

NEWSLETTER APRIL – JUNE 2025

The greatest gift you can give your
children is to heal yourself.

- Gabor Mate

JULY 2025

SAPPIN

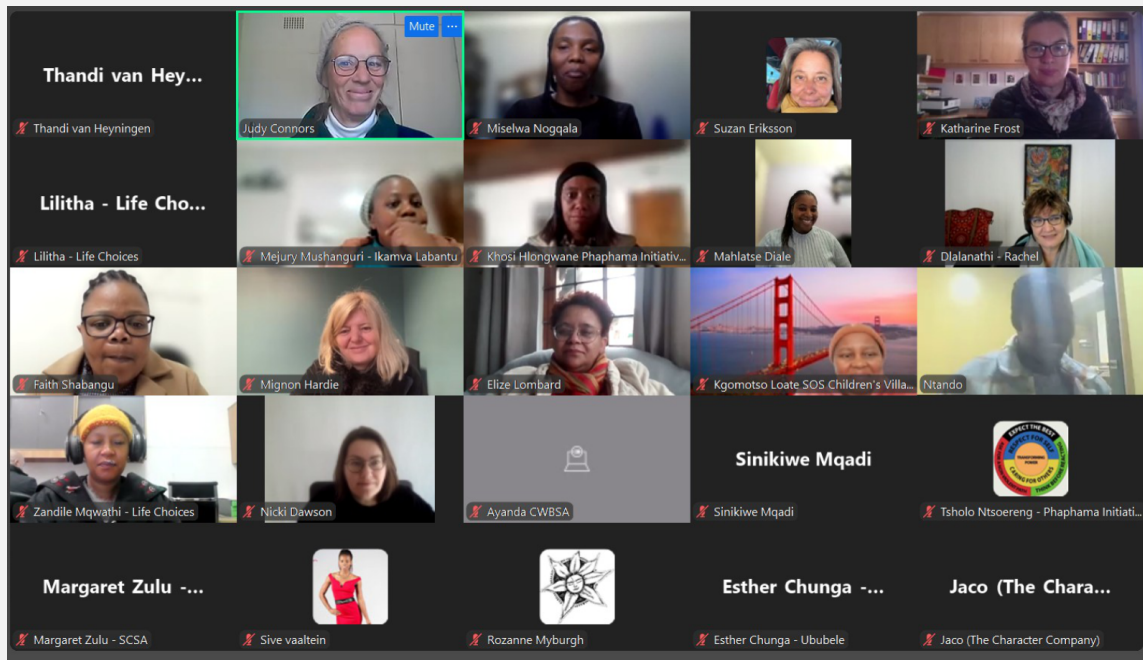
Quarterly Newsletter







SAPPIN ONLINE MEETING



Strengthening Connection, Innovation & Reflection: Highlights from SAPPIN's Mid-Year Network Meeting

On 25 June, SAPPIN members gathered virtually for our annual mid-year check-in to reconnect, reflect, and reimagine. The gathering aimed to strengthen our relationships, understand the evolving ecosystem we work in, and plan our next steps as a network.

As always, we grounded ourselves in mindfulness and reaffirmed SAPPIN's values, with the reminder to embody fun, time management, and warmth in our work. Members shared organisational and ecosystem updates in small groups and plenary.

Across the board, creativity and innovation are alive—whether through new income-generating strategies, work with schools and governing bodies, or data collection around social norms. Yet, members also shared concerns about restructuring, shrinking funding, and the need to sustain impact while navigating uncertainty.

Key programme updates followed. The **ParentLine** WhatsApp service has expanded – more news to follow later in this letter.

We also explored the exciting next phase of **Free to Grow**—a workplace-based parenting programme co-developed by SAPPIN – stay tuned for more in this newsletter.

The final session tackled an essential part of our network’s deep work: **Power, Rank, and Privilege**. Members reflected on personal and organisational blocks, aspirations and the emotional complexity of equity work. The consensus was clear: SAPPIN offers a brave space for learning and growth and these conversations must continue—carefully held, openly approached and tied to tools like onboarding material, reflective processes and future training modules.

As we move forward, SAPPIN’s leadership will reflect on the feedback shared and guide the next steps. As we do, we will remain grounded in community, care and our shared belief that **together**, we can transform parenting support across South Africa.

