

“There is a saying: “Time waits for no man.” The gender bias aside, this statement is correct, not only in business but also in the non-profit sector.

We hear this all the time from our colleagues, from other NPOs, and from those leading organisations across South Africa. It is a fact that in the NPO world, in our enthusiasm and keenness to get the work done, we tend to take on more than we should. For many leaders in the sector, eight hours of work is half a day.

As we all know, time is finite – there are only 24 hours in each day, and we need breaks to think, relax and to re-energise. Without this we would succumb to overload, exhaustion and be of lesser value to our organisations. Eventually we will not be able to sustain this. So, what do we do?

First, we need to ask ourselves: “How are we spending our time?” Given that most of us are required to work 8 hours each day, we should do an analysis of what we spend our time on. For example, are we mindlessly, and out of habit, scrolling on social media (all formats) for lengthy periods of the day?

If we struggle with time management, here are some ways to be in control of our time (a scarce resource).

Start with a time audit - tracking and recording tasks and activities that we spend time on. Do we spend hours in un-productive meetings? The results will be very informative and interesting.

Once we have this record we can limit or eliminate time wasters. As NPO leaders we need to say “no” more often to unnecessary meetings, webinars, and seminars.

A productive approach is to block out time for necessary meetings, writing, and thinking.

It is critical that we prioritize our activities, with the most important activities being allocated the most time.

Another tactic is to allocate mornings for the most important tasks and activities, since we generally have most energy in the morning, we can focus and perform better.

Enjoy this edition of Early YEARS.

ERIC ATMORE

Director



RED TAPE, HUGE FINES, AND THREATS OF CLOSURE: THE FIGHT TO KEEP TWO CAPE TOWN ECD CENTRES OPEN

~ The Centre for Early Childhood Development

A new advocacy video released by CECD documents the real-life experiences of two ECD centre principals who faced criminal charges, administrative penalties, and development charges of around R3410,000 - simply for trying to operate legally and keep their doors open for the children in their care.

The video, 'Red Tape, Huge Fines, and Threats of Closure: The Fight to Keep Two Cape Town ECD Centres Open', is available via YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=tG_bnrGDVol&t=3s.



A Complex, Costly, and Slow Registration System

There are approximately 2,620 ECD centres in the City of Cape Town. At least 1,694 are not fully registered with the Western Cape Education Department - largely because the municipal compliance process is prohibitively complex, costly, and slow. Without full compliance, centres cannot access the government subsidy of R24 per child per day - a lifeline for those serving the city's most vulnerable communities.

"These clearances are incredibly difficult to get. They take very long. There are massive fees and charges attached, and it is a complicated process for ECD centre principals to navigate on their own," says Yusrah Ehrenreich, CECD's Advocacy and Social Justice Manager.

Two Principals. Two Impossible Situations.

Anne-Marie Nieuwenheyzen, who runs an ECD centre in Kuils River, was working her way through the process of registration, when she received a notice of closure. Knowing the children in her care had no where else to go - she kept her doors open and

decided to fight for what she believed in. Because of this she was criminally charged and had to appear before a magistrate multiple times. Her land-use application was denied - even after she sacrificed outdoor play space to accommodate six mandatory parking bays that no one needed. CECD appealed the decision on her behalf. The case was successful and Anne-Marie received her requisite land-use permission!

"Because of the help and support of the Centre for Early Childhood Development - I see light in the tunnel. I spread the news. I tell people there is help."

Michelle Wagner, who runs an ECD centre in Grassy Park, spent four and a half years trying to become compliant, only to be issued a an administrative penalty of R4000, and then a development charge of over R194,000 as a condition to the land use approval. CECD first managed to get it reduced it to R86,000 through an appeals process, then secured a full exemption.

"Being exempt from it just took a whole load off my shoulders."

From Individual Cases to Systemic Change

These cases led CECD to pursue structural reform. In December 2022, the City of Cape Town established a dedicated ECD Task Team, which sees the CECD team working with mayoral leadership, and local partners, to reduce the barriers to registration for ECD centres in the City. The task team is working through more than ten work streams targeting the specific barriers ECD centres face at each stage of the compliance process.

For a more in-depth exploration of this work, read CECD's Learning Brief: www.cecd.org.za/learning-brief-links or visit www.cecd.org.za to learn more.



