

TOGETHER WE CAN

2025 IMPACT REPORT



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ECD Early Childhood Development
SEN Special Educational Needs
OT Occupational Therapy/ist
PT Physiotherapy/ist
SLT Speech and Language Therapy/ist
ASD Autism Spectrum Disorder
CP Cerebral Palsy
CDG Care Dependency Grant
IT Inclusion Tool
MEL Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning
CHW Community Healthcare Worker
ISP Individual Support Plan

DEFINITIONS

Siyasiza Siyakwazi community-based fieldworker

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

TO ALL SIYAKWAZI'S STAKEHOLDERS AND INTERESTED PARTIES,

As we enter 2026, Siyakwazi reflects on a year of strategic review and organisational development. In 2025, we focused not only on programme delivery, but on strengthening the structures and leadership that will underpin Siyakwazi's long-term sustainability.

Through a formal strategic planning process, we identified gaps in capacity and systems. This led to the initiation of recruitment for a Senior Manager role and a clearer investment in supporting and developing our Programme Managers. As our work becomes more specialised, strong leadership and accountability are essential.

We are also refining our service model—while we continue to deliver direct services in KwaNzimakwe and KwaXolo, we are shifting from a primarily area-based approach to clearly defined, specialised programmes with measurable outcomes. Our ECD 'Inclusive Hubs' expansion project is being established as a distinct programme, with a focus on outreach, partnerships, and sharing learning beyond our immediate communities into other parts of the Ugu District.

*refining our model
to strengthen
support and
deepen impact*

Our advocacy work continues, particularly in advancing the inclusion of children with disabilities. Early intervention and quality early childhood development are foundational to long-term educational outcomes and full participation in society.

Siyakwazi remains grateful to our donors, partners, and supporters which enables the above endeavours. Special thanks to Cathy Mather-Pike, our Director, and the whole Siyakwazi team for their ongoing commitment.

After 7 years participating with this highly effective team, I step down from the Committee this year, confident in the organisation's direction and leadership. It has been a privilege to be part of the team.

RORY O'DONNELL
CHAIRMAN


DIRECTOR'S REPORT

2025: CLARITY OF PURPOSE FOR INTENTIONAL ACTION

Our team focused on strengthening our foundations in 2025—for strategic growth and long-term sustainability. Through a consultant-led planning process, I worked closely with our senior managers to clarify our priorities, support internal capacity-building, and organisational stability moving into 2026 and beyond. We wanted clarity of purpose to guide intentional action across every programme, training, and platform entrusted to us.

We made really positive steps in Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL), improving how we collect, analyse, and share programme data. We continue to strengthen these systems to ensure data is translated into learning and that insights are accessible and relevant.

Our team's capacity and technical expertise continue to grow. Siyasizas are developing greater specialisation within specific programme areas to ensure consistent, high-quality support for children and their families. Excitingly, this included strengthening specialised support for children with CP in 2025—which will inform how we do the same for ASD in 2026.



***consistent, high-quality
support for children and
their families***

We also expanded our holistic approach to family support through initiatives such as microbusiness support, including the sale of second-hand bales from homes to generate supplementary income. At the same time, we placed greater emphasis on encouraging active parent participation during home visits and therapy sessions to boost caregiver engagement and interaction with their children.

Another important milestone for 2025, we began developing structured training manuals to document and share inclusive practices more systematically.

A very special **thank you** to each of our partners, funders, and donors who make this work possible, as well as the ongoing commitment of the incredible Siyakwazi team.

**CATHY MATHER-PIKE
DIRECTOR**

2025 IMPACT AT A GLANCE



34

Primary schools & ECDs received support through Inclusion & School Readiness Programmes.



655

Children supported by School Readiness Programme in primary schools & ECDs.



174

Children with disabilities & their guardians supported by the Inclusion Programme



150

Children & their guardians supported through Early Learning (0-2) Programme

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT (2025 – 2029)

In 2025, Siyakwazi undertook an organisational development process facilitated by an external consultant. This process identified three priority areas for development: **smart programme growth**, **succession planning**, and **strengthening senior leadership and organisational structure**.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN 2025

- A revised organisational structure and organogram were developed to strengthen management and clarify reporting lines.
- A job evaluation framework was introduced to improve role clarity and ensure fair staff compensation.
- Recruitment processes began for key leadership roles, including a Senior Programme Manager.
- Five managers participated in facilitation and leadership training to strengthen management and programme delivery skills.
- Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) systems were strengthened, with work beginning on transitioning programme data to a digital platform.
- Monthly HR consultancy support was secured to strengthen policies, contracts, and performance management systems.

KEY PRIORITIES FOR 2026

- Continuing the transition to digital monitoring and evaluation systems.
- Establishing a training unit to support internal staff development and share Siyakwazi's inclusive practices with partner organisations.
- Continuing leadership development and mentoring for managers and staff.
- Finalising programme manuals and strengthening systems that support inclusive early childhood development and early identification of disabilities.

“Our 2026 priorities aim to ensure that Siyakwazi can expand its impact while maintaining strong systems, clear leadership pathways, and high-quality services.”

— Cathy Mather-Pike, Director

MEET NOMONDE, PROGRAMMES MANAGER

Nomonde joined Siyakwazi at the beginning of 2026.

“What stood out to me about Siyakwazi is the commitment of the team working directly with children and families in the community. My role is to support that work by strengthening coordination across programmes, supporting staff, and helping build systems that allow us to learn from what we are doing.”



“I’m excited to be joining the team at a time when there is a strong focus on strengthening leadership and expanding our inclusive approach so that more children and families can benefit.”



INCLUSION

"I had no answers. I lost faith. When Siyakwazi got involved—everything started to change."










— Guardian



INCLUSION PROGRAMME

Siyakwazi’s flagship Inclusion Programme continued in 2025, supporting 174 children with disabilities across ECD centres, schools, in their homes, and at our Resource Centre. The programme integrates core pillars of healthcare, inclusive education, guardian participation, and advocacy to promote the holistic development of each child and strengthen households raising children with disabilities in KwaNzimakwe and KwaXolo.

MOST PREVALENT DISABILITIES IN 2025

		Diagnosed	Suspected Diagnosis	% of total
	Cerebral Palsy	31	2	20%
	Autism Spectrum Disorder	21	6	17%
	Speech Delay	2	13	9%
	Intellectual Disability	5	10	9%
	Developmental Delay	5	9	9%
	ADHD/ADD	1	12	8%
	Hearing impairment	4	5	6%
	Visual Impairment	2	5	4%
	Hydrocephalus	5	1	4%



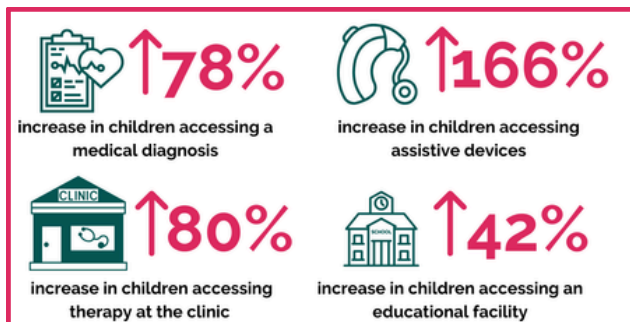
Access to Services in 2025

-  6 children received medication or surgical procedures
-  24 children supported accessing diagnosis of which 75% were supported through Siyakwazi’s own channels
-  8 children supported with enrolment at Special Education Needs (SEN) school
-  5 children accessed assistive devices
-  4 families of children with disabilities successfully supported accessing the Care Dependency Grant (CDG)

4,400 home visits for children enrolled in the Inclusion Programme and their guardians in 2025.

