

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

The Journey to Wellbeing

community
keepers 



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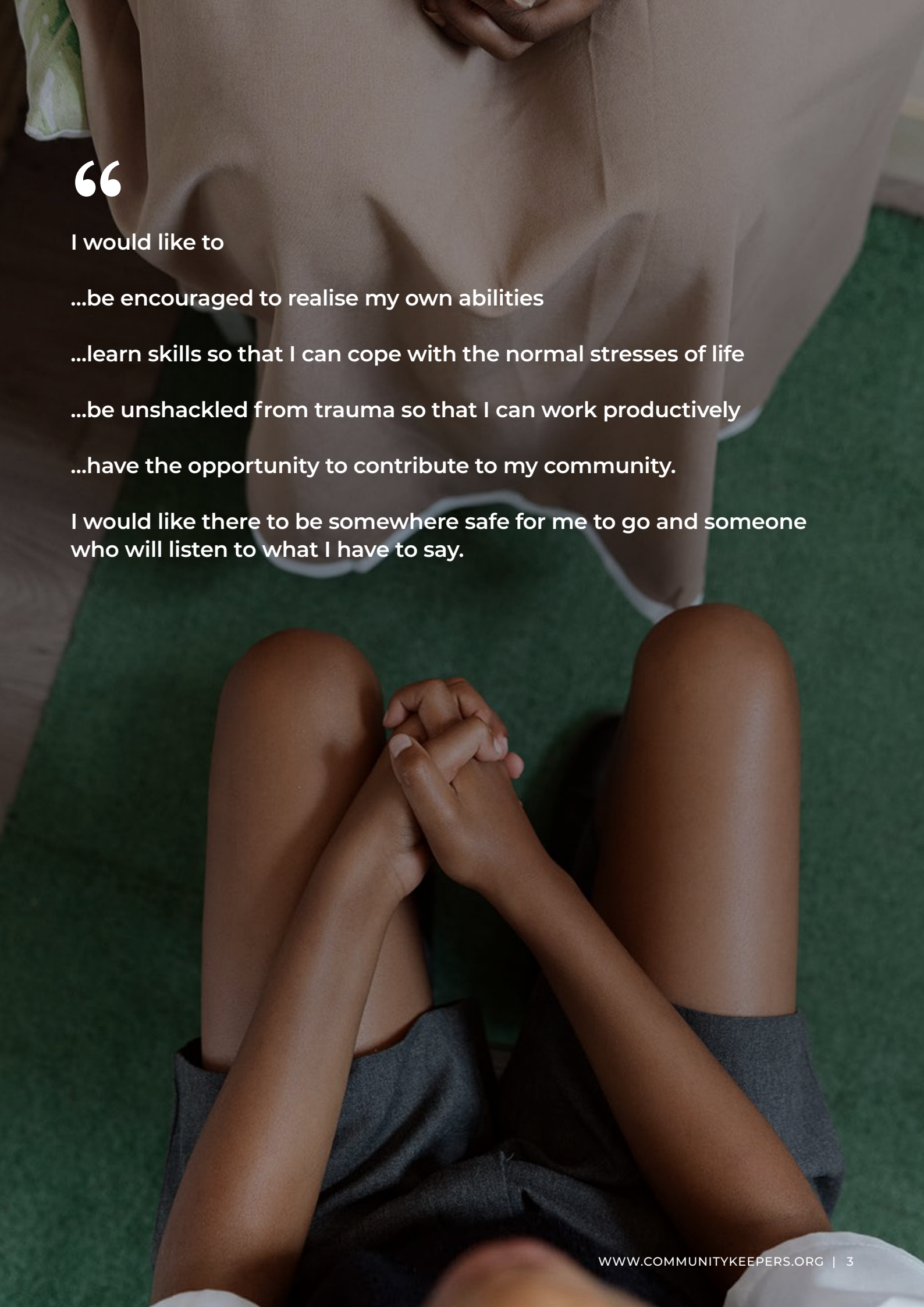
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COVER IMAGE: During sand tray therapy, children use figurines to create scenes in a box of sand as an aid in telling their story.



“

I would like to

...be encouraged to realise my own abilities

...learn skills so that I can cope with the normal stresses of life

...be unshackled from trauma so that I can work productively

...have the opportunity to contribute to my community.

I would like there to be somewhere safe for me to go and someone who will listen to what I have to say.

In school corridors and classrooms we see the realities that many children carry with them each day. Some arrive distracted by pressures at home, others are learning how to navigate friendships, identity and difficult emotions. Our work begins by listening carefully and walking alongside them as they find safer ways forward.

SELF HARM

Among learners in Grades 6 and 7 we are seeing increasing difficulty with healthy coping skills. Some young people are turning to self harm when they feel overwhelmed. In one month alone we completed five safety plans with learners who needed immediate support. One learner shared their story simply. "I used to cut myself with scissors. CK helped me with my behaviour. They gave me tools and information on what to do when I feel like hurting myself."

GANGS AND KNIVES

Another emerging concern is the formation of small gangs among learners, with some children carrying knives to school. We are planning awareness campaigns together with the South African Police Service to address the risks and to strengthen a culture of safety within the school community.

