



A COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN: PROMOTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN IN VRYGROND

PREPARED BY THE CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN, IN COLLABORATION WITH THE VRYGROND COMMUNITY ADVISORY GROUP OF THE SAFE, INCLUSIVE AND PARTICIPATIVE PEDAGOGY (SIPP) RESEARCH PROJECT.

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Abbreviations

DSD	Department of Social Development
ECD	Early Childhood Development
SIPP	Safe, Inclusive, Participatory Pedagogy
CI	Children's Institute, University of Cape Town

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Introduction

This document provides details of a Community Action Plan, including priorities and actions that can be taken to improve early learning for children aged 0-6 in the Vrygrond community, an area in Cape Town, in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. The Community Action Plan was developed within a research project led by the Children's Institute at the University of Cape Town and was co-created with a community advisory group in Vrygrond. The community advisory group consisted of members who are actively involved with providing early learning services for young children in the community. We believe that this document will have value beyond the Vrygrond community as it was informed by those who are actively engaging in the early learning community on a daily basis in a local community.

Firstly, we provide a background to the research project in which the Community Action Plan was created, secondly, we provide details of the process of developing the Community Action Plan and finally we present the Community Action Plan, including the three priorities that were agreed on and the actions that need to be taken. In summary the three priority areas identified include:

1. Support for parents to develop nurturing, healthy relationships with young children as well as with ECD centres or programmes in Vrygrond;
2. Support for the development and well-being of ECD practitioners/teachers;
3. Strengthening community-level relationships to enhance information sharing and collaboration among ECD stakeholders, and the broader community.

How can the Community Action Plan be used?

The Action Plan is intended to be used as a source of information on actions that can be taken to support the development and well-being of young children in Vrygrond. The Community Action Plan can be used:

- as a tool to promote parent support, the capacity development and support of ECD practitioners, and community strengthening for improved collaboration and information-sharing on issues affecting the development of young children.

- shared widely with relevant stakeholders in Vrygrond to gather support for implementation of the actions, including the Vrygrond Community Development Forum, the ECD Forum, ECD centre principals, caregivers or parents, and potential donors or government departments that could fund or support these activities.
- applied with flexibility. It is not cast in stone but must be viewed as a working document that should be adapted to changing circumstances.

Background

In 2020, the Children's Institute, University of Cape Town, partnered with True North, an Early Childhood Development (ECD) Resource and Training Organisation in Vrygrond, on a four-year research project focussed on early learning opportunities for young children. This research project, known as the Safe, Inclusive and Participative Pedagogy (SIPP) project aimed to understand and explore early learning practices, with a focus on safety, inclusion, and participation. The study sought to understand how focusing on these three areas could improve young children's learning experiences. Multiple stakeholders including parents or primary caregivers of young children, ECD practitioners and principals, local organisations providing services to young children and their families, and young children, were included in the research. Qualitative methods were used to obtain information such as focus group discussions, individual interviews and activities to spark conversations with children.

True North introduced the project to various stakeholders including the ECD Forum Executive, who showed support and interest. Despite early setbacks to the project due to Covid-19, True North initiated an advisory group consisting of local ECD and child and family service organisations, members of the ECD Forum, and the Vrygrond Community Development Trust. The advisory group's role was to provide guidance and support for the implementation of the research project in Vrygrond. The advisory group met over several months to provide strategic and practical advice on the research content and process and to share their understandings and experiences. They reviewed the information collected during the research process to provide insights for interpreting and contextualising the information. A snippet of the key findings from the research component are presented in Box 1.

Box 1: A brief summary of findings of the SIPP research project

Safety

Stakeholders said that there was a general lack of physical and emotional safety for children in Vrygrond, including in some ECD centres. ECD centres were perceived generally as safe spaces for children and children reflected that they found safety in God and in their parents. Participants reflected that children were sometimes treated harshly at home, with substance abuse, economic hardship, domestic violence and child neglect as key risks to young children's development. Children roamed the streets, at risk of car accidents and community violence, gangs controlled the parks, and there were environmental risks, including garbage dumping. Children were at greater risk on weekends when there were no facilities or safe spaces for them. Staff and community organisations stressed the importance of emotional safety, recognising signs of trauma and paying attention to keeping children mentally and socially well.

Inclusion

Stakeholders reported that there were insufficient ECD services to respond to the needs of all young children living in Vrygrond; the failure of government to provide resources was a common concern. Barriers to access to ECD centres included financial lack, parents' priorities, child neglect, government's registration requirements, and lack of identity documents. Generally, ECD centres struggled with inclusive early learning practice due to lack of resources, practitioner training, cultural diversity, and language barriers. Certain groups of children were identified as more likely to be excluded, including children with disabilities. Some ECD practitioners had a rigorous focus on all children adhering to the ECD centre's daily programme, and find it challenging to be sensitive to children's individual needs.

Participation

Stakeholders emphasised that it was necessary for young children to feel safe in order for them to meaningfully participate in learning activities. Adults often see themselves as knowing best and do not consider children's views; a change in adults' attitudes and perspectives of young children is therefore needed. Child participation was not a parent priority, partly because of cultural norms but also because providing safety, nutrition and access to education was perceived as more urgent. Practitioners often applied a rigid approach to the ECD programme directing all the activities, due to limited training, restricting children's opportunities to participate in early learning activities. Parents also felt powerless due to their limited opportunities to exercise their agency within the community; this in turn restricted their ability to promote child participation. Children faced certain barriers to their participation in early learning, including language issues, low self-esteem, and trauma.

Based on these findings, the advisory group considered actions that can be taken to remedy some of the challenges identified, and to strengthen activities that are already working well in the community. With the aim of improving the lives of young children and their families in Vrygrond. The Community Action Plan provides pathways that can be taken to support and strengthen the Vrygrond ECD community.

Development of the Community Action Plan

In the SIPP research project, we set up a community advisory group in Vrygrond to advise us on our research processes in their community. The research team introduced the idea of developing a community action plan to the members of the community advisory group. Given the lessons learned from the results of the research component of the project, and the context specific knowledge of the advisory group, the research team felt that these results could be transformed into a set of key actions.

