

# SISANDA FUNDAYTION 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

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Sisanda FunDaytion is registered as:  
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' If it wasn't for this programme I would be on the streets, in a gang doing drugs right now. Thank-you'  
 Young man of 17yrs

# 2009 TO 2025 SUMMARY

15<sup>th</sup> year  
of a clean audit

100%  
compliance with  
Department of Social  
Development

Level 1  
BBBEE status  
maintained

84 Youth Play  
Ambassadors  
Empowered

1 244  
Parents and  
Caregivers lives  
touched

12 599  
Children lives  
touched

3 639  
Volunteers  
lives touched

**"I USED TO KEEP THINGS IN BECAUSE I THOUGHT  
NO ONE WOULD UNDERSTAND,  
BUT TODAY I SAW THAT I'M NOT ALONE."  
— YOUTH PARTICIPANT**

**"I WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ABLE TO  
GIVE THIS TO MY  
DAUGHTER MYSELF.  
YOU'RE MAKING OUR  
CHILDREN SEE US DIFFERENTLY."  
— PARENT PARTICIPANT**



**"I HAVE LEARNED TO INCLUDE EVERYONE.  
I HAVE ALSO LEARNT  
TO BE KIND."  
- CHILD PARTICIPANT**

# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FROM THE BOARD

The year 2025 had indeed been 2020-thrive! It has been a year of tremendous growth, with Sisanda FunDaytion living up to its name (sisanda literally means 'we are growing in isiXhosa).

Under the leadership of founder and director Nicky Seymour, this year has been one of expansion, visible transformation and consolidation. We have grown not just in terms of numbers (though those are, of course, important); we have also grown in confidence, leadership and connection across the communities we serve. When a 17-year-old Youth Play Ambassador says, "If it wasn't for this programme I would be on the streets, in a gang doing drugs right now," we are reminded that this work is not small; it is life-changing.

During the course of 2025, we connected with some 1 554 people across our partner communities of Gugulethu, Manenberg, and Nyanga in the Western Cape. We reached 1 270 children, 233 parents and caregivers and 155 volunteers. Since our founding in 2009, we have now touched over 12 000 children's lives. But beyond the numbers, what stands out more clearly is the evidence of real change happening inside households, inside young people, and inside communities.

Nothing exemplifies this more clearly than this year's appointment of Nkulee Gwele as our first full-time employee. Nkulee's journey from Fun Day beneficiary to Programme Co-ordinator is what Sisanda is all about.

Nkulee began her journey with Sisanda in 2014, when she attended one of our magical Fun Days. Inspired by the encounter, she responded to calls for volunteers and, a decade later, Nkulee now heads up our Youth Play Ambassador Programme, which is rapidly transforming into the beating heart of Sisanda. In 2025, we consolidated it into a structured one-year leadership programme, giving greater clarity, accountability and depth to the journey from belonging to leadership. The results have been encouraging. So many of our YPAs report feeling more positive about their futures now that they have developed clearer life goals. Many speak about discovering passions for teaching, community work and leadership that they didn't know they had inside them.

Families are changing too. Through two cycles of our Play@Home programme, launched during the Covid pandemic, we reached 91 families in 2025, an increase from last year. What's more, nearly 60% of those families reported improved relationships at home, saying there is reduced stress in the household and that they have noticed positive changes in how their children relate to others. Parents describe shouting less, listening more, and replacing conflict with connection. One grandmother shared, "We're a different family now." That is not a small statement.

A particularly significant milestone this year was our first formal external evaluation under the guidance of monitoring and evaluation research specialist Dr Kath Morse. In November 2025, Sisanda staff, board members and YPA leadership participated in an in-depth evaluation workshop that included a creative and forward-looking review of our resources, data and capacity. This was an illuminating opportunity for the staff and board to connect and share memories, experiences and hopes.

Dr Morse's evaluation gave us the space to reflect honestly on what is working, where we are growing, what needs to change, and how we can scale responsibly without losing the heart of our model. The key message was clear: Sisanda is scalable, but only if we build innovative relational capacity, not just activities and numbers. We need to go deep, and not just wide! The evaluation confirmed that our PlaySMART framework is doing exactly what it was designed to do: through play, we are shaping self-aware young leaders who go on to influence caregiver-child relationships. That affirmation has strengthened our confidence and sharpened our focus as we plan for the future.

We remain passionate about the importance of play, and agree with US psychologist Kay Redfield Jamison when she says: "Play is not a luxury. Play is a necessity". Play is not an optional extra to be added once the "real" needs of the child are met. It is a right, recognised by Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is as essential to a child's wellbeing as education and protection. What's more it is the very best means of supporting both education and protection.

Play is especially important in communities facing chronic stress, poverty, violence and instability. It's one of the most accessible, culturally adaptable and cost-effective ways of strengthening resilience and restoring connection. Through play, children regulate their nervous systems. They practise problem-solving. They build language. They rehearse co-operation. They experience joy and freedom. And, importantly, they experience being seen.

For families under pressure, play builds relationships. It reduces stress, opens communication, softens conflict and brings laughter into the home. For youth leaders, it becomes a vehicle for purposeful leadership. In this context, protecting a child's right to play is preventative. It interrupts cycles of disconnection and builds the relational foundations that support learning, mental health and community cohesion.

This year has also been a year of strengthening the governance of our organisation. We celebrated our 15th consecutive clean audit and maintained 100% compliance with the Department of Social Development. We were selected for a significant three-year organisational strengthening grant by the staff of investment management company Allan Gray. This will enable us to shift from being a reactionary 'survival mode' organisation toward a sustainable NGO with long-term goals. Our governance structures remain strong, our partnerships are deepening, and our Youth Play Ambassador Leadership Team is strengthening community ownership from within. Sisanda is growing and transforming.

We are well aware that the realities facing the communities we serve remain challenging, but 2025 has shown us again that connection can change things. When young people learn to manage their emotions and discover their voice, when families play together and when children feel safe enough to express themselves and experience magic, resilience grows.

Sisanda FunDaytion is not just running programmes. We are nurturing leaders. We are strengthening families. And, in doing so, we are building communities where children can truly experience the joy of being children.

Dr Marth Evans, Co-founder, Chair of the board

## 2. ORGANISATION OVERVIEW

**In Xhosa, Sisanda means “We Are Growing”.**

### **Vision**

Our vision is a world in which all children experience the joy of being children, and develop the relationships and resilience to thrive.

### **Mission**

Our mission is to inspire and empower positive role models who, through a trauma-informed and play-based approach, uplift mental well-being and foster resilience in vulnerable children.

### **Context**

South African children in underserved communities face compounding challenges that affect their mental health, development, and future opportunities. Many grow up in environments marked by poverty, violence, under-resourced schools, food insecurity, and limited access to safe spaces for play and growth.

In parts of Cape Town, high youth unemployment, gangsterism, substance abuse, and child-headed households intensify toxic stress and trauma within families. Research shows elevated levels of depression, anxiety, and trauma symptoms in township communities, linked to sustained socio-economic strain and exposure to crime. Many young people carry emotional burdens without structured support or positive role models, increasing vulnerability to low self-esteem, disengagement, and harmful behaviours.

There is a critical need for safe, relational spaces where children and youth can experience belonging, develop leadership, and rebuild confidence. We believe that strengthening relationships is the most powerful protective factor for children.

### **Communities we serve**

We focus on communities where children are at heightened risk of trauma and toxic stress. Our core Youth Play Ambassador teams are based in Gugulethu, Manenberg and Nyanga in Cape Town.

Through partnerships in the health, education, and social sectors, we also reach additional at-risk children and youth across Cape Town.