SUBSTANCES

One learner was referred for therapy after beginning to experiment with marijuana, tobacco and alcohol. Through the assessment process it became clear that he was at risk of developing an addiction. With his consent and family support he was referred to SANCA for an outpatient programme. When he returned he thanked our team for encouraging him to attend. He shared that the sessions helped him recognise how quickly experimental behaviour could place his future goals at risk. Two weeks after completing the programme he tested negative for substances and continues to visit our office regularly to stay accountable and maintain his sobriety. His caregiver has also noticed meaningful changes in his behaviour since receiving support.

ENGAGEMENT

School absenteeism is also a challenge. In response our Care Practitioner started an engagement support group. One educator recently shared that a learner who previously struggled with attendance is now present every day. Not only is he attending consistently, he is also helping other learners with their schoolwork. Another learner receiving counselling has also shown significant improvement in school attendance.

BOUNDARIES

The school is currently facing challenges related to inappropriate touching and sexual harassment among learners, from Grade 1 through to Grade 7. In response our team began facilitating group sessions on body safety and healthy boundaries. We also partnered with the South African Police Service to support these conversations. During one of the sessions a member of the learner committee spontaneously taught a constable the "private parts" song that learners had learned during Child Protection Month. Soon the whole group joined in, turning a serious conversation into a moment of shared learning and confidence.

Being a small town presents challenges. Many of the young student teachers are known to the learners, which sometimes leads to fawning behaviour and inappropriate touching that makes the teachers uncomfortable. We facilitated open discussions with both learners and student teachers, creating a safe space to talk about respect, boundaries and appropriate ways of relating to one another.

KEY STATS

CHILDREN FACING RISK IN SA

62% of children in South Africa are affected by poverty

88% of children in rural areas are affected by poverty

60% of children in South Africa need wellbeing support

Source: PsySSA, Children's Mental Health Week 2025

WHEN CHALLENGES BEGIN

50% of lifelong challenges* begin before age 14

75% of lifelong challenges* begin before age 24

* life-long mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression and disruptive behaviour

Source: <https://shorturl.at/64IVL>



CASE STORY

SAFETY RISKS IN THE COMMUNITY

4,328: Village population (2011 Census)

0.94 km²: Area

994: Households

Unemployment: Estimated at 60% of adults, with many relying on seasonal farm labour.



In October 2025, our team based at a local primary school reported growing concern about gang related behaviour among learners, as well as the emergence of informal spaza shops selling unsafe contraband to children.

One particular concern was the sale of a male sexual enhancement tablet called Red Cobra, which learners were able to purchase for as little as R10. Some learners as young as Grade 3 and Grade 4 (approximately 8 to 10 years old) had reportedly bought these tablets. This raised serious concerns after incidents of sexually inappropriate behaviour began to emerge at the school.

The matter was reported to the relevant authorities and our Care Practitioner engaged with the Social Crime Prevention Unit of the South African Police Service. Steps were put in place with local partners to address the issue and to prevent these unsafe products from being sold to underage learners.

YEAR AT A GLANCE



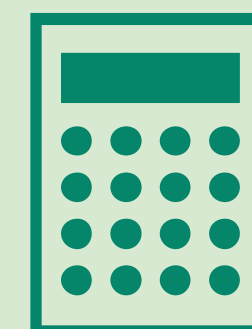
PROVINCES 4
(2024: 4 PROVINCES)



78 825 LEARNERS
(2024: 78 168)

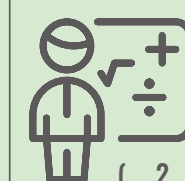


89 PARTNER SCHOOLS
(2024: 79 PARTNER SCHOOLS)



DONATIONS: R24 733 713
(2024: R29 910 310)

177 CK EMPLOYEES
(2024: 175)



EDUCATORS ENROLLED IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS 8 655

(2024: 8 328)

212 268 LEARNERS ENROLLED
IN ANCHORING LIFE-SKILL WORKSHOPS
(2024: 197 583)



9 323 C-SERVICES
(2024: 9119)

AVERAGE 5 SESSIONS/CLIENT
(2024: 5 SESSIONS)

