Masibumbane Development Organisation, South Africa Partners and eight (8) Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centres have partnered to strengthen ECD quality and access in Duncan Village, Vergenoeg and Parkside Townships in East London, Eastern Cape. The Community ECD Network began in 2012 and is focused on five key areas essential to improving the educational outcome of under-resourced centres.

1. **PROVIDE MANAGEMENT SUPPORT AND CAPACITY BUILDING FOR PRINCIPALS:** A needs assessment conducted in 2012 revealed a lack of management expertise at the 8 ECD centres and led to a recommendation to support principal capacity development as a priority. The assessment also revealed that the majority of centres were not registered with the Department of Social Development as non-profit organisations, and they were also not registered as places of care, day care centres or ECD centres. Immediately, MDO and SA Partners created a platform where the principals and their deputies could meet on a regular basis to discuss issues of mutual importance, share critical information and make plans to improve the status quo. The Community ECD Network meetings are held on a monthly basis as a forum for peer support, information sharing and planning. Furthermore, mentoring is carried out through weekly visits to the centres, when supervision and management skills are emphasised.

2. **FACILITATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRAINING AND MENTORING OF PRACTITIONERS:** There are a total of 26 ECD practitioners employed in the 8 partnering ECD centres. Only 1 in 4 practitioners has ever received formal ECD training. From the outset the upskilling of ECD practitioners was recognized as the critical need by all the principals. Towards this end, we have paid for the enrolment of four (4) ECD practitioners in NQF (National Qualifications Framework) level 4 ECD training at ITEC, a local partner. Furthermore we have established ongoing mentorship of Principals and practitioners and working with partners like the Buffalo City Municipality and Cotlands, we have facilitated opportunities for capacity development and skills transfer in the areas of theme planning, daily programme planning and baby stimulation.
3. **DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT EARLY LITERACY STRATEGIES:** MDO won a grant of R20 000 from Investec to begin the installation of literacy corners in four (4) ECD centres most in need of learning materials and books. These will feature a book caddy or shelf and a selection of books per centre, depending on the centre’s needs and available resources. The centres will also receive quarterly workshops to support the use of the literacy corners as tools for instruction. We have partnered with ITEC to ensure that the literacy corners will be installed by end of 2015.

4. **CREATE PARTNERSHIPS AND INCREASE AWARENESS AROUND ECD THROUGH STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOPS, COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION:** MDO has partnered with various stakeholders in a bid to increase awareness about ECD as well as to collaborate effectively to identify resources, information and knowledge that will advance the ECD work in Duncan Village. Amongst the partnerships that have been created are: Cotlands, which partners with MDO on the baby stimulation programme; Joint Aid Management (JAM), which provides a nutritious porridge to all MDO supported ECD centres; and the Buffalo City Municipality, whose ECD Advisor, Ms Colleen Forsyth, has provided critical workshop sessions to ECD principals and practitioners on daily programmes of learning (July) as well as theme planning (September). Furthermore a partnership with the University of Fort Hare has provided two Social Work students who have volunteered on the ECD programme for 3 months as part of their internship. The students visit the centres and work with the principals and parents to build awareness on ECD.

5. **IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY RESEARCH:** MDO is serving as a community partner in the development of the new Early Childhood Development Centre of Excellence at the University of Fort Hare. In February, 2016, researchers from the University of Fort Hare and Wheelock College will carry out an extensive needs assessment of local ECD providers that will include several of the MDO supported centres. Through observation of classroom practices and extensive interviews with Principals, practitioners, parents and other community stakeholders, researchers will gather both baseline data for future research and gather information about community-based ECD that will inform the research agenda for the new Centre of Excellence.

**BABY STIMULATION WITH COTLANDS**

Masibumbane has partnered with Cotlands, a national NGO with offices in the Eastern Cape, to provide demonstrations of baby stimulation techniques in four early childhood centres in Duncan Village. In total, 37 babies ages 12 to 24 months have benefited from the intervention since the partnership began in May 2015. Cotland’s Birth – Two Programme focuses on the first 1,000 days of a child’s life, prioritising nutrition, proper health care and emotional and cognitive stimulation as critical factor’s in a child’s ability to grow and learn.

To ensure the programme’s sustainability, Cotlands practitioners are transferring skills to maintain the baby stimulation to the ECD practitioners working in the Duncan Village centres.

“Since we have been rendering services, there has been a BIG improvement with the children’s learning, singing etc. Even a practitioner with low level of education she is always willing to learn new ideas and enjoys participating. The Early Learning Facilitators (ELFs) visit weekly and have reported that it is going well. The practitioners participate and continue with the activities for the rest of the week.”

