The key is that more disadvantaged children have greater access to high quality ECD support. Caregivers across the board are key in this respect, from parents to ECDPs and day mothers.

We believe that this will contribute towards realising the National Development Plan 2030 objectives as well as the overall goal of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 on quality education. Overall, our ECD practitioners and day mothers have found the programme to have played a significant role in their ECD centers. Through their participation in aRe Bapeleng they have learned new ways of fostering learning using fun activities, and they have also become more confident and organised in how they approach their time with their children.

However, one of their biggest challenges is getting parents to support ECD practitioners and day mothers and get more involved in their children's development. ECD practitioners and day mothers also call for more training around educational games, as well as dealing with issues such as trauma and hyperactivity.

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<https://mg.co.za/education/2021-11-09-early-childhood-development-practitioners-important-for-the-future-of-our-society-and-yet-overlooked>

THULI MADONSELA CALLS FOR AN IMPROVEMENT IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

~ Harvest Thwala

Equality in education for South Africa's youngest children will deliver true social justice in the future.

Professor Thuli Madonsela who serves as the Law Trust Chair in Social Justice at Stellenbosch University Law Faculty, believes that every South African child is entitled to a "fair start to life", through equal-quality Early Childhood Development (ECD) for children aged 0-6.



Currently, Prof Madonsela is leading the "Musa Plan for Social Justice" also known as the "Social Justice M-Plan". This is aimed at accelerating the advancement of social justice, focusing on zero poverty and equalising opportunities in South Africa by 2030, as envisaged by the National Development Plan.

According to Prof Madonsela, South Africa needs modern 21st century education relevant to the new global economy.

"With the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), the machines are doing all the routine things. And we must be the ones who are innovative. Therefore, now there's a mismatch between ourselves and our education," says Madonsela.

She said the current education system was specifically created for the 19th century, when industry needed people who didn't think.

"It just needed people who had to do as they were required and told, But the 4IR has significantly changed this 200-year-old educational approach."

Prof Madonsela is a patron of the Indaba Foundation, based in the Cape Winelands, which funds the training of women at the Indaba Institute training school outside Stellenbosch. This training enables women graduates to offer significantly higher-quality ECD to children in vulnerable communities. Other patrons include former Deputy President of South Africa, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, who has recently served as the executive director of UN Women, and UN expert Bience Gawanas.

Through the Indaba Foundation, Madonsela urges the government, the private sector and all South Africans to support quality ECD, "so that we can build a thriving nation".

"A comprehensive network of quality ECD centres, such as the Indaba Foundation is working to deliver, could transform the future for South Africa. It's all-hands-on-deck. We all need to become involved. When spider webs combine, they can tie up a lion," concludes Madonsela.



Andre Shearer, founder and chairperson of the Indaba Foundation, welcomed Prof Madonsela, saying that her participation was crucial.

“Our urgent investment in our women graduates, and in the children they care for in our communities, is far more than an ‘education’ issue. We are laying the foundation for a more socially just future. To have Prof Madonsela at the forefront of ECD advocacy is both an honour, and vital.

“Her call for social investment in our work will resonate with people around the world. As it should, because investment in the earliest years of our children’s lives - aged 0 to 6-years-old - is the greatest investment any society can make in its future,” said Shearer.

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EXPLORING PHOTOGRAPHY WITH A SMARTPHONE

~ Sukaina Ishmail

(A highlight from the Cape Town Museum of Childhood, a flagship project of the Centre for Early Childhood Development)

Five high school pupils have been learning how to see the world around them with a photographer’s eye and capture intriguing images using only their smartphones, thanks to a course they’ve been doing in Rondebosch.

Avuziwe Mini, Zin Zan Lamb, Ruth Jobling, Nieyaaz Petersen and Skyler Beets received certificates last Friday after completing the EduSnap Smartphone Photography Workshop, which started three years ago through a partnership between Rondebosch’s Cape Town Museum of Childhood and Orms Cape Town School of Photography.

EduSnap exposes photography to young people who might otherwise never get a chance to study it.

The five participants exhibited images, under the theme of “care”, at the Orms Cape Town School of Photography.

During five sessions at the Cape Town Museum of Childhood, they learnt about the camera features on their phones, exposure, lighting, editing and composition.

“We focused primarily on smartphone photography because it is more accessible to learners from all over,” said lecturer Lauren

Theunissen. “The learners’ photos and stories took place within their own spaces and communities. Also it’s best to learn photography in an area that is familiar to you.”

It had been beautiful to see how the pupils had interpreted the “care” theme in their work, she said.

“I saw that family, spending time with each other and feeling a sense of community and connection was important to them.”

Cape Town Museum of Childhood outreach manager Chanel Fredericks said the pupils, from different backgrounds, had been pulled together by a common interest, and the workshop might inspire them to further pursue that interest.

“The workshop helps the learners to be creative in their everyday life with their own cell phones,” she said.

“When I first heard of the workshop,” said Avuziwe, from Cape Town High School, “my thoughts were that it was just what I needed. I love taking pictures of nature, people and even myself. It has been such a pleasure to be a part of EduSnap because it taught me how to cherish every special moment and to show gratitude to ‘care’.”

Skyler, from Elsie River High school, said: “I photographed my family as a form of care. When we spend time together, we make memories and enjoy each others company. I love going places where we get to experience things together. My family shows love and care through spending time with one another.”

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<https://www.southernsuburbstatler.co.za/news/exploring-photography-with-a-smartphone>



‘Celebrating Life’ by Avuziwe Mini (#EduSnapper)