



ANNUAL REPORT

1 March 2020 – 28 February 2021



Quality Early Childhood Development for EVERY CHILD

Education, empowering women and Early Childhood Development (ECD) are crucial to the upliftment and transformation of marginalised communities in South Africa - and Masikhule is dedicated to these strategic areas. Our mission is to address the disparities children in our local marginalised communities face in terms of access to improved teacher competency, learning resources and early intervention.



A message from the Founding Director, Léanne Keet



After an intensive strategy planning meeting held in the beginning of 2020, our team felt motivated and inspired for what lay ahead – a year of training, mentorship, development and empowerment. That all changed in mid-March when the country went into its first hard lockdown due to COVID-19. The devastating impact of the pandemic on the general population of South Africa, and within the Early Childhood Development (ECD) sector in particular, presented us with many challenges as well as opportunities to be agents of change.

I am ever grateful to be surrounded by a dynamic and passionate team who have proved to be incredibly flexible, creative and innovative. We have missed the usual contact with our beneficiaries but the changes have also had positive outcomes and we count these blessings daily.

I continue to be amazed and inspired by the women we work with in the ECD community. Despite all the financial, emotional and social challenges they have faced, 98% of the ECD Centres we work with reopened by September 2020 (the national average was as low as 15%). We remain concerned that only an average of 40% to 60% of children returned to their ECD Centres at the beginning of 2021, some only a few days a week. Without access to nutritious food, basic care and early learning opportunities, we can expect higher rates of physical and cognitive stunting. Early deprivation is very difficult to make up in later school years which means we could be facing a significant loss in human capital potential in South Africa.

However, we are known for our resilience and positivity, and through support from incredibly generous donors (from once-off donations, large donor funding, knitting of blankets to dropping off of food for soup kitchens) the Masikhule team made sure our beneficiaries were supported, empowered and enabled throughout the year.

Thank you Greet De Wulf, Else de Jong and Erika Kruger, our esteemed Advisory Board members, Naomi Malebo (Management Team – Community Liaison) and our Masikhule team consisting of Jeanine Andro, Amanda Bangani, Karen Bufé, Anjo du Preez, Sandy Immelman, Rachille Morison and Coreen Vlok for guiding, supporting and running this incredible organisation with me.

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." – Helen Keller



Word From Greet De Wulf, Advisory Board Chairperson



Dear Masikhule supporters,

2020 will always be remembered as the Covid year. The year where a virus took over the world. It was a year full of challenges – worldwide, for South Africa and not in the least for Masikhule and the ECD Centres and crèches it supports. But Masikhule wouldn't be Masikhule if they didn't respond to this with their well-known resilience, positivity and out-of-the-box thinking. Despite the very difficult circumstances, they continued to post online educational games so that the children would be stimulated even though they could not attend pre-school. Masikhule also recognised that many families struggled financially and that is why they decided to distribute frozen meal packs together with Pebbles Project, and they continued to provide fortified porridge to 2000 children.

After the lockdown, Masikhule played a vital role in assisting ECD Centres to comply with all the health and safety measures so that they could re-open as soon as possible. I also thank and salute the many principals and educators who invested time and effort unselfishly and very often at the expense of their own well-being. I am in awe of, and at the same time enormously humbled by what they have achieved through their unconditional love and passion for the well-being and education of the children. As Else de Jong, one of the advisory board members put it, "You have shown how resilient and adaptable Masikhule can be. It's amazing how you have survived and actually developed in an incredibly positive way!"

We hope and trust that you will continue to support and motivate Masikhule in their unceasing efforts - and results - to contribute to every child's right to education and well-being.

1 March 2020 to 28 February 2021 at a glance:

Our response to the pandemic was largely a humanitarian one. Our team proved to be agile, and solution-driven in their responses to the community's needs. Our responses were fuelled by the fact that the ECD sector was one in dire straits – principals were not receiving any income; staff were not receiving salaries; Centres had no savings to pay for PPE; parents were unable to pay school fees; only a third of children eventually returned to the Centres by the end of 2020; children were no longer receiving the daily nutritious meals supplied by the Centres and many children faced neglect and a lack of stimulation. Coupled with this, information being filtered to the sector was confusing and operating procedures proved very restrictive.