SA’s CHILD PROTECTION PLEDGE NEEDS NGO PARTNERS TO SUCCEED

Published on 05 June 2025 in [ISS Today](#) By

[Chandré Gould](#) Senior Research Fellow, Justice and Violence Prevention,

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About 1 100 children were [murdered](#) in South Africa in the past financial year, according to South African Police Service (SAPS) crime statistics. Estimates prepared by detective services suggest that around 1 181 children were victims of attempted murder and 6 209 were seriously assaulted in just the last three quarters of the 2024/25 financial year.

To read further: <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/sa-s-child-protection-pledge-needs-ngo-partners-to-succeed>

Parentline SA
Supporting South Africa’s Parents, One Message at a Time



Parentline SA is growing rapidly as a trusted support system for caregivers across the country. Hosted on WhatsApp, the chatbot offers free, low-data, culturally appropriate parenting guidance—accessible 24/7 in a format that is warm, easy to use and aligned with evidence-based practice.

In just the past month, our user base has grown by 137%, with many users now accessing the service more regularly. We are proud to share that Parentline is currently being used in every province of South Africa - testament to the national relevance of our offering and the pressing need for accessible parenting support.

User Distribution by Province

What Parentline Offers

At the moment, Parentline offers over 80 menu items across

1. Child Behaviour

Everyday Challenges: Tantrums

Playing & Bonding: How to

*Positive Parenting: *Gentle*

2. Child Development

Growth Stages: Growth Stages

Healthy Habits: Sleep, Sit, Stand

Sexual Development

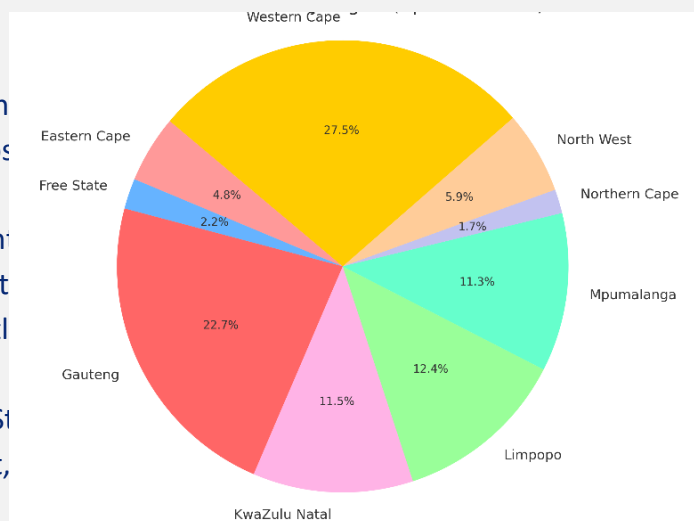
3. My Well-being

I Am Stressed: Parenting and Stress, Calming Activities, More Information

I Am Angry: I Get Angry, Dealing with Anger, Parenting and Anger, Where It Comes From, Calming Activities

Parental Confidence: Building Confidence, Parental Confidence

Self-Care: Asking for Help, Helplines, Understanding Stress, Feel Better, Release Exercises, Breathing Exercise, Mindfulness



years old and includes

4. FTD (First Thousand Days)

FTD Overview, Birth & Newborn, Breastfeeding, Breastfeeding Timeline, Happy Healthy Child, Healthcare

5. Health & Nutrition

Nutrition by Age, *Digital Medic Content (new)

6. Family Changes

Grief Support, Divorce, New Baby, Moving Home, New Marriage, *Single Parenting (new), *Co-Parenting (new)

7. Child Safety

Under 12: Keep My Child Safe, Body Safety, Online Safety, Helping Your Child Feel Safe Again

12+: Keep My Child Safe, Social Safety, Body Safety, Online Safety, Helping Your Child Feel Safe Again

8. Emergency Info

About Parentline, What We Can Help With, Do's and Don'ts, Emergency Numbers

**These topics are currently in development and will be added to the chatbot in the next four weeks*

What's Next for Parentline

The next phase of Parentline's development focuses on:

Voice Notes: We will begin adding audio versions of select content to make the chatbot even more accessible to users with low literacy or limited time to read.

Referral Network Expansion: We are strengthening our in-person referral system by onboarding more parenting-focused NGOs across the country - broadening our geographic reach and ensuring that more families can be supported close to home.