Members of the advisory group then expressed the need for a document that sets out a plan for actioning a set of activities that have the potential to drive change for better outcomes for young children in Vrygrond. They specified that the community action plan should highlight the need for young children to be safe in their homes, early learning settings and the wider community. It should also address early learning practice and promote improvements to enable better quality learning environments for young children. The action plan should also emphasise the need for community awareness on the status of young children and their families in Vrygrond and community-wide responses that can support their development.

This resulted in a Community Action Plan which was developed collaboratively between the researchers of the SIPP project at the Children's Institute, University of Cape Town (UCT) and the members of the advisory group. Through a series of four consultative workshops with the research team, the advisory group crafted a set of priority areas for action and related activities, using the research results and recommendations as the basis for these discussions. The workshops enabled the advisory group to, with due consideration of the multiple risks to young children's growth and development in Vrygrond, think together strategically to:

- Formulate a vision for the young children in Vrygrond and
- Develop strategies toward fulfilment of the vision, including selecting target groups and key areas for action.

The research team generated a set of questions to drive the development of the community action planⁱ. A range of facilitation methods were used during the workshops to promote rich and goal-directed engagement including small group exercises, interactive plenaries, mapping and brainstorming, and continuous summarising, reflection and feedback to enable group consensus¹. Information from the workshops was collated and arranged according to the selected key areas of action and drafted into this Community Action Plan which is designed to indicate

i These questions can be seen in the tables where the details of the Community Action Plan are shown.

steps that can be taken to achieve the goals of supporting and strengthening the Vrygrond ECD community and the broader community, to promote better outcomes for young children and their caregivers.

Planning for a brighter future for young children in Vrygrond

The study findings show that contextual factors such as poverty, unemployment, crime, violence and poor access to basic and essential services, such as public health care, make supporting early child development in Vrygrond very challenging. For parents, these factors also create harsh conditions in which to raise young children.

What happens if action to support young children's development is not taken?

The results of not actively supporting the early development of young children are damaging, as young children and those who care for them are exposed to several risks, often occurring at the same time, and creating a 'negative' effect on children's development. Appendix A provides a table summarising the priority risks and likely outcomes for young children when they do not have access to the necessary protection and supports to prevent or lessen the impact of these risks. While not listed in the table, poverty is a strong underlying factor linked to these risks that can lead to compromised early development.

Despite the challenges, the Vrygrond community has an active group of resource organisations that provide or support services to young children, their families, and the broader community (see Box 2). Within this context, the community advisory group developed a vision statement to express their hope and commitment for a brighter future for the young children of Vrygrond, as reflected in Box 3.

Box 2: The Vrygrond ECD Community

The Vrygrond community has an active group of resource organisations that provide or support services for young children, their families, ECD centres and other community settings. These include resource and training organisations, child and family support organisations, community health organisations, faith-based organisations and approximately 40 ECD centres. Community structures have been established to support and guide the delivery of services and promote sustainability and implementation of programmes for the benefit of the general community. These include the ECD Forum, a support and coordinating structure for ECD centre principals, and the Vrygrond Community Development Forum (CDF), a leadership structure tasked with enabling community development and sustainability which is overseen by an executive committee.

Box 3: A vision for young children in Vrygrond

We desire a Vrygrond community where every young child is valued and understood to have a unique personality and potential for growth. We strive to be a community where young children are accepted and nurtured during each stage of development, and where their voices are heard.

We desire to create a warm, inclusive community atmosphere where all families with young children feel motivated to genuinely collaborate with health and community workers, ECD teachers, programme leaders, services and organisations and are supported to provide healthy and safe environments within Vrygrond, to ensure each young child is well-nourished, protected from harm and that their development is promoted.

We especially aspire to ensure that every young child, regardless of race, gender, ability, social status or other exclusionary factors, can participate in the services and support programmes available in Vrygrond. We strive to be a community that understands the importance of creating stimulating environments and the critical value of quality early education, in family homes and in out-of-home settings.



DETAILS OF THE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN

The three priority areas of the Community Action Plan are summarised in Table 1. The priorities are then presented in more detail with specific, concrete and outcomes-based suggestions for action in the section that follows. In Appendix B we also provide a list of organisations that are already actively engaged in ECD in Vrygrond and have included additional organisations that could be leveraged in the future.

In the following pages you can see the detailed actions for each priority.

Table 1: Summary of priority areas for action

Priority One: Support for parents

Support for parents is essential to develop effective, healthy relationships to promote children's early development at home and early learning settings. This will be achieved by providing relevant information and support to parents to strengthen parents/caregivers' capacity to parent their young children, including supporting parents' access to support services and networks, and to foster healthy relationships between parents/caregivers and ECD programmes/centres in Vrygrond. Actions to achieve the goal for this area include sharing general information and offering basic support to parents; supporting parents to address trauma, supporting parents to build healthy relationships with their child's ECD centre, and strengthening ECD centres' role in encouraging parents' participation in programme activities and involvement in their child's development.

Priority Two: Support for the development and well-being of ECD practitioners/teachers

Supporting ECD teacher development and well-being is vital to enhance the well-being of, and the quality of teaching and learning for, young children. This will be achieved by supporting teachers' capacity to provide improved quality interactions with young children in learning settings by improving their ability to recognise and respond appropriately to children with developmental difficulties, and by providing support and guidance to enable teachers' personal development. Key actions in this area include activities to support teachers to identify and respond to children with developmental difficulties, and initiatives to provide teachers with personal support, growth, and development opportunities.

Priority Three: Strengthen community partnerships

Strengthening collaboration and information-sharing among ECD stakeholders has the goal of enhancing networking and advocacy for improved quality services to young children and their families, by creating opportunities for collaboration, and by sharing resources and information among ECD stakeholders and the broader community. Actions to achieve the goal for this area include convening community dialogues to stimulate collaborations; documenting all services offering support to young children and their families, and sharing the product widely; creating a virtual Information Hub/Centre to house all information on services available in Vrygrond for young children and their families to facilitate improved access to services; and using the information to lobby for improved and expanded services for young children and their families.