## Our Background

Founded in 2009 by Daniella Mark, Nicky Seymour, Melissa Wallace, and Martha Evans, Sisanda FunDaytion emerged from a transformative experience in Khayelitsha, Cape Town. While working with teenagers, Daniella learned that their greatest Christmas wish was simply to visit the beach—a mere 5km from their home, yet a world apart from their reality. This experience ignited a deep awareness of the stark contrasts between their lives and her own, leading to a beach day that brought joy and fostered connections across cultural and economic divides. The day's success highlighted the profound impact of immersive experiences, inspiring the founders to create an organisation dedicated to connecting individuals through play and building resilience.

In partnership with organisations such as HCI Foundation's 'Community Transport Initiative', Truwoths, Omega Air and Spur Foundation, our efforts have for 16 years connected children with positive role models, introducing them to new experiences. Since 2020, we have intensified our focus on empowering youth and built the Sisanda Youth Play Ambassadors Programme. The initiative aims to foster a sense of agency and reduce poverty's cycle by transforming youth into positive role models for children and families in their communities and equipping them to ignite play, strengthen their own relationships and embrace a holistic understanding of well-being.

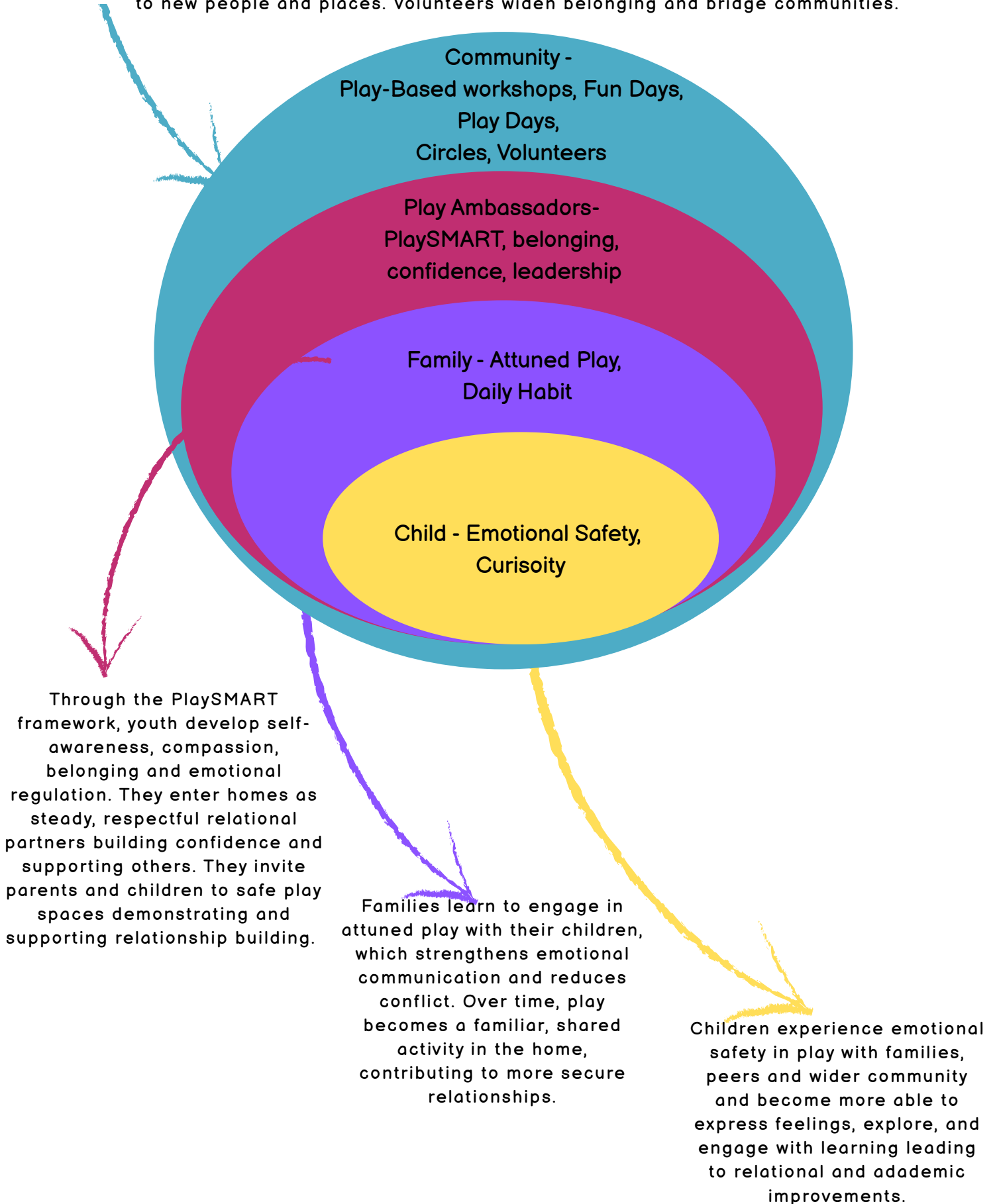
By intentionally using play and novel, stimulating experiences as a vehicle for connection, we have seen increased confidence, strengthened social and emotional development, and positive ripple effects into academic engagement, parental involvement, and motivation to grow.

## Our Approach



# Theory of Change

In a context of chronic stress, fractured relationships and historic mistrust; Sisanda FunDaytion creates emotionally safe spaces through Play-based workshops, Play@Home, Fun Days, PlayDays and Circles, exposing children, youth and caregivers to new people and places. Volunteers widen belonging and bridge communities.



## 3. ACHIEVEMENTS IN THIS PERIOD

### Organisational Strengthening

We held a multi-stakeholder strategy event, completed an external evaluation, and secured a three-year organisational strengthening grant through the Allan Gray Philanthropy Initiative Staff Campaign, and continued to grow donor relationships from previous years.

### YPA Leadership Team Established

Four Youth Play Ambassadors formed our first YPA Leadership Team, strengthening recruitment, programme consistency, and community ownership.

### One-year YPA Programme Pilot Completed

We completed the first pilot year of our structured one-year YPA Development Programme, gaining valuable learning to refine the model. And we have over 40 youths either wanting to continue into 2026 OR electing to start in 2026. This indicates the success of 2025.

### Impact

Reviewing the evidence of our impact we are encouraged with signs that our approach is making positive change. 79% of YPAs report feeling more positive about their futures, after making significant contributions to their communities. 59% of Families following the Play@Home programme have reported improved family relationships, 61% of have noticed changes in the way their children relate to others and many have noticed changes in academic engagement.

### Reach

We **connected 1 554 people** this year across ability, health status, age, demographic, personality style. Through Play@Home, Fun Days, Community PlayDays, and Resilience Toolbox trainings we continued to be creative in how we meet people where they are. This creates safe, stimulating spaces where they get to connect and grow.



## 4. SUSTAINABILITY STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE

Our Board of Trustees includes three of our co-founders: Martha Evans, Melissa Wallace and Nicky Seymour

We are supported by an advisory network providing strategic oversight in finance, governance, and monitoring and evaluation. Tim Bashal (retired KPMG Partner) and Dr Kath Morse continue to offer invaluable input.

**Our core staff team** has been in place since 2020:

- Nicky Seymour – Executive Director (part-time)
- Melanie Lippert – Operations Manager (part-time)
- Nkulee Gwele – Youth Play Ambassador Programme Coordinator (full-time)

Nkulee first engaged with Sisanda FunDaytion in 2012 as a programme beneficiary. Over the years, she has grown through volunteer and staff roles and now leads the development of our Play Ambassador network, a powerful example of sustainable community leadership.

In early 2025, we said goodbye to two valued team members Megan de Villiers (Communications and Fundraising) and Leesa Bright (Fun Day Programmes). Leesa continues to support the organisation in a volunteer and advisory capacity, particularly with large-scale children's festivals.

At the end of 2025, we welcomed Bulelo Shinta, who strengthens our monitoring and evaluation capacity as we grow.

