

African Bank Limited press release

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### **Gearing up women to be Early Childhood Development experts**

Early Childhood Development (ECD) is possibly the biggest blindspot in our education crisis. Did you know that most parents in South Africa, according to the national average, spend only 11 minutes per day interacting one-on-one with their children? There are over six million children in South Africa under the age of five, and almost 75% of these children are not receiving ECD services. 75% of children between the ages of birth and six years old are living below the breadline of R604 per month, according to South Africa's ECD Policy. It is therefore not surprising that 35% of children in South Africa will drop out of school before they reach Grade 3. "We are facing a national education crisis - and if we don't start with ECD we are going to be in even bigger trouble," says Kennedy Dembetembe, National CSI Manager for African Bank

Foundational teaching in social skills, spatial and motor abilities, cognitive development and nutrition, amongst other developmental processes, are the building blocks on which schooling stands. ECD provides the foundation on which to educate a child. Without ECD, basic things such as holding a pencil, peer-to-peer interaction and the ability to play can be compromised.

"We recognise that there is no point in putting money into education when the foundation isn't there. We have therefore committed to invest in this area so that other interventions don't have to be remedial, but rather progressive," adds Dembetembe.

[Early Inspiration](#) proved to be just the investment African Bank was looking for. "Early Inspiration is successfully training hundreds of women to be qualified ECD practitioners. As with all our projects, we invest in people, not just projects. We have very close relationships with all our project leaders, and in the ECD space we developed a relationship with Dr Lauren Stretch, the Managing Director of Early Inspiration. Dr Stretch is a young, dynamic woman passionate about ECD and her organisation."

Dr Stretch says educating and equipping parents and care-givers as to how they can enhance the child's development from an early age, through stimulation, is essential. "Through working with children's development and equipping parents and care-givers, the future leaders of South Africa are being equipped - educating them, inspiring them and birthing in them a desire to see this country flourish."

Dembetembe says that 2016 marks the fourth year that African Bank has been involved with Early Inspiration. "Until 2015 we only operated in the Eastern Cape but since 2015 we have run an additional programme of the same nature in the Western Cape. Our contribution goes towards three main programmes the first being the ECD practitioner

training. We cover the costs for the education of 24 women in the Eastern Cape, and 24 women in the Western Cape , who were formerly unqualified crèche teachers. The programme takes these women from being basic child minders to be qualified ECD practitioners. They complete a SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority) course which is accredited with ETDP SETA and get trained in best practice with Early Childhood Development as well as basic business skills.”

The second aspect of the programme is the Home Visit Programme and Parent Support intervention. Dr Stretch explains that the home visit support is for children that have been deemed as at-risk (scoring below 40% on a developmental test pre-intervention). “56 children in Nelson Mandela Bay are visited twice monthly for one-on-one support and we provide guidance for their parents,” she says. Early Inspiration also runs a Parent Support programme which is a six-session support workshop for parents where they learn basic parenting skills, discuss the role of the parent and gain practical, relevant knowledge in understanding their children.

“Our experience with the Early Inspiration Training Programme has proven a 100% pass rate of the practitioners that we sponsor for training. A highlight each year is seeing the excitement and enthusiasm exuding from these women as they graduate. The ECD practitioner training model is one we love. It is sustainable as these women will keep on investing in the development of children year-on-year. It also empowers them as these crèche and primary school child-minders are upskilled and equipped with business skills,” says Dembetembe.

“The early years of a child’s life are years of rapid development and change. We believe each child is born with enormous potential and possibilities. It is our duty to help these children grow and flourish, and by so doing, we ignite the power that is within them,” he concludes.

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