



#DoMore4Pongola Newsletter

"CREATING A PLACE WHERE YOUNG CHILDREN CAN FLOURISH"

MAY 2023



MESSAGE FROM LYNN STEFANO (PROJECT LEAD)

It is always a pleasure to update you on our work to improve the lives of young children in uPhongolo, & especially so when there are important developments underway. In this newsletter we share the DO MORE FOUNDATION's model for delivering a broad basket of services to young children in areas across South Africa where RCL FOODS operates. This approach aims to support not only individual ECD centres, but to bring about change that will improve the whole system in which young children live, learn, and grow.

Some of our highlights this month include: our work with the Real Reform for Early Childhood Development (RR4ECD) initiative which engages municipal structures to include young children's rights and needs in the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) Review processes; distribution of safety equipment to ECD centres to support their efforts to become fully registered with the Department of Education and receive government's subsidy for their children; and various workshops to upskill ECD practitioners to improve the teaching and learning of young children.

In April we started our annual visits to all ECD centres to update our database. The data we collect helps us identify where infrastructure, training, and qualification needs are to meet ECD registration requirements. We are on a big drive to get as many ECD centres fully registered as we can by the middle of 2023 - we'll share more on this work in our next newsletter.

A big thank you to the generous donors who contribute towards our work.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

Over the past six years, the DO MORE FOUNDATION (DMF) and its partners have been working together to promote universal access to a comprehensive basket of quality services to meet young children’s developmental rights and needs in the area, in line with the National Integrated ECD Policy. The team is continuously working to deliver a broad basket of services to the young children of uPhongolo- this basket includes:



 Capacity building + leadership development

REAL REFORM FOR ECDS IN UPHONGOLO

The Real Reform for Early Childhood Development (RR4ECD) is a national movement advocating for holistic, well-funded, inclusive, and quality early childhood development services for all children. Their focus is on ensuring and enabling legal, policy, and regulatory environment for the provision and expansion of ECD services. Tshepo Mantjé, RR4ECD’s ECD Coordinator, visited our implementing partner Lulamaphiko in uPhongolo in February 2023 to raise awareness amongst key stakeholders in the ECD sector in uPhongolo around the need to include early childhood development in the municipality’s Integrated Development Plan (IDP). The IDP is a critical tool for municipalities to ensure the effective delivery of services to communities.



We held three meetings with stakeholders:

- We met with the Operation Sukuma Sakhe team under the leadership of Mr Themba Masondo, and the IDP Manager Mr Sibusiso Mthethwa. This was a very productive meeting where we agreed to work with municipal officials to share information about the ECD landscape in uPhongolo and get inputs from ECD programme principals for the municipality to consider during the IDP Review 2023 process.

ECD Forum members attended information sessions with Tshepo in Godlwayo and Thusong. These were lively events where principals and practitioners were introduced to the RR4ECD initiative, and information was shared about how to make submissions to the municipality. The participants raised many issues that prohibit the delivery of quality services to young children in the wards they work in. It was especially pleasing to have seven indunas attend these meetings and give valuable input into the proceedings, and we look forward to working more closely with them in the future.

YOUNG CHILD FORUMS CONTINUE TO INSPIRE

These monthly gatherings which are open to all 99 ECD centres on our database continue to provide space for engaging in discussions and learning on interesting and stimulating topics pertaining to early childhood development. About 80 principals and practitioners attend these forum meetings. Since our last report, we have hosted the following speakers and events:

- The Health Systems Trust's Nomcebo Mthembu presented on HIV and young children.
- Pongola Municipal Library's Buhle Radebe encouraged ECD practitioners to visit the library and make better use of the services they have on offer.
- Scilla Edmonds of Birches Pre-Primary in Ethekekwini visited for three days to present on making ECD centres sustainable and including food gardens.
- Tshepo Mantjé of Equality Collective and the Real Reform 4 ECD initiative facilitated workshops on the IDP.
- The Lulamaphiko team continue to provide a printer, computer, and router for participants to use for admin purposes.





