



NEWSLETTER APRIL - JUNE 2026

**Children are the world's most valuable resource and it's best hope for the
future -**

John F. Kennedy



MARCH & MARCH

As the events surrounding the March & March movement continue to unfold across South Africa, many of our members have shared that they are working in communities affected by fear, uncertainty, division, anger and, in many cases, violence. We recognise that these realities affect children, families, practitioners and organisations alike.

Within SAPPIN, as within South Africa itself, there are diverse personal perspectives on the issues currently being debated. However, SAPPIN is not a political movement. We are a professional network of organisations united by a shared commitment to strengthening families, preventing violence and ensuring that children receive the care and support they need to thrive.

Our work is guided by evidence, by the Children's Act, and by our own principles of collaboration, respect, non-violent practice and doing no harm. These commitments remind us that, regardless of our individual views, we have a collective responsibility to promote nurturing relationships, support caregivers and contribute to environments where children can grow up safe, healthy and protected.

SAPPIN will therefore continue to advocate for evidence-informed parenting support, stronger prevention systems and policies that respond to the realities faced by families in South Africa. We remain committed to bringing organisations together, strengthening collaboration across sectors and supporting solutions that reduce violence and promote nurturing care.

We may not always agree on every issue facing our country, but we can stand together in saying that violence against children is never acceptable, and that building a safer South Africa for children is a responsibility shared by all of us.

STRENGTHENING PARENTING SUPPORT ACROSS EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA – TANZANIA



In March 2026, partners from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and South Africa gathered for the East and South African Regional Convening on Parenting Programmes to Prevent Violence and Advance Gender Equality. Jointly convened by the Prevention Collaborative, Impact and Innovations Development Centre (IIDC), SAPPIN, Global Communities and Kivulini, the convening brought together organisations working at the forefront of parenting support and violence prevention to exchange learning, strengthen partnerships and identify opportunities for collective action.

Over three days, participants shared diverse approaches to supporting parents, engaging fathers and caregivers, strengthening families, and preventing violence against women and children. The convening highlighted the richness of work taking place across the region—from community-based parenting programmes and early childhood interventions to digital innovations, health services, network strengthening and policy engagement. Despite different contexts, many of the challenges and opportunities were remarkably similar.

A major focus was how to meaningfully engage men and fathers as caregivers through gender-transformative approaches. Organisations shared practical lessons on recruiting and retaining fathers, addressing resistance, working alongside women and communities, and creating safe spaces for men to reflect on identity, power and caregiving. Discussions reinforced that sustainable change requires more than programme delivery; it depends on organisational readiness, practitioner support and collaboration across sectors.

The convening also explored workforce wellbeing, recognising the emotional demands placed on practitioners working in violence prevention. Participants shared strategies such as reflective supervision, peer support, somatic approaches and organisational wellbeing practices that help sustain frontline workers while improving programme quality. Digital innovations were another area of learning, with organisations showcasing tools that complement face-to-face parenting support and expand access for families.

The final day focused on the future of regional collaboration. Participants committed to continuing their partnership through joint advocacy, shared learning webinars, fundraising and the development of common messages that strengthen parenting support as a critical strategy for preventing violence against women and children. Over the coming year, the collaborative will host a series of webinars, co-develop advocacy products and continue building a regional community of practice that learns from one another's experiences.

For SAPPIN, the convening reinforced the value of being part of a growing regional movement committed to strengthening families through evidence-informed, collaborative and systems-based approaches. The relationships and learning from the convening will continue to shape our work while contributing to stronger parenting support systems across Africa.



WELCOME TO SAPPIN's NEW MEMBER

Cotlands



Cotlands

Cotlands is a registered non-profit and public benefit organisation that has been in operation since 1936. We work across South Africa, empowering and mentoring adults to deliver impactful, quality play-based early learning programmes that transform communities.

This is accomplished through Early Childhood Care and Education Hubs that integrate centre-based learning, a learning and teaching support materials library (also known as a toy library), an accredited training facility, and a Birth – 3 parenting playgroup programme into one community-driven model of excellence.

