

2023/24

Annual Report

LITTLE ELEPHANT TRAINING
CENTRE FOR EARLY
EDUCATION
T/A LETCEE



01

A word from the chair



In last year's opening remarks, I noted that LETCEE's work is never done. Aside from continually striving to bring about innovation and new initiatives in its commitment to its role, the continuous challenge of addressing and overcoming day-to-day obstacles is notable. LETCEE's successes in overcoming many challenges are abundantly clear in this year's report. From strengthening community involvement, securing markets for produce to facilitating infrastructural upgrades in community facilities, the goal of ensuring sustained and impactful ECD certainly requires a community-wide approach and solutions.

On behalf of the non-executive team, I would like to congratulate and thank our new Managing Director, Mrs. Reveni Aheer, for the fantastic work that she and the entire team have accomplished over the year. This gratitude extends not only for the tangible and reportable triumphs outlined hereunder but also for the 'hidden gains' that often come in the background of building a strong team and culture. I would lastly, of course, like to thank our donors and funders for the trust placed in LETCEE and hope that this report reminds you of the noble difference being made by your support.

Colin Corbishley

Training and ECD Quality

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The Early Childhood Development (ECD) Quality and Training division at LETCEE made significant strides in 2023, focusing on improving the skills of practitioners, extending the reach of educational resources, and enhancing the quality of ECD programs across communities. Through targeted training programs, such as Level 4 practitioner development and resource-making workshops, practitioners gained valuable knowledge in curriculum implementation, innovative resource creation, and the importance of early literacy and numeracy. Despite challenges such as attendance issues and weather-related delays, the team remained proactive in addressing obstacles, ensuring that both practitioners and children continued to benefit from high-quality educational support. This section highlights the key activities, achievements, and challenges faced by the division throughout the year, demonstrating LETCEE's ongoing commitment

to enhancing early childhood education in the communities it serves. LETCEE has achieved several key milestones over the past year. A total of 383 trainees are currently studying at NQF Level 4 to become Early Childhood Development (ECD) practitioners. The ELOM assessments were successfully completed despite weather-related delays. Furthermore, 45 Level 4 ECD practitioners have been endorsed by ETDP SETA and are awaiting final certification. Basic APT and resource-making training sessions were successfully implemented with four groups of 20 participants.

However, some challenges arose due to attendance issues caused by community conflicts and financial problems, leading to a few students dropping out or missing sessions. Despite these setbacks, proactive follow-ups were conducted to address the students' difficulties. LETCEE's trainers also attended workshops on the South African National Curriculum Framework (NCF), enhancing their understanding and expertise.

ECD Centres



The Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centres supported by LETCEE have made significant progress throughout the year. Despite challenges, such as staffing changes and transportation difficulties, the centres continued to provide essential services to children from vulnerable communities. Key programmes, such as the feeding project, ensured that children received nutritious meals, including breakfast and lunch, which supported their ability to learn and develop in a nurturing environment. This was especially important in areas where poverty is prevalent, and many children arrive at the centres on empty stomachs. ECD practitioners, alongside committees, worked diligently to maintain high standards

of education and care, as evidenced by the smooth operation of centres like Upper Thulini, and Izingane Zethu. With daily routines and education programmes well in place, children benefited from structured learning environments, and positive educational progress was observed. The feeding programmes have also been instrumental in reducing malnutrition, particularly at centres like Izingane Happy Children's Centre, where caregivers face unemployment challenges.

The Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centre in Nseleni has seen a remarkable transformation with the construction of a new building, named Sekuyakhanya. Nseleni is a disadvantaged community with limited access to essential services.

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ECD Centres

In 2020, LETCEE introduced a Toy Library in the area, along with itinerant ECD practitioners to provide much-needed early childhood education. The Toy Library quickly became a success, attracting children not only to borrow toys but also to enjoy playtime in what was then an old shipping container.

As the centre grew in popularity, the Toy Librarian, trained and certified at NQF Level 4 in ECD, contributed to the thriving centre. With funding secured, LETCEE began providing both breakfast porridge and healthy, nutritious meals to the children. To accommodate these growing needs, the centre required an expansion.

A generous community member donated land for this purpose, enabling LETCEE to approach the nearby NTE Factory in Hermannsburg for support.

We are immensely grateful to the NTE Factory, which constructed a two-room building for classrooms, created a large outdoor play area with a protective roof, and relocated the shipping container to the new premises.

Within days, the centre reached its capacity of 40 children, demonstrating the immense demand for early childhood education in Nseleni.

