

## The Bright Kid Foundation: A true commitment to early childhood development



*An ECD practitioner busy at work at the Kromdraai ECD Centre@UNICEF/2019/Mojapelo*

*Krugersdorp, 16 April 2019:* A gravel road close to the world-renowned Cradle of Humankind leads one to a brightly-painted picket fence behind a series of colourful buildings. As one enters, one is greeted by laughing children enjoying their playtime break. Built from a series of converted shipping containers, these innovative structures form the Kromdraai Early Childhood Development Centre are located in west Johannesburg.

There is compelling evidence of the impact early childhood development has on shaping the lives of children for the better. In under-resourced communities such as this one, that impact is all the more meaningful as there are very few other options.

This sanctuary is due to the commitment and vision of the Bright Kid Foundation, an innovative non-profit entity since 2000, that has converted over 500 shipping containers into fully-functional early childhood development centres and delivered them throughout Africa. Today, the Foundation works with a large number of ECD-focused NGOs in South Africa and has received glowing endorsements from across the spectrum.



*“Hold hands!” shout the children at the Kromdraai ECD Centre. ©UNICEF/2019/Mojapelo*

Founder and CEO of the Bright Kid Foundation, Nicholas Jaff explains how this life-changing organization came into existence. Working with the Nelson Mandela Foundation in 1999 to provide toys in schools, he one day received a letter of thanks from a teacher in the Eastern Cape who added “the toys are lovely but please send us a school.” Shortly afterwards while driving to Durban behind a truck carrying large shipping containers, a solution occurred to Nicholas.

Researching the dimension and potential use of these shipping containers, Nicholas recalls exclaiming at the time “I found my school!” The first container was delivered to a school in an underprivileged community in 2000, and today over 65,000 children have benefitted from having a functioning, practical, physical structure for their early learning and development experience. This year (2019), an estimated 30 containers will be delivered. Strong and versatile (made from 2 mm steel), the containers are painted in bright colours, often with local motifs. After the first container Early Childhood Development Centre (ECDC) was delivered, the national Department of Social Development was impressed and requested that this initiative be expanded. There were also suggestions that the container-based ECDCs should also include shaded space for the children to play, and have toilets and water tanks. “We have never had a centre fail and we always ensure full community buy-in” explains Nicholas. “Mothers understand the importance of early education and we see tangible results which are very significant” he adds.

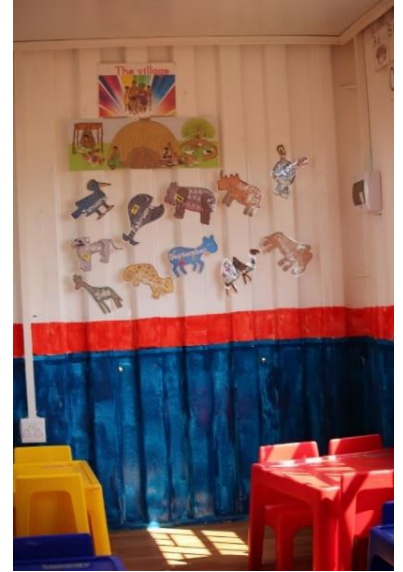
Since 2000, over ZAR 200 million (\$14 million) has been raised by the Bright Kid Foundation from a wide range of corporate and individual benefactors, all of whom see considerable value in these centres. “I promise donors that it is a once-off donation” explains Nicholas while adding that his responsibility is “to make sure that ECD centres are in the right place and the right NGO is dealt with.”.

For Andries Viviers, ECD Specialist at UNICEF South Africa, “The Government of South Africa made early childhood development a national priority through the NDP: Vision 2030, which requires all role-players to play their part. The Bright Kid Foundation plays a valuable role through their approach in bringing business, ECD networks and communities together to contribute to this national vision and making a difference in the lives of young children”.



*Andries Viviers (L), Bertha Moralo and Nicholas Jaff at the Kromdraai ECD Centre ©UNICEF/2019/Mojapelo*





*The cheerful colours of the centre which is a place of safety and stimulation ©UNICEF/2019/Mojapelo*

Describing the containers as “magnets for development”, Nicholas informs the UNICEF team that he receives up to 50 requests per month from communities, thus underlining the dire need for these centres. Community buy-in is critical and Nicholas describes how local communities gather when the containers are delivered by large trucks and hoisted onto the selected land by cranes. “It is a heartwarming experience” he says. In terms of finding the site, the Foundation works with ECD non-governmental organisations who help identify the site. The teachers are then trained and they get community support. “It is not an individual project as we work closely with well-established ECD NGO partners,” explains Nicholas.

With a welcoming smile, ECD practitioner and principal, Bertha Moralo takes a visiting team from UNICEF South Africa for a tour of the facilities. Bertha has been with the centre from its inception and notes that she loves what she does, “Because I love kids.” This centre was established in 2012 and there are 25 children per classroom, with a current enrollment of 85 children and 4 teachers. A colourful jungle gym dominates the courtyard and the centre is neat and well-maintained. In the evening the centre provides a space for Adult Basic Education and Training and a workshop space for parents, thus actively contributing to community building.

It is a long day for Bertha and her team as children are collected from their homes from 06h20 in the morning. By 06h45 the centre is open and it remains so until 16h00 daily. For this peace of mind and the knowledge that their children are safe and in good care, parents and guardians pay a monthly fee of R150. Bertha informs us that the community is appreciative of the work being done by the Centre and help ensure that there is no vandalism or theft on the property.



*Bertha Moralo has been at the Kromdraai ECD Centre since it was established @UNICEF/2019/Mojapelo*

The welcome sight of a lush, healthy-looking vegetable garden greets visitors to the centre. The garden is watered using the water collected from the 2500-litre water tanks that are part of every centre. “We eat from the garden” says Bertha proudly. Carrots, spinach tomatoes, green pepper and beetroot are grown and help provide nutritious meals for the children daily. UNICEF is a strong proponent of healthy eating for children and is greatly encouraged by this. The nutrition guidelines of the Department of Health (DOH) are followed as both UNICEF and the DOH believe that a healthy meal in terms of the cognitive development of children cannot be underestimated.

Dr Alison Feeley, Nutrition Specialist at UNICEF South Africa notes that range of facilities provided by the Bright Kid Foundation plays a critical role in aiding the full development of children. From clean and safe ablution facilities to fully equipped converted class rooms, food gardens and safe play spaces, Dr. Feeley commends the Foundation for the “invaluable combination of facilities that help enable communities to provide for their children.

For parents in this area, many of whom are either unemployed, job-seeking or who are employed in relatively low-paying jobs that require long distances to travel daily, the centre is a true sanctuary

UNICEF South Africa has established ECD as among its key priorities in South Africa and is inspired by innovative work being done by the Bright Kid Foundation at Kromdraai and elsewhere in the country. UNICEF believes that early learning and development opportunities provide children with the best start in life and help them to grow up to be healthy, happy secure adults; and that the innovative and collaborative approach of the Bright Kid Foundation helps expand such opportunities for young children – one ECD centre container at a time.

For more information, contact Nicholas Jaff at the Bright Kid Foundation: [info@brightkidfoundation.co.za](mailto:info@brightkidfoundation.co.za) / <https://www.brightkidfoundation.co.za/>



*Initiatives like the Bright Kids Foundation help to create healthy, happy adults ©UNICEF/2019/Mojapelo*