

IMPACT REPORT

2024



EXPLORE

“Building cohesive and resilient communities of parents and caregivers who have agency and feel equipped to support their children’s early learning and development.”

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Context

Young children thrive if they receive nurturing care.

Parents and caregivers play a critical role in creating a conducive environment. This should include supporting the child's good health and nutrition and keeping them safe by protecting them from threats. They should also provide opportunities for early learning and brain stimulation through emotionally supportive and responsive interactions.

Unfortunately, the reality is that for many young children in South Africa, many of these components are not available.

The 2021 Thrive by Five Index revealed that over 50% of children aged between 4 and 5 years are experiencing significant barriers to thriving—this is to say they are not meeting the requirements for early learning that will enable them to lead productive and healthy lives. In a country like South Africa, which is riddled with significant socio-economic strife, many children continue to be left behind as they are unable to access quality early education, and the need for alternative models of ECD provisioning has become increasingly important.

Parents and caregivers in marginalised communities in South Africa face a multitude of challenges:

"I don't have a job."

"I can't afford to send my child to crèche."

"We are hungry."

"My community is unsafe."

"My child only starts learning at school"

2 About Seriti and aRe Bapaleng

This is how we are different:



Our focus is on tackling this challenge by working together with parents and caregivers of young children, as they are critical to enabling an environment of nurturing care. We view this as a partnership with communities of caregivers where we support them to feel empowered to play this critical role.

Our role is to act as a facilitator and enabler of positive social change. Communities in South Africa already possess a rich foundation of knowledge, experience, and capacity. Our mission is to work alongside them to unlock social value and catalyse meaningful change, bringing joy into homes and fostering a love of learning and play.



aRe Bapaleng aims to address the critical gap in supporting a child's early years of development (aged 0-6), focusing on the parent's and caregivers' roles.

The project is dedicated to empowering parents and caregivers in underserved communities by providing the necessary skills, tools, and resources to understand their crucial role in shaping their child's life.

The objective is to foster an ecosystem of support in early childhood development (ECD) that nurtures children to become future-fit and supports parents and caregivers to feel more confident to create nurturing environments for their children. aRe Bapaleng achieves this through the implementation of its Active Learning Workshops (ALW), home-based visits, awareness campaigns and ECD centre support. As an advocate for the well-being of all children, the programme has supported parents and caregivers to gain basic knowledge that they can use to become more responsive and nurturing, thereby helping to bridge the gap and ensure their children thrive.

The aRe Bapaleng programme, which works across 9 provinces, has employed 6 field coordinators over the past year to support the project coordinators with implementing project activities. Excitingly, the programme also leveraged its partnerships to support implementation, specifically in far-flung provinces such as the Northern Cape.



19,706
Caregivers reached
via awareness
campaigns in
2024

ECD AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

Through a variety of awareness campaigns a broader community of parents and caregivers are being reached and sensitised to the importance of ECD and the role they play in supporting the early learning and development of the young children in their care.

3,538

Caregivers received home visits in 2024

As a result, 7,369 young children from marginalised communities are receiving higher quality early learning and development support.

86,132

PARENTS & CAREGIVERS REACHED TO DATE

- Increased access to learning materials and resources
- Increased access to opportunities
- Increased access to knowledge and the ability to build multiple skills sets

HOME ECD VISITS

Through a series of home ECD visits, individual parents and caregivers are equipped with the skills, tools and confidence to support the early learning and development of the young children in their care.

4,431

Caregivers were ALW trained in 2024

As a result, 13,917 young children from marginalised communities are receiving higher quality early learning and development support.



Highlights of 2024

Not only did the programme continue to reach many more parents and caregivers in 2024, but it also achieved significant highlights and achievements that are worth celebrating.

The third Seriti aRe Bapaleng Annual Partner Networking event took place, bringing together key stakeholders who have contributed to and worked with the programme over the years. Through robust discussions, it cemented aRe Bapaleng's place as an advocate for leveraging ECD as a driver of economic change for young people at the local community level.

In June, the programme participated in the celebration of LEGO Foundation's inaugural International Day of Play. The programme hosted a play event in recognition of this day by inviting the community of Standerton to engage in activities that demonstrate the importance and value of play for children's development. The event was attended by key stakeholders including local partners such as Nali Bali, Singakwenza, Masakhane Trust and McDonalds. A total of 23 children, 56 parents and caregivers and 10 NYS participants attended the event.



The festivities continued in July when the aRe Bapaleng team participated in Mandela Day event in Standerton. The event which was in collaboration with Astral sought to gather employees from both organisations and participants from the NYS programme to do work towards the improvement and upgrade of the Farm 3 aRe Bapaleng Library. The library will serve children of the Astral employees and will become a valuable resource for the school community where the library is located.

An exciting addition to the suite of aRe Bapaleng resources is the development of a Fun Box. This was developed with the intention of providing programme beneficiaries with a range of resources that they can use to promote learning in the home environment. The box includes the aRe Bapaleng parent and caregiver guide, activity books, Lego Six Bricks, flashcards, a CorrectBook, a threading set and crayons.



A collaboration with Standard Bank South Africa (SBSA) and the Western Cape District Municipality culminated in a joint event in the small town of Piketberg. The collaboration proved the importance of displaying the programme's commitment to supporting all communities and demonstrating how parents and caregivers can support the early learning and development of their children. This further strengthened the programme's partnerships and allowed it to expand its reach.

Excitingly, in September 2024, the Programme Lead, Gauteng Project Coordinator, and M&E Coordinator attended the launch of the first Parent Club in Standerton. This intervention was borne out of the need to maintain continuous contact with parents and caregivers who have attended ALW training, but who may also benefit from a safe space that allows them to learn and get additional support either through referrals or through peer support.

The intervention allows parents to come with their children and as part of the engagement, some activities encourage parent-child interaction. Although some of the information that is shared with the parents and caregivers seeks to reiterate what is shared in the ALW parent guide, the content also seeks to explore other topics that relate to parents and caregivers including mental health, navigating relationships, and the importance of psychosocial support. Since the first two sessions, two subsequent sessions have taken place, and the Parent Clubs will continue to be implemented across all sites.

