



Building Tomorrow, Today

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# Early Learning Resource Unit

## Family and Community Motivator Programme



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Public Benefit Org No: 930010808



## ELRU Vision

A good start in life for every child

## ELRU Mission

Building tomorrow, today by facilitating better child outcomes for children in vulnerable communities through effective early intervention programmes.

## Organisation overview

The Early Learning Resource Unit (ELRU) is a non-governmental organisation (NPO 003-285) and Public Benefit Organisation (PBO 930010808), authorised for the issuing of Section 18A donation certificates. We specialise in the delivery of quality Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes in impoverished communities.

Our footprint is established three South African provinces: Western Cape (includes Cape Town and Saldanha Bay municipal districts, and Cape Winelands) with additional service points in the Northern Cape and North West provinces. ELRU has been a pioneer in ECD and an advocate for child rights since 1978.



## About us

ELRU programmes are built on the premise that the parent is the child's first teacher. By building the capacity of adults we ensure that children are surrounded by circles of support—within the womb, in the home, and throughout each age and stage of their development. Comprehensive ELRU training and mentoring programmes provide pregnant women, caregivers, facilitators, practitioners and ECD principals with all they need to nurture and shape the children in their care.

Our aim is to create a safe environment for children where they are cared for, loved and where children don't just survive but they also thrive. This requires a collective effort of working together that will result in better child outcomes and improved preparedness for entry into Grade R.

Through integrated service delivery, ELRU concentrates on the essential, immediate needs of the child: social, physical, emotional development, cognitive development and wellbeing. Our holistic model of intervention is cemented through strong partnerships and collaboration with government, service providers and municipalities.

Through our interventions, ELRU aims to create a safe environment for children where they are loved, have access to quality early childhood development ECD programmes and where children don't just survive but they thrive. At the heart of our strategy ELRU remains committed to address the greatest challenges facing early childhood development: **access to quality** ECD services for **all** vulnerable children.

## The environment in which we work

In South Africa, six out of ten children are born into poverty with the zero to five age cohorts being most widely affected. Despite acknowledging the urgency, there is a major gap in service delivery, a lack of quality, and limited access to healthcare services. Undernourished, vulnerable infants and young children are especially at risk.

Poverty is also associated with poor maternal education, toxic maternal stress, depression, and inadequate stimulation in the home. Each one of these factors has a detrimental impact on a child's physical, psychosocial and cognitive development.

Another challenge is the accessibility of early learning interventions and quality thereof. Research indicates that 79% of children under age 2, and 1.1 million children aged 3–5 years, do not have access to an early learning programme (this includes a crèche, nursery school and playgroup). ECD services for the children age 0–5 are either non-existent, inaccessible or unaffordable, and for parents who can afford to send their child to an ECD Centre, the quality of learning is often totally inadequate.

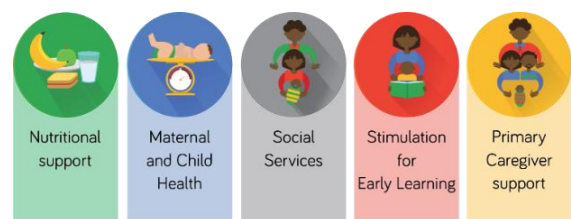
## The solution to the problem

Studies show that investment in ECD is one of the most effective long-term strategies to alleviate poverty and achieve social and economic equality in South Africa.

Urgent, early intervention is key. The first thousand days of life – from conception to age two – is a critical stage of rapid growth and an urgent one-off window-opportunity to shape essential brain connections in young children. It is more difficult for these connections to form later on in life and without early intervention, disparities widen over time. Even from within the womb, every early experience and encounter (both positive and negative), has a long-lasting impact on children's physical, psychosocial and cognitive advancement.

ELRU programmes provide children with holistic support by capacitating the parents and caregivers around them. Through this approach, pregnant women, caregivers, ECD practitioners and principals gain access to essential services that are critical for the healthy development of children. This includes nutrition, health services, social services, stimulation for early learning and support for the primary caregiver. Collectively, we refer to these integrated services as the 'Essential Package' of support for ECD.

ELRU facilitates access to essential services, each of which provides comprehensive ECD support that aligns with each age and developmental stage. They are delivered across all ELRU programmes and interventions, either directly or through referrals (where necessary).



The 'Essential Package' of support for ECD

## ELRU Programmes

ELRU's goal is to achieve universal coverage and capacitate the primary caregiver to ensure that all children living in poor communities, age 0–6, have access to quality ECD services via an ELRU Programme which includes the following:

1. Family and Community Motivator Programme: home visiting programme covering the first 1000 days (conception to age 2)
2. Playgroup Programme: non-centre based playgroup for children ages 3–5

3. Whole Centre Development Programme: centre-based development and enrichment programme for ECD Centre principals and practitioners (ages 0–6)
4. Training, capacity building, materials development and resource provision

## Family and Community Motivator Programme

ELRU's Family and Community Motivator (FCM) Programme is aimed at the first 1000 days (conception to 2 years) when the foundations of all learning take place and the home is the key enabling environment. The goal is to nurture the mother's well-being for positive parenting, and children's early development through good nutrition, maternal and child health care, opportunities to play and learn, as well as facilitating access to social protection services.