The Cotlands Parenting Programme is a comprehensive early childhood development (ECD) intervention designed to support optimal growth, learning and caregiving practices from birth through 36 months. It equips parents and caregivers with practical, developmentally aligned activities that strengthen bonding, promote health and safety, and build foundational early learning skills through everyday routines and play.

While Cotlands has recently developed its Birth–3 parenting programme, it has extensive experience in supporting families with young children through the successful implementation of Birth–2 playgroups over a number of years. In addition, the organisation has facilitated both the Department of Social Development (DSD) Parenting Programme and the NECDA Parenting Programme, providing a strong foundation in parent support, caregiver engagement, and early childhood development practice. These experiences have enabled the organisation to build trusted relationships with families and develop practical insight into the needs of caregivers and young children within the communities it serves. The newly developed Birth–3 programme builds on this existing experience and learning, while also incorporating updated approaches and strengthened content informed by current best practice in early childhood development and parenting support

***BOLD IDEAS FOR BRIGHTER FUTURES 2026 - PUTTING
CARE FOR THE CARERES ON THE GLOBAL AGENDA***



SAPPIN was proud to participate in Bold Ideas for Brighter Futures 2026 – the 2nd Global Conference on Child and Adolescent Mental Health, held in Cape Town from 18–20 May. The conference brought together more than 350 researchers, practitioners, policymakers, youth advocates and civil society leaders from around the world to explore how research, innovation and collaboration can strengthen the mental health and wellbeing of children and adolescents, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. A strong emphasis was placed on youth participation, community-based approaches and translating evidence into action.

Ahead of the main conference, SAPPIN partnered with Grassroot Soccer and The Two Lilies Fund to host a pre-conference session, Care for Carers – A Global Priority. The session explored a question that is central to SAPPIN's work: *Who supports the people who support others?* Through interactive activities, lived experience panels and research presentations, participants reflected on the emotional demands placed on frontline practitioners and the systems needed to sustain them.

The discussions reinforced that staff wellbeing is not simply an individual responsibility but a systems issue. Participants highlighted the importance of reflective supervision, psychologically safe workplaces, supportive leadership, manageable workloads and organisational cultures that recognise wellbeing as essential to effective and ethical service delivery. There was also strong agreement that funders and policymakers have a critical role to play by recognising workforce wellbeing as a core investment rather than an optional extra.

SAPPIN's work featured prominently during the conference. In one of the conference breakaway sessions, Dr Nicki Dawson from Ububele Educational and Psychotherapy Trust and Jane West from The Two Lilies Fund presented findings from SAPPIN's national workforce wellbeing research. Their presentation highlighted evidence from more than 200 practitioners across parenting support and violence prevention organisations, demonstrating the high levels of burnout and secondary traumatic stress experienced by frontline workers,

while also showcasing the protective value of reflective supervision, supportive management and psychologically safe organisational cultures.

The conference provided an important opportunity to connect with global partners, share South African evidence and contribute to a growing international movement that recognises caring for carers as fundamental to strengthening services for children, families and communities. For SAPPIN, it reaffirmed that investing in the wellbeing of the workforce is not separate from quality implementation—it is one of its essential foundations.



Violence Prevention for Peaceful and Inclusive Communities – VPPIC

SAPPIN is part of the Dorsch Impact/SAPPIN consortium to implement Output 1 of GiZ's Violence Prevention for Peaceful and Inclusive Communities (VPPIC) intervention, strengthening evidence-based violence prevention approaches in the caregiving environment for children aged 0–12 in three communities, Tembisa, KwaMashu, Tlhabane.