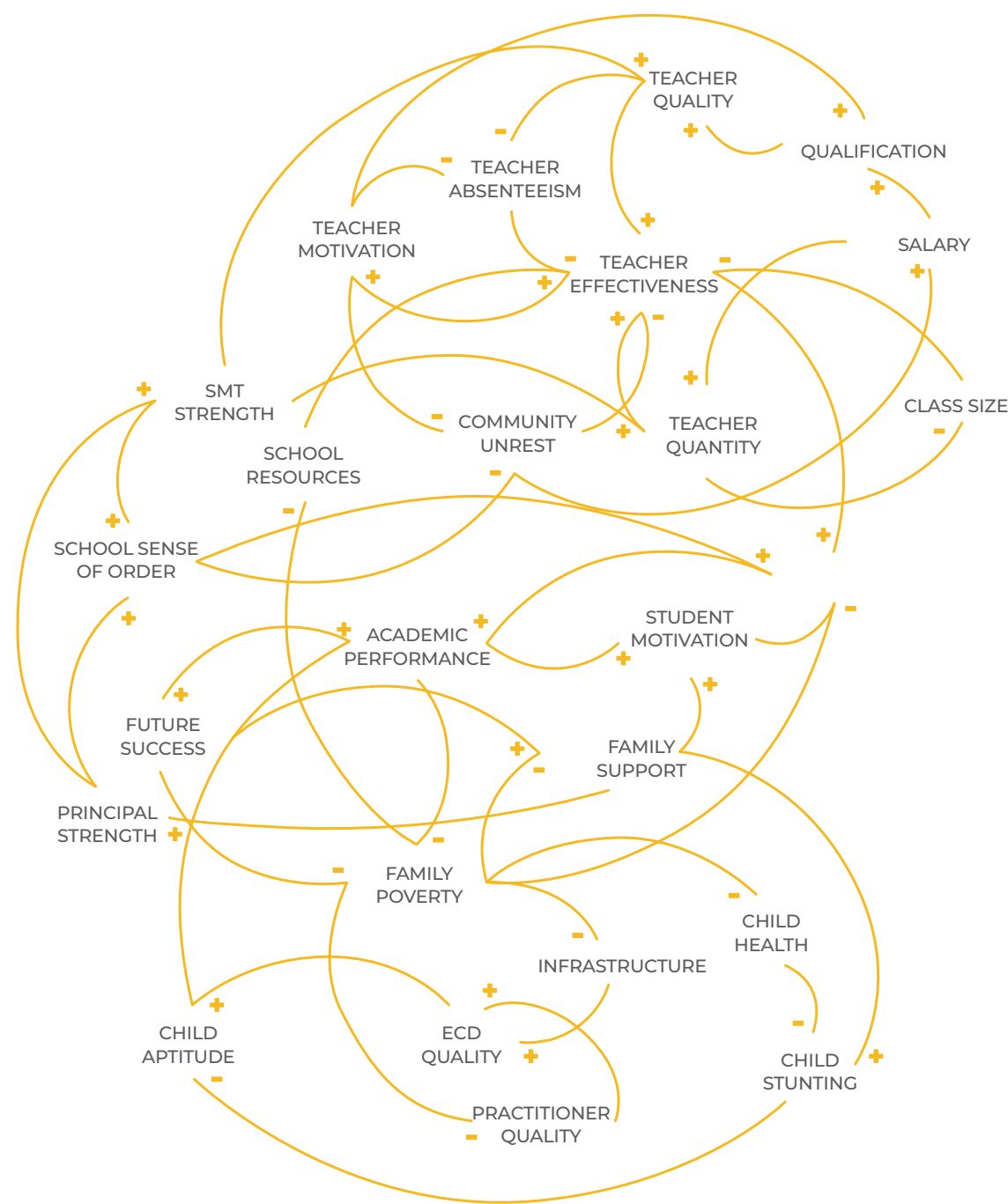
CAREGIVERS/GUARDIANS ENROLLED IN POSITIVE CAREGIVING WORKSHOPS 15 723
(2024: 34 067)

ENGAGING CAREGIVERS: CHALLENGES AND NEW APPROACHES

This year we saw fewer caregivers engaging than we had hoped. Many caregivers face demanding schedules and limited resources, which can make participation difficult. At the same time, we recognise the need to continue strengthening how we connect with families and how they connect with their children. One encouraging example came when a partner school hosted an inter-house sports day and invited caregivers to attend. Our team used this opportunity to host a short caregiving workshop, introducing caregivers to the CK office and its services. Many caregivers were previously unaware of the support available, and several others shared positive testimonials about the impact CK had already made in their children's lives. This experience highlighted the value of meeting caregivers where they are and connecting with them through existing school events.

SYSTEMS THAT SUPPORT REAL CHANGE

“...improving students’ social circumstances has a greater impact on their academic performance than improving their classroom experience.”



Source: A Systems Thinking Approach to Improve Education and Policy in South Africa | ORMS Today
<https://shorturl.at/qz0tk>

LETTER FROM OUR CHAIRMAN



ANDRÉ DU PLESSIS
Chairman and co-founder

On 26 March 2026, it would have been 17 years since Community Keepers was registered and our work began. At the time, I had met Philip Geldenhuys, a social worker who was always so eager to share his thoughts and equally eager for us to go into the community and listen to what children, teenagers and adults were grappling with and thinking about. A team of various disciplines was put together and under the name of Afrikids, our research commenced, until we finally decided to provide psychological and social services at schools.

A lot has changed, but in essence our services stayed the same. We still meet regularly with researchers at universities and similar aid organisations around the world to be challenged by their thoughts. We also continue to ask people in the communities about their needs and the things that bring them hope. Currently, we are spending time with people like Dr Heleen Hofmeyr from the Economics Department at the University of Stellenbosch who told us that the capacity of NPOs in South Africa is around 1% compared to government, and the best test of an initiative is when somebody invests and it gets implemented. In 2022 a team from the Treasury Department of the South Africa government met with us and invited us to be

part of their job creation project. They wanted us to employ unemployed young people and social workers. Our previous research confirmed that there were more than 10,000 qualified but unemployed social workers in South Africa. With the government’s help, 68 new jobs would be created in this project, and the part that excited them the most, was that by investing in the mental health of children while they are in school, we would play a role in creating employment in the future. This was a two-year project, adding 44 new schools to our 35 schools at the time, which they called catalytic growth. They funded the two years, and contracted us to continue for a third year, reporting on the impact. Unfortunately they discontinued their funding, and without them the project became unsustainable. More setbacks occurred in 2025 when many rounds of budget cuts by our government and other funders, including philanthropists in the USA and corporate donors continued. It was a tough year, and even more challenging for the communities where we work.