Enhanced Safety Content: New material will tackle issues like child sexual abuse, online exploitation and trafficking - helping caregivers protect their children from harm.

Growing Our Reach: Parentline will be promoted through clinics, community radio and social media to continue expanding our user base and deepen engagement.

Looking Ahead

Parentline is already integrated into many SAPPIN members' programmes and we would like to encourage all to use it as a resource for parents and caregivers they support. Our long-term vision is for Parentline to become a government-endorsed national support line, linked to the Child Support Grant system, formal ECD and parenting policy frameworks, DBE, DSD and DoH.

We invite the SAPPIN network to walk this road with us. Whether through collaboration, referrals, content creation or local promotion, every partner plays a vital role in making sure that no parent in South Africa is left unsupported.

Free to Grow



Since 2020, the ISS has been partnering with SAPPIN to develop and implement "Free to Grow," a workplace-based programme focused on positive parenting and interpersonal skills development. The main outcome for the program is to prevent family violence, specifically violence against women and children. The programme is 12 weeks long and delivered through 90-minute interactive sessions led by skilled facilitators. You can read more about the development of Free to Grow [here](#).

There has been increasing interest from the private sector in offering Free to Grow at workplaces. Wilmi and Thandi recently visited In2Food, a large agro-processing business operating nationally with around 8,000 employees. They are eager to collaborate with SAPPIN and ISS to introduce Free to Grow to their worksites. We have also shared information about Free to Grow with Agbiz, an agricultural business chamber network, through their latest newsletter. This has helped disseminate information about Free to Grow within the agriculture and food processing sectors and we hope it will generate increased interest and demand for program implementation across various sites in South Africa.

In 2025, we will focus on developing and equipping our cohort of facilitators to deliver Free to Grow, anticipating the growing demand. We plan to conduct online training for our first cohort in August, after which the newly trained facilitators will deliver the programme to the next group of SAPPIN facilitators interested in becoming future Free to Grow facilitators. This initiative aims to expand our facilitator pool and ensure we are prepared for program implementation in workplaces by 2026.

Another exciting event was the recent site visit to Tikketai during the 21st Violence Prevention Forum. Tikketai is a broccoli and cauliflower processing business that originally partnered with the ISS and the Seven Passes Initiative, another SAPPIN member, to develop Free to Grow. During the site visit, 22 participants from the VPF visited the premises, where they were taken on a tour of the factory. They

also had an opportunity to experience some of Free to Grow and take part in a facilitated discussion with Tikketai employees who had previously participated in Free to Grow.

MEMBER UPDATE – SUZAN ERIKSSON



We're excited to share that one of our valued members is now working as a strategic consultant, bringing over 25 years of experience supporting organisations in families, children, humanitarian aid, education and healthcare. With expertise in strategic planning, partnerships, fundraising and programme development, she is passionate about driving meaningful, lasting change. If you're interested in connecting or exploring potential collaborations, feel free to reach out to Suzan at sje@rootedinstrategy.co.za.

Parenting in the Absence of Fathers: The Need for MENtors and Real Engagement **The Character Company**



FATHERS MATTER

In many of the communities we serve, trying to run a parenting workshop can feel like putting together a puzzle with half the pieces missing - because so often, fathers are simply not in the room. Whether due to physical absence, emotional disconnection or societal pressures that discourage male vulnerability, the reality is that many children - especially boys - grow up without active, present fathers. The effects of this are deeply felt, not just by the children but by the mothers who are left to carry the full emotional, physical and financial responsibility of parenting. The gap, however, is more than just an emotional one - it affects a child's development, behaviour and long-term identity formation.

In South Africa fatherlessness is not an exception - it's becoming the norm. According to Stats SA, almost 70% of children in our country are growing up in single parent homes and according to the recent "State of South African Fathers" (SOSAF) report, less than 35% of boys grow up with their biological father in the home. That number isn't just a statistic - it's a crisis because the absence of a father doesn't just leave a gap at the dinner table; it creates a vacuum in a child's identity, security and understanding of what it means to be a man or how to relate to one.

Research consistently confirms the value of father involvement: children with present, positive male role models are more likely to perform well academically, have stronger emotional regulation and develop healthier social relationships. In environments where biological fathers are absent, the need for "**social fathers**" - men who step in as mentors, coaches, teachers or community leaders - is critical. These men don't replace dads; they stand in the gap, offering consistent, value-based support to both

the boys and the mothers raising them.

