



CELEBRATING SUCCESS

BENEFITING YOUNG CHILDREN



Angie Skippers was considered the go-to person in her community when it came to caring for others' babies. She started Bethel Nursery in 1999 and admits that she had no knowledge of the legislated norms and standards required to run an Early Childhood Development (ECD) service.

She had completed some skills courses in ECD and had a limited amount of ECD experience. She started the business in a small Wendy House in her backyard, and ran it for 12 years with no administrative records.

In 2010 Gail Richards invited Angie to join the Wentworth Early Childhood Development Forum (WECDF) but she was not keen, preferring to work on her own. She felt she'd join when and if she was ready. After three years of constant invitations, from various friends and fellow practitioners, she decided to investigate the forum for herself – and she's never looked back.

The last four years have been a life-changing journey for Angie, from the relationships built to the training and opportunities provided. The change can be seen in the growth of the services – in number, in structural size and in how the services are managed.

One of the most notable changes for Angie has come about as a result of the Water, Sanitation, Health and Hygiene (WASH) Programme, an Oxfam initiated campaign to save lives through addressing WASH related elements that are negatively impacting on communities.

Some of the babies she took in at three months of age, four years ago, are still with her, or new siblings have taken their place. Their parents have noticed the huge improvements made at the service to ensure health and hygiene are a priority. Before joining the WECDF and learning about WASH, Angie was not particularly bothered at the thought that government officials might drop by and find her service lacking – she felt that it was her land, her ECD service and her business – and she could do as she pleased. She admits that this mindset was unhealthy, and since changing her attitude, she has reaped the benefits.

“ The WASH programme, and every bit of training given to us, has been such a great help. ”

The training received doesn't end with Angie and her staff members. She is now able to pass on what she has learnt to the very young mothers who leave their children in her care, so that they can return to finish their schooling. She bathes the children when they arrive at the service and before they leave, and teaches the young mothers how to bathe their children correctly, especially those who have no mothers from whom to learn. Bethel now has health policies and guidelines in place, from bottle washing to nappy changing. Sanitation and hygiene are an everyday concern as Angie now knows the impact it has on both child and family health.

The WECDF has provided an ongoing learning platform for the practitioners, and it was here that Angie also learnt the importance of having safety measures in place.

She has grown on a personal level and holds the position of Deputy Chairperson of the WECDF, often acting as the voice of reason in difficult and challenging times.

This publication is the second in a series documenting the work of Save the Children (SC) and the stories of the WECDF. With a focus on partnerships, this booklet highlights relationships and how these relationships have worked to bring much needed support to a perpetually marginalised community and to a sector that is often neglected but so very crucial to the development of a strong community.



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ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

AACES	Australian African Community Engagement Scheme
CCG	Community Caregiver
CWDD	Child Welfare: Durban and District
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ETDP	Education, Training and Development Programme
DoSD	Department of Social Development
DoE	Department of Education
DoH	Department of Health
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
MAM	Moderate Acute Malnutrition
MUAC	Mid-upper Arm Circumference
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
SAM	Severe Acute Malnutrition
SETA	Services, Education and Training Authority
SC	Save the Children
TB	Tuberculosis
WASH	Water, Sanitation, Health and Hygiene
WECDF	Wentworth Early Childhood Development Forum

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THE WENTWORTH EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT FORUM

The WECDF began as a pilot programme that was initially supported by the McCarthy's Corporate Social Investment wing and the eThekweni Municipality South Durban Basin Area Based Management (SDB ABM) Department/Division. At the very early stages it was taken on by Save the Children (SC) who has, for the past five years, supported and facilitated the WECDF. This has resulted in the creation of a forum model that is outcomes-based rather than reactive or activity driven and is responsive to the needs of the ECD sector in the community.

Through this model, the WECDF ensures that existing and new ECD services (both home and centre based) operate according to the standards and regulations set by the Department of Education (DoE), Department of Health (DoH), Department of Social Development (DoSD) and the eThekweni Municipality. This is necessary to ensure that children receive the best possible care when attending a local ECD service. These requirements address the holistic development and needs of the young child. As DoSD is unable to meet their mandated responsibility for monitoring all ECD services in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) - both registered and unregistered - they have accepted and acknowledged the intervention by SC and the WECDF in contributing towards filling this gap.

Fondly known as *The Sisterhood*, the WECDF comprises a group of vibrant, passionate women (between the ages of 20 and 65) who own, run or work at one of 22 ECD services (affiliated to the WECDF) in the Wentworth area.

“ The journey to address the rights, needs and responsibilities of the ECD sector in Wentworth has been an incredible one, the distance covered being more than we ever imagined. Driven by the WECDF, a community supported approach was started to ensure that the young children of the area have access to quality ECD services that contribute to their holistic development. ”

“ What a privilege it has been for me to be one of the drivers alongside the incredible Gail Richards and to have the opportunity to meet and work with so many who recognise the importance of appropriate care and development opportunities for the young child. ”

- Mari van der Merwe, Save the Children

A Meeting of minds – how it all began

The involvement of SC in the community of Wentworth, Durban, has its roots in the 1970's when social work student Mari van der Merwe (nee Jessiman) undertook the practical component of her studies in the area. Her journey in the field of social work facilitated a deeper involvement in the community of Wentworth and was instrumental in setting up one of the first ECD services, Jack and Jill Play School, with a group of volunteer women in the community. Mari worked in Wentworth for five years and then moved on, but continued her relationship with the community. She began working with SC in 2003 when the Organisation had yet to implement an outreach programme in Wentworth.

When I began working at Save the Children there was no outreach to Wentworth. I received the invitation to attend the ECD *Indaba* facilitated by Phakama and that is where it all began, leading to the establishment of the WECDF.

Gail Richards was born and raised in Wentworth. She understands the nature of the community, its people, the dynamics and the socio-economic challenges they are faced with on a daily basis. Through her company, Phakama Consulting, Gail provided ECD practitioners in the Wentworth community with services and support. Her first encounter, leading to her involvement with ECD, was when she visited an ECD service in crisis. Practitioners were unsupported, in desperate need of guidance, mentorship and support, and far too many children were crowded into a small space.



Gail approached Eurakha Singh from the eThekweni Municipality SDB ABM about her concerns and the result was an Early Childhood Development (ECD) *Indaba* in June 2009 that brought together ECD practitioners, government officials and other interested stakeholders, to discuss matters, share opinions and ideas, and create a new platform from which ECD service providers and practitioners could express their needs and concerns.

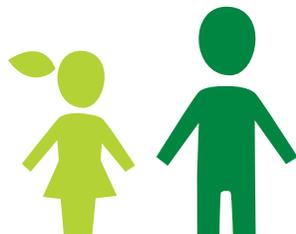
It was at *the Indaba* that Gail and Mari met and a relationship began. The foundation was laid for the WECDF. SC has a fifteen year history with the ECD sector in KZN, and has supported ECD practitioners and service providers by developing community-based forums, and focusing on issues such as capacity building, best practice, lobbying and advocacy, and ultimately, ensuring that children in this phase of development receive the best quality and service provision.

“ Save The Children has a fifteen year history with the ECD sector in KZN, and has supported ECD practitioners and service providers by developing community-based forums... ”

Gail and Mari have since then worked together in developing the WECDF alongside *The Sisterhood*, slowly building skills, accountability and responsibility, and helping create a model for ECD that focuses on outcomes that keep the child firmly at the centre while taking a pragmatic approach to working in the community. The first publication¹ in this series provides an overview of the Wentworth community, an area that has become notorious for the social issues affecting it.



1. A vision made real: the Wentworth crèche forum



WASH: A SIMPLE BUT LIFE CHANGING MESSAGE

In 2011 Oxfam, with funding from the Australia Africa Community Engagement Scheme (AACES), started supporting SC with the introduction of a WASH (Water, Sanitation, Health and Hygiene) programme into the ECD services in Wentworth.

The programme sought to address issues affecting the health and development of young children resulting from a lack of awareness, non-existent or inappropriate infrastructure, and poor service delivery. WECDf provided the ideal platform to roll out the programme to the ECD services: it enabled an improvement of standards, learning and implementation, and collective action to hold duty bearers accountable.

The WASH programme supports and promotes good hygiene and sanitation practices, with children as agents for change. Children, like a pebble dropped into a pond, create a ripple-effect by taking what they learn into the home and ultimately into the community. By providing ECD practitioners with everything they need to create a clean and hygienic learning environment, the message of good WASH behaviours is easily taught and readily remembered. The ECD phase is the ideal phase to introduce such practices to children – it is at this time in their lives that they learn concepts and skills, and develop attitudes about particular practices.