**Our four-member Youth Play Ambassador leadership team** plays a vital role in expanding our reach and strengthening community ownership: Analisa Kakaza joined us as a YPA in 2020, and Yamkela and her Sister Soso joined in 2023, while Likhona started as a YPA in 2024 and is an assistant leader.



We maintain **strong governance and compliance** practices to ensure accountability, transparency, and responsible stewardship of resources. Annual independent audits have been conducted by Nolands since 2010. We remain compliant with the Department of Social Development and have successfully completed Community Chest due diligence processes.

Sisanda FunDaytion holds BBBEE Level 1 status and maintains annual Personal Injury and Public Liability Insurance.

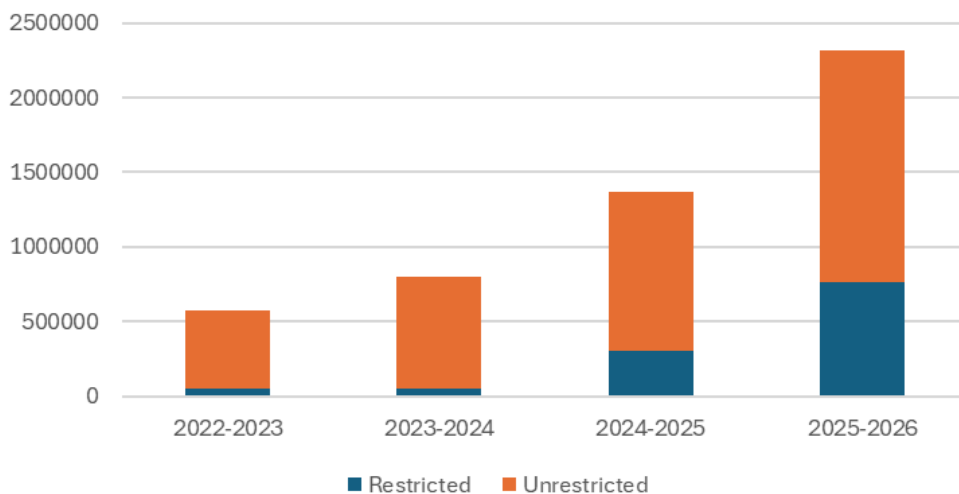
Our core governance framework is supported by comprehensive policies, including a Child Protection Policy, POPIA compliance measures, a Finance Policy, and a Human Resources Policy. To safeguard the children and families we serve, all YPAs require a Police Check and volunteers are required to provide police clearance or sign a formal declaration confirming no convictions under the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 2007.

# 4. SUSTAINABILITY

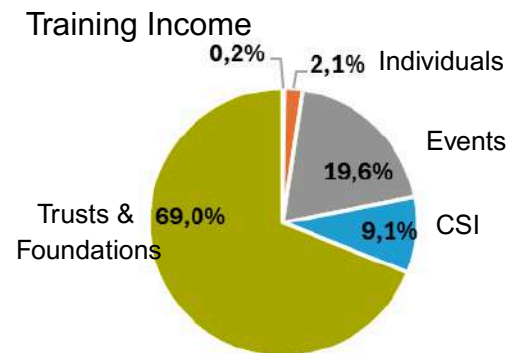
## INCOME & FINANCIAL PARTNERS

Strengthening financial sustainability remains a strategic priority. We have steadily increased income year on year through improved planning, working closely with long-term funders and being agile and responsive to new opportunities (see graph below which reflects our financial year). Tim Bashall, retired partner of KPMG, has offered guidance strengthening our financial oversight and decision-making. Our income generation during the 2025-2026 financial year has set us up for better planning moving into the next year.

In this period we began a significant three-year partnership with Allan Gray's philanthropy initiative. Their investment in organisational strengthening marks a transition from operating in survival mode toward building long-term sustainability and organisational strength.



**INCOME FROM 2020 TO 2026 ACCORDING TO FINANCIAL YEAR (MARCH TO FEB)**



**INCOME STREAMS - 2025**

We are deeply grateful for our long-standing financial

- Omega Air (since 2010)
- CP Trust (partner since 2016)
- Zestcore (since 2016)
- Rolf-Nussbaum Foundation (since 2020)
- Converge Consulting (since 2019)
- Wings of Support (KLM Staff Foundation) (2024)

We equally value new partnerships:

- Bridge-Ed Foundation
- Different.org
- Community Chest
- Allan Gray's philanthropy initiative

Our annual campaigns continue to increase visibility and engagement while strengthening our funding base. These include: R4R (Runners for Resilience), Steps4Smiles, Do Different Campaign and significantly Major Vs Masterchef with LED Lighting SA raising funds for the 2026 Children's Festival.

These initiatives bring energy, community participation, and broader awareness to our mission. 10

# PARTERS IN 2025: FINANCIAL AND IN-KIND DONATIONS

With Connection as a key driver for us, we work hard to nurture relationships with people and organisations joining us on this journey.

We are enormously grateful for the part you have played in 2025!

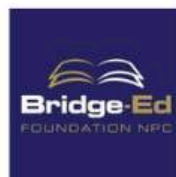
The CP Trust  
Foundation



Omega Air



LED Lighting SA



HEI foundation



since 1924  
EAGLE LIGHTING  
100 Years of Excellence!



MYDIFFERENCE



Paula Youens - Linda Balme - Tsholo Mshuru - Michael Forth - Pam Knight - ChangeX  
Derek Patrick - Dance 4 all - O'Donovan family - Dylan Henick - Tony Warrenner  
Kathleen Kitschke - Philipa Skowno - Tim Bashall

# PARTNERS IN 2025: PROGRAMMES IMPLEMENTATION



INTERNATIONAL  
SCHOOL  
OF CAPE TOWN



## 4. SUSTAINABILITY

### PARTNERSHIPS – INSPIRING AND GROWING IMPACT

Partnerships are central to our work. They strengthen our governance, deepen programme quality, expand our reach, and amplify our mission of Connection through Play. A main partner of ours spanning many years is **Khanyisa Community Church** in Manenberg. Together with their Cool Kids Programme and New Day Foundation. We are fortunate to use their facilities for many of our events and in turn, our programmes strengthen local connection and support networks in Thambo village community.

Our partnership with **SHAWCO (Students Health and Welfare Centres Organisation of University of Cape Town)** deepened in 2025. SHAWCO members delivered training to our YPAs on Inclusive Play and Community Referral Systems, while students attended our sessions on Resilience, Emotional Regulation, and the value of play.



**SHAWCO OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST  
DELIVERING A SESSION ON  
INCLUSION TO OUR YPA LEADERS**

**Betty Stockigt**, psychologist with additional human resource background from Germany, has spent some time with us in-person and remotely giving her valuable input to our YPAs. Another new relationship with **Fundi Digital** has been wonderful with offering a new hiking club to our YPAs and some technical support with our Annual Reporting.

A long-standing relationship with **LED Lighting South Africa** led to the launch of the first large-scale **Children’s Festival** in 2025. What began as a Fun Day concept grew into a city-supported initiative, now known as the Sunshine and Smiles Festival. The festival held at the beginning of the year expanded from 500 (2025) to 800 (2026) children from residential care facilities and is set to continue as an annual event.

**Project Playground** supported child-protection training through social work expertise and partnered with us on community events, including Single Parent Workshops and celebrations. **Dance4All** have helped with creative fundraising, bringing high energy through Zumba to several events. In collaboration with **ChangeX** (LEGO-funded initiative) and Kids Collab, we implemented a joint project enhancing physical development through play.

**Resilience Toolbox (RTB)**, a collaborative training platform between Sisanda FunDaytion and Resilience Hub, led by Nicky Seymour, provides the Resilience Zones and Resilience Toolbox models and supports training for parents and community organisations.