2.1. Priority area one: support for parents

Goal and objectives:

To support parents or primary caregivers to develop healthy, effective relationships to promote children's early development at home and early learning settings. Specifically, to provide relevant information and support to parents to:

- a. Strengthen parents/caregivers' capacity to parent their young children, including supporting parents' access to support services and networks
- b. Foster healthy relationships between parents/caregivers and ECD programmes/centres in Vrygrond

a. Framing the priority area:

What primary challenge is addressed by this area of work?	How does the area of work contribute to safety, inclusion or participation for young children?	What is the overall expected outcome of these activities?	What are the strategies to achieve the outcomes?
<p>Being a parent of a young child can be very challenging. Parents need support to better understand their role, especially to offer stimulating interactions and home environments that foster young children's learning. Parents also need support to strengthen their role as nurturing and responsive caregivers to their young children.</p> <p>Parents lack support and face many challenges that stop them from being effective parents; this includes financial lack, poor social support, and mental health concerns. They especially need support because of trauma and stress.</p>	<p>Parents who understand their role and feel supported will be better equipped to create safe spaces and protect their children. They will also place a demand on service providers for safe, inclusive services.</p>	<p>Parents have improved understanding and knowledge about their role and their rights as parents.</p> <p>Parents have improved knowledge on the importance of ECD and their role in providing nurturing, responsive care, stimulating interactions and environments, and of the role and value of ECD programmes/centres in the community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent support activities should include information-sharing and promote positive parenting. • Activities that include fun elements and offer support and social networking opportunities will be helpful to parents. • Home-visiting during infancy, and book-sharing from about 2 years of age have been used effectively in South Africa.² • Supporting parents to interact with their children through simple activities e.g., storytelling, reading, singing and playing with household items can be effective.³

What primary challenge is addressed by this area of work?	How does the area of work contribute to safety, inclusion or participation for young children?	What is the overall expected outcome of these activities?	What are the strategies to achieve the outcomes?
<p>Parents need to know more about why ECD programmes and centres are important for their young children's development. This means that they don't always work together with ECD teachers and principals or participate in their children's learning. Poor communication between parents and ECD centres results in challenges that negatively affects the development of young children.</p> <p>In Vrygrond, parents whose young children are not attending an ECD centre are hard to reach.</p>	<p>Improved parental understanding will also enable meaningful opportunities for children to participate in everyday activities and support their participation in learning settings and activities.</p>	<p>Parents have improved support to enable positive parenting in the home that enables learning, and the development of healthy relationships with community resources, such as ECD programmes/centres.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reaching parents who are not in contact with ECD centres is critical. This can be done through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offering basic support and information to parents at clinics, as many parents will access child health services regularly. Using faith-based organisations and community activities, including ECD campaigns.
<p>Alignment of actions with relevant policy:</p> <p>The National Integrated ECD Policy promotes the provision of parent support and information, especially for the parents of children younger than 3 years. It also emphasises a communications strategy to inform parents and key stakeholders about the importance of ECD and the role of parents.⁴</p> <p>The Children's Act also mandates the provision of positive parenting programmes to build parents' capacity and to strengthen the parent-child relationship.⁵</p>			

b. Identifying the existing and potential resources to support the priority area for parents:

What resources and/or systems are already in place to support parenting activities in Vrygrond?	Which actors are already working on parenting activities in Vrygrond, and who else could potentially be involved, in Vrygrond and beyond Vrygrond?
<p>ECD centres are nodes of information and support for parents (e.g., parent meetings)</p> <p>NGOs in the community that provide a range of child and family services such as Where Rainbows Meet, Living Hope, Butterfly Arts Project, True North (the activities of these organisations need coordination and strengthening)</p> <p>Department of Social Development (DSD)'s social work services offer social services and support for children and families</p> <p>Whatsapp community groups offers information on community services and programmes that can benefit families</p>	<p><i>Existing actors:</i></p> <p>Vrygrond Development Trust, for community awareness</p> <p>Where Rainbows Meet</p> <p>Living Hope</p> <p>Butterfly Arts Project</p> <p>True North</p> <p><i>Potential actors where further support can be requested (some of these have previously provided services in Vrygrond)ⁱⁱⁱ:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vrygrond Library and Loxion Library (could contribute to a book drive for children not attending ECD centres) • Parent Centre • DSD's family strengthening services • New World Foundation • Wordworks (training that fosters parent involvement) • Families South Africa (FAMSA) and South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) (to address trauma specifically) • Early Learning and Resource Unity (ELRU) (revisit their past programmes in Vrygrond and establish whether their services can be revived) • National caregiver capacity building programme • Caregiver Learning Through Play programme (Hope World Wide and ELRU) • South African Parenting Programme Implementer's Network (SAPPIN) • Mikhulu Trust • Bookdash (can assist in making free books available) • Biblionef (can assist in making free books available)

c. Describing the practical steps toward actioning the priority area for parents:

What actions can ECD stakeholders in Vrygrond and beyond take to support parenting activities?	What are the suggested timelines, and key actors identified for taking these actions forward?
<p><i>Share general information and offer basic support to parents</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop communication and awareness programmes to inform parents on the benefits of their involvement with their child's development, about the role of ECD programmes/centres, and that they can access support and information through specific services. 2. Disseminate basic messages on ECD via radio and social media. A leaflet and video for parents on choosing an ECD centre have been produced. 3. Convene a Parents Indaba in Vrygrond, in partnership with the ECD sector, as an annual event. 4. Convene workshops and information-sharing sessions for parents, to be available once per term. 5. Use existing community meetings and platforms to raise awareness of existing services and to link parents to services. 6. Convene a parents' forum (a similar concept to the ECD forum). <p><i>Support parents to address trauma</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop monthly support programmes to address parents' trauma. <p><i>Support parents to build healthy relationships with their young child's ECD programme/centre</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ECD programmes/centres should communicate clearly and be specific about parents' roles and their expectations of parents. Such communication can occur in the following ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key information can be shared with intake forms. • Use induction programmes to clarify expectations and inform parents of what to expect from a relationship with the ECD programme/centre. • Share key information at the point of enrolment and through regular open days. 	<p><i>Initial timeline</i></p> <p>5 months to 1 year for the range of actions.</p> <p>Communication and awareness programmes and the parent workshops and sessions can begin in the next 6 months.</p> <p>The first Parent Indaba was hosted in October 2023.</p> <p>The trauma-focussed programmes, and the Parent Forum launch can take place in 2024.</p> <p><i>Coordination and leadership:</i></p> <p>True North in partnership with the ECD Forum committed to coordinating all action steps listed to support parents to build healthy relationships with their young child's ECD programme/centre, noting that all action steps listed linked to ECD centres/programmes should encourage parents' participation in the centre's activities and involvement in their child's development; and to convening a Parents' Indaba.</p> <p>Living Hope commits to action step 4 of sharing general information and offering basic support to parents, and to jointly convene a Parents' Indaba with True North. They will also work with True North on the coordination of the action steps listed to support parents to build healthy relationships with their young child's ECD programme/centre, and the steps listed linked to ECD centres/programmes to encourage parents' participation in the centre's activities and involvement in their child's development.</p> <p>In addition to the above commitments, the advisory group will work collaboratively on all action steps.</p>

What actions can ECD stakeholders in Vrygrond and beyond take to support parenting activities?	What are the suggested timelines, and key actors identified for taking these actions forward?
<p><i>ECD centres/programmes should encourage parents' participation in the centre's activities and involvement in their child's development, in the following ways:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encourage parents to read to their children by suggesting the materials/books that they can read, provide access to books, and support them to use reading to engage with their children. 2. Use parent meetings and enrolment programmes creatively to share key messages with parents and encourage their participation. 3. Introduce fun and new activities for parents, such as celebration days, and use existing priorities such as firefighting and first-aid as opportunities to engage parents. 	

2.2. Priority area two: support for the development and wellbeing of ECD practitioners/teachers

Goal and objectives:

To support the development and well-being of ECD teachers to enhance the well-being of, and the quality of teaching and learning for, young children. Specifically, to support and enhance teachers' capacity to provide improved quality interactions with young children in learning settings, in the following ways:

- Improve ECD teachers' understanding and ability to recognise and respond appropriately to children who have developmental delays or disabilities.
- Provide support and guidance to enable ECD teachers' personal growth, development, and wellbeing.

a. Framing the priority area for ECD practitioners/teachers:

	What primary challenge is addressed by this area of work?	How does the area of work contribute to safety, inclusion or participation for young children?	What is the overall expected outcome of these activities, and how could this be achieved?	What are the strategies to achieve the outcomes?
<i>a) Improve ECD teachers' understanding and ability to recognise and respond appropriately to children who have developmental delays or disabilities</i>	Teachers generally struggle to identify signs of developmental delay and disabilities in young children, and don't know enough about how to respond appropriately. Although teachers have received some training on identifying developmental delay and disabilities, it is challenging to put their knowledge into practice, and they often feel they are not properly equipped to respond when they identify signs of delay or disability. It is also challenging to address their concerns about a child's development with the parents.	This work area contributes to inclusion by enabling teachers to have the skills and resources to ensure that children with developmental delays and disabilities can learn in quality, mainstream settings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers have the capacity to identify developmental delay and disabilities in young children. Teachers receive support, in the form of a person/s able to mentor and coach them in inclusive practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build skills and competencies in ECD teachers through interactive, practical adult-learning methods, and opportunities to practice the new skills In-service, practice-based mentoring, coaching and support

<p><i>a) Improve ECD teachers' understanding and ability to recognise and respond appropriately to children who have developmental delays or disabilities</i></p>	<p>Teachers generally struggle to identify signs of developmental delay and disabilities in young children, and don't know enough about how to respond appropriately. Although teachers have received some training on identifying developmental delay and disabilities, it is challenging to put their knowledge into practice, and they often feel they are not properly equipped to respond when they identify signs of delay or disability. It is also challenging to address their concerns about a child's development with the parents.</p> <p>Factors that impact on addressing developmental delay and disabilities include that ECD teachers' current training is not always useful, class sizes are large, referral pathways are not clear, and teachers not having adequate time to respond to individual needs due to class size. Principals also don't always communicate enough relevant information with teachers.</p>	<p>This work area contributes to inclusion by enabling teachers to have the skills and resources to ensure that children with developmental delays and disabilities can learn in quality, mainstream settings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers have the capacity to identify developmental delay and disabilities in young children. Teachers receive support, in the form of a person/s able to mentor and coach them in inclusive practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build skills and competencies in ECD teachers through interactive, practical adult-learning methods, and opportunities to practice the new skills In-service, practice-based mentoring, coaching and support Have a referral system in place and be aware of parents' need for support.⁶ Consult with the Education Department for support with promoting inclusive practices, and the involvement of their inclusion units at ECD centres.
<p>Alignment with relevant policy:</p> <p>The National Integrated ECD Policy prioritises support for young children with disabilities and acknowledges the need to upskill and support the ECD workforce to respond appropriately to the needs of children with developmental delays and disabilities, and their families.⁷</p> <p>A formative assessment tool linked to the National Curriculum Framework for birth to four years was also developed. It assists teachers to identify delays or difficulties, per age and developmental stage.</p>				