I want to end with a positive story, because that is what one needs in the hard times. One of our long-standing funders, extremely loyal and faithful people, knew what we were going through and they stepped in to fund the salary bill of all 44 Care Facilitators for the year, while we covered the salaries of the social workers from our reserves. Those 44 young men and women had all been previously unemployed and 38 of them graduated as qualified social auxiliary workers. The qualification in itself will assist with their future employment. Thank you very much for your generosity. For all the other funders, I would like to thank you and honour you too.

Thank you to God for watching over and leading us, our team who never gives up, our funders who believe in what we do and the way that we do it, and our partners at the schools who welcome us to provide our services on their premises. We are truly grateful.



LETTER FROM OUR CEO



GERRIT LANING
CEO

Disruptive behaviours are often the visible warnings of what lies deep within. Exposure to violence, abuse, loss, neglect, a motivational deficit, a sense of hopelessness - these are the bricks that weigh down the backpacks of our children arriving at school.

In a recent radio interview, Dr Heleen Hofmeyr (Stellenbosch University) said: "South African children are struggling under the social ills in our country... teacher stress is about dealing with that. I'm seeing teachers as front-line workers who are dealing with the very harsh realities of our country. One of the main emotional stressors that they experience is having to take on this role of being a psychologist or a social worker and, in some cases, even a caregiver. The obvious solution there is, put those mental health professionals in schools. That is clearly what we need to do." <https://shorturl.at/ahZH8>

I spent the final weeks of the 2025 school year travelling to schools and listening to children, our team (84% of our staff are under the age of 35), our funders and a group of specialists from across the globe who gathered at a conference.

The message is consistent: Every school needs a Mental Health First Aider (MHFA), to be resident on the premises where they can build trust and rapport. These MHFAs must be well trained, supervised, supported and cared for – personally and professionally – and they must form part of a geographic cluster so that they can engage in valuable contact time with their colleagues and cluster manager. They must have access to mental health professionals - a scarce resource - who either rotate between schools, providing the most intense version of support intervention or can be reached through technology.

Getting this right means that interventions journey through a series of bell curves where a new site is opened, support ramps up and then tapers off, as learners and their caregivers are counselled and equipped with a toolbox of techniques for lifelong wellness. Then, where a traumatic event impacts the school, they can quickly tap into high-intensity support, albeit through our virtual clinic.

This work is a deeply personal journey for each one of us who hold the trust of vulnerable, traumatised young people who need to be cared for and the trust of exceptionally generous funders who care deeply about the healing work that we do.

Like so many other NPOs across the world, we have been battered and shaken by funding cuts, shifting focus and a harsh economic climate that results in a greater need with fewer resources available. It is difficult to remain hopeful - as difficult as it is for our clients to remain hopeful when they feel pressed from all sides. Viktor Frankl's words are printed out in bold on our wall: Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms- to choose one's attitude despite the circumstances.

THEORY OF CHANGE

WHY

EVIDENCE-BASED ASSUMPTION 1

Offering someone a safe space (a calm, quiet, private area) and a safe person (a trusted adult trained in mental health first aid) enables them to feel secure, process big emotions, and build resilience- so that learning and development can prosper.

EVIDENCE-BASED ASSUMPTION 2

"Socio-emotional learning (SEL) is the acquisition and application of skills that allow children to:

- track and manage emotions,
- feel and show empathy for others,
- make responsible decisions,
- achieve positive goals.

When learners develop strong socio-emotional skills:

- empathy rises,
- agency is strengthened,
- their classroom behaviour improves,
- and, importantly, academic performance also improves

These are qualities that are not only essential for learning and achievement at school, but also for navigating the complexities of life beyond school."

Source: Prof Mark Thomlinson, Stellenbosch University

WHO

Schools serving low-income communities across South Africa.
Those most at risk and with least access to support.

HOW

INTERVENTION

C

Crisis and counselling
10-15% uptake

A

Anchoring life-skill workshops
Focused SEL

R

Referrals to specialised services and Resources

E

Light-touch whole school approach
100% uptake

S

Stakeholder engagement at all levels
Co-creation

WHAT will the intervention achieve?

IMMEDIATE OUTCOMES:

- Skill acquisition
- Skill application

INTERMEDIARY OUTCOMES:

- Reduced stigma
- Increased engagement

IMPACT:

- Tools for lifelong wellbeing

M&E

Quantitative

•

Qualitative

•

Implementation Integrity

•

Fidelity





CASE STORY

A WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH

Our team C.A.R.E.S. for the learners that we work with. That means we offer Counselling, Anchoring life-skills, Referral pathways to specialists, and an Environment of wellbeing while listening to Stakeholders.

Below is a beautiful example of this in action: We hosted a positive caregiving session where caregivers came together to share their experiences and learn practical ways to support their children with empathy and positive discipline. Caregivers expressed how valuable it was to gain tools that help them communicate better, manage discipline positively, and support their children's emotional wellbeing. The energy in the room was filled with hope and appreciation, showing how small shifts at home can make a big difference in a child's wellbeing and learning.

We also met with new educators and assistant teachers to introduce our services. It was an important step in helping them understand how we can work together to support learners. The session strengthened collaboration and encouraged early referrals, ensuring that learners in need receive the right support at the right time. Both sessions captured what our work

is all about, building relationships that create safe, supportive, and thriving school communities.

One story that stood out involved a Grade 4 learner whose class teacher approached us for help in finding a place where he could get replacement prescription glasses, as his pair had broken. At the state clinic, his mother had apparently been told that she would have to pay for another pair to be issued. We informed the educator about a programme at Specsavers where children aged 12 and under receive a free eye test and free prescription glasses.

