



## *How do we prioritise responsive parenting in South Africa?*

Report of the first Families Indaba  
held at Victoria Yards, Lorentzville, Johannesburg  
**26 & 27 October 2022**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The inaugural SAPPIN Families Indaba was the culmination of several years of SAPPIN's vision to highlight the work of the organisations within SAPPIN as well as to draw attention to the collaboration and innovation of the network as a whole. At the centre of the Indaba was the desire to share the critical importance of the role of Families, and support for families, in South Africa. The Indaba foregrounded that the family and the support for the family (in all of its diversity) is at the centre of any sustainable change in this country. The Indaba did not intend to provide false hope. There was an acknowledgment of the real and multitude of challenges facing the country. The venue, the décor, the breakaway rooms, the Open Space Technology, the theatre piece, the gift, food and the attendees list were all put together intentionally to provide the space for active collaboration. Collaboration of: what needs to be done to support families; collaboration with those inside and outside of the space; collaboration on the multitude of platforms to be used for such a purpose. The following report is an attempt at describing the work of the two days of the Families Indaba.

## SAPPIN BACKGROUND

SAPPIN builds a secure future for all who live in South Africa by helping families create warm and non-violent homes for children.

The purpose of the network is to strengthen the voice of civil society working with families through collaboration and shared learning. SAPPIN aims to enhance civil society's capacity in the realm of implementation, research, fundraising, communication and advocacy to collectively ensure that quality programmes are available and sustainable across the country in communities where they are needed.

SAPPIN exists to contribute to a larger theory of change by linking to South African and international policies for the protection and security of children and prevention of violence in childhood. Positive parenting interventions, informed by these policies, have been proven to have a direct link to the reduction of violence within homes and the promotion of alternative disciplinary strategies, contributing to more securely attached children. These children have increased resilience and have more improved opportunities for a better future, impacting all of South Africa.

This network has its origins within the Dialogue Forum (now called Violence Prevention Forum). All original implementing partners within the network were present in the forum. The purpose of the network was to strengthen the voice of parenting programme implementers, to strengthen our research capacity particularly in the realm of implementation research, to collaborate with regard to fundraising and communication. This effort of joining implementers in such a network ultimately serves to strengthen our capacity to collaboratively reach greater numbers of children and families, with quality, evidence-based parenting interventions. The principles and values of the network guide the way it operates and who can become a member.

#### **PRINCIPLE 1:**

The parenting programmes of SAPPIN members promote warm & non –violent family (caregiver-child) relationship.

##### **Values:**

**Non –violent communication, nurturing care, violence prevention, respect for families.**

#### **PRINCIPLE 2:**

SAPPIN members are guided by an ethos of collaboration & learning amongst themselves & also with stakeholder.

##### **Values:**

**Openness, mutual learning, support, trust, respect, relationally for members.**

#### **PRINCIPLE 3:**

Quality programmes are being implemented. SAPPIN members are committed to ensure that (1) M&E and (2) supervision are applied, that programmes are (3) evidence –based or informed & that they occur within (4) a basket of services (referral network) to ensure optimal service delivery towards the families served.

##### **Values:**

**Integrity, honesty, openness, adaptability, ethical, trust, accountability quality, excellence.**

#### **PRINCIPLE 4:**

Parenting programmes are informed by relevant social, cultural and religious practices.

##### **Values:**

**respect, cultural sensitivity, valuing, diversity, understanding.**



## PRINCIPLE 5:

All SAPPIN members uphold the principle of do no harm. All programmes apply ethical & respectful practices of implementation & research with regards to beneficiaries & staff.

### Values:

**respect, self-care trust, confidentiality ethical.**

## PRINCIPLE 6: GOVERNANCE

SAPPIN members are registered, compliant entities in South Africa, and have child protection & safe guarding policies.