The simplicity of the WASH programme is that it starts with washing hands – something most children do anyway because they love to play with water. By teaching a child to wash his or her hands properly and frequently with soap, illness is reduced, and more days are as a result spent at the ECD service learning, than at home recovering from being sick.

Water: An essential everyday hygiene practice

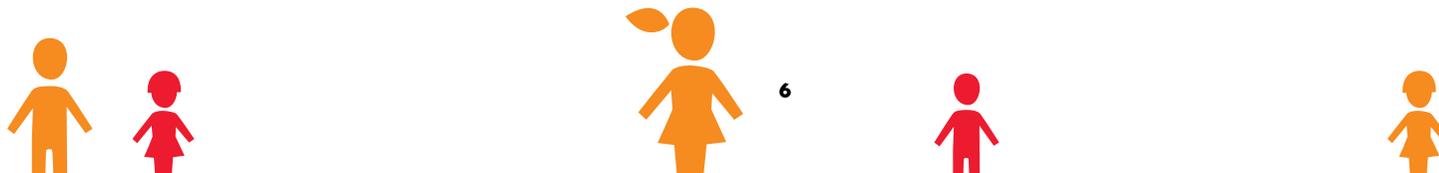
Romany Roberts has used the WASH programme as a platform to teach the children at her ECD service to think more about the world around them and how to implement what they have learnt in different settings. On Global Handwashing Day Romany organised a fun session to talk to the children about how they could wash their hands if they couldn't find a tap. She wanted them to think about other ways of handwashing, rather than simply wiping their hands on their shirts, or not washing at all.

Romany and the teachers created little stories around possible scenarios for the children to think about, such as going to the park with mommy and finding no bathrooms or taps. What could mommy do in such an event? Mommy might have a bottle of water and a small bottle of handwash in her bag. She could squirt some handwash onto your hands, and use water from her bottle to clean them.

Or going on a school trip out into the country. Perhaps the children could find a river and ask teacher to collect some water in a container for them to wash their hands. Even without soap, a good wash in water will remove dirt that clings to the skin.

These scenarios lead to discussions on safety and being careful around water, whether the sea, river or dam, and provide fun ways to talk about a wide variety of topics.

Romany believes children should be exposed to different situations so they will be prepared when they are in an unfamiliar environment. She does not want her children to think that handwashing is only possible when specific structures - such as taps and bathrooms - are available, but rather, that children should think creatively and not abandon what they know to be right if the situation requires some thought and ingenuity. A great example of this is the *Tippy Tap* at her service constructed out of a 2-litre soft drink bottle and a straw. The bottle top acts as a valve while the straw, inserted into the bottle, allows water to flow out. Romany attended *Tippy Tap* training and took her knowledge back into the classroom and shared it with the children.





Sanitation: Upgrading facilities for improved environments

Desiree Ratter has run a home-based ECD service for three years in the Wentworth area. When she opened Friends Day Care, in January 2013, she had only one toilet for the children. The ECD service located in her outbuilding expanded quickly and more toilets were needed, so she utilised an additional small cottage on her property, which had another bathroom. At the time, Desiree's home-based service did not meet the legislated norms and standards. Additionally, the responsible government departments were not registering home-based services in KZN. But Desiree felt she should comply as best she could to the norms and standards prescribed for Partial Care Centres.

In line with this, Desiree bought two child-sized toilets and handwash basins for Friends Day Care. She wanted her service to have child-friendly facilities that both met the standards of the Department of Social Development and the eThekweni Environmental Health Bylaws, and made children excited about their toilet and hygiene routine. In 2014, one year later, Desiree funded the purchase and installation of the toilets and basins herself (at a cost of R5000), putting money she earned from fees towards the renovations. She feels that it was money well spent and invested, and parents are impressed at the standards she has set.

With the introduction of the WASH programme, Desiree says their sanitation, health and hygiene standards have improved considerably, from changing hand-towels every day to washing down surfaces with disinfectant and water. Each teacher has a spray bottle with a disinfectant/water solution, and this is sprayed into the air throughout the day to keep additional airborne germs at bay.

Desiree has hired a cleaner, whose main task is to make sure the ECD service is cleaned each day. In the mornings the cleaner helps the children with their toilet routine. In the afternoons, she sets about cleaning floors, toilets and stretcher beds for naps, toys, and any surface with which children and teachers may come into contact.

Desiree has had the DoH nurses come in and check her service, and has received a thumbs-up for the way she maintains health, hygiene and safety standards.



A message with wings: Children as change agents

ECD practitioners insist that one of the best ways to ensure a programme is adopted by a community is to begin by educating the children. Engage them in educational activities that are fun, with catchy songs and silly dances, and they will be hooked. Not only do they hold each other accountable at the ECD service through the childish right to “tell-on” friends who don’t conform to social norms and values, but it seems that family members are equally held accountable.

Ensuring the WASH message leaves the classroom and enters the community is a crucial component of the programme; and this is certainly done when the message bearers are small children. Every ECD practitioner interviewed talked about how easily the children firstly absorbed the message, and secondly spread the message to whomever they came in contact.

Practitioners shared stories of parents and carers who had commented that their children remind the family to wash their hands before cooking, after going to the toilet, and before meals. They no longer have to beg or negotiate with the children about having clean hands before undertaking certain activities. And parents and carers are not let off the hook themselves.

One parent, a nurse, was surprised to be informed by her children that she had been washing her hands incorrectly. As a medical professional, she had not been given the right information on hand washing and now uses the WASH technique in her professional life.

For the practitioners, the fact that something as mundane as hand washing has been turned into an acquired habit is crucial. If you want to get children to do something, and keep doing it – make it fun!



Taking the message into public spaces

Maria Mthembu, an ECD practitioner, recalls a day when she had the opportunity to share the WASH message with a random stranger. She had been in town, at a local market, and was about to go into a public bathroom. On her way in, she observed a woman who had five small children in tow. The lady sent the children in and waited outside. Maria went in and observed the children going to the bathroom unaided and unaccompanied and also not washing their hands because there was no soap in the dispenser.

Maria felt she could not let the children leave without engaging with the woman. She introduced herself to the woman, stated that she was an ECD practitioner, and talked to her about the importance of children washing their hands properly after using the bathroom. Maria informed the woman that since public bathrooms were often without soap, an easy and cost-effective solution to the problem was to buy a small bottle of handwash and keep it in her handbag. She also used the opportunity to talk about safety, and the dangers of sending children into a public bathroom that hadn't been checked by the guardian.

For Maria the experience was encouraging – the woman was grateful that someone had taken the time to share the information with her, because as an adult, she'd never been taught the basic principles of keeping germs at bay by washing hands properly.

Practitioners admit that before WASH was introduced to the WECD, their hygiene standards were lacking. While this was particularly true of hand washing, it was also true of how the services were kept clean.

Key changes since WASH was introduced four years ago include the use of the correct types of cleaning materials and equipment. Each practitioner now has an arsenal of cleaning equipment at the ready – from detergents to mops, buckets and other cleaning aids. These

were provided by SC in a once-off allocation at the beginning, with ECD services now meeting these costs. The ECD service, if divided into age groups (such as babies and toddlers), should have a separate set of cleaning equipment for each division, and these should not be shared. The practitioners have become quite possessive of their equipment, and guard them from accidental (or intentional) borrowing. Home-based services keep a separate set of equipment from those they use in their homes.

Some ECD services, such as at the Durban Christian Centre, have engaged a staff member as a cleaner, whose main task is to keep the ECD service as clean as possible. The cleaner must ensure that toilets, kitchen areas, play areas, toys and sleeping mats are kept clean and frequently washed down with a water and disinfectant solution.

With the provision of WASH guidelines, policies and training sessions, practitioners find it easy to keep on top of what is required – they now know what needs to be done, and have put measures in place to attain the hygiene standards required.

The result of this has been significant. Most practitioners have found that the number of children who are absent, specifically over winter, has dropped. This they attribute to the washing of hands and surfaces, but also to ensuring that contact with bodily fluids associated with colds and influenza is limited. Immune systems seem to be stronger, with less time spent away from the ECD service when sick. Healthier children, practitioners and family members is the key outcome, but interestingly, it has also led to ECD services that implement WASH becoming those of choice with parents.

The practitioners acknowledge that keeping up with WASH standards takes time and effort – but it has been worth it, and none foresee themselves giving up on WASH. In fact, the practitioners are already devising a *Keep WASH Alive* strategy to ensure it does not fade away, and that training and implementation continues.







