

3 cops fight in police P7 station

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Proud graduates from the Bright Future Preschool at Nkoyoyo, with their certificates.

Communities embrace early childhood education

BY SITHEMBILE HLATSHWAYO

MBABANE - Good early childhood development before the age of five, is now seen as essential for children to do well at school and break out of the intergenerational poverty cycle.

SHAMBA, a local Non-government organisation working with various communities in the Hhohho region, has ensured that early childhood development is realised.

Secretary of the SHAMBA Trust Dr Allan Low, said the organisation has worked with communities in Mpolonjeni, Nkoyoyo and Ntambande. Low said these communities were in the forefront of international thinking on where best to invest their scarce resources, to reduce poverty and develop themselves.

"Good early childhood development before the age of five is now seen as essential for children to do well at school and become productive, constructive Swazi citizens, who are able to break out of the poverty cycle," said Low.

He said it was unfortunate that a growing number of orphaned and vulnerable children were being brought up in impoverished households, where their early years of development is very limited.

"These children lack opportunities to develop cognitive skills or the equally critical 'soft skills' such as discipline, attentiveness, self-control and sociability."

Low said international studies have shown that where these skills have not been developed by the age of five, chances of developing them later decrease drastically.

In Mpolonjeni, he said communities were supporting the provision of quality early childhood education and development, for their most vulnerable children through their NCPs.

They have partnered with SHAMBA to establish and run high quality preschools for children

aged three to five years in conjunction with their NCP kitchens.

Low said in Nkoyoyo, the NCP committee partnered with the Swedish Free Church and SHAMBA to set up the Bright Future Preschool. He said the church building acts as the preschool during weekdays and reverts to a church on weekends.

SHAMBA employs and trains the preschool teachers and the church employs a preschool helper, who is also the NCP caregiver. In return for free quality education for their children, the mothers or carers of the preschool children take turns to cook at the NCP kitchen every weekday.

Most graduates from the Bright Future Preschool, go on to the local primary school, St John's and Mater Della Rosa, where they are reportedly performing very well.

Work

The Roma NCP has also worked with SHAMBA to replace their old stick and mud kitchen with a structure that houses a kitchen and a classroom.

The NCP committee have asked SHAMBA to help them recruit, train and employ a teacher and assistant teacher as well as to identify children from the poorest households to benefit from the 20 places that will be available.

Ntambande community has also requested SHAMBA to support them in the same way. A site has been allocated for the kitchen/schoolroom to replace two former NCP kitchens.

The NCP committee and SHAMBA have approached a number of local and international donors for support and are still waiting for their response.

In Mpolonjeni, there is a belief that early childhood education and development for those most in need does herald a brighter future, not only for the children and their families but also for the rejuvenated NCPs and the whole of the Mpolonjeni community.