### Values:

**Professionalism, transparency, accountability.**

## MEETING USING OPEN SPACE TECHNOLOGY

The decision to use Open Space Technology(OST) was very specific. The reason is that OST enables all kinds of people, in any kind of community, to create inspired meetings and events. Over the last 30 years, it has also become clear that opening space, as an intentional peace-building practice, can lead to inspired (in-spirited) communities and organisations, where ordinary people work together to create extraordinary results with regularity.

In Open Space meetings, participants create and manage their own agenda of parallel working sessions around a central theme of strategic importance. In the case of the Families Indaba, the question: How do we prioritize responsive parenting in South Africa? was posed to create much needed conversation. Open Space works best when the work to be done is complex, the people and ideas involved are diverse, the passion for resolution (and potential for conflict) are high, and the time to get it done was yesterday.

For those who did not attend the Families Indaba, here are the fundamentals of OST. The information will give a clearer understanding of the processes that was followed.



# THE FUNDAMENTALS OF OPEN SPACE TECHNOLOGY

## **Theme: What are the current issues and possibilities?**

How do we prioritise responsive parenting in South Africa?

### **Four principles**

- Whoever comes are the right people
- Whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened.
- Whenever it starts is the right time.
- When it's over, it's over.

### **One Law**

The Law of Two Feet.

The law encourages people to leave a conversation if it doesn't interest them anymore. They can then move to a different conversation. This creates more conversation and also cross-pollinations within the different conversations.

### **Be prepared to be surprised!**

The surprise was that real conversations were had. People felt comfortable and took ownership of the Indaba. It was not just a talk shop.

An invitation was sent out beforehand to give the theme with the instruction to be brief, compelling, intriguing, to allow the imagination to grow, and contain the promises:

- Every issue of concern to anybody will have been raised, if they took responsibility for doing that.
- All issues will have received full discussion, to the extent required.
- A full report of issues and discussions will be given to all participants.
- Priorities will be set and action plans made.

Issues were visible to all in attendance.

The invitation prepared attendees for what the discussion would entail.

Another reason why OST was chosen for the Indaba because it enhanced the model used by SAPPIN that everyone is equal, everyone has an equal contribution and is respected and honoured for being part of the process. It further aspired to create a family atmosphere.



# EVALUATIONS RECEIVED FROM PARTICIPANTS ECHOED THE SUCCESS ACHIEVED FROM USING OST:

*“Met everyone where they were. A core of kindness, love, inclusion.”*

*“Love how the open space discussion was documented and sent out – makes it so helpful to share with the team back home.”*

*“Safe space to have tough and deep discussion without dwelling too much...”*

*“It was such a curious, provoking space. The sense of agency and autonomy was deeply felt as participants were invited as collaborators, stakeholders, thinkers, contributors, scribes - human beings.”*





## KEYNOTE SPEAKER: SIZWE MPOFU-WALSH

Dr Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh is a lecturer in the Department of International Relations at the University of the Witwatersrand. He completed a DPhil from the University of Oxford. His first book 'Democracy and Delusion: 10 myths in South African Politics' won the City Press Tafelberg Nonfiction award. The book was accompanied by a rap album of the same name. His second book: 'The New Apartheid' was published in 2021 and is one of the bestselling books in South Africa that year. Mpofu-Walsh has been described as one of the finest writers of his generation.



Dr Mpofu-Walsh's keynote address straddled his personal journey in becoming a father for the first time earlier in the year with the reality of current South African struggles. His talk addressed some of the issues in South Africa's past and the trauma of Apartheid in all of its vicissitudes and how these manifest themselves in current South African life. He argued that there is another Apartheid at play in South Africa at present - one that has highlighted the discrepancies between those that have and those that have not and the impossibility of bridging that divide. He shared how visitors to this country are shocked at the continuing blatant inequalities in our society that we, as citizens, are at risk of becoming accustomed to. Dr Mpofu-Walsh shared that his son, as a boy child of a mixed, racial, religious beginning, has much to face in his life. He shared a short excerpt of a rap that addressed these issues. The keynote address was concluded by a focus on South Africa's future and the tentative hope that a gathering, such as the Families Indaba, holds.