Output 1 has wrapped up the stakeholder/approach mapping phase across our three pilot sites — Tembisa, KwaMashu, and Tlhabane — and is now deep into the validation period, checking the findings with local stakeholders led by the site coordinators Ntuthu Fuzile, Zakhele Mavundla, Themba Hlongwana with Team Lead, Suzan Eriksson and administrative support from Lethubuhle Dube. These findings will support the development of a comprehensive approach that will be tested at each site. Multi-stakeholder partnerships are currently being selected at each site. These partnerships will co-lead the development and implementation of the pilot test, which kicks off in September. On the SAPPIN side, a technical committee is being formed to support this work and keep things aligned across partners. More updates to come as we head into the next phase.

NATIONAL VIOLENCE PREVENTION FORUM – 27 & 28 MAY



SAPPIN recently participated in the 23rd National Violence Prevention Forum (VPF) meeting.

For over 11 years, the VPF has brought together leaders from government, civil society, researchers, development partners and the private sector committed to building a safer South Africa. While there have been important strides in violence prevention, recent shifts in the global and national context, including worsening socio-economic conditions, changes in the funding landscape, and a move away from multilateralism, have placed a strain on our collective efforts.

This raises important questions about how we continue to lead, collaborate, and sustain violence prevention efforts in a changing environment. Thus, under the theme *“Meeting the moment: What does the current context require of us as leaders to protect, champion, and advance violence prevention in South Africa?”*, the meeting created space for leaders to reflect on what these changes mean, to reflect on where the violence prevention movement stands after more than three decades of democracy, and what is needed now to strengthen violence prevention efforts nationally and meet this moment.

Participants were encouraged to look back on their own contributions over the years, while asking whether the values of the Violence Prevention Forum have truly changed the way we lead, collaborate and respond to violence. A recurring message throughout the discussions was that violence is complex and organised, and is interconnected with global and socioeconomic factors, yet often our responses are fragmented. If we are serious about prevention, we need to move beyond organisational silos, competition and counting programme outputs. Instead, we must strengthen the systems that shape children's lives, actively listen to one another, welcome dissenting voices, share what works, and build partnerships that place long-term prevention ahead of short-term reactions. Prevention is not only a social imperative—it is also an economic one, requiring investment before violence occurs rather than paying the far greater costs of responding afterwards.

While South Africa has a strong policy environment for violence prevention, implementation continues to require stronger collaboration, sustainable funding, evidence-informed decision-making and greater support for civil society organisations.

For SAPPIN, these conversations resonated deeply. Our work is built on the belief that preventing violence requires strong collaboration, evidence-informed parenting support and organisations that are connected rather than competing. The forum reaffirmed that lasting

change will not come from isolated programmes, but from strengthening the systems, relationships and partnerships that enable children and families to thrive.

PARENTLINE SA: LISTENING, LEARNING AND GROWING – ONE CONVERSATION AT A TIME

Parentline SA, the WhatsApp-based parenting support chatbot - 087 813 4290, developed as a SAPPIN initiative, continues to grow steadily across South Africa. Since launch, the platform has built a near-even split between urban and rural users, with caregivers reaching out from all nine provinces — a spread that reflects our core belief that every parent, regardless of location or circumstance, deserves access to reliable, evidence-based support.

Growth has been deliberately slow but steady, prioritising quality and trust over speed. This caution is rooted in our early fieldwork, which found that parents are often wary of apps and digital tools unless they come recommended by a trusted source. Building that trust takes time, and we would rather grow sustainably than rapidly.

Listening To Our Users

A central part of Parentline SA's design is its feedback loop. Every piece of content and every referral can be rated by users, and we use this data to understand what is working and what isn't. Where ratings dip for a particular topic, we convene listening circles — focus groups specifically built around the content that scored poorly — to understand why, and to revise it accordingly. This responsiveness is, we believe, what keeps Parentline SA relevant and trusted rather than just another static information source.

Expanding Our Content

We are currently adapting new content for the chatbot in partnership with Wordworks and ChildSafe South Africa, broadening the range of evidence-based, peer-reviewed guidance available to caregivers. We are also developing a new section focused on parenting children with disabilities, as well as advice tailored to parents who are themselves living with disabilities — an area of support that is often overlooked in mainstream parenting resources.