COVID-19 Response:



Communication was key. We set up a WhatsApp group with over 70 ECD Principals and engaged with them on different levels. It was set up to offer encouragement, share vital information and as a support for each other. The 70 Principals were linked to an average of 4 staff each, who in turn relayed information to parents, reaching at least 2000 families in total.



Food security was a real threat for not only the children and their families, but the ECD staff too. Incredibly generous funding from many partners made the following possible:

- Delivered 1917 food parcels to families of 38 ECD Centres
- Purchased and distributed over 1800 x R200 - R300 food vouchers to families and ECD staff to the value of R570 000
- Through JAM-SA, distributed over 18 000 kgs of fortified porridge
- Through Pebbles Project kitchen, delivered over 48 000 cooked meals to 31 ECD Centres once they were able to re-open
- Instrumental in the start-up and support of 5 community soup kitchens.



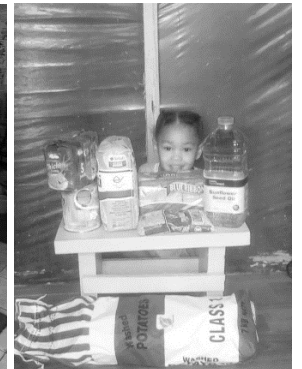
Access to funding for PPE and understanding the complex standard operating procedures (SOP) proved to be a challenge for ALL ECD Centre owners and their staff.

- We condensed the SOP into an accessible format
- Offered training, PPE and resources to over 65 ECD Centres in July 2020, including posters/signage and fun flashcards we created
- Through funding from the Department of Social Development, distributed over R385 000 worth of PPE to 63 ECD Centres in October 2020
- Purchased and distributed donated soaps and sanitisers to over 70 ECD Centres not covered by the DSD funding throughout the year.



We remained concerned about the development and stimulation of children who were no longer accessing learning programs.

- We sent, via our Principal WhatsApp group, daily stimulation activities to children and their caregivers – potentially reaching over 2000 young children
- Distributed reading books (through Bookdash) and basic stationery packs to over 2000 children
- After our successful Mandela Day event, distributed a large number of blankets, beanies, knitted dolls and educational material to children.



Masikhule Early Learning Program/Curriculum:

Even though the lockdown hampered our ability to meet for training, we soon found ways to improvise and ensure the successful implementation and mentorship of this project, which was in its second year of development.

- Educators from 6 ECD Centres were trained in the implementation of this holistic theme-based learning program – either via ZOOM (data supplied) or in small groups at our office. Another 4 ECD Centres joined the program in January 2021
- We offered regular mentorship via cell phone, video call and eventually on-site
- Our Occupational Therapist provided valuable insights (through training and mentorship) into child development, assessment of children with particular delays and concerns.



Educators' Early Learning Resource Library:

Established in 2016, this continues to be a vital and valuable resource for educators and children alike. The sheer variety of theme bags, educational games, age-and language-appropriate books and classroom aides have provided opportunities for the implementation of superior quality play and learning opportunities. We unfortunately had to close our Library's doors during the lockdown and the ongoing restrictions greatly impacted our numbers. Our Library re-opened in September 2020 for members to collect pre-ordered theme bags and resources.

	March 2019 - Feb 2020	March 2020 – Feb 2021
Library members	28	26
Visits to library	235	68
Theme bags issued	329	80
Books issued	1465	307
Total items issued	5838	1443

We had a few attempted break-ins during the year and precious funds had to be used to ensure the safety of this unit, our staff and Library members.

The Library re-opened for members on 9 February 2021. We are committed to making the library resources available to our members in a safe and practical manner, constantly adapting our services as COVID restrictions and protocols are imposed and change.



ECD Principal and Practitioner Training:

The ECD Principals have been affected on so many levels by the pandemic and they expressed feelings of great anxiety, stress, fear and being generally overwhelmed. In response to this, Masikhule developed and hosted 3 Wellbeing and Empowerment workshops in November 2020 for ECD Principals from Sir Lowry's Pass, Strand, Lwandle, Nomzamo, Asanda Village, Zola, Macassar and Eerste River.



The main aim of these workshops, facilitated by professional Psychologists, Occupational Therapists and Educationalists, was to ensure their wellbeing (and understanding thereof) and included topics such as setting boundaries, effective communication, self-confidence / self-belief, creating professional vision boards, relaxation techniques, etc. The feedback received from attendees was extremely positive.



