



## **NEWSLETTER JANUARY – MARCH 2026**

**A better world begins at the beginning. Ensuring every baby experiences the best start to life is the most powerful way to shape a brighter future for all.**

**Andrea Leadsom**



**SAPPIN MEETING**



The SAPPIN network came together in March 2026 in Cape Town for a two-day meeting that reflected both the strength of the collective and the realities of working in a complex, under-resourced sector. From the outset, the tone was grounded in purpose—participants spoke openly about what sustains their work despite ongoing challenges, highlighting the impact on children and families, the importance of safe spaces, and the value of not working in isolation. What stood out was the depth of commitment across the network, paired with an honest acknowledgement of the pressures organisations face, from administrative burdens to funding instability.

At a systems level, the meeting reinforced SAPPIN’s role as a connector and enabler rather than a direct service provider. The focus remains on strengthening the broader parenting support ecosystem through advocacy, coordination, mapping and organisational support. Key areas of work include engaging government to prioritise parenting support in policy and budgets, building a national map of interventions to improve alignment and visibility and supporting organisations to strengthen governance, monitoring and implementation quality. There is a clear shift towards outcome-focused thinking – moving beyond tracking activities to understanding real impact at family and community level.

Collaboration continues to be a central strength but also an ongoing challenge. Participants reflected on fragmentation across government departments and the difficulty of creating coherent systems of engagement. At the same time, there was conversations around the potential of shared platforms, digital tools and even AI to improve knowledge-sharing and coordination across the sector. The network is increasingly positioning itself as a space where organisations contribute, learn and collectively shape solutions, rather than operate in silos.

Several programme and research updates highlighted the breadth of work across SAPPIN, including innovations in digital parenting support, workplace-based parenting programmes and community-led violence prevention initiatives. A consistent theme across these efforts is the integration of parenting support with broader social issues, particularly gender-based violence and mental health. There is growing recognition that strengthening families is not a standalone intervention but a critical entry point into wider systems change.

The meeting also created space to reflect on internal practices, particularly around values and organisational culture. Participants engaged in discussions on accountability, respect, confidentiality and cultural sensitivity, emphasising the need to move beyond “tick-box” approaches and ensure that values are the motivation in daily work. This extended into conversations on supervision and staff wellbeing, where gaps in consistent, supportive

systems were identified, alongside the need for more reflective, context-sensitive approaches.

Despite the complexity, there was a strong sense of momentum. The network is evolving towards a more integrated, systems-driven approach, with increasing emphasis on evidence, collaboration and practical application. What came through clearly is that SAPPIN's strength lies in its ability to both support organisations on the ground and simultaneously working to shift the systems that shape their work.



**WELCOME TO SAPPIN's NEW MEMBERS  
Ignite Catalysts & Sesame Workshop SA**



Founded by Jonathan Manuel and Amy Vraagom

Leaders with a combined over 30 years of expertise in leadership development, organisational transformation and psychosocial support to families and communities.

Ignite Catalysts delivers coaching and consulting solutions that inspire meaningful change and deliver measurable outcomes.

“Our approach integrates globally recognised best practices with a nuanced understanding of the South African socio-cultural context, enabling us to address critical challenges in leadership capability, team performance, emotional resilience and diversity management”.

### **Personal & Relationship Wellness**

- Pre-Marital & Family Coaching: Strengthening communication, alignment and conflict resolution.
- Personal Development Coaching: Building resilience, confidence and self-leadership.

Corporate, community and family wellness is the heartbeat of our approach



Sesame Workshop South Africa believe that playful learning sparks curiosity, creativity and confidence. Through their TV programme, Takalani Sesame and their community programmes, children build critical foundational skills, from early literacy and numeracy to science, problem-solving and language development.

With content aligned to national curricula and delivered in multiple languages, they meet children where they are, giving every learner a strong start for school and for life.

## **BUILDING MOMENTUM FOR UNIVERSAL PARENTING SUPPORT**

On 2 April 2026, two NGO networks, Families4Children and SAPPIN, co-hosted an advocacy webinar on securing universal parenting support for child development in South Africa.

