

Retailer helps create safer more stimulating environment for preschoolers

“I sleep better at night knowing that our school building is safe and our children eat regularly.”

These are the words of community champion and preschool principal, Noxolo Xuma, who recently partnered with the Shoprite Group to improve the lives of the young children in her care.

Shoprite is taking hands with early childhood development centres across the country to bring about transformation by enabling the education of the poorest and most vulnerable. Throughout Women’s Month, Africa’s largest food retailer will unveil a number of schools who are benefiting from this programme to empower women at the helm of ECD centres and the communities they serve.

Ndamase Preschool, which was founded by Noxolo in 1995, suffered significant damage to its buildings as a result of two storms that tore through the Mfundisweni region in 2016. The school is situated in the Phepheni location some 32 km from Flagstaff in the Eastern Cape.

“The roof was badly damaged, walls were cracked and floor tiles came loose as a result of the storms. I worried about the children’s safety in the buildings, but I couldn’t close the school and let my learners down,” Noxolo explains.

According to the Department of Social Development, 70% of early childhood development (ECD) centres in South Africa are not suited to provide the necessary services to young children.

Together with its implementation partner, the Centre for Early Childhood Development (CECD), Shoprite has ensured that the school buildings are not only safe, but that the school is also fitted with a fully functional kitchen. “Before the renovation, meals for the children were cooked outside. Now there is no need for that. With Shoprite’s help we were able to paint the buildings inside and outside, provide educational equipment in the classrooms and refurbish the children’s play area,” says Rukea Shaik, spokesperson for CECD.

Hunger relief plays a pivotal role in Shoprite’s attempts to transform the communities in which it trades and therefore learners at Ndamase will be provided with meals from the Lunchbox Fund for a year.

The school as well as five surrounding ECDs benefited from teacher and governance training. “The training has been a real eye opener. I now better understand my work and role at the school,” states Noxolo.

She also mentions that the school’s refurbishment has made the community prouder of it. “Our neighbours are keeping a closer eye on the school so that if anyone tries to break in or to damage the buildings, they will act to protect the school.”

END

The state of Early Childhood Development in South Africa

- Almost 4 million children in South Africa do not have access to any form of Early Childhood Development
- Close to 3 million of these children do not receive their daily nutritional requirements
- 51.7% of children aged 0-4 years have no access to any form of ECD
- 13% of 5 year olds have no access either
- The first 1 000 days of a child’s life has a significant impact on their development, well-being and earning potential.

Source: Department of Social Development's Audit Report of ECD centre