

Retailer facilitates radical makeover of Plastic City preschool

As the world commemorates International Children's Day (1 June) with its focus on the protection of children, a Brakpan preschool has undergone a dramatic transformation following support from the Shoprite Group.

The Blessings Eco Preparatory School was founded by sisters Jessie and Hlengiwe Nkosi in 2015 in a shack made from material found on a nearby landfill. The Nkosi sisters were spurred into action after hearing the story of one-year-old Blessing, who almost died after drinking drain fluid. Blessing's parents, residents of the informal settlement Plastic City, had left her with a friend so they could collect litter for recycling at the landfill site - like so many of their neighbours.

"The community of Plastic City rallied and got her to the hospital in time for her life to be saved," says Jessie. "I heard this terrible story and decided to create a safe place in which I could take care of the preschoolers in Plastic City."

Jessie named the school Telitubbies Daycare and with Hlengiwe initially cared for 10 children up to five years old. Blessing, who lent her name to the school when it was later renamed, is still among the 29 children currently in the Nkosis' care.

When the Shoprite Group heard about the good work the Nkosi sisters were doing, it immediately jumped in to improve the school's conditions.

The retailer joined forces with The Early Care Foundation to provide early childhood development (ECD) training to the Nkosis as well as carers from five other preschools in the Brakpan area. The Lunchbox Fund is providing each learner with a nutritious daily meal for the next year, whilst Shoprite and its implementation partner Food and Trees for Africa work to establish a food garden at the school.

Through the Bright Kid Foundation, Shoprite provided the Blessings Eco Preparatory School with two new containers – one to serve as a classroom and the other as a kitchen and office - which has replaced their former structure.

"Watching everyone work together to ensure that these learners are taken care of in a safe, secure environment has been very gratifying. At Shoprite we seek to empower and support women like Jessie and Hlengiwe Nkosi - women raising the next generation," says Lunga Schoeman, CSI spokesperson for the Shoprite Group.

"We still can't believe how generous Shoprite has been to us. We're very grateful for all the support we received and so happy that we are able to take better care of our children," concludes Jessie.

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CAPTION: Learners of Blessings Eco Preparatory School in Brakpan were overjoyed when they moved into their new school building in time for International Children's Day on 1 June.