The pregnant mother or primary caregiver is mentored and equipped with tools and skills that will promote healthy growth and encourage the young children in their care to flourish. Referrals to health- and social services are made where necessary.

The FCM Programme is made up of three key components:

- Home visits
- Parenting workshops
- Play hubs

### Home Visits

Home visits focus on the pregnant mother or caregiver and their interaction and activities with the young children in their care.

During pregnancy, the focus is on nutritional status and maternal and child health as the mother prepares for the birth of her new-born. The FCMs ascertain whether the pregnant woman is up to date with her antenatal clinic visits and whether she is taking essential vitamins such as folic acid. She teaches the mother-to-be how to start early learning by demonstrating stimulation of the baby in the womb. The FCM also provides basic psychosocial support as anxiety or fears of being a new mother may be encountered. FCMs provide breastfeeding training and information about the postnatal services the mother should access as well.

From birth, caregivers receive training on how to stimulate the young child through the demonstration of age-appropriate learning activities and how they can continue the programme at home when the FCM is not there. Caregivers are also taught how to make home-made toys that are hugely beneficial for the optimal cognitive, sensory and motor development of their child. The FCM facilitates access to a range of government health interventions, ante- and postnatal nutritional support and social services, either directly during the home visit or—where necessary—through referrals (applications for social grants, birth registration, clinic visits).

### Parenting Workshops

Twice a month FCMs organise a workshop with all their families who are registered in the FCM programme while caregivers and neighbours in the community are also invited to attend. The workshops raise awareness about relevant topics and provide peer support for caregivers. All parents who attend receive a small meal at the end of the workshop.

Developed by the Department of Social Development and in collaboration with UNICEF, the Parenting

Programme centres around the 'Essential Package' for ECD support, with topics that are current and relevant to the struggles caregivers face daily. Some of the topics covered include the following:

- Health and nutrition
- Play and creativity
- Physical development
- Social, emotional development and confidence building
- Intellectual and language stimulation
- Child safety and protection
- Conflict management
- Immunisation and childhood illnesses

## Play Hubs

While parents and caregivers attend the Parenting Workshop, we set up a nearby play hub for children accompanying the adults to the session. Here, young children are kept safe and engaged with a wide selection of educational toys and resources that are age and stage appropriate. The play hub introduces children to structured learning through play, develops social and emotional skills and children become accustomed to engaging in a group. These are key areas of importance when children reach school-going age, and prepare them for the classroom environment. Parents and caregivers attending the workshop can witness the benefits of this early group interaction with peers.

There are often three to four FCMs conducting the play hub while the other two FCMs simultaneously conduct the Parenting Workshop.

## Playgroup Programme

Structured learning and play are brought into the communities of vulnerable children (age 3-5 years) whose families do not have access to- or cannot afford to send their child to a formal ECD Centre. Playgroup facilitators are unemployed mothers or caregivers from the local community.

Play and stimulation enhance language, physical, cognitive and socio-emotional development of young children. The Playgroups curriculum is implemented through the SmartStart franchise model.

## Whole Centre Development Programme

This multi-faceted Programme provides holistic support to community ECD Centres (which refers to a crèche, day-care centre, playschool, a preschool or after school care). It ensures quality-driven early learning is delivered in a classroom environment that is conducive to optimal learning. This is accomplished through practitioner skills training, mentoring, leadership development and capacity building.

The following are key areas that require support for the many challenges faced by ECD Centres:

- **Centre development:** Centre Development Facilitators (CDFs) are stationed in targeted communities to train, mentor and provide on-site support aimed at improving the standard of education and care at the Centre.
- **Training for principals and practitioners:** The skills and capacity building of ECD practitioners is enhanced to strengthen business skills, deliver quality ECD and create an optimal learning environment. Practitioners must have level 1-6, with the principal requirement being a level 5 or above.

- **Infrastructure support and Centre registration:** ELRU provides support towards infrastructure and resourcing needs while we facilitate the Centre registration process to ensure all the Department of Social Development requirements are met.

## Training and Materials Development

Training programmes, learning models and creation of materials are integrated into all ELRU programmes. They are tailored to target and strengthen specific skills that lead to the capacitation and delivery of quality-driven ECD that simultaneously supports clear career pathing.

## Conclusion

Support of early childhood development (ECD) is an investment that has long-term benefits and the potential to reshape subsequent generations towards positive change in South Africa.

## Building Tomorrow, Today

### Banking details:

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Standard Bank

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Business Cheque Account

Swift code SBZAZA JJ

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