ECD CENTRE REGISTRATION

ECD centres cannot access the government subsidy of R17 per child per day until they are fully registered with the Department of Basic Education. The registration process is a long and arduous process involving multiple government departments.

The demands on under-resourced ECD centres to meet the registration requirements are unrealistic. Our implementing partner in uPhongolo, LULAMAPHIKO, works closely with the Zululand District Municipality's (ZDM's) Environmental Health Officers, Sandile Zulu and Samke Shamase, to identify what is needed at each of the 99 centres that we are supporting to meet these registration requirements.

Currently, only five of the 99 ECD centres we support are fully registered, and 57 are partially registered. A total of 11 ECD centres are very close to meeting all the requirements, so, we are on a drive with the Zululand District Municipality to identify what infrastructure upgrades and health improvements are needed to submit their applications to the Department of Basic Education.

Last year DO MORE FOUNDATION supplied JoJo tanks, fire extinguishers, and first aid kits as these are critical infrastructure and equipment required for registration.

The FOUNDATION is grateful to funders who are supporting us in this critical work.



FRIDGE DONATIONS TO ECD CENTRES

RAMA donated fridges to four ECD centres in November 2022. This is to ensure that children's meals are stored safely and kept fresh.



WOODEN TOYS FOR COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT



Wooden toy packs were delivered to 35 ECD centres in uPhongolo benefitting children. We handed out instruction posters to ECD practitioners on how to make the best use of the toys. The wooden toys provide key cognitive learning outcomes for the children.

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR READING AND WRITING

The Lulamaphiko team facilitated Every Word Counts (EWC) early literacy workshops in October and November 2022. The workshop ran over three full days and a total of 60 ECD practitioners enrolled, with 51 receiving certificates for attending all three sessions. EWC is based on the latest research into how ECD practitioners and parents can use everyday activities to lay the foundations for reading and writing for children aged 3 to 5-years. Each ECD centre received 20 Book Dash books and an easy-to-follow booklet titled Make Your Own Early Learning Resources which uses mostly recycled materials as well as little knitted dolls. A big thank you to the Grindrod Family Centenary Trust for funding these important workshops that aim to give practitioners the knowledge and skills to enrich children's learning.



MORE PORRIDGE TO FUEL MORE PLAY



Good nutrition is vital for children attending ECD centres to learn and achieve the best cognitive outcomes. RCL FOODS Sugar Mill HR department delivered a total of 5,900kgs DoMore Porridge to 35 ECD centres in uPhongolo from October 2022 to March 2023. This provided a daily meal for 1,428 children each month in the area.

FOOD GARDENS AT ECD CENTRES

We started supporting 10 ECD centres in 2021 to establish food gardens with the aim of producing fresh, healthy vegetables for children's meals. ECD gardeners have been trained by Biowatch SA, an agro-ecology organisation based in Durban and Mtubatuba. Through the close relationship between Lulamaphiko and Biowatch SA, we continue to support gardeners to attend training to improve the methods they use in their ECD gardens to produce organic vegetables and herbs. As those who live in uPhongolo know, the climate is fierce in this part of the world, and growing vegetables in the summer months is a huge challenge. Gardeners have received training on how to build beds with small shade cloth coverings to protect crops from the sun, animals, and insects. Sonto Ndlangamandla and Edward Nkosi, two local residents, visit the ECD gardens eight days a month to provide training and support. Thanks to Brownie Points and the Social Employment Fund for giving Sonto a 10-month contract to work with us. We are also thankful to the Grindrod Family Centenary Trust for providing funding for this project.



LEARNING IN THE GARDEN



We are piloting Lulamaphiko's exciting new programme Learning in the Garden in 10 ECD centres. This programme reaches 448 children aged 4 to 5 years. Practitioners are trained and given resources over 10 months to encourage children to learn in, with, and from nature. Each month we introduce a different topic, for example Rainbows, Seeds we plant, Seeds we eat, Plants need good soil/water/sunlight and Friendly bugs.