Additionally, in support of a concept that was submitted to Pareto Ltd., the first pop-up junxtion was launched at Southgate Shopping Centre. The platform was established to engage parents, caregivers, and their children in a fun, interactive manner.

Through the pop-up junxtion, the aRe Bapaleng team has an opportunity to raise awareness about the programme's work and invite parents and caregivers with more information on how they can become part of the Caregiver Network.

To this end, parents who visit the pop-up junxtion have the option to register on the aRe Bapaleng App, purchase a Fun Box for their children, or engage with their children in simple play-based activities. The pop-up junxtion reached a total of 54 parents and caregivers during the period of its implementation.



aRe Bapaleng's selection as a finalist in the MIT Solve LEAP Challenge marked a significant achievement. The twelve-week sprint sought to provide key insights on implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The sprint supported the revision of the programme's Theory of Change and inspired a different way of thinking about how it will continue to impact communities. Having access to leading thinkers has enabled the programme to strengthen its working model and integrate international best practices.

The link to the final report is included herein: (<https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:EU:6fc047ae-b60e-4044-9de7-d402a4e46639>).



2024 LEAP Challenge



PROJECT HOST



To showcase the work of aRe Bapeleng, a two-page spread in the Triologue CSI Handbook has been published.

To enhance the information shared with parents and caregivers, an additional module on disability and inclusion will be added to the parent guide in 2025. In preparation for this addition, the aRe Bapeleng team attended a 3-day training on the subject.



aRe Bapeleng App



aReBapeleng.co.za is a digital platform designed to support **early childhood development (ECD)** by enabling Caregiver Networkers to deliver quality, play-based learning support to families and children in their homes and communities. The app provides access to **active learning tools, lesson plans, progress tracking, and resources** that promote early learning through everyday interactions.

It also serves as a communication and reporting tool, helping **ECD facilitators, programme managers, and fieldworkers** monitor implementation, gather insights, and strengthen the link between **home-based support and centre-based ECD services**.

Through aReBapeleng, the goal is to make early learning more **accessible, relevant, and responsive**—especially in underserved communities.

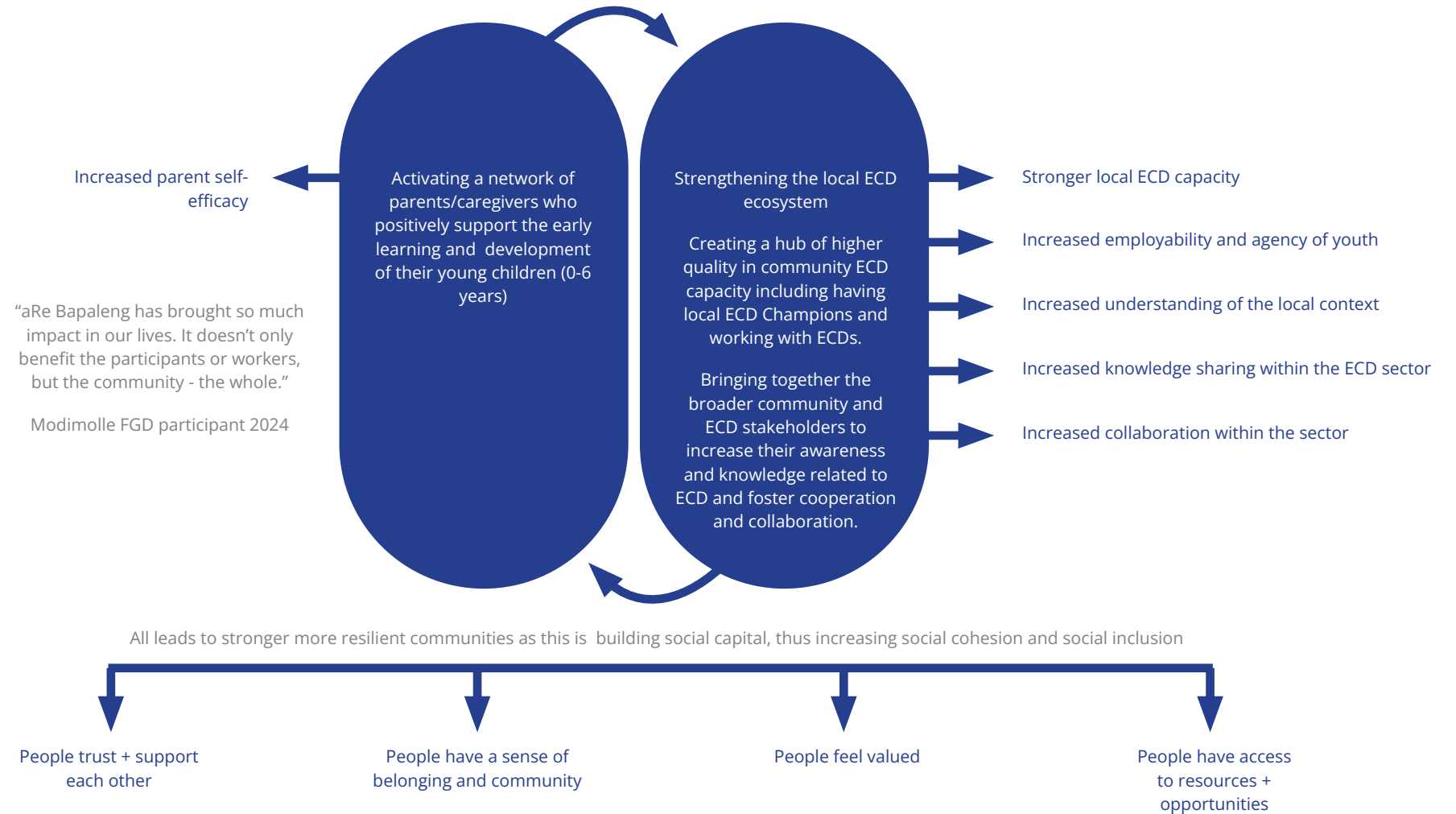
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Seriti aRe Bapaleng – showcasing impact

Seriti aRe Bapaleng has catalysed much positive social change in 2024.

