



# Building up the future of early childhood development



Israel Mqingwana  
HEAD OF HUMAN CAPITAL

## **i** KEY TAKE-AWAYS

- Early childhood development (ECD) plays a crucial role in the formative years of a child's life, and it's imperative that they have an environment that supports their emotional and physical development.
- Many township-based ECD centres require government financial support to survive, but can't meet certain criteria to qualify for funding. The South African Education Project (SAEP) is helping over 100 centres in Philippi to qualify with the government.
- Prudential is partnering with SAEP to help three ECD centres currently upgrade their infrastructure to becoming eligible for government funding.

**S**ocial upliftment has always been at the heart of Prudential's corporate culture, from the various community outreach programmes that our staff are involved in, to the social development initiatives that our company has supported over the years. We're immensely proud of the work that we've done in the Corporate Social Investment (CSI) space, and we're equally excited about the projects that we're currently involved in and the benefit that we believe these will bring to the communities in which they take place.

In recent years we've narrowed our focus to support initiatives aimed at improving the educational needs of children within previously disadvantaged communities, specifically programmes that specialise in Early Childhood Development (ECD). ECD plays a crucial role in the formative years of a child's life, and it's imperative that they find themselves in an environment that supports their cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. This, understandably, can be a challenge within communities where ECD centres (i.e. places where toddlers and pre-school children can go

during the day while their guardians are away at work) lack the necessary infrastructure, training and support to provide children with the age-appropriate stimulation and learning needed to advance their development.

Many township-based ECD centres require the financial support of the government to overcome these difficulties. However, in order to qualify for a government subsidy, each ECD centre must first meet certain criteria in areas such as: infrastructure, financial management, curriculum and teacher training. This in itself presents a challenge as many of these centres lack access to these skills and the funding to meet infrastructural requirements. It is here where our current flagship CSI partner, the South African Education Project (SAEP), has stepped in to play a crucial role in helping these centres receive the support that they need.

SAEP is a Public Benefit Organisation (PBO) that has been doing fantastic work within the township of Philippi for the past 26 years. The organisation focuses on providing educational programmes across all schooling levels

(from pre-school all the way to high school). However, it is arguably in the ECD space where they have made the most impact.

In 2017 SAEP was contracted by the Department of Social Development (DSD) to audit roughly 138 informal ECD centres in the Philippi area, with the goal of helping each centre meet the requirements needed for government registration. Just one year later SAEP had managed to help 16 ECD centres to successfully register with the DSD. This is an impressive number given the stringent (but necessary) requirements that each centre is required to meet and the costs associated with meeting these requirements. Lack of funding is understandably one of the biggest hurdles that SAEP has to overcome, which is why corporate funding plays such a pivotal role in their ability to make a meaningful impact within the communities in which they work.

In 2019 Prudential partnered with SAEP to help three ECD centres in the Philippi township (Luntu, Thandolwethu and Sithembele) meet the requirements outlined by the DSD. The needs of each centre varied, from requiring a

complete building overhaul (as in the case of Sithembele), to fixing minor issues such as electrical rewiring (as in the case of Thandolwethu). In addition, each centre also required staff to receive training on a range of ECD principles, including effective ECD management, daily lesson planning, as well as emotional and cognitive development for young children.

SAEP managed to make quick work of what would have ordinarily been a slow and cumbersome process. At the time of writing, SAEP had successfully coordinated the refurbishment of Luntu and Thandolwethu, with the plans to rebuild Sithembele in the process of municipal approval. The current lockdown has understandably delayed certain projects, and it's unclear as to when Sithembele will be completed. This, however, has not stopped SAEP's work within the community, they have merely redirected their focus to where the need has become more pressing.

The economic impact that the Coronavirus has had on the more vulnerable sections of society has been devastating. The majority of employed people within Philippi



work in the informal sector, and are unable to earn an income while under lockdown. This has placed additional strain on an already economically-fragile community, making it difficult to provide basic essentials such as food. SAEP has stepped in to help reduce the impact on ECD centres by providing them with food parcels and supplementary meals for children (an initiative that Prudential supports and has helped fund). Each food parcel, which costs just R340, is sourced by a

local supplier and designed to feed a family of four for a month.

While there is still much work that needs to be done to help uplift previously disadvantaged communities, we believe that by supporting organisations such as SAEP we will collectively be able to make a meaningful impact within the areas of society that need it most. For more information about SAEP, the projects that they are involved in, and how you might be able to help, please visit [www.saep.org](http://www.saep.org). ■

*Israel joined Prudential in 2018 as Head of Human Capital. He is responsible for attracting new talent, developing Prudential's staff and fostering a professional and supportive corporate culture. Prior to joining Prudential, Israel worked in a variety of human resources and organisational development roles for some of the country's leading multinationals, such as Unilever and SAB Miller. He also held executive roles at RCL Foods, SC Johnson and more recently Sodica Consulting. Israel holds a B.A. (Honours) degree in Industrial Psychology and Industrial Sociology from Rhodes University.*