

Exploring New Outreach Models for Early Childhood Development



ABSTRACT

The topic of early childhood development (ECD) has been of growing interest in South Africa since the onset of democracy in 1994. Several organisations have been established across the Western Cape Province with the goal of providing greater access to ECD services, and employing their own approaches to improve access to ECD resources. In particular, Foundation for Community Work (FCW), an organisation established to address childhood development within the context of families and communities, has proposed two new models of providing ECD services to under-resourced areas. The first model involves utilising existing public space for ECD programming. The second involves transforming a shipping container into an ECD resource hub. Our team collaborated with FCW staff, other ECD organisations, and residents from Vygieskraal, a marginalised settlement in Cape Town, to explore the potential of these two models.

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IDENTIFYING THE OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH IN ECD

South Africa faces vast disparities in income, education, and living situations. Additionally, there is an unequal distribution of infrastructural resources for childhood development (Department of Social Development, 2011). Of the children between the ages of 0 and 4 years living in the Western Cape Province, 65% do not attend a day-care, crèche (preschool), playgroup, nursery school, or pre-primary school (Statistics South Africa, 2013). Over the past two decades, South Africa has attempted to address these issues by emphasizing equal access to ECD (Atmore, 2013). This increased attention has provided an opportunity for organisations to develop new models designed to promote access to ECD services and materials.

BACKGROUND: LEARNING THE ABCS OF ECD

In the latest version of the National ECD Policy, released in March 2015, the South African Department of Social Development notes that ECD is “central to the realisation of the national development goals of reducing poverty and inequality.” Providing children with access to ECD services improves preparation for entry into primary school, and increases the likelihood of continuing with secondary education. In addition to fostering intellectual development, ECD programmes also stimulate physical development, introduce children to social situations with others of the same age, and nurture and strengthen parent-child bonds (Chatterjee, 2015). Mothers also benefit from ECD programmes that provide opportunities for parental engagement. Mothers have an opportunity to spend time out of the home and socialize with colleagues. In



doing so, they not only learn about ECD, but also develop reliable support networks. Improving access to ECD resources, therefore, has become a priority for the national government.

The city of Cape Town believes that the availability of resources, such as play centres and toy libraries, assists children in developing social and language skills (Wotshela, 2013). Providing children and caregivers with access to these types of services can drastically improve the quality of early childhood development. However, given South Africa’s current state of inequality, the challenge is providing access to ECD services and resources to marginalised communities.

In many instances, organisations build new community centres to hold ECD programmes and services. For example, Centre for Early Childhood Development (CECD), in collaboration with WPI, Community Organisation Resource Centre, and the Informal Settlement Network, worked to establish a crèche in the informal settlement Flamingo

Heights (Brousseau, DiTroia, Ibelle, Olson, & Monterroso, 2015). While the centre based ECD model has been effective in many instances, this model is not always feasible.

An alternative to centre based ECD services is the utilisation of publically available spaces to foster the development of young children. Sikhula Sonke, an ECD focused organisation based in Cape Town, uses this approach in its Emthonjeni Programme model. In this model, non-centre based ECD delivery sites are created around environmental features, specifically water taps. “Emthonjeni” is an isiXhosa word meaning a “well” or a “source” (Art Map South Africa, 2015). In 2010, a Cape Town Project Centre (CTPC) Project in Monwabisi Park took advantage of publically available water taps, benches, and archways in the area to develop an Emthonjeni Programme in collaboration with Sikhula Sonke. These Emthonjeni sites complemented existing ECD centres, and were specifically designed to take advantage of the natural environ-





ment of the settlement, rather than building new structures (Barbour, Bell, Gottshall, & Sparrell, 2015).

The sponsor of this project, Foundation for Community Work (FCW), also employs a non-centre based approach to support ECD in marginalised communities. In their Family in Focus (FIF) programmes, home visitors interact with individual families within their homes to encourage parents to become more involved with and care for their children (Allie, 2015). In order to supplement the FIF programmes, FCW is exploring alternative outreach models for ECD that take advantage of readily available resources to increase distribution of ECD services. One such example is seen in Vygieskraal, an under-resourced community in Athlone, Cape Town, where FCW is currently exploring alternative ECD models.

