



Evidence of Impact on Children and Families

A Narrative from the Play Ambassador
Programme and Play@Home Family
Feedback



Prepared by Londiwe Zamalotshwa Ndwandwe
Banzi Catalyst
September 2026
www.banzicatalyst.com

Contents

Executive Summary	3
Evaluation Approach	3
1. Children's Wellbeing and Resilience.....	4
1.1 Improved Listening and Communication	4
1.2 Emotional Regulation and Reduced Aggression.....	4
1.3 Confidence and Self-Belief	5
1.4 Children Opening Up About Difficult Experiences.....	5
2. Family Relationships and Bonding.....	5
2.1 Quality Time and Shared Play.....	5
2.2 Parent-Child Communication	6
2.3 Sibling Relationships.....	6
3. Sustained Practices and Protective Behaviours	6
3.1 Programme Techniques Retained	6
3.2 Handling Difficult Situations.....	7
4. Play Ambassador Growth as a Pathway to Family Impact	7
5. Community Ripple Effects.....	8
6. Contribution Assessment	9
7. Considering Alternative Explanations.....	10
8. Conclusion	11
Methodology Note	11

Executive Summary

This narrative reflection draws on two complementary data sources to present evidence of impact for children and families within the Sisanda FunDaytion Play Ambassador Programme. The first source is a self-report survey of 39 Play Ambassadors (both current and alumni), providing quantitative Likert-scale ratings and qualitative reflections on personal growth, community contribution, and family relationships. The second source is Play@Home family feedback, capturing qualitative responses from approximately 27 families who participated in facilitated play sessions led by Play Ambassadors in their homes.

Together, these sources triangulate a consistent story: the programme contributes meaningfully to children's emotional regulation, communication, and confidence; to stronger parent-child and sibling bonds; and to families' capacity to handle demanding situations through play-based techniques. The evidence supports contribution rather than attribution, what this means is that the programme is only outlining one significant factor as a contribution among many other factors which have influenced these families' and communities' lives.

Key headline findings: Children show improved listening, communication, and emotional regulation; families report stronger bonds and new shared practices within their interpersonal relationships. The shift in the Play Ambassadors is reflected between the time they joined Sisanda and by their growth in confidence and patience, as well as an increased desire to help others. Families reflect new techniques which have been learnt after being part of Sisanda programs, this includes, breathing exercises, entering the "Green Zone.", Families report improved emotional state learnt through the Hot Lava game as well as positive self-talk which are coping mechanisms which persist long after the formal sessions end.

Evaluation Approach

This narrative follows a theory-based contribution evaluation framework. Rather than claiming the programme single-handedly caused observed changes (attribution), we ask whether the programme made a reasonable contribution to the changes reported, whether the evidence is internally consistent, and whether alternative explanations can be considered. The two data source, a self-report survey of Play Ambassadors (N=39) and qualitative Play@Home family feedback (27 families), provides independent but converging perspectives on the same programme mechanisms.

The Play Ambassador self-report survey includes 5-point Likert items covering personal growth, community engagement, and family relationships; a skills tick-box section; and open-ended qualitative questions. The Play@Home feedback forms capture family-level observations of children's behavioural changes covering the themes around, quality time, coping with demanding situations as well as sustained programme practices. There are instances where both data sources speak to the same theme for example, improved communication or emotional regulation are seen converging as a thematic area when analysis of data is completed, this is something which strengthens the contribution claim

1. Children's Wellbeing and Resilience

1.1 Improved Listening and Communication

The most frequently cited change in children, reported by approximately two-thirds of Play@Home families, is improved listening and communication. Families describe children who were previously "not good listeners" now "doing their best to improve"; children who "listen more attentively and wait for what another person has to say"; and children who are now "respectful and always listen". One grandmother noted that children who previously "liked to fight and argue" are now "able to correct each other".