Accessibility has also been front of mind in how the chatbot itself functions. Recently, Parentline SA was tested by a user who is blind, who found the WhatsApp menu-based navigation easy to use — encouraging validation that the platform's simple, low-data, text-based design serves a genuinely broad range of caregivers.

Building The Referral Network

Alongside content development, we continue to strengthen our referral partner network, with organisations now signed up in every province to provide in-person support when a caregiver needs more than the chatbot alone can offer.

What We're Raising Funds For

Looking ahead, we are raising funds to safely introduce AI into Parentline SA's user interactions, while keeping the menu-based structure that caregivers already know and trust. The aim is not to replace the menu, but to complement it: users will still be able to navigate

the familiar menu options, while also being able to ask follow-up questions in their own words. AI will then draw on our existing, curated and peer-reviewed content to surface the most relevant information in response — rather than generating new, unverified answers.

Safeguarding comes first: this means building in crisis detection and full POPIA compliance before any conversational AI capability goes live, so that the platform’s responsiveness never comes at the cost of user safety or privacy. In the longer term, we also hope to extend Parentline SA’s reach by enabling it to understand and respond in more South African languages, including the ability to code-switch the way our caregivers naturally do — meeting parents in the language, or mix of languages, they are most comfortable using.

To learn more or get involved, contact Karen Ross at karen.ross@mikhulustrust.org, or experience Parentline SA yourself via WhatsApp on +27 87 813 4290 — simply message “hi” and follow the prompts.

EXPLORING ECO ANXIETY THROUGH THE ELEMENTAL AND CREATIVE 2026



We’re excited to introduce a powerful collaboration between Lefika La Phodiso and Creative by Nature — two organisations united by a shared commitment to healing, creativity, connection, and resilience. Lefika La Phodiso, Africa’s first organisation offering community art counselling training, has long created safe, transformative spaces where art becomes a

tool for recovery, growth, and accessible mental health support. Creative by Nature brings a deeply rooted connection to nature, creativity, and meaningful living, inviting us to reimagine how we relate to ourselves, one another, and the world around us.

Together, they will be co-hosting and collaborating on the new pilot module, Exploring Eco Anxiety through the Elemental and Creative 2026. This inspiring new offering opens up space for reflection, expression, and shared learning at the intersection of mental health, creativity, and our relationship with nature. It's a timely invitation to explore eco anxiety through imagination, embodied experience, and collective care — and to discover new ways of dreaming, healing, and building resilient futures together.

Eco-anxiety deserves care, creativity, and community.

Join us for a gentle online journey of reflection and exploration.

Starts 25 July 2026 | 9:30–11:00 am

Read the full story and book your spot via the links: <https://lefikalaphodiso.co.za/news/a-creative-online-space-to-explore-eco-anxiety-with-care-reflection-and-community/>

Purchase here: <https://lefikalaphodiso.co.za/product/exploring-eco-anxiety-through-the-elemental-and-creative-module-a/>

More about the collaborators:

<https://lefikalaphodiso.co.za/about-us/>

<https://creativebynature.online/>

DO MORE FOUNTION

launch of the Young Child Forum Handbook

The Do More Foundation invites you to join us for the launch of the Young Child Forum Handbook, a practical guide grounded in practitioner experience and field-based learning. In this webinar, you'll hear from presenters who have been integral to defining the YCF, its purpose, the practicalities and how partners are using it to support ECD practitioners nationally..



DO MORE FOUNDATION

WEBINAR INVITE | **YOUNG CHILD FORUM HANDBOOK LAUNCH**

What does a Young Child Forum look like in practice?

Friday, 28 July 2026
10:00 - 11:15 (UTC+2)
MS Teams

Join us for the launch of the Young Child Handbook, a practical guide grounded in practitioner experience and field-based learning. Hear from those who have been integral to defining and hosting YCFs in their community.