During 2024, Seriti aRe Bapaleng conducted several Focus Group Discussions to hear from parents and caregivers who had participated in the Programme. These stories illustrate the profound impact of the aRe Bapaleng programme in fostering personal growth, stronger family connections, and healthier habits, reinforcing the vital role parents play in shaping their children’s futures.

The programme has proven to be a vital intervention, significantly improving parenting practices, community health, and social cohesion.



4

1. Activating a network of parents/caregivers who positively support the early learning and development of their young children

Increased levels of parent self-efficacy:

Due to their participation in the Seriti aRe Bapaleng programme, parents/caregivers are demonstrating higher levels of confidence in their parenting and feel more competent as they have the skills and knowledge needed for effective parenting. They believe they have the capacity to positively influence a child's behaviour, development, and overall well-being. In addition, parents/caregivers appear more resilient and able to better cope with stress and challenges faced while parenting.



Improved parenting skills:

The programme has helped parents understand the importance of nutrition, hygiene, and emotional support for their children. Parents have become more engaged in their children's lives, leading to better communication and stronger relationships. Parents spend more quality time with their children.

Improved family dynamics:

Parents report more open communication with their children, fostering trust and emotional security. Families have shifted towards more responsive caregiving practices, resulting in happier, healthier relationships.

"For me, I've learned to be a better parent not only to my daughter but to also my brother's daughters. Because we've learned how to communicate, to have a better communication. So, I learned from aRe Bapaleng - How to talk and how, because I'm part of the nutrition group, how children should eat. And that's how it's very important to make sure that they go to the clinic and appointments needed - to never miss them. So that's what I've learned from this programme. And, how to play with your children. You can't just let them stay there. You need to engage with them. You need to play with them. You need to communicate - how they feel - to have a better relationship with them. Because, before, I used to think "Ah - they're just kids. Let them play alone." But now I can engage, to better understand them. So, I can say that our relationship has been better and it's growing because of this programme." - aRe Bapaleng participant



4

aRe Bapaleng has contributed to communities being stronger and more resilient with active caregiver networks

THE NURTURING CARE FRAMEWORK: The Seriti aRe Bapaleng Programme aligns with The Nurturing Care Framework by focusing its activities across these different areas, which has led to various positive changes in participants' lives. The Nurturing Care Framework emphasises the importance of good health, adequate nutrition, responsive caregiving, opportunities for early learning, and a safe, secure environment.

The World Health Organisation (WHO), UNICEF and the World Bank Group have developed the Nurturing Care Framework for helping children survive and thrive to transform health and human potential. The components include good health, adequate nutrition, responsive caregiving, safety and security and opportunities for early learning.

“As parents, we have learned about their nutrition. Some of us didn't know how to manage our children's diet. We just gave them any food, any time. So, during this programme, we have learned how to manage their diet.”

“We learned the importance of breastfeeding. It's one point that I didn't even think mattered before. That milk has all the nutrients which the child needs to grow. So it is very important. aRe Bapaleng helped me to realize that.”

THE 5 DOMAINS OF NURTURING CARE



HEALTH



NUTRITION



RESPONSIVE CAREGIVING



SECURITY & SAFETY



LEARNING & STIMULATION

Improvements in Health & Nutrition

Our beneficiaries have gained knowledge about proper nutrition, hygiene, and the importance of breastfeeding, leading to improved health outcomes for families. Many parents reported dietary improvements, such as introducing more fruits and vegetables into family meals and managing children's diets to prevent malnutrition. Their own diets have also improved, decreasing health risks such as diabetes and high blood pressure. Parents are role modelling better health choices and eating habits. Additionally, a focus on physical and emotional health has enabled parents to support their children's overall well-being.



ADEQUATE NUTRITION

Adequate nutrition refers to maternal and child nutrition. Why both? We know that the nutritional status of the mother during pregnancy affects her health and well-being and that of her unborn child. After birth, the mother's nutritional status affects her ability to provide adequate care to her young child.



GOOD HEALTH


Good health refers to the health and well-being of the children and their caregivers./ Why both? We know that the physical and mental health of care givers can affect their ability to care for the child.

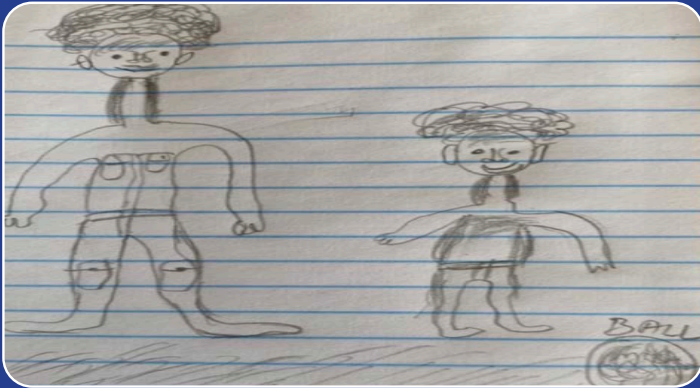
Parents /caregivers are adopting positive behaviour changes from participating in the aRe Bapaleng programme.

“I gave up smoking!”

“We are all eating better and are more healthy”

“I introduced Wellness Wednesdays!”



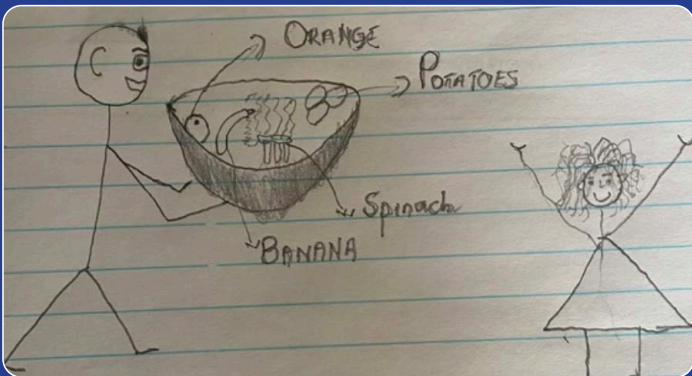


Father in Modimolle draws himself and his son exercising on "Wellness Wednesdays".

CASE STUDY:

Introducing nutritious eating habits.