What primary challenge is addressed by this area of work?	How does the area of work contribute to safety, inclusion or participation for young children?	What is the overall expected outcome of these activities, and how could this be achieved?	What are the strategies to achieve the outcomes?
<p>b) <i>Provide support and guidance to enable ECD teachers' personal growth, development, and wellbeing.</i></p>	<p>Teachers are exhausted and feel overwhelmed. They often feel undervalued and earn low wages.</p> <p>Personal stress and low income as well as the community environment are contributing factors.</p>	<p>Teachers would be less volatile and frustrated.</p> <p>Teachers would show greater interest and have more energy to give their best to young children. They would have the appropriate mindset to engage with young children.</p> <p>Teachers would be more relaxed, in turn resulting in children feeling freer to participate and less withdrawn.</p> <p>Focusing on teacher wellbeing will foster learning environments where young children are safer, feel more included, and enhances their participation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers feel supported and have enhanced personal skills to set priorities and to better manage life and work-related stress and challenges. Teachers have more opportunities and access to resources to enhance their personal growth, development, and wellbeing. As a result, teachers are passionate about contributing to young children's education and wellbeing and have the capacity to give young children their best. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create an enabling environment for teachers to flourish professionally and personally. This includes building positive relationships and recognising teachers, to improve the quality of teaching and learning.⁸ Assist ECD teachers with personal growth, including addressing stressors and challenging situations. Mindfulness-based programmes that promote self-care are promising.⁹ Build life and relational skills among ECD teachers to promote quality outcomes. ECD centres that show positive outcomes focus on teamwork and shared duties and leadership.
<p>Alignment of actions with relevant policy:</p> <p>While not explicitly stated, we understand that the promotion of practitioner development and/or practitioner support in various policies includes the provision of psychosocial support and overall wellbeing.</p> <p>In addition, the provision of quality ECD programmes cannot be attained in the absence of overall teacher wellbeing. Examples of policies include the National Integrated ECD Policy¹⁰ and the Human Resource Development Strategy¹¹.</p>			

b. Describing the existing and potential resources to support the priority area:

a) Improve ECD teachers' understanding and ability to recognise and respond appropriately to children who have developmental delays or disabilities	What resources and/or systems are already in place to support ECD teachers' development in Vrygrond?	Which actors are already working on ECD teacher development in Vrygrond, and who else could potentially be involved, in Vrygrond and beyond Vrygrond?
	<p>A few services and facilities are available to assess child development, support the identification of delays and disabilities and provide appropriate services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day Hospital • Red Cross Children's Hospital • Trauma-based counselling 	<p>Existing actors that support the identification of delays and disabilities:</p> <p>Department of Health clinic, Seawinds Living Hope ECD Forum Ward councillor</p> <p>Potential actors where further support can be requestedⁱⁱⁱ:</p> <p>Shonaquip social enterprise Inclusive Education South Africa (training is government funded) Persona Dolls Training (PDT)</p>
b) Provide support and guidance to enable ECD teachers' personal growth, development, and wellbeing.	<p>Opportunities that offer ECD teachers' personal support and development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art training • Lifeskills training <p>Other forms of training to build teachers' capacity are available, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly curriculum training • Ad hoc training • Principals generally offer support to teachers <p>More attention could be paid to the above opportunities to support teachers' personal growth, development, and well-being.</p>	<p>Existing actors:</p> <p>True North ECD Forum Butterfly Art Project Where Rainbows Meet Living Hope Light from Africa Learning Initiative (for registered ECD centres only)</p> <p>Potential actors where further support can be requested:</p> <p>Siyakhula New World Foundation Hope House Lifeline (personal development course) MathMoms</p>

iii A list of resource organisations is available in the Appendix B.

c. Describing the practical steps toward actioning the priority area for practitioners:

a) <i>Improve ECD teachers' understanding and ability to recognise and respond appropriately to children who have developmental delays or disabilities</i>	What actions can ECD stakeholders in Vrygrond and beyond take to support ECD teacher development?	What are the suggested timelines, and key actors identified for taking these actions forward?
b) <i>Provide support and guidance to enable ECD teachers' personal growth, development, and well-being.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish an ECD Information Hub to facilitate ECD teachers' access to information and basic support on personal matters. 2. Promote the involvement of the ECD Forum, to encourage principals to focus on this matter. 3. Promote one-on-one support for parents and teachers e.g., using the Blocks for Growth approach. 4. Lobby for and mobilise funding through Western Cape Education Department for Blocks for Growth, to be available to most Vrygrond ECD centres. 	<p><i>Initial timeline:</i></p> <p>5 months to 1 year for the range of activities. Obtaining funding may require more time.</p> <p><i>Coordination and leadership:</i></p> <p>Living Hope commits to coordinating action step 1. In addition to the above commitments, the advisory group will work collaboratively on all action steps.</p>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish an ECD Information Hub to facilitate ECD teachers' access to information and basic support on personal matters. 2. Convene small support groups to offer emotional and practical support for teachers. 3. Increase the capacity of community service providers to provide one-on-one counselling to teachers. 4. Offer personal growth and development support, such as Heartstyles and Art therapy for teachers. 5. Encourage principals to fundraise to enable support and development for their teachers. 6. Encourage staff team-building for ECD centres/programmes. 	<p><i>Initial timeline:</i></p> <p>5 months to 3 years for the range of activities. The launch of the ECD Hub is proposed for January 2026; Commencing with small groups for support, January 2024; Personal growth activities, January 2025; Increased counselling capacity is made available, January 2024.</p> <p><i>Coordination and leadership:</i></p> <p>True North in partnership with the ECD Forum commits to coordinating action steps 1, 2, 3 and 4. In addition to the above commitments, the advisory group will work collaboratively on all action steps.</p>

2.3. Priority area three: strengthen community systems for ECD

Priority area goal and objectives:

Strengthen collaboration and information-sharing among ECD stakeholders, and within the broader Vrygrond community, to enhance networking and advocacy for improved quality services to young children and their families. Specifically, to:

- Create opportunities and spaces for collaboration and joint problem-solving, and
- Share resources and information among ECD stakeholders and the broader community

c. Framing the priority area for collaboration

What primary challenge is addressed by this area of work?	How does the area of work contribute to safety, inclusion or participation for young children?	What is the overall expected outcome of these activities, and how could this be achieved?	What strategies will be used to achieve the outcome
<p>A lack of resources, capacity and manpower exists among the community of ECD-focussed organisations in Vrygrond to meet their organisational objectives. Stakeholders also tend to work in isolation and to mistrust one another.</p> <p>The resource shortages include a general lack of facilities/infrastructure in the community. This contributes to stakeholders being unable to offer safe, stimulating environments in Vrygrond.</p> <p>In general, the community lacks a sense of ownership and empowerment to address common issues constructively.</p> <p>For stakeholders, there is a lack of knowledge of all the available services for young children and their families in Vrygrond. There is a lack of a centralised space where relevant information can be found. The referral pathways across sectors are also not well known. Existing structures are helpful, however, there are times when information is not shared with all relevant stakeholders.</p>	<p>Strengthening communication and information sharing will lead to improved, meaningful education for young children, and opportunities for young children to feel safe, included and to participate in learning settings.</p> <p>This will result from ECD stakeholders sharing resources, collaborating with one another, and from improved community involvement, ownership, and community partnership with the ECD sector.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A unified, educated and resilient Vrygrond community, with ECD stakeholders working collaboratively to share information and resources for improved services to young children and their families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen community engagement, especially the use of a place-based approach, to improve local ECD services. This approach involves bringing existing services for young children together to coordinate them, and to improve families' access to services.¹² Build and improve community ECD systems, such as information systems. Gather and use local information and evidence to make decisions that will have community-wide impacts. Decisions should respond to stakeholders' and community members' needs and goals.¹³

Alignment with relevant policy:

The National Integrated ECD Policy emphasises and promotes the delivery of community centred ECD services, and that services should be delivered innovatively, tailored to the needs of specific communities.¹⁴ It also promotes a coordinated approach to delivery.

d. Identifying the existing and potential resources to support the priority area

What resources and/or systems are already in place to support the strengthening of collaboration and information-sharing in Vrygrond?	Which actors are already working on strengthening of collaboration and information-sharing in Vrygrond, and who else could potentially be involved, in Vrygrond and beyond Vrygrond?
<p><i>The following structures/bodies are already in place in Vrygrond:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECD Forum • Vrygrond Community Development Forum • Vrygrond Trust • Ward and Street Committees • Child Protection Forum • Department of Social Development and SASSA • Department of Health • Where Rainbows Meet • True North • Living Hope • Community Library • Primary Schools • Churches and mosques 	<p><i>Existing actors:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where Rainbows Meet (builds connections with community stakeholders, distributes resources to the community) • True North (brings together principals and teachers, active involvement in networks and partnerships) • Living Hope (involved in establishing referral pathways and partnerships) • Churches (sharing of physical spaces for ECD community activities) • ECD Forum (communication platforms for ECD centres, represents ECD sector on the Vrygrond Community Development Forum) <p><i>Potential actors where further support can be requested¹⁵:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Parent Centre • Mosaic • International Organisation for Mobilisation (IOM)

iv A list of resource organisations is available in the Appendix B.

e. Describing the practical steps toward actioning the priority area:

What actions can ECD stakeholders in Vrygrond and beyond take to support the strengthening of collaboration and information-sharing?	What are the suggested timelines, and key actors identified for taking these actions forward?
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Convene community dialogues to consult and obtain different views from community members and to work towards resolutions of common problems. Secondly, spaces for dialogue will stimulate the development of partnerships and collaborations. 2. Document all services/programmes and service providers working in Vrygrond (a type of mapping exercise) to support young children's development and distribute the product to the community. 3. Create an Information Centre/Hub with relevant information on all the services available to young children and their families in Vrygrond, and how to access these services. 4. Clarify and communicate referral pathways for young children and their families, to enable referral to different services/support across sectors as needed, especially for those with special needs. This information should be shared via the Hub. 5. The 'Information Hub' could be available via an online/virtual space. The virtual Hub could act as a place for referral to specific organisations. 6. Identify a person to collate and manage the information for the Hub. Ideally, mobilise funds to cover the costs of the individual recruited to manage the Hub. 7. Use the information gathered to advocate and lobby at community and local forum meetings, and meetings with government, for improved services for young children and their families. 	<p><i>Initial timeline:</i></p> <p>9 months to 2,5 years for the range of actions. Establishing a well-functioning Information Hub is envisaged as a longer-term goal, although some aspects of the Hub could begin functioning in the short-term without a funded person to manage it.</p> <p><i>Coordination and Leadership:</i></p> <p>True North in partnership with the ECD Forum commits to coordinating action steps related to the Information Hub (3, 5 & 6).</p> <p>Butterfly Arts Project and Vrygrond Community Trust will contribute to action step 2, and co-ordinate steps related to the Information Hub, together with True North and the ECD Forum.</p> <p><i>Living Hope commits to coordinating action step 4.</i></p> <p>In addition to the above commitments, the advisory group will work collaboratively on all action steps.</p>

2.4. Practical pointers to consider when actioning the plan

Lastly, this document provides pointers to consider when putting a community action plan in motion. These include supporting those with responsibility for taking action to follow through and monitor actions; keeping track of the activities toward meeting the goals of the community action plan; and communicating and obtaining buy-in from relevant stakeholders to move forward with the actions.

Support for follow through and follow-up on actions

While the action steps have been identified toward meeting the objectives of each priority area, the actors responsible for co-ordination should ensure that the action steps are taken, preferably within the agreed timeframe. Ideally, an advisory group, or a planning or technical group agreed on by the advisory group, should keep track of the progress of actions, and follow-up or offer support or assistance with actions as needed.

Keep track of your activities

It's a good idea to record work towards an action and when an action is completed, as this helps with assessing progress toward achieving the goals of the action plan. It is also useful to monitor how much time, and other resources, are needed to complete an action. These self-evaluation questions are useful to monitor progress:

- “Are we doing what we said we would do?”
- “Are we doing it well?”
- “Is what we are doing moving us closer to our vision?”¹⁵

Also, it is important to celebrate achievements, as this keeps the actors involved motivated and enthusiastic. Reflecting on progress will also help to assess whether any changes are needed to the Community Action Plan, especially in relation to changing circumstances, priorities or opportunities within the local area.

Communicate and obtain buy-in for the action plan from relevant parties

A range of stakeholders and interested parties will need to be consulted to get their support for the Community Action Plan.