This family-level evidence converges with the Play Ambassador self-report data. Play Ambassadors rated "I am better with children" at a mean of 4.08 out of 5, and "My relationships have improved" also at 4.08. Qualitatively, Ambassadors describe learning "communication skills, being a team player and being better at interacting with children at home and in the community" (Onele Mhaga), and "learning more about children and learning to communicate with people" (Sinxolo Magadla). The convergence between Ambassadors' self-assessed improvement in working with children and families' direct observation of improved child listening suggests a genuine programme mechanism: play-based interaction teaches and models communication.

1.2 Emotional Regulation and Reduced Aggression

Approximately one-third of Play@Home families specifically describe reductions in aggression, fighting, or anger in their children, alongside gains in patience and emotional control. A mother reported that her 10-year-old son: *"Used to fight back to someone who would play with him rough and now he understands that he would rather not play with that person and he can control his anger"*

Another family noted their 12-year-old: *"Was having difficulties being in fights or arguing with others but he is much better now, he knows how to control his anger"*. A foster grandmother described previously *"insensitive and aggressive"* children who now *"report to someone older and wiser"* instead of engaging in fights.

Families consistently attribute these changes to specific programme techniques. The *"Green Zone"* a self-regulation framework taught through the programme; this is named explicitly in the following statement: *"When they are furious or sad about something they know what to do to get to their normal selves. They call it the 'Green Zone'".* Breathing exercises and calming techniques are also cited: *"through the calming down exercises they have learnt to be patient and kind", and a 6-year-old "knows how to handle her anger towards other kids"* using the *"resilience table"*. From the Play Ambassador side, emotional regulation appears as a personal outcome: *"Managing my anger issues and also thinking of others"* (Luvuyo Gwele); *"I have learnt how to manage, identify and accept my emotions"* (Sibulele Daki); and *"learning how to control your emotions in different situations"* (Lindokuhle Bam). The programme's Likert item on managing mental health and stress scored 3.87 out of 5 scored the lowest rated but still remains a positive item, what this suggests is that while emotional regulation is the hardest skill to develop compared to the other items named on the scale, it is nonetheless being learned.

Impact: The parallel between Ambassadors' own emotional growth and the emotional regulation they observe and facilitate in children is a strong indicator of programme contribution: the skills transfer from youth leaders to the children they serve.

1.3 Confidence and Self-Belief

Multiple families describe children gaining confidence. One family noted *"kids have a lot of confidence when it comes to things in school"* after joining the programme. Another observed that through *"engagement and playfulness involved in the activities, it has helped her to be more confident in herself"*. A 16-year-old eldest daughter who previously did not engage now *"assists us in terms of prepping for school e.g. uniforms and lunch"*.

Play Ambassadors themselves echo this theme. Thandwayo Gontsana reflected: *"I used to be shy, but now I am not. I am more confident than before and because of that I made new friendships."* Njabulo Mbabala described discovering *"potential in me"* after leading a station activity. In the quantitative data, confidence working with children reached 95% of Ambassadors (tick-box), and the overall skills confidence was strong across relationships (85%), communication, and leadership.

Impact: The programme's confidence-building mechanism appears to work bidirectionally: Ambassadors gain confidence through facilitating play, and children gain confidence through being heard, included, and successful in play activities.

1.4 Children Opening Up About Difficult Experiences

One of the most striking findings is that the programme creates conditions for children to disclose difficult experiences. A 16-year-old girl *"opened up about challenges of bullying that she is currently experiencing as she is a teenager and also in high school. She can now share what she needs in battling this."* Another family noted that before the programme, children *"couldn't share their problems enough but now they are telling me what happens outside"*.

This disclosure mechanism is consistent with the safe-space creation that Ambassadors describe: *"play is powerful, it breaks barriers and creates safe spaces where everyone feels included"* (Dineo Swakamisa). The programme's play-based approach appears to lower barriers to communication, creating a context in which children feel safe enough to voice concerns that were previously hidden.