## SPEAKER: HELLEN NYANGOYA, UNICEF

Ms Hellen Nyangoya, Chief Child Protection (Acting) from Unicef, was introduced by Katharine from Sappin. Ms Nyangoya began her presentation by describing the situation of Children in South Africa and she highlighted the statistic that 1 in 3 children have experienced some form of violence by the time they turn 18 years. She continued to provide details into the living arrangements of South African children such as: 36% live with biological parents, 19% live with neither parent, 97% have female carers, 35.5% of economically active women bear the brunt of unemployment.



Although there is an absence of fathers, many children have a male figure in their lives, and 134 500 children have lost a parent or primary caregiver due to CoVID-19.

Hellen then went on to discuss the importance of parenting programmes particularly in the context of the above statistics and she highlighted the necessity of support for parents and caregivers. Some evidence was shared regarding violence prevention and how violence prevention starts at home. Protective factors such as improved peer networks, family connections, decreases in intimate partner violence and violence against children can be consequences of effective parenting support. She concluded by suggesting that parenting programmes are not in themselves sufficient but that policy amendments supporting parenting need to be advocated for and that UNICEF is ready to support government in such endeavours.



## SUMMARY OF EACH GROUP DISCUSSION: DAY 1

The OST process started by asking everyone in attendance to identify a question, related to the overall theme of “How do we prioritize responsive parenting in South Africa?” that they are grappling / wanted to grapple with. Different topics were discussed during the two time slots of day one. The full conversations were immediately sent to participants (Appendix 1).

The different themes discussed were:

### Creating support for parents

- How do we strengthen what caregivers already have?
- How can we support parents to do well with co-parenting?
- How can teen parents be supported?
- How do we support Responsive caregiving in adverse settings and what do they know or believe about it (rural, poverty, unemployment)
- How can caregiver support services be more cognisant of parents' time?

## **Parenting and mental health**

- How can we expect traumatised parents not to raise traumatised parents?
- How do we talk about mental health with communities who do not believe in mental health?

## **Culture, tradition and social norms**

- What is the impact of culture, social norms and tradition on responsive caregiving?
- Is it realistic to expect parents to raise children without using corporal punishment, especially when they believe that it works?
- What will it take to transcend from traditional concepts of parenting being the women's responsibility to it being a shared responsibility?

## **Advocating and awareness of responsive caregiving**

- Before they are asked to prioritise it - How do we help parents understand the importance of responsive caregiving?
- How do we engage men in responsive caregiving?
- What do parents in rural and poverty-stricken settings know and believe about responsive caregiving?

## **Garnering support from funders and government**

- How can government, funders and business prioritise quality parenting programmes
- How can the Department of Basic Education more effectively support the uptake of parenting skills?
- What legal avenues are there to pursue the implementation of support for parents?

# **THEATRE PERFORMANCE**

Guests enjoyed a theatre performance that took place over the course of the 2 days, performed in 6 standalone acts. The piece was performed by actors using only the devices of movement, physical theatre, voice, and an innovative use of the in-the-round space, to illustrate some of the typical issues facing families in South Africa.

Told through the eyes of a "father" protagonist, themes included: strained relationships, familial pressure and work pressure that many caregivers experience, as well as the resulting frustration, helplessness, disillusionment and despair that many feel when faced with such issues.



The piece illustrated how these lived experiences can lead to resentment, and often violence, but presented potential interventions that entities such as SAPPIN can provide. The resolution was not that our hero's problems could be "fixed", but rather through interventions that organisations such as SAPPIN member NGOs provide, pathways can be built to alleviate tensions and begin a journey of healing.

The audience was enthralled in the narrative of the piece and SAPPIN will consider developing the piece further in 2023.





