

Three new educational programmes for SA crèches

The Unlimited Child has a pilot launch of three new education programmes that will ultimately be supplied free of charge to the crèches using The Unlimited Child model. The organisation reaches 762 disadvantaged crèches in six provinces: Gauteng, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and the Western Cape.



The Unlimited Child – Makabongwe Training (L - R): Nozipho Zondi (Siqalo Crèche), Sibahle Mboongwe (Enrafeezini Crèche), Jackie Kabindu (Makabongwe Pre-School), Zama Ngwane Majola (Khulanathi Crèche), Phakamile Chiliza (Enrafeezini Crèche) and Thulisile Makhathini (Monitor / Trainer for The Unlimited Child).

"Since we launched the programme in 2008, it has already helped provide quality early childhood education to 90,000 children, mostly aged between three and six years," says Steph Bester, chairman of The Unlimited Child. "Our programme is based on international research that shows play is the only effective way of teaching pre-school children.

"To meet the stipulations of the National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS) curriculum, we have refined our play-centred learning programme so that it can respond to the needs of a broader age group. Our three new programmes for babies, toddlers and Grade R will complement our existing core programme for pre-Grade R children."

All four programmes - consisting of a practitioner's guide and an age-appropriate kit of educational toys and equipment - will be supplied to new crèches identified by the company according to the age mix of their children. Over time, these programmes will also be rolled out to the crèches already reached by The Unlimited Child.

"We train all caregivers how to use programmes, so the rollout to the crèches already following our model will involve re-

training many of our caregivers to help them make the best use of these new programmes. The caregivers often do not have matric, let alone a teaching qualification. Therefore, we give hands-on, practical training showing them how to use the programmes. This is followed by regular monitoring of our crèches."

This week, a pilot group of nearly 40 caregivers from 10 different crèches are being trained to use the new programmes. During the four-day training session, caregivers will learn to use the easy-to-follow practitioners' guides that provide detailed outlines for activities and tasks for 200 days a year. They guide caregivers through the crèche day, from how and when to use the toys in the kits to when nappies for babies and toddlers need to be changed.

"Caregivers can use the equipment in different ways. Our training helps them understand that when the toys are used effectively, the children get maximum educational value."

The combination of the toy kits and the guides are the culmination of three years of planning and design by two of South Africa's leading early childhood educationalists, Freda Wilkens and Ian Corbishley. They have ensured that the new programmes are relevant and credible, in line with current curriculum requirements.

The Unlimited Child has partnered with educational toy supplier and publisher Vivlia to supply the material for the programmes. Bester says Vivlia have been totally committed to sourcing the best-quality toys for the kits. Many of the toys have been specially designed by Freda Wilkens and have been sourced and produced locally. This has meant that South Africa's rich heritage can be reflected as much as possible.

"We want the children reached by the programme to be proud of their South African roots. Therefore, when we include animals, they are rhinos and elephants; our dolls reflect who we are as South Africans in our rainbow nation. In addition, all our books and picture cards feature real South African characters. An example of this is that instead of Old MacDonald, we have Farmer Kunene! And our books and picture cards are available in three languages - English, isiZulu and isiXhosa - with a Sepedi version currently in the pipelines."

While The Unlimited Child is making a difference for thousands of children, the reality is that there are 7 million children in South Africa under the age of six, three-quarters of whom do not have any access to quality early childhood education.

"Many of these children are in crèches but, because of a lack of stimulation, they are already on the back foot when they start primary school. The company's goal is to reach at least 20 000 crèches across the country and we would really welcome like-minded companies and philanthropists as partners to help us achieve our goal and change the future of South Africa," concludes Bester.

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