One parent described their journey from frequently indulging their child with sweets to introducing healthier food options, such as vegetables. Initially, the transition was met with resistance, as the child rejected unfamiliar foods. Drawing on lessons from the programme, the parent collaborated with their partner to create a unified approach to healthier eating. Over time, this teamwork and consistency helped the child adapt to a more nutritious diet, demonstrating how the programme equips parents to overcome challenges and promote healthier lifestyles for their families.



A father draws how he has changed their diet to be nutritious after learning about this from aRe Bapaleng.

Increased levels of responsive caregiving

aRe Bapaleng equips parents with tools to communicate effectively and respond to their children's needs with empathy and understanding. By fostering gentle parenting techniques and educating families on how to positively support their child's early learning and development, the programme empowers parents to build secure attachments with their children. This transformation has led to stronger relationships and improved emotional support within families.



RESPONSIVE CAREGIVING

Responsive caregiving refers to the caregiver to notice, understand, and respond to their child's signals in a timely and appropriate manner. Considered the foundational component because responsive caregivers are better able to support the other four components.

"How to properly speak to your child. Basically, gentle parenting so that your child can learn to be more open with you - that if anything happens to them outside the streets, they'll be able to come home and talk about it, instead of holding it back. And that can cause depression and other things... Be kind - kindness goes a long we. Be kind." (Standerton)

Parents/caregivers are prioritising spending quality time with their children.



"I now make sure I'm home before sleep time so I can spend time with my kids"

"I communicate better with my child"

"I am more sensitive to my child's emotions"



Mother in Orange River draws her daughter looking to her and says, "I want my daughter to know I will always be there for her - in good and in bad times."

"Our children also have stress. So, through this programme, we've learned, and we are also practicing stress management, not only for the children but for us also as parents. How to deal with your stress, how to deal with children - with their emotions. How to manage and support them. That's the root of the happiest and healthiest baby ever!" - aRe Bapaleng participant

4

Enhanced early learning support

Through play-based interventions and an emphasis on social interaction, the programme has highlighted the importance of early learning. Parents have reported increased engagement with their children through play and educational activities, which not only enhances children's cognitive and social development but also strengthens familial bonds.



OPPORTUNITIES FOR EARLY LEARNING

Opportunities for early learning refers to any opportunity for the infant or child to interact with a person, place or object in their environment. Recognizes that every interaction (positive or negative) or absence of an interaction is contributing to the child's brain development and laying the foundation for later living.

"We have learned that kids are able to learn through playing. For example, the types of games that we usually play there - that shape games, number games. So kids can learn different types of shapes. How to count. So yeah, it's productive." (Modimolle)

Parents noted that their children have become more confident and socially adept, as they engage more with peers. They are also spending time supporting their children's early learning.



"Learning through play has helped my children learn about shapes and numbers"

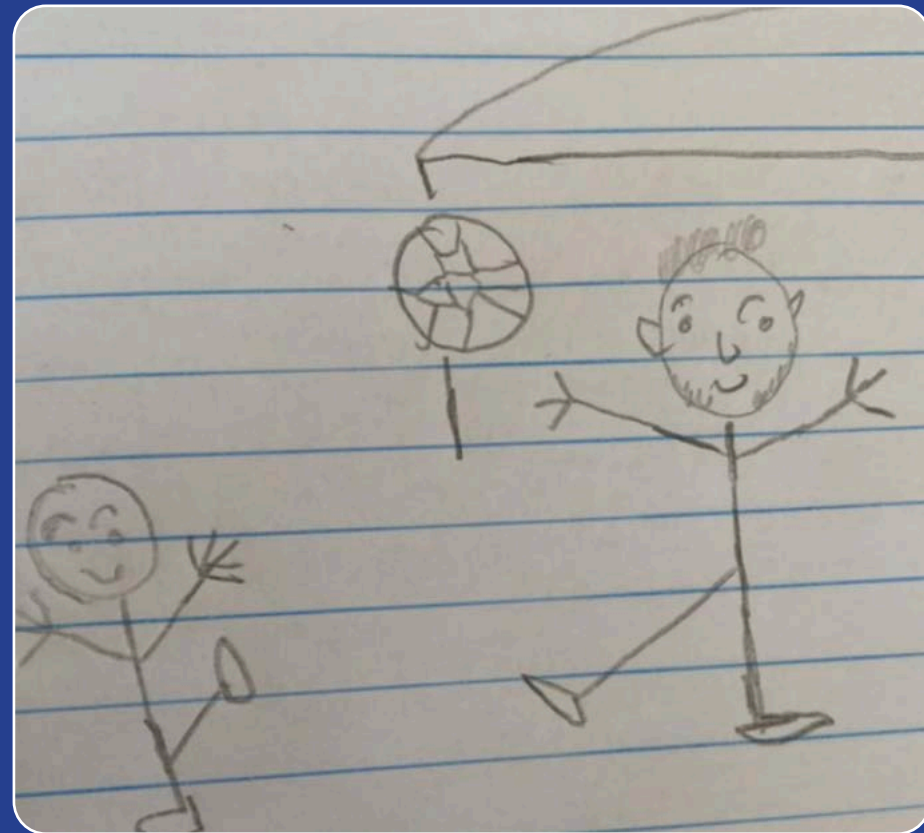
"We have become more creative making toys from recyclables!"

"His communication skills have improved as well. Because, through playing now, he is calmer and asks things that he was not able to ask me before. He's able to make friends." - aRe Bapaleng participant

CASE STUDY:

Discovering and supporting a child's passion.

Through increased involvement with their child, one parent discovered their child's love for soccer, an interest they had previously overlooked. By participating in activities together, the parent recognized how important it was to nurture this passion. They began actively supporting their child's enthusiasm for the sport, expressing that shared activities like soccer helped build the child's confidence while strengthening their parent-child bond.



Father draws himself playing soccer with his son.

4 2. Strengthening the local ECD ecosystem

4.2.1 Creating a hub of higher quality in community ECD capacity, including having local ECD Champions and working with ECDs

Working with communities of parents/caregivers to strengthen the local ECD ecosystem

A stronger hub of local ECD capacity exists, with a network of local ECD Champions now active. The programme has activated networks of parents/caregivers who not only feel more empowered to be better parents/caregivers but also feel a civic responsibility to actively help other parents/caregivers to positively support the early learning and development of the children in their care.