MISSION STATEMENT AND OBJECTIVES

This project explored two outreach models for ECD in under-resourced settlements: (1) *utilising existing public space for ECD programming*, where public space entailed an

existing building, such as a school or stadium, and (2) *retrofitting a shipping container for use as an ECD resource hub*.

Throughout the course of this project, we followed a Shared Action Learning (SAL) model, partnering with local residents to develop sustainable solutions to complex community challenges (Jiusto, Hersh, & Taylor, 2015). The following objectives were identified over the course of this project:

1. Established relationships with FCW staff, residents of Vygieskraal and other relevant stakeholders, to ensure that all project objectives were completed collaboratively.
2. Identified co-researchers from Vygieskraal who were willing to participate in the SAL model of the CTPC.
3. Explored the alternative ECD models proposed by FCW:
 - Partnered with residents of Vygieskraal to explore how caregivers perceived and responded to the proposed model of *utilising existing public space for ECD programming* at the Vygieskraal Stadium.

- Assessed the potential of using the ECD resource hub model to supplement ECD in resource poor communities.
 - Met with local ECD organisations to gather feedback.
4. Developed a proposal to obtain support and funding for the alternative models of ECD identified by FCW.

OUR APPROACH


The team first conducted an interview with FCW staff in the preparatory term to identify project goals and open a line of communication with the sponsor of the project. During the first week of project work in Cape Town, the team met in person with FCW employees to debrief on the preparation that was completed in the previous weeks and to discuss the direction of the project.

Throughout the first two weeks, the team worked to identify people from Vygieskraal to partner with as co-researchers. This involved speaking with FCW staff, the Vygieskraal Stadium Manager, and residents of Vygieskraal to find people who were reliable to work with and interested in ECD.

For Model 1, the team and FCW staff spoke with the co-researchers, FCW programme participants, and other Vygieskraal residents to identify opportunities for improvement within the public space model at the stadium. For Model 2, the team contacted multiple shipping container, branding, and refurbishing companies to create a spreadsheet of prices and options to transform a


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Interactive Qualifying Project 2015
Cape Town, South Africa




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The Gap



In South Africa, 5.5 million children under the age of five are in need of ECD services.




10% of these children live in the Western Cape.



Of those children, only 30% have access to ECD resources.

The Partnership




-Students completing a project
-Professors advising

-NPO working to spread ECD
-Looking for new ECD models

Together creating 2 ECD outreach models


The Models

Utilising Existing Public Space for ECD Programming




A Case Study at the Vygieskraal Stadium

Retrofitting a Shipping Container for Use as an ECD Resource Hub



A Set of Plans for the Future

The Proposal



-Introduces FCW and its mission
-Details both models
-Will be used by FCW to acquire funding in the future

shipping container into an ECD resource hub. The team also constructed a Computer Aided Design (CAD) drawing of the layout of the container with ECD resources in it. As part of this process, the team met with CECD, Early Learning Resource Unit (ELRU), Grassroots, and Sikhula Sonke, to gain feedback on the two proposed outreach models for ECD.

The team organised a proposal for FCW highlighting the major points of the two outreach models. The proposal includes the case study of the public space model in Vygieskraal and the planning elements for the ECD resource hub model.

OUTCOMES

FORMING NEW RELATIONSHIPS

Over the course of this project, our team created strong bonds with FCW employees and Vygieskraal residents. Our sponsor gave us the freedom to explore and expand upon

two outreach models for ECD, invited us to put the WPI logo on the ECD resource hub, and expressed interest in hosting another WPI project team in the years to come. From the day that we arrived in Cape Town, they welcomed us into their family, bringing us along to a company conference and including us in various celebrations. It was through FCW that our team was able to connect with the residents of Vygieskraal. At first, the residents we worked with were hesitant to work with us and the language barrier was a bit of an obstacle, but after a couple of weeks we started having more casual conversations and even began to joke around. We also had the opportunity to have a glimpse into their day-to-day lives by using PhotoVoice. As it was unsafe to spend unstructured and unaccompanied time in Vygieskraal, this strategy offered an insider perspective of life in the community. The technique involved providing each of our co-researchers with a disposable cam-



era, and having them take pictures of things in Vygieskraal that they saw as both positives and challenges.