INTAKE & FOLLOW-UP ANALYSIS

Follow-up assessments were conducted in June 2025 with **26 families** whose children had participated in the Inclusion Programme for 12–22 months (August 2023 to May 2024 intake). Representing a sample of the wider programme (26 of 174 children), the analysis aimed to measure impact in a number of key areas:



“WHO has promoted community-based rehabilitation by local communities in low-income countries as a means of ensuring that people with disabilities receive services in their own communities.” — World Health Organisation, 2015

Improved Access to Diagnosis

Siyakwazi continued to strengthen pathways to diagnosis. The number of children with a confirmed medical diagnosis increased by 78% (from 9 to 16). Improved support for families also meant that 100% of guardians whose child received a diagnosis reported understanding it at follow-up, helping them better navigate services and interventions. Overall, 88% of guardians reported a stronger understanding of their child's developmental challenges, an important step in supporting children's long-term progress.

Increased Access to Services

There was an 80% increase in children accessing clinic-based therapy and an 83% increase in access to medication. Access to assistive devices grew, with a 200% increase (from 3 to 9 children) receiving devices. In addition, 42% more children were attending an educational facility by the end of the year (80% in total). Importantly, all children receiving medication at follow-up had a confirmed diagnosis, demonstrating stronger alignment between diagnosis and appropriate treatment.

FOLLOW-UP FEEDBACK

“He was not able to walk and could not speak, however coming to therapy has helped him strengthen his muscles and improve his speech.”

“Siyakwazi has encouraged me to look after my child well and has taught me about her needs.”

“My child can now play with other children, he can hold a scissor and cut flowers, he has also learnt to count.”

Assistive Devices

Siyakwazi played a key role in facilitating access to assistive devices, with 100% of new device referrals supported through the programme. 83% of guardians reported positive behavioural or functional changes following the introduction of a device. Weighted jackets were most frequently highlighted as effective in helping children regulate emotions and remain calm in stimulating environments.

ONGOING GAPS & CONSIDERATIONS

While progress has been significant, **38% of children remained without a formal diagnosis** at follow-up. Importantly, even where diagnoses were secured, this did not lead to a proportional increase in access to the CDG, pointing to ongoing systemic barriers that require further advocacy.



“Block Week gets better every year. By introducing programme manuals and inviting more than one caregiver to attend, the sessions in 2025 felt even more practical for families. Block Week is not only therapy for the child—the goal is always that families leave with clearer tools and a shared understanding of how to support their child.” — Mpume Somana, Inclusion Programme Manager

Image: Guardians at Block Week.

BLOCK WEEK INTERVENTIONS

Therapy Block Days and Weeks remain a core component of Siyakwazi’s specialised support for children with CP and ASD. These intensive, structured weeks provide targeted therapy alongside practical training for guardians.



18 + 36
children and their guardians supported across three Block Week interventions.

In 2025, two strategic improvements strengthened the model. Each participating family now receives a comprehensive, photo-based programme manual. This enables caregivers to continue implementing therapy-led activities at home, extending the impact of the intervention beyond the Block Day or Week itself. In addition, families are encouraged to bring a second caregiver or family member. Equipping more than one adult increases continuity of care and reduces the risk of disruption when caregiving responsibilities shift within the household.

36%

of children supported by the Inclusion Programme in 2025 have cerebral palsy or autism spectrum disorder.

BLOCK WEEK TESTIMONIALS FROM BLOCK WEEK

Although enrolled in primary school, *Buyisiwe, 5, is not able to participate in lessons, is frequently agitated, and shows signs of cognitive and communication delays. His mother admitted to stopping his medication out of denial. **“At home they said it was my fault,” she said. “I didn’t believe the doctors when they said it was autism. Now I can see it clearly.”** For her, Block Week became a turning point—an opportunity to re-engage with support and make informed decisions about his care.

*Ndimiso, 4, is not enrolled in any learning setting and had never received any therapy before joining Siyakwazi. He is still in nappies, cannot communicate verbally, and struggles to interact with other children. **“We accept him at home,”** his mother said, **“but I worry about whether other children will include him or tease him.”** For this family, the Block Week was a first exposure to developmental information, structured support, and long-term planning for their child.



THERAPY FEEDBACK

“Khethokuhle has improved in lifting his head because of using the gym ball and standing frame.”

“Asimahle has improved in throwing overhead and catching the ball. This supports gross motor, balance and hand eye coordination.”

“Imphiwe has achieved the goal of going up and down steps facing forward so that her feet move well when climbing steps.”

FOCUS ON CEREBRAL PALSY

In 2025, Siyakwazi strengthened its support for children with CP through targeted investment in staff capacity and follow-up care. A specialised CP skills-strengthening initiative was launched, with selected fieldworkers receiving advanced training from a physiotherapist. This ensures that staff working directly with children with CP have the technical knowledge and practical skills required to address complex physical needs and adapt interventions appropriately.

During the year, **38 children with more complex conditions began receiving follow-up home visits** from Siyakwazi’s physiotherapist and specialised CP team. These visits enable ongoing review and adjustment of therapy programmes, refinement of assistive devices, and observation of how exercises are implemented within the home setting.



“For children with cerebral palsy, consistency is critical. The new follow-up visits improve the quality and continuity of our support. Therapy becomes an ongoing, responsive process rather than a chore for families. This is especially important where children have severe CP, and progress is not always linear and periods of regression can be discouraging for caregivers.” — Dani Mulder, Occupational Therapist and Consultant

UNDERSTANDING LEVELS OF CEREBRAL PALSY

Children with CP experience a wide range of physical abilities and support needs. Some children experience mild motor challenges and require periodic guidance, while others have severe to profound physical impairments that affect mobility, communication, feeding, and daily care. The level of functional ability determines the intensity and frequency of support required—ranging from home-based exercises and assistive devices to ongoing, multidisciplinary intervention. Tailoring support to each child’s level of severity ensures that therapy is both appropriate and responsive to individual needs.

RESPIRE PLAY & LEARN

As of 2025, the programme supports 19 children and their caregivers across KwaNzimakwe and KwaXolo. Now in its third year of implementation (since 2023), the programme has maintained continuity and consistency, operating twice weekly with two rotating groups of children every Wednesday and Friday at the Resource Centre. The programme provides caregivers with respite from full-time caregiving responsibilities, as it serves children who stay at home and are not enrolled in any form of educational facility.

Through structured group sessions and ISPs, the team monitors developmental progress and adapts interventions to meet each child’s needs. This approach helps reduce regression and strengthens functional skills for children with severe to profound disabilities.