CLICK TO REGISTER

📍 MS Teams Webinar (Online)

🕒 10:00-11:15

📅 28 July 2026

As the ECD sector continues to evolve, there is growing recognition that sustainable change happens closest to the child. The Young Child Forum demonstrates that when local actors are supported to build and hold agency.

Book your spot: <https://events.teams.microsoft.com/event/eabc0477-1a08-44ff-8f1a-c97f1ccb4cd5@d1da1a04-9e6d-48a9-bb3e-fb293a65ccab>

TAKING BOOK-SHARING INTO THE CLASSROOM – AND BACK HOME AGAIN

The Idea

Mikhulu Child Development Trust (MCDT) is piloting a structured Group Book-Sharing Programme across ECD centres in under-resourced Western Cape communities. The model adapts MCDT's evidence-based dialogic book-sharing methodology — until now delivered mainly one-to-one with parents — for use in ECD classrooms, while training practitioners to extend the same skills to parents at home.

The result is a dual-track intervention: children in the centre benefit directly, while a deliberate parent-engagement component creates spillover to younger siblings aged 0–3 who are not yet enrolled in any ECD programme — reaching children during the most rapid window of brain development, at no additional direct cost.

Why It Matters for the Sector

Most ECD interventions in South Africa work either in the centre or in the home, rarely both. MCDT's model closes that gap, embedding the same dialogic technique in both spaces so that classroom practice and home practice reinforce each other rather than running in parallel.

The methodology rests on Randomised Controlled Trials conducted in Khayelitsha, Cape Town (Vally et al., 2015; Murray et al., 2016), which found significant gains in children's language, attention, and socio-emotional development, alongside improved parental sensitivity. A further study in Namibia provides evidence for the group classroom adaptation (unpublished). The current ECD centre pilot is being implemented in partnership with the Brookings Institution's Centre for Universal Education, generating live implementation evidence as the model scales.

What Makes It Distinctive

A core enabler is MCDT's catalogue of locally produced, wordless picture books — designed specifically for South Africa's multilingual, low-literacy contexts, and structured around defined developmental goals (early literacy, numeracy, Theory of Mind and emotional regulation). Because the books are wordless, they work across all 11 official language communities and require no particular literacy level from the caregiver using them.

Practitioners complete a structured five-session training programme, then receive twelve months of mentorship and fidelity support — ensuring quality delivery rather than a once-off workshop.

The South African Learning Ecosystem

In South Africa, early childhood development does not begin at the school gate. It begins in the home — in the arms of a grandmother, in games played with a neighbour's child, in songs sung at bedtime and stories told around a table. Long before a child sets foot in an ECD centre, they are already learning, and they are learning from the people around them.

This is the South African learning ecosystem. It has layers:

- The family — parent, grandparent, older sibling, aunt, uncle, or whoever steps in when a parent is working a long shift
- Neighbours — people who share a yard, a tap, or a fence, and who often share in a child's daily care
- The broader community — churches, community-based organisations, and informal networks that show up where services do not
- The ECD centre — not the starting point of learning, but the place where everything that has already happened comes together and is extended
- ECD provision in South Africa, at its best, is community provision. It is not delivered to families — it grows from them.

What We Are Currently Doing: The Home–School Connection Pilot

Between March and August 2026, Mikhulu is running a pilot project in partnership with the Brookings Institution's Centre for Universal Education, focused on strengthening the connections between families and ECD centres at two sites in the Western Cape.

Site 1 — Leratong ECD, Nkanini, Kayamandi, Stellenbosch

Nkanini is a community where formal infrastructure is limited and shared. There is no public library, no sports facility, no museum. But it is a community that is extraordinarily rich in people — and people, it turns out, are the most powerful resource a young child can have.

In the absence of formal institutions, the community has built something else: neighbours who form safety nets, older siblings who become teachers, grandmothers who are keepers of language and story. What has emerged from necessity closely mirrors what child development research tells us children need most: warm, responsive relationships and language-rich environments. This community has been building this all along.