Empowering Young Parents and Caregivers on the Road to Employment:

Through a partnership with the National Youth Service (a public employment programme), the Seriti aRe Bapaleng programme provides cohorts of young, unemployed parents and caregivers with earning and learning opportunities. For many, this is the first exposure to a working environment.



4

Unemployed youth are provided with a range of training which covers not only early learning and development but also work readiness and soft skills.

Participants earn a stipend and gain practical work experience by doing a range of work activities, including volunteering at ECD centres and becoming active aRe Bapaleng Caregiver Networkers.

The result is that not only do they become better caregivers to young children, but they also have more agency and are more employable. Between January to December 2024, the programme has created 3945 work opportunities.

Where possible, these youth are supported to transition into formal employment and as a result, some have joined the Seriti aRe Bapaleng programme as part of the field team, continuing to expand the Programme's reach, and catalysing social impact.

Here are some of their stories of change.



LETSOOA MOHLABA

Free State Field Coordinator

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude for the opportunity to grow and develop within the organization. Since joining as a Field worker in 2023, I have gained invaluable experience and knowledge in Early Childhood Development.

Initially, as a male in a female-dominated field, I faced challenges. However, I persevered and embarked on a journey of self-discovery and growth. The aRe Bapaleng programme and various trainings, equipped me with the skills and confidence to excel in my role. Through these opportunities, I gained a deeper understanding of ECD and developed a new perspective.

My professional growth was further enhanced when I took on the role of Field Coordinator. I successfully engaged stakeholders, including HOPE worldwide, and fostered a partnership that continues to positively impact our communities.

I'm thankful for the support and guidance I received from Seriti and the aRe Bapaleng programme. My journey has been rewarding, and I am proud to have made a positive impact. I look forward to continuing this work and leaving a lasting legacy.

Thank you.



MAKOMA MOROPA

Alma Field Coordinator

In June 2024, I embarked on a transformative journey with aRe Bapaleng, joining as a Field Coordinator in the Alma community, Limpopo. This opportunity was groundbreaking, as it allowed me to utilize my expertise to map and analyse the community, gaining valuable insights into their unique challenges and needs. Through this mapping, I uncovered critical information about the community's struggles, including the challenges faced by parents, the education statistics of children, and the level of care and development available for young children aged 0-8 years.

My role involved practically evaluating training needs, implementing interventions to address gaps and formulating and managing activities tailored to these needs. I coordinated training sessions, raised awareness on critical child development issues and provided direct support to ECD centres, ensuring they were equipped to deliver quality care and development for young children.

My work in Alma was both inspiring and eye-opening. I enjoyed helping parents navigate the complexities of raising children in a nurturing and supportive environment. Running ALW (Active Learning Workshops) sessions was particularly fulfilling, as these workshops empowered parents and caregivers with practical skills and knowledge. I also took pride in raising awareness on key issues such as nutrition, environmental factors affecting children's growth, and the overall importance of Early Childhood Development.

Through aRe Bapaleng, I was capacitated with tools and knowledge to make a meaningful impact. I guided parents on how to properly feed their children, create safe and stimulating environments for their growth, and understand the critical aspects of ECD. This included areas such as child development milestones, psychosocial support, and the importance of holistic care during early childhood.

The journey also revealed several gaps within the community loopholes in understanding nutrition, the environment children grow in, and the role of ECD itself. However, addressing these challenges was deeply rewarding. Witnessing the transformation in parents as they became more aware and equipped to support their children was the highlight of my work.



AMANDA SELOKO

Orange Farm (Gauteng) Field Coordinator

Amanda began her role as the NYS Team Leader from January 2022 until March 2022. After the conclusion of the NYS contract, she joined SEF as a participant from April 2022 until May 2024. In July 2024, she became a Field Supervisor at Seriti (aReBapaleng), where she implemented programmes within her community and established multiple partnerships. Throughout her time as Team Leader, Amanda was very passionate about her work; she effectively managed her team and actively participated in community service initiatives. During her time at SEF, she engaged with the community to ensure the effectiveness of the services provided. Currently, as an FS, she is responsible for managing the NYS 3 team and implementing the programme. aReBapaleng.

She shared her life Journey:

"When I began working as a Field Coordinator, I felt anxious because this role was different from my previous experience as an NYS team leader and SEF caregiver networker. I initially hesitated to accept the position because it felt like a major role to step into. However, my willingness to learn, gain experience, and make a positive impact in my community encouraged me to confront my anxieties and move forward with courage. My experience as a field coordinator has taught me that the role is not just about completing the tasks assigned to me; it's also about building strong relationships with the community and stakeholders. Being a field coordinator feels like being the face of the company! It's a role that allows me to connect with others and represent our amazing team. Some people would call me as "Mme MaSeriti" or "aRe Bapaleng" when they see me in the mall or around the community. As a field coordinator, I had several highlights, including building relationships with community members and stakeholders, attending ECD forum meetings, and participating in events organized by community organizations such as SANCA, Clean Touch Administrative Services, Moleboheng Cares, Love Life, Omama Besiqu, and Let Us Grow. I also worked on obtaining permission from clinic matrons to conduct awareness campaigns.

My field coordinator journey has been nothing short of phenomenal, due to the leadership and support of my programme coordinator. She allowed me to make mistakes and learn without making me like a failure. During this experience, I have gained many skills, such as team management, conflict resolution, planning, collaboration, and delegation."



NEO LEBOGO

Deelpan (NW) Field Coordinator



My Name is Neo Lebogo, and I'm from Deelpan village in the Northwest Province. I've been working as a field coordinator at Seriti Institute under the aRe Bapaleng programme since June 2024. Initially, I lacked experience in coordination and facilitation, but the programme has equipped me with the necessary skills in coordinating ECD programmes and activities. Through the training I received, I've built strong relationships with stakeholders, including children, parents, caregivers and community leaders. I've gained a deeper understanding of cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development of children. Additionally, I've developed strategies for engaging communities, promoting ECD services, and building partnerships. By the time the NYS programme started, I had a comprehensive understanding of the aRe Bapaleng Programme, which enabled me to develop leadership skills and take initiatives. I confidently coordinated five sites on the ground, with support from my coordinator at Head Office. My responsibilities included training participants to implement the programme in their communities and neighboring areas. This experience helped me adapt to new environments, step out of my comfort zone, and improve my presentation skills. I also gained valuable insights into child development and learned to remain calm in stressful situations.