RESPIRE PLAY & LEARN TESTIMONIALS



*Lungelo, 19, has made remarkable progress. With support, he can now stand comfortably throughout a session and participate in learning activities using the hand-over-hand. He can greet others, communicate about his day, identify colours, count from 1 to 5, and eat independently. ***“I’m so happy to see Lungelo improving. He comes back from Respite happy and excited—he talks about his day, shows me his schoolwork, and even counts out loud!”*** — Mom

*Mbali, 9, can now sit comfortably during meals and stand for 20 to 30 minutes without distress—an incredible milestone in her physical development. Mbali is also building trust, improving her listening skills, and participating with greater ease and confidence. ***“I wasn’t able to leave Mbali with family members—she would cry a lot. But since starting at Respite, she stays happily with others and doesn’t cry when I leave. She’s adjusting and growing.”*** — Mom

66 Play & Learn Respite groups in 2025 for 19 children with severe to profound disabilities aged 7+.



GUARDIAN PARTICIPATION

Siyakwazi recognises that supporting a child with a disability requires a holistic approach. Guardian participation within the Inclusion Programme is encouraged through **income generation and skills upliftment, family strengthening, and support groups.**



“I started with selling clothes. Then I decided to sell other things so that if the business is slow on clothes, other things can boost me. Now I can add if we are short of something. We were depending on Gogo’s pension and child support grants.” — Maureen

Image: Maureen (right), her son, and Siyasiza Sbani during a home visit.

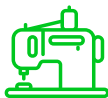
Income Generation & Skills Upliftment

Financial strain remains one of the greatest pressures facing families raising a child with a disability. Evidence shows that poverty deepens disability, and disability in turn deepens poverty, particularly in under-resourced communities.

In response, Siyakwazi’s microbusiness initiative continues to grow. In 2025, Siyakwazi introduced clearer programme structures and group mentoring to strengthen entrepreneurial skills and accountability. What began as a **Sewing Hub** has expanded to include the **resale of second-hand clothing** and **baking skills training.**

In 2025, Sewing Hub participants completed more than 20 orders (producing over 1,000 items) and earned 68% more than the previous year. Of these, 483 items supported Siyakwazi’s own programmes, while over 500 items were made for partners and private orders, providing both practical resources and income-generating opportunities for guardians.

4



guardians or family members earned income through Sewing Hub in 2025.



9



guardians sold 87 bales (870 kgs) of clothing in 2025.



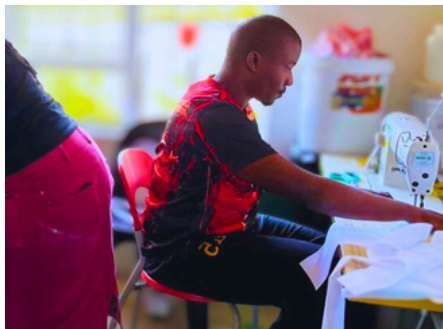
1,000+ items produced by Sewing Hub in 2025.



4



guardians completed baking training in 2025, and 2 have found employment.



“Getting an opportunity to do sewing at Siyakwazi has helped me a lot. I completed matric in 2022 and didn’t do anything afterwards—I stayed at home. The money I earn from sewing helps with household items, and I also use that money to take *Inkanyezi to the doctor if she is sick. Before joining Siyakwazi, I was not familiar with disability. Working here has opened my eyes. I am no longer scared of disability.” — Sanele, *Inkanyezi's uncle

***INKANYEZI'S STORY**

Inkanyezi, 3, has made remarkable progress through early intervention and consistent support. Born prematurely at six months with medical complications—a hole in her intestine and a brain clot—her early life was marked by uncertainty. ***“The birth was very traumatic,”*** recalls her mom, ***“I was so scared... but then also some relief to know, ‘I have a child, she is alive!’”***

Despite these early challenges, Inkanyezi is a joyful child. Her expressive personality shines through in her love for singing and counting, especially at her ECD centre where she has grown socially and gained confidence.

Access to Siyakwazi's therapy and resources has been a turning point. While the local clinic provided some support: ***“With Dani [Siyakwazi therapist] there is a great relationship—Inkanyezi loves Dani!—and there is a lot of time spent explaining things and discussing what her next steps are.”*** Siyakwazi also helped the family access CDG, which eased financial pressures.

One of Inkanyezi's biggest milestones has been learning to stand, supported by a standing frame, and later to walk. ***“It took a long time. It was easy to think that there was no progress... but we kept pushing, knowing that it would be small progress!”***

Her mom encourages independence, and Inkanyezi can now feed herself and partially dress on her own despite weakness on her left side. Currently, her therapy programme focuses on strengthening bilateral coordination, balance, and fine motor skills. ***“My dream is that she loves herself for who she is and not think she is different from other children.”***



Targeted Family Strengthening

In 2025, Siyakwazi introduced a focused family strengthening component within the Inclusion Programme to safeguard children who may be vulnerable due to socio-economic pressures.

Led by Mihle, a qualified social worker who joined Siyakwazi in late 2024, this initiative provides structured support through reflection tools, household budgeting guidance, and practical interventions such as food gardening to improve food security. This work addresses financial instability as a key risk factor and aligns closely with Siyakwazi's child protection and safeguarding framework.



"Sometimes people just need to feel seen to find motivation again."— Mihle Bandezi

13 families identified for family strengthening support.

25 family strengthening home visits conducted in 2025.

MEET MIHLE, SOCIAL WORKER

"Financial insecurity plays a huge role in families becoming at risk so I try and give them practical tools that they can use to eliminate food insecurity or better manage their finances. Sometimes people just need to feel seen to find motivation again."

"Often, when a social worker enters a home, people can become tense. I know I need to listen to what the person is saying and turn it into a conversation. This allows the person to feel safe and share more deeply."



Support Groups

At the start of 2025, two additional support groups were introduced—a termly group in KwaXolo and a dedicated group for male guardians. This expansion enabled approximately 30 more caregivers to participate, bringing total termly attendance across KwaNzimakwe and KwaXolo to around **50 guardians**.



10 Parent Support Group sessions were held in 2025 across KwaNzimakwe and KwaXolo, including 2 sessions specifically for men.

"We often have lots of things we wish for our children to be able to do. Sometimes it's discouraging knowing they might not ever do these things, but now I feel better because I understand my child."

"The challenge is that other people in the household do not understand. They would say 'the mother must come and take her child' [...] You accept—but at some point, you have those moments where you feel a bit heavy."

"As fathers we grew up without a father figure in our families. So let us break that curse and not copy what happened back in the days. Let us bring change in our families as fathers, let us be present fathers."

"We would love to have more of such groups. It will help us heal wounds."

***APHELELE'S STORY**

When Aphelele, 6, joined the Inclusion Programme in 2022, he struggled to speak and was often restless in class. Diagnosed with ASD, he has since made remarkable progress, both at home and at school. His mother proudly shares, ***"I noticed improvement in Aphelele's communication because now he can make a conversation with full sentences. He is very confident, and his participation in reading, writing, and playing has increased."***

Through Siyakwazi's therapy sessions, parent guidance, and school-based support, Aphelele's mother has become an active partner in his growth. ***"Each day I practice activities from the therapist, use flash cards, and ask about his day so he can communicate more."*** Their favourite activity to do together, mom explains, ***"Going to the playground, running and stretching our bodies together."***

With participation from both guardians and Siyakwazi's additional support, Aphelele is well on his way to continuing to develop and grow. This success means he will no longer need intense support from Siyakwazi and can successfully continue in his mainstream school environment.