The listening circle held with parents and practitioners at Leratong revealed something important: the relationship between families and the ECD was not broken. There was genuine warmth and mutual trust on both sides. What was missing was not willingness — it was a practical bridge between what happens in the classroom and what happens at home.

There is also deep value placed on education in this community. Families in Kayamandi know that for children growing up in these circumstances, education is the beginning of a different path. The ECD centre is where that journey starts — birthing hope for a family and for a community.

Site 2 — Evie's Educare, Lotus River, Cape Town

Evie's Educare serves a community that similarly relies on extended family and neighbourhood networks to care for and raise young children. Parents here may work long shifts, and it is often an older sibling, a grandparent, or a trusted neighbour who drops children at the gate and collects them in the afternoon. This is not a gap in the system — it is the system, and it reflects how South Africans have always raised children: together.

At Evie's, strong communication between the principal and parents was already in place, and parents were actively engaged in their children's learning. The pilot at this site has focused on formalising and deepening those connections, extending book-sharing into the home, and creating simple structures that allow families to stay informed about and involved in classroom learning.

The Home–School Connection Toolkit

Across both sites, Mikhulu developed a four-resource toolkit through listening circles with parents and practitioners. Each resource was shaped by the people who will use it:

- Book-sharing training — practitioners trained in dialogic book-sharing using wordless picture books, then supported to pass the method on to families. No reading ability required.
- Communication strategy — a simple, consistent weekly rhythm using WhatsApp, voice notes, and in-person check-ins to ensure families always know what is happening at the centre.
- The Learning Wall — a weekly poster at the ECD entrance sharing the week's theme, one home activity, and one question to ask the child. Requires no phone; works for every person who walks through the gate, including older siblings and grandparents collecting children.
- Bring It Back — a small object travels home with the child each week, linked to the classroom theme. The child brings it back on Friday with a story to share. The child is the messenger, because children in these communities are already carrying learning home naturally — in songs, new words, and classroom routines.

The toolkit is designed to be low-burden, adaptable to each centre's context, and rooted in relationships that already exist. Pre- and post-questionnaires via KoboToolbox are tracking changes in caregiver confidence, home-school communication, and children's learning experiences across the pilot period, with final data collected in August 2026.

Taking This Learning to the World

The approach underpinning this pilot has resonated well beyond the Western Cape. In June and July 2026, Mikhulu was invited to share this work at two significant international engagements.

- On 16 June 2026, Mikhulu presented at the Brookings Institution Centre for Universal Education's Family Engagement and Empowerment Network (FEEN) Meeting, sharing the work around Leratong and Evie's alongside global case studies in family-school partnership.
- On 2 July 2026, Mikhulu presented at the Global Symposium on Transforming Education Systems in Times of Disruption and Shifting Power — representing South Africa's community-based approach to ECD alongside work from Zanzibar and Sierra Leone.

"Families and communities already possess solutions to their own challenges. Our role as institutions is to create platforms where they can be heard — and to build interventions that incorporate those solutions rather than replace them." - Nandipha Ganya, Head of Programmes

This was the major learning — and the major affirmation — from both engagements. Across very different contexts, the same truth emerged: top-down, institution-led interventions consistently underperform against community-responsive ones. When families are treated as partners and their knowledge is built into the design of programmes from the outset, outcomes improve.

This is precisely what has enabled the success of the ECD pilot thus far. The toolkit did not arrive ready-made. It was developed through listening circles, shaped by practitioner feedback, and refined through honest conversation with the parents and community members it is meant to serve. The community was not the recipient of the intervention — it was the author of it.

Where It's Headed

MCDT is fundraising to expand from the current two-centre pilot to a 30-centre, three-year programme, with a costed model designed for replication by other ECD networks and partners.

The Home–School Connection Toolkit will be made available to partner organisations as a practical, adaptable resource — one that can be contextualised to different communities while holding firm to its core principle: that the family is the first classroom, the community is the curriculum, and the ECD centre is at its strongest when it is woven into both.

