

Making early childhood development easier

Durban, 22 September 2016: In the disadvantaged Durban community of Khulula, in Newlands West, there were no decent crèches, nursery schools or day care centres for children. This meant zero facilities for hard-working parents to drop their little ones in the morning where they can learn, be safe and have some fun. But, thanks to Easy Bee Day Care, that is now a thing of the past. The facility recently opened its doors to offer a quality learning environment for all pre-primary children, from 3 months to 6 years. This takes care of many of Khulula's children, who had been living with nothing but the harsh theme of poverty, unemployment and crime ruling their days.

The non-profit start-up organisation is providing a safe and stimulating environment which includes child care-giving, ECD (early childhood development) education, monitoring, supervision and nutritious meals by a dedicated and experienced team of volunteers. "The people who give of their time at Easy Bee are from the community of Khulula and are passionate about the development, safety and wellbeing of the children in their community," says Princess Bhekeni Magagula, Chairperson of Easy Bee. "The day care is a place where babies, toddlers and young children can play, learn, enjoy meals and rest while providing parents with peace of mind while they are at work."

In fact, Easy Bee's main objective is to provide the same stimulating day care centre to other communities, too. "We'd like to see our model of day care centres with high quality care and passionate volunteers grow in areas where there are young disadvantaged children so we can ensure our youngsters get a good start in life physically, mentally, emotionally and socially," she says.

But as much as the day care centre is bringing some hope and reassurance to the parents of Khulula, so it is still affected by the vast socio-economic challenges in the community including crimes like theft and rape. "There are also numerous road accidents on nearby roads, which further highlights the need for a safe environment for our children," Magagula explains.

But the centre has been struggling to handle the growing influx of children. In dire need of additional facilities and materials to be able to provide a quality service to the community, Tongaat Hulett Developments stepped in to assist the day care centre. “We recently collaborated with Trade and Investment KZN in order to generate maximum impact for the crèche,” says Musa Shabane, Stakeholder Relations Manager. “A two-room building was constructed for Easy Bee and nine volunteers from Tongaat Hulett Developments spent a day painting the premises. We also organised presents for the 53 children who currently attend the crèche. Symbolically, we chose to do this on Nelson Mandela Day.”

Now, Tongaat Hulett Developments has committed to helping Easy Bee in other areas, too. For example, when an opportunity presented itself to link the facility with other ECD practitioners to share best practice, the company assisted with the connection. “This provided the Easy Bee staff with access to more skills, particularly with the life-transforming curriculum which challenges families to be more actively involved in the development of their children,” says Shabane.

Tongaath Hulett Developments plays an important role in ECD intervention and specifically works with pre-primary schools in the impoverished and vulnerable communities which neighbour its landholdings. “We also like to provide support to selfless social entrepreneurship initiatives which are run by the community to help solve local challenges,” Shabane says. “Easy Bee needs our assistance and we’ll gladly give it. This way we get to support an ECD facility which is run by dedicated people with an entrepreneurial spirit.”

And it is this entrepreneurial approach which differentiates Easy Bee Day Care from other similar facilities. Magagula saw the gap in the market - lack of pre-schools in the area - and took it. By providing a stimulating environment for all pre-school ages it has automatically given the centre a larger share of the market. “Parents have one touch point with us where they can build a long-term relationship with us while monitoring the growth and development of their children as they move through the various

stages,” says Magagula. “Children don’t face the disruption of school changes during their early growth and development as they are able to remain at Easy Bee for all their pre-school years. This reduces stress and anxiety which, in turn, produces a happy and well-rounded child.”