**8**

Children in the Inclusion Programme supported to enrol and attend SEN schools in 2025.

INCLUSION PROGRAMME: FOCUS AREAS FOR 2026

- Establish a specialised ASD support team, building on the successful model of the CP initiative to strengthen targeted expertise within the Inclusion Programme.
- Expand the Sewing Hub microbusiness initiative to produce a wider range of therapy and learning resources, while extending the product catalogue to increase income-generating opportunities for participating guardians.
- Further develop the Respite Play & Learn curriculum, including the differentiation of learning activities and the collation of themed resource packs to support more consistent and effective implementation.

AWARENESS & ADVOCACY

Building inclusive communities requires more than direct programme support. In 2025, Siyakwazi strengthened its awareness and advocacy efforts to ensure that children with disabilities and their families are better understood, supported, and included in their communities. Through outreach and engagement, the organisation works to challenge stigma, increase understanding of disability, and improve access to services.

Two initiatives form the main outreach pillars of the Inclusion Programme: **#ProjectAccess**, which supports Community Healthcare Workers (CHWs) and families to navigate health services, and the **Inclusive ECD Hubs Expansion**, which strengthens inclusion within ECD centres outside of Siyakwazi's geographic catchment. The launch of Siyakwazi's Training Unit will further support this work by sharing inclusive practices with practitioners and partner organisations across the region.

#PROJECTACCESS

Siyakwazi's #ProjectAccess awareness programme continues in collaboration with physiotherapists at Port Shepstone District Hospital, supporting early identification and improved access to services for children with disabilities. In 2025, the programme initially focused on training CHWs, but challenges in accessing these groups required a strategic shift. Siyakwazi instead prioritised awareness and relationship-building within local clinics, including outreach events during Disability Rights Awareness Month.

“Many families don't realise that physiotherapy and other rehabilitation services for children with developmental delays or disabilities are available through their local clinic or hospital. Through #ProjectAccess and our work with Community Healthcare Workers, we're helping families see that support and hope are closer than they think.” — Katlego Modimakoane, Physiotherapist at Port Shepstone District Hospital



A highlight of the year was a high-level engagement with Department of Health leadership and influential stakeholders, which secured departmental support and reinforced Siyakwazi's role in strengthening community-based disability services.

In 2026, Siyakwazi will continue working with Assisi Clinic, where #ProjectAccess activities have begun to consolidate, and will add one additional clinic within the Port Shepstone Hospital catchment area. Alongside this, the organisation will begin building a relationship with St Andrews Hospital in the Umuziwabantu Municipality, with the aim of identifying one clinic that can support improved access to services for children attending ECD centres in areas where Siyakwazi is expanding its Inclusive ECD Hubs.

This work will complement the organisation's broader awareness and advocacy priorities while demonstrating how community-based partnerships can strengthen support for children with disabilities across multiple levels of their ecosystem.

INCLUSIVE ECD HUBS EXPANSION

In 2025, Siyakwazi expanded its Inclusive ECD Hubs programme in partnership with Impande and the DoE, reaching 31 centres across the wider Ugu District. The programme strengthened practitioners' skills and confidence to identify and support children aged 0–5 with disabilities, shifting from direct Siyakwazi-led services to practitioner-led inclusion supported through in-person training and ongoing remote mentoring. Key developments included baseline assessments at all ECD centres, focus group discussions, practitioner training, onsite mentoring, and the development of a training manual.



**STRATEGIC
EXPANSION
FOCUS ON
UMUZIWABANTU**

Umuziwabantu, a mostly rural area in the Ugu District near the Eastern Cape border, is shaped by forestry and agriculture. Impande has long supported local ECDs and broader programme development in the region.

60 ECD practitioners across 31 centres trained in disability awareness and inclusive classroom strategies in 2025.

Building on achievements in 2025, the organisation will focus its ECD expansion in 2026 on the Umuziwabantu Municipality, targeting 70 ECD centres. Central to this expansion is the launch of Siyakwazi's Training Hub, which will support in-person training and remote mentoring. The eight-person expansion team receives regular training on facilitation techniques, inclusion strategies, and practical implementation, ensuring they are fully prepared to support practitioner-led inclusion across the district.



“When we started visiting Umuziwabantu, we could see straight away that the need is very high. Many of the ECD centres are working with very little support around how to be inclusive. But they are eager to learn and improve because most have children with disabilities in their classrooms already.”

Taking on 70 ECDs is more than doubling what we currently support in KwaNzimakwe and KwaXolo. The model is different because we are upskilling the ECD practitioners rather than working directly with the children, but I am very excited. When we strengthen the teacher, we strengthen the support every child in that classroom receives.” — Nosipho Gasa, Manager & Inclusive ECD Hubs programme lead

ECD PRACTITIONER FEEDBACK

“I was assisted by Siyakwazi training, where they emphasised how important it is to allow children with disabilities to be around other children, to be loved and cared for. That opened my mind, now I include children with difficulties when doing activities. Children were so excited when I did that for the first time. I no longer feel irritated. I am thankful to Siyakwazi for training, it opened my mind.”

“I have a child with disability in my ECD this year. Last year I also had a child with similar disability. Now it is easy to understand different children [...] Moving forward it will not be an issue to support children with disabilities, Siyakwazi equipped us with necessary skills.”

AWARENESS & ADVOCACY: FOCUS AREAS FOR 2026

- Expand the programme to 100 ECD centres, scaling support to an additional 70 centres while continuing to strengthen engagement with the existing 31 sites.
- Revise and formalise the training manual to support more consistent implementation and knowledge sharing across practitioners and partner organisations.
- Strengthen strategic partnerships within Umuziwabantu Municipality to support programme growth and improve coordination with local stakeholders.



SCHOOL READINESS

"I like writing and playing. It's nice being at school." — Learner enrolled in Catch-up, Thongasi Primary



SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAMME

2025 marks the eighth year of Siyakwazi's School Readiness Programme. The programme combines two-tier Red Flag screenings (in Term 1 and Term 3 or 4) and direct Catch-up lessons delivered using Siyakwazi's CAPS-aligned curriculum.

The model allows early identification of developmental delays, provides structured classroom-based support, and creates pathways for referral into Siyakwazi's Inclusion Programme. Through this approach, teachers are supported to identify learners who are at risk of falling behind while children receive targeted intervention.

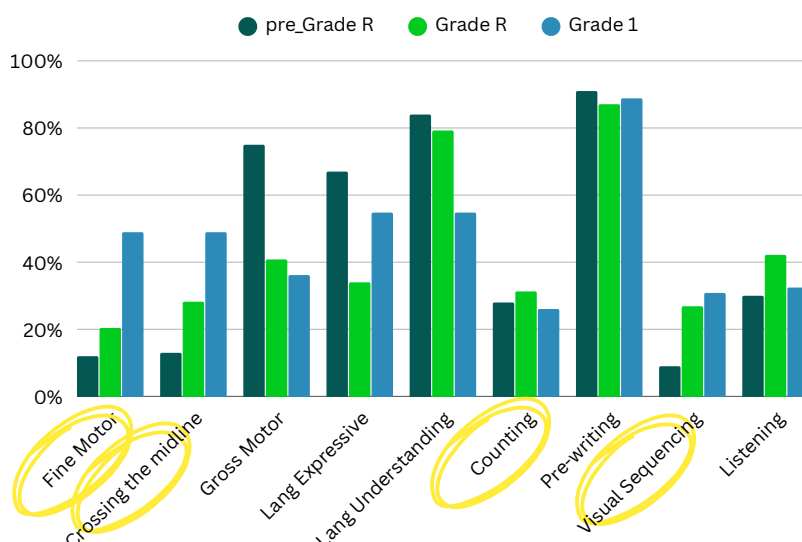
RED FLAG SCREENING

At the start of 2025, more than 2,400 children across three age groups (Pre-Grade R, Grade R, and Grade 1) were screened in 22 ECD centres and 12 primary schools. Following screening, 655 children aged 4–7 were identified as at risk of falling behind and enrolled in Catch-up groups.