The webinar was convened to mobilise the many organisations working across the diverse arena of parenting support to unite behind common advocacy messages that will ensure the operationalisation of the government's many policy commitments to universal parenting support.

Parenting support across the life course includes many services provided by government and non-government sectors, from birth through to age 18. When provided together, parenting support yields substantial developmental returns for both children and the country.

The challenge is that the obligations to provide the combined services are not being met comprehensively because the underlying system is marked by gaps and challenges. Many CSOs and government departments are united in wanting to change this but tend to address the challenge from a programming perspective. They introduce or seek to strengthen parenting programmes, especially those focused on responsive care.

SAPPIN and Families4Children commissioned a policy brief to understand the underlying causes and advocacy challenge, which, if addressed, would move us closer to universal parenting support in the country.

The policy brief positions parenting support as both a developmental imperative and a rights-based obligation. It draws on national policy commitments, international frameworks, and practice-based evidence to argue for the universalisation of sustained parenting support. The message is clear—while there is no shortage of policy intent, progress has been limited because the relevant role players have not developed and adopted the systems necessary to sustain implementation of the whole and bring about changes in outcomes for parents, children, and the country's development.

stronger alignment, collaboration, and follow-through across sectors.

SAPPIN and Families4Children brought together stakeholders from across government, civil society, and research to share the results of the policy brief and plan a collective way forward to address these systemic challenges, including:

- Improved leadership and coordination
- Consolidated information providing direction to all role players on the systemic steps and measures that should be taken to operationalise policy commitments
- Increased public funding of parenting support by the National Treasury as a national development priority
- Stronger monitoring and evaluation of parenting support outcomes.

A central focus of the webinar was creating space for organisations to reflect on their current advocacy efforts and to identify where there are shared energy and opportunity for collective action. There was strong recognition that many actors are already doing important work, but that fragmentation continues to limit impact.

The webinar concluded with the shared recognition that moving forward requires a more coordinated, systems-level approach driven by appropriate, collective advocacy. It also requires sustained collaboration between government and non-government partners, with a focus on quality, accessibility, and continuity of support across the life course. The process concluded with a number of concrete suggestions as to how this may be achieved, and our focus will now turn to actioning these outcomes.

For organisations interested in being a part of the journey going forward, please send us your details which may be addressed to [wilmi@sappin.org.za](mailto:wilmi@sappin.org.za) or [rachel@dlalanathi.org.za](mailto:rachel@dlalanathi.org.za) and we will share a copy of the full webinar report and include you in the process from here on out. In the meantime, you can read the full policy brief here:

<https://sappin.org.za/parenting-supportfor-early-childhooddevelopment-to-achieve-transformation/>

## MAHLATSE DIALE: REFLECTIONS ON SAPPIN DRIVER GROUP



In Sepedi, the proverb "*Tau tša hloka seboka di šitwa ke nare e hlotša*" has always resonated deeply with me. It teaches that a pride of lions without unity, cannot defeat even a

limping buffalo. This wisdom has been a guiding light throughout my life, and during my journey with SAPPIN and the Driver Group, it has taken on even more profound meaning. The proverb beautifully captures the essence of collaboration and collective strength that defines our work.

SAPPIN is a vibrant network of diverse organisations within the parenting sector, each bringing unique purposes and focus areas. While each organisation makes significant strides on its own, together, we achieve far greater impact. The Driver Group embodies this unity, bringing together knowledge, passion and varied perspectives to advocate for parents and communities across South Africa.

Working alongside such dedicated individuals, I came to appreciate that even the smallest contributions matter. My role as a social worker originating from rural Limpopo might have seemed modest, but when combined with others' expertise, it became part of something truly powerful. This collective effort allowed us to amplify voices, influence government forums, engage funders and shape policy discussions.

Our work is gaining recognition not as a single programme replicated everywhere but as tailored initiatives addressing specific community needs. This approach highlights the importance of context-sensitive solutions. Through innovative research methods rooted in people-centered thinking, we generate evidence that inspires funders to partner with us rather than simply provide aid. This shift restores dignity to parents and communities, moving away from deficit-based views toward holistic support.

