

#DoMore4Worcester

"A PLACE WHERE YOUNG CHILDREN FLOURISH"



Message from the Project Lead

The young child sector in Worcester remains vibrant on all fronts. The DO MORE FOUNDATION (DMF) is privileged to engage with many stakeholders in the community including Early Childhood Development (ECD) forums, the public sector, civil society organisations, and academia to continue building on the goal of making "Worcester a place where young children flourish!"

Towards the end of the year, there's a chance to reflect on program implementation quality, challenges faced, successes, and improvements for the following year. The last quarter is a mix of slowing down and wrapping up programs, along with activities like children's graduations and year-end events.

This year, there was a deliberate focus on assessing and mentoring to facilitate better quality implementation. In phase one, 30 centres received training in Duplo Playbox, Every Word Counts, and Repurpose for Purpose programmes. These centres also underwent an in-depth assessment covering infrastructure, program implementation, nutrition, skills development, and governance. The findings from the assessment will guide the focus for 2024, addressing concerns such as infant training and infrastructure maintenance.

The Young Child Forum and First Thousand Days platforms continue to foster learning, partnerships, and collaboration. Regular communication among stakeholders is encouraged, with forum members helping choose relevant topics for engagement.

In commemoration of Nelson Mandela Day, the DO MORE FOUNDATION invited RCL FOODS and the Association for Persons with Disabilities (APD) to partner with the organization in producing and distributing play packs to under-resourced ECD centres. The event was hosted at APD and RCL heroes painted upcycled toy kits for distribution to 33 centres in Worcester and Zwelethemba. These toys support various key areas of development including numeracy, visual coordination, and cognitive functioning.

Top stories

Repurpose 4 Purpose and Duplo Playbox Training Takes Another Stride Forward:

The Repurpose for Purpose (R4P) programme is one of DMF's national programmes that helps to develop children's cognitive skills. The national Early Learning Outcomes Measurement survey shows that cognitive skills in South African foundation phases are weak, and much can be done to improve on this.

The R4P training for the past quarter, facilitated by The Learning Initiative (TLI), took place in June 2023. It built capacity of practitioners at 30 selected ECD centres on Playbooks 1 and 2, with a focus on enhancing early learning activities for children aged 2 months to 5 years in ECD programmes, including centres and playgroups.

The sessions were attended as follows :

- Playbook 1 had 22 attendees
- Playbook 2 had 11 attendees

Duplo Playbox and R4P Refresher training was also facilitated in September 2023. Duplo Playboxes are provided by the Lego Foundation to organisations that work with disadvantaged children and contain various LEGO blocks that are used as learning and teaching tools to help develop physical, cognitive, social, and emotional skills.

The purpose of the refresher training was to assess practitioners' understanding of practical examples and implementation in their respective centres. Feedback from The Learning Initiative indicated that practitioners had a strong grasp of the concepts and effectively incorporated practical examples into their work. A total of 11 practitioners participated in the refresher training.



Nutrition support for young children and their families

During the period from July to September 2023, a total of 2325 kgs DO MORE porridge was distributed to 29 ECD centres and one soup kitchen in Worcester. This helped to feed approximately 2114 children in the area.

In addition to this, our partner SA Harvest continues to deliver fresh and frozen produce and protein to the Worcester ECD sector. This is distributed to the three forums namely Grapevine, Masiphatisane and Angel Lovers on a rotational basis. Bollieland had also been regularly approached by commercial farmers in the Breede Valley area to distribute fresh fruit such as blueberries, apples, and tangerines to ECD centres. This is a big help in ensuring that children consume healthy fresh products on a regular basis.




EAT LOVE PLAY TALK (ELPT) Parent Engagement Programme still thriving in Worcester

The DMF continued with the implementation of our ELPT Nutrition Programme, designed for ECD practitioners and facilitators to engage caregivers of children under five in discussions about healthy eating, nurturing relationships, playful learning, and language development. So far, 6 out of the 8 programme sessions have been successfully completed.

Notably, different practitioners are attending the sessions, and new cohorts of parents are being reached, with experienced facilitators from the previous year now mentoring the newcomers. However, smaller centres have faced challenges in finding new parents to engage, resulting in a slightly lower reach compared to the previous year, with 90 caregivers involved in 2023.

Future plans for ELPT include providing certificates of completion for both facilitators and caregivers and conducting a comprehensive review of the program's effectiveness.



A positive addition this year was the introduction of a height chart in the ELPT package, which caregivers found exciting and effective in promoting nutritious eating messages to children.

Caregiver feedback also revealed a favourable view of the DMF, and children enjoyed the resources. In total, ELPT resources account for 312 kilograms of porridge distributed to ECD centres and households on a monthly basis.



Breede Valley Young Child Forum Workshops

Between July and September 2023, 3 Young Child Forum workshops were held in Breede Valley. These workshops were targeted at ECD practitioners. The purpose is to educate the practitioners on recent developments within the sector and to share other practical knowledge that can be used to move the centres forward.

The Young Child Forum workshops focused on the following topics:

- Overview of Breede Valley Association for Persons with Disabilities (APD) service delivery by Verna Afrika and Social Employment Fund (SEF) feedback and second phase implementation strategy by Trevor Johnson from Thembaletu Development.
- Reflect, reset, and focus on your well-being facilitated by Renee Lighton.
- An update on the migration of ECD services from the Department of Social Development to the Department of Basic Education by Ruth Leukes from the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) and of the identification of Autism in young children presented by the Neurodiversity Foundation (Noeline De Goede).

The Young Child forums remain well attended by ECD programmes, with attendance figures reaching between 50-60 participants. The platform remains engaging and dynamic, and practitioners are not only passive receivers of information but also feel free to voice what is working for them and which areas they require more assistance in.