Analysis of the March 2025 baseline data identified recurring areas requiring focused support across age groups (*graph, right*):

- Counting and early numeracy
- Visual sequencing
- Crossing the midline
- Fine motor development

This screening process continues to function as an early identification mechanism for children who may otherwise remain undetected in mainstream settings.



CATCH-UP RESULTS

Previously, all children in Catch-up were rescreened at the end of the year (Term 4). While this maximised intervention time, it limited follow-up support for Grade 1 learners transitioning to Grade 2.

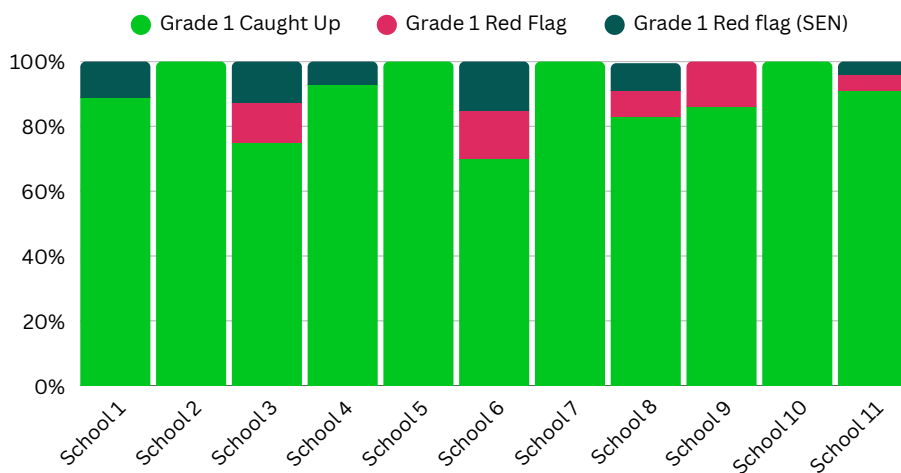


In 2025, Siyakwazi shifted to rescreening Grade 1 learners at the end of Term 3 instead. This adjustment enables earlier identification of learners who have not caught up and creates time to engage families where underlying challenges may require further support. This change strengthened early referral pathways into the Inclusion Programme and improved follow-up support.

Grade 1 Success in 2025

- An average of 89% of children identified as at risk of falling behind successfully caught up through targeted intervention.
- If learners with known disabilities are excluded (for example, in Grade 1 where 10 learners fall into this category), the adjusted outcome shows that 95% of learners successfully caught up.
- For the first time in Grade 1, **four schools achieved 100% catch-up.**

The graph (below) indicates the before and after result of **all children rescreened in Grade 1** at the end of the year.



34 ECD centres and primary schools supported by Catch-up interventions.

SIYASIZA FEEDBACK ON CATCH-UP ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

“Using playdough materials such as stencil cutters and rolling pins allows children to make shapes and feel the shape once they have rolled it out.”


“The activity of feeding the tennis ball with pom poms using tweezers helps children strengthen fine motor skills, as well as develop their hand-eye coordination.”

“The threading activities develops fine motor skills, it helps children develop hand-eye coordination as well as helping children to concentrate.”

“The children do a pattern, the aim of a pattern is to train fine motor, and also helps teach them moving from left to right for when they start writing.”

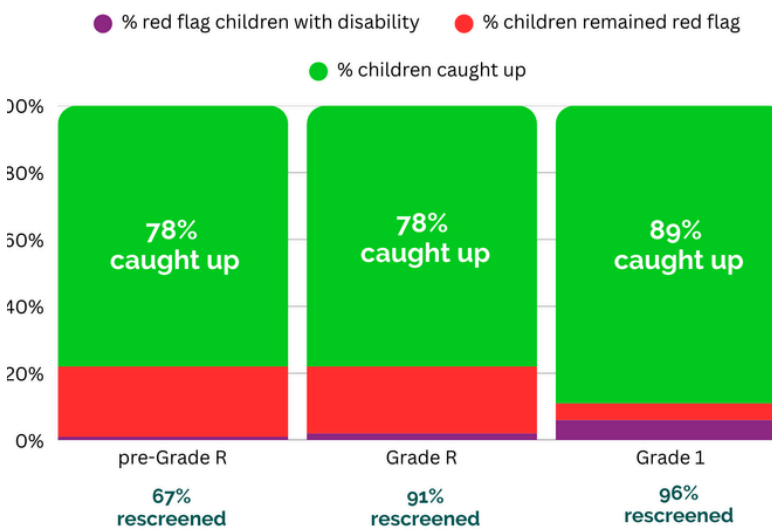
Overall Catch-up Results

Siyakwazi’s CAPS-aligned Catch-up lessons remain critical in addressing the challenge of widening academic gaps. The graph (below) shows percentage of children who caught up and those who remained red-flagged across the three age groups. The reported catch-up percentages include learners who remained red-flagged and have a known disability.

 **453**
children caught up in their learning with support from the School Readiness Programme.

Results for Grade R and Pre-Grade R remained similar to 2024. Grade 1 showed significant improvement, increasing from 82% of learners catching up in 2024 to a substantially higher rate in 2025.

RED FLAG & CATCH-UP 2025



Top Three Improvement Areas (% increase) per age group:

Grade 1

- Gross Motor - 122%
- Counting - 194%
- Listening skills - 145%

Grade R

- Fine motor - 275%
- Crossing the midline - 159%
- Language expressive - 134%

Pre-Grade R

- Fine Motor - 327%
- Crossing the midline - 271%
- Maths pattern - 218%







“Only 42% of four-year-olds enrolled in ECD are developmentally on track [...] too many young children in South Africa not getting the support they need to thrive in school and life.” — Extract from Thrive by Five Index Report, September 2024

IDENTIFICATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Through screening and classroom observation in the School Readiness Programme, **17 children with disabilities were identified** and enrolled into Siyakwazi's Inclusion Programme in 2025. Without structured screening and consistent on-site presence, these children may have remained undetected and unsupported.

In total, across all age groups, **112 children with disabilities in primary schools and ECD centres** are supported through the Inclusion Programme. However, only 54% of children with disabilities aged 0–5 enrolled in the programme attend ECD services, highlighting ongoing barriers to early access. Strengthening early identification and improving access to inclusive early learning remains central to the programme's impact.