For single mothers especially, this situation is incredibly tough. They are doing their absolute best, often with limited support but many of them will tell you that raising a boy into a good man, is a job that was never meant to be done alone. “It is not that moms are not good enough, they are just not Dad enough”. This is where the idea of “**social fathers**” comes in: mentors, uncles, coaches, teachers, grandfathers or community men who intentionally step into a young boy’s life. These men don’t need to be perfect - they just need to be present, consistent and value-driven.

At The Character Company, we walk this road every day. We mentor boys who are growing up without dads and we’ve seen first-hand how life-changing it is when a boy begins to experience what healthy masculinity looks like - when he learns that being a man is not about dominance, anger or power but about courage, vulnerability and responsibility. We also work with mothers who feel both the gratitude and the relief of knowing there are good men walking this road with them and their sons.

Here’s the hard truth though: we can’t rely on social fathers alone. We still need to find ways to reach and engage the biological fathers where possible - and that’s no small task. Many men feel ashamed, inadequate or excluded from the parenting conversation. Others have never had a model of fatherhood themselves and don’t know where to start. Some have been told - directly or indirectly - that they’re not needed.

The good news is that most men *want* to be involved - they just don’t always know *how*. And that’s where our approach needs to change. If we want more fathers in the room - both in parenting workshops and in their children’s lives - we need to engage them differently. Not by guilt-tripping or blaming but by inviting them into a vision of manhood that’s bold, meaningful and deeply needed. Here are five practical, proven ways we’ve found to engage men more effectively in the parenting journey:

1. Meet Men Where They Are

Expecting dads to show up at a school hall on a Tuesday night for a parenting talk? Probably not going to happen. Host something at a soccer field, a braai or a barbershop - and you might get their attention. Engagement starts with creating spaces where men feel comfortable and not judged.

2. Use Language That Speaks to Purpose and Legacy

“Parenting classes” may sound boring or even intimidating but talk about *raising a king*, *leaving a legacy* or *becoming the man your son needs*, and you’re speaking their language. Purpose drives men - use it.

3. Involve Respected Men from the Community

Peer influence is powerful. When respected men - local coaches, pastors or business owners - step up and speak out about their involvement in parenting, it encourages others to follow. No one wants to be the only guy in the room.

4. Make It Practical and Action-Based

Most men want to *do* something, not just *talk*. Replace lectures with hands-on activities like father-child building projects, outdoor events or even team sports that create shared experiences and learning moments.

5. Create Safe Spaces for Vulnerability

Men aren't used to being asked how they're doing emotionally - let alone being told it's okay to say, "I don't know how to be a dad." We need spaces where men can talk without being shamed. Vulnerability leads to accountability and accountability leads to real commitment. 'Men Around a Fire' (M@F) is a unique initiative by the Character Company to create safe spaces like these and can be rolled out easily with willing partners.

Fathers matter and, in their absence, *MENTors* matter. The goal is not perfection - it's presence. If we want stronger families, better behaved kids and safer communities, we must stop treating men like the problem and start equipping them to be part of the solution. It's hard work but it's worth it - because when a boy sees what a good man looks like, he begins to believe he can become one.

Jaco v Schalkwyk is the Dad & Founder of the Character Company, a long-term MENTorship program for young boys growing up with absent fathers or no positive male role models in their lives. Jaco is an intentional single Dad and he is passionate about Jesus and MENTorship.

WELCOME



A beautiful boy has joined our network

SAPPIN celebrates the joys of life alongside our important work and this quarter brought extra special news! One of our members welcomed a beautiful baby boy into their family. We're thrilled to share in this joy and wish them all the love and strength on their parenting journey.



Welcome James Wynne who joined the world on 9 May. Lots of love and strength to your parents and sister on the journey further.

PARENTING TRAINING FOR SENIOR CITIZENS – # INCLUSION



Ikamva Labantu embarked on parenting training for older persons. This was initiated after Ikamva Labantu's research on elder abuse, [An Exploratory Study of elder abuse in Cape Town's Townships](#), found that older people in township communities are not only caring for their children but also their grandchildren. Elders are left with the enormous task of rewinding the clock and starting all over again with the responsibility of child rearing at a time when the older persons are expected to rest and enjoy their position as grandparents.