POWER IN PARTNERSHIP

SC and the WECDF have always held partnership and collaboration to be vital to providing the best possible services to the communities in which they work.

The holistic approach to development means that where opportunities arise to supplement and complement work done, these are explored, developed and nurtured to provide the best possible solutions. Over the years, WECDF has built invaluable relationships which have made the provision of ECD services and the lives of the young children and their carers that much easier.

Gateway Clinic

Primary healthcare (PHC) is at the heart of Government's plans to transform healthcare services in South Africa and plays a key role in bringing affordable and accessible health service to communities. In 2012 the government began its re-engineering of PHC in an effort to improve health outcomes and to strengthen the effectiveness of the health system.

The Gateway Clinic is seen as one of the institutional vehicles for driving the re-engineering process. The family health team was mandated to develop a relationship with members of the community and key stakeholders.

Sister Roskrige-Wilkins, the Operational Manager at the Gateway Clinic, admits that prior to *re-engineering*, there were poor community partnerships and no intervention focusing on the health status of the young child. It was when the relationship with the WECDF began that this began to change significantly.

The clinic's approach is holistic and includes attending and participating in community ECD events and providing health services to ensure the wellness of ECD practitioners and members from the extended families. They further provide training on common childhood diseases and educational talks to assist practitioners with identifying health challenges in

children in their care (including caring for children with a disease such as TB or HIV). Children are included in fun educational talks that convey messages in such a way that they both understand and take them into their homes. Parental consent is sought by the nurses for each child, and once given, the child's Road to Health Card/ Booklet is sent to the ECD service.

One of the WECDF aims is to bring a multi-disciplinary approach to the ECD health care environment. This would include dieticians, psychologists, occupational therapists, speech therapists and social workers. The idea is to help practitioners bypass the challenging systems in government hospitals when needing assistance for children, and to eliminate the waiting periods between detecting an abnormality or problem in the child and securing an appointment to see the relevant doctor or specialist.

Sister Roskrige-Wilkins believes that the WECDF has brought about significant changes to ECD services. Community spirit has been revived, healthcare for children and extended families has improved, and partnerships between key stakeholders are forming. She grew up in Wentworth and her son, aged 27, and daughter, 22, attended Little David ECD. Today, her three-year old granddaughter attends the same ECD service. She has witnessed the changes personally and professionally.

Promoting Health

Gail and Mari had spent a year engaging with the eThekweni District office of the DoH before they were referred to Gloria Ratsi, Assistant Manager of Health Promotion. Gail and Mari were interested in improving health services, but more importantly, ensuring that ECD services became accredited Health Promoting facilities.

The WASH programme had provided the medium to lobby and advocate for an accreditation tool to be designed specifically for ECD services. The DoH relies on NGOs to partner with them to deliver services to communities and had, up until now, been focusing their health promotion efforts at schools. Gloria, however, felt that while it was good to focus on school



children over six years, the focus should include children under six – in the ECD phase – where the greatest development takes place in a child’s life. The assessment tool and criteria used for schools were modified to suit the ECD environment, with important input from SC and WECDf. This ECD Health Promotion Accrediting Tool was recently signed off and approved by the DoH for implementation – a huge accomplishment for all concerned.

Gloria was invited to attend a special WECDf meeting where she met the women who represent the various ECD services around the Wentworth community as well as Sister Roskrug-Wilkins from Gateway Clinic. She was taken on a tour to two ECD services where the opportunity for ECD services to be accredited as Health Promoting Facilities could be piloted.

“ Not only was the WECDf an entity that conducted itself professionally, but it included all sectors of the community in its initiatives rather than working in isolation. ”

Gloria’s impression of the WECDf is that it is organised, focused, reaches a large number of children, and is well supported by the community. When she was approached by a representative from UNICEF’s Health Promotion Unit to identify a community they could support for their 2014 Global Hand Washing Day, her immediate choice was Wentworth and the WECDf. Not only was the WECDf an entity that conducted itself professionally, but it included all sectors of the community in its initiatives rather than working in isolation.

For Gloria, the WECDf has provided a platform from which to engage with the community and expand service delivery. One of the main benefits of the WECDf has been to provide a communication channel between ECD practitioners and government. Gloria believes that the WECDf, with the mentorship and guidance of SC, has empowered the practitioners, giving them confidence and a voice. They are able to engage with government departments and other stakeholders, a skill lacking in the past. Additionally, the training offered to practitioners has developed their skills and, ultimately, had a positive impact on the children at their services.



One of the successes of the WECDF has been the buy-in from both the community and small-business, who actively support activities and events organised by the WECDF. Gloria believes that big business could bolster the activities and reach of the WECDF, and that their investment is imperative to continued growth. She feels that big business would be investing wisely in an organisation that has a proven track record and is inclusive in its desire to improve the health and learning experiences of children in the community.

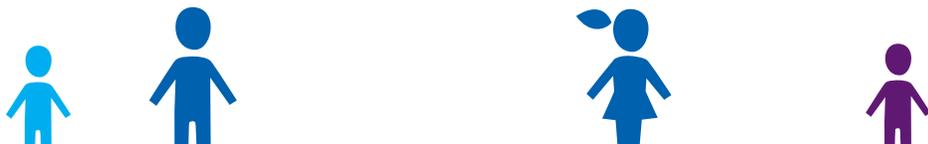
The holistic approach to health care has been made possible through the partnerships formed and relationships developed over the past five years.

Building Partnerships

Two special private partnerships emerged in 2015 in the form of young medical professionals Dr Lyron Moonsamy, a private dentist in Wentworth, and Dr Hajra Paruk, a private optometrist from Central Durban. Both partnered with the WECDF to supplement hygiene and health education and services administered through the WASH programme and have offered their services free to all children attending the 22 ECD services associated with the WECDF.

Healthy teeth; happy smiles

Dr Moonsamy's desire to make outreach part of his own practice was sparked during his studies in Cape Town when a mobile dentistry clinic would make its way into rural and disadvantaged communities that had little to no access to healthcare. When Dr Moonsamy started his own practice in the Wentworth area he looked for an outreach project to get involved with.



His partnership with the WECDF began in time for National Oral Health month in September 2015. Dr Moonsamy offered to screen all the children attending the 22 ECD services. His philosophy is to educate first, then act. He begins by educating children, parents, caregivers and ECD practitioners about the importance of good oral healthcare, which includes healthy nutrition. He also provides toothbrushes and toothpaste to the children, and education charts and resources to the ECD services.

By the end of 2015 an estimated 700 children will have received a free screening to determine the condition of their teeth, and if necessary, a follow up session at Dr Moonsamy's practice to resolve any problems. Before treatment starts Dr Moonsamy sends a report to the parents, including them in his findings, and suggests a way forward. He charges a small fee for a session at his practice, which includes any procedure - cleaning, extraction and fillings. This fee will remain the same until the child turns 12. Alternatively, parents can wait for free dentistry services available at Wentworth Hospital.

For many residents of Wentworth, a trip to the dentist is not an option. Maintenance of teeth is costly and many parents request that Dr Moonsamy simply pull out the offending tooth, whether or not it is necessary. Instead, he fixes the tooth and provides a free six-month check-up to ensure the health of the tooth is being maintained.

This experience for Dr Moonsamy has been particularly meaningful. Many children are raised by grandparents who struggle financially, and quite a few families have only one toothbrush which the family members share. For Dr Moonsamy, the expense of this type of outreach is far exceeded by the impact one visit can make to a child's health.

Dr Moonsamy believes this outreach will be a yearly event, and would like to partner with other stakeholders to broaden his reach and provide much needed supplies, such as toothpaste and toothbrushes, to children and their families.





Providing a better view

For Dr Paruk, providing young children with eye-care is vital in combating learning difficulties associated with undetected eyesight problems. Many children with eyesight challenges suffer from low confidence because they miss out on vital clues for socialisation. Like Dr Moonsamy, Dr Paruk knows that most families in Wentworth don't have a budget for a trip to the optometrist. Additionally, the cost of glasses is often prohibitive. She too has had to educate parents and carers on the positive benefits of fitting children who require them with glasses, because many have negative perceptions in this regard. Dr Paruk knows that testing is imperative to ensuring problems don't become irreversible in the future.

