

Gathering Input: An Informed Opinion on the Proposed ECD Models

After meeting with Centre for Early Childhood Development ([CECD](#)), Early Learning Resource Unit ([ELRU](#)), [Grassroots](#), and [Sikhula Sonke](#), and through conversation with our sponsor Foundation for Community Work ([FCW](#)), our team was able to put together a range of inputs on the two proposed ECD outreach models: (1) Utilising a Public Space for ECD Programming, and (2) Retrofitting a Shipping Container for Use as an ECD Resource Hub. This input came from organisations with a variety of experiences and approaches to ECD throughout the Western Cape. In preparation for these discussions, we conducted some [background research](#) on each of the organisations.

The public space model was generally considered a positive idea, as it brings parents and children out of their immediate surroundings into a safe space within their community. ELRU was vocal about the importance of having a safe environment and designated area for ECD, emphasizing that these spaces often help parents find a support network within their community. A few of the organisations also mentioned that working with local municipalities, such as the Department of Social Development (DSD), could help identify areas of need within a given settlement, as well as pinpoint possible public spaces for use of this model. Grassroots stressed that in the past, coordinating with the DSD has helped them work in tandem with outside partners to accomplish common goals.

Although the public space model was unanimously accepted, a few of the organisations noted that it would work better if families were targeted to participate by a home visiting programme. CECD noted that they had remarkably better attendance and participation from families who had previously been visited in their homes as part of their Family Outreach Project, and that the public space model could plan to target similar groups. Sikhula Sonke already has a type of ECD outreach service in place that utilises a room in a public library for monthly parent workshops and daily children's programmes. Their feedback was therefore very positive and in favour of the public space model. They also echoed CECD in suggesting initial work with families in the home, and then expanding to a group setting. This feedback was well received by FCW, as they had already considered implementing Family in Focus ([FIF](#)), their home visiting programme, in areas where they intend to implement the public space model.

The ECD Resource Hub model was also well received by all of the organisations. Logistical questions were brought up in relation to the physical location of the container, and who would claim ownership. CECD expressed concern that there would be a debate over the entitlement that the target community has for the resource hub, and ELRU noted that there would likely be an issue over sharing the container with the community versus the sponsoring organisation having complete ownership. This is a challenge already anticipated by FCW and plans are in place, including the rotation of the container among communities so that it is not in one location for a long period. A few of the organisations, specifically Sikhula Sonke and Grassroots, compared this model to the concept of a toy library. While Grassroots does not have a toy library currently in place, they do have toy kits as start-ups for a few of their programmes, and are considering adding the concept of the toy library to their set of ECD approaches.

An interesting observation was made by Sikhula Sonke and ELRU when they compared the resource hub model to the Emthonjeni Programme currently employed by Sikhula Sonke. The Emthonjeni Programme is a form of ECD outreach that utilises communal water taps and other existing features in the community as safe spaces for children to benefit from access to ECD resources. The Emthonjeni approach is meant to complement the work done in ECD centres, and is similar in many ways to the

resource hub model being proposed by FCW. This model and the Emthonjeni approach offer a nice alternative approach to the public space model in the sense that residents do not have to leave the familiarity of their settlement.

A common consensus from all of the organisations on ECD approaches in general is that different strategies need to be used in different places as not every settlement or community will respond to the same approach. The organisations also voiced that it is difficult for people in under resourced areas to focus on ECD when significant effort is required to fulfil basic needs. CECD, ELRU, Grassroots, Sikhula Sonke, and FCW are all well-equipped to work under a variety of circumstances to promote ECD in unique ways despite these challenges. The public space and resource hub models being proposed by FCW work to complement the various approaches in existence, while also bringing new ideas to the table.