Through **NASCEE** and **the Learning Trust**, we remain connected to the after-school and education sectors, strengthening our capacity and partnerships.

# VOLUNTEER NETWORKS

We value engaging youth volunteer groups, including school Interact clubs, as well as local and international students. In 2025, 155 volunteers supported our programmes. Fun Days create meaningful opportunities for volunteers to connect with children and Youth Play Ambassadors from underserved communities while experiencing active citizenship in practice.

The International School of Hout Bay participated in our large-scale Fun Day for children from residential care facilities, later inviting us to present to their student body to inspire civic engagement, a partnership continuing in 2026. Foreign exchange students from the Grow Abroad programme also participated, immersing themselves in South African community life through inclusive play experiences.

Volunteers consistently reflect on the power of connection:

"It gives the kids opportunities to have different kinds of role models and engage with adults playing games with them."

"When your body is doing something like jumping, your mind will also be there. It makes you forget about your stress levels."

"I didn't expect to see this much joy and learning through play, it's something we can bring into our own homes."

The diversity of our volunteer network demonstrates that Sisanda FunDaytion is building bridges across age, culture, and social divides, inspiring connection for everyone involved.

"No one was left behind, it was all about teamwork and connection."



**ST. JOSEPHS SPECIAL SCHOOL FUN DAY HAS A WONDERFUL VOLUNTEER TURNOUT**

# 5. PROGRAMMES AND IMPACT

2024

2025

YOUTH PLAY  
AMBASSADORS  
31



YOUTH PLAY  
AMBASSADORS  
34



CHILDREN  
951



CHILDREN  
1270



201 PARENTS &  
CARERS  
131 VOLUNTEERS



233 PARENTS & CARERS  
155 VOLUNTEERS  
321 TRAINED



6 FUN DAYS & 5 CPDS  
2 PLAY@HOME  
9 WORKSHOPS



6 FUN DAYS & 5 CPDS  
2 PLAY@HOME  
15 WORKSHOPS



# OVERVIEW OF ANNUAL PROGRAMME

## **Connecting through Play: Opening pathways to emotional safety and growth.**

In 2025 we ran our 5 main interconnected programmes each with several smaller projects reaching our three main communities and several organisations beyond this. Main programmes are: Youth Play Ambassador Programme, Play@Home, Fun Days, Community PlayDays and Resilience Toolbox Workshops.

Through our programmes, we bridge generational, cultural, and social divides by identifying and equipping local changemakers who are best positioned to lead. Through a simple, practical, trauma-informed and play-based approach, we enable sustainable individual and community growth.

### **External Evaluation**

We were very pleased to have benefitted from our first formal external evaluation. In November, Dr Kath Morse did a desk-top review of our resources, approach and data, combined with one focus group discussion with YPA leadership and SF team and integrated responses to questions from SF director. A full report can be accessed through the website, with summary points here.

### **Main reflections**

'Sisanda is scalable, but only if scale is understood as the thoughtful expansion of relational capacity, not the multiplication of activities. PlaySMART shapes the YPA; the YPA reshapes the caregiver-child relationship; shared play becomes habit; community spaces, volunteers, and culturally rooted play practices widen and stabilise belonging. Any scaling strategy that preserves this sequence will maintain impact.'

The PlaySmart model is relational, experiential, and cumulative, the more contexts in which attunement is encountered, the more durable the change.

'Children respond directly to these relational changes. They become more expressive, confident, and willing to seek help when needed. Some caregivers and YPAs note improvements in school engagement and peer relationships. In several cases, strengthened trust in caregivers has enabled children to share experiences of distress that they had previously held alone.

### **In One Sentence**

Sisanda FunDaytion's model develops regulated, attuned young leaders who nurture playful, emotionally connected relationships in homes and community settings, creating a developmental pathway that builds family resilience, broadens social belonging, and grows youth leadership capacity.

# FRAMEWORKS UNDERPINNING OUR PROGRAMMES

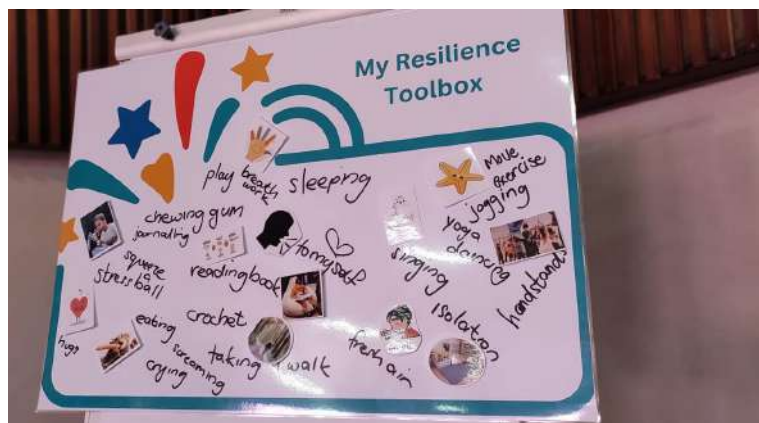
Our primary foundation is the use of Play, because this is the language of childhood, entrenched in the rights of the child, and backed by research as being effective for building resilience, stimulating learning and strengthening relationships.

This framework not only benefits Play Ambassadors personally but also empowers them to positively influence the children they work with.



The PlaySMART approach emphasises that by focusing on trauma awareness, building relationships, self-awareness, emotion management, and engaging in positive activities, individuals can enhance their resilience. We effectively reach a wide audience by using play as the vehicle, and have a greater potential to sustain impact when choice and enjoyment are embedded.

To be PlaySMART we share the Resilience Zones Framework which helps to increase self-awareness, create a common language around mental health, and empowers individuals to accept themselves and others and take control of their emotional regulation.



To be PlaySMART one needs to learn emotional regulation and the Resilience Toolbox symbolises the control we can have if we intentionally attend to what strengthens, empowers, regulates and supports our unique systems.

To be PlaySMART we practice expressing ourselves and having conversations through the use of COSMO Kids conversation toolkits.



# DESCRIPTION OF YOUTH PLAY AMBASSADOR PROGRAMME 2025

The Youth Play Ambassador (YPA) Programme is the cornerstone of our organisation. Through the PlaySMART framework and body-based regulation tools, we equip young leaders (ages 15–25) to regulate themselves, attune to others, and facilitate safe, joyful spaces for children and caregivers.

The programme goals are

- Personal Growth
- Strengthened Resilience & Emotional Regulation
- Contribution to Caregiver–Child Relationships
- A Growing Network of Relational Leaders

In 2025, we consolidated all YPA activities into a structured one-year leadership programme. This improved administrative clarity, deepened impact, and created more transparent developmental pathways for youth at different stages of engagement. The open structure encourages peer mentoring and community ownership, with experienced YPAs recruiting, mentoring, and holding newer members accountable.

Our dedicated YPA Leadership Team coordinates community-based teams strengthening sustainability and peer-led impact.

Youth Play Ambassadors are offered more than 60 opportunities each year in which they can choose to show up for their own growth, leadership, and community engagement. These opportunities fall into two broad categories:

**Personal growth (YPA-Focused):** Opportunities designed to increase self-awareness, build social-emotional skills, and connect with peers. These include Let's Connect Sessions, Peer planning & reflection sessions and ad hoc enrichment activities – such as the Fundi Digital Hiking Club and participation in events like the Community Mental Health Convention.

**Active Citizenship (Community-Focused):** YPAs apply their learning in service of others including delivering the Play@Home Programme, Fun Days and Community PlayDays and other ad hoc opportunities when requested through partners eg New Day Holiday Club, Project Playground birthday celebrations, St. Joseph's Paediatric Hospital Parent Workshop

“This programme is shaping the future leaders of our community. It has reignited the spirit of play.”