Being part of the Driver Group has shown me that advocacy is most effective when grounded in lived experiences. By conducting research that reflects the realities of families, SAPPIN challenges traditional approaches and promote decolonised methods. This ensures that parents are seen not as problems to be fixed but as individuals deserving respect and comprehensive support. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this collective journey. To every organisation and individual who wonders if their input matters: it truly does. Every voice, idea and effort strengthens the network. As illustrated in *Happy Feet 2*, where even the smallest krill makes a decisive impact, our combined actions free communities from challenges and create lasting change.

As I transition out of the Driver Group to new responsibilities within SAPPIN, I carry forward a renewed vision. My focus on Personal Development and Leadership (PDL) and Reflective Supervision excites me deeply, as I am passionate about empowering frontline workers. Supporting those who support others ensures resilience and sustainability in our collective mission.

The proverb reminds us that unity is strength. SAPPIN thrives because individuals and organisations bring their unique contributions into a shared effort. Together, we advocate, innovate and inspire. As we continue this journey, let us embrace collaboration, amplify every voice, and move forward with purpose—because our collective impact is far greater than the sum of our parts.

## **LULU NGCOBO SUCCEEDING AS DRIVER GROUP MEMBER**



It is with great excitement and humility that I take on the role of being a member of the SAPPIN Driver Group. Parental support remains core to our conversations in the network. We strive to support each other, share resources and remain abreast of the developments in the sector both locally and internationally. I hope that my contribution will add value to the SAPPIN office and all its members as we jointly take the network forward.

## **FATHERHOOD COP**



The Fatherhood Community of Practice (CoP) met in April 2026 in Cape Town, bringing together practitioners, researchers and organisations working across parenting, gender and violence prevention to reflect on work in the Fatherhood eco-system. What emerged was not a neat consensus but something more honest and useful - a group willing to struggle with complexity, tension and the reality that fatherhood in South Africa cannot be reduced to a simple definition. In fact, one of the strongest threads across the two days was that the struggle to define fatherhood is part of the work and that the CoP itself should model what it looks like to interrogate with difficult, evolving questions while still moving forward.

There was clear agreement that the dominant narrative around men and fathers needs to shift. Too often, the focus remains on absence or violence, which distorts the broader reality and limits how interventions are designed. Participants highlighted the need to recognise different groups of men - those who are disengaged, those who are overwhelmed and those who are already showing up - and to focus more intentionally on supporting men who want to be involved but lack the tools, confidence or support to do so. At the same time, there was a strong call to centre the child more explicitly, shifting attention from who the caregiver is to whether children are receiving consistent, safe and nurturing care. This opens the space to include a wider range of caregiving roles, including social fathers and other adults in a child's life, without losing the focus on strengthening father involvement.

The discussions also challenged the group to think beyond Western constructs of family and fatherhood and to ground the work more firmly in South African realities. This includes recognising the role of culture, history, trauma and shifting power dynamics in shaping how fatherhood is understood and practiced. There was a clear push to move away from overly academic or rigid frameworks and towards language and approaches that resonate at community level. At the same time, participants acknowledged that this work sits within a broader context of violence, inequality and social pressure, making trauma-informed and prevention-focused approaches essential.

While much of the conversation was reflective, there was also a strong sense of urgency. Participants repeatedly emphasised the need to move from discussion to action - testing ideas, strengthening programmes and aligning efforts across organisations. The CoP was seen as a space that must balance thinking and doing: a platform for shared learning but also a mechanism to coordinate efforts, amplify impact and build a stronger collective voice. This includes engaging more strategically with government, contributing to national processes and shaping public narratives in ways that highlight progress and possibility rather than only deficit.

Importantly, the meeting surfaced the depth of existing work already happening across the network. Organisations are generating significant reach and impact through campaigns, research and programme implementation - from large-scale social norms campaigns and children's voice research to innovative uses of social media data and AI to track and shift harmful narratives. The opportunity now is not to start from scratch but to connect these efforts, share tools and evidence and build a more coherent and visible body of work that can influence both practice and policy.