Video available at:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=tG_bnrGDVol&t=3s

With thanks to the Barry Christianson, for the incredible video which captured our work so beautifully!



BREAKING THE COMPLIANCE DEADLOCK HOLDING BACK EARLY LEARNING CENTRES IN CAPE TOWN

~ Tamsin Metelerkamp

Over the past three years, the Centre for Early Childhood Development (CECD) and the City of Cape Town have partnered to remove municipal barriers that prevent ECD centres from achieving registration and accessing critical subsidies. Through a dedicated task team, the collaboration has already secured significant regulatory reforms, reduced compliance costs, and created more practical pathways for centres – particularly those serving vulnerable communities – to operate legally and sustainably.



Young learners play at Inkwenkwezi Educare in Nyanga, Cape Town, on 22 January 2026.
(Photo: Tamsin Metelerkamp)

Over the past three years, the Centre for Early Childhood Development and the City of Cape Town have been working together to tackle barriers to early childhood development (ECD) centre registration at a local government level. Their efforts are aimed at transforming the regulatory environment to be more enabling and responsive to the realities of early learning practitioners in communities, with a focus on land use as the first step in the municipal compliance process.

The centre first approached the City of Cape Town in 2022 after engagements with a range of ECD centres in the metro revealed common challenges in achieving municipal approvals needed for registration. This led to the establishment of a joint ECD task team in December of that year, led by Cape Town Mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis and Deputy Mayor Eddie Andrews.



Cape Town Mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis.
(Photo: Gianluigi Guercia / AFP)



Cape Town Deputy Mayor Eddie Andrews. (Photo: Suné Payne)

“It’s difficult for ECD centre principals to navigate the world of local government approvals and compliances. What we’re finding is because ECD centres are not able to comply with the municipalities, they cannot reach the relevant, appropriate level of registration, which is silver- or gold-level registration, to then access the [ECD] subsidy,” said Yusrah Ehrenreich, Centre for Early Childhood Development advocacy and social justice manager, at the launch of a learning brief on the organisation’s efforts to address local government barriers in May 2026.

“In response to this, the Centre for Early Childhood Development Advocacy and Social Justice Unit decided to launch a targeted initiative, starting with the City of Cape Town, to look at those key barriers in the regulations, finances and processes that are preventing centres from getting those compliances in place.”

Breaking down barriers

The ECD task team has drawn in government officials from the different departments that centres must interact with to achieve municipal approvals, and has reported on its progress to the mayor and deputy mayor every two to three months. The “social



partners” in the process have been the Centre for Early Childhood Development and the nonprofit organisation, Ikamva Labantu.

The team has been working with 14 early learning centres across formal and informal areas to trial proposed solutions to compliance challenges.

The key achievements of the ECD task team as of November 2025 included:

- **Halting notices to cease operating:** ECD centres without the correct land use were previously at risk of receiving cease operating and comply notices from the City, despite abrupt closures having serious implications for children and communities who were reliant on them. The City has indicated it will no longer issue these notices unless there are health and safety concerns at centres.
- **Expanding the City’s map of exempted areas:** The centre has co-developed an expanded map of exempted areas with the City of Cape Town to better identify vulnerable communities where targeted support for reaching municipal compliance is needed. This map currently supports at least 1,562 ECD centres attended by 58,043 children.
- **Attaining approved exemption from the administrative penalty:** The ECD task team has assisted centres facing penalty fees, ranging from R500 to R40,000, for operating without the necessary land use approval, or with unauthorised building work. The City has approved exemptions for centres operating in government-subsidised housing developments, informal townships or vulnerable communities.
- **Getting approved land use in specific zoning categories:** The City of Cape Town recently approved amendments to the Municipal Planning By-Law that allow ECD centres in specific zonings to operate without obtaining land use approval, providing certain conditions are met.
- **Advancing a regulatory system for ECD centres in informal settlements:** The City of Cape Town is working to create a regulatory framework that supports ECD centres in these communities, as the existing system provides no clear pathway for practitioners in informal areas to obtain land use approval.

The ECD task team has also flagged that development charges are often unaffordable for practitioners. These are once-off payments that must be made to the City to cover the cost of municipal engineering services aimed at addressing added demand on bulk infrastructure. According to the Centre for Early Childhood Development, the highest development charge it has seen was R1-million for an ECD centre serving 206 children in Khayelitsha.

