

“Having a mentor plays a significant role in developing leadership talent and supporting organisations in the good work that they do. Most of us have had a mentor at some stage of our careers, even if we may not have recognised it as such. For most of us our first mentors were our mothers and fathers who guided us in the early years of our lives.

In the work environment mentors are critically important, no matter how qualified, skilled or experienced we may be. I have had a few mentors over the years. Today after a four-decade career, I still have individuals who I go to for advice and guidance. These include Professor Jonathan Jansen, Professor Nuraan Davids, my Centre for Early Childhood Development colleagues, Roz Wibooi and Jessica Blom, amongst others. At times my two eldest daughters Elizabeth and Sarah mentor me.

In a recent article, Margaret Harris writes that: “Finding a mentor can be a long and difficult process, with plenty of pitfalls. She quotes Zanele Sithole, chief legal counsel at Mondelez International as saying: “A mentor should not be chosen just because they look like you or share your background. Those connections can be powerful, but mentorship should stretch us, sharpen our judgement, widen our perspective and prepare us to act with greater confidence”. Zanele advises that mentorship is “...more than a relationship in which two people exchange stories about their struggles or bemoan workplace unfairness”. She suggests that in looking for a mentor, we “find someone who will help us prepare for opportunities, improve our skills and overcome the things that we may be avoiding because they make us uncomfortable”.

She further suggests, "Don't search for one perfect mentor," saying, "The real value lies in building a network of people who can challenge, guide and support us as our career evolves."

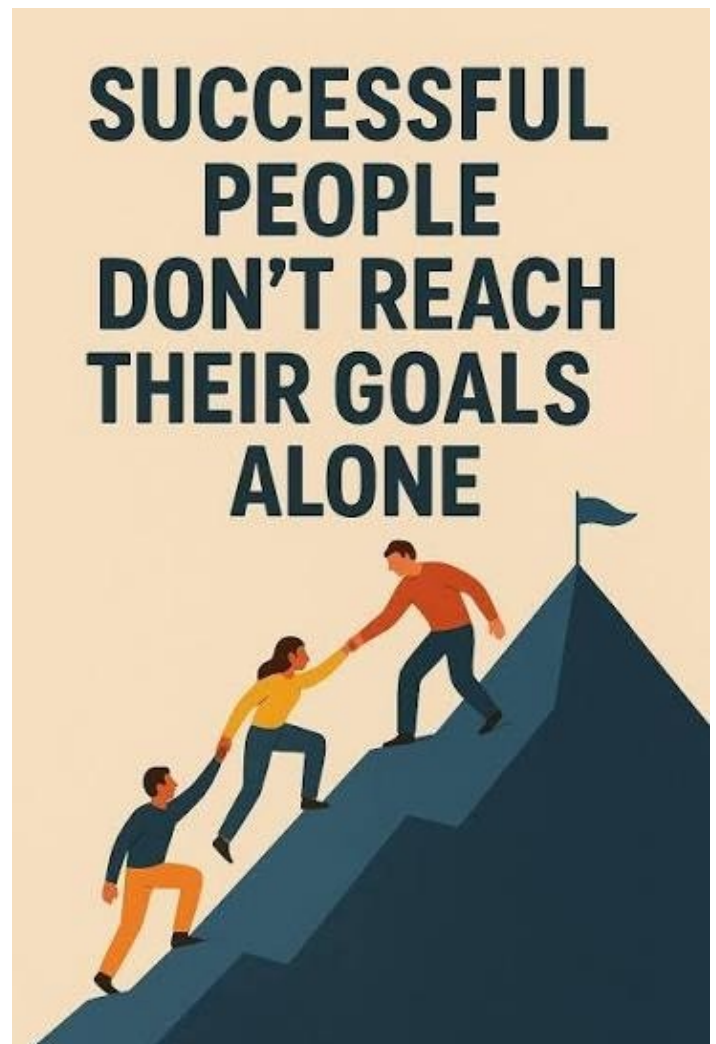
Lastly, she writes, “Good mentors ask difficult questions, give helpful feedback and help their mentees think more deliberately about their choices.”

No matter how skilled or how qualified one is, or how old one is, having a mentor (or two) will certainly help us in our work.

Enjoy reading this addition of EARLY YEARS.

ERIC ATMORE

Director



YUSRAH EHRENREICH CHAMPIONS CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

~ Wesley Ford



Yusrah Ehrenreich is championing the rights of young children as the Advocacy and Social Justice Manager at the Centre for Early Childhood Development (CECD), where she works to strengthen advocacy and government accountability in South Africa's early childhood development (ECD) sector.

As part of Cape Community Media's Women's Month campaign, Ehrenreich is being recognised for dedicating her career to ensuring that children, ECD practitioners and communities have a stronger voice, while holding the government accountable for creating an environment in which quality early childhood development can thrive.