The process also highlighted the importance of values. There was a strong sense that the CoP needs a clearer, more accessible set of guiding principles - something that reflects where the field is now, rather than where it was a few years ago. This includes being more inclusive of different forms of caregiving, taking an asset-based approach and ensuring that both fathers and mothers are supported within a broader ecosystem of care. At the same time, there was recognition that values alone are not enough; they need to translate into practical action and measurable change.

By the end of the meeting, there was no final definition of fatherhood, no fixed structure and no single agreed pathway forward. What there was, however, was a stronger sense of collective purpose, a willingness to engage with complexity and a shared understanding that this work matters deeply - not only for fathers but for children, families and communities. The CoP is still evolving but it is clear that it has the potential to play a critical role in reshaping how fatherhood is understood and supported in South Africa, and in doing so, contribute meaningfully to violence prevention and stronger, more resilient family systems.

## 0 - 3 YEARS LEARNING SERIES



Join Our Online Learning Series on Parental Engagement in Early Childhood Development, an informal space for anyone working with pregnant mothers, or parents/caregivers of young children.

Are you interested in spending time with colleagues from across the country engaging in open conversations about each other's work, what's going well, what's hard? The Learning Series offers an informal, online space for implementers, researchers, advocates, ECD practitioners and anyone else interested, to connect, share and learn from one another about engaging parents in ECD.

Each 90-minute session includes one or two short presentations from different organisations, followed by further reflection in small groups and plenary. This is an informal space where everyone's participation is valued and learning from each other is the focus.

Session 1 happened on 24 March with 26 participants joining and helping to shape the next three sessions. One message came through clearly in the discussions – parents aren't just recipients of support, they are central in their children's development, particularly in the early years and their voices need to shape the systems and services around them. You can find the full report [here](#).

The next session will take place on 26<sup>th</sup> May from 10-11:30 and will focus on supporting father's involvement in ECD. You can register [here](#).

We are looking for one or two organisations to share something about their work in this area, if you are interested in sharing, please reach out to [wilmi@sappin.org.za](mailto:wilmi@sappin.org.za) or Bongekile [bongekile@dlalanathi.org.za](mailto:bongekile@dlalanathi.org.za)

Sessions 3 and 4 are as follows:

- Tuesday 25 August: Parents as a Child’s First Teacher – the overlap between responsive care and opportunities for early learning
- Tuesday 27 October: Implementer wellbeing and self-care

All sessions run from 10:00-11:30.

Please share with colleagues, everyone is welcome - SAPPIN member or not. The more voices that join the conversation, the deeper the learning.

## MIDLANDS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

### 45 YEARS OF SERVICE



Midlands Community College is proud to celebrate 45 years of service this year, rooted in the communities of the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands and committed to learning, development and opportunity. We value our membership of the South African Parenting Programme Implementors Network as an important space for shared learning, relationship-building and collective impact. Our work is grounded in community-based partnerships and strengthened through collaboration with other ECD organisations, recognising that meaningful and sustainable progress for children and families is best achieved when organisations work together. Deepening these partnerships remains a key priority as we continue to build stronger systems of support across the sector.

This collaborative approach shapes our Early Childhood Development work, where we support both caregivers and practitioners to create nurturing, language-rich environments in which young children can thrive. Through initiatives such as *Dlalakhuluma Funda*, we promote playful learning, early language development and positive caregiver-child interaction, while *Step Up ECD* focuses on strengthening practitioner confidence, centre quality and ongoing professional support. Together, these efforts aim to improve the everyday experiences that shape children’s early development.

Our commitment to learning improvement is further reflected in our participation in a collaborative ELOM project with four partner organisations. This work focuses on identifying and testing practical microchanges within specific developmental domains to strengthen early learning outcomes. By combining evidence, reflection and shared practice, we hope to demonstrate how small, intentional shifts can lead to meaningful gains for children.

