

## **ELEVATING THE QUALITY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING**

**04 April 2017**

The Gauteng Department of Social Development, in collaboration with SANTS, is directly addressing the gap which persists in the education levels of Early Childhood Development Practitioners in Gauteng. Reality is that thousands of Early Childhood Development practitioners at Early Childhood Development Centres across South Africa are untrained and/or underqualified to teach our young children. Children who would be entering formal schooling unprepared for the challenges ahead.

Early Childhood Development (ECD) has been recognised as critical for establishing the foundation of academic success, particularly for young children from disadvantage backgrounds associated with limited access to quality ECD programmes. The early years are critical for the acquisition of concepts, skills and attitudes that lay the foundation for lifelong learning. These include the acquisition of language, perceptual- motor skills required for learning to read and write, basic numeracy concepts and skills, problem solving skills and keenness for learning.

According to the Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA) Sector Skills Plan (2013/ 2014), a significant gap persists in the education levels of ECD staff, since 52% of ECD practitioners and 45% of ECD principals are still untrained and/or underqualified, and need a minimum of an ECD NQF level 4 qualification. For these reasons it is critical to ensure that our ECD practitioners have the knowledge, skills and know how to be able to uplift and improve the quality of education.

The Gauteng Department of Social Development (GP DSD) took the initiative in partnership with SANTS, a Private Higher Education Institution seasoned in ECD training, to bring about a Further Education Training Certificate (FETC) in Early Childhood Development (ECD) NQF Level 4 learnership in this province. The project started on the 27 February 2016 and came to an end on the 12 November 2017. Out of the 40 enrolled candidates, 35 achieved full competency in the required 21 unit standards during this period, which is an 87.5% pass rate. By doing so the GP DSD is ensuring that our ECD practitioners are adequately qualified and in doing so directly elevating the quality of ECD education which our children are exposed to at ECD centres.

The following port of call for ECD practitioners is the Diploma in Grade R Teaching (NQF 6; 360 Credit) programme. This constitutes the first ever meaningful career pathway for ECD practitioners as this programme gives those who previously did not meet the requirement, access to Higher Education qualification. Beyond the Diploma in Grade R Teaching, candidates who are successful will have access to the B Ed Foundation Phase Teaching programme.

With quality ECD practitioners in South Africa, education efficiency would improve, as children would acquire the basic concepts, skills and attitudes required for successful learning and development prior to entering the system, thus reducing the chances of failure. Our children deserve the best possible education available.