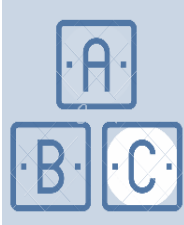


Mpumalanga Early Childhood Development Community of Practice Meeting Highlights 04 March 2021

Virtual meeting

WELCOME AND CHECK-IN




Thulile Makofane, ECD Programme Director at Penreach welcomed municipal representatives, civil society, NGOs and government representatives. Thulile thanked CoP members for their time and welcomed new and old CoP members.

This CoP meeting provided a discussion on the ECD stimulus package and delved into some of the challenges around inactive ECD centres and the reasons for this.

The CoP is reminded of BRIDGE's knowledge management role. All meetings, presentations and discussions are captured and shared on BRIDGE's Knowledge Hub, as are any other specific knowledge products relevant to ECD. [Here](#) is the link to this.

DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ECD Employment Stimulus Relief Fund



There was an announcement last year that there would be assistance from the stimulus package which would be awarded to the ECD sector. The announcement mentioned an amount of R500 million which would be allocated to around 108 000 ECD practitioners. The Department of Social Development (DSD) in partnership with Civil Society has been working hard to get the application process going. This has been a bit of a challenging exercise because the ECD sector does experience limitations with online applications – not everyone has access to a computer and internet. The decision to have this process online was due to time constraints.

About R496 million has been approved and the application process has now been concluded. The process required ECD programme owners/managers to spearhead the applications – they would have to apply on behalf of their employees. DSD along with DGMT (PMO) came up with a plan to have provincial organisations support ECD programmes within the provinces. For example Penreach and other organisations are assisting in Mpumalanga. There now needs to be sorting and verifying of the applications.

CoP members spoke about how they have been assisting with this on the ground:

Thandi (Cotlands) – Cotlands has assisted 64 ECD centres. They did experience some difficulties with the Central Supplier Database (CSD) database as people didn't come to register with all the qualifying documents. The CSD is a database linked to the National Treasury that includes details of organisations that conduct business with government or are paid by government for services. Whilst registered ECD programmes would typically have a CSD number, the challenges was getting unregistered ECD programmes registered on CSD and generating a CSD number for them Cotlands is now waiting for the list of those ECD programmes that need e-verification. There were also some challenges regarding registering non-centre based programmes – for example, when an organisation has 24 different play groups, each of these need to be applied for separately. The system also got overwhelmed at times and kicked people out and they had to start the whole process again.

Modupi (Penreach) – Penreach communicated the information about the stimulus package through existing WhatsApp groups with ECD practitioners and centre managers in their programme. They also went on radio to reach the broader ECD community. They then went into various areas in the community and assisted 66 centres whilst ECD programmes in the Penreach network (Smartstart and Asidlaleni) also managed to apply. The challenge was the registration into CSD largely due to bank details however; there is still an opportunity to rectify these issues on the system.

Esther (Penreach) - Penreach was able to apply for SmartStarters and Asidlaleni with the use of volunteers. Challenges were found with the link and code that was sent as the code would sometimes not work however, they made use of the GovChat and this helped resolve the issue.

Bonga (Ntatiase) – Ntatiase was able to assist individual centres and the 38 playgroups in the Ntatiase Lowveld Network. There were people/groups in Nkomati who were assisting ECD programmes not known to supporting organisations or DSD. Penreach also experienced this challenge where people offered to assist ECD programmes at a fee, taking advantage of the situation. It seems there were youth recruited to assist with this process but this was not properly communicated.

Concluding remarks on the ECD Stimulus Application:

The summary of challenges reported by the three supporting organisations include:

-Registration of multiple ECD programmes was a challenge-the process was long and onerous because the system would kick people out after a certain time. The process would have to be started from the beginning.

-ECD programmes had to submit banking details that match the names of the organisation. Many ECD programmes make use of personal bank accounts usually not in the name of the organisation.

-There were people unknown to the supporting organisations and to DSD officials assisting ECD programmes for a fee. There were also youth recruited to assist in this process but supporting organisations were never informed and this caused confusion on the ground.

The participants agreed that although this had been a challenging process, it was largely beneficial to the sector and government. The application of unregistered sites meant an improvement of the

current government databases. A largely informal ECD sector had to make use of technology to access assistance which is usually not the case. There are lessons to draw for the ECD sector in this process.

Consultation: could we map inactive ECD services in Mpumalanga and how?

There has been thinking around mapping inactive ECD programmes within the BRIDGE ECD CoP and the purpose of this session is to get a sense of what the MP ECD CoP thinks about this. Is it a something beneficial? Many surveys have been done and the outcomes show that things have regressed in terms of access within our sector in terms of the reopening of centres.

What is happening on the ground?

CoP members were able to provide these insights:

- Most ECDs have reopened but attendance of children has dramatically dropped.
- More ECDs have opened this year than last year. At non-centre based facilities there is poor attendance and this is due to social distancing requirements – activities have been split into groups consisting of a morning and an afternoon option. Most parents would like the morning session causing them to fill up this time slot quickly and having to find other centres.
- Some centre based programmes accommodate children on a rotational basis. Parents want children to attend on a daily basis and end up looking for alternatives.
- Out of 76, only 11 Smart Start play groups are yet to open. Change agents are coaching them on the requirements in order to reopen.

There might be a link to primary and high school rotation reopening and poor attendance of small children to ECD programmes-parents might find it unjustifiable to send the little ones to ECD programmes when the older siblings are home most of the week. The older siblings might also be assuming caregiver roles when they are not physically attending

- Parents could be observing a lack of compliance on the ECD programme's part
- Increase in C-19 related deaths in the second wave might have caused fear in parents
- More children are joining Toy Libraries due to the rotation of groups of children at different times.

With ECD Employment Stimulus Relief Fund requiring that currently closed ECD programmes commit to reopening if they are approved for funding, more programmes will most likely reopen. Tracking the reopening of programmes might not be a useful exercise, however, it would be prudent to understand at length, the reasons why children are not coming back to ECD centres. The CoP agreed to the following:

- Engage caregivers more to understand why children are not coming back to ECD programmes and report back at the next CoP meeting
- BRIDGE would also understand through the other provincial CoPs, what the trends are

BRIDGE will endeavour to create a brief Knowledge Product around children's attendance.

Dr Moodley to share findings on research conducted on the state of ECD programmes.

NATIONAL ECD CoP SUMMARY

This has not yet happened as we weren't able to get speakers from QCTO and the ETDP Seta. The intention was to have a CoP on qualifications and we wanted to have this in conjunction with an update on PIECCE. This has been postponed for now.



OTHER UPDATES

- Nonkululeko from FHI 360 announced that they are rolling out a community based HIV Prevention Programme across seven provinces including Mpumalanga. Nonkululeko will be given a chance to present at a future meeting.
- Verifications on the stimulus package will be done soon
- The Function shift has been postponed to April 2022 and the department is working on the presidential proclamation. Dr Moodley to update the CoP at the next meeting.



CHECK OUT QUOTES

“I am glad to have this opportunity to be a part of this platform. If we work together as partners we can assist the sector and the children more going forward.” – Benedict Nkambule

“Being part of this CoP keeps us up to date with what is happening so that none of us fall behind. We always learn a lot from each other at these meetings.” – Thandi Mdaka

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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