



UPDATE PLAY FOR ALL

PROGRAMME FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (ECD)



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INTRODUCTION:

If we were asking for advice from our Land and Housing team on how to build a house that will stand strong and last the test of time, they would advise us to build strong foundations. If they were asking us how to ensure children grow up to thrive, succeed, contribute and be happy, our advice would be the same. Focus your efforts and investments on the child and their environment from conception to school going age, and they will be well set up.

In the informal settlements the living environment is a harsh one, however the home, the community, and the ECD centre can still provide a sanctuary for children if there is care, play, security, sanitation, and opportunities for early learning. As part of our Play for All ECD Programme, we are working to support parents, educators and communities to give children the best possible start in life, regardless of their circumstances. As well as our programmes in the Informal Settlements, DWN also works as part of national ECD programmes to contribute to the wider agenda.

OUR DONORS AND PARTNERS:



2024 ECD RESULTS AT A GLANCE



13,018 ECD aged children supported directly



538 teachers trained



18 ECD Centre Improvements as of 2024



3, 687, 627* with over 1,2 million people reached every month

**some of these individuals may have been reached more than once*



SOCIO-EMOTIONAL STORYBOOKS:

Stories are an essential, and joyful part of childhood. Stories help us develop a moral compass, empathise, foster imagination, develop our identities, and they lay the foundation for literacy.

Unfortunately, many children in Namibia, especially those in informal settlements, do not have age-appropriate books and reading materials, and where they do exist, they are often highly westernised. According to the 2019 UNICEF school readiness study, more than 55% of Namibian children under six have only one book, often a Bible, and merely 5% live in homes with seven or more books.

DWN has been enjoying a highly creative and playful programme in the development of our own story books. Our team creates tales from our own experiences and imaginations which are beautifully illustrated and translated. On July 26, 2024, with support from the Swiss Embassy, Interteam, and MTC, a series of six new story books was launched. This latest series is all about socio-emotional development concepts such as strengthening coping mechanisms, fostering self-identity, promoting empathy, enhancing communication skills, and encouraging nurturing interactions during early childhood.

As part of this initiative, 20 library boxes filled with storybooks translated into various local languages have been distributed to kindergartens in informal settlements. These boxes will not only serve as libraries for nearby ECD centres but also provide parents and caregivers the opportunity to borrow books and read to their children.

As well as the donated books – all our publications are available to purchase, and funds go back into our Play for All programme.

EDUCARER TRAINING:

Young children learn through play, and for them to do so, their teachers need to be playful! Many ECD educators have not had formal training and lack the confidence or knowledge to fully embrace getting hands-on, messy and loud.

With support from MTC, DWN is providing highly practical training to educators that equip them with skills and knowledge to facilitate play based learning. Our training uses Montessori principles and is designed for low-income settings where space and materials are a luxury. The training covers pre-mathematics, language development, music, and play-based learning, with a strong emphasis on socio-emotional growth. Educators also benefit from the opportunity to share experiences and adapt the content to their specific classrooms.

A unique aspect of our training involves teaching educators how to make recyclable teaching materials from household items such as bottles and boxes. This approach allows teachers, particularly in informal settlements, to access materials without incurring additional costs.

During this year’s workshops, we have trained 538 teachers in towns across Namibia, including Windhoek, Oshakati, Oniipa, Ondangwa, Katima Mulilo, Otjiwarongo, Keetmanshoop, Opuwo, Okahandja, and Swakopmund.

As well as training on classroom practice and delivery, through our Minderoo and Interteam funded activities we also train educators on their role as ECD champions in communities; how to work with parents, how to support holistic child development and alternatives to violence.



ECD teachers during training sessions.

OUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE NATIONAL RIGHT START PROGRAMME:

Every child’s journey begins with their first steps, and these steps must be the right ones. However, not all parents and stakeholders are aware of what the “right steps” are- specifically what a young child needs to flourish. As a part of the National Right Start programme, and with funding from Interteam, DWN is dedicated to spreading essential early childhood development messages nationally using mass media channels, and directly to our communities through house-to-house visits, bulk SMS, parental engagements session and exchanges with community leaders.