Every Word Counts Training Resumes in Worcester:

The goals of the Every Word Counts programmes is quoted as the following by Wordworks:

- Build an understanding of the importance of loving, responsive caregiving and the positive impact of talking with babies and young children.
- Introduce parents and caregivers to what is meant by early language and literacy learning.
- Share practical ideas and resources on how to support and stimulate language and early literacy in ECD centres, playgroups and at home.

The DMF Worcester site is quite privileged to be able to bring these skills to the ECD sector in 2023, and practitioners have enjoyed the training that started earlier this year in March. Although the attendance varied over time due to other responsibilities of centres and the dire lack of capacity within the sector, there are 21 practitioners that attended at a more regular basis.

Practitioners are encouraged to implement the sessions after each workshop and post some examples of resources that they produce and responses of children to the activities that they introduce on the communal WhatsApp group. Feedback from practitioners is that there is definitely new knowledge that they are acquiring with the Every Word Counts programme and what they most like is that it is a very practical programme. The opportunity they have to engage with facilitators on a WhatsApp group platform, they also regard as a great feedback loop.

The last session for the year will be in November and the Wordworks team will then proceed to do in-centre assessments to ascertain how proficient practitioners are at implementing the programme.



First Thousand Days (FTD) Forum

The First Thousand Days (FTD) forum, co-facilitated by the Department of Health and Wellness (DoH&W) and the DO MORE FOUNDATION has seen an expansion and growth in the last few meetings with more stakeholders such as Grow Great, the Western Cape Education Department, Neurodiversity Foundation, Soul Food and Grassroots joining the platform. The platform is dynamic and highly productive and brings together various stakeholders from the public sector non-governmental organizations and community-based organization space who are all actively involved in the FTD programmes. The primary objective of this platform is to raise awareness of the FTD concept and promote FTD activities and programmes in order for it to grow and expand within the Breede Valley municipality and even beyond.

Some noteworthy activities that had taken place as an outcome of the FTD platform are as follows:

FTD training for 20 social workers conducted by the Department of Health and Wellness (DoH&W)

- A digital FTD newsletter was developed and distributed.
- Various community-based breastfeeding workshops were conducted by the DoH&W with beneficiaries including FASFacts facilitators, pregnant teenagers and lactating mothers.
- FTD stakeholders and ECD centres received seed packs from Soul Food to contribute to the cultivation and provision of healthy meals for children and pregnant women.
- The capacity of Flourish and FASFacts programmes have been expanded due to the collaboration with Thembaletu Development who is implementing the Social Employment Fund which is a public employment programme that avails employment opportunities to unemployed and underemployed individuals.
- DSD offering to train parents affiliated to centres and playgroups as well as Flourish hosts and mothers affiliated to their programme in their positive parenting programme
- The Neurodiversity Foundation offered training to ECD programmes in the identification and referral of children with autism and other conditions that results in learning difficulties.
- The Sikunye Church and Early Life programme is more widely known and supported due to exposure to the forum and members of the forum are also aware of the role that faith-based institutions can play in supporting families within the FTD period.

Organizations that are part of the FTD forum are acutely aware of the critical importance of spreading the FTD message to parents so that they take on the responsibility of ensuring that their children live up to their potential by following some of the practises advocated within the FTD programme. Mostly this entails children eating healthy food, parents expressing their love and care for their children, parents playing with their children to stimulate their physical and cognitive growth and development and ensuring that children are safe at all times. The importance of reading to children can also not be over-emphasized considering the recent and recurring statistics results from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) that has shown that 81% of South African learners in grade 4 cannot read for meaning.



Read and Play at Home Training:

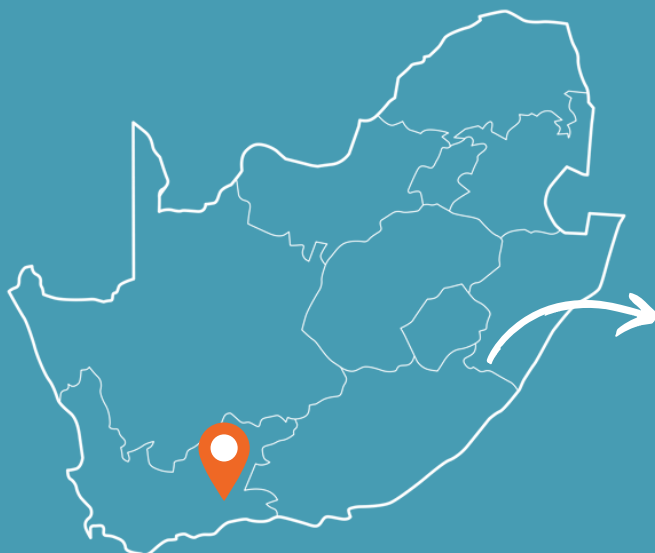
The Read and Play at Home training program for parents is designed to be engaging and playful. It encourages active participation and leverages the existing knowledge and practices of parents. The goal is to provide new information that enhances their skills and underscores the importance of play.

In this quarter, the program concluded a review of the last training session, which took place in October, and summarized the number of parent sessions conducted. A report was submitted to BookDash outlining the progress, achievements and challenges incurred during training and implementation. A refresher training session, led by Lynn Stefano, was held in September with the aim of improving on future training sessions and addressing any challenges that may have arisen.



BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

Over the past six years, the DO MORE FOUNDATION 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 Worcester- this basket includes:



-  Food security and nutrition
-  Parent (caregiver) support
-  Maternal and child health
-  Early learning through play
-  Child safety and protection
-  The first thousand days
-  Infrastructure and services
-  Enterprise development
-  Capacity building + leadership development

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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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