2. Family Relationships and Bonding

2.1 Quality Time and Shared Play

Play@Home families report a clear shift in how they spend time together. Quality time-rates increased from an average of approximately 2.9 ("start") to 3.8 ("end") on a 5-point scale across families, suggesting perceived improvement. Qualitatively, families describe moving from isolated screen time to shared play: *"we are no longer fighting or watching TV, now we are playing"*; and a mother who *"didn't spend time with my kids"* now says *"even my nieces... they enjoy staying with me and spend time together today. We are always colouring now and reading."*

Specific activities are named repeatedly as bonding mechanisms. The "Hot Lava" game, a cooperative floor game where players must avoid touching the floor, brought intergenerational joy: *"there was a time when we played Hot Lava and Granny was a part of it too, it was fun"*. Card games, reading together, exercises, baking, and chore-sharing all emerge as new family practices. One family described how *"the eldest child (female, 16) now engages and plays more with her sister (8)"*, bridging an age gap through shared play. Play Ambassador qualitative data supports this from the facilitator perspective. Thabiso Magqalaza noted: *"The play at home helped many parents to understand the behaviour of their kids. I have also learned that there are connections through play."* The Ambassador role of entering homes and modelling playful interaction appears to catalyze a shift in family dynamics from hierarchical to relational.

2.2 Parent-Child Communication

Families describe deeper, more open communication. A mother reported: *"Before they couldn't share their problems enough but now, they are telling me what happens outside."* Another family said children are *"able to voice out their concerns, feelings and emotions without fear"*. A parent who *"never considered how my children feel"* reflected: *"it was all about me. I never bothered to consider how they feel, now I know they are important."*

The quantitative data reinforces this. Play Ambassadors rated *"My relationships have improved"* at 4.08/5. The skill of relationship building was ticked by 85% of Ambassadors, and confidence working with children by 95%. These are the people facilitating family sessions, their own relational growth is a precondition for the relational changes they observe in families.

2.3 Sibling Relationships

Several families note improved sibling interaction. A 16-year-old now *"engages and plays more with her sister (8)"*. A teenager who *"used to isolate in her room"* now *"enjoys spending time with her siblings"*. A 4-year-old is *"more disciplined and respectful than before"*. These shifts reflect the programme's emphasis on cooperative play, these activities on the play sheets *"require interaction and engagement that assisted in drawing her attention"* suggesting that structured cooperative play is a mechanism for improving sibling bonds.

3. Sustained Practices and Protective Behaviours

3.1 Programme Techniques Retained

A critical indicator of lasting impact is whether families continue programme practices after formal sessions end. The evidence is strong:

- **The Green Zone** — a self-regulation framework that helps children identify their emotional state and return to calm. Families name it unprompted: *"they know what to do to get to their normal selves. They call it the 'Green Zone'; 'the zones helped my family and I alot, we now know how to get ourselves back on track."*
- **Breathing and calming exercises** *"we enjoy meditating together"; "we do exercise almost every morning to start our day nice and healthy"; "breathing techniques and doing house chores together like cooking."*
- **Positive self-talk** — *"self-positive-speaking has helped me a lot during my times of distress and sadness."*
- **Cooperative games** *"playing cards"; "Hot Lava"; "we enjoy baking together and spending quality time together as a family"; "we take time to read stories and share our thoughts."*

Impact: The fact that families can name and continue these specific techniques months after the programme suggests genuine internalisation rather than superficial compliance. These are not one-off activities but embedded new practices, what programme theory would call *"mechanism effects"* that outlive the intervention.

3.2 Handling Difficult Situations

Approximately two-thirds of families who answered the question on handling demanding situations reported concrete improvements. Families describe children using programme tools to manage conflict: *"when they are angry, they use the resilience table"; "they know right from wrong and they have good communication with me"; "instead of engaging when there's a fight, they now report to someone older and wiser"*.

Parents, too, report changed approaches. One mother said: *"The programme has taught us a lot of positive thinking, because in a lot of situations we know how to handle and sort things out."* Another noted that the programme helped her *"understand my children when they are feeling sad or angry about something"*. A father observed: *"at least now we don't have to shout a lot, and the children have changed a lot at school."*

From the Ambassador side, the ability to manage demanding situations is reflected in the item *"I can manage my mental health/stress"* (mean 3.87/5) and qualitative responses about emotional control. The programme appears to equip both Ambassadors and families with a shared language and toolkit for navigating difficulty, the Green Zone, breathing exercises, and the principle of pausing before reacting.