A few weeks later, the educator brought the learner back to show us his new glasses. She shared how grateful she was to have Community Keepers in the school, noting that we support both educators and learners in many different ways, something she has witnessed repeatedly.

C.A.R.E.S. MODEL

C	a	r	e	s
We can go to CK, when we need to talk to someone or when we don't feel safe (on-site or online).	CK comes to us, in our classroom, and they teach us new tools for our toolbox.	Sometimes CK isn't the right place to help us, like if our families need food parcels, but they help us to find the right people.	CK comes to our school assemblies and playground, and they make posters for our school during the Kindness Campaign and Child Protection Week.	CK asks us what we think is important; we can join the CK committee or we can give them feedback.
				
Containment Counselling Crisis intervention	Anchoring life-skill workshops for learners, educators and caregivers	Referrals Resources	Ecosystem Environment where everyone feels a sense of belonging (engagement)	Stakeholder engagement #nothingaboutuswithoutus

The depth and duration of a CK intervention depends on the need; the severity and complexity of the need



**WELLBEING IS A CONTINUUM
AND WE RESPOND TO THE CHANGING NEED**



CASE STORY

MONITORING SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING

Supporting wellbeing means paying attention not only to crisis moments but also to how learners experience their everyday lives. While the global SDG 3.4 indicator tracks suicide as an extreme outcome of poor mental wellbeing, we follow the OECD approach of monitoring subjective wellbeing, how people feel about and experience their lives.

We use the internationally recognised WHO-5 Subjective Wellbeing Index, an evidence based tool validated across cultures, to track subjective wellbeing over time. In partnership with Stellenbosch University, the questionnaire

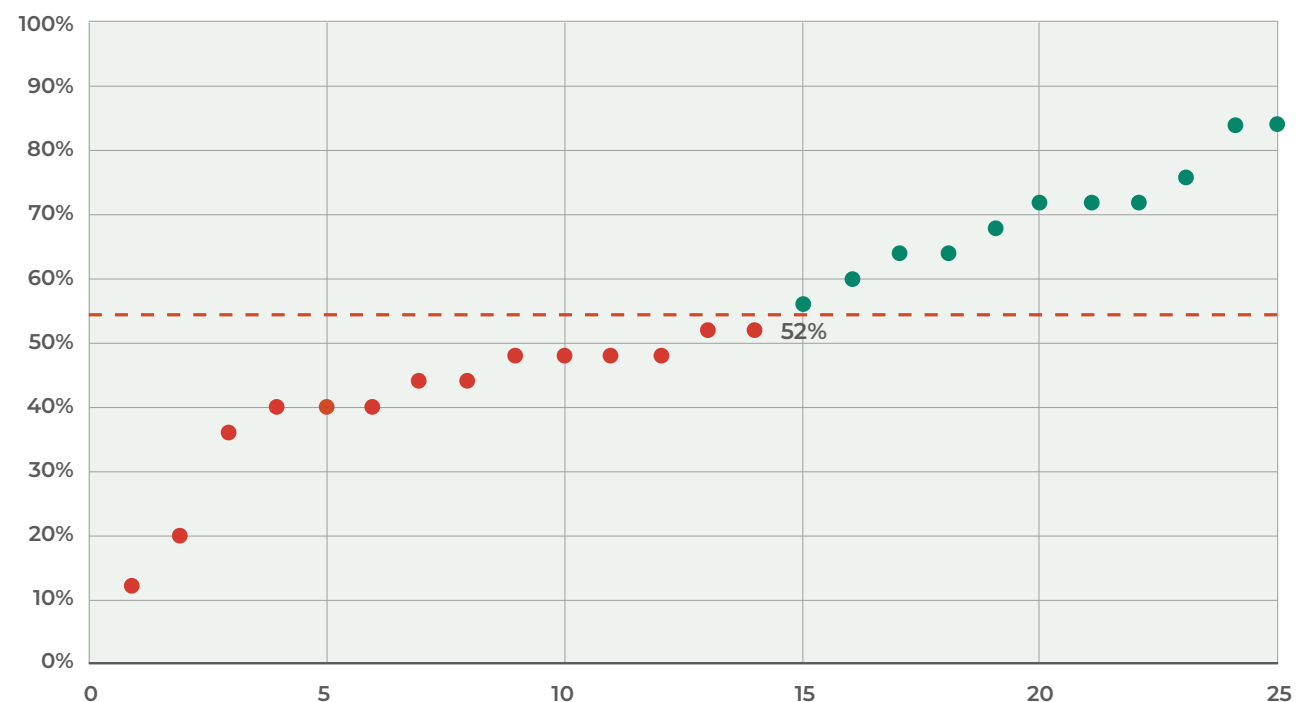
was translated into local languages to ensure accessibility for learners.

Our monitoring approach has recently improved by shifting from group score to plotting the spread of anonymised individual scores. This allows us to identify the percentage of learners who may be at risk of depression and to respond with earlier support.

These insights help us understand wellbeing trends and strengthen the support we provide in schools.

WHO-5 Term 4 2025

More than half (56%) of the 25 Educators surveyed, were flagged as "at possible risk of depression" (WHO-5 Group score: 53.76%)



All images of children in this report were taken during a posed photo shoot with our CK Learner Committees. We have obtained written consent from both the learners and their caregivers. The images are used for illustrative purposes only.