Dr Paruk's relationship with the Wentworth ECD Forum came through another private partner who suggested to her that the forum members would benefit greatly from her services. She too has begun offering free screening and based on her findings, will refer a child for a full eye test at her clinic or to another medical professional such as an ophthalmologist. To date Dr Paruk has provided screenings to 422 children. An important aspect of her work is that she is able to pick up other health problems that a carer might not. For instance, one of the children at an ECD service was noted to be slow to respond and was struggling in a mainstream ECD service. Dr Paruk was able to refer the child to a government ophthalmologist as well as an audiologist to assist the child further and get the help the child sorely needed.

Both doctors provide notes pertaining to the child's health to the ECD service, and this is kept in the child's file so that the school they eventually attend is made aware of any health issues and interventions that have been initiated. The power in partnership is that through holistic interventions a child has a greater chance of doing well at the ECD service, at school and in life, because the responsibility is shared.





Sharing vital information: The Blue Roof Wellness Centre

The Blue Roof Wellness Centre (The Blue Roof) in Wentworth was established by the NGO Keep a Child Alive and offers children and families in the community a safe place to access HIV testing, counselling, treatment and care. It also offers TB and cervical cancer screening, and psychological and adherence support to those receiving treatment. The centre has nurses and HIV counsellors, and runs a community outreach programme providing basic HIV education in the schools and local businesses.

Tessa Beaunoir is the Nursing Manager at The Blue Roof and Sister Doreen Louis is a professional nurse with more than 20 years of experience working in clinics in different communities. She is now a nurse at the Blue Roof and is actively involved in the WASH Programme. Both women work closely with the WECDf.

The Blue Roof has a relationship with Wentworth Hospital and works with patients who require further assistance than that provided at the clinic. The centre sees 3000 patients a month, 161 of which are children (aged 5 to 15 years).

The centre's aim is to ensure their patients have an undetectable viral load and currently, at least 85% of their patients have achieved this goal. Four of their patients ran the Comrades Marathon in the year.

HIV is now considered a manageable disease – it is controllable, but not curable. Still dealing with myths and stigma, which is particularly bad in the communities of the South Durban Basin, Sister Beaunoir believes that education, conveyed with the help of partners and stakeholders, is the key to reducing this epidemic.



One of the most important relationships that The Blue Roof has in taking education into the community is with ECD practitioners. A number of ECD services that have both HIV positive children and staff were concerned with how to care for and treat those infected and affected appropriately. The Blue Roof educates practitioners about the disease, modes of transmission, and treating infected people with love and care, and without discrimination. Practitioners then convey this to parents, carers and families, ensuring the message continues to spread in the community.

“ The Blue Roof educates practitioners about the disease, modes of transmission, and treating infected people with love and care, and without discrimination. ”

The Blue Roof, in working with the practitioners from the WECD, realised that while the focus is most often on the young children, practitioners are very much in need of care themselves. For many practitioners, their service is their business; they work full long days (from 6.30am to 6pm) looking after the children, and then work into the night handling administration and development that goes with building a business. They cannot afford to be sick or to take days off. The Blue Roof recognised that practitioners needed to learn to take care of themselves first, if they were to offer a consistent level of effective service.

Caring for the Carer training sessions focus on topics such as taking time to relax and recharge. The sessions aim to prevent practitioners from burnout, something that happens frequently in the ECD sector. The Blue Roof provides wellness days for ECD practitioners, offering free blood pressure, sugar, TB, HIV and breast checks as well as pap smears.

“ The Blue Roof recognised that practitioners needed to learn to take care of themselves first, if they were to offer a consistent level of effective service. ”

For Sister Beaunoir, good nutrition is the foundation of a nation. Through training, practitioners learnt how to make healthy, nutritious food using fresh vegetables, rather than buying store bought foods. By sharing the information learnt, practitioners are able to show young mothers that homemade food is more nutritious, as well as cheaper, than store bought baby food.

Sister Louis is WASH trained. She has been responsible for training all ECD practitioners on effective handwashing, health and hygiene and the different relevant activities which can be conducted with young children. She goes into the community spreading the message of cleanliness, the importance of handwashing, and the need for good nutrition.

It is through partnerships, such as the one with the WECD, that Sisters Beaunoir and Louis can filter vital teachings into the community.





ADDRESSING THE ISSUES

Vulnerable children

Nishell Pieters opened Wonderland Educare three years ago, in an area of the community ravaged by drug and alcohol addiction. She joined the WECDF in 2012, and it was her acceptance into the WECDF that led to her becoming the owner of her own ECD service.

For Nishell the WECDF has played a vital role in supporting her as an ECD owner. This was exemplified one day when two small boys, aged four and five, arrived at her door. The boys were being cared for by their granny, and she presented Nishell with the boys' clinic cards. The cards revealed that both boys had last received their immunisations at birth. One of the children was underweight and had a speech impediment. According to rules and regulations, children should not be accepted into ECD services, or schools, until their immunisations are up-to-date. The boys' previous ECD service, in Johannesburg, had not picked up on this, nor initiated any interventions to deal with the health and education challenges presented by the children.

Through her relationships with the Wentworth ECD Forum and Gateway Clinic Nishell was able to quickly organise an appointment, where the children received their immunisations and were placed on a nutrition programme. Additionally, speech therapy was recommended for the youngest child, which Nishell personally attends to. She also takes him to see a nutritionist and occupational therapist.

Through these interventions, the children have grown in confidence and ability – with the older boy moving on to school in 2016, and the younger boy showing significant improvement in speech and in weight-gain.

Aunty Pearl, as she is affectionately known by all, started Little David in 1992 in response to the need she saw in her community. It became apparent to her that there were many children in the community that were not attending an ECD service for various reasons.

Grandmothers would come to Little David and plead with her to take in their grandchildren, many of whom had lost their parents to drugs, alcohol and AIDS-related diseases. She approached the Wentworth Office of Child Welfare: Durban and District (CWDD) in 1992 and offered to take on ten children linked to the organisation, free of charge, to provide them with important early childhood care and stimulation.

Each year the demand grows. In 2015 Aunty Pearl has 28 children referred by CWDD, with a further three being referred by The Wentworth Victim Friendly Centre (a safe house for women in distress, while their domestic situations are being resolved). Several other ECD services in Wentworth also take in two or three children at no fee or at a nominal fee of ZAR100 per month.

Taking on children from abusive and disadvantaged backgrounds is challenging and requires a great deal of patience and kindness. Many children exhibit negative behaviours, which can affect the other children in the ECD services, and this requires specialist interventions such as psychologists. Aunty Pearl finds out from parents and carers if interventions have taken place, and if not, whether she can use the services offered by Gateway Clinic and Child Welfare.

Little David and Child Welfare share the same building, which has encouraged a strong relationship between the two. The children at Little David are taken out of class to attend sessions at Child Welfare that deal with the specific psycho-social needs of the child. Aunty Pearl provides a safe space for the children during the day – three meals, education, care and concern. She keeps spare sets of clothes on hand for those children who arrive and are in need of a bath and a clean change of clothing. Aunty Pearl believes that the healing and health of children can only take place if their emotional, physical and spiritual needs are met. Their attendance at Little David also provides Child Welfare with a means of monitoring their development.





A case of hand-foot-and-mouth disease

Kaylene van der Haar runs Ezzy's Ark, a home-based ECD service that looks after 32 children. Her service has been running for just over a year, and she joined the WECDF in 2015. Kaylene is in the process of registering her ECD service and has benefited from the training, advice and assistance of the WECDF regarding the requirements for registration and meeting the legislated norms and standards for a Partial Care Facility.

Recently Kaylene was faced with a situation that threatened to close her fledgling business. Gail received a phone call from a parent who alerted her to the fact that her child had been diagnosed with hand-foot-and-mouth disease. The parents did not know where the child had picked up the disease, but were concerned that it might have been passed on to other children, or even been contracted at Ezzy's Ark. Kaylene was immediately notified. A month later the same young child was diagnosed by a different doctor as having a second bout of hand-foot-and-mouth disease.

Kaylene had little knowledge of the disease, and immediately asked for advice. With the help of SC, Kaylene was provided with information to assist her with identifying the symptoms. Kaylene checked the other children for similar symptoms and reviewed the Absenteeism Register to see any trends of children who had had been ill and/or absent over the past weeks. She then identified that three other children had the same symptoms, but had been diagnosed as having other illnesses. Sister Roskrug-Wilkins (Gateway Clinic) was also advised of the illness and kept abreast of developments.

Since she was new to the WECDF, Kaylene had not yet attended the WASH training. Whilst her ECD service was clean, she had not implemented some of the practices recommended to ensure that children do not pass on diseases to one another. She was advised to sterilise the service, from toys to bedding, floors to walls, and to create a stronger awareness amongst



the ECD teachers of the importance of good hygiene practices. She has since participated in WASH training and implemented a WASH policy in her ECD service, which entails regular cleaning and sanitising, as well as handwashing to prevent the spread of germs and bacteria. She was also grateful that prior to this incident she had already opened all the registers according to the required norms and standards and the Absenteeism Register had greatly helped her.