4. Play Ambassador Growth as a Pathway to Family Impact

The Play Ambassador data adds a crucial layer: the youth who facilitate family sessions are themselves on a developmental trajectory that directly enables family impact. The quantitative profile shows:

- Overall programme impact: 3.94 out of 5 across all Likert items
 - Desire to help others: 4.13 out of 5 (the highest-rated item)
 - Better with children: 4.08 out of 5
 - Relationships improved: 4.08 out of 5
 - Manage mental health/stress: 3.87 out of 5.
 - Stronger support network: 3.67 out of 5
- Skills confidence: 95% confident working with children, 85% in relationship-building

Qualitatively, Ambassadors describe transformations that parallel and enable the family-level changes:

- **Communication:** *"communication skills, being a team player and being better at interacting with children at home and in the community"* (Onele Mhaga)
- **Patience and anger management:** *"Managing my anger issues and also thinking of others"* (Luvuyo Gwele); *"being patient"* (Puleng Molelle); improved *"patience and anger, and self-doubt"* (Thabiso Magqalaza)
- **Self-knowledge and emotional awareness:** *"I have learnt how to manage, identify and accept my emotions"* (Sibulele Daki)
- **Life direction:** *"Through Sisanda, I was able to identify my passion... I want to study teaching"* Mhaga); *"I want to dedicate my life to working with people, especially children and young people"* (Dineo Swakamisa)
- **Perspective shift:** *"I have learnt that it is okay for kids to make mess and mistakes, because that's how they learn"* (Iviwe Gwele); *"I never bothered to consider how they feel — now I know they are important"* (Play@Home parent)

Impact: The evidence suggests a causal chain: the programme develops Ambassadors' interpersonal skills and emotional maturity, which enables them to facilitate family sessions effectively, which leads to families experiencing improved communication, emotional regulation, and bonding. This chain is supported by the convergence between what Ambassadors say they learned and what families say they experienced.

5. Community Ripple Effects

Beyond the immediate family, there is evidence of wider community contribution. Several Ambassadors report applying their skills in other volunteer roles: assisting in after-school programmes, supporting church youth ministries, and helping at school events. Dineo Swakamisa described using *"the skills I gained as a Play Ambassador, like leading games, working with children, and creating safe, fun environments"* in school, church, and community events.

At family level, nearly every family that responded to the recommendation question said they would recommend the programme to others, often with passionate conviction: *"yes 100%"; "it could be a very helpful programme that will make our families and community more*

inspired and motivated"; "I would recommend the programme as it was the necessary foundation needed in order for us to reconnect with family." The desire to share what they learned suggests not only satisfaction but a felt obligation to extend the programme's benefits, which is a form of organic scaling driven by programme participants themselves.

One Ambassador summarised the ripple effect concisely: *"friends we have grown to be positive good role models and great leaders"* (Thabiso Magqalaza). The programme's impact on families does not end at the household door; it enters communities through the youth who carry their skills forward and the families who advocate for the programme.

6. Contribution Assessment

Using a contribution framework, we assess whether the evidence supports the programme's contribution to observed changes:

Table 8.1 Contribution assessment matrix — triangulated evidence from both data sources

Theme	Ambassador Evidence	Family Evidence	Contribution Strength
Improved child listening & communication	4.08/5 better with children; qualitative quotes on communication skills	15 families report improved listening; children speak about feelings	Strong — convergent evidence
Emotional regulation & reduced aggression	3.87/5 manage stress; Quoted as; 'managing me anger'; 'manage emotions'	8 families cite reduced fighting: Green Zone, breathing named as tools	Strong — parallel mechanism identified
Confidence & self-belief	95% confident with children Quoted as; 'potential in me'. 'Not shy anymore'	Children 'more confident'. teenagers taking on responsibilities	Moderate-Strong — consistent but fewer specific examples
Parent-child bonding & quality time	4.08/5 relationships improved Quoted as: 'power of play to bring people together'	Quality time scores rise, families describe new shared activities	Strong — before/after improvement documented