The centres also provided support to school-going children, though improvements were needed in accommodating their homework assistance and meal schedules. Despite these challenges, centres like Izingane Zethu experienced a rise in child enrolments, indicating growing community trust in the quality of care provided. The establishment of new practitioners and the strengthening of community involvement, particularly through monthly meetings, have helped to stabilize operations and ensure continued growth and impact across all sites.

LETCEE's ECD Centres remained resilient, focusing on providing children with the education, nutrition, and care they need, while also working on overcoming logistical and staffing issues to ensure a stable future for the communities they serve.



Abahambi programme

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The Abahambi Programme at LETCEE plays a vital role in extending early childhood development (ECD) services to rural and under-resourced communities through mobile playgroups and home visits. The programme consists of 42 Abahambi providing ECD access to 1089 children Birth to 5 years old. This programme focuses on providing young children, particularly those unable to attend formal ECD centres, with the opportunity to engage in play-based learning that supports their cognitive, social, and emotional development.

Throughout 2023, the Abahambi Programme has seen significant growth, with the recruitment of new Abahambi from communities such as Matimatolo and Eshane. These new recruits have received training and ongoing support to ensure they deliver quality ECD interventions during their home visits and playgroup sessions. The new programme places special emphasis on children aged 0-2 years, with Abahambi engaging caregivers and offering guidance on nurturing and stimulating young children's development.



A major milestone for the Abahambi Programme in 2023 was the successful completion of several audits across various communities, including Njengabantu, Matimatolo, and Eshane. These audits, conducted by LETCEE's Integrated ECD team, aimed to assess the quality of service delivery, identify areas for improvement, and ensure that the playgroups were functioning in line with the programme's standards. During the audits, it was noted that many playgroups demonstrated excellent hygiene and the children were observed to be in good health. Additionally, the audits highlighted the need for refresher training in resource-making for some Abahambi, particularly to enhance the fantasy play areas.

Abahambi programme

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The audits also revealed valuable insights into the strengths of the programme and areas for development. For example, at the Nseleni area, the playgroups were found to be well-organized, and the community was actively involved in supporting the Abahambi's efforts. However, in some areas, such as Matimatolo, challenges remained, including the need for continued guidance to support Abahambi in becoming more independent. The Abahambi Programme in the Mbuba area concluded its formal phase as LETCEE exited from providing monthly stipends due to discontinued funding.

However, LETCEE remains committed to supporting the community by continuing to supply Lunchbox porridge, offering Mobile Toy Library visits, and implementing the Play Able programme for children with disabilities. Ongoing training for the Abahambi will also be provided to ensure sustained quality of services.

Four of the ten Abahambi have successfully transitioned to self-sustainability by charging a small fee to cover their salaries, enabling them to continue offering their services.



LETCEE is actively supporting the remaining six Abahambi to adopt similar models, empowering them to become financially independent while continuing to serve their communities.

Moving forward, LETCEE's commitment to developing the Abahambi includes offering additional training and mentoring to help these facilitators enhance their skills and sustain their playgroups. The goal is to ensure that every Abahambi is equipped to provide high-quality early childhood education in their communities and, over time, become self-sufficient in managing their playgroups.

Toy Libraries



The Toy Library initiative at LETCEE, both mobile and stationed, continues to be a cornerstone of our early childhood development (ECD) support. Serving over 2,000 children annually, these Toy Libraries provide access to a wide range of educational toys and resources, fostering learning through play in communities that lack access to formal ECD centres.

The mobile Toy Libraries travel to remote areas, bringing toys directly to children in their communities, while the stationed libraries serve as central hubs where children and caregivers can borrow toys on a regular basis. This toy exchange model allows children to engage in play that stimulates their creativity, problem-solving skills, and social development, all while ensuring that resources are shared equitably across multiple communities.



In addition to providing toys, the libraries serve as platforms for community engagement, offering caregivers guidance on the importance of play in child development. The programme is instrumental in promoting learning through play, reaching vulnerable children who would otherwise have limited access to such opportunities.

LETCEE remains committed to expanding the reach of the Toy Libraries and ensuring that more children continue to benefit from this essential service, supporting holistic child development across the communities we serve.

PlayAble Project

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The PlayABLE project continues to make a profound impact on the lives of children with disabilities by providing inclusive play opportunities, therapeutic support, and family engagement. In 2023, the project supported 24 children with various disabilities, including cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, autism, and visual impairments. Through regular playgroups, home visits, and collaboration with healthcare professionals, the PlayABLE project ensures that children receive the necessary care and developmental support in a safe and nurturing environment.