## RESEARCH: DR NICKI DAWSON

Dr Nicki Dawson presented a talk entitled:

**“Striving for Programme Excellence: An Alternative to the WEIRD evidence-based Agenda”.**

Nicki highlighted that child development research and parenting interventions largely derive from WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic) countries. That is to say, child development research is largely conducted on middle class white Western children and their families, who represent less than 5% of the world’s families, and parenting programmes are largely developed in these contexts and then brought to South Africa. Importantly, these families tend to parent in ways that are the outlier across the world. Interventions for South Africa need to be cognisant of this.



Internationally and locally there has been a call for evidence-based parenting interventions to be rolled out in the prevention of violence. Evidence-based interventions are defined as “interventions that have demonstrated statistically, practically meaningful, and sustained improvements through at least one independent high-quality randomised control trial”. This was contrasted against practice-based evidence, defined as “the cumulative knowledge and learning acquired by practitioners through years of innovation, reflection and refinement”. Nicki noted that, in a country that diverges from WEIRD parenting practices, in an effort to avoid further colonization, much work is needed to be done to decolonize child development research and interventions, to find African solutions for African problems, and to find responsive solutions to the changing environment on the ground (i.e. to respond to context specific needs). This is best done through drawing on practice-based evidence – as we work from the established WEIRD base of child development research and parenting interventions, but engage with them through a critical lens.

Nicki reported on the four central themes that arose from a focus group discussion of SAPPIN members regarding the proposed evidence-based criteria for parenting programmes with 12 parenting programme implementing organisations in March 2021. The four central themes are listed below:

1. **Adaptation is necessary.** Practice-based evidence reveals the need for adaptation in response to contextual and cultural differences, as well as real world conditions.
2. **An evidence-base does not fully guard against harm.** Evidence-based interventions only measure harm on variables that it seeks to measure. It often fails to investigate harm such as further colonization through spreading of Western ideas, or staff burn out from sustained service provision.
3. **Implementing evidence-based interventions is costly.** Money focused on impact evaluation often means money is routed away from service provision. For implementing organisations struggling to sustain their services, this is a concern.
4. **The perspectives of academics are elevated over the voices of experienced implementers,** and the knowledge of experienced implementers and beneficiaries is being lost. The wealth of practice-based evidence is not being fore-fronted.

Nicki reported on SAPPIN's proposal that the six SAPPIN principles be drawn on to help guide criteria for programme excellence in the South African context. These principles are:

1. Parenting programmes and their implementers should promote warm & non-violent family (caregiver-child) relationships.
2. Parenting programmes and their implementers should be guided by an ethos of collaboration and learning amongst themselves and also with stakeholders.
3. Quality programmes must be implemented. In order to ensure quality, implementers should be committed to undertaking (1) Monitoring and Evaluation and (2) regular reflective supervision; should use programmes that are (3) evidence –based, led or informed & should offer these programmes within (4) a basket of services (referral network) to ensure optimal service delivery towards the families served.
4. Parenting programmes should be informed by relevant social, cultural and religious practices.
5. Parenting programme implementers should uphold the principle of do no harm. All programmes should, thus, apply ethical and respectful practices of implementation and research with regards to beneficiaries and staff.
6. Parenting programme implementers should be registered, compliant entities in South Africa, and have child protection and safe-guarding policies.

Moving away from a purely evidence-based criteria, this broadens and expands programme excellence to include:

### **EVIDENCE-INFORMED INTERVENTIONS**

Defined as interventions informed by the same theory of change and contain many of the same components of evidence-based interventions (including adapted evidence-based interventions) that do not yet have their own evidence-base.

### **EVIDENCE-LED INTERVENTIONS**

Defined as interventions developed out of sound research on both child development and mechanisms for behaviour change that have not yet been researched for efficacy.

