

“Organisations in the non-profit ECD sector all wish to achieve great success, do the correct thing and do it well. But success is often not defined, described or enabled. Some organisations simply ignore the basics of achieving success. While success is never guaranteed and can often be difficult to achieve, there are actions that will increase the likelihood of success for an organisation, a team, a company or an individual. Here are some suggestions.

In striving for success, it is important to build and develop an organisation brand and identity that describes the organisation, what it does, why it does what it does, its value proposition and what it intends to achieve.

Building a supportive network of skilled colleagues, ‘the team’, is critical since no one individual can build an organisation alone; we are always assisted in some way by others. The success of the Centre for Early Childhood Development is built by every one of our 26 staff. If we analyse the very successful Springbok rugby team, we see that it is not only the 15 players on the field on game day who produce the success. The coach, the medical personnel, the substitutes (what Rassie Erasmus calls his bomb squad) and the “water boy”, all contribute to team success.

To be successful one needs to keep reading and learning. Not a day should go by when organisation leaders and staff do not read and learn.

As organisations, we also need to speak out and advocate for our specific sectors if we wish to succeed.

We hope you enjoy reading this edition of EARLY YEARS and may your organisation achieve huge success in the years ahead.



ERIC ATMORE

Director

58,000 CAPE TOWN CHILDREN CAUGHT IN A COMPLIANCE TRAP - HOW ONE ADVOCACY INITIATIVE IS ALREADY CHANGING THAT

~ The Centre for Early Childhood Development

The Centre for Early Childhood Development (CECD) has launched a Learning Brief which shares lessons from their targeted advocacy campaign to address local government barriers for early childhood development (ECD) centres and offers practical guidance to scale reforms nationwide.

The Advocacy and Social Justice Unit of the Cape Town based non-profit organisation, CECD, has been calling to address local government barriers for ECD centres. In December 2022, their targeted initiative began with a pilot in the City of Cape Town - to challenge and transform the local regulatory environment in which ECD centres run, so that it is more enabling, equitable, and responsive to the realities of ECD centres on the ground.

On Thursday, 14 May 2026, CECD launched their Learning Brief, 'An Advocacy Call: Addressing Local Government Barriers for ECD Centres'. The brief captures key insights, shares critical lessons and strategies, and offers reflections on and recommendations for the ongoing journey to build a more just and inclusive ECD landscape in South Africa.



CECD's Advocacy and Social Justice Manager, Yusrah Ehrenreich, delivering the main presentation at the Learning Brief launch event.

What is the reality for ECD centres in South Africa?

A principal opens an ECD centre in her home because children in her community need care. She has 66 children, six staff members, and years of service behind her. Then she receives a

notice: comply within two months, or face a fine of R800,000, imprisonment of up to 20 years, or both.

Her crime? Not getting land use approval from the municipality - a process so complicated, expensive and lengthy that the vast majority of Cape Town's ECD centres haven't been able to complete it.

This is part of the system that Yusrah Ehrenreich and her team have spent years working to change. This system keeps ECD centres unable to meet municipal compliances, unable to fully register, and unable to receive the government ECD subsidy: a compliance trap.



CECD's Advocacy and Social Justice Manager, Yusrah Ehrenreich (LEFT) with CECD's Deputy Director, Jessica Blom (RIGHT).

"Right now, we have a Department of Basic Education that has funds, but the funds are not flowing to the children," said Ehrenreich at the launch event. "And that is an indictment on children's rights. We cannot have funds available, that then do not go to provide children with nutrition, that do not go to our ECD workers' salaries, because systems are put in place that prevent the funds from flowing - the very systems that adults create. And we are here to say that we create systems, and so we can change systems."

To access the government ECD subsidy, centres must reach silver- or gold-level registration through the Bana Pele ECD Registration Drive (or Mass Registration Drive) - but the biggest barrier to achieving this is municipal compliance. In Cape Town alone, at least 1,694 of some 2,620 ECD centres are not fully registered, leaving approximately 58,000 young children in environments that cannot be guaranteed as safe and who are unable to access nutrition through the ECD subsidy.



From individual cases to systemic reform

The Learning Brief outlines the groundwork of CECD's advocacy campaign, from community engagement through visiting ECD forums and taking on walk-in cases, to systemic reform by approaching the Mayor and establishing an ECD Task Team led by Cape Town's Executive Mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis. "The task team structure and our strategy have made all the difference," said Ehrenreich. "That really pushes accountability, it pushes progress, it gives urgency."



CECD's Yusrah Ehrenreich (CENTRE) with the principals involved in the unit's first walk-in cases, namely Anne-Marie Nieuwenhuyzen and her husband Rodney (LEFT), and Michelle Wagner and her husband Vernon (RIGHT).