WHAT HAPPENS WHILE CHILDREN WAIT

As already mentioned, the ratio of government psychosocial support is estimated at one social worker for every 23,000 learners. As a result, many children wait extended periods before receiving the help they need.

During this waiting period, children experiencing trauma or emotional distress often see their symptoms worsen. Continued exposure to toxic stress can lead to heightened anxiety, trauma-related responses, and behavioural challenges such as aggression, withdrawal, or self-harm.

THE IMPACT OF WAITING FOR PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

Without timely support, children are at risk of:

- **Worsening trauma symptoms**, sometimes resulting in dropouts or disruptive behaviour.
- **Toxic stress and developmental delays**
- **Declining mental health**, including anxiety and low mood.
- **Regression and social withdrawal**, such as sleep disturbances, and disengagement from friends or school.
- **Increased vulnerability**

THE VALUE OF IMMEDIATE SUPPORT

Early, accessible interventions, particularly those delivered in schools, can make a significant difference while children wait for specialised care.

Immediate support can:

- **Mitigate crises**
- **Reduce acute distress**
- **Provide safety and stability**
- **Equip caregivers**
- **Prevent long-term harm**



A SCALABLE APPROACH

Research shows that task sharing, training community-based workers to provide structured mental health support, is both feasible and effective.

When properly supported, these facilitators can significantly improve children's psychological wellbeing. In South Africa, task sharing is increasingly recognised as a critical and cost-effective strategy for expanding access to equitable, community-based mental healthcare.

THE BIG PICTURE:

Globally, mental health challenges are among the leading causes of illness and disability in young people. In South Africa, these pressures are intensified by poverty, violence, and limited access to care.

THE GAP:

"The vast majority of young people with mental health problems do not seek help or receive care," said Prof. Jason Bantjes, Director of SA Medical Research Council - Mental Health, Alcohol, Substance use and Tobacco Research Unit (MASTRU). "Sometimes this is a result of resource constraints and a scarcity of health professionals who are properly trained to identify and treat childhood psychiatric conditions. But stigma and a lack of knowledge among teachers and caregivers can also contribute to children not getting the care they need."

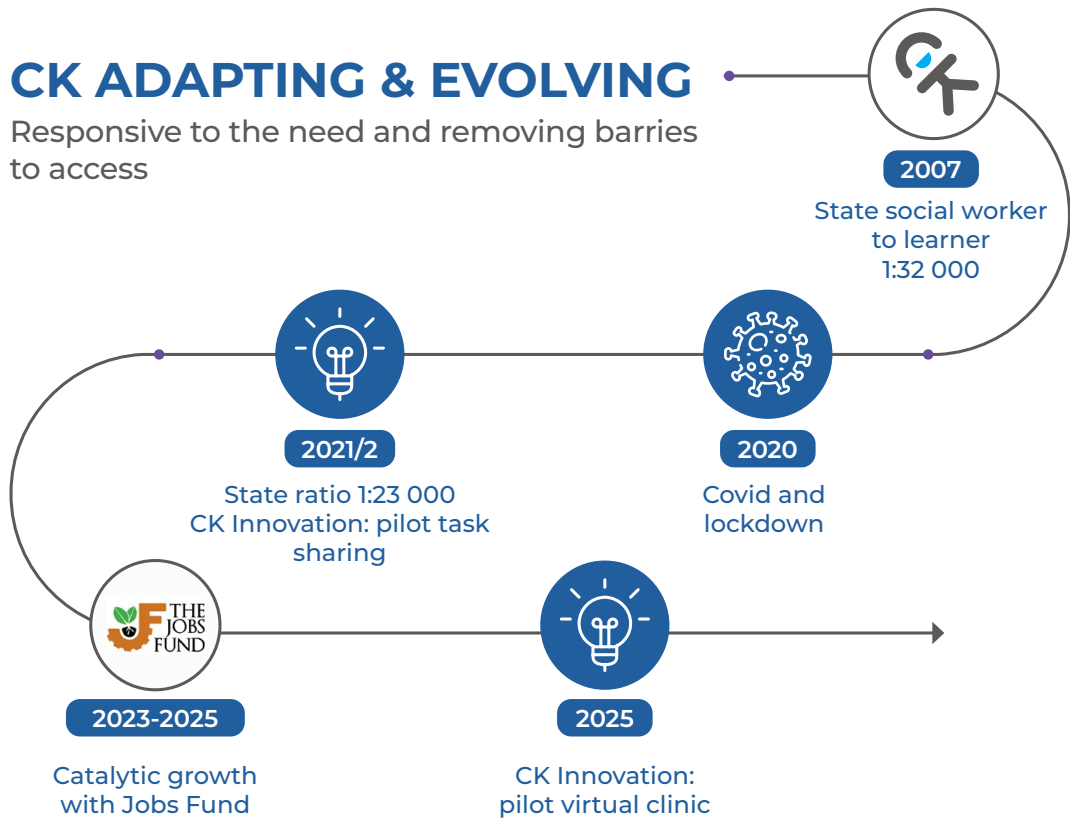
WHY IT MATTERS

Untreated childhood mental health problems can persist into adulthood, leading to long-term physical and psychological harm. While effective treatments exist, many South Africans cannot access them.

