

**ADDRESS OF THE HONOURABLE MEC FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
MR MXOLISI SOKATSHA ON THE OCCASION OF THE LAUNCH OF
THE ECD MOBILE AT THE BARCELONA SPORTS GROUNDS IN DE
AAR, PIXLEY KA SEME DISTRICT ON 12 MARCH 2015 AT 14H00**

Program Director:

Ward Councilor of the Emthanjeni Municipality: Cllr Stibi

Community members of the De Aar and surrounding areas

**Management and Staff of the Department led by the Head of
Department Ms Liz Botes**

Partners and Stakeholder Present here today

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Molweni!!!

I want to greet you in the name of our wonderful savior on this beautiful morning. Allow me to take this opportunity to say a few words about our business of the day.

Early Childhood Development is the process of emotional, mental, spiritual, moral, physical and social development of children from birth to nine years.

A child's needs at this period are different from those of older schoolchildren, because early childhood sees the greatest growth and

development, when the brain develops most rapidly, almost at its fullest. It is a period when walking, talking, self-esteem, vision of the world and moral foundations are established. The early years of life are critical to the development of intelligence, personality and social behavior.

Part of the open opportunity society for all, is to ensure that every child in South Africa has access to quality education. This however, starts long before the child walks into the Grade 1 classroom for the first time. It is imperative that parents realise just how important it is to ensure that their child is thoroughly equipped for their school career. A major contributor to South Africa's poor education performance is, too many grade 1 learners enter the school system without the basic cognitive and language skills needed to be able to learn and progress in the curriculum. Learners in this situation are prejudiced from the outset, and are more likely to drop out as school becomes increasingly difficult. This in turn fuels unemployment, crime and other social ills.

"A child's life is like a piece of paper on which every person leaves a mark."
Chinese Proverb

Early childhood care and development refers to a range of services that can be provided to the young children and parents/families/caregivers. Care should be taken that ECD not only refers to the more formal provision through ECD Centres/ Crèches or Pre-schools.

Program Director; Early childhood care and development firstly starts with the family within, where not only parents, but also other family members play a pivotal role in the care, protection and development of the young child.

In the absence of family members, other primary caregivers such as foster parents may play the same role as family members. The family forms the foundation of early childhood care and development and parents should be enabled, as far as possible, to ensure that they provide their young children with necessary care, protection and support.

This includes access to health, psychosocial care and support, nutrition, immunization, birth registration, play, social interactions, intellectual stimulation, emotional growth and many more. The role of older siblings, grandparents, extended family members and friend and neighbors of the family are important for the child's human relations and also for support and guidance to the parents, especially young parents.

Within the context of our department's mandate for service delivery we should ensure that programs for families are based on the life cycle and give prominence to young children as well as a focus on special programs for new and young parents. It is important that we should ensure that all early childhood care and development programs involve the development of the capacity of the parents/ primary caregivers in an active manner. Early childhood care and development should also form an essential component of family preservation programs and interventions.

The Department of Social Development should ensure that programs are developed that are gender sensitive towards early childhood care and development and in particular focus on the inclusion of men in the care, protection and development of young children.

The following provides an overview and discussion of the key points:

- **Strengthening Family Life:** First and foremost the Department of Social Development has the mandate to strengthen and support family life and recognize the importance of the family as the critical point of care, nurturance and socialization.
- **A Life Cycle Approach:** A life cycle approach should guide and inform the programming of the department, which means in practice that the department provides a special focus on the early childhood years as the foundation of the life cycle.
- **Vulnerability of Young Children:** It states that children from birth to 3 years and from 3 to 6 years are particularly vulnerable and are in particular need of early child development services.
- **Care, protection and support:** It requires that services to families should provide comprehensive protection and support and that such services should concentrate first on prevention by enhancing the capacity and functioning of the family, then on protection and lastly on statutory intervention.