Church leader



# DESCRIPTION OF PLAY PROGRAMMES 2025

2 Play@Home  
with 91  
families & 214  
Children

**Play@Home Programme:** Trained YPAs help families integrate play, emotional regulation, and connection into daily routines by supporting families through guided home visits over a two-month cycle. This programme started in 2020 in an informal way. In 2025 with our 2 annual programmes we reached 91 families, an increase of 20 from 2024. Growth was driven by increased YPA engagement and strengthened leadership support structures.

**Fun Day Outings:** YPA and children, mostly from their own communities have a shared experience beyond their usual contexts. These experiences expand horizons, build confidence, and reduce social barriers by bringing together participants, including volunteers, from different backgrounds in shared recreational spaces.

6 Fun days  
with 807  
children

<p><b>Childrens Festival - Feb</b></p> <p>500 children from a range of Childrens homes were treated to a magical festival just for them. 77 Volunteers and 16 YPAs joined in.</p>	<p><b>Wings and Waves, Muizenburg Beach Day - March</b></p> <p>34 children between 7 &amp; 12 from Gugulethu and Tambo Village cooled off with 14 YPAs and 5 volunteers</p>	<p><b>Youth UnMuted – June</b></p> <p>34 children between 7 &amp; 12 from Gugulethu and Tambo Village practiced noticing thier feelings and speaking out with 10 YPAs and 4 Volunteers</p>
<p><b>Mandela Day - Zip Zap Circus – July</b></p> <p>67 kids &amp; YPAs from Gugulethu, Tambo Village &amp; Nyanga were inspired and nourished, while also being warmed up with our Winter Warmer campaign.</p>	<p><b>Spring is in the Air – Sept</b></p> <p>43 kids and 14 YPAs from Gugulethu, Tambo Village &amp; Nyanga enjoyed some nature time and free movement in Greenpoint Park with 4 volunteers.</p>	<p><b>St. Josephs School Carnival Cool to be Kind – Nov</b></p> <p>Over 150 variously abled kids, 38 Volunteers and 17 YPAs got to know each other immersing themselves in adaptive activities in new and fun ways .</p>

**Community PlayDays (CPD).** YPA lead low-cost, community-based play opportunities. CPDs provide accessible spaces for connection within communities. Parents frequently attend, allowing us to model play-based engagement and share practical stress-management tools. A developing partnership model with SHAWCO integrates access to health and rehabilitation services during selected events.

5 CPD  
with  
249  
children

<p><b>SHAWCO CPD - Mobile Health Clinic - March &amp; August</b></p> <p>Children, parents, young Play Ambassadors, students and healthcare providers from Tambo Village came together to experience the impact of play on relationships and health and identify and support those in need of healthcare services.</p>	<p><b>Tambo CPD May, October</b></p> <p>You Matter: May was our biggest turnout yet: 63 Children, 33 Parents together with 22 YPAs and 5 Volunteers. October had 45 children and only 3 parents which was attributed to several funerals coinciding.</p>	<p><b>Play@Home Christmas Party - December</b></p> <p>54 children and 34 parents were celebrated in Christmas style by 19 YPAs and 4 volunteers. Connecting before the end of the year showed</p>
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**Soso, a YPA, reflected on running the May You Matter CPD which had an enormous turnout**

*"This wasn't just volunteering, it felt like we were shaping something bigger for our community."*

# Description of Resilience Toolbox Training Play-based and Trauma-informed workshops



The Resilience Toolbox team (Sisanda FunDaytion + Resilience Hub + Youth Play Ambassadors) has been busy sharing a trauma-informed approach to understanding our body-brain connection and to supporting emotional regulation and managing stress.

Since 2022 this collaboration has led to 19 short courses reaching 678 participants.

Sisanda FunDaytions role includes referral, co-training and supporting Youth Play Ambassadors in training experience and exposure.

This year we delivered 9 workshops reaching 321 participants.

- Childcare workers from Sikhule Sonke in Khayelitsha
- Staff and Management of Omega Air one of our long time donor
- Staff of Herschel Senior School
- Counsellors working for Lifeline
- Management & facilitators of Music Works an NGO based in Stellenbosch
- Parents, Staff and Management of St. Joseph's Paediatric Hospital
- Bursary Students of HCI Foundation one of our donors
- Parents, teachers and childcare workers of Cape Kidz, an NGO in Muizenberg



# PROGRAMME IMPACT: YOUTH PLAY AMBASSADOR'S

## Participants - Our reach

Between 2020 and the end of 2025 we have had 79 YPAs participate in our programmes  
They come from three communities:

- ① 43 From Gugulethu,
- ② 25 From Thambo Village, Manenberg,
- ③ 11 From KTC Nyanga

## 33 Youth Play Ambassadors in 2025

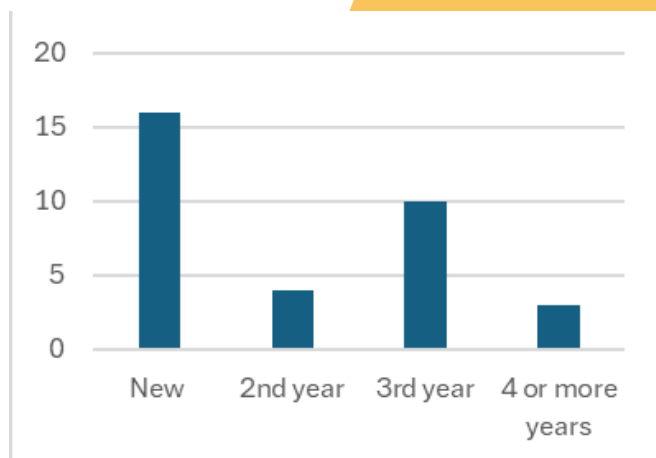
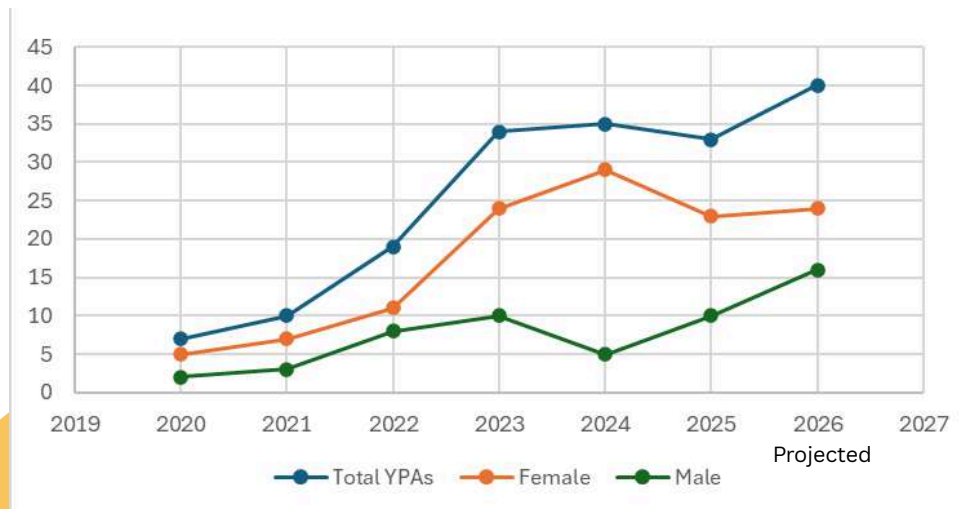
16 YPAs were new.

22 Females and 11 Males

19 were under 18 yo

Youth participation has increased steadily since 2020. The primary recruitment tool is word of mouth however many YPAs were child beneficiaries of previous programmes.

Typically more participants are female however the numbers of males is increasing, with positive signs of what we can expect for the 2026 year.



It is important to keep our more experienced YPAs feeling like they are growing and adding value, so they continue to participate and support the new, young, and less confident group.

