

MasiBakhuseleni ECD Programme

Mnquma, Eastern Cape

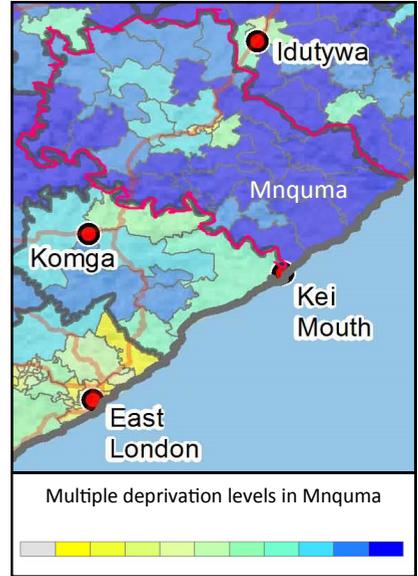


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how can we help you?

There is growing scientific evidence that children's early development affects the entire lifespan, and that attention paid to supporting children's early development impacts not only on individuals, but affects the wellbeing of whole societies.

ITEC has been working in Early Childhood Development in the Mnquma area for a number of years. The Mnquma municipality, which is characterised by high levels of multiple deprivation - material, income, employment and education - is home to more than 29,5 thousand children below the age of 5 years. All these children need to be well cared for and have opportunities to learn, but many do not receive what they need. The First National Bank funded ITEC Masibakhuseleni Project ('Let us protect them') works with local community based organisations to raise awareness of children's needs, and improve the quality of care for children in Mnquma.



Map adapted from Noble, 2013.

THE ITEC MODEL



Working with our partners, we advocate strongly for children, and share information about child development and learning. We build the capacity of our partners through training, mentoring, and support, and we provide resources to facilitate their work. Although we promote holistic child development, we particularly focus on language and literacy development, as well as the inclusion of children with developmental delays or disabilities.

THE MASIBAKHUSELENI PROJECT

The following are the key outcomes for the Masibakhuseleleni Project in Mquma:

- Children under five years of age will have improved opportunities to learn through play;
- Parents and adults will be empowered to support their children's early learning;
- Home visitors and parents will be better able to identify developmental delays or disabilities, and reduce their effects on children's development.

In 2014, we partnered with four local Community-Based Organisations that have established home visiting programmes, and a profound understanding of the communities in which they work. ITEC's role is to shape attitudes, increase knowledge about children's developmental needs, and build skills so that our partners can confidently provide home visiting services that focus on the needs of young children and their families.

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

Over a number of years, ITEC has built good relationships with key ECD stakeholders in the Mquma area. Initial planning for the 2014 project included the Departments of Social Development, Health and Education, the Special Programmes Unit in the Municipality, CBOs that work with families or children, and CBOs that work with disability. Our goal was to raise awareness of children's needs, and encourage commitment to meeting them.



Initial planning meeting with key stakeholders

ADVOCACY AND INFORMATION SHARING

An initial Seminar, entitled “*Umntwana ngumntwana*” (“A child is a child”) was held to raise awareness of developmental delays and disabilities, the necessity for early identification, and to prompt action to offer all children opportunities to develop to their maximum potential.

Participants included representatives from the Human Rights Commission, Disabled Children's Action Group, as well as the local municipality, the Departments of Social Development and health, ECD practitioners, parents and activists.

CBO managers attended information-sharing sessions on the proposed project. The purpose of these sessions was two-fold: firstly, to provide information on the importance of child-focused home visiting programmes, and secondly to invite Expressions of Interest from CBOs who would like to join the ITEC 'Active Learning Home Visiting' programme.

JOINING THE PROJECT

Community Based Organisations applied to join the Active Learning Home Visiting programme. After a careful selection process, Memorandums of Agreement between ITEC and four CBOs were drawn up and signed.

The aim of the Active Learning Home Visiting Programme is to empower CBOs to help parents and caregivers to support the learning and development of their young children at home.

25 participants (from a range of CBOs, including those that specialise in disability) were selected to attend a learning programme on identifying and ameliorating developmental delays in young children.

CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMMES

“Active Learning” for home visitors

CBO managers and home visitors attended an orientation workshop aimed at increasing understanding of how young children develop and learn, and to build the capacity of managers to support the project.

Workshop topics included how children learn best, the importance of interaction between adults and children, the latest information on brain development, the importance of the first thousand days of a child’s life, the Essential Package of services for young children, and engaging with local government for children.

20 Home Visitors from the four CBOs received further practical training in a safe and supportive setting. In addition, Lenette Lessing, Professor of Social Work at Wheelock College, USA, hosted a workshop on emotional, social and cognitive development in July 2014.

Developmental Delays and Disability

Thanks to supplementary funding from First National Bank, ITEC staff were accredited by the Sunshine Association to present the Sunshine START programme to home visitors, CBO managers, and ECD practitioners. The START course enables participants to identify developmental delays early, to work with children and parents to ameliorate challenges, and to refer children for professional assessment.

Participants attended five days’ of training, and two subsequent reflective sessions where they considered their progress and planned the way forward.



Men are increasingly understanding how important it is to be involved in children’s development.



A home visitor provides support for children’s play and learning

RESOURCE PROVISION

Although we encourage home visitors to use the materials and toys available in the environment as far as possible, a basic toy kit is invaluable in such resource-poor areas. Home visitors who attended the course on Developmental Delays and Disability were provided with a basic toy kit to help them assess children's development and promote active learning in the home, while the four CBOs were provided with a basic toy library to enable their home visitors to borrow and return toys and equipment for their work with the children and families they visit.



Home Visitors with their basic toy kits

IMPACT TO DATE

By July 2014, the CBO Home Visiting project had reached 421 children and 444 adults, while the participants in the Developmental Delays project had interacted with 309 children, including 31 with disabilities.

Quotations from participants

'[The training] helped me see things differently about children, and how important it is to start at an early age'

'[The training] equipped with useful information on how to care for children living with disabilities, especially cerebral palsy, the way to manage it.'

'We learned about the ingredients of active learning and discovered this is information we can implement in our own homes'

CONCLUSION

All young children should receive high quality support from the adults around them. Raising awareness of what can and should be done and equipping role players to do it is key to a new paradigm for children in South Africa.

We believe that acknowledging and building on the work of organisations or individuals is an effective and sustainable way to change the lives of children and their families for the better.

References

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www.itec.org.za | T: 043 743 8333 | E: mail@iteced.co.za
8 Park Avenue | East London | Eastern Cape | South Africa

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