To learn more or get involved, contact Karen Ross at karen.ross@mikhulutrust.org

FREE TO GROW – LEARNING TOGETHER TO STRENGTHEN FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

In June, members of SAPPIN, including Roslynn Damons from the Seven Passes Initiative and Thandi van Heyningen from ISS, participated in the Healthy Futures South Africa Learning Circle held in Wittedrift, Bitou. This quarterly gathering alternates between Knysna and Bitou and is organised by the Healthy Futures South Africa team, a programme of the University of Cape Town in partnership with the Western Cape Department of Health and Wellness, the Mastercard Foundation, Planet Youth, and other key stakeholders.

The Learning Circle creates a valuable space where community members, practitioners, researchers, government representatives, and partner organisations come together to share knowledge, reflect on emerging evidence, and explore practical solutions to strengthen communities. Discussions centre on improving health and well-being while creating meaningful opportunities for young people aged 18 to 35.

As SAPPIN members, Ros and Thandi were invited to address parenting, a key challenge identified in previous Learning Circles and community meetings. Their topic was: “What Makes Parenting programmes Work? Lessons from Free to Grow.”

Free to Grow, an evidence-informed family violence prevention intervention developed through a partnership between SAPPIN members and the Institute for Security Studies, combines evidence from rigorous parenting and violence prevention research with practical implementation experience to support parents and caregivers in relevant, accessible, and sustainable ways.

Thandi presented evidence on effective parenting programmes, emphasising that some of the strongest evidence on successful interventions has been developed right here in South Africa. The research indicates that positive parenting skills can be learned, strengthened, and sustained when caregivers receive ongoing support, rather than simply being innate.

Many South African families face challenges such as poverty, unemployment, food insecurity, violence, and chronic stress, which place immense pressure on caregivers. It is crucial to understand that parenting difficulties often arise not from a lack of love or commitment but from the overwhelming circumstances in which families are raising children.

The presentation outlined five parenting practices from Free to Grow and other evidence-based parenting programmes within SAPPIN that make a significant difference for children and families:

1. Building strong connections through quality time together.
2. Offering praise and encouragement.
3. Establishing predictable routines.
4. Communicating openly and respectfully.
5. Using calm, consistent discipline instead of harsh punishment.

These seemingly small daily interactions strengthen relationships, improve communication, reduce conflict, and help children feel safe, valued, and supported.

A key takeaway was that parenting programmes should not be seen solely as child development initiatives. Evidence shows they are also effective in violence prevention, mental health promotion, and family strengthening. Their impact extends beyond individual households, contributing to stronger schools, healthier communities, and improved well-being for future generations.

Thandi and Ros shared how Free to Grow provides opportunities for caregivers to practice new skills, reflect on their experiences, receive encouragement, and learn alongside others over time. This approach has been shown to be more effective than simply providing information and is more likely to result in lasting behaviour and norms change.

Building on this evidence, Roslynn Damons explained how the Seven Passes Initiative implements these principles through its parenting programmes. She provided an overview of the organisation's current family-strengthening initiatives, which support caregivers in

building positive relationships with their children while promoting healthy child development and resilience within families.

The inputs from Ros and Thandi emphasised the strong alignment between the Seven Passes Initiative's community-based parenting work and the evidence base for the Free to Grow programme.

The Learning Circle reinforced an important lesson central to SAPPIN: learning is a shared journey. As organisations work alongside communities, they gain insights not only into the challenges families face but also into the resilience, strengths, and local solutions that already exist. These shared experiences contribute to stronger programmes, deepen partnerships, and remind us that lasting change is achieved through collaboration.

Strong families are the foundation of vibrant communities. At SAPPIN, we leverage evidence, shared experiences, and community partnerships to support initiatives such as the Healthy Futures Learning Circle. This collaborative approach strengthens our collective efforts to empower children, caregivers, and communities to thrive together.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD: WHY PARENTING MUST BE PART OF THE CONVERSATION

SAPPIN recently participated in the Independent Philanthropy Association South Africa (IPASA) consultation on integrating climate change into Early Childhood Development (ECD). The consultation brought together funders, government departments, civil society organisations and researchers to shape national guidance on how the ECD sector can respond to the growing impacts of climate change.