Six learning themes are covered on a topic: Discussion circle, numeracy, early literacy, science, creative arts, and the Isimangaliso Walk. Practitioners tell us that they appreciate the practical activities including collecting flowers/leaves/stones, planting vegetables and flowers, and watering and weeding the food gardens. The children thoroughly enjoy spending more time learning and exploring outdoors. We believe that supporting children to build a strong relationship with nature from an early age will set the stage for them to care for and protect the environment in the future. The Grindrod Family Centenary Trust very generously funds this important work.



EAT LOVE PLAY TALK (ELPT) PARENTING PROGRAMME

We developed ELPT as a programme for ECD practitioners and facilitators to engage in activities and conversations with caregivers of children up to the age of five years about healthy eating, building loving relationships, playful learning, and language development.

Last year, 16 principals/practitioners from eight ECD centres in uPhongolo and Mkuze were trained as facilitators of this programme. They completed seven sessions and received certificates for their attendance and commitment. These principals and practitioners then trained parents of children in their ECD centres on how to use ELPT at home with their children.

We had an evaluation of the programme done at the end of last year, and it is very encouraging to learn that many significant improvements have happened as a result of this series of workshops. Amongst these are: children are eating more fruit and vegetables, parents spend more time playing and reading with their children, children are being taken to the clinic more regularly, and practitioners are communicating more with parents on issues regarding their children. The Lulamaphiko team is eagerly preparing to train a new cohort of 14 ECD practitioners and 182 parents at 7 ECD centres this year.



BOOK DASH BOOKS



Book Dash is a South African non-profit organisation and social impact publisher of open source, African picture books for very young child. It believes that every child should own 100 books by the age of five years. In the past six months 19,500 Book Dash books were received for the Read and Play at Home initiative, 76 practitioners attended training on how to use the books, 1,290 parents attended 54 workshops, and 4,939 children received Book Dash books. In addition to this, Book Dash book donations were made to RCL FOODS staff during RCL FOOD'S Wellness Day, and also delivered to the paediatric ward at Itshelejoba Hospital.



WEEKLY BROADCAST ON PONGOLA FM



Pongola FM continues to present a weekly programme sponsored by DO MORE FOUNDATION for parents and caregivers. Since our last newsletter, presentations included topics such as Graduation Day at ECD centres by Nqobile Simelane, principal of Azande Creche, 16 Days of Activism, and keeping children safe, by Themba Masondo, chairperson of Operation Sukuma Sakhe. Fezile Mathe, who worked closely with our team last year has left the radio station to pursue her studies – we wish her well and thank her for her excellent contribution to ensuring parents received up to date and relevant information to support their young children.

In March 2023, the new Pongola FM presenter Thabo Nkosi interviewed Lungile Mathe, principal of Sizabantu Pre-School who discussed early childhood development and the role of parents and caregivers. Sister Madonsela of the Department of Health's Ncotshane Clinic was interviewed on why it is important to prevent drug abuse during pregnancy. We look forward to working with Thabo as he settles into his new role.

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WHERE TO FROM HERE...

Over and above the programmes and initiatives mentioned in this newsletter, the project team will be focusing this next reporting period on further supporting ECD programmes through:

- EAT LOVE PLAY TALK workshop continues until October.
- Funda Engadini (Learning in the garden) training happen every month until November.
- Book Dash parent workshops and book distribution starts in July
- Discussions with the Department of Health, DO MORE FOUNDATION, and Dlananathi start in May on plans for Community Health Workers to be trained in the Ibhayi Lengane First 1000 days programme.
- Preparations are underway for Mandela Day outreach events in July.
- ECD centre profiling visits to 99 ECD centres will continue up to the end of May.

Ways you can support:

- Pest control to assist with registration compliance.
- Garden equipment, tools, and seeds/seedlings to grow vegetables for children’s meals.
- Sponsoring of ECD practitioners to attend NQF 4 and 5 training.
- Refreshments for ECD practitioners at forum meetings.
- Playground equipment for ECD centres.

PARTNERS WORKING TOGETHER



“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together”
 - AFRICAN PROVERB

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