Furthermore, I acquired the skill of writing narrative reports, documenting every activity that took place during the month.

ZINHLE NCOBENI

Mpande and Sweetwater (KZN) Field Coordinator



Zinhle Ncobeni started working at Seriti under the aRe Bapaleng programme in 2022 as a CGNER funded by SEF in partnership with Dlalanathi in Pietermaritzburg, KZN. This was a very interesting experience for me, as we were trained to recruit ECDs (Early Childhood Development practitioners) to support our services. I had the opportunity to visit households and learned that my community is struggling with parenting. The aRe Bapaleng programme played an enormous role in teaching and helping caregivers in the community. I was promoted to supervisor within three months of the implementation of the programme in KZN, where I was responsible for the entire team. This journey tested my leadership skills, as I was in charge of logistics during training sessions with Seriti partners and ensuring that team members fulfilled their responsibilities in the community. I also managed the signing of timesheets and the writing of weekly reports. There have been challenges along the way, particularly due to the head office being in Johannesburg. We sometimes faced issues with receiving materials on time and candidates not showing up for work. However, by learning how to lead a team and handle work-related issues collaboratively, we overcame these challenges.

Training sessions like Nlibali helped me understand how to run a book club for ECDs and the importance of reading stories to children. This knowledge has even benefited my own household, as I can now read to my 8-year-old and 3-year-old sons, and they enjoy it. Partnering with Singakwenza has also opened my eyes to how to recycle and create toys from waste, as well as the importance of play without the need to purchase toys. Although we do not have a toy library in Pietermaritzburg, I would be thrilled if the programme could consider establishing one. Starting in 2024, I have transitioned from supervisor to field coordinator in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). My responsibilities have increased, as I am now responsible for requesting the necessary equipment for the implementation in KZN. I oversee two sites: Mpande and Sweetwater, under the aRe Bapaleng programme funded by NYS. This is very exciting for me, as I can see the expansion of the programme and the job opportunities that have come with it. I am eager to connect with more communities through our programme.

BONAKELE THABATHE

Standerton & BBR (MP) Field Coordinator



My name is Boni I have been a field Coordinator for 2-months. So far I am enjoying my work because it is interesting and challenging at the same time. I mostly enjoy working on ground because I get to engage more with the participants, and caregivers and mostly with children. My work has thought me to work independently and mostly learn good communication skills and be responsible. What I still find challenging is keeping up with my admin work because it is all still new.

I am grateful to have a supportive line manager who I can ask for help and who is open to helping me when I do not understand something. I appreciate my stipend a lot because this year for the first time after long time I didn't worry about sending my kids back to school and providing all they school needs, also not forgetting that I come from are community that don't have are lot of opportunities for young people.

Building stronger, more resilient communities of caregivers

Parents/caregivers reported feeling empowered and more knowledgeable about child development, as well as more comfortable to discuss challenges and seek help. As a result, **they are able to positively support their children's early learning and development. This is narrowing the gap between children who have access to ECD and those that do not.** *"But as caregivers, we make our children feel comfortable. Even if the child is at home like, but she gets the amount of love that the children at the crèche get. Even when we play games with them, that child inherit and learns like a child that is at the crèche. When that child's comes back and interacts with our children at school again, there is no difference."* (Modimolle).

Participants in Standerton noted that the programme has helped young people in their Youth programme to reduce unemployment risks by providing stipends and teaching financial management. It also offered training opportunities, such as certificates in Occupational Health and Safety, which boosted participants' confidence and employability. Another participant in Orange Farm is studying Foundation Phase education and stated that she transferred her learnings from the aRe Bapaleng workshops to her studies. Her on the job skills improved her formal learning experience. *"What we've learned when Seriti came, it actually helped a lot of young people. To decrease chances of unemployment. It offered people a stipend, so people were able to get something from it and cover their needs. You know, teach them how to use money."* (Standerton).

Unemployed youth are being supported towards a pathway to employment



INCREASED ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES AND RESOURCES



YOUTH FEEL MORE SKILLED AND EMPLOYABLE



PEOPLE FEEL VALUED AND EMPOWERED



4 2. Strengthening the local ECD ecosystem

4.2.2 Bringing together the broader community and ECD stakeholders to increase their awareness and knowledge related to ECD and foster cooperation and collaboration

Stronger social capital due to strengthened networks of collaboration, cooperation and learning exchange that have been fostered in these communities because of parents and caregivers participating in the aRe Bapaleng programme.

The programme has fostered a sense of community among participants, encouraging them to share knowledge and skills with others. Participants actively disseminate information about health, nutrition, and responsive parenting to their neighbours. This collective effort has led to improved parenting practices and childcare within the community. Participants expressed a duty to transfer the skills they learned to other parents, thereby enhancing the community. This sense of altruism and civic duty not only extends to the sharing of knowledge but also of food as well.

“Participants in the three regions shared concern for neighbours with food shortage. Where community gardens were established, parents were sharing food with those in need. There was a request for home gardens in the regions this was not yet started.” - Focus Group Discussions.



More altruism and tolerance are positively supporting greater social inclusion

SOME PARTICIPANTS VOICED THAT SERITI HAS AIDED IN MORE INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES, COMBATTING DISCRIMINATION TOWARDS FAMILIES WITH DISABILITIES.

“The aRe Bapaleng programme also helped I believe in the community to break stereotypes. In it, we also have households, of which you might arrive at a certain household and find out that they have children that are living with disabilities.

But because of this stigma and what not, they isolate the children from the community. So, this has given us an opportunity to reach out to those households to also engage with the parents that it's okay.