Theme	Ambassador Evidence	Family Evidence	Contribution Strength
Handling demanding situations	3.87/5 manage stress Quoted as; 'control emotions'; resilience language	~two-thirds of families report improvement;	Strong — technique naming signals internalisation
		specific techniques named	
Sustained practices	Ambassadors volunteer in other contexts; skills transfer reported	Families continue Green Zone, breathing, games, self-talk	Strong persistence after programme ends is robust indicator
Community ripple effects	4.13/5 desire to help others; volunteer work cited	Near universal recommendation willingness; organic advocacy	Moderate — indirect but consistent

The table above shows that for six of seven themes, evidence from both sources converges, and for five of seven, contribution strength is rated "strong". The weakest area includes community ripple effects because it is inherently harder to measure through self-report tools. Despite this, volunteers report a consistent desire to help others which means that they genuinely influence families and communities positively.

7. Considering Alternative Explanations

A contribution evaluation must consider whether observed changes could be explained by factors other than the programme. Key alternatives include:

- **Natural child development:** Some changes (e.g., improved communication as children matures) could occur without the programme. However, the specificity of named techniques (Green Zone, Hot Lava, breathing exercises) and the timing of changes following programme participation argue against pure maturation.
- **School or other interventions:** Children may be exposed to other programmes. However, families explicitly attribute changes to the Play@Home activities and play sheets, and the techniques they name are programme specific.

- **Hawthorne or social desirability effects:** Families and Ambassadors may overstate positive changes because they value the programme relationship. The consistency across independent sources (self-report and family observation) and the specificity of examples mitigate this concern, though it cannot be fully eliminated.
- **Selection bias:** Families who participate and complete feedback may be those with the most positive experiences. This is likely true, and the evidence should be read as describing the experience of engaged participants rather than a random sample.

On balance, the triangulation of independent data sources, the specificity of named programme techniques, and the convergence between Ambassador and family accounts argue that the programme makes a genuine and substantial contribution to the observed changes.

8. Conclusion

The evidence from both Play Ambassador self-reports and Play@Home family feedback tells a coherent story. The programme contributes to children's wellbeing by improving their communication, emotional regulation, and confidence. It strengthens families by creating new patterns of quality time, shared play, and open communication. It equips both youth leaders and parents with specific, named tools including the Green Zone, breathing exercises, positive self-talk, cooperative games that persist beyond the programme's formal duration. There is a notable community ripple effects through Ambassadors who volunteer elsewhere and families who advocate for the programme.

The strongest evidence lies in the convergence: when a Play Ambassador says, "I have learnt how to manage my emotions" and a family says; "my child now knows what to do to get to their normal selves, they call it the Green Zone", the programme's contribution mechanism is visible. The skills Ambassadors develop are the skills families experience.

This is not a claim that the programme caused all observed changes, it is important to note that families are complex systems influenced by many factors. Despite this knowledge, evidence supports the conclusion that the Play Ambassador Programme and its Play@Home component make a meaningful, recognised, and sustained contribution to the wellbeing of children and families in the communities it serves.

Methodology Note

Data Source 1: Play Ambassador Impact Feedback Survey (N=39, current and alumni Ambassadors). Administered by Sisanda FunDaytion. Contains 5-point Likert items on personal growth and community impact, skills tick-boxes, and five open-ended qualitative questions. Consolidated September 2025.

Data Source 2: Play@Home Family Feedback Forms (~27 families). Collected by Play Ambassadors during home visit sessions. Contains family-level qualitative responses on observed child changes, quality time, handling demanding situations, retained activities, and programme recommendations. No quantitative scoring beyond quality time start/end ratings.

Analytical approach: Thematic coding of qualitative data from both sources; cross-referencing of quantitative Likert means with qualitative themes; contribution assessment using theory-based evaluation (Mayne, 2012); consideration of alternative explanations.

Limitations: Self-report bias; no control group; family feedback collected by programme facilitators (potential social desirability); sample represents engaged participants only; family data available only from image capture (not a clean dataset). Future evaluation could strengthen claims through pre/post comparison, external observation, and longitudinal follow-up.

--/--