TOP 4 PREVALENT DISABILITIES IN SCHOOLS & ECD CENTRES IN 2025

	Diagnosed	Suspected Diagnosis	% of total
 Autism Spectrum Disorder	10	2	19%
 Speech Delay	1	8	14%
 Intellectual Disability	1	7	13%
 Cerebral Palsy	7	1	13%

"I need support understanding my child. He is very stubborn and cannot read or write although he can dress himself and feed himself. As his parent I try to encourage him when he is doing an activity." — Guardian of child identified in the Catch-up and enrolled in Inclusion Programme



"I can really see how much Esethu has grown. Her teacher was happy with her progress, and we spoke about what would help her most going forward."
— Nandi, Esethu's mom

Image: Esethu at home with Nokwe, Siyasiza

ONE YEAR ON: REVISITING ESETHU'S STORY

Siyakwazi's last Impact Report shared the story of *Esasa* (pseudonym), a learner who received support through the School Readiness programme and then the Inclusion Programme. Following an SABC broadcast highlighting Siyakwazi's work, the family chose to share her real name, Esethu. In 2026, Esethu passed Siyakwazi's red flag screening for the first time after two consecutive years of not meeting the benchmark—an important step in her learning journey. At the end of 2025, her teacher and mother agreed that repeating Grade 1 would give her the time needed to strengthen her foundations before progressing to Grade 2. Esethu continues to attend Nokwe's Catch-Up lessons at Dlukulwane Primary School with support from her teacher, her family and Siyakwazi's team.

ONGOING CHALLENGES

Teacher Participation & Capacity

Alongside direct intervention, the programme prioritises strengthening teacher capacity to independently identify and support learners. In 2025, Term 2 reflection meetings were conducted with each ECD centre and primary school to review 2024 results and discuss improved teaching strategies.

“Many learners need help and it became difficult for the teacher to attend to them individually.” – Teacher feedback

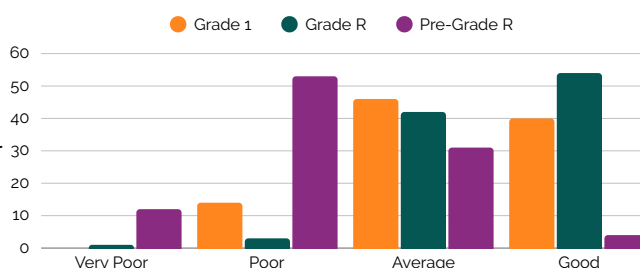
While teacher participation has improved (particularly in identifying learners at risk of falling behind) consistent transfer of skills into daily classroom practice remains a challenge, especially in larger classrooms. Continued mentorship and follow-up support are required to strengthen implementation at site level.



Attendance

Mid-year attendance analysis showed generally low attendance in ECD centres, with primary schools performing slightly better (*graph, right*). This is concerning because attendance remains a key indicator of learner engagement and participation in Catch-up lessons.

ATTENDANCE OVERVIEW PRE GRADE R - GRADE 1



Grade R and Grade 1 learners demonstrated predominantly average to good attendance (above 50%), whereas most ECD centre learners recorded attendance below 50%. These patterns highlight ongoing barriers, directly affect screening coverage, and limit intervention continuity.

Low Rescreening & Catch-Up Completion in Pre-Grade R

On average, only 67% (two-thirds) of children were available for rescreening at year end, with some ECD centres recording rates as low as 30–40%. Across all ECD centres, 78% of children identified as at risk of falling behind successfully caught up, leaving 22 children still red-flagged without an identified underlying condition. Programme participation also varied significantly across the 22 supported ECD centres. Only 7 centres demonstrated above-average performance in both screening and Catch-up implementation, highlighting inconsistent programme engagement.

Limited engagement with guardians

Although Catch-up support focuses primarily on classroom intervention, Siyakwazi’s model recognises that children progress most effectively when supported both at school and at home.

SCHOOL SPOTLIGHT

Delihlazo Primary School, Okushwini, Ugu District

In January 2025, Siyakwazi began supporting Delihlazo Primary School through its Red Flag and Catch-up interventions as part of the School Readiness Programme. Delihlazo Primary School is in an area new to Siyakwazi.

“Siyakwazi’s arrival reminded us of the activities we should be doing to develop learners’ fine motor skills. We’ve seen children show significant improvement in class participation. Some can now hold a pen, write, and express themselves.” –

Mrs Zulu, Delihlazo Primary School Principal

45 Learners at Delihlazo Primary School were red flagged at the start of 2025, and 86% caught-up when rescreened in Term 3 and 4.

At the start of the year, 95 Grade 1 learners and 72 Grade R learners were screened. Among these, 23 Grade 1 learners and 22 Grade R learners were identified as red flag.

The programme at Delihlazo Primary School is led by Noxolo Sikobi (Sbani), a newly-appointed Siyasiza. Sbani works with learners in small groups, using play-based, hands-on activities to address fine and gross motor skills, numeracy, and language development.

For fine motor skills, children use playdough to form letters, numbers, and shapes, complete puzzles, and practise threading activities. Gross motor activities include animal walks, “wheelbarrow” exercises, hopping on colour-coded chairs, and ball games. Numeracy is reinforced through counting with cards, fruit counters, and pompoms, while language skills are supported through rhymes, storytelling, and interactive games.

DELIHLAZO LEARNER JOURNEYS



*Lindi (Grade 1) initially struggled to follow instructions, speak clearly, and write her name. She could not read, write, or copy from the board. After joining catch-up classes,

Lindi’s learning difficulties were identified more formally, her guardian was engaged, and a therapist referral was suggested. By Term 3, she was expressing herself more confidently and playing with peers, though her literacy skills are still developing.



*Siyanda (Grade R) began the year struggling with focus, delayed speech, challenges with fine and gross motor skills, and self-care tasks.

By Term 2, after several months of catch-up sessions, his pencil grip had improved, he began joining in rhymes, and he even discovered a love for playing soccer. Siyanda’s teachers believe that with more intervention time, he could make even greater strides.

SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAMME: FOCUS AREAS FOR 2026

- Revise the ECD Catch-Up curriculum to strengthen targeted support for children with developmental gaps, with a greater emphasis on addressing specific areas of delay (including using *Finding Thabo* to support the development of visual perceptual skills).
- Pilot practitioner-led implementation of the Catch-Up curriculum in three ECD centres to support whole-class learning.
- Increase guardian engagement through targeted home visits, focusing on children with 7–9 “no” responses on the Red Flag screening who are falling significantly behind.



EARLY LEARNING

"Now I understand how important it is to spend time with my child—it helps me a lot as a parent to understand my child better." — Guardian



EARLY LEARNING (0-2 YEARS) PROGRAMME

Siyakwazi's Early Learning (0-2) Programme saw several important developments in 2025, including the expansion of ASQ-3 screening, the introduction of structured Learn & Play sessions, and a shift in how developmental progress is measured. Overall, the programme continues to be guided by three core pillars: strengthening guardian participation in play-based learning through the distribution of baby bags and practical learning resources, supporting early screening and developmental monitoring, and improving nutrition through the provision of fortified porridge and eggs.