"This training helped me to focus on myself – something I never did before. I did not want to do anything but now I am so motivated. This workshop was perfect for this time of the year of COVID."

"I learnt to really listen. My self esteem is better and I will remember the important things about me. Like I am very special."

"I was wishing this year must just end. Now I am feeling motivated, relaxed. I am looking forward to complimenting my staff."

"I was exhausted and not sure of myself. I felt confused, angry and wanted to give up. I now know I need to take care of myself so that I can take care of others."

"I felt physically, mentally and emotionally tired. When we were playing the drums I felt like a child again."

Naomi Malebo, ECD Principal and Masikhule Management Team member (Community Liaison) in Asanda Village:



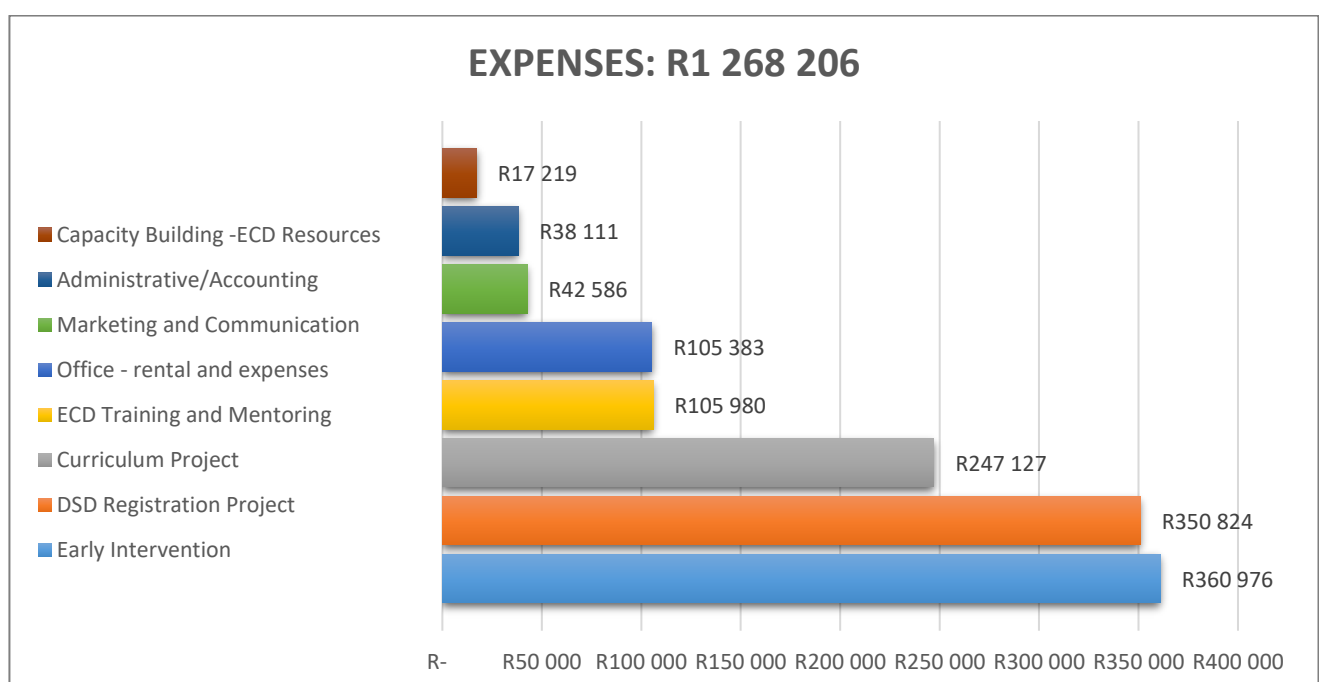
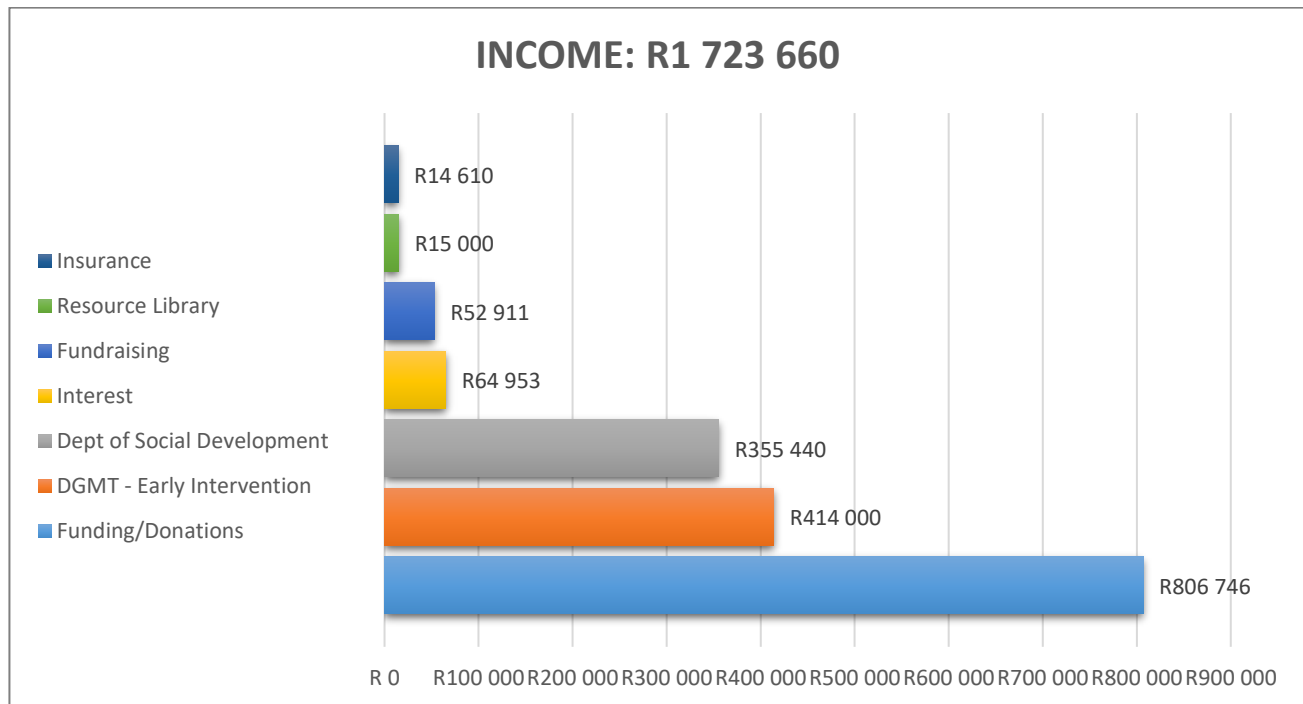
2020 what a year it was! COVID caught us unawares and when the storm hit it put us in situations that we did not know how to get out of. Frustration and depression cut through us. We were challenged to find new ways to make ends meet, but we remembered that it's in the midst of challenges that we grow.