We also recognise that strengthening the ECD sector includes supporting practitioner growth beyond initial qualifications. Through *Sivulithuba*, we work specifically with ECD Level 4 graduates as they transition into further study, providing academic, digital and psychosocial support. In this way, we seek to create pathways for continued professional development and leadership within the sector.

Alongside this, our partnerships are increasingly responding to emerging challenges such as climate change. We are involved in research exploring the perceptions of caregivers and ECD practitioners regarding climate change, with the aim of generating meaningful baseline data for donors and sector partners. This evidence can help shape relevant programmes and practical interventions that support children, families and communities facing growing environmental and economic pressures.

Across all of this work, we remain committed to collaboration, evidence-informed practice and community partnership as the foundations for a responsive and future-focused ECD sector.



## **USAPHO GBV AWARENESS CAMPAIGN**

**8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> December 2025**



USAPHO Foundation, in partnership with Heartlines' Fathers Matter programme, engaged men between the ages of 18 and 62 in the fight against gender-based violence during the 16 Days of Activism campaign. These once-off engagements were conducted in peri-urban and rural areas, including Philadelphia and Klipheuwel Farm.

For many participants, this was their first opportunity to be in a space where they could openly discuss their experiences of violence and reflect on its long-term impact on their lives and families. The men acknowledged feeling uncomfortable sharing their experiences, as doing so is often perceived as a sign of weakness. They noted that women are generally seen as more able to talk about and express their emotions, while men tend to keep their struggles to themselves and suppress their feelings.

Participants reflected that suppressed emotions often manifest in harmful behaviours and recognised the need for healthier ways of coping. They further highlighted the lack of dedicated spaces or platforms for men to engage in such conversations. The men expressed appreciation for the safe space created through these workshops and strongly welcomed the opportunity for more engagements of this nature in the future.



## Child Online Safety - Tales of Turing

The Child Online Safety Initiative, implemented by [Tales of Turing](#) with support from the World Childhood Foundation, examines the risks children face in digital spaces in South Africa while developing responses that empower them to navigate these environments safely. Through [observational research](#) in preparation for full-scale [social media listening research](#) across platforms such as TikTok, Discord, Roblox, and gaming communities, the

initiative explores real-time online conversations and emerging risks, including grooming, sextortion, cyberbullying and exposure to harmful or sexualised content. The research also highlights challenges such as sharenting, algorithm-driven exposure to harmful material and the use of slang and coded language that can obscure risks from caregivers and educators.

To better [understand how these issues are discussed](#) in real time, eight digital dialogue facilitators engaged with public conversations on platforms such as TikTok, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube over a one-month period. Using a curiosity-driven dialogue approach, facilitators responded to posts with reflective questions that encouraged critical thinking, challenged harmful behaviours and promoted awareness of children’s digital vulnerabilities across diverse online communities in South Africa.

Insights from these reports inform child-led interventions through Digital School Clubs established with Grade 6 and 7 learners. Using a narrative therapy and reflective learning approach, a series of in-person workshops created spaces for children to share their experiences, build digital literacy and develop dialogue and facilitation skills to support peers. Through storytelling, creative activities and collaborative reflection, learners explored healthy communication, responsible social media use and ways to respond to online harm while identifying trusted adults who can provide support. The process also enabled learners to begin forming peer support networks and co-creating awareness around online safety within their schools, parents and communities.

Complementing these activities, a set of creative, unbranded [social media visuals](#) was developed to encourage open and relatable conversations about children’s online experiences. Informed by insights from the observation report, stakeholder meetings and direct engagement with children, the designs use colloquial language and visual storytelling to raise awareness about risks such as cyberbullying, harmful content and privacy violations while supporting educators, facilitators and youth groups to promote safer and more responsible digital engagement.

## WELCOME



A beautiful girl has joined our network! Ziphozenkosi Fanelesibonge Nene was born on 12 March 2026. Congratulations to Sinikiwe and the family on this amazing miracle.

Please don't forget to support SAPPIN on social media