Stakeholders who have a role to play in actioning the action plan

Communication is key when working with a range of different actors and stakeholders. Initially, sharing the action plan with the actors who will be involved in actioning the different steps will be critical. It will be helpful to get feedback and ensure that everyone who has a role to play approves of the plan and is committed to the goals and overall vision, and understands the strategies included in the plan. Once there is overall agreement, clarifying expectations regarding roles, tasks, and timeframes will be critical. It will also be helpful to develop simple processes for different actors to report regularly on their tasks, if regular meetings to discuss the action plan are not held.

Community leaders and structures with influence

Once the action plan is consolidated, it should also be communicated to influential community leaders and key bodies, such as the ECD Forum and the Vrygrond Community Development Forum. Opportunities should be identified to show the alignment of the Community Action Plan with other community-level strategies and pressing community issues, that indicate the benefits of the plan for the local community, and the ideas in the Community Action Plan discussed with leaders to seek their support for taking it forward. The plan should be presented at community meetings and fora which focus on children and families across different sectors, to share the intentions of the plan and obtain support from community members and key stakeholders.

Notes

Appendix A

Risk factors for early childhood development (this is not a comprehensive list)

Risk group	Brief description of risks	What is likely to happen to young children without action?
Biological	Nutrition	
	Poor growth in the womb due to mothers' poor nutrition and infections	Low birth weight Poor infant and child development Low cognitive and problem-solving ability Effects may last into adolescence and adulthood
	Poor nutrition or lack of iron in pregnant women and mothers	Low interest or responsiveness in infants and children Low sensitivity in mothers Delayed infant development Effects may lead to poor problem-solving ability in infants
	Undernutrition or poor nutrition in children and poor weight gain. A lack of zinc, iron, iodine and other micronutrients in the diet worsens the effects of poor nutrition.	Stunted growth Illness and disease Insecure bonding with primary caregiver Lack of interest, low levels of play Poor cognitive, motor, socio-emotional and behavioural development Effects may last into adolescence Stunted children: Low cognitive ability, poor school performance, school dropout Less likely to be formally employed as young adults Poor psychological functioning in adolescence
	Infectious diseases	
	Central nervous system infections; infections after brain injury	Poor functioning of the brain or nervous system Low nutritional status Less physical activity and play
	Diarrhoea	Stunted growth, depending on severity from birth to 2 years Poor cognitive and language development
	Intestinal infections, for example, through parasites in the intestines	Effects may lead to poor language and motor development
	HIV/AIDS	Disruption to brain function, possibly changing the brain structure during infancy Risk of developmental delays, especially cognitive, language and motor development Children with HIV-infected caregivers may experience reduced resources and psychosocial risk factors including caregiver stress, illness and death
	Malaria	Disruption to brain function, low cognitive ability Poor school readiness

Risk group	Brief description of risks	What is likely to happen to young children without action?
Biological	Environmental exposure to harmful substances	
	Exposure to lead, pesticides, hydrocarbons, arsenic and manganese (the latter may be present in drinking water). Exposure can also occur during pregnancy.	Low cognitive ability, poor language, motor and behavioural development
	Disabilities	
	Childhood disabilities, ranging from intellectual to physical and behavioural disabilities	<p>Low access to school and health services</p> <p>Risk of caregiver stress and depression</p> <p>Inclusion in society limited by social stigma</p>

Risk group	Brief description of risks	What is likely to happen to young children without action?
Psycho-social	Early learning and caregiver-child interaction*	
	Lack of cognitive stimulation or child learning opportunities	Low cognitive functioning Poor social behaviour, low self-confidence Behavioural problems
	Lack of sensitive and responsive behaviour from the caregiver, harsh physical punishment	Insecure bonding with primary caregiver Poor social emotional development Low infant cognitive ability Behavioural problems for pre-school age children
	Maternal depression	
	Depressed pregnant women and mothers. Generally, depressed mothers are less involved, less sensitive and more negative when engaging with their infants.	Low quality of parenting Infant stunting Low cognitive functioning Behavioural problems
	Exposure to violence	
	Direct exposure or the consequences of exposure to different forms of violence e.g., child abuse, family violence, community violence, armed conflict and wars, political and civil unrest.	Risk of low quality of parenting, depending on type of violence Experiences of trauma due to a violent act or continuous/multiple acts Insecure bonding with primary caregiver Poor social emotional development Aggression Attention problems Depression Risk of behaviour problems Poor social behaviour
	Institutionalisation	
	Child-rearing starting early in life in institutional settings, e.g., non-parental group residential care	Young children at risk of: Poor physical growth and brain development Ill health Poor bonding with caregivers Attention problems Low cognitive functioning Anxiety Behaviour problems

* The term caregiver here refers to adults who have caregiving duties including parents and teachers

Sources: Walker S, et al. (2007)¹⁶ Child development: risk factors for adverse outcomes in developing countries; Walker S, et al. (2011)¹⁷ Inequality in early childhood: risk and protective factors for early child development.

Appendix B

List of Resource Organisations

Parent support for parents/caregivers of young children

1. Vrygrond Library

This existing facility can contribute to book drives in Vrygrond, especially for young children not attending ECD centres. The library can also link into the existing network of toy libraries in the Western Cape and South Africa (tlasa.org/) to enable better access to quality toys for ECD programmes and to families with young children in Vrygrond. The Loxion Library is a Mobile Library which travels on a bicycle around the community promoting the love of reading. <https://saskiamessow.wixsite.com/loxionmobilelibrary>.

2. The Parent Centre

The Parent Centre (theparentcentre.org.za/) is a well-established family-centred NGO providing parent support services in Cape Town. Their offering includes training for facilitators and community workers who want to offer parent support programmes, as well as direct services including counselling, parent workshops and basic information and support to parents.

3. Department of Social Development (DSD's) family strengthening services

Social Development has programmes aimed at rebuilding families and communities. Social Development's Services to Families programme aims to link families to support services, with parenting programmes as a key priority (www.westerncape.gov.za/service/services-families-programme). The Western Cape government also has initiatives to scale-up evidence-informed family strengthening programmes that reduce violence in the Western Cape, primarily led by the Department of the Premier.

