

Chapter 1

Putting children and families first

Introducing Nosakekhele the Nomakhaya

Nosakekhele Nani is a Nomakhaya¹ or Family and Community Motivator.

She lives in or near the village where she is working. She speaks the local language and she knows the customs. Nosakekhele enjoys working with people and she is very fond of young children. Nosakekhele has attended a training programme where she learned how to conduct home visits, how to run support workshops and how to identify and build relationships with local resource people and services (clinic and the Department of Social Development). Nosakekhele also looks at practical ways to support the primary caregivers or parents of young children by building on their own traditions and beliefs about how children grow and develop.



Working closely with the primary caregiver or the parents Nosakekhele develops a plan to meet the needs of each family which comes under her care. Nosakekhele reports to her supervisor and facilitator, Funeka Jija, and they are employed by a local community organisation.

1. *Nomakhaya* comes from the Xhosa word for home. It is the name chosen by the motivators of the Masikhule FCM Programme and describes a person that makes other people feel welcome and at home.

What is early childhood development?

The early childhood development (ECD) period is the first, most rapid, most critical and most vulnerable phase of human development. Early childhood development is an umbrella term that applies to the processes by which children from birth to about nine years grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially².

Early childhood development (ECD) is about care, education and development. They go together. Care includes protection, emotional support and education and education includes care. ECD includes a range of services and programmes³ provided to children and their families in order to ensure that children are better protected and to enhance their physical, social emotional and cognitive development. The child and family are at the heart of ECD and ECD is the heart of community development!

Why is family important?

Parents and primary caregivers are the child's first teachers. They are closest to the children and set the foundation for early development. Important developmental milestones such as learning to walk, learning to talk and learning to feel good about oneself and to interact with others are first engaged with in the home setting. Studies have shown that early literacy and numeracy can be enhanced when parents talk to and negotiate with their children.

How does crisis impact on families?

Tragically, however, the same milestones can be undermined by many factors including poverty, malnutrition, HIV and AIDS, disability, child neglect and abuse which blights the lives of many of South Africa's youngest children and if not addressed can lead to serious and sometimes irreversible developmental problems. The experience of feeling poor, marginalized and vulnerable can lead primary caregivers towards depression and defeat with serious impacts on the child's growth and development. This can have lasting effects on the mental and physical capacity of children, their socialisation, safety and later progress and performance in school.

The historical and current crisis in ECD

The apartheid legacy left a heavy toll on South Africa's youngest children and their families. Years of discriminatory policies and racial exclusivity ensured that black people were marginalized in designated areas which lacked resources and infrastructure. Families were fractured by forced removals and the widespread migrant labour system which, via a succession of apartheid era labour policies, successfully forced black people off the land to work the mines. Unemployment, scarce remittances from the mines and periods of severe drought led to the development of an endemic system of widespread poverty characterised by crime, domestic violence and child abuse which continues to flourish despite South Africa's new democratic order.

2. Department of Education 2001b.3.

3. ECD programmes include family support and education programmes, creches, preschool centres or nursery schools, full day care centres, baby care programmes, childminders, Grade R programmes, general awareness and media programmes.

Basic facts that impact on child development in South Africa⁴:

- 84% of South African children have no access to any form of early childhood development service provision.
- There were an estimated 343 723 children in the age category birth to nine years living with HIV and AIDS in South Africa in 2006. The under-5 mortality rate has risen to 42%.
- There were an estimated 5.4 million people living with HIV or AIDS in South Africa in 2006. Women account for 55% of these and the peak age for affected women is 25 -29 years. HIV and AIDS continue to destroy livelihoods at family and community level.
- 42% of children live in a household where neither parent is employed.
- 39 % of households are headed by single women who are the main carers of children and these households have half the income in comparison to male-headed households.
- 1 out of 10 children were found to be severely malnourished (2000) and 1 in three children suffer Vitamin A deficiency.
- The Child Support Grant (CSG) has been shown to have a positive impact on child nutrition, growth and hunger.

Progressive laws and policies are now in place

Progressive laws and policies are now in place. The *South African Constitution* (1996) with the inclusion of a bill of rights for children, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC), the *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* and numerous subsequent policies are steadily bringing about progressive change. Significant gains include free primary health care for pregnant and nursing mothers and children below six years, increasing take-up of the child support grants and pensions and the free education policy for children from Grade 1 (6–15 years). A number of departmental policies also include parent education as part of a range of strategies to address the needs of children ‘at risk’.

ECD does not however fall neatly into any one government department or sector. The key government Departments of Education, Social Development and Health all have policies that call for an integrated, cross-sectoral approach and a plan across government that will involve all stakeholders and role players at every level – district, local, provincial etc. The *White Paper on Education and Training* (1995) lays emphasis on the importance of continuity between the home, preschool and early years of schooling. The *South African Schools Act* provides for inclusion of parents in school governing bodies and the *National Curriculum Statement* for curricula to include local content and to build on the child’s own experience. The *Children’s Amendment Bill* which is in process at present includes the principle to extend ECD service provision to children at risk via a range of services and programmes including family-based programmes.

4. Information sources listed in the reference section.

The National Integrated Plan for ECD includes

- *Tshwaragano Ka Bano* has significant targets for vulnerable children and families and a focus on parent support and education work which can when it becomes operational, build on the long history of family work in South Africa.
- The *Expanded Public Works Programme* has a strong ECD and community development focus and provides for a large number of training opportunities for staff at registered sites but insufficient funds for reasonable salaries will continue to marginalize this vitally important sector. The parent education and training component is very unclear.