What has been achieved

Since 2022, CECD has directly assisted centres in removing charges and penalties amounting to over R1.8 million. Through the ECD Task Team, the impact is even greater. CECD's advocacy initiative has produced concrete, lasting reforms embedded within the City's by-laws and systems. Among these are: a halting of closure notices; expanding the City's map of exempted areas and approving an exemption from the administrative penalty accordingly; amendments to the Municipal Planning By-law, allowing centres in specific zones to operate without needing land use approval (provided conditions are met); amending the development charge exemption criteria and process; and developing pathways for a just regulatory system for centres in informal settlements.

For Ehrenreich, changing people's mindsets within the City has been the biggest difference made by the advocacy call: "We have actually shifted how people think about young children. And that is the game changer."

The City's commitment

Deputy Mayor Eddie Andrews, who previously ran an ECD centre with his wife, attended and addressed the launch and confirmed the City's ongoing commitment. "ECD is one of those areas of public life where the stakes are incredibly high, but the work is deeply practical. It is about a child having a safe place to learn. It is about the practitioner being able to operate with dignity. It is about a parent knowing that when they leave the child in someone else's care, that the child is protected, that the child is stimulated, but most importantly that the child is loved."

Andrews was frank about the burden that has fallen on the sector: "Many of the ECD centres have carried an impossible burden for too long. We know that you are expected to comply, but often face a system that is complex, expensive and difficult to navigate. We don't want you to suffer in silence."

He described the City's direction clearly: "We want to become a more enabling government... (one that) understands that regulation must be accompanied by guidance, compliance must be accompanied by support, and policy must be shaped by what is actually happening on the ground."

Andrews closed with a reminder of what is ultimately at stake: "Behind every regulation, every application, every single checklist, every policy process - there is a child. That child does not understand municipal planning. That child does not understand intergovernmental mandates. That child does not understand why adults cannot get the system to work. The child simply needs us as a collective to get it right."



City of Cape Town's Deputy Mayor, Eddie Andrews (LEFT), CECD's Yusrah Ehrenreich (CENTRE), and CECD's Infrastructure Manager, Sarah Atmore (RIGHT).

A model for municipalities across South Africa

The Learning Brief presents a real opportunity for all spheres of government and political leadership in offering practical guidance and tools to replicate, scale and transfer these successes across other municipalities. Indeed, this advocacy call



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has national relevance, however, with 257 municipalities across South Africa, each with their own contexts, Ehrenreich emphasises the importance of being context specific. Ehrenreich recommends a combined approach with context-specific local reform, identification of cross-municipality trends, and technical expertise.



Ikamva Labantu's Mildred Bopoto, CECD's Amanda Mbali and Sarah Atmore, Deputy Mayor Eddie Andrews, CECD's Yusrah Ehrenreich, City of Cape Town's Charles Rudman, and CECD's Eric Atmore.

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Closing call

Ehrenreich's presentation closed with this call: "This work is urgent. And it cannot wait. Children are born with rights, and we create systems that undermine their rights. And that needs to change."



You can access the Learning Brief and online resources here:
www.cecd.org.za/learning-brief-links

RURAL KURUMAN PRESCHOOL TRANSFORMED THROUGH MAJOR ECD PARTNERSHIP

~ Morgan Morgan

A crumbling preschool built from rusted corrugated iron and overcrowded classrooms in the Northern Cape is being transformed into a brand-new centre of hope for dozens of young children in one of the province's rural communities.



The preschoolers, teachers and NPO partners of Reaiteka Pre-School in Maruping Village near Kuruman stand in front of the old corrugated iron classrooms that will be repurposed as an arts and play area as the children move into a new, safe brick-and-mortar school building made possible through the support of four organisations.

In Maruping Village, about 15km from Kuruman, the Reaiteka Pre-School is undergoing a dramatic makeover through a partnership between the Santa Shoebox Project Legacy programme, the Centre for Early Childhood Development (CECD), Breadline Africa and Kathu Solar Park.

The project will provide a new brick-and-mortar Early Childhood Development (ECD) centre for some of the area's most vulnerable children, replacing unsafe and unsuitable learning conditions that had become a daily reality for pupils and teachers alike

Ground was broken earlier this month and construction is already progressing rapidly, with the official handover to the Maruping community, represented by Chief Kagiso Seupi, expected in July.

From tin shacks to a proper school

Until recently, 64 children between the ages of three and five were being taught in overcrowded facilities, including a rusted corrugated iron structure that became unbearably hot during summer and bitterly cold in winter.



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While some learners were accommodated in two prefabricated classrooms funded through the Kathu ECD Project, another group of children still attended classes in the deteriorating shack structure. A toilet block replacing pit latrines was funded in 2024, but much more support was needed.