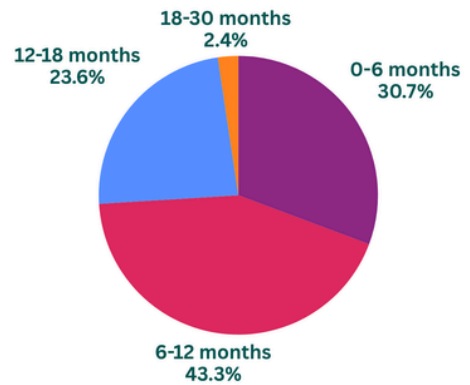
GUARDIAN PARTICIPATION

The pie graph (right) shows the age distribution of children enrolled in the programme, with the largest cohort aged 6-12 months (43%), followed by 0-6 months (30%).

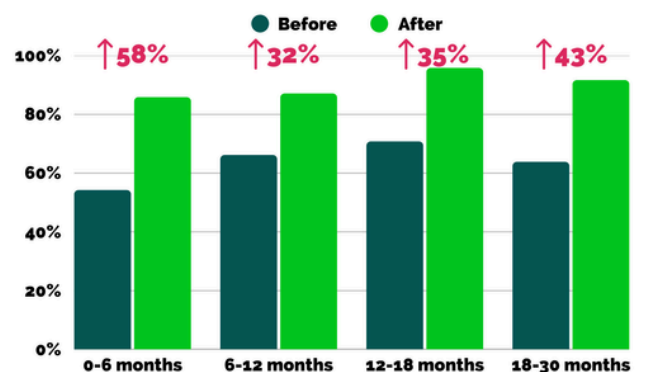
A key highlight was a 56% increase in the number of children under six months enrolled compared to 2024. Supporting children from this early stage strengthens developmental foundations, encourages earlier entry into ECD centres, and builds guardian confidence in facilitating early learning.

Analysis of before-and-after guardian assessments (January-June 2025) shows that 100% of guardians improved or maintained their level of participation. The younger age group (0-6 months) demonstrated the greatest improvement, with a 58% increase in guardian participation, reflecting growing awareness that learning begins at birth and that early engagement matters. The bar graph (right) also shows a notable increase in participation among guardians of children aged 18-30 months, which rose by 43% between January and June.

EARLY LEARNING AGE DISTRIBUTION



BEFORE & AFTER JAN-JUN 2025 AGE GROUPS



MEASURING CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Midway through 2025, Siyakwazi introduced a revised assessment tool. Unlike the previous tool, which primarily measured guardian participation, the updated version assesses a child's age-appropriate development based on their ability to complete structured activities across key developmental areas.

Key Findings

“Before” Assessment (July 2025)

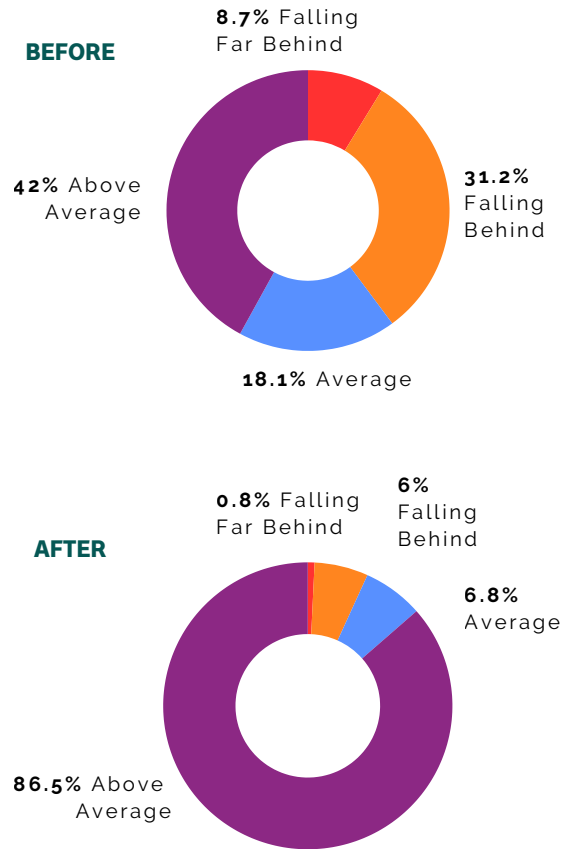
More than half of the children assessed scored 69% or lower. The lowest-performing group was children aged 6–12 months (43 children assessed), highlighting the need for stronger stimulation and developmental support during the earliest stage of life.

“After” Assessment (Dec 2025)

The end-of-year assessment showed strong improvement. 86% of children scored 70% or higher, compared with 42% in the July assessment. Average scores across age groups ranged between 77% and 92%, with the 6–12 month group showing the greatest improvement.

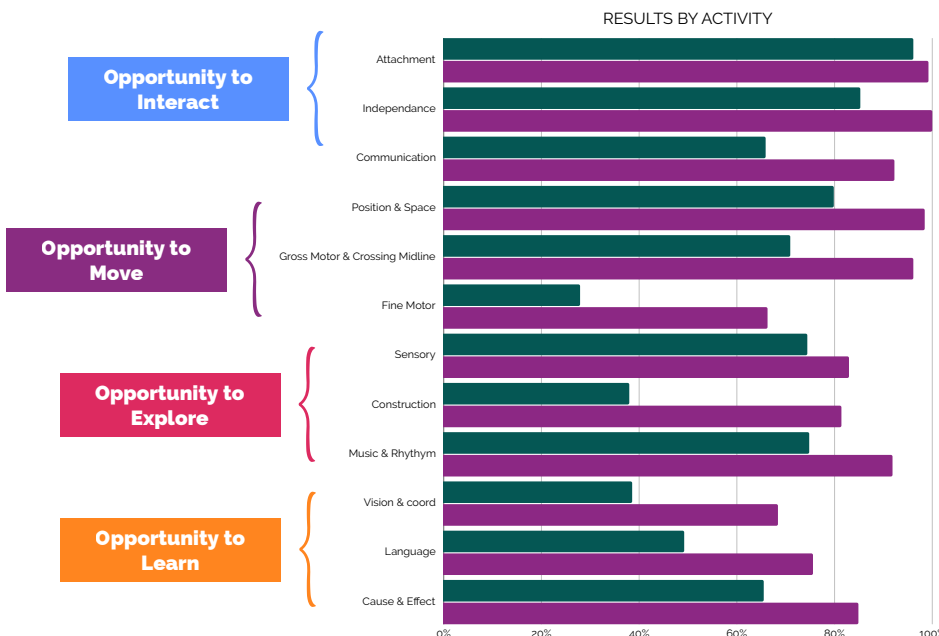
These results suggest that regular home visits, guardian support, and access to learning resources increase guardian confidence and create more opportunities for early learning at home. Across the twelve developmental areas assessed, 75% or more of children successfully completed activities in ten areas. Fine motor and vision and coordination remained the most challenging, particularly for children aged 6–12 months.

OVERVIEW OF CHILD ASSESSMENT SCORES



86% of children scored “Above Average” (70% or higher) at the end of the year, up from 42% in July.

- Falling far behind: 0%-39%
- Falling behind: 40%-59%
- Average: 60%- 69%
- Above average: 70% - 100%



Developmental Progress Across Activities

The graph (left) shows results by activity across all age groups. In the before assessment, children found fine motor, construction, vision and coordination, and language activities most challenging. With targeted support, appropriate resources, and regular guardian check-ins, improvement was observed. In the after assessment, 75% or more of children successfully completed activities in 10 of the 12 developmental areas.