The table on the left shows the spread of experience and the peer network available for support and learning. Three of the YPAs have participated for over four years adding a wonderful mentor component.

The peer learning space becomes richer when experience, confidence, new perspectives and ideas come together.

## YPA OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

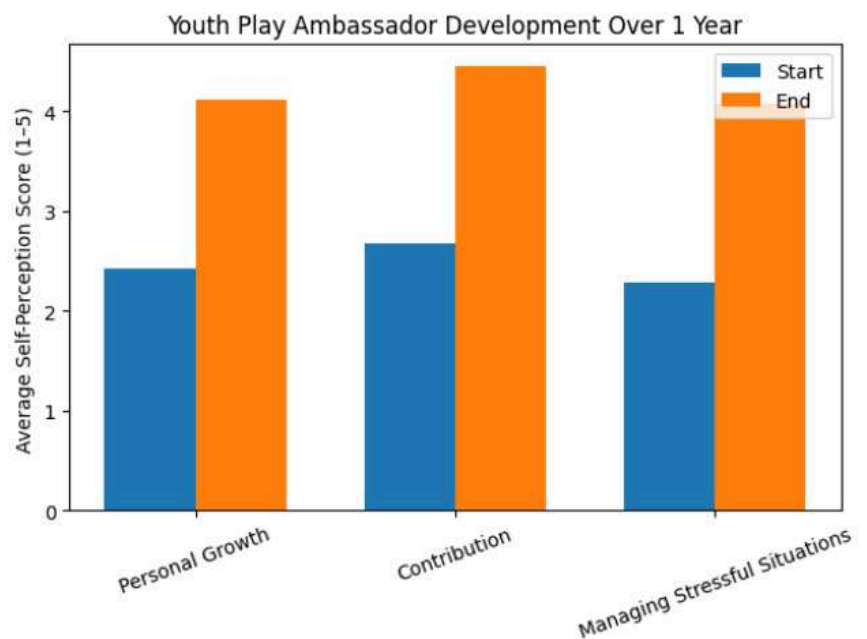


'The core driver of change in Sisanda is relationship-based transformation of young people, through PlaySMART, which they carry into families.'

– Dr Kath Morse, External Evaluator

Over the course of one year, Youth Play Ambassadors demonstrated significant self-percieved growth across all measured areas: Personal growth, Managing stressful situations (resilience), and Contribution.

Table: Average self-perception scores of 23 Youth Play Ambassadors across three developmental domains at the start of the programme and after one year.



Scores increased significantly across all primary categories, from approximately 2.4 at baseline to above 4.1 by the end of the programme, indicating substantial development in personal confidence, resilience, and leadership capacity.

Participants reported increased Personal Growth (awareness of their strengths, improved communication and relationship skills), and greater ability to manage stressful situations (managing stress and seeking support when needed). Strong gains were also observed in contributing positively to others (how I show up with others, and how I engage with people who are different to me).

These results highlight the programme's role in equipping young leaders with the skills needed to support both their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of their communities. However, the assessment relied on self-reported scores from Youth Play Ambassadors. While self-perception data provides valuable insights results may be influenced by personal interpretation or social desirability. We gather additional data such as levels of participation and qualitative feedback to deepen our learning.

# 1. PERSONAL GROWTH: AWARENESS OF STRENGTHS, IMPROVED COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

Many YPAs entered the programme feeling shy, disconnected, or unsure of their abilities. Over the year, they reported personal transformation and growth. Opportunities are tiered according to experience, allowing YPAs to grow progressively in responsibility and confidence. Exposure is also intentionally to diverse environments, people, and roles to reduce fear of the unknown and builds confidence, competence, and self-worth.

- Familiar and unfamiliar spaces
- Diverse community, cultural and economic contexts
- Multiple generations, young to old
- Children with disabilities or illness
- Roles ranging from supporting to planning and leading
- Individual, small-group, and large-group facilitation

Owam

"It made me realise that life has two rules. Rule number one never quit, and rule number two, remember rule number one."

Qhamani

"It has made me fall in love with people, especially kids. I always wanted to be alone with my friends that I know, so being a Youth Play Ambassador has impacted and helped me a lot. It's given me the chance to be able to understand myself."

Thabisa

"Personally, I have improved with my patience and anger, and self-doubt. Because of all the work I have done with my community, it has made confident."

Asavela

"To be honest, it has impacted me in many ways. First, to get out the inner child in me that has been stuck for many years. Growing up, I did not recall having a childhood time for myself, now seeing kids play and have fun brings joy in me. My dream of being a teacher is coming true, it is amazing to me and I have got to know people that I think are my second home. I love the new me."

A follow up of 39 YPAs after one year, some still in our programmes and others not, revealed that 32 ie 82% have **better relationships with families and friends.**

Lindokuhle

"I have seen a big change with my family. They now can speak family matters to me."

Aya

"I was scared to be in front of adults and children, to talk or to be their role model. Now I can communicate with others, play and have fun. I also didn't used to talk much about myself to my friends and family and now I got this chance and it has helped to take out my stress."



## 2.MANAGING STRESSFUL SITUATIONS: EMOTIONAL REGULATION & SEEKING SUPPORT

**91% (21 of 23) of YPAs say they handle stressful situations better than they did at the start of the programme.** They consistently referenced the practical tools gained through Sisanda's Resilience Toolbox and Resilient Zones framework.



*Yamkela (YPA Leader)*

*"I'm so much grateful for the Resilience Toolbox. I use it at school and at home it helps with managing my emotions so well. I used to think I had stage fright but now I'm able to stand in front of people and explain. When I was hospitalised because I was struggling with breathing, I used Sisanda breathing techniques. They helped a lot."*

*Anelisa (YPA Leader)*

*"There were times this year with my internship and exams when I felt like giving up. I felt drained, yet the grounding exercises helped me in calming down and returning to myself. The Resilience Zones helped me acknowledge how I felt, accept and let those unwanted feelings go."*

*Enathi*

*"The programme reminded me that it's okay not to be okay. Its ok to have emotions, we all have our bad days, but how we handle it matters the most. I now have coping mechanisms in my resilience toolbox."*

*Sibulele*

*"I have learnt how to manage, identify and accept my emotions without necessarily having to seek for a therapist. It changed my perception of mental health and well-being."*



### 3. CONTRIBUTION

The programme creates opportunities for youth to contribute to their own communities and to other vulnerable children. Their eagerness to get involved is always commendable.

This year the 34 YPAs showed up: **22 of them ran the 1st Play@Home programme and 24 ran the second 2 month programme. We held 14 Saturday Fun Days and Community PlayDays. 40 % of the YPAs did 7 or more of these. In total they filled 234 roles** engaging with and caring for children. They build compassion and confidence through these programme, learning to attune to others needs while growing leadership skills.

"I have learnt how to be more like a brother to my neighbours and my community at large."

"I loved being a Play Ambassador. I have become the greatest mom to my son."

I have learnt to embrace people who are shy, quiet, introverts, those who are different (like autism). To embrace others' insecurity, treat them as special and with love.

"I'm proud of myself to say I have made changes to people because of Sisanda FunDaytion. I had a 12 yrs old boy in my workplace who was very naughty, sometimes arrogant to other kids. Instead of me isolating him, shouting or embarrassing him like everyone else, I showed him compassion, kindness, and love. I gave the attention he was seeking. He seemed to change, to be more disciplined. His school mark also went up."

"I've been able to support events at schools, church, and community programs where I used those same skills I learnt at Sisanda to bring people together, encourage participation, and make activities more engaging. It's shown me that what I learned as a Play Ambassador can be applied in many spaces to make a positive impact."

"I am going to share a story of this boy. He is shy, and would never play with others. He is new to the community from Eastern Cape. Something inside me told me to visit and greet them. I took him to the [Community PlayDay]. The mother was so happy that someone finally made him smile. The boy now is having many friends in the community, even in school."