Fifty-four older persons from two of Ikamva Labantu's senior clubs, underwent the 8 weeks parenting training. The participants enjoyed the training with some saying: 'They will never grow too old to learn'. They loved the check-in the most, where they got to do some basic breathing exercises. It was evident by session two that facilitators needed to work hand-in-hand with social workers as the training started unravelling challenges that the older persons were experiencing with children and grandchildren in their care. Social workers assisted with follow-ups and conducted family meetings where needed. Ikamva Labantu even had a child reinstated back into school with the support of the social workers.

The training was an eye opener and a realisation that when organisations plan programmes, they should never leave out senior citizens in the assumption that they have seen it all, as some of the challenges being experienced today, are new and exacerbated by technology, which most of the seniors are not well-versed in.



LITERACY STARTS AT HOME: WHAT WORDWORKS' MAYIKHULE PROJECT IS TEACHING US



The *Mayikhule* project - meaning “*let it grow*”- is an initiative of Wordworks, designed to bring families, teachers, and communities together to support young children’s early literacy and learning.

As a South African non-profit organisation focused on early language and literacy development in the first eight years of a child’s life, Wordworks has long recognised the vital role families play in supporting learning at home. With Mayikhule, Wordworks combines two of its well-established programmes - Together in My Education (TIME) and Home-School Partnerships (HSP), to deepen collaboration between homes and schools.

The project is currently being implemented in partnership with four inspiring community-based organisations in the Eastern Cape: Khululeka (in collaboration with Siyakholwa), Masinyusane, Rhodes Centre for Social Development and Little Seeds. Together, they are working in 48 schools, reaching over 1,200 parents and caregivers, and more than 3,000 learners.

At the heart of Mayikhule is a simple but powerful idea: parents and caregivers have an important role to play in their children’s learning. The TIME programme provides families with story-based activities aligned with the Grade R and Grade 1 curriculum - designed to be easy to use, enjoyable, and grounded in everyday experiences. Through HSP, Foundation Phase teachers host workshops that help parents and caregivers understand how to support their children’s language and literacy development.

A key strength of the project is the way it builds local capacity. Trainers from partner organisations are trained to support Foundation Phase teachers, who then run sessions with parents and caregivers in their own communities. These workshops are conducted in isiXhosa - the language of learning and teaching in participating schools - creating inclusive spaces where families feel seen, heard and equipped to contribute.

The Mayikhule initiative draws on valuable experience from the Western Cape, where the HSP programme has been implemented in many schools and has become part of broader provincial education support efforts. By bringing TIME and HSP together in a new context, Mayikhule is opening fresh possibilities for how schools and families can work hand-in-hand.

Instead of viewing literacy as something that only happens in the classroom, families are discovering that it begins at home - in shared stories, daily routines and caring conversations. Through Mayikhule, Wordworks and its partners are strengthening the connections between schools and communities and helping young learners build a strong foundation for success.



Life Choices Celebrates a Year of Impact and Welcomes New Board Members



Life Choices recently hosted its 2025 Annual General Meeting (AGM), joined by our board members, staff, partners, and learning partners. The gathering was both a joyful reflection on the past year's milestones and a powerful affirmation of our commitment to keeping youth at the heart of everything we do.

A key highlight of the AGM was the official welcome of three new board members: Allison van der Walt, Irene Khumalo, and KC Makhubele. Their leadership, insight, and energy will be instrumental as we move into a bold new chapter.

We also honored the incredible contributions of Rayelene Govender, who is stepping down as Chair after four years of dedicated service. Rayelene has played a vital role in ensuring Life Choices' strong governance, always leading with both integrity and compassion. She passes the baton to Nyasha Njela, who will now serve as Chair.

We extend our deepest gratitude to Rayelene for her guidance and friendship, and to Elena Mancebo Masa, who also concludes her four-year tenure on the board. Elena's wisdom and support have shaped so much of our growth.

We would also like to thank our Managing Director, Mignon Hardie, for her steady leadership, and all Life Choices staff and stakeholders who continue to walk alongside us. Your dedication makes it possible for young people in South Africa to feel seen, valued, and heard and to thrive, not just survive.

To our entire Life Choices community, thank you for continuing to champion a world where every young person is free to rise, lead, and live a life of purpose and possibility.

Aluta continua!

Visit us at: www.lifechoices.co.za

Please don't forget to support SAPPIN on social media