One of the strongest messages emerging from the discussions was that climate change is no longer a future concern—it is already affecting children through extreme heat, flooding, food insecurity and increasing household stress. Participants agreed that climate resilience should be viewed as an integral part of the ECD system rather than as a separate environmental issue.

SAPPIN contributed by highlighting an important perspective that is often overlooked: while much attention is given to making ECD centres more climate resilient, parents and caregivers also need support to understand environmental risks, make informed decisions about their children's safety and respond when climate-related events disrupt daily life. This broadened the discussion beyond ECD centres to recognise the central role of families in building children's resilience.

The consultation identified several priorities for the sector, including stronger coordination and knowledge-sharing, practical tools for practitioners, greater support for parent and caregiver resilience, improved data and evidence, policy alignment and sustainable financing.

A recurring theme was the importance of strengthening what already exists rather than creating parallel initiatives—a principle that strongly resonates with SAPPIN's own systems leadership approach.

The draft guidelines presented at the national launch also encourage funders to invest in coordination, evidence, implementation support and systems influence, recognising that lasting change depends on collaboration across the sector rather than isolated projects.

For SAPPIN, the consultation reinforced an important lesson: climate change is also a parenting issue. Supporting parents and caregivers to navigate increasingly complex environments is essential if we are to protect children's wellbeing and development. We look forward to continuing to contribute to this emerging area of work and to ensuring that parenting support remains part of South Africa's climate resilience agenda.

MASANA EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE



In May, SAPPIN was represented by Mahlatse Diale at the Masana Early Childhood Development (ECD) Conference, attended by organisations from 13 African countries. The conference created a valuable space for learning, collaboration and the exchange of ideas on how to strengthen early childhood development across the continent.

Throughout the conference, speakers and participants emphasised the importance of positioning ECD as a foundation for national development. Discussions explored a wide range of issues affecting young children and their families, including newborn survival, responsive caregiving, nutrition, holistic childhood development, disability inclusion beyond ECD centres, child safeguarding, trauma-informed care, and how to deliver quality ECD services in resource-constrained settings.

On the final day, the closing discussions focused on building sustainable and impactful organisations in wounded contexts—a theme that strongly resonated with the realities faced by many organisations working with children and families across Africa.

One of the highlights of the conference was Mahlatse's participation on a safeguarding panel, where she shared SAPPIN's perspective on creating safer environments for children. She emphasised that safeguarding cannot rely on policies alone. While policies are essential, they only become meaningful when they are understood, embraced and consistently practised by teachers, parents, caregivers and everyone involved in children's lives.

Her contribution also highlighted the many risks children face within communities, including verbal abuse, physical violence and sexual exploitation. Effective safeguarding requires constant vigilance, increased awareness, and confidence to recognise and report signs of maltreatment. Importantly, safeguarding responsibilities extend beyond schools and ECD centres to include everyone who interacts with children, including transport drivers and other community members.

Mahlatse also contributed to discussions on positive and non-violent parenting. Drawing on SAPPIN's commitment to strengthening families through nurturing care, she encouraged practitioners to engage parents in conversations about alternatives to harsh discipline. Rather than focusing only on changing behaviour, these conversations should support parents in building warm, respectful relationships with their children and achieving positive, child-centred parenting goals.

Reflecting on the conference, Mahlatse described it as more than a learning opportunity. It was a reminder of the shared responsibility that organisations, practitioners, caregivers and communities have in protecting and nurturing children. Across the many discussions, safeguarding and positive parenting consistently emerged as two of the most important pillars for strengthening early childhood development systems throughout Africa.

For SAPPIN, the conference reinforced the value of engaging with partners across the continent, learning from diverse experiences, and contributing South African perspectives to broader conversations about creating safe, nurturing environments where every child has the opportunity to thrive.

Please don't forget to support SAPPIN on social media