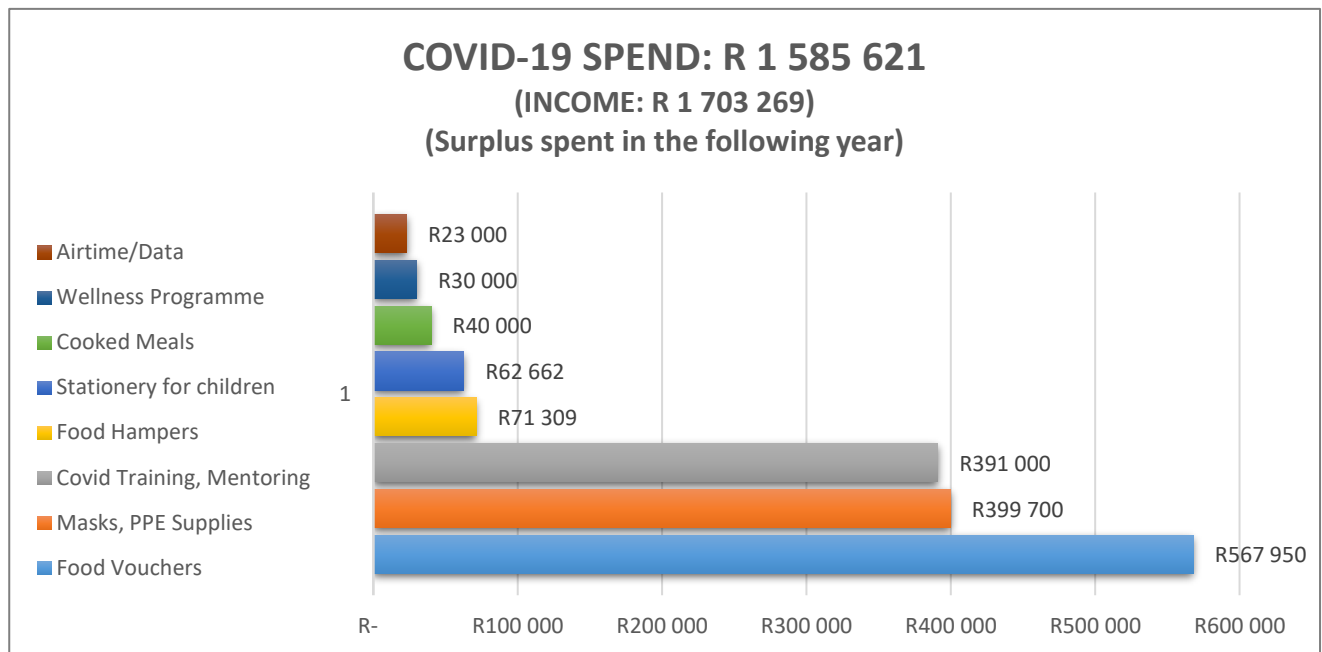
I feel grateful to be associated with the likes of Masikhule who stood by us, helping us to continue helping others by making sure that our staff members and our children remained fed and safe. The training and resources provided helped us to prepare and stay calm. How did we survive? I still don't know. But they remained our pillars and were with us all the way through. Thank you Masikhule and the Team.

Financial Statements:

This year made it clear that not only do we have a solid foundation of support, but that our donors trust us implicitly, giving us the required flexibility to meet the unforeseeable situations COVID-19 presented. We received an additional R1.7 million to assist us with mitigating the harsh circumstances the ECD Centres found themselves in. Thank you for your ongoing trust and support - we are all immensely grateful.

Financial Statement: Income and Expenses



COVID Spend:**Future Plans:**

- Masikhule Early Learning Program (ELP):**
 The 2021 year will see a further 8 ECD Centres being trained and mentored to use this program.
- Online Masikhule Early Learning Program (ELP):**
 We believe our ELP has the potential to positively impact the growth and development of all pre-schoolers and should be available to all ECDs (and parents/caregivers) throughout the country. We thus plan to make our unique program available online. We have specific goals, outcomes and timelines in place and over the next three years hope to make all our programs and early intervention strategies available to those in need. Thank you UK-based Upside Trust for sponsoring Phase 1 of this project.
- Educators' Early Learning Resource Library:**
 This project adds immense value to daily teaching, learning and exploring. Accessibility of the unit and the safety of our beneficiaries is of great concern. There is a need to offer a deliver service and we will be exploring this option and trust funding will make this a reality.

- **Early Intervention:**
Our Occupational Therapy Team will send regular goal-directed activities to the ECD educators offering them activity ideas, useful tips and developmental aims. The service will include mentoring and OT group intervention where needed
- **ECD Wellness and Empowerment:**
In the face of great uncertainty, fear, anxiety and a sense of helplessness, we endeavour to offer workshops focussing on self-care, communication skills, conflict resolution, setting boundaries, setting goals, strategies for tension-release and much more.
- **Level One First Aid:**
A current Level 1 First Aid certificate is a legal requirement at all ECD facilities. Through lack of training opportunities (due to COVID) and a lack of financial means, the vast majority of ECD Centres are in need of this certification. We aim to offer free training focussing particularly on baby and toddler care.
- **Principal Support:**
Through regular communication with our involved Principal Whatsapp Group, who in turn communicate with their practitioners, parents and caregivers, we will be able to ensure correct official information is shared and the staff feel supported.
- **Department of Social Development:**
We will continue to be a Service Provider in our specific area of the Helderberg, assisting over 100 ECD facilities with registration requirement and capacity building. (Important to note: Migration of ECD is set to take place from the Department of Social Development to the Department of Basic Education in April 2022)



Thank you

As we take stock of the past year and navigate an uncertain future, we remain incredibly grateful for our very loyal donors and supporters. Each and every contribution is valuable and ensures the source of our giving remains viable and sustainable. Thank you ALL for being, together with Masikhule, agents of change.