Toddlers play at the Little Learners Crèche in Roodepoort, Gauteng, on 16 August 2023. (Photo: Felix Dlangamandla)

The task team is working to make the City’s development charge exemption, available to ECD centres since 2020, more accessible for facilities with 35 or more children.

“It’s really important to note at the outset that we are not done as an ECD task team. There is significant progress, but there’s a considerable amount of work that must take place, particularly for ECD centres informal areas,” said Ehrenreich.

A more enabling government

Andrews noted that many ECD centres had carried an “impossible burden” for too long.

“We don’t want [ECD practitioners] to suffer in silence because we know that you are expected to comply, but often face a system that is complex, expensive and difficult to navigate,” he said.

“When people suffer, it is of concern to us, because it’s not only about... [the] operator, it is about the children. It is about the working parent, but most importantly, it is about the community... So from the City’s side... our message is simple: we want to become a more enabling government.”



Michelle Wagner, founder of Legos Daycare in Grassy Park, Cape Town. (Photo: Supplied / Michelle Wagner)



EARLY YEARS

Michelle Wagner, founder of Legos Daycare in Grassy Park, is one of the practitioners the centre assisted with achieving municipal compliance. She first started her centre 25 years ago, and over the next few years completed the complex process of registering it with the Department of Social Development (before the ECD function migrated to the Department of Basic Education in 2022).

However, in 2018 she encountered land use hurdles when attempting to increase the number of children her centre could accommodate. After asking the City of Cape Town send a building inspector to look at her property, she was told that she had unauthorised building work on the land and needed to appear in court.

Over the next year, she was required to pay a R4,000 administrative penalty, as well as R15,000 to obtain a traffic impact statement from a consulting engineer. After securing an approved building plan and presenting it in court, she was charged an additional penalty of R2,700.

When Wagner finally secured permission to take on more children, she was informed by the City that she would need to pay a development charge of R146,000. Shortly afterwards, the Covid-19 lockdowns came into effect, and her centre was forced to close.

Throughout 2020, she continued to receive notices that the development charge was increasing due to her failure to meet the deadline for payment. By October of that year, it stood at R194,000.

"During that time, in early 2021, I was at my wits end, really demotivated, having to fight and come back from Covid to reopen my centre and keep it open," she told Daily Maverick, adding that she went from looking after 80 children before the pandemic to nine when she reopened.

"Obviously, you could understand not just the frustration but the uncertainty, and at that time I was just so tired."

Lifting a heavy load

Having exhausted all her savings, Wagner approached the Centre for Early Childhood Development for assistance. She noted that speaking with the team at the nonprofit was the first time she felt truly seen and heard.

With the centre acting as a mediator between Wagner's centre and the City, she was first issued with a reduced development charge, and then exempted from making the payment entirely.

The centre's work with the City of Cape Town had streamlined the municipal compliance process for early learning centres, said Wagner.

"I know I speak on behalf of my colleagues and fellow principals [when I say] it is helping us lift such a heavy load. Because none of us want to operate illegally. I don't think anybody opens up a daycare centre saying, 'I'm not going to pay any attention to the laws of the land.' But streamline it, simplify it, don't make it so complicated," she said.



Anne-Marie Nieuwenheizen, founder of an ECD centre in Blue Downs, Cape Town. (Photo: Supplied / Anne-Marie Nieuwenheizen)

Her sentiments were echoed by Anne-Marie Nieuwenheizen, founder of an ECD centre in Blue Downs, who also encountered challenges in securing land use approval for her centre in 2019. Despite receiving notices from the City to cease operating, she continued running her centre as it was needed by the local community. This resulted in criminal charges being levelled against her.

With the assistance of the centre, Nieuwenheizen won an appeal to keep her centre open. When the City issued her with a R146,000 development charge, payable within three months, the nonprofit organisation helped her to secure an exemption.

"If it was not for the Centre for Early Childhood Development... I would have been out of business, out of doing what I love to do," said Nieuwenheizen.

Between 2022 and May 2026, the centre had assisted various centres with the removal of charges and penalties amounting to more than R1.8-million.

Article first published and is available at:
www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2026-06-10-breaking-the-compliance-deadlock-holding-back-early-learning-centres-in-cape-town/