A key component of the project is the inclusive playgroups, where children with disabilities engage in structured play activities alongside their peers. These sessions, facilitated by trained staff and a physiotherapist, help children develop essential physical, cognitive, and social skills. Additionally, caregivers are empowered through these sessions, learning how to implement home programs and provide ongoing support for their children. Caregivers have expressed deep appreciation for the project, noting improvements in their children's development and the emotional support they receive from the PlayABLE team.



The project also collaborates closely with healthcare providers, such as the Greytown hospital rehabilitation team, to ensure children receive proper medical attention, including therapies and referrals for specialized care. For instance, the project facilitated the donation of wheelchairs and other mobility aids, ensuring that children diagnosed with cerebral palsy, have access to the tools they need for greater independence. Additionally, several children were referred to specialists for further assessments, such as autism diagnostics and speech therapy.

PlayAble Project

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In 2023, the project saw the introduction of new resources, including play kits for blind and visually impaired children, donated by the South Africa Mobility Blind Trust. These kits were distributed during home visits, and caregivers were trained on how to use them effectively to support their children's development. Moreover, the project hosted community workshops and support group meetings, where caregivers shared experiences, received emotional support, and learned new techniques to enhance their children's learning and wellbeing.

As PlayABLE continues to evolve, its impact on children with disabilities and their families grows stronger, offering hope and tangible improvements in their quality of life. LETCEE remains committed to expanding the reach of the PlayABLE project, ensuring that no child is left behind, regardless of their physical or developmental challenges.



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Social Worker at LETCEE



LETCEE's social worker plays a vital role in providing holistic support to children and families across various communities, focusing on addressing social and emotional needs, improving access to essential services, and ensuring family preservation.

A key responsibility is facilitating access to crucial documents like birth certificates, which are necessary for children to access education and social grants. In 2023, a concerted effort was made to reduce the number of children without birth certificates across playgroups and centres.

The social worker processed numerous applications in areas like Matimatolo and Njengabantu, helping families navigate complex systems to secure these vital documents. Psychosocial support is another cornerstone of the social worker's role. Families of children with disabilities are supported through programs such as PlayABLE, where caregivers receive guidance on parenting skills, coping mechanisms, and emotional support. Workshops on alternative disciplinary methods, like those held in Potspruit, aim to educate caregivers on creating nurturing and non-violent environments for their children.

Additionally, LETCEE's social worker engages in group work and community outreach, addressing broader social issues like child protection, victim empowerment, and life skills development. Community awareness campaigns, such as those focused on gender-based violence and drug abuse, play an essential role in promoting safer environments for children.

Project - Closing the Gap

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Project Closing the Gap is a crucial initiative by LETCEE designed to address the literacy and math gaps among children from Grade R to Grade 3. This project aims to bridge educational inequalities, particularly for children in vulnerable communities, by providing targeted interventions that foster foundational skills in reading, writing, and mathematics.

Operation Impact has successfully launched in February 2023 after the pilot period with 240 learners and 8 facilitators. Sessions were conducted across several sites, including Lilani, Thulini, Shebe, and Nseleni. These sessions, facilitated by experienced teachers, provide tailored educational support to enhance the children's learning experience. The project focuses on giving children a strong start in their education by offering structured lessons and using interactive learning methods to engage the young learners.

Each Operation Impact site caters to 30 learners, with a dedicated facilitator per site. and facilitators received essential resources to continue their work effectively. Resources were delivered to all sites, allowing sessions to operate productively and ensuring that children have the tools they need to learn.

In addition to in-classroom support, Operation Impact also emphasizes the importance of parental involvement and community engagement. This holistic approach aims to create a supportive learning environment that extends beyond the classroom. The project has not only impacted literacy and numeracy but has also contributed to overall child development by building confidence and fostering a love for learning.

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The Powergirls Project



The PowerGirls project, a flagship programme at LETCEE, continues to empower girls from vulnerable communities by providing them with essential life skills, knowledge, and a sense of belonging. Throughout the year, the programme has operated at four sites, with a focus on building confidence and nurturing the potential of young girls through engaging themes and activities.

In 2023, the PowerGirls project emphasized safety and gratitude. These topics aimed to instill a sense of responsibility and self-awareness among the girls, equipping them with practical tools to navigate challenges both within and outside of their communities.