ASQ-3 SCREENING

A total of 56 ASQ-3 screenings were conducted within the Early Learning programme in 2025, covering children aged 8 to 24 months. The largest number of children screened were in the 14-month (19 children) and 16-month (15 children) intervals.

From these assessments:

- 11 children scored below the cut-off in one developmental area
- 1 child scored below the cut-off in four areas of development
- 8 children were identified within the monitoring zone in two or more developmental areas and were flagged for additional support and follow-up

Across the screenings, fine motor and problem-solving skills emerged as the most common areas of concern, aligning with patterns seen in Siyakwazi's internal developmental assessments.

Comparing Screening Approaches

Comparison between the ASQ-3 results and Siyakwazi's June developmental assessment highlighted an important learning. Of the 12 children who scored below the ASQ-3 cut-off, only four had previously been identified as falling behind or far behind in Siyakwazi's assessment. Similarly, only one of the eight children in the monitoring zone had been identified as falling behind in the internal assessment. These findings suggest that Siyakwazi's current assessment tool may not yet reliably identify which children require more detailed developmental screening through the ASQ-3.



Q&A WITH CEBO

*Langa, 2, joined the Early Learning Programme at 15 months old in January 2025. Cebo, Langa's uncle, is one of his guardians.

Q: Can you tell me more about Langa, what he likes to do?

"Langa enjoys playing outdoors with other children in the neighbourhood. He is very social and at his happiest when he is with other children. His favourite family member is me, his uncle Cebo. We spend a lot of time together, mostly playing ball and enjoying outdoor activities. It's our special bonding time."

Q: Before Siyakwazi, were you aware Langa was behind with his developmental milestone?

"Yes, we noticed some delays, especially with walking. We were aware of the most obvious challenges, but we didn't realise that there were other areas he was also behind until Siyakwazi told us. At first, we were shocked. We were worried that he might be disabled, and we didn't know what the future would look like. But Siyakwazi helped us understand the situation better and reassured us that early support could make a big difference."

Q: How has Siyakwazi been supporting you, after receiving ASQ-3 results?

"Siyakwazi has been very supportive. Zamo [Siyasiza] and Mihle [Siyakwazi social worker] would visit us, play with him, and get us involved in practical activities we can do with him to help him improve. We have a lot of improvements. Langa is now more confident, he plays independently, and he can do tasks that used to be difficult. Things are much easier for him now. We are very happy and grateful for the progress he has made."

Q: How do you help Langa achieve his developmental goals?

"We spend time playing with him and encouraging him to try new things. We use the toys and learning resources Siyakwazi provided, and we keep practising the activities we were taught. It has helped him get used to different tasks and improved his skills."

Q: What advice would you give to a new parent?

"They must play with their children and teach them things from a young age. My favourite part is how Siyakwazi brings guidance. Knowing I have someone that I can ask when I'm not sure about my child's development. Without Siyakwazi I wouldn't know much."

**HEARING SCREENING CHALLENGES**

Audiologist assessments were successfully implemented in 2024. However, in 2025, consistent screening was disrupted by limited clinic staff and the absence of an on-site audiologist. Despite these challenges, audiology remains critical for early identification and support. Siyakwazi has been building a relationship with the sister-in-charge at the local clinic to ensure a smooth referral process, while also strengthening collaboration with the Port Shepstone Hospital Audiology Department to improve access to screening services in 2026.

EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMME: FOCUS AREAS FOR 2026

- Strengthen collaboration with local clinics to accelerate auditory screening and improve referral pathways for children requiring follow-up support.
- Consolidate developmental screenings earlier in the year to allow more timely interventions for children identified as falling far behind.
- Investigate a new area with limited early childhood resources and services to explore potential early learning interventions for 2027.



Image: The team supporting Casual Day 2025, an initiative by National Council of and for Persons with Disabilities.

SUPPORTERS & DONORS

“Siyakwazi has been a Masana wa Afrika grantee partner since 2023 and has been supported to provide quality, specialised early childhood services to children with disabilities and their caregivers. Throughout our partnership, they have met due diligence standards and demonstrated good leadership.”

— Ruth Mapara, Director, Masana wa Afrika

“Siyakwazi does amazing work for the most marginalised in our society. You add dignity and worth to the lives of children who would otherwise be forgotten. It’s a privilege to be able to support you. Thanks for being our hands and feet.”

— Nick Goldblatt, Fund Manager, Chrysalis Capital

“Siyakwazi’s approach is sound—early identification of learning barriers and addressing them through interventions with families and education practitioners. This work is particularly critical in rural and hard-to-reach areas, which is exactly where Siyakwazi operates.

Each time I visit, I am more convinced that the value of this work is immeasurable. Compared to national school readiness statistics, the results speak for themselves—most children are able to catch up.” — Elinor Kern, Coordinator, RES Foundation

FINANCIAL REPORT

Siyakwazi continues to prioritise responsible financial management while strengthening the organisation for robust stability and growth. The 2025 financial year reflected continued organisational progress, supported by focused internal strategic planning and a growing base of donor support.

Total revenue for the year reached R6 167 496. Siyakwazi's diversified funding base also continued to grow, with two new funders joining the organisation during the year and 19 existing funders retained.

Prudent financial management ensured that expenditure remained focused on programme delivery and organisational strengthening, supporting Siyakwazi's continued impact in the communities it serves.

R6,2 million

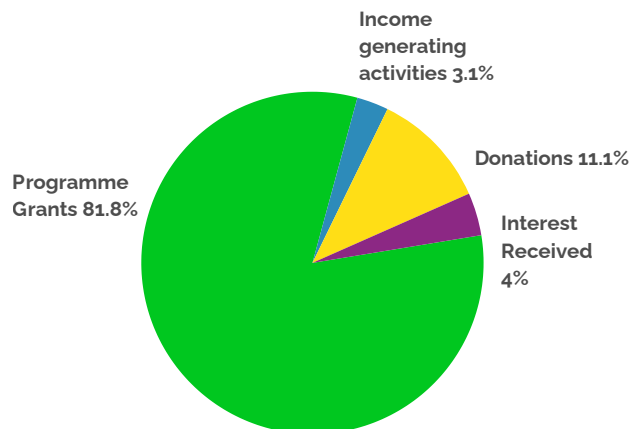
invested in programmes to support children with disabilities and barriers to learning.

Income generating activities:

Includes sale of goods through the secondhand shop and Sewing Hub. Hosting fees acquired for learnerships and venue hire for training. Training income done with other organisations.

Donations: Monthly and once-off donations from individuals and businesses.

Programme and operational grants: Annual funder grant agreements.



"The 2025 financial year marked another period of meaningful growth for Siyakwazi. While this growth differed in nature from the previous year, it was no less significant. Although the net financial results reflect a modest deficit for the year, it is important to note that, excluding depreciation related to prior years' capital expenditure, the organisation would have reported a surplus. This underscores the sustainability of its core operations and prudent financial management."

"Siyakwazi's strategic progress has been strongly supported by its funders, who continue to value the organisation's transparency, accountability, and long-term commitment to community upliftment. Their confidence affirms the positive trajectory and impact of the organisation." — Graeme Gawler,

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