PATRICIA GUNN, EASTERN CAPE REGIONAL MANAGER- COTLANDS
There is a close tie between children’s success in school at ages nine (9) and ten (10) and the amount and quality of the verbal interaction, or talk, that they engage in with their parents and caregivers during the very first years of life. When adults speak and encourage children to respond, when young children show curiosity and adults follow up on their natural curiosity by conversing with them, children’s brains are developing, preparing them for school and for success.

Sifunda Ngokuthetha, (“We Learn by Talking Together”) has been designed to strengthen early development by creating opportunities for caregivers and young children (2 to 8 years) to engage in conversation and early learning in everyday environments. To implement this early literacy strategy, Masibumbane has partnered with South Africa Partners. With grant support from The Innovation Edge, a collaborative early learning innovation fund initiated and supported by an agreement between Ilifa Labantwana and donor partners (DG Murray Trust, Elma Foundation, FNB Fund and UBS Optimus Foundation), we have piloted Sifunda Ngokuthetha in the Duncan Village community. Two settings were selected to test the model – the Boxer Supermarket and two local health facilities. In both settings, carefully crafted signage in isiXhosa that is child friendly prompted conversations between child and caregiver. A research team from the University of Fort Hare will help us measure the impact of the signage.

In 2013, the Masibumbane Board of Directors set its vision of creating a fund to support eligible learners in four identified Eastern Cape historical schools i.e. Nyanga, Healdtown, St Johns and Mariazelle. This venture is an important component of Masibumbane’s mission - Restoring the Education Excellence in the Eastern Cape, while also seeking to honour the brilliant efforts of Ma’am Seipelo Maqubela who devoted her life in teaching excellence in Maths and Science.

Through her efforts, Mrs. Maqubela helped produce black professionals who are today leaders in their own right in business, science and various fields of education. December 2014 saw the selection of the first successful awardees of the Ma’am Seipelo Maqubela Bursary Trust. Anelisa Marwanqana – Mariazelle (Grd 11); Masixole Mjakula – Healdtown (Grd9); Athenkosi Soyizwaphi – St John’s College (Grd9) became the first recipients of the Bursary. In August 2015, follow up visits were paid to the schools and feedback about the performance of the learners was received. It was heart-warming to hear from one of the parents how much the assistance had meant to her family. A call for applications for funding the 2016 academic year has been issued to the schools and we look forward to adding more recipients to the pool.

Professor Lynette Lessing of Wheelock College in Boston, Massachusetts (USA) conducted a brain development workshop that was held in Duncan Village on 21 May, 2015. A total of 70 people from across Duncan Village, including ECD practitioners, managers, parents and stakeholders, attended and participated to learn more about brain development in young children and the importance of baby stimulation in developing young brains.

Wheelock College has been consulting with local partners to identify opportunities for improving the educational outcome for children who attend early childhood centres affiliated with the Community ECD Network.
Masibumbane has commenced work on LinkCARE, a PEPFAR programme funded through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Masibumbane is one of five partners working on the LinkCARE programme nationally, with lead responsibility in the Eastern Cape and Western Cape provinces.

In this capacity, Masibumbane will be responsible for scaling-up the recently adopted “National Adherence Guideline for Chronic Diseases,” as well as improving the management of chronic diseases such as HIV, tuberculosis and non-communicable diseases for children, adolescents and adults. Over the next five years Masibumbane will work with DOH and partners to improve linkages to care, long-term retention in care, and adherence to treatment.

Other LinkCARE partners are: ZoeLife, working in KwaZulu Natal and providing national technical assistance on pediatric care; Pathfinder International – South Africa providing national technical assistance on adolescent care; the National Alliance of State & Territorial AIDS Directors, working in the Northern Cape, Free State, Mpumalanga and Limpopo; and South Africa Partners, which is responsible for overall national leadership and the provinces of Gauteng and North West.

**GOLF DAY**

On Friday, 23rd October, 68 Golfers supported the 2nd Annual MDO Golf Day Fundraiser held at the East London Golf Club. The Fundraiser, themed ‘Supporting the Education of 450 Pre-Schoolers’ raised more than R70 000. Funds raised through this event will support MDO’s ECD programme, which supports 8 ECD centres in Duncan Village, Vergenoeg and Park Side townships.

Approximately 40 companies provided various forms of support, from sponsoring of 4-Ball-Alliances to sponsoring of holes, donating prizes, services and money to the cause. The event culminated in an exciting cocktail and prize giving function which featured an exciting auction led by an experienced and funny Ed Thompson of Tirhani Auctioneers.

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