Ehrenreich joined the Claremont-based CECD in 2020 after being recruited by the organisation's director, Professor Eric Atmore, following her community service work supporting the organisation.

Originally from Lansdowne, she holds a Bachelor of Social Science degree majoring in politics and economics and a postgraduate law degree from the University of Cape Town.

Ehrenreich's role as the Advocacy and Social Justice Manager

In her current role, Ehrenreich focuses on increasing public and government engagement and awareness around ECD rights, challenges and the realities experienced by practitioners and children on the ground.

"Our work includes raising awareness about ECD rights, ECD needs and the issues experienced by the sector," she said.

A significant part of her work involves engaging with government departments, policymakers and political leadership.

"We focus on the government because they are the decision-makers who create the regulatory environment in which the ECD sector operates. They draft and approve laws, policies and processes with which the ECD sector must comply. It is important to hold them accountable, work alongside them and ensure they understand the needs of the sector so that their decisions benefit ECD communities," she said.

Beyond direct government engagement, Ehrenreich also leads reactive advocacy efforts when urgent issues arise.

"That can involve awareness campaigns, sharing information on social media, lobbying the government, policy work, organising protests or writing open letters. Advocacy takes many forms depending on the issue, available resources, political context, urgency and risk involved for the people it represents," she said.

Her passion for education and public service began at a young age.

"As a child, I wanted to become the president of South Africa, and if not, then the Minister of Basic Education," she said.

After completing her Social Science degree, her father encouraged her to study law.

"He told me that if I wanted to enter politics, I needed to understand the laws of our country."

After earning her law degree, Ehrenreich completed her articles and practised as an attorney at Cliffe Dekker Hofmeyr, gaining experience in corporate and commercial law, as well as constitutional and administrative law, and public law litigation.

Although she enjoyed practising law, her long-term goal was always to work in education.

"I have always understood the importance of education and the opportunities it creates," she said.



EARLY YEARS

Reflecting on her experience at the CECD

When Atmore approached her about joining the CECD, she quickly realised the vital role early childhood development plays before children enter formal schooling.

"The drawcard for me was working with a grassroots organisation that is deeply rooted in communities and truly understands the experiences of the ECD sector," she said.

She joined the organisation during the Covid-19 pandemic, when several ECD advocacy organisations successfully challenged government in court to reopen early childhood development centres that had been closed during lockdown.

According to Ehrenreich, Atmore believed those legal victories demonstrated how litigation and law could bring meaningful change for young children and the sector.

Today, she is proud to be part of an organisation that has spent more than three decades advocating for the rights of children and ECD workers.

"I am honoured that the ECD sector trusts me to use the skills I have to improve the lives of other people. It is truly a privilege to be able to do this work," she said.

Atmore praised Ehrenreich's contribution to the organisation and the sector.

"I knew that the ECD sector would not advance children's rights without strong advocacy. Yusrah, as a lawyer, was appointed to lead our advocacy team, and she has made a massive difference to early childhood development across the country," he said.

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www.southernsuburbstatler.co.za/news/2026-08-04-yusrah-ehrenreich-champions-childrens-rights-in-south-africa/

SIVIWE GWARUBE TARGETS SEVEN MILLION CHILDREN IN STRUCTURED ECD PROGRAMMES BY 2030

~ Tamsin Metelerkamp

South Africa's Basic Education Minister, Siviwe Gwarube, is targeting seven million children in structured early learning

programmes by 2030, framing early childhood development as vital to fixing literacy and boosting GDP. Through the Bana Pele registration drive, expanded subsidy access and targeted nutrition initiatives, she aims to eliminate red tape and bridge the country's stark inequality gap from the ground up.



Since being sworn into office as South Africa's Minister of Basic Education in 2024, Siviwe Gwarube has consistently advocated for urgent and sustained investment in early childhood development (ECD), framing quality learning in the early years as a critical mechanism for fixing the national literacy and numeracy crisis.

In November 2025, Minister in the Presidency Khumbudzo Ntshavheni announced the approval of the National Strategy to Accelerate Action for Children, a framework that aims to intensify efforts to advance the welfare and development of South Africa's children.

In May 2026, Gwarube said that more than 13,300 ECD centres had been registered in the past year, and that upward of 1.2 million children were accessing registered early learning programmes across the country.

However, sitting down with Daily Maverick to discuss her vision for the ECD sector, Gwarube was not afraid to acknowledge that there was still significant work to be done.

"We are able to see the direct correlation between children who have access to [the ECD] subsidy, who are on the Child Support Grant, and education outcomes... I think the ECD team is incredible and they do really great work, but we've got to push ourselves harder and harder. Remember, the target is



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seven million children in structured ECD centres by 2030,” she said.