Kaylene was one of the lucky ones. The guidance, support and knowledge provided by the WECDf, and stakeholders such as Gateway Clinic, enabled her to resolve the problem and put corrective measures in. It further has been an opportunity to equip ECD practitioners to deal with communicable, contagious diseases in young children attending an ECD service.

Community events

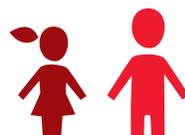
In 2014, the DoE provided sports equipment to the WECDf and training on their *Right to Play* Programme. In order to make the best use of it, they decided to host a community Sports Day, the first of its kind in Wentworth. Most ECD services in the Wentworth area are not able to offer a sporting programme for the children as they do not have the space or equipment to do so. The event was a huge success and in August 2015, the second community Sports Day was hosted by the WECDf, with over 3000 community members joining in the festivities.

The event was chaired by Agnes Mazibuko and her team from the WECDf. For Agnes the event was a success on a number of levels: firstly, it again brought the community, ECD services, local businesses, government departments and other stakeholders (police and fire fighters) together; secondly, it promoted the importance of health and exercise in young children, and led senior citizens in the community to take an interest in becoming more physically active and seek help from the WECDf in this regard; thirdly, it was a personal journey for Agnes....

'I've learnt to work with people, and to cherish everyone's input. We worked as a team. I always teach children - this taught me to be mature and to work with adults. I'm more observant, and can implement. It helped me grow personally, emotionally and physically. I've grown in confidence, skills and abilities.'

At a recent DoE National Curriculum Framework training session for ECD practitioners from all areas, Agnes and Maria Mthembu (profiled later in this publication) inadvertently spread the WASH message, much to the enjoyment of the other attendees. The handwash booklet sponsored by Oxfam provides ECD practitioners with songs and activities, and the ladies used one of the songs as an ice-breaker. By the end of the training they had photocopied the booklets and handed them out so that the other practitioners and educators could take the Handwash message back to their own ECD services and schools in the different communities.

Allowing ECD practitioners to become actively involved, and take on roles of responsibility, has been a vital step in empowerment.





Special Needs

Down-syndrome

Three years ago, Glynis Hamiel welcomed Rhonwin Snyman into New Generations Educare as a volunteer assistant. Rhonwin's mother had approached Glynis and Patricia Dove to give Rhonwin an opportunity to get involved in some physical and mental activity. Rhonwin, who has Down Syndrome, had previously been working in a printing shop, but the job had not lasted, and she had become despondent at home.

For Glynis the experience has been filled with challenges, but equally many successes. Rhonwin is excellent with the children; she operates well on their level, dancing and singing with youthful abandonment, and engaging with them on a level that most adults can't. The children love her, regarding Rhonwin as special, in a good way; they treat her with care, especially when she's telling stories – many of which she makes up on the spot.

“ Rhonwin is excellent with the children; she operates well on their level, dancing and singing with youthful abandonment... ”

Glynis gave Rhonwin the opportunity to attend WASH training, where she learnt how to teach children about hygiene and the importance of washing their hands frequently and properly. One of her main tasks is to assist the children with their toilet routine.

Rhonwin's favourite part of the day is working with the grade R's and she is quick to admit that working at New Generations is far more fun than working at the print shop.

Challenges faced by Glynis and her staff, when working with Rhonwin, include her sometimes erratic emotional state. On the odd occasion, Rhonwin will have a particularly bad day and won't feel up to looking after the children, and the staff have to make do without her. Working with Rhonwin requires patience, but in general, she is an asset to the ECD service, and Glynis, the staff and the children love having her with them on a daily basis.

The opportunity provided by Glynis and New Generations is important on a number of levels. Firstly, giving Rhonwin a safe, stimulating environment to go to everyday, where she has specific responsibilities, is important for her development and gives her a sense of place in the community. Secondly, Rhonwin's presence has helped to educate the children about the differences in people, and how those differences don't make people better or worse, but rather simply part of a diverse human race. Finally, Rhonwin's sense of belonging has extended into the WECD and no group function is complete if she is not there.

Epilepsy

Nafisa Saunders is the principal at Pooh Bear and Friends Educare Centre. In 2015, Nafisa had to make a difficult decision - to take in a child suffering from severe epilepsy, who had been denied entry to other ECD services, or turn her away. The child had been brought to Nafisa by the mother and grandmother, who were desperately looking for an ECD service that would take their child, with her condition. Nafisa was reluctant because her ECD service, like most in Wentworth, was simply not equipped to take on a child with such challenges; the staff were not adequately trained and Nafisa was worried that something might happen to the child on her watch. The family had indicated that the child would need a dedicated ECD worker to be with her at all times as she should not bump her head. Although Nafisa had done first aid training, she felt it was necessary to discuss the situation with SC's facilitator and the WECD. It was decided that Nafisa should take on the child for a one-month trial period, with indemnity forms completed and signed. Nafisa's husband also suffers from mild epilepsy, so the couple had some understanding of how to care for someone with the same condition.





Sandra*, was five years old, suffered from seizures, could not talk, and was still wearing nappies when she arrived at Pooh Bear and Friends. Her first few days were spent in the corner with an assistant, observing the other children. Eventually she emerged from her shell and joined in with the activities. The ECD practitioner would take her on walks in the yard and stretch her arms to keep her moving, and she was included in as many activities as she was able to participate.

As the weeks went by Sandra blossomed and began to say simple words such as “nana” when she was hungry, and could sit in a chair with side-bars to eat with the other children. She would scoot along on her bottom and hold up her hands to be carried – small triumphs for all involved.

For the children at Pooh Bear and Friends, Sandra was their first experience of a child with disabilities. Initially the children were reluctant to play with her, and Nafisa decided to turn it into a learning experience. She also started to include ways of teaching children about the differences between people in her lesson plans. Nafisa further decided to organise a visit for her children to an ECD service in the Overport area that assists children with barriers – but before they could go, she received the devastating news that Sandra had died at home. Sandra had spent two months with Nafisa at Pooh Bear and Friends.

For Nafisa, WASH had opened her mind and to some degree had changed her mindset on incorporating children with special needs. Whilst she had attended awareness and basic training on special needs, taking on a child with challenges provided her and her staff with the opportunity to learn how to include children with disabilities and special needs in their ECD. Sandra’s last days were happy and full of smiles, and it was interesting to see how the children later adjusted, including and protecting her.

Nafisa acknowledges that in future they would need to be more equipped and receive advanced training to accommodate children with special needs. This is being facilitated through the WECDF networks and included in the 2016 training calendar.



Autism

Laurel Cook, owner and principal of Fairy Tales Daycare, first experienced autism as a special needs case in her ECD service when the younger brother of one of her charges joined. For Laurel the family of the children in her care become part of the greater Fairy Tales family, so it was important that the little brother would follow suit.

When Jaden* arrived she noticed a distinct physical difference between the two children, as well as a difference in personality. The parents were aware of the differences and the father hoped that by putting Jaden in an ECD setting he would receive better stimulation and input than he was currently receiving at home with granny, who was caring for the boy during the day. The mother was cautious and observed how Laurel and staff reacted to her “different” son. The staff simply included him in their everyday activities with the other children.

After six months, Jaden was removed from Fairy Tales and sent back to granny to be raised as the family were going through their own emotions and fears. He came back to Fairy Tales when he turned four, as the family lived in an apartment and Jaden needed friends and an outdoor space. By then it was apparent that there was something different about Jaden, and although Laurel’s staff were not trained to deal with a child that had special needs they made every effort to work with him and the unique challenges he presented. They didn’t separate Jaden or let the other children treat him differently – he was simply a unique child in their care. The children learnt to work around his sometimes difficult behaviour and became quite protective of him, helping Jaden and doing small things for him. Jaden’s granny would pop in every so often at the start but soon realised her grandson was in good hands.

A few months later Jaden’s mother told Laurel he had been diagnosed with autism. She asked Laurel if she and the ECD staff would complete daily reports to complement the doctors’ observations. By the time Jaden left Fairy Tales he could walk, carry his bag, comfortably be transported in a bus with the other children, say key phrases such as “I’m hungry” and “Thuli, you’re naughty” and was potty trained. Jaden was ready for big school!