By the end of our time in Cape Town, a mutual appreciation for one another was felt and many lessons were learned by all involved. We also helped facilitate a bond between FCW employees and the Vygieskraal community. In our last group meeting, these FCW employees and our co-researchers decided that they would meet on 14 January, 2016 to discuss the next steps of how to improve ECD outreach services in Vygieskraal.

MODEL 1: UTILISING EXISTING PUBLIC SPACE FOR ECD PROGRAMMING

The public space outreach model for ECD was implemented as a trial at the Vygieskraal Stadium over an eight week period. FCW invited our team to join them in this case study of the model's implementation. ECD programmes were held three days a week by FCW employees, during which time

our team worked separately with three members of a Vygieskraal committee to gather feedback on the model. In collaboration with FCW staff, Vygieskraal residents, and other ECD organisations, we developed several suggestions on how to improve implementation of this model in the future. These suggestions are based on an evaluation of the ECD programmes that were held at the Vygieskraal Stadium, but are applicable to a range of ECD related programmes that could be held in an accessible public space (e.g. school, stadium, community hall).

1. Initiate the FIF home visiting programme in the community before implementing the public space model, so that residents are already familiar with FCW and with ECD.
2. Properly market the model to the community:
 - Select a name for the programmes that encompasses the primary objectives. For example, the name of the pro-



grammes at Vygieskraal was “Early Childhood Development Programme.”

- Create flyers in the primary language(s) spoken in the target community that advertise the public space as the location of the programmes.
- Choose a time to hold the programmes when parents are least busy with other responsibilities.
- Hold the programme once within the community to generate interest with minimal inconvenience to parents.
- 3. Provide incentives for going to the public space for the programmes, such as food and opportunities to learn other skills, such as resume writing.
- 4. Identify individuals who regularly attend and express interest in the programmes at the public space. They can potentially assist in facilitating the programmes and in spreading news about the programmes to other parents and caregivers.

MODEL 2: RETROFITTING A SHIPPING CONTAINER FOR USE AS AN ECD RESOURCE HUB

The use of a retrofitted shipping container as an ECD resource hub presented itself as another alternative approach to expanding ECD delivery to resource poor areas. At the beginning of our eight week project, we had hoped to purchase, refurbish, and fill a shipping container as FCW’s first ECD resource hub. However, as we realised the process would take longer than expected, we shifted the focus to creating detailed plans for the retrofitting, stocking, and branding of the shipping containers.

We contacted various shipping container distributors, refurbishing companies, and branding companies in the area to calculate a budget and establish a services network for FCW to use. We had extensive conversations with FCW staff members regarding the materials that they wished to see incorpo-

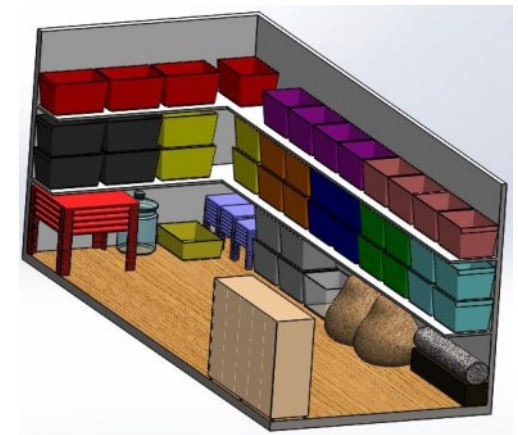
rated in the hub, and toured their material stores to see for ourselves the items they have available. With this knowledge, we formatted inventory check logs and material sign-out sheets to help track the quantity and quality of the items once the hub is in place. We measured and recorded the dimensions of boxes, portable shelving units, plastic chairs, and plastic tables for the hub. We also considered various arrangements within the 6 meter by 2 meter space to identify an optimal arrangement within the shipping container. Based on these measurements, we created three-dimensional representations of the items in a CAD software and generated a scale model of the final layout. By making the connections with distributors, formatting a floor-plan, and creating organisational spreadsheets, we compiled a set of plans to bring the model to life. These plans will ensure that the process of acquiring and filling a shipping container to make an ECD resource hub is reproducible.



