



Early Childhood Development Investment Crucial for SA's Children

In South Africa, almost half of Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres lack basic necessities, with [45%](#) having no indoor plumbing, and 40% lacking flushable toilets. Additionally, 34% don't have a proper outdoor playground. These conditions can hinder a child's development and well-being, highlighting the urgent need for intervention.

[SSP Legacy](#), a division of the [Santa Shoebox Project](#), is tackling this crisis head-on by building their fifth facility in just four years, providing safe and nurturing environments for local children. Situated in KwaVala, near Winterton, a small town nestled in the foothills of the Drakensberg Mountain in KwaZulu-Natal, the Zisizeni Creche will be transformed from a simple one-roomed structure with a leaking tin roof, dusty floors and zero amenities into a supportive space for learning. The new building, set to accommodate up to 40 children, will consist of two classrooms, a sick bay, office, toilets, kitchen, food garden and secure, fenced-in educational playground. A solar-powered borehole is also on the wish list.

The nonprofit organisation (NPO's) CEO, Deb Zelezniak, says the decision to rebuild this particular crèche was made last year while the team was building in the neighbouring uThukela District. "A teacher's tears solidified our decision," she explains, referring to Phumelela Mazibuko at Zisizeni who wept, apologising for not being able to do more for the children in her care. "We knew then and there we had to do the necessary."

Reflecting on the milestone of building five ECD centres in four years, Zelezniak shares her pride, "We're making a difference in communities around the country. Each year, every one of these ECDs impact the lives of more children. While each facility supports around 40 children, over the past four years we have provided buildings for 495 to learn in. With the addition of Zisizeni, this number will increase to 535 and continue to grow each year, as we have no plans of stopping."

Nikiwe Ngobese, a caregiver at the Qandokuhle Crèche, the NPO's most recent build, shares that now the facility is at a standard where the children can learn. "We are located in a rural area where infrastructure development is slow, but the Santa Shoebox Project rescued us from this situation. We hope that the organisation will continue helping other centres in need."

"The parents were very pleased when they heard that there will be a crèche opening in our area," adds Zodwa Ngwenya from Snethemba Educare, the Santa Shoebox Project's third undertaking which was built from the ground up on a vacant piece of land.

Funding for the project is entirely sourced from private philanthropic contributions and the proceeds from the [Virtual Santa Shoebox](#) which enables donors to purchase shoeboxes online year-round for donation to underprivileged children throughout South Africa. However, the organisation encourages individuals and companies to support the cause by donating funds or in-kind contributions such as playground equipment, security systems, educational toys, books, and food.

“Despite what we've been led to believe about budget allocations to early childhood development, it is becoming more difficult than ever for the women running these centres to access funding and infrastructure. Without a solid early childhood education, the impoverished children they tend to will find themselves entrenched in the poverty cycle. It is incumbent on those of us with resources who are able to assist, to step up. We simply cannot turn a blind eye to the needs of children,” concludes Zelezniak.

To get involved, go to <https://santashoebox.org.za>.

About the Santa Shoebox Project

Traditional Santa Shoebox: Over the last 18 years, 1 226 756 Santa Shoeboxes, each containing eight specified items of treats and essentials, have been given to underprivileged and socially vulnerable children throughout South Africa and Namibia. From 01 September each year, Santa Shoebox donors choose their beneficiary child/ren by name, age and gender and are given the child's clothing size. Each personalised shoebox reaches the very child for whom it was pledged.

Virtual Santa Shoebox: These shoeboxes are purchased online by donors and are available year-round, meeting the needs of donors who live too far from drop-off points, are too busy to shop or have health issues. Components are chosen by the donor on the Santa Shoebox website, the shoeboxes are packed by the Santa Shoebox Team and delivered to children attending far-flung rural facilities. A Virtual Santa Shoebox contains the eight specified items, as well as additional items, such as a lunchbox and books. A Virtual Santa Shoebox costs R450 plus an optional delivery fee of R30.

SSP Legacy: All Santa Shoebox Project operating costs are covered by corporate sponsors. Privately donated funds accrue to the SSP Legacy and are used to bring permanent change to the lives of Santa Shoebox beneficiary children and the impoverished communities in which they live.

Fiduciary information: As a Level One Contributor to B-BBEE, the Santa Shoebox Project earns 100 points on the generic scorecard, and with Section 18A status, is able to provide a tax-deductible receipt in recognition of donations. The Project is an initiative of the JOG Trust (IT2671/2009). The Trust is registered as a Public Benefit Organisation (PBO-930031301), a Non-Profit Organisation (NPO 102-098) and holds a current ICPR in support of 100% SED compliance.

Social media:

TikTok: @santa.shoebox

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Instagram: /santashoebox

YouTube: The Santa Shoebox Project

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