Through this experience Laurel has formed a relationship with a teacher at St Raphael's, a school in the area that caters for children with disability. Joey Usher (a foundation phase teacher, with more than 20 years' experience) will be offering the WECDF training sessions to teach practitioners how to work with children with learning disabilities. She also set up meetings with Jaden's parents to teach them how best to deal with a child with his unique challenges.

At a recent WECDF meeting one of the teachers raised the issue of a child she had in her care who was exhibiting certain behaviours, and Laurel immediately identified these as being similar to Jaden's. She was able to refer the teacher to the Principal at St Raphael's for a comprehensive assessment for the child.

The power of WECDF is in the sharing of experiences and lessons learnt, and providing each other with the support and training required to take on new challenges, including embracing and working with children with special needs.

Hearing

When twin boys, Tariq* and Shane*, were enrolled at Sunbeam it was clear to Romany Roberts and her staff that both boys were struggling with their speech. In 2015 a multi-disciplinary team from Wentworth Hospital provided introductory information to ECD practitioners on speech therapy, occupational therapy, clinical psychology and dietetics. This training assisted ECD practitioners to identify problems that were being displayed by children in their care. When Romany contacted the mother she admitted that she knew there was a problem, but she was unsure of what to do or how problematic it was. Romany suggested that through the WECDF's excellent relationship with the operational manager at Gateway Clinic and the community caregiver who visits and monitors the ECD site (through the WASH programme) the boys be taken for an assessment, which the mother agreed to.

Both boys were found to have an excessive build-up of wax in their ears, which had to be cleaned out. This was assumed to have played a role in the boys' speech difficulties – the wax had acted as a barrier to hearing and whatever the boys heard was muffled. Speech therapy was advised and Romany contacted the mother to let her know the proposed way forward.

The boys' mother was relieved to know that her sons' speech challenges could be treated and agreed to take them for speech therapy. After a few sessions more intensive and specialised speech therapy was recommended at King Edward Hospital. The boys have been benefiting from this for the last two years. The mother's positive and proactive attitude has been a huge help in ensuring they get the treatment they require.

“ Children who haven't been diagnosed with hearing problems are often assumed to be naughty, when in reality they simply cannot hear or fully understand what they are being told to do. ”

Romany has noticed a change in the boys' confidence and the relationship between the boys and their mother has improved remarkably. Children who haven't been diagnosed with hearing problems are often assumed to be naughty, when in reality they simply cannot hear or fully understand what they are being told to do.

Working with a multi-disciplinary team at Wentworth hospital is certainly adding value to ECD services and to the health of the young children being cared for in these services.



Remedial support

Doreen Hamiel is the principal of Excel Pre-Primary and Remedial Centre. She has 47 years of experience and instead of enjoying her retirement years has chosen to continue the wonderful and much needed work of serving children in her community, especially those with special needs. While the pre-school children who attend Excel are asleep for their afternoon nap Doreen opens her doors to children in the community who require remedial intervention to improve their mathematics, English, Zulu and Afrikaans ability. Since 1992 Doreen has provided the only community-based remedial learning service in Wentworth.

Before Doreen opened Excel in 2000 she worked as a qualified teacher at Wentworth Primary and had the opportunity to do a course in remedial teaching at the then University of Durban Westville. She caters for approximately 30 children from the community who require remedial classes and have been referred by their school teachers. Many children entering primary school face language and mathematics challenges and Doreen is able to provide the help they need.

Like many other ECD service directors Doreen has had to learn to include children with disabilities in her classes. Two autistic brothers attended the ECD and benefited from Doreen's remedial teaching. While the older child was accepted into a primary school that caters for children with special needs, the youngest boy, whom she had more time with, was able to attend a mainstream school.

A story that stands out for Doreen is that of a twelve year old boy who had been diagnosed with dyslexia. The boy could not read at all. Doreen, with a great deal of hard work and prayer, was able to get him to the stage where he was able to read - a huge accomplishment - and find ways to cope with his dyslexia.



Although the Excel ECD service is not fully equipped to take on children with disabilities Doreen does so because there is such a need in the community. She attends workshops to learn about different ways of assisting disabled children and the challenges they face.

One of her charges was a 13 year old boy who was wheel-chair bound and unable to speak or write. He had no physical function but had the normal intellectual ability of a child his age. He attended St Raphael's School during the day, and then came to Excel in the afternoons, where they helped him with his homework and remedial teaching. Although he could not speak, the ECD practitioners could understand him well and their joy was in seeing him being stimulated mentally and growing in confidence, especially in Maths, self-esteem and self-worth.

“ Many children entering primary school face language and mathematics challenges and Doreen is able to provide the help they need. ”

Doreen believes that if the practitioners treat the “special” children the same as they do the other children the message conveyed is that everyone is the same, except that some have challenges that need to be accommodated.

One of the highlights of Doreen's career is reconnecting with adults who attended her ECD service and/or remedial service as children. Recently she met a young woman who was about to graduate as a mechanical engineer and another who was top of her class at university.

Laying the correct foundations in a child's life has long term benefits that are sometimes only seen long after a child has left the care of an ECD service.







ADVOCACY & **LOBBYING**

Learnerships: capacitating ECD practitioners

The WECDF has played a crucial role in lobbying and advocating for the training and development of ECD practitioners, many of whom have been running ECD services for years but have had no formal training or tertiary education opportunities. Through the WECDF, SC has been instrumental in lobbying and advocating for learnerships, and has represented ECD practitioners by attending meetings between the Education, Training and Development (ETDP) SETA, eThekweni Municipality SDB ABM and Skills Development Unit and the learnership service providers. Through the WECDF, practitioners have had access to four learnerships, a monumental achievement.

When challenges began to arise during the course of some of the learnerships, practitioners felt unable to directly approach the service provider or the SETA. They felt ill-equipped, afraid and intimidated. The WECDF provided a united and professional mouthpiece from which the practitioners could air their complaints and concerns, and it was through this platform that required changes were made by those responsible for implementing the learnerships.

Most ECD practitioners are poorly paid, so learnerships provide them with the only affordable means to study further.

For SC, lobbying and advocacy is vital:

“ Our main goal as SC is that children who attend Wentworth ECD services benefit – if the teachers benefit from improved quality of learning, the children benefit, and ultimately South Africa benefits because the level of matric passes should increase, because of a strong ECD foundation. ”

- Gail Richards, Phakama Consulting

Without this united voice, government would not fully understand the needs and challenges experienced on the ground, and practitioners would very likely not approach government to discuss them. ECD practitioners have little to no rights – especially with regard to receiving a minimum wage. The ECD environment is not regulated and is open to abuse. Only one of the 22 ECD services receives a subsidy from the Department of Social Development. An additional burden is that many take in children whose parents are unable to pay the monthly fees because they feel they cannot turn a child away.

The WECDF has been instrumental in ensuring that the rights and needs of ECD practitioners are being heard and considered, and being attended to by the relevant government departments.





SUSTAINABILITY: MOVING FORWARD

In March 2016 SC ends a five-year period of facilitating the WECDF and the reins will be handed over to the Executive Committee to continue building upon the foundation created through this partnership.

One of the biggest challenge the WECDF faces is sustainability. As a constituted organisation it must decide on a way forward that will continue the productive and necessary engagement that has taken place between ECD practitioners and other stakeholders. Whilst SC has implemented a succession plan for the past year, the members of the WECDF believe that the first hurdle they will have to face is proving to the community that they can do it, and maintain the high standards that have been set.

The Executive Committee that has been elected is faced with two areas that need to be addressed: sustainability from within, which entails building a stronger forum and ECD community; and sustainability from without, which requires building new stakeholder relationships, as well as strengthening existing relationships.

Sustainability from within

Currently practitioners who are members of the WECDF benefit greatly from the input of SC and the hard work, often behind the scenes, of the Executive Committee. For some members it appears that the WECDF operates like a well-oiled machine that requires little maintenance. For the Executive this is a perception that they know needs to change if the forum is to continue. The WECDF is reaching a stage where everyone will need to contribute, participate in, and take an active interest in the forum and its activities rather than simply benefit from the opportunities on offer.

Without the buy-in and commitment from all members the Executive Committee believes it will fail. Part of the strategy of the Executive Committee is to challenge the dependency mentality and to make members aware that the service that is being provided by the WECDF has incredible value and should be regarded as such.

Additionally, the Executive knows that the practitioners as well as the greater Wentworth community have many skills, talents and abilities that can be put to use in addressing some of the challenges they face. They would like to create opportunities that allow for an exchange of ideas and the implementation of skills, and to build a culture of reciprocity. A participatory approach is essential in obtaining community buy-in and ensuring regular attendance.