One of the highlights of the year was the PowerGirls National Steering Committee workshop, where LETCEE played an instrumental role. The workshop gathered representatives from five NGOs to share successes and challenges since the project's inception in 2019. LETCEE, represented by its Managing Director and Programme Coordinator, proposed the inclusion of emotional intelligence as a critical component of the programme, a gap identified in previous activities.

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The Powergirls Project

This addition is expected to further enhance the emotional and psychological development of participants.

The recruitment of new PowerGirls was a success, with all four sites meeting their target of 48 girls per site. Throughout the year, the project engaged 192 PowerGirls, supported by eight facilitators and four coordinators. Sessions were designed to be interactive and relevant to the girls' needs, with facilitators receiving refresher training to ensure effective session delivery.

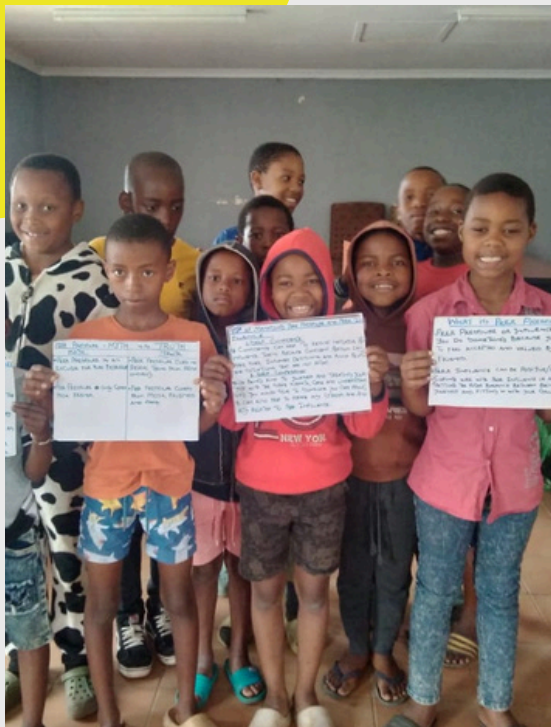
As the programme moves forward, there are plans to develop an alumni network to support PowerGirls who have graduated from the programme. The Steering Committee is currently working on strategies to maintain connections with past participants and involve them in mentoring younger girls, creating a sustainable and supportive ecosystem that extends beyond the initial programme.

The PowerGirls project has not only been impactful in terms of the number of girls it has reached but has also created meaningful change in the lives of its participants. With continued support from LETCEE, Mamas Alliance, and other stakeholders, the project is well-positioned to grow and empower more girls in the coming years.



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The Boys Programme



The Boys Programme at LETCEE, launched as a pilot project in May 2022, has successfully supported and guided a group of boys from ages 8 to 13. Starting with 15 boys and expanding to 20 after six months, the programme focused on fostering leadership, self-awareness, and emotional resilience through various themed sessions. Themes included "I Am Special," "I Am a Future Leader," "Defeating Depression," and "Teamwork is Key," with activities linked to national celebrations and awareness months, such as Mandela Month and Mental Health Awareness Month.

The programme has had a significant positive impact, with boys choosing the name "Proudly Boys" and creating the slogan, "Siyakhula, Siyaphambili, Singamadoda Akusasa" (We are growing, we are looking forward, we are future men). Through engaging activities, boys learned about personal identity, dealing with peer pressure, and their roles in the community. Feedback from school management, parents, and local authorities has been overwhelmingly positive, recognizing the transformative influence the programme has had on the boys and their families.

However, the project faced challenges, such as limited funding, capacity, caregivers not encouraging participation, and difficulties in balancing school and household responsibilities. Despite these obstacles, the boys remained committed, with some even returning after brief absences. The programme also highlighted the need for greater support from teachers in addressing bullying. Unfortunately, the Boys Programme had to be paused due to limited funding. We are hoping to re-open this great programme in 2025 again.

Food Security Project

LETCEE's Food Security Project has made significant strides in supporting community members and enhancing food production in vulnerable areas. Throughout 2023 and early 2024, the project focused on creating sustainable gardens, providing training, and securing markets for produce, all while addressing ongoing challenges like water scarcity and adverse weather conditions.

One of the core components of the project is community engagement through garden development. In 2023, gardens across various regions such as Upper Thulini, Matimatolo, and Njengabantu were supported with essential resources like seeds, seedlings, and gardening tools. LETCEE introduced training sessions on topics such as proper land preparation, seed sowing, organic pest management, and efficient harvesting techniques. Farmers were also trained on record keeping, a crucial skill for ensuring sustainability and productivity in their gardens.