Source: <https://shorturl.at/sYXrU>

CK ADAPTING & EVOLVING

Responsive to the need and removing barriers to access





CASE STORY

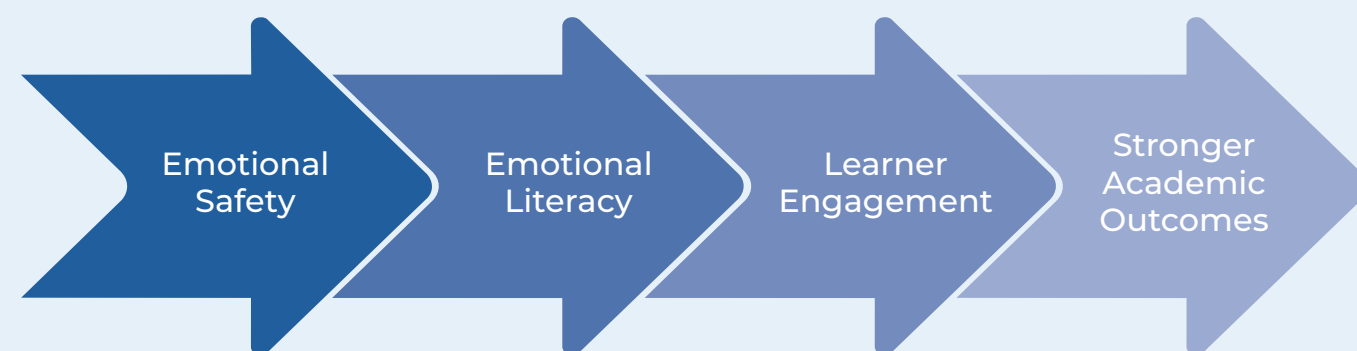
WHERE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT CAN PROSPER

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT UNLOCKS LEARNING

What happens when schools support both literacy and learner wellbeing?

A recent study explored this question in schools where Community Keepers and Click Learning work together. At a school level, there are consistent trends of better academic performance where both psychosocial and academic support are present.

SUPPORTING THE WHOLE LEARNER



When learners feel safe and supported, they are better able to engage in learning.



30
schools
analysed



Stronger
academics with
sustained support



Some schools
also received CK
psychosocial support



All used
Click Learning
literacy tools

Supporting wellbeing strengthens learning readiness.

“

Access to psychosocial support is associated with learning outcomes at the grade and individual levels. Schools with existing Community Keepers support have higher Systemics and eQuiz scores, especially in Grade 6, compared to newer CK schools. When trauma is addressed and emotional literacy is supported, academic programmes become more effective.

In 2025, 38 of our Care Facilitators graduated as Social Auxiliary Workers. Rukaya Adams shares with us the impact that this had on her career.

I joined Community Keepers in August 2022 as a Care Facilitator at a primary school. Before joining, I was working at Year Beyond at a primary school that I had attended as a learner myself. I could clearly see the needs within the school community. When I saw the opportunity at Community Keepers, I applied, not fully knowing what the role would require, but knowing I was willing to learn and wanting to make a difference.



RUKAYA ADAMS

The Mental Health First Aid training I received from Amanda before starting officially really inspired me. It opened my eyes to the importance of mental health support and immediately sparked a passion in me. I knew I wanted to be part of something that could positively impact learners' lives.

One story that will always stay with me involves a particular learner. He arrived early one morning and shared everything that had been happening in his life. It was an emotional and heavy conversation. After he finished speaking, there was a moment of silence and he apologised for not confiding in us sooner. I gently reassured him that what mattered most was that he had spoken up now.

From there, I followed the appropriate referral process and ensured the necessary interventions were initiated. What remains most meaningful to me is that, even though I no longer work at the school or at Community Keepers, whenever he sees me, he still runs to greet me. That reminds me that the safe spaces we create and the relationships we build truly matter.

Working with Community Keepers transformed my understanding of community wellbeing. I learned that social impact often begins with one safe space, one conversation and one trusted adult. I witnessed how early intervention within schools can prevent more severe challenges later in life. I came to understand that providing guidance and support in vulnerable communities can change not only a child's life but also the trajectory of an entire family. The organisation also invested in my personal and professional growth. In 2023, Care Facilitators were given the opportunity to apply for further studies. I doubted myself initially and consulted my Area Manager before submitting my motivational letter.

Shortly thereafter, I received confirmation that I had been successful. That moment was life changing. Balancing full time studies with full time work was demanding, but I persevered. I was supported by an exceptional mentor, Russia Davids, whose academic and personal guidance shaped my development significantly. Because of that support, I am now living out my passion for serving vulnerable individuals and families.

After completing my Social Auxiliary Work qualification in August 2024 and registering with the South African Council for Social Service Professions, I received a job offer to work at a safe house in Stellenbosch, supporting survivors of gender based violence and their children. My responsibilities included facilitating caregiving groups for mothers and educational group sessions for children not attending school.

Currently, I am employed at the Department of Social Development as a Social Auxiliary Worker. My daily responsibilities include conducting home visits, accompanying clients for medical assessments, assisting with late birth registrations, supporting social workers with foster care applications, accompanying clients to court and assisting with client screenings under the guidance of a case manager. A significant portion of my role involves administrative work, which is important for service delivery, accountability and legislative compliance. I am most passionate about gaining experience in generic social work and deepening my understanding of legislative processes and procedures within child protection and family services. Although this differs from school based work, it has broadened my professional perspective within the field of social work.