They are also part of our community, and they need to be inclusive, instead of just isolating them, because of their disability. So, it's breaking barriers for me. And it's also teaching us or educating us as a community that they are part of our community. So, we also need to reach out to them. Not only to people without disabilities, but we also need to reach out to them and have activities that we can do with them because it does not mean that they are limited.

They are not given a fair chance, but they are able. They're just differently abled. However, they can do whatever that we can do, given a chance.” - aRe Bapaleng participant.

4

By equipping parents with critical skills and knowledge, the programme fosters a culture of empowerment and proactive care. Participants envision these benefits cascading to future generations.

Participants expressed hope that the benefits of the aRe Bapaleng programme would extend to future generations, contributing to a healthier, more educated community. They see themselves as part of a larger movement to create a healthier, more educated community. They believe that the skills and knowledge gained will help reduce societal issues like crime and poverty, while enhancing education and improve overall community well-being.

The aRe Bapaleng programme has not only improved individual parenting practices but has also contributed to broader community health and well-being. Participants feel that the programme should continue and expand to reach more families. Many felt the programme should be integrated into the education system.



**COMMUNITIES SUPPORT
THE PROGRAMME AND ITS
EXPANSION**



**POSITIVE VISION OF
FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR
THE COMMUNITY**



Facilitating dialogue and understanding of the community and the context in order to strengthen local ECD ecosystems.

Strengthened local engagement including increasing opportunities for networking, collaboration, and cooperation:

Through its activities such as the annual Partner Networking Event and its provincial Expert Forums the Seriti aRe Bapaleng Programme is facilitating partnership engagement and dialogue, as well as contributing to a better understanding of the ECD landscape and local context. This process is also enabling the sharing of best practices and lessons learned, as well as catalysing further collaboration within the partner community of ECD Stakeholders, from educators, policymakers, community leaders, and others.

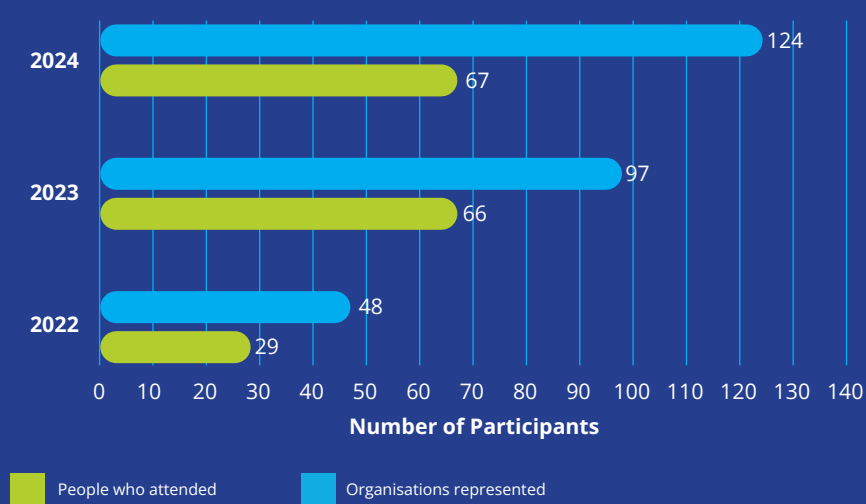
4 aRe Bapaleng Partner Networking Event

LEVERAGING THE POWER OF COLLABORATION TO BUILD AN ECOSYSTEM OF ECD SUPPORT FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS.

Seriti hosted its third annual aRe Bapaleng partner networking event on 17 May 2024 at the Standard Bank Global Leadership Centre in Morningside, Johannesburg.

The event was dedicated to exploring the crucial role of collaboration in building a robust ecosystem of support for Early Childhood Development (ECD) among parents and caregivers. It brought together aRe Bapaleng partners, government, donors and other CSO/NPOs in the ECD space to learn more about how they are influencing social change and to explore potential areas of collaboration to promote greater social impact. Through the event aRe Bapaleng aimed to enable the strategies that will increase collaborative partnerships in the ECD/Early Learning/Parental support space.

2024 PARTNER NETWORK EVENT ATTENDANCE



The day was marked by robust discussions gleaning learnings and insights that can be used by the ECD community going forward.



- Think more about the pathways and how diverse these may be and how to contribute to multi-faceted interactions within a specific ECD space.
- Public employment provides opportunities for meaningful work experience, particularly in the care economy, and lead to greater social inclusion
- Collaboration through partnerships is key to unlock social change and maximise impact
- Important to share lessons learned along the way
- The ECD sector needs coherent support
- Network and focus on what you can contribute to catalyse change.
- Parents play a key role in child development, and they come with their own knowledge too
- Youth voices are a central source to draw on



4

Partnerships – a core strength of aRe Bapaleng that catalyses positive social change

aRe Bapaleng is contributing to social cohesion by facilitating stronger inter-group cooperation not only within communities of parents and caregivers, but also with other key stakeholders. The development of partnerships is seen as a critical element of the aRe Bapaleng working model, which enables the programme to extend its reach (both country-wide and in marginalised areas) and provide holistic, multi-faceted support.

Participants call for Seriti to take a more pivotal role here to be even more holistic by including a broader range of key stakeholders – *“Some pointed out partnership potential with community workers such as pastors, social workers, and schools, for a holistic approach to community (and caregiver) wellness. Parents believed that Seriti could act as a pivotal program, amplifying efforts to drive meaningful and lasting change.”* - Focus Group Discussion findings

Expert Forums

OBJECTIVES:

- Focus is on raising awareness and increasing knowledge related to key aspects of ECD including nutrition, mental health and learning through play, as well as keeping up to date with latest policy and research.
- Sharing best practice and lessons learned from implementation of programmes and support initiatives focused on supporting families and young children.
- Finding ways to cooperate, collaborate and coordinate to support parents/caregivers and their young children, ensuring synergy and maximising resource efficiency and effectiveness.

3

Events held in
2024

75

Participants

- Seriti aRe Bapaleng - enabling collective impact to support early learning and development
- Feedback from target participants (key stakeholders in ECD ecosystems)
- Expert forums were a good networking opportunity and a valuable channel for identifying potential partnerships
- Learned how other organisations work and about a number of other ECD related aspects



Participants shared what they learned that was new for them...