Lastly, Nicki highlighted the network's assertions that good governance and reflective supervision/debriefing were considered critical criteria for the provision of quality programs in South Africa. The need for sustainable, secure, well governed organisations, who care for their staff and safe guard their beneficiaries was noted as critical.

## **PANEL DISCUSSION**

**Thandeka Rantsi (Bridge)**

**Rachel Rozentals-Thresher (Dlalanathi)**

**Blanche Rezant (WC DSD)**

**Facilitated by Suzan Eriksson (CWBSA)**



The key theme was to address the diversity of South African families and to see how SAPPIN, civil society and government can ensure that the correct support is provided to parents and caregivers, building on their existing skills and knowledge. Statistics from the 2019 General Household Survey were shared to provide context. The aim was firstly to look at the community level through the lens of Dlalanathi and how family interventions have impact, then the Western Cape Premier's Office's intervention was to be presented to show how it is possible to bring a diverse group of actors together if the political will is in place, then Bridge contributed focusing on the ECD sector and how so many departments mention parenting in their policy documents, but limited collaboration is undertaken between ECD centres and families.





There is a lot of complexity so there is not one simple easy answer or solution.

Complexity within families - Wide diversity within families and family circumstances, no two families are the same – each person, child, and relationship is unique. Living arrangements also affect the nature of relationships and responsibility and care of children. This means that valuing the role parents play and using principle-based approaches parents can adapt to their own situations is important.

Complexity within collaboration - Western Cape Government Premiers Office Intervention is an illustration of a pilot driven by government, seeking to establish a collaborative space to cost and deliver an Evidence Based Parenting programmes funded by the State through collaboration with a number of partners, including government departments and implementing organisations. There is a need for more of these kinds of spaces, and to use existing spaces where collaborations are already happening to include a focus on parenting;

Complexity within policy - A natural space for collaboration is in the Early Childhood Development Sector through 'communities of practice' like Bridge. It is important to note that within the ECD policies 29 different government departments are mentioned as having a role or contribution to make. This means there are many possible points of entry.

The audience questions ranged from how to encourage parents and caregivers to participate and attend programmes, how to work closely and positively with teenagers, how can disabilities be a priority in family interventions, how families in rural areas should not be left in the periphery, how DSD National and Gauteng is interested to collaborate with civil society and for organisations to reach out. To look at what government means, when we talk about government who do we mean? In addition, there were comments about how to encourage sectors to work more closely together. There was also an appeal to challenging the approach that 'parents are the problem', shifting that to parenting is really difficult, parents need support to do this job better.

# SUMMARY OF ACTION PLANS DAY 2

## 1 SAPPIN to collaborate on advocacy activities

- The growth of the SAPPIN network is not driven by a need to reach large numbers. It is driven by the desire to develop positive and mutually beneficial relationships with its members. NPO members who feel connected to SAPPIN's purpose and ethos would be invited to join the network.
- There is an opportunity to find mutual benefit from working closely with other NPO groups. One such group is the South African National Child Rights Coalition (SANCR) and SAPPIN would aim to join the "Family Support for Nurturing Care" priority.

## 2 Develop media plan for advocacy activities

- Media plan to be developed to focus on two audiences; NPOs and Parents
- Develop plan for individual attendees, who should understand their individual role in advocating for parenting work.
- Explore how to better leverage social media to drive SAPPIN advocacy agenda forward

## 3 Individual NPOs/SAPPIN members to serve parents in a collaborative and supportive way

- Increase communication about the parenting support-services being offered. Improve communication with other NPOs and with parents who would access the services.
  - Purpose of communicating to NPOs: Individual NPOs able to support each other's initiatives/work, improve reach and quality of services.
  - Purpose of communicating to parents: Improve awareness of the services being offered to improve buy-in, knowledge of benefits of services and help them become a part of the process.
- Individual members/NPOs to participate in community and other networks and forums, to share information of the work they are doing.
- Where forums are not happening, take the lead to call stakeholder engagement meetings
- SAPPIN to share profiles and details of NPOs who participated in the Families Indaba
- Where possible, NPOs to support each other with training opportunities
- Where possible, share monitoring and evaluation tools and outcomes to help improve services

## 4 Work with children must filter back to parents and vice versa

- Identify ways in which your work with parents can be fed back into discussions with their children, and vice versa.