The project has played a vital role in improving food security by providing fresh produce to families in need. Gardens have produced a variety of crops, including spinach, cabbage, potatoes, and beans. These gardens not only support families with nutritious food but have also become sources of income, with produce being sold to local markets and schools. This has motivated farmers, who now view food security as a key strategy to fight poverty.



Food Security Project

In addition to vegetable gardening, the project expanded into poultry farming. For example, the Upper Thulini Poultry project received support with chickens and feed, enabling farmers to raise and sell chickens to local communities and LETCEE centres. This added dimension of farming has contributed to the economic resilience of the participating families.

Despite these successes, challenges like water scarcity, pest management, and unpredictable weather remain ongoing concerns. In response, LETCEE has implemented strategies such as installing irrigation systems in gardens like Ngoje and providing training on water-saving techniques to mitigate the effects of drought. LETCEE's Food Security Project continues to empower communities by fostering sustainable farming practices, improving food access, and creating opportunities for income generation, contributing to both individual well-being and broader community development.



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SmartStart



LETCEE's SmartStart programme continues to make a significant impact on early childhood development by providing accessible early learning opportunities to children in underserved communities. Over the past year, the programme achieved key milestones, such as reaching 400 franchisees, conducting successful matching days, and holding numerous start-up training sessions for new franchisees.

One of the core strengths of the SmartStart programme is its structured approach, which allows

franchisees to follow a clear curriculum that ensures progress for the children in their care. The programme's effectiveness is further enhanced by the ongoing support provided by coaches and local clubs, which offer guidance and practical applications of early learning techniques.

Despite these successes, the programme faced challenges, particularly around business skills training and quality assurance. However, LETCEE is addressing these gaps by setting individual and team targets for coaches, encouraging stronger communication, and holding regular club meetings to ensure continuous engagement and progress. Franchisees are also playing a critical role in community engagement, with many showing great initiative in marketing the programme and enrolling children. Although some areas still face challenges due to unemployment and inconsistent fee collection, the demand for the SmartStart programme continues to grow, especially as communities recognize the importance of early learning.

LETCEE’s 2024 financials reflect a stable and responsible approach to resource management, ensuring that the organization continues to provide vital services to vulnerable communities. Our audited financial statements demonstrate transparency and adherence to financial regulations, with all funds accounted for and used efficiently to support LETCEE’s various programmes.

Income R 13 848 950

Donations	R	151 400.00	1.09%
Fundraising	R	41 052.00	0.30%
Grants	R	12 568 563.00	90.75%
Interest	R	223 751.00	1.62%
Sales	R	6 211.00	0.04%
Training	R	523 755.00	3.78%
Recoveries	R	154 920.00	1.12%
Other Income	R	179 301.00	1.29%

Expenditure R 12 173 741

Staff Costs	R	5 734 789.00	47%
Project Costs	R	3 351 730.00	28%
Vehicle and Travel Costs	R	1 058 235.00	9%
Training Costs	R	938 668.00	8%
Office Costs	R	994 261.00	8%

Partners, Funders and Friends

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Kinderfonds Mamas	Oppenheimer Memorial Trust	First Rand Foundation	Grindrod Family Centenary Trust
HCI Foundation	SmartStart	Jim Joel Fund	Volkswagen
Izingane Happy Foundation	The Lunchbox Fund	Victor Daitz Foundation	Ackerman Pick'n Pay Foundation
IQRAA Trust	BASF	SMEC	Investec
Scorpion Legal	First Job	Biblioneef	Mondi SA
Care for Education	Lego Foundation	BookDash	Solon Foundation
NTC Forestry	Afgri	Murray & Roberts	RTS Greytown
WordWorks	Plennegy	Pidelta	Mascor Toyota
The Dream Team	Aheers Supermarket	Credit Guaranteed	NTE Factory Hermannsburg
Sunshine Seedlings	Hermannsburg School	Wembley College	St. David Diocesan School
Bluecrest Holdings	CPS Seedlings	SAB	Buffalo Security

Conclusion

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In conclusion, this year has been one of growth, resilience, and impactful change for LETCEE. Through our various programmes, we have continued to reach vulnerable communities, providing essential services in early childhood development, food security, and community empowerment. Despite challenges, including financial constraints and community conflicts, our commitment to improving the lives of children and their families has remained unwavering. With the continued support of our partners, funders, and dedicated team, we look forward to expanding our reach and deepening our impact in the coming year. Together, we are building stronger, more resilient communities, one step at a time.



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