"The Youth Play Ambassador programme has been the best since day 1. As I began to get used to the programme, everything started to change in a good way. I even changed people's lives - not only my peers I am also talking about the elderly people needing a hand of help."

## 4. LEADERSHIP, FUTURE ORIENTATION AND HOPE

Our YPAs are in varied life stages. Some are in school others tertiary education, employment, or seeking opportunities. They therefore draw different benefits from the programme. To understand if our programme has an impact beyond we gather feedback from YPAs who have completed a year or more even if they have moved on to their next stage of study, work, or life transition.

The data below reflects self-reported impact (n=39):

- Developed skills that have helped with my education – 17/39. 43%
- Developed skills that have helped with getting a job – 16/39. 41%
- I have developed goals for my life – 29/39. 74%
- I feel more positive about the future – 31/39. 79%

The programme's impact extends beyond immediate activities, shaping identity, leadership capacity, and future direction.

Mariza

"I have to navigate difficulties shared by the less experienced YPAs that I mentor, this has helped me to grow. My peers and leaders supported and affirmed me, while challenging and pushing me. My Resilience Toolbox also helped. I have helped them to solve problems. I am so proud of myself."

Onele

"Through Sisanda, I was able to identify my passion. Before joining the program, I was indecisive about what I wanted to study. Now, I know that I want to study teaching, as I have developed a heart for children."

Dineo

"Being a Play Ambassador has changed how I see myself and influenced my life decisions. I want to dedicate my life to working with people, especially children and young people. I want to continue in leadership, community development, and creating safe spaces where others can grow"

These reflections indicate that the YPA Programme contributes meaningfully to leadership development, personal agency, and a strengthened sense of hope for the future.

Increasingly, experienced YPAs are also contributing to programme review, strategy discussions, and planning, enhancing local ownership and organisational relevance.



# PERSONAL JOURNEYS SHARED BY TWO YPAS

## Meet Esethu



Esethu is a proud Sisanda beneficiary whose journey reflects both hardship and growth. She joined Sisanda as a child and later became part of the YPA programme. Growing up in KTC as the middle child of four siblings, she learned to carry responsibility quietly. She lost her father at a young age, and her family later experienced the devastating loss of her brother. These experiences left her emotionally shaken. However, she says

“Participating in Sisanda’s programmes helped me remain resilient. During the time I was dealing with my brother’s loss, Sisanda became my anchor. Through leadership opportunities, and support from other YPAs, I found the strength to keep moving forward. Sisanda gave me opportunities of translating between English and isiXhosa in some of the programmes, and that helped me rebuild my confidence. In 2025 I was part of an internship programme; an opportunity I felt confident pursuing because of the leadership experience and self-belief I developed through Sisanda. The exposure I gained through Sisanda’s programmes strengthened my professional skills and expanded my sense of what is possible.”

“I would encourage anyone who wants to build confidence and develop leadership skills to join Sisanda. Growing up, I always called myself shy, but the truth is, I was hiding. I didn’t believe my voice mattered. Sisanda gave me opportunities to step forward, and each one helped me see my potential. Today, I speak in front of others especially in church, where I am part of children’s ministry. I lead, and I believe in myself in a way I never did before. I am planning to further my studies next year, and being part of an internship showed me that I am capable of more than I once imagined.”

## Meet Lihona

Three years ago, a quiet and reserved 16-year-old named Likhona joined our Play@Home programme. She kept to herself, rarely spoke, and was easy to overlook—but those who noticed her saw deep potential. Today, at 19, Likhona is a confident and committed Play Ambassador. Likhona is no longer just a participant—she’s a leader, shaping the future of her community.

“This programme had a profound impact on me, shaping my personality, beliefs, and skills in a meaningful way. Personally, I’ve become more outgoing and confident. I’m able to connect with people from different backgrounds now, and I truly believe that play brings people together, it closes gaps and builds real connections.

Through my role as a Play Ambassador, I discovered my passion for empowering others and creating meaningful connections. I’ve developed a stronger sense of self-belief and I now know that I can make a positive impact wherever I go. I understand my strengths and weaknesses better, and that’s helped me grow. Even through setbacks and loss, I’ve become more resilient, I bounce back.

I’ve also gained a deeper understanding of inclusivity. We all have different abilities, and I’ve found so much joy working with children with disabilities. It’s taught me patience, compassion, and what true connection really looks like.”

# PROGRAMME IMPACT: FAMILIES

## Beneficiaries - Our Reach

*'Caregiver change is not only instructional, it is also relational; it emerges through being seen, listened to, and invited into gentle play without judgment.'*

*Dr Kath Morse, External Evaluator*

Our Play@Home Programme and YPAs are reaching increasing numbers of parents and caregivers across Gugulethu (331 families since 2020), Tambo Village (124 families since 2022), and Nyanga (35 families since 2024).

Encouraging parent participation in training and workshops is a well-known challenge in child-focused programmes. So we start where they are at. YPAs and our partners identify families and invite them to participate. Some families request to join after seeing previous programmes in their community.

### 91 families participated in 2025.

Once signed up to the Play@Home programme we use play and consistent, relationship-based engagement in their home to gradually build trust and involvement. YPAs share simple resilience tools, introduce stress-management strategies, and use conversation cards (COSMO Kids) to spark meaningful dialogue at home. The skills they build in training, confidence, communication, creativity, and play flow directly into families. This is where new activities and pastimes are taking root and strengthening bonds.

Their trusted relationships with families encourages attendance of other community activities such as Sisanda Community PlayDays and Workshops. These opportunities create further moments for shared connection, peer support, and modelling of playful, emotionally attuned interactions. We are seeing the impact on parent-child relationships and the knock on effects in improvements in academic and social-emotional skills.

**PLAY + TIME + EMOTIONAL STEADINESS + TRUST = STRENGTHENED RELATIONSHIPS  
ACADEMIC, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL IMPROVEMENTS**



Year	Description and note on attendance	Children	Parents/ carers	YPA
2023 -April	Project Playground Gugulethu children 5-7 yrs	33	3	8
2024- May	PlayDay With Shawco for children 5-13 yrs	53	12	15
2025- May	PlayDay for 5 to 13 yo	63	32	22
2025- Aug	PlayDay With Shawco for 5-13 yo	52	20	21
2025- Dec	Christmas Party	54	34	19

YPAs and Parents showing up more consistently to CPDs.

# 1. PLAYTIME TOGETHER STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS

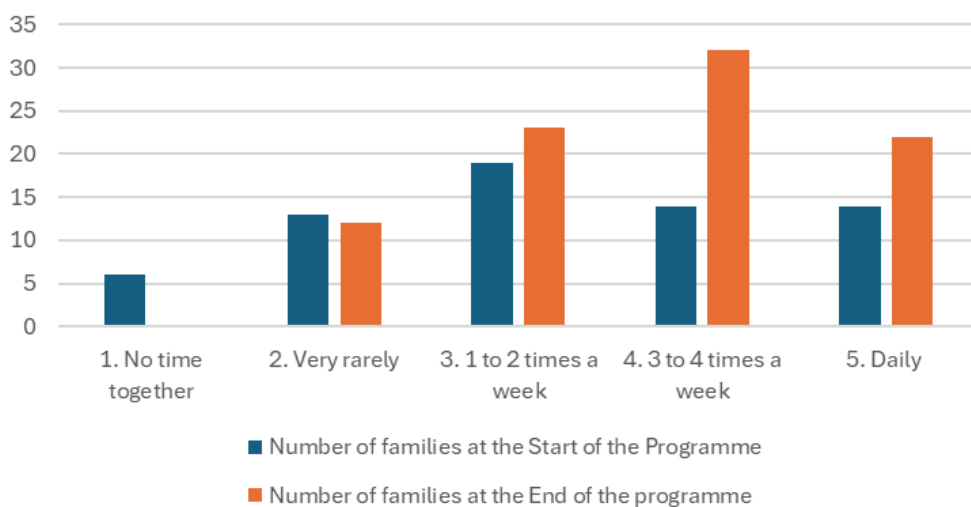
*'Sustaining factors are self-awareness, compassion and the habit of shared play.'*

– Dr Kath Morse, External Evaluator

Play@Home programme is designed with weekly check-ins from YPAs and tools to ignite daily playtimes. Community PlayDays and Fun Days stimulate creativity even further. We enquire about time spent together as a family and if our programmes spark shared interests that can help sustain this.