Radio station interviews



Community engagement sessions at a church

The messages are developed and refined based on need. To establish the focus areas, DWN, in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication, and Social Welfare (MGEPESW) and with support from Interteam undertook a Knowledge Attitude and Practice Study which was conducted in eight regions of Namibia, and which examined current practices and attitudes towards ECD. The study was launched by the Executive Director of Gender in November 2024, and the findings are being used to further develop and tailor communication messages through RightStart. The study can be found here: <https://dw-namibia.org/kap-study/>

DWN’s Right Start Reach:



TV: **1,762,904**



Radio: **2,578,370**
(across 7 radio stations at 10 languages)



Print: **43,000**



4388 through parenting sessions,



30,567 through household visits,



5800 through SMSs

Key findings from the knowledge, attitudes, practices (KAP) study

Parental Knowledge and Engagement

One in five parents believe that children should start ECD centers at age five or six, which is later than recommended.

Father’s Role

Only 6% of households reported that fathers took primary responsibility for caregiving.

Violence and Abuse

49% of households report using physical punishment to discipline young children, and over half of the respondents (57%) agree that “children learn when they fear punishment”.

Neglect and Lack of Care

Less than half of parents (45%) reported showing affection through physical contact (hugging) in the past week.

Health and Nutrition

25% of mothers were reported to have drunk alcohol or smoked during pregnancy.

Using the KAP as a baseline, our impact assessment found that **parents who had benefitted from DWN programmes showed an improvement of knowledge and practice of 55.1% on average in the scores compared to the national baseline.** Specifically, it found an **improvement in behaviours related to engaging with and showing affection to children** (an increase in parents doing educational activities with their children (by 36%), an increase in parents playing with their children (by 27%). **There was also a decrease in parents who reported to use corporal punishment on their children** (a 35% decrease). General understanding about ECD was also improved, with parents answering correctly to true and false questions and demonstrating positive practices related to nurturing and responsive care giving.

BUILDING CENTRES AND ENHANCING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS:



There is a serious shortage of quality ECD infrastructure across Namibia, especially for community ECD centres that are affordable. In a collaboration with MTC and the Oshakati Town Council, DWN built the MTC Onawa ECD Model Centre. This centre is part of the new Onawa Extension which was serviced as part of the DWN land programme. The centre was launched on 27 September 2024 in Oshakati and is now operating as a model centre, serving the children of the community based on holistic, Montessori practices as well as providing training, guidance and material exchange with nearby centres.



The approach of adding an ECD centre into the extensions we service under the Land Programme is one we plan to expand, with Rehoboth being next on our list.

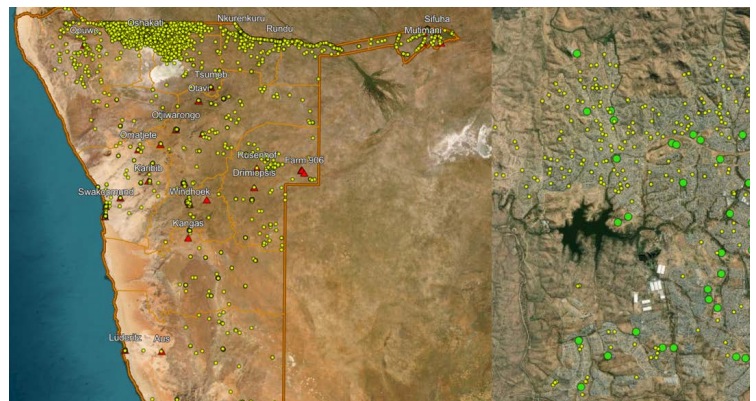
As well as our work on building centres, many existing centres are struggling with limited, or uncondusive spaces. DWN has been working with community members to upgrade these areas through the expansion of classrooms, provision of shading or play areas and building of safe toilets. Within the centres DWN has been providing furniture and teaching and learning materials. In Omaheke this has been done with the support of Capricorn Foundation, and in Karibib and Omaruru, this has been funded by the Twin Hills Trust.



Picture at the front of the newly Launched MTC Onawa ECD Centre

DATA FOR PLANNING:

At DWN we love data! Data for planning, data for monitoring results, data to remind ourselves what we are doing and why. In 2024 we worked with the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare to use our GIS skills and knowledge to map the schools of Namibia and the ECD centres to assist with planning and coordination across the two ministries on ECD and service delivery. This work was supported by Interteam and continues in 2025, together with the National Statistics Agency to embed this into national systems.



Extracts from mapping tool- showing schools and ECD centres based on their GPS coordinates

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