Referencing the Department of Basic Education’s (DBE) Bana Pele ECD Mass Registration Drive, launched in 2024, she noted that focus had shifted from getting centres registered at bronze level, to elevating programmes to silver and gold level, where they could access the ECD subsidy of R24 per child per day.

Expanding ECD subsidy access

In 2025, the National Treasury allocated an additional R10-billion to the Department of Basic Education over the medium term to increase the subsidy to R24, and support expanded access to ECD for about 700,000 more children under five.

“The R10-billion that has been allocated over the medium term is going to hinge on whether or not we are able to spend that money, and spend it effectively. So, that has to be the obsession,” said Gwarube. “We never want to demonstrate to National Treasury that we are unable to spend that money.”

Gwarube, who was born and raised in KwaMdingi, a village near Qonce (formerly King William’s Town) in the Eastern Cape, reflected on how her own childhood experiences had shaped her passion for the development of the early learning sector.

“I was raised by a woman who was a teacher in a village, and I can understand that having children go to a structured centre is far more important than we would have really given it credit for... Now, we are saying it’s important that our ECD centres are structured places where children can come learn, play, but also [have assurance] that they are looked after and that they are safe,” she said.

Reducing barriers to registration

So, how is the DBE centring subsidy access for ECD centres?

Gwarube chairs the Inter-Ministerial Committee on ECD, a task team that brings together various departments, including the Department of Basic Education, Department of Home Affairs, Department of Social Development and Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Cogta), to “break down silos” between agencies in the development of early learning.

Through collaboration with Cogta Minister Velenkosini Hlabisa, and various metros, the Department of Basic Education was attempting to make it easier for ECD centres to comply with bylaws and zoning requirements, said Gwarube.

“We can’t allow red tape to be the barrier to people being able to comply and do what they need to do,” she emphasised.

The Department of Basic Education has been pushing specific targets for government partners on the committee, including getting the births of more children in early learning programmes registered through home affairs, and expanding access to the Child Support Grant through the Department of Social Development.

“Government services have to serve people, and not the other way around. And often in SA, to access a government service is so arduous, and we have to make sure that we don’t do that,” continued Gwarube.



Combatting stunting and malnutrition

A Department of Basic Education tender for the appointment of a service provider to implement an ECD Nutrition Support Programme for a period of three years was published in March 2026, and remains open on the department’s website with a closing date of 11 September 2026. The National Treasury first allocated R197-million for the project in 2024/25, scaling the allocation to R772-million over the medium term in 2026/27.

Asked about the implementation of the programme, Gwarube said: “We’re going to be piloting that... nutrition programme in the Eastern Cape, because of course we know that the Eastern Cape is acutely affected by child malnutrition and child stunting.

“I do want to make it quite clear that I think it’s an absolute indictment on us as leaders in this country to have children who go hungry... I think, frankly, it’s a crime. SA is not a poor country. That there are children who’ve lost their lives because they couldn’t access food is something that we all, as leaders, need to take stock of and pause.”



EARLY YEARS

Beyond the rollout of the pilot nutrition programme in the Eastern Cape, Gwarube said that Department of Basic Education was looking to collaborate with corporate and civil society partners in the nutrition space to identify and address hunger hotspots in areas across the country.

“Once a child is stunted, it is irreversible, and that is why it is so incredibly heartbreaking for me, because that child’s prospects of success in life diminish significantly,” said Gwarube.

“If we don’t get this right, every single thing that we do from here onwards is not going to matter, and we’re still going to have this incredible divide of those who have, and those who have not. The only time we will ever start closing that inequality [gap] is if it doesn’t matter whether you grew up in Qwa Qwa or in Sandton.”



Closing the inequality gap

Gwarube is of the view that basic education is more of an economic portfolio than a social one, arguing that any country that is serious about addressing inequality needs to prioritise education. She referenced the findings of the Department of Basic Education’s South African Systemic Evaluation that many children who were in Grade 3 were actually at a Grade 1 level, in terms of literacy and numeracy.

“That, for me, is the crisis of our time because it’s not about... how many matriculants take up maths and science. It’s about the fact that we’ve allowed learning losses to take root... If you say you want to really undo inequality in SA, you have to fix that,” Gwarube told Daily Maverick.

South Africa’s ECD sector is a largely entrepreneurial space, according to Gwarube, led by women in local communities who have identified gaps in the market. The Department of Basic

Education is not looking to “schoolify” centres, but rather empower and upskill practitioners when it comes to qualifications and training, and ensure better infrastructure for young learners.

“Economists around the world have often remarked that when we invest in the foundations of learning, we could literally grow our GDP by 2%. So, this is not a peripheral issue, a social issue about saying, ‘Oh, the children are cute.’ They are cute, but it’s literally about building a country,” she said.

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www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2026-08-19-siviwe-gwarube-targets-7-million-children-in-structured-eed-programmes-by-2030