95%

of participants learned something new at the event.

They found the presentations informative and inspiring

IMPORTANCE OF NUTRITION AND BEING HEALTHY, INCLUDING MENTALLY:

- “We must eat less starch and more veggies.”
- “Nutrition – what is the best food to eat.”
- “That breast feeding is important and mental health.”
- “Role of trauma in outcomes of children (PTSD)”

LEARNED MORE ABOUT THE ECD SECTOR RELATED TO ITS COMPLEXITIES AND CHALLENGES:

- “There is a gap in making Early Childhood Development (ECD) centers conducive for child development, and the lack of sufficient funding is a serious issue for the nation.”
- “Legislation and policies.”

REALISED THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF ECD AND THE ROLE OF THE PARENT IN STIMULATING EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT:

- “How crucial it is to play and interact with the child as a way to stimulate them.”
- “To invite parents at our centre, not only in the emergency.”
- “Parenting skills.”

LEARNED ABOUT WHAT OTHERS IN THE SECTOR ARE DOING AND THAT THERE ARE DIFFERENT WAYS OF DOING THINGS AND HELP IS AVAILABLE TO OVERCOME CHALLENGES:

- “How other organizations work.”
- “I have always struggled with having enough breast milk and it is good to know that I can get help for that at the clinic.”

TOYS DO NOT NEED TO BE STORE BOUGHT AND PARENTS CAN BE CREATIVE IN THIS AREA:

- “Singakwenza give us more skills of making toys.”
- “Creative thinking when it comes to make toys for our children. Teaching them that not everything must be bought.”



4

Expert Forum Event - Free State - 28 August 2024





What did you like most about the event?

- "The event was highly informative, and I learned so much. The most important takeaway for me was realizing that I'm not alone in feeling stressed about the current social issues and challenges facing South Africa."
- "Different mindsets and well experienced people coming together and sharing the same goal for a better tomorrow."
- "The diverse range of expert perspectives and experiences shared."
- "The setup, coordination, important information, intelligent speakers, togetherness, catering and the venue."
- "The presentations from different stakeholders working with children."
- The content. It was an eye-opening session for small things that we ignore in ECD.
- What I loved most was how passionate and knowledgeable everyone was, especially when it came to advocating for children. The way the discussions focused on real issues affecting vulnerable communities and explored practical solutions really stood out.
- It was great to see everyone coming together, sharing ideas, and showing genuine commitment to improving the lives of children. The focus on collaboration and child advocacy made it clear that we all have a role to play in creating a brighter future. Well done on organizing such a meaningful and impactful event!
- The way they change our community into something else.

"Everything!"

Expert Forum Event - Limpopo - 14 November 2024

4

All participants felt the event had helped them with networking. A high percentage are interested in collaborating or partnering with Seriti going forward. Those that responded that they were not interested tended to be because they were already partnering with Seriti.



Closing comments from participants...

- "We look forward to staying connected and sharing future events with you."
- "It was great event full of information."
- "Everything was well planned and prepared and I loved all the experts who were there."
- "Seriti should keep up the great work!"
- "The next event should happen soon."
- "We hope Seriti will organise such events more often. We really learnt a lot and hope to learn more. Thank you."

Parents endorse Seriti aRe Bapaleng

“We just wanna thank the Seriti members, because they have brought a very huge impact and difference into our lives. A lot has improved. We have learned. We are well trained through this programme. The things we never knew existed; they are there. You will never starve; you’ll never go hungry with this aRe Bapaleng programme... I really don’t know how to thank the people from Seriti. Because they just brought us (this programme).”

They took us from zero to heroes... So, we are no longer starving. We are no longer lacking money... And if it can bring more, that means there will be no hunger anymore. It will create jobs. Not only for us but for everyone.” (aRe Bapaleng Participant - Modimolle)

“We are so creative. We didn’t know we had it until they aRe Bapaleng programme started. Hidden talents, but now we are given a chance. So, there’s so many things from this programme that has improved in our lives and our children’s lives as well.” (aRe Bapaleng Participant - Modimolle)

“We really needed this life reviving tool.” (aRe Bapaleng Participant - Standerton)



“For me, aRe Bapaleng changes lives. It also liberates, because I’ve learned so much. And, from learning from the aRe Bapaleng project, I’m able to take what I’ve learned from here, to the community – Let it be a friend, a family member. So, for me, it’s “each one teaches one.” I cannot just take this information to be for myself, I must take it to the next person, the next person, so on and so forth. So, it’s bringing change. Because we’ve learned so much. I would not have learned so much if it was not for this programme.” (aRe Bapaleng Participant - Orange Farm)

Reflections and way forward

After five years of implementation, the programme finds itself in an opportune position to reflect and pivot where necessary. In the next year, the focus will be on working with parents and caregivers through a model that prioritises long-term implementation with a cohort of parents as suggested by the LEAP process. The programme will enhance its aRe Bapaleng App to become not only a centralised data collection tool but a platform that can also enrich the beneficiaries' experience.

In addition to this, efforts will be made to add to the existing content and information through the development of new info sheets. The accreditation of the ALW material as a level 1 skills programme will allow the programme to enrol its first cohort of students in 2025.

The programme will continue to strengthen its partnerships and focus on establishing relationships with local government and other community-based stakeholders, including relevant government departments. The programme will continue to position itself as an advocate for parental well-being and demonstrate how this can have positive effects on overall community wellness and cohesion. Ultimately, the programme will focus on supporting other aspects of ECD and parent and caregiver support as drivers for socio-economic upliftment.



7

Acknowledgement and thanks

The aRe Bapaleng programme's growth and impact over the years would not be possible without the support of our donors, communities and partners.



A deep appreciation goes to Standard Bank South Africa for their continued support of the programme since its inception.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the implementing and enabling partners who continuously commit to advancing the work that we do on aRe Bapaleng. Their tireless efforts to helping us build resilient communities and stronger ECD ecosystems allows us to achieve significant impact.



Our Partners:



We are Members of the following Networks:



As we look ahead to the future, we are excited to continue working together with our stakeholders to bring more meaningful impact through the programme.



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