4. New World Foundation

The Foundation offers a range of social work and support services, as well as lifeskills and training for work programmes. These include general and gender-based violence counselling, conflict resolution and support groups. They also offer specialised services for victims of violence including a safe house, and services for teen mothers ([https://newworldfoundation.org.za/](http://newworldfoundation.org.za/)).

5. Wordworks

Wordworks is a NGO that focuses on early language and literacy development in the first eight years of children's lives. They offer training, resources and support for partners. Their 'every word counts' programme focuses on parents of 0 – 5 year-olds to improve parents' participation in supporting children's early literacy. Their other programmes focus on home visitors and community workers, and ECD practitioners ([https://www.wordworks.org.za/](http://www.wordworks.org.za/)).

6. FAMSA

FAMSA Western Cape is an NGO specialising in relationship counselling, offering counselling and support services. Online counselling is also available. Aside from general family counselling services, they also offer specific divorce services, a 'men stopping violence' support group, and community projects in specific locations (www.famsawc.org.za/).

7. SADAG

SADAG is an NPO, serving as a support network for persons with mental health problems or queries. Professional counselling staff operates a counselling-and-referral call centre. It offers a large network of support groups, educational materials, a referral service and free treatment where available, workshops and training programmes (www.sadag.org/).

8. ELRU

ELRU is a well-established NPO offering ECD programmes and support. Programmes include home-visiting focussed on the first thousand days, and support for centre-based learning programmes. ELRU programmes also supports pregnant women, parents/primary caregivers, ECD practitioners and principals (www.elru.co.za/). ELRU has previously worked in Vrygrond, however, these home-visiting programmes ended due to funding constraints.

9. National DSD caregiver capacity building programme

The national caregiver capacity building programme developed a training programme, to enable trainers to train parents/caregivers who are caring for children aged birth to 5 years old. A 'train-the-trainers' model is used, with DSD social workers trained initially to roll-out the training programme. Topics covered include essential skills, knowledge and attitudes that are important for raising young children (www.westerncape.gov.za/service/services-families-programme).

10. Caregiver Learning Through Play programme (Hope World Wide)

Hope World Wide assists parents to nurture their children's development through parent support group meetings, play groups, home visits, toy and book libraries and referrals to other service providers. The organisation has also spearheaded a programme to support parents and ECD practitioners to engage in meaningful play to support learning in young children, and to strengthen parents' capacity for nurturing caregiving (hopeworldwidesa.org/).

11. SAPPIN

The South African Parenting Programme Implementors Network is a network of NGOs providing parenting programmes and support services. The network promotes the development and improvement of programmes based on evidence and supports organisations

through mutual learning and advocacy. Vrygrond organisations involved in parenting programme delivery could benefit from this network's support (<https://sappin.org.za/>).

12. Mikhulu Child Development Trust

MCDT is a NPO promoting evidence based ECD programmes in South Africa. Mikhulu seeks to bridge the gap between academic research on parenting and families, and the actual networks that support them. In particular, Mikhulu is driving the use of a programme called 'dialogic book-sharing', which encourages parent-child interaction and promotes active, child-led engagement (mikhulutrust.org/).

13. Bookdash

Bookdash has developed a unique model to counter poor access to appropriate books for young children. They create appropriate African story books in a variety of South African languages that are contextually relevant, open-licensed and low cost. Working with community partners, they distribute these books to families with young children (bookdash.org/).

14. Biblionef

Biblionef is a public benefit organisation that donates new storybooks in all official South African languages to schools and children's organisations, targeting children aged 3 – 18 years. Biblionef strives to improve literacy levels and create a reading culture (www.biblionefsa.org.za/).

Support for the development and well-being of ECD practitioners/teachers

1. Shonaquip social enterprise

Shonaquip is an organisation promoting inclusion and the creation of enabling environments for persons with disabilities. They have an established training programme. For ECD practitioners, training covers types of disabilities, the ecosystems for inclusion, inclusive play and stimulation programmes. They also offer training programmes for parents (shonaquipse.org.za/).

2. Inclusive Education South Africa

IESA works to promote and support inclusive education practices in South Africa, focusing on adult educators, parents and professionals. They offer training, funded by DSD, for ECD practitioners and community workers to develop awareness on barriers to learning, and to encourage a change in attitude in practitioners to improve the participation of children with learning difficulties (www.included.org.za/).

3. Persona Dolls Training

The organisation promotes inclusion, diversity and the overcoming of prejudice due to several factors, including (dis)ability. The NPO offers training and resources. Training pro-

grammes are specifically designed for ECD centre-based teachers, and for ECD community-based and home-based workers (personadolls.org.za/).

4. New World Foundation

General social work and support services are available.

5. Hope House

Hope House is a counselling centre offering care and support services. This includes lay counselling; workshops on a range of topics such as self-care and trauma, emotions and self-regulation, and anxiety and stress; and organisational wellness including team building and people skills (hopehouse.org.za/).

Strengthen community partnerships: Collaboration and information-sharing among ECD stakeholders and within Vrygrond

1. The Parent Centre

The Centre provides a programme focussed on community empowerment and support, delivered through workshops, talks and training. These activities can be tailored to the needs of particular organisations, groups or communities. Topics include the importance of play, and the effective discipline of toddlers and preschoolers (theparentcentre.org.za/).

2. Mosaic

Mosaic addresses violence against women and girls, particularly from a holistic and community systems approach. Mosaic has a 3-pillar service model including access to justice, social support services, and the empower to survive programme. The latter focusses on awareness raising and training workshops for children and youth, mentorship support for vulnerable girls and women, and economic empowerment and training for work opportunities (mosaic.org.za/).

3. International Organisation for Migration

The IOM works to integrate migrants into new locations and promotes social cohesion in communities across South Africa. It provides humanitarian assistance and strives for sustainable development in local communities, by building partnerships. They train peace monitors to be conflict mediators, to raise awareness on issues of cultural diversity and peace, and to sensitise communities on tolerance (<https://southafrica.iom.int/>).

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