It is important to note that the ECD programmes that do exist, both centre-based and family-based, struggle to survive or face collapse without committed and consistent government support in the form of subsidisation, capacity building, evaluation and monitoring.

Parenting skills

Parent education levels are strongly associated with the wellbeing of children, child survival rates and the capacity to support children through school. The census of 2001 noted the high illiteracy rate in South Africa, particularly among women, as problematic with consequences for children because women are most often the primary caregivers.

Many parents lack the knowledge, confidence and material resources to support their children's education therefore many children either do not attend school or drop out in the early grades. Recent studies and newspaper reports including a *National Indicator Report* from the Department of Education showed that very large numbers of children are living in homes which lack basic resources including food and educational materials. Most children from poor and disadvantaged homes start school with no experience of books or word play and many fathers do not play a supportive role.

Nomsa is a mother of two children. The first child is 5 years of age and the second one is 2 years old. They live together with the father who is unemployed. Nomsa complains that she does not receive anything from his retrenchment package, not even for children's food.

"He takes all his money to his sister and when I asked him, he took a wooden stick and assaulted me. He broke my arm and I can't feed my children anymore," she said sadly with tears in her eyes. She then explained that she survived by doing piece jobs as a domestic worker.

“Other days we sleep without food and sometimes I ask from the neighbours for food and I’m now scared to do it, it doesn’t feel good at all. My five year old is out of pre-school because I can’t afford to pay the fees, nevertheless I learned how to make toys out of waste for my children and I now know how I can teach them myself.”

FCM report

There are few parents/primary caregivers who can manage without support and information during this vitally sensitive ECD period if they wish to ensure that their children thrive and achieve their full potential.

How can family work strengthen ECD?

By promoting the resilience of caregivers and children, building on people’s strengths by words, actions and support for environmental changes.

By promoting prevention, identifying children at risk and providing support and systems for the early stages of literacy and numeracy, the early identification of learning difficulties, the prevention of drop outs and prevention of abuse and neglect.

By addressing broader developmental issues that impact on families. Support for increased income generation and the economic activity of women both in the formal and non formal sectors is vital to enhance the long term capacity, particularly the psycho-social capacity, of women and children to participate fully in the realisation of their rights and abilities. In FCM programmes women come together to share child care responsibilities in order to make time for activities including household and subsistence activities.

Family based ECD programmes are critical for providing the foundation for lifelong learning and productive participation in life. However there is a serious lack of this kind of basic primary prevention programme.

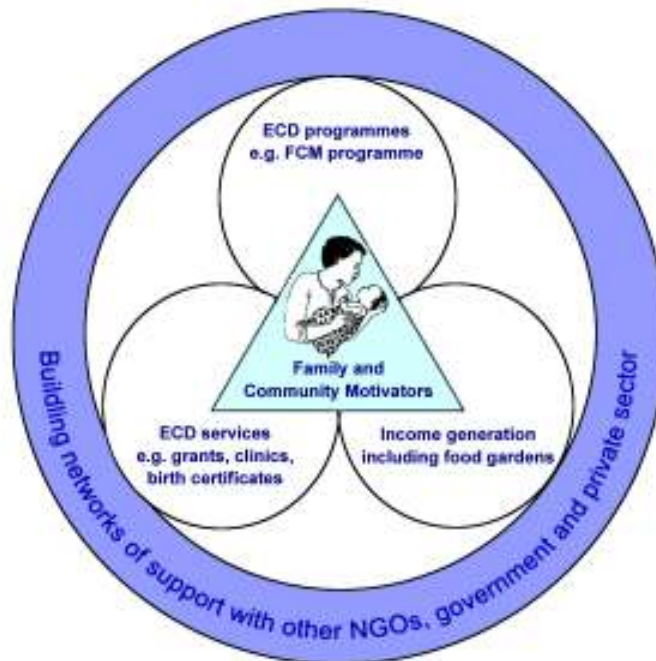
The Family and Community Motivator (FCM) Programme and other similar family outreach programmes play an important role in bridging the gap.

Parent programmes offered by other organisations in South Africa all contribute to the extension of ECD service delivery in South Africa but in order to flourish sustained, adequate financial support is required.

The Family and Community Motivator Programme

The Family and Community Motivators (FCM) Programme was developed as an ‘approach’ to ECD in the early 1990s. Motivators working in different sites at local community level have played a critical role in bringing child rights to the foreground.

In areas where there is little or no infrastructure around early childhood development services, the FCM programme has offered a strategic and systematic way forward for including local people in the development of a comprehensive ECD programme in a variety of ways — as primary caregivers or parents, as volunteers and elected members of the community-based management committees, as stakeholders, as trained facilitators and as trained family and community motivators such as Nosakekhele.



The FCM Programme serves as a catalyst which helps to strengthen the safety nets around children at risk by building networks of support with other NGOs, government departments and the private sector. Educational outreach programmes strengthen parenting skills and promote the child’s all round health and early learning. Services include increasing access to child support grants, pensions and disability grants, access to primary schooling for out of school children, HIV and AIDS awareness and treatment programmes. Income generation includes providing support for the establishment of food gardens, subsistence activities and access to other income generating opportunities as they arise in a particular area.

The following chapters explore the vision, strategies, methods, tools and processes that emerged as the ELRU FCM programme of outreach to vulnerable children and their families took shape.