Sustainability from without

The WECDF is hosting a breakfast in 2016 where community stakeholders, the Jacobs and Isipingo Chamber of Commerce, government departments and industry will be invited to learn about the work that WECDF and SC have been engaged in for the past five years. The intention is to show various stakeholders the importance of partnership, and how much more can be achieved when everybody contributes towards the upliftment, development and capacitation of a community – specifically in the field of ECD. The Executive Committee will have to raise significant funds in order to continue with the implementation and ongoing development of the WECDF work they have been doing if they are to ensure the same standard and quality of work is maintained. The breakfast will be an opportunity to appeal for and secure that support

The Executive is confident about approaching potential funders, because through Oxfam and SC, they now have extensive evidence of what these organisations have achieved and what can be achieved in the future. The phenomenal changes within the ECD environment in Wentworth have demonstrated the effectiveness of the ECD forum model. Continuity is vital and the Executive intends ensuring it takes place by securing funding and skills transfer through training by experts in the field. This includes finding funding for the continuation of the WASH programme, which has been so successful, is loved by the children and practitioners, and has produced important outcomes such as decreasing school absenteeism due to sickness.

For the Executive, the most important funding to secure is for the post of mentor and monitor (see the story below). This position is key to helping ECD services perform to optimal standards and provides an interface for all the concerns and questions of practitioners.





MENTORING & MONITORING

SC offers two types of mentorship and monitoring support: one which focuses on complying with norms and standards, and the other which involves supporting ECD services strategically.

Ensuring compliance with norms and standards

In 2012, Roselind Rose was hired to implement a mentoring and monitoring programme for the ECD services affiliated to the WECDF. She was trained for this role by SC and has worked tirelessly with the services to achieve and sustain the improved quality of ECD in Wentworth.

Her role is vital – she is responsible for making sure that each ECD service complies with the minimum standards put in place by the DoSD (0-4 years), the DoE (5 years and older) and the eThekweni Municipality.

Roselind undertakes site visits to the ECD service to ensure, amongst other things:

Premises and equipment: the structure is clean, safe, well maintained, well ventilated, there is enough light, and the playroom is relevant for all age groups;

Ablution facilities: toilets are clean, suitable for the age groups, and sufficient for the number of children at the service;

Health, safety and nutrition: a menu list of meals per day is provided, child protection checks are done, and the children and staff files are accessible;

Management: a focus on administration, which includes application forms, records of children (including birth certificates), working hours of staff, ages catered for, admission policies, registers (attendance, absenteeism, incident register and financial);

Active learning: looks at the programmes being run by the services, as well as planned activities to develop the whole child;

Practitioners (teachers): notes their qualifications, training and ratio of staff to children.

Part of Roselind's job is to ensure ECD services have policies and procedures in place, something that was previously lacking. In order to make this more manageable for the ECD service, basic templates were designed by SC for practitioners to utilise in writing up their own policies and procedures and made available in the form of a resource kit, accessible to ECD practitioners at the WECDF Resource Centre based at the Child Welfare Offices in Wentworth. The ECD Resource Kit has now been shared with ECD forums across KZN.

Between 2012 and 2015 Roselind was the main ECD mentor available in Wentworth. In 2014 the National Department of Social Development visited the Wentworth community to discuss and help find solutions to the many social ills in the community. ECD was included – something that had not happened previously. Prior to this, visits from any officials were rare.

During the tour of the community by both National and Provincial DoSD officials they learnt that the vast majority of ECD services in the area were unregistered. The supervisor of Little David, Pearl Windvogel, had tried for 21 years to register her ECD service with the DoSD, with no success. During the visit to Wentworth, Little David was issued a registration certificate at a function in the Community Hall. At this occasion Pearl challenged the officials to ensure that more ECD services in the community are registered.

As a result of all this DoSD profiled the 22 ECD services in the Wentworth area, focusing on important aspects that Roselind addresses when she mentors and monitors the services. This exercise resulted in a comprehensive report being developed, highlighting needs and challenges faced by the ECD services. Home-based services, while not being able to meet all the infrastructural requirements, are often able to meet the others. DoSD are now assessing these services with the view to granting conditional registration to them – a big step forward.



With the assistance of Roselind and a group of volunteers from the Netherlands two additional ECD services have now been officially registered. Currently there are six ECD services working on their registration files, and a further two are waiting for their NPO certification before submitting their application for registration as a Home Play or Partial Care Centre with DoSD. The strategic partnership of the Wentworth Victim Friendly Centre and the volunteers from the Netherlands has been invaluable in this process.

One of the many benefits of having an ECD service registered is that all staff of the service need to have been cleared against the National Child Protection Register. This register lists the names of people who should not work with children because they have been found to be unsuitable. Roselind ensures that even the unregistered ECDs comply with this.

In addition to the DoSD profiling each ECD service and as a result of lobbying by SC, the Environmental Health Department of the eThekweni Municipality also initiated their own audit and profiling of the ECD services in 2014 and 2015. These reports are vital because without them the ECD services have no way of knowing which standards they do not yet meet and therefore the mentor is not able to effectively support them. Even with the constant lobbying that SC does, most reports are still outstanding and a few have been referred back because of inaccuracies.

“ These reports are vital because without them the ECD services have no way of knowing which standards they do not yet meet and therefore the mentor is not able to effectively support them. ”

Without Roselind the regular checking of ECD services in the Wentworth area would not happen. She performs a function that is the joint responsibility of DoSD, the eThekweni Municipality, the DoH and the DoE.

Roselind ensures that ECD services do not get complacent or fall behind – she wants them to be ready for the day that their registration comes through. She does this by visiting the services; giving them a courtesy “heads up” about a week before, and then showing up on one of the days. Roselind writes and shares with each service an inspection report after each visit. These reports are kept on file and activities are implemented and monitored against these. She accounts and reports to the SC facilitator on progress, challenges and concerns. Parents appreciate this service as they now have a direct communication line to address concerns.

Roselind loves her job and is grateful to SC for the opportunity, not only to assist ECD services with improving their service provision, but also to grow and develop herself. She now represents SC at some training events, conducts training, and types reports on computer - a skill she has learned whilst being a Mentor.

Unlocking potential – providing strategic support

While Roselind provides operational support, Gail Richards supports services strategically, aiming to ensure that the practitioners who manage portfolios and represent the WECCDF do so properly and with confidence, and that the operational mentor has a clear work plan, direction and guidelines. In addition she mentors the management team, portfolio managers and planning sub-committees as part of the succession plan.

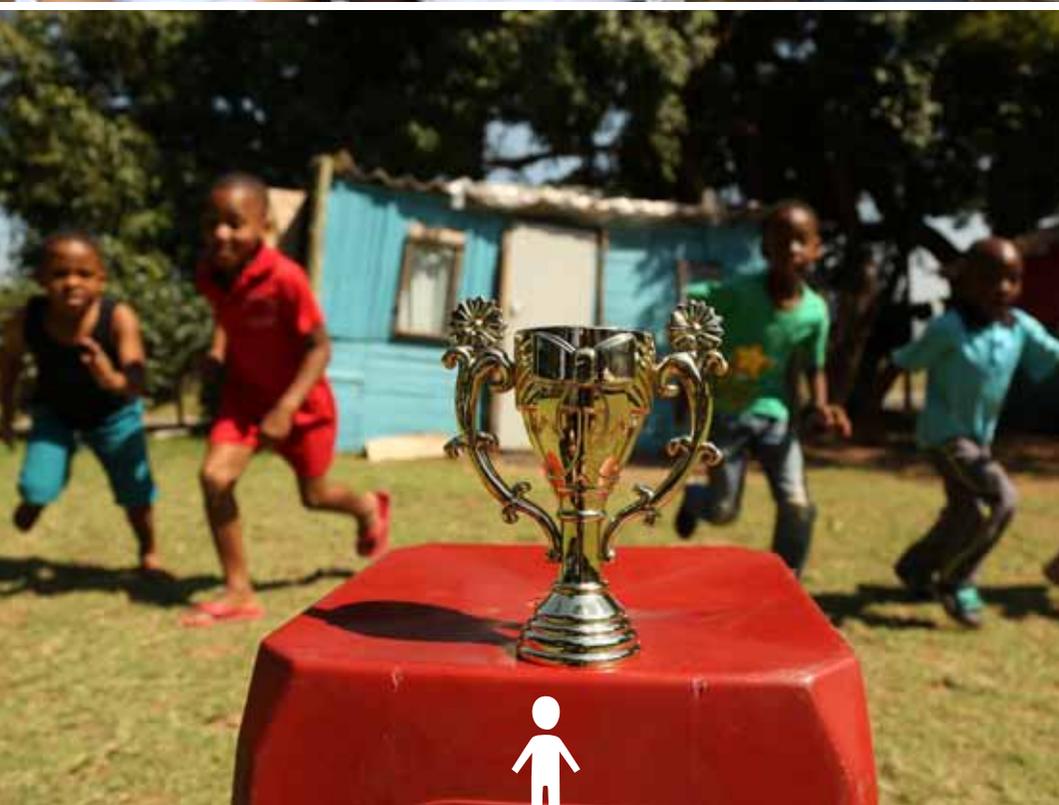
Gail believes that the greatest lessons she’s learnt in the last year-and-a-half has been the unlocking of skills through the WECCDF and that social capital exists in every community, simply requiring effort and time to locate, unlock and then develop. For her “diamonds are right on our doorstep”. It has been a revelation to Gail and she has witnessed many examples of women rising up and taking hold of the potential within.