One of the most valuable skills I gained at Community Keepers is the ability to build rapport and create a safe space. Working with learners strengthened my ability to listen actively, empathetically and without judgement. This skill is invaluable in my

current role, particularly during home visits and when engaging with vulnerable families.

Community Keepers also instilled resilience, adaptability and effective time management in me, especially during periods when I had to manage responsibilities independently. These lessons continue to guide me in my current professional journey.

From an external perspective, I believe Community Keepers' most significant contribution is providing accessible mental health support directly within schools. Many children in vulnerable communities would otherwise not have access to counselling or emotional support services. By identifying challenges early and providing timely intervention within the school setting, the organisation plays a vital preventative role. Its impact extends beyond individual learners, strengthening entire school communities.

“

Community Keepers did not only impact the learners I worked with, it changed my life.

STRENGTHENING SCHOOL BASED SUPPORT TEAMS

A School-Based Support Team (SBST) is an internal school structure in South Africa mandated to identify, screen and support learners experiencing barriers to learning. The team usually includes the principal, class teachers, grade heads, curriculum heads and learning support staff. Teachers identify learners, refer them to the SBST, which then meets to discuss, plan and monitor the intervention, typically requiring caregiver involvement.

In several partner schools, School Based Support Teams (SBSTs) were either inactive or not in place, despite being a requirement of the Department of Education. Our role is not to lead these structures but to act as a bridge that helps schools establish and strengthen them. In many cases, our presence has helped bring these teams back into operation.

At a high school in Mamelodi East, the SBST committee, which previously faced challenges, is now functioning again. Regular meetings are taking place and the team is engaging in meaningful discussions about how best to support learners experiencing barriers to learning. These conversations also explore how external partners can assist with the early identification of challenges and provide additional support where needed.

Learners are often referred to the SBST when barriers to learning are identified. However, given the heavy workload educators carry, these barriers are sometimes addressed only at a

surface level. At our partner schools, we encourage a culture of looking beyond the presenting problem and understanding the deeper factors that may be affecting a learner's ability to learn and participate fully in school life.

An SBST coordinator at a secondary school shared how this partnership has changed their work:

“

I had a lot on my shoulders before Community Keepers came to our school. Learners who needed emotional support were referred to me, but I was not trained to help them. I do not know what I would do without your support. You have made my work easier.

Teachers often carry multiple responsibilities, which increases the risk that some learners may fall through the cracks. At a primary school in Mamelodi, the SBST coordinator explained how Community Keepers has eased this pressure.

"I have been saying this since Community Keepers began working with our school. Now I can sleep peacefully knowing that professionals are handling learners' issues."

She reflected that before Community Keepers was involved she often had to make difficult decisions about which learners to prioritise. In some cases, she had to set certain concerns aside in order to focus on teaching responsibilities. Many educators also report that they are not always clear on the formal processes required when responding to learner concerns. This creates an opportunity for Community Keepers to provide practical guidance and professional development.

For example, we support educators in understanding the Form 22 process and guide them through the practical steps required when reporting concerns. Form 22 is primarily known in South Africa as the mandatory reporting form used to report child abuse or deliberate neglect, as required by Section 110 of

the Children's Act of 2005. It is used by professionals and community members to notify social development departments or police of a child in need of care. Our team at a high school in Cape Town noted a similar need for support.

"Many of the educators and SBST members who attended the session were not familiar with the Form 22 and asked many questions about the process. Our role within schools plays a crucial part in the reporting of child abuse, and this became very clear during the session."

By strengthening SBST structures and building educators' confidence in these processes, schools are better equipped to identify concerns early and ensure that learners receive the support they need.



A total of 432 Form 22's were submitted during the course of 2025.



19 of our 66 primary schools saw an increase in Form 22 reporting from 2024 to 2025.

WHY TEACHERS NEED SUPPORT

Research from the South African Journal of Childhood Education highlights an important challenge in schools. While disclosures of child sexual abuse are relatively common, many educators feel unprepared to respond. Teachers report that limited training, uncertainty about reporting procedures and a lack of institutional support often leave them feeling ill equipped to act. As a result, some cases may go unreported or unresolved. These findings point to a critical gap in training and support systems. Strengthening school structures and equipping educators with clear guidance can help ensure that learners receive the protection and support they need.

Source: <https://shorturl.at/vXweb>

KEY LESSONS LEARNT

1. When reviewing our WHO-5 subjective wellbeing data, one of our funders recommended strengthening how we interpret and present the results. Rather than relying only on average scores for a class, we now also track the percentage of learners or educators at possible risk of depression (i.e. scores below 52%).
2. Onboarding schools that have asked for our service and joined our waiting list is a quicker and simpler process. Offering our service to schools that align with our funder objectives but have not expressed a need for the service is not as successful. Respectful consultation over a longer timeline and across all levels is needed.
3. Being on the school premises and part of the school team presents a challenge, should it ever be necessary to complete a Form 22 on one of the school staff. This scenario is best tabled and discussed when we first contract with a school so that the risk is well described and understood.
4. Task sharing is now well entrenched in our model and evidenced in our data. Mental health professionals are scarce and there is an opportunity for them to rotate between schools in a geographical cluster or through a virtual clinic using technology.
5. Young voices are welcome at the table. "Nothing about us without us." Whilst we have always had learner committees at a school level informing the programme, the establishment of a Youth Advisory ensures that young people from our school communities now meet at regular intervals with