Many parents shared that before joining the programme, they were not spending enough quality time together as a family, often relying on television instead of interaction. After participating in Play@Home, families reported spending more intentional time together through play. The table below shows 66 families responses to the change in time together. The majority said they now enjoy playing together as a family. Families described becoming "a happier family" through shared play and connection.

Family Time (n = 66)



**Children are noticing and often asking for more time together**

"I will teach my family that play is for everyone. I'll even tell my father it's not only for girls!"

"I did not know that pastors and doctors can play too. Playing cricket with them was cool."

"I liked that the older kids [YPAs] talked to us, like we matter too."

## Play@Home Impact: A Mother's Journey with her 5 children

### BEFORE Play@Home

"I did not pay a lot of attention to them... Kids can be very annoying especially when they don't listen."

"My kids liked to fight and argue."

"I was always shouting."

"Even the eldest one didn't enjoy staying with me."

### AFTER Play@Home

"Now we spend time together playing. I even read my little one books, and I start conversations with my kids."

"My children are now able to correct each other... they even share things amongst each other."

"The 13yo boy now spends more time with me."

"It builds relationships and trust."

## 2. BETTER STRESS MANAGEMENT STRENGTHENS RELATIONSHIPS

*'Play is a social technology for connection, regulation and resilience'*

*Dr Kath Morse, External Evaluator*

By increasing awareness, steadiness and stress-management tools of YPAs we transfer information and increase modelling to parents and children. We share the Resilience Zones model in homes opening up conversation on emotional states and teach techniques such as breathing, movement and play to help reduce the build up of stress in our bodies. By experiencing, and reflecting on the impact we hope to sustain the renewed sense of empowerment they have gained.

**At the end of the programmes reaching 91 households 57% reported Reduced stress in the house.**

***Some quotes:***

*"When we feel stressful we do breathing exercises to calm"*

*"The small posters on emotions helped us with understanding how we feel"*

*"She's not so clingy to me anymore. She plays a lot."*

At the two-month follow-up parents reported continued changes in how stress is managed within the household. Before the programme, many struggled with unmanageable stress and lacked healthy coping strategies. Some acknowledged managing stress negatively. Following participation, families described adopting positive coping mechanisms, including:

- Playing together to manage stress
- Listening to music and sharing hobbies
- Playing music and dancing while doing household tasks
- Using calming techniques learned from Sisanda

**A Reflection after Play@Home:**

Before the programme the Granny shared that the household used to be tense, with lots of shouting, no team work. Discipline was left up to the her and she found this tough. She resisted the programme initially feeling it was just a way to keep the children at home, but she came to realise this was a family programme. Now she says 'I used to think play was only for kids, now I see how it helps all of us. I don't shout like before, I use the breathing my Play Ambassador taught us. My husband is also showing up more. The kids help each other, and their school work is better. We're a different family now'.

### 3. STRENGTHENED RELATIONSHIP LEAD TO SOCIAL, AND ACADEMIC PROGRESS

*The model is relationship, experiential, and cumulative – the more contexts in which attunement is encountered, the more durable the change.’ – Dr Kath Morse, External Evaluator*

Increasing a sense of safety for a child within their relationships, home and community can have an impact on relationships, social-emotional skills and learning engagement.

**59% reported improved family relationships and 61% noticed changes in how children relate to others**

A parent said “I used to shout at them, so Sisanda show me how to be calm. We play together now. He is very open now as he used to isolate himself from others. He can laugh freely.’



At the two-month follow up the majority of parents reported positive improvements in both **academic engagement and homework routines**. Parents observed that their children are now more enthusiastic about school and more responsible with their academic work. One parent shared: “Yes, every time he gets back from school, he tells us what he learnt.” This reflects increased interest in learning and improved communication between children and their caregivers about school activities.

Homework completion has also improved. A parent explained: “Homework is done on time because they know there are games to play once they are done.” This suggests that families are using positive reinforcement strategies introduced through the programme, encouraging responsibility while maintaining a balanced and playful home environment.

Some parents also noted **behavioural improvements linked to school performance**. One caregiver reported previously receiving frequent calls from the school regarding her child’s behaviour, but since participating in Sisanda’s programmes, those calls have decreased, indicating improved conduct and school adjustment.

**A reflection at the year-end Party:**

A Grandmother noted that she never misses any Sisanda programmes.

Her granddaughter was quiet and less interactive before meeting Sisanda, but she has improved greatly. She expressed gratitude especially for the use of English language during Sisanda programmes, as that has improved the child’s vocabulary and led to improvement in her schoolwork.



**The Lani Family**  
**Location: Cape Town KTC**

The Lani family lives in one of the townships in Cape Town, a community in Cape Town facing socio-economic challenges, high unemployment, and visible substance exposure.

The household consists of a single mother and her two children.

The mother acknowledged regular alcohol use, often in front of her children. Over time, she observed increasing behavioural difficulties in one child, including aggression, defiance, emotional outbursts, and imitation of adult language and behaviour at home and school.

**Tell us about the programme**

"Before joining the programme, my child struggled to follow instructions at school and often acted out aggressively or with disrespect. Even though the programme focuses on home support, I noticed that these changes also helped my child at school. Over time, I've seen real improvements. Aggressive incidents have decreased, emotional outbursts happen less often, and our relationship has become stronger. I can see that my child is calmer, communicates better, and our home feels more peaceful.

Play@Home really helped us connect in a healthier way."

"I didn't realise how much my child was copying me. The Play Ambassador helped me understand that my behaviour affects my child. I'm still learning, but play has helped us connect in a healthier way."

**Do you think other families will enjoy the program?**

"I believe other families would really enjoy the Play@Home programme. It gives you practical tools and guidance to connect with your children, manage behaviour, and create a calmer, happier home. Even small changes make a big difference, and it helps both parents and children feel supported and understood."

# SUMMING IT UP & PLANS FOR 2026

We are proud of the work we do and the care with which we do it. While the realities of the communities we serve — and the ongoing demands of sustainability — can feel heavy, 2025 has marked meaningful progress in both programme impact and organisational strengthening.

In 2026, we remain committed to strong governance, sound financial management, and building the capacity of our team and Youth Play Ambassadors (YPAs). We will further refine the structured one-year YPA programme and expand opportunities for youth to strengthen their leadership and facilitation skills. We also aim to grow partnerships, particularly with schools, and extend the reach of our Resilience Toolbox training for parents, caregivers, and teachers.

With the support of external consultants, we will continue strengthening our monitoring and evaluation systems and we will develop and begin implementing a structured three-year organisational capacity development plan.

This year has reaffirmed that Sisanda FunDaytion's work goes beyond play. Through youth leadership development, emotional regulation tools, family engagement, and safe play spaces, we see restored joy, strengthened relationships, and growing resilience — one child, one young leader, and one family at a time.

*"With good memories created with my kid I now remember that a family that connects and bonds together will have kids grow to be healthy, full of life and enthusiastic beings," - a mother*



'You can learn more about me [a child] in one hour of play than you can in one year of conversation'

PLATO