“ Agnes was able to get local and provincial departments, community organisations and small business involved in the Sports Day, with more than 3000 community members attending. ”

Agnes Mazibuko spoke English poorly when she first began working at an ECD service. After the owner passed on, she went on to open her own service, Kool Kats. Recently she led the planning sub-committee in organising the successful community Sports Day and developed the confidence to invite government and other important stakeholders to attend. Agnes was able to get local and provincial departments, community organisations and small business involved in the Sports Day, with more than 3000 community members attending.



She represents the WECDF on the SC KZN Association of ECD Forums and is mandated to highlight concerns of members and provide necessary information. Her task is further to provide monthly feedback to WECDF members, a role she carries out with distinction.

One of the ways in which members of the WECDF are empowered is through having a portfolio to manage. Portfolios include transport, safety, catering, training, representing the WECDF at the meetings of the War Rooms², caring for members who are ill, celebrating their birthdays or hosting events. Members manage their portfolio and represent the WECDF as well as provide feedback to the other WECDF members. For Gail, mentorship has been an important aspect of ensuring that members are able to handle responsibilities, feel confident, fully participate and take ownership of their forum in the true sense. When an important or larger event comes up a planning committee is established and Gail mentors the sub-committee in order to ensure sustainability.

². War Rooms were initiated and are coordinated by the Office of the Premier of KwaZulu-Natal to provide for interaction between government duty bearers and the community, allowing for issues to be raised and for government to be held accountable in attending to these.



Seventeen years ago Maria was a domestic worker for Aunty Doreen's family. She was offered a position at Excel ECD Centre as a cleaner and through capacity building, mentorship and guidance, she has gone from being a domestic worker to an ECD cleaner, to an ECD worker caring for babies, to an ECD practitioner, to a remedial ECD teacher and was recently trained by the DoE as part of train-the-trainer on the 0-4 New Curriculum Framework. She has also received ECD training through Embury College.

According to Maria, holding a position of influence in the WECDF has led her to become more responsible and to take what she has learnt and share it with others.

“ We have to take our positions very seriously. In my centre I have to make sure that I take a stand for our children, but also for other ECD workers in our centres. Because not all of us had a chance to be in those positions, you come back and help other ladies. ”

Gail believes that effective mentoring has led to the greatest rewards. She has seen enormous growth and development of the practitioners and is of the view that every practitioner has a story of growth to share, a story of change that has led to a considerable transformation.



AN UNEXPECTED CONSEQUENCE: **THE BUILDING OF A SISTERHOOD**

In the years before the WECDF the concept of a “sisterhood” amongst the ECD practitioners in the area was laughable. According to a number of practitioners interviewed they were competitive, distrustful of each other and in no way united. The WECDF has provided an opportunity for practitioners to come together; share ideas, opinions, best practices and training opportunities; and most importantly, unite in their mission to give the children of the Wentworth community a solid foundation in life. While huge strides have been made in building trust amongst practitioners, the journey continues as relationships are strengthened over time.

Supporting each other in times of grief has provided a true example of how important the Sisterhood has become in the lives of each practitioner. Over the past two years, three loved and respected members of the WECDF passed away, and it was the Sisterhood that rallied together to support each other and those most affected by the losses.

The Sisterhood would like to remember Dianne Davis, best friend of 40 years and co-teacher to Jenny Osborne, at Little People; Aunty Sandra, best friend to Doreen Hamiel and ECD supervisor of Excel; and Beryl Joshua, owner of Bright Babes Home Play service. All three were active members and much loved by all the women in the WECDF. When these women passed on it was the Sisterhood that came together to provide support and help and ensure that no one grieved alone.

“ ...it was the Sisterhood that rallied together to support each other and those most affected by the losses ”

An example of the role of the Sisterhood in times of grief was demonstrated at the funeral of Beryl, where every woman in the Sisterhood wore a yellow rose and yellow scarf in remembrance of her – a sea of light in a dark time. For SC these are small wins that often go unnoticed but create a ripple of hope for the community and many organisations in Wentworth.





A FINAL WORD

Looking back and reflecting on our journey over the past five years I ask, “Did we achieve our goals that we initially set?” And I can say, yes, indeed we did. In some areas we overachieved, while in others we have made considerable progress. I honestly feel that not one of these women, or the ECD services, is where they used to be. They may not all be where they are supposed to be, but it’s important to celebrate their tremendous progress and development on this journey.

I will be eternally grateful to Mari van der Merwe (SC), Eurakha Singh (eThekweni Municipality SDB ABM), Iris Cupido (formerly from McCarthy) and Oxfam for affording me this amazing and unforgettable opportunity to be of service to my very own community...and to the amazing women who have trusted me in leading and mentoring them. I still see a long road ahead.

My final message to the WECDf:

As we hand the baton over it’s time for the WECDf to reposition itself. This will mean that ECD practitioners bring their very own gifts - skills, talents, knowledge, and abilities - the best of themselves, to the organisation. Every member has something to contribute. The opportunity to reposition the WECDf should be seen as a God-given vision to serve, accomplish what you can, and at some stage exit, leaving a measurably improved space for the next generation of ECD practitioners and workers to benefit from and build on.

Before I end I have to offer a cautionary note to my sisters. Unity is the most important weapon you have to ensure the continued success of the forum. Without it everything we have all worked so hard for will surely crumble. The Sisterhood should work hard to continue supporting each other and be willing to raise issues honestly and with integrity, keep each other to account, challenge one another - but through it all, always be united.

“ I might not get there with you but I have seen the other side. ”

- Martin Luther King, Jnr (Gail Richards, Phakama Consulting)





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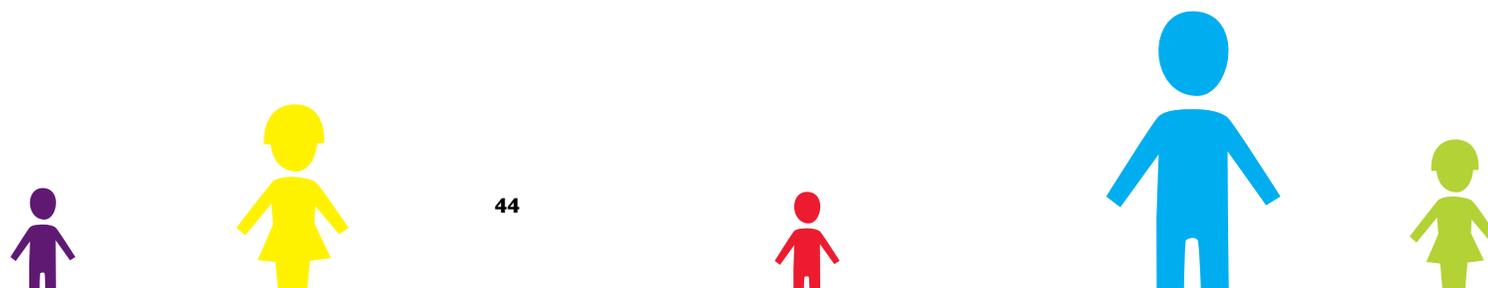
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Save the Children has had a presence in KwaZulu-Natal since 1961 and for most of that time has supported or implemented developmental programmes that benefit preschool children. For some time the organisation has recognised that the need in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) sector is so great that one-on-one assistance to individual ECD services is not efficient, effective or sustainable. This resulted in Save the Children in KwaZulu-Natal starting to work with and through forums of ECD service providers. This publication documents the journey of one of these forums and highlights the amazing role played by women to benefit the young children of a community.