- **Unique needs of young children:** The children from birth to 9 years have unique needs. These needs should be addressed by fostering their physical, emotional, mental, moral and social development.
- **National Early Childhood Development Strategy:** It calls for national early childhood development strategy, which reflects the role of government departments, civil society and the private sector in early childhood care and development; and that inter-sectoral committees at national and provincial levels should be established to co-ordinate and implement such a strategy.
- **Preventative Services:** Appropriate early childhood development services that are preventative in nature and constitute a social investment.
- **Targeting disadvantage children:** Disadvantage children under the age of five years will be the primary target for early childhood development services. The needs of children from birth to 3 years and children with disabilities will be addressed urgently.
- **A range of services required:** A range of services are required to meet the early childhood care and development needs of young children and their families.
- **Training and development programs:** Training and capacity development programs for caregivers, parents, social service

professionals as well as government, local authorities (municipalities), non-governmental organizations and community based organizations.

- **Registration:** Early childhood care and development services should be registered and registration should provide for a wide range of services and circumstances.
- **National Standards for Early Childhood Care and Development:** National Standards for Early Childhood Care and Development needs to be developed.
- **A combination of public and private financing:** A combination of public and private financing for early childhood development services is promoted.

Much of the first two years of life are spent in the creation of a child's first "sense of self" or the building of a first identity. This is a crucial part of children's makeup—how they first see themselves, how they think they should function, how they expect others to function in relation to them. For this reason, early care must ensure that in addition to employing carefully selected and trained caretakers, program policy must emphasize links with family, home culture and home language, meaning caregivers must uniquely care for each child using Developmentally Appropriate Practice, Individually Appropriate Practice and Culturally Appropriate Practice. Care should support families rather than be a substitute for them on the role of parents and families in early education.

The missing piece of the puzzle is early childhood development, whether this is offered by parents or by ECD services where parents are unable to provide the service. Either way, it is crucial that parents of young children

realize that from birth, their child needs them to provide adequate cognitive stimulation in order to learn basic skills. Parents need to read to their children, helping them to develop listening skills. Parents need to teach children to tie their own shoelaces, to arrange blocks in different colors and shapes, and to brush their teeth. Reading to children, and playing games with them, is not just for fun. These activities are essential for the development of children's brains, and help prepare them for school.

This government is determined to do everything possible to increase the quality and reach of Early Childhood Development. We have trained ECD practitioners across the province, particularly geared toward improving the quality of learning program. These practitioners also play a vital role in educating parents about how development can be aided in the home. With the help of committed parents, we can turn this province and this country – into an international success story.

It is widely recognized that the first five years of children's lives are the most important because vital development takes place in all domains (sensory-motor, cognitive, socio-emotional), and children's earliest experiences have the potential to positively or negatively influence them, their families and their communities in later life. Therefore the period between conception and 5 years (i.e. pre- birth to Grade R) is an important and transient window of opportunity. Brain development after this period occurs at a significantly slower pace and builds on the base achieved in early childhood and competencies acquired here become cumulative.

Similarly, lack of optimal cognitive and psychological development in this critical period becomes increasingly difficult and costly to address as

children get older. Significantly, the gaps between better and worse-off children widen over time.

Program Director; the ECD sector is a vibrant but complex one, characterized by multiple role players as I have indicated before.

The ECD sector is a vibrant but complex one, characterized by multiple role players, differing.

The ECD sector currently experiences the following key challenges:

- under provisioning or skewed provisioning in relation to need and where children find themselves;
- variable quality of programs because they have never had to be accredited;
- lack of or inadequate practitioner/teacher training and supervision and low morale of staff who are trained but have limited career path opportunities;

If a young child doesn't receive sufficient nurturing, nutrition, parental/caregiver interaction and stimulus during this crucial period, the child may be left with a developmental deficit that hampers his or her success in pre-school, kindergarten, and beyond.

Ladies and Gentlemen; the mobile ECD Units focus on children outside of ECD centres in rural areas like this one, and informal settlements, through regular structured playgroup sessions. Parents are encouraged to accompany their children, and information/ awareness sessions are facilitated. Interventions that involve direct activities with the child and

training the parent on how to stimulate the child in the house environment with resources in the home.

I thank you

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