Now, through an additional R900,000 investment, the school community will soon have access to improved classrooms and learning spaces designed to create a safer, more stimulating environment during the critical early years of childhood development.

"This project is ultimately about restoring dignity, creating opportunity and investing in the future of children who deserve every possible chance to thrive," said Deb Zelezniak, CEO of the Santa Shoebox Project (SSP).

Reaiteka principal Vivian Kilelo said the centre currently supports 64 learners with the help of three teachers, three teaching assistants, two kitchen workers and a gardener.

"The upgraded ECD centre will make a huge difference because we can now separate the children by age group and teach them in a safe, proper classroom instead of a shack. This means better learning conditions, a more structured learning environment, and more space for each child," said Kilelo.



Ground was broken on May 4 for the new Reaiteka Early Childhood Development centre in Maruping Village near Kuruman. The project is expected to be completed in July and will provide safer, improved learning spaces for young children in the rural community.

A partnership built on 'ubuntu'

Project leaders said the transformation of the preschool highlights what can happen when organisations pool resources and expertise to support rural communities.

According to Zelezniak, the Reaiteka project marks the first collaboration between SSP Legacy, CECD, Breadline Africa and the Kathu ECD Project, which is supported by Kathu Solar Park.

Sarah Atmore, ECD infrastructure project manager at CECD, said the centre's staff had continued to support young children despite difficult conditions.

"This team has always gone above and beyond to offer young children in their community the best quality start in life, despite tough circumstances," she said.

Warren Povey, head of strategic partnerships at Breadline Africa, described the project as proof that "ubuntu is alive and well in South Africa".

"It's just special to be involved in this project for the long-term with other committed partners," he said.

Atmore added that the organisations involved were "people who get things done".



Maruping Village, about 15km from Kuruman, is set to receive a brand-new brick-and-mortar building at the Reaiteka Early Childhood Development centre through a partnership between the Santa Shoebox Project, the Centre for Early Childhood Development, Breadline Africa and Kathu Solar Park.

More than just bricks and mortar

The project extends beyond simply constructing classrooms. Existing corrugated iron structures will now be repurposed into an indoor-outdoor activity space for art, water play and other learning activities.

"One of the best things about this project is that the facilities serve multiple purposes, and it's a space that the staff can be proud of," said Atmore.

The Reaiteka Pre-School is also one of 27 ECD centres participating in the Kathu ECD Project, where teachers and



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school leadership receive professional development support through CECD and Africa A+ Schools.

Support includes training in teaching and learning strategies, leadership and governance assistance, first aid training, educational resources and help with Department of Basic Education registration processes. The school has already achieved conditional registration status.

Sandisiwe Mntonintshi, SED manager at Kathu Solar Park, said investing in ECD programmes was ultimately an investment in the future of local communities.

“We are proud to support ECD initiatives, as investing in young children is investing in the future of our communities. This financial assistance reflects our commitment to improving access to quality early learning opportunities, strengthening educational foundations, and creating an environment where every child has the opportunity to thrive. We aim to make a meaningful and lasting impact on the lives of children, families, and communities,” she said.

Atmore said the dedication shown by staff had made the project even more meaningful.

“The staff have taken every opportunity to improve their skills, to improve what they're able to offer to the children, and so it's special to create a far safer and a far more conducive environment for early childhood development,” she said.

‘A turning point’ for Maruping

For Kilelo and the wider community, the new school represents far more than upgraded classrooms.

“Before, we were teaching in a shack with limited space and resources. The main challenges were overcrowding, lack of proper facilities, and difficulty separating the children by age. It made it hard to give each child the attention they needed,” she said.

“We thank our partners for their support. We truly appreciate the work you do for our children... giving them a chance to learn in a proper environment.”

The project also forms part of the broader SSP Legacy mission to improve ECD centres in vulnerable communities across South Africa. While the Santa Shoebox Project is best known for delivering personalised festive gift boxes to children, its Legacy programme also funds school upgrades, teacher training initiatives and reading corners nationwide.

According to the organisation, more than 180,000 children have been reached through SSP Legacy initiatives over the years, with Reaiteka becoming the eighth school construction project completed since 2006.

The importance of quality early childhood development has also been highlighted in several recent international studies. UNICEF, UNESCO and academic research institutions have all pointed to the critical role early learning plays in children’s cognitive development, educational achievement and long-term well-being.

For the children of Maruping, however, the impact is already becoming visible – not in reports or statistics, but in the walls of a new school slowly rising where a rusted shack once stood.



Article first published and is available at:
www.dfa.co.za/news/2026-05-19-rural-kuruman-preschool-transformed-through-major-eecd-partnership/