FEEDBACK FROM ECD ORGANISATIONS ON THE MODELS

To gather feedback on FCW’s two proposed outreach models for ECD and learn about the various approaches to ECD taking place in the Western Cape, we spoke with CECD, ELRU, Grassroots, and Sikhula Sonke. Based on information recovered during these conversations, we were able to work with FCW staff to produce a document directing the new ECD models.

A notable suggestion for the first model, *utilising existing public space for ECD programming*, included targeting families that are already involved in some type of ECD home visiting programme. As the public space model allows for group style interactive programmes, certain sensitive topics that are best discussed one-on-one in the home should be avoided. However, the group dynamics provide an opportunity for sharing between community members and the building of social networks. The second model, *retrofitting a shipping container for*





use as an ECD resource hub, was considered comparable to Sikhula Sonke's Emthonjeni Programme in that it offered a non-centre ECD opportunity. However, in the Emthonjeni approach, the ECD resources are brought into the community by Sikhula Sonke staff for each session. The ECD resource hub model allows a safe space to keep ECD materials within the community that are more routinely accessible to community members.

PROPOSAL OF THE TWO MODELS

In order to obtain support and funding for these two new alternative ECD models, our sponsor requested a proposal that they could distribute to government agencies and potential sponsors. The proposal discussed the two different outreach models for expanding ECD services in under-resourced communities. Specifically, the

models are explained, as are benefits and obstacles of using each model. This proposal will be used as an organisational reference and to request funds from local organisations and government municipalities.

REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

When our team arrived at FCW on the first day, we were expecting to work with the organisation to create morning and afternoon programmes to be held in a local stadium. We quickly realised, however, that the programmes were already planned out and ready to be implemented. Multiple conversations with our advisors and FCW employees helped us readjust our focus, honing in on the construction of a proposal that FCW would be able to distribute to local municipalities and other organisations

to introduce and gain support for their new ECD models.

For the public space model, we worked closely with FCW, Vygieskraal residents, and other ECD organisations to grasp a better understanding of the approach. As part of exploring this model, we walked through Vygieskraal with FCW and our co-researchers to speak with caregivers in the community about the model. This gave us the chance to learn first-hand about the challenges that caregivers face in Vygieskraal, as well as understand what would make the model more appealing and useful to them. After gathering this feedback, we implemented various incentives to the case study in Vygieskraal and learned that different communities require different approaches and variations of ECD models.

The ECD resource hub model was a completely new approach for FCW. We initially thought that we would be able to see the creation of the first hub through to the end, but time proved to be a challenge. Instead,

we turned our attention to compiling a detailed set of plans and resources to help FCW purchase, refurbish, brand, and fill a shipping container. In doing this, we created a record of the steps necessary to prepare an ECD resource hub to simplify FCW's efforts in the future when initiating the model.

This project encompassed much more than writing a proposal and creating a guide for outfitting a shipping container. Over the course of our eight weeks in Cape Town, our team learned about the fluidity that accompanies working with real people on real life problems. We adapted daily to new challenges and unexpected variables, sometimes changing our plans several times in the span of a few hours. We were also able to make amazing connections with incredible people. The bonds we made with the employees of FCW and the residents of Vygieskraal are invaluable, and we will take the lessons that we learned from them into the rest of our schooling and careers.



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