## 5 Improve parent-support offering to Fathers

- Increase programmes offered to fathers that support them to develop bonds with their children
- Involve male community leaders to encourage fathers to participate in programmes being offered
- Raise awareness in men's places of work
- Build capacity of male facilitators to deliver programmes to fathers
- Support women to help change the narrative in their homes, with their boy children and male caregivers. Help them to encourage men to see themselves playing a more holistic role in their child's life. Help them to allow men the space to learn and adapt.

## 6 Secure funds from DSD to support teen parents

- Identify what funding DSD provides for programmes that support teen-parents
- Prepare funding proposals and submit to DSD





## CONCLUSIONS: WHAT WE LEARNED FROM THE INDABA

Many opportunities presented itself during the two-day Indaba on a bigger and individual scale to learn through the experience. Herewith a couple of lessons that we identified:

- Even though it is an extremely difficult time for our country, there is immense hope and opportunity for those who want to contribute to change
- Parenting, and the factors that influence parenting, are complex. Many factors were discussed during the break-away sessions on Day 1
- We have learnt that the model of OST works to provide participants with equality and equal opportunity to define the key themes of the Indaba. This created an opportunity for participants to be part of the agenda of the meeting
- The issue of “evidence” on what works needs to be re-addressed and other alternatives should be investigated
- We have learnt that collaboration and networking is of the utmost importance in Parenting work. On the other hand, it is one of the most difficult aspects where organisations tend to work in silos
- Making this a reality will require great effort from everyone involved. More time should be given to identify more targeted goals and action steps on useful and successful collaboration.
- Collaboration and networking should not only be within the civil society sector but across government, civil society, academia and business.
- Advocacy should be a strong priority and the civil society sector will need support from marketing or PR companies to promote responsive parenting.

## FUTURE STEPS

### Membership

A number of participants felt that there was not a clear directive on how to become a member of SAPPIN. The network specifically didn't focus on gaining membership during the Indaba but will include a membership form for interested parties. SAPPIN beliefs that membership / partnership takes time, to build trusting relationships doesn't happen overnight and the members cannot build trust with many new organisations at a time. New membership is therefore a slow and deliberate process.

### Families Indaba 2023

The 2023 Families Indaba is on our agenda en we plan to have it late in September but is subject to receiving the relevant funds. We will keep you informed early in 2023.

## Collaborations

- SAPPIN and the Child Rights Coalition were deliberate in finding ways to work together in future.
- A collaboration between SAPPIN, UNICEF and the Department of the Premiers Office was established.
- Relationships with Gauteng Provincial Government to be explored
- To maximise collaboration with those with various skills particularly several attendees with particular skills in the advocacy sphere.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SAPPIN wishes to thank all the sponsors who contributed to the success of the Families Indaba World Childhood Foundation, Two Lilies Fund, UNICEF, The Lego Foundation, Institute for Security Studies and Clowns without Borders SA.

SAPPIN wishes to thank Bloom & Stone for their hard work, their creativity and how they made our “family” vision a reality. We would never have been able to do it without your input.

SAPPIN wishes to thank all participants who attended the two-day Indaba.

SAPPIN wishes to thank all their members for contributing and working together to make the event an enormous success.

**THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS FOR  
MAKING THE **FAMILIES INDABA** POSSIBLE**



## APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Families Indaba Report – Day 1

Appendix 2: Families Indaba Report – Day 2

Appendix 3: List of Participants / Registered

Appendix 4: Membership Application Form

Watch the Families Indaba video on [SAPPIN Youtube](#)

