

Upgraded creches a boon for Worcester community

More than 400 preschoolers from four early childhood development centres (ECDs) in Worcester are benefitting from a partnership with the Shoprite Group which includes nutrition, teacher training and structural upgrades at the schools.

The Group is committed to supporting female community champions across South Africa who run ECDs, and these schools - namely Heavenly Toddlers, Mother of Many, Khanyisa and Bollieland - were selected because the children of Shoprite and Checkers staff members in Worcester attend them.

“Shoprite has a long history of celebrating ordinary women doing extraordinary things in their communities, however we recently refined our ECD programme to focus specifically on those preschools who care for our staff’s children,” explains Lunga Schoeman, Shoprite’s CSI spokesperson.

Charmaine Louw, a principal at one of the schools, is a former supermarket employee. She re-educated herself and founded Heavenly Toddlers in 2005 in a zinc structure attached to her house in Avian Park.

Over the years the one-roomed structure became increasingly dilapidated, but Charmaine couldn’t afford to close her school because the need for childcare in Avian Park is so great.

Today, with support from Shoprite, Charmaine’s heavenly toddlers are being cared for in a brand new building equipped with much-needed educational materials. The children are also guaranteed a nutritious daily meal from the Lunchbox Fund whilst Charmaine and her teaching assistants will receive some valuable training.

Mother of Many, two streets away from Heavenly Toddlers, sports a new mural and renovated classrooms. Just like at Heavenly Toddlers, the learners at this school are also receiving daily meals from the Lunchbox Fund whilst principal Ursula Williams and her assistants have been enrolled for teacher and governance training.

Khanyisa Educare Centre, a creche in the Zweletemba township on the other side of Worcester, received a facelift when the building was painted inside and out, and a beautiful mural now adorns one of the walls. Each classroom was fitted with child-friendly toilets and a food garden - to supplement the school’s existing feeding programme - is in the pipeline.

At Bollieland, a creche near the centre of the town, teacher training will also be rolled out in the coming weeks.

Shoprite’s implementation partner, the Centre for Early Childhood Development (CECD), has more than 30 years’ experience and is therefore well-versed in offering support to these schools. “Teacher as well as governance training is at the core of what we do. We also contract local builders to do the renovations, thus ploughing back into the communities we’re supporting,” says Rukea Shaik, CECD’s spokesperson.

Nomaphelo Gqamane, a cashier at Shoprite Zweletemba, is very grateful for the improvements at Khanyisa, where her two year old daughter goes to school: “I am very happy about the upgrades to the school. It shows that Shoprite cares about its staff and I’d like to see more employers do this kind of thing.”

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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
- 70% of ECD centres in South Africa are not suited to provide necessary services to young children
- 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