

Impacting community mental health through play

Nicky Seymour, reg Occupational Therapist, Masters in Rehabilitation

nicky.seymour@sisanda.org.za; +27 845715030; 21 Silverlea Village, Silverlea Road, Wynberg, Cape Town, SA

Sisanda FunDaytion www.sisanda.org.za

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1. Background

Sisanda FunDaytion is a not-for-profit working since 2009 to uplift the mental health and develop the potential of children and young people in Cape Town through Play.

Low-income areas have been enormously impacted by the pandemic adding to existing economic and social challenges: unemployment, encroaching gang and gender-based violence, congested living, combined with limited financial resources and support services.

During the early stages of the COVID pandemic we adapted our activities to help families comply with the 'stay at home' message. The positive impact of our Sisanda Playsheets with the range of holistic, interactive, intergenerational activities led to the creation of the Play@Home (P@H) programme.

Our approach is to create a circle of security and role models around the child, raise awareness of mental health and contribute to building resilience and relationships. We work with families with young children as well as young people in the community. We use play and recreation as our vehicle due to the evidence-based benefits (<https://learningthroughplay.com/>).

2. Programme objectives

- Empower youth (Play Ambassadors (PA)) to become role models
- Empower caregivers to create a safe, nurturing space for positive development and mental wellbeing of children
- Facilitate young people to develop the brain architecture for mental wellbeing.

3. Programme activities

- Provide training over 3 months for PAs building confidence and communication skills and empowering them to deliver the P@H programme.
- Connection of PAs to a peer support network and support them to implement the programme with 5 families
- Guide families through 8 home-visits by a PA, a set of Playsheets and resources with information on play, resilience, and relationships.

4. Strengths: A community-based programme, efficient with resources and replicable.

Challenges: Communication system with lack of smart phones or internet.

5. Outcomes

After 5 programmes we have worked with 200 families and 20 PAs in Gugulethu and Thambo village. Two partners, an ECD and Church Community Programme share positive feedback on behaviour change of families and children. Family feedback gathered midway, end and after 2 months includes less fighting in households and between children in the street, greater interest and respect for each other and more ideas on what to do as a family. Notably many families report talking more and sharing about themselves. 83% families reported an increase in quality-time, 100 % communicate better, 77% said they are now less stressed.

6. Next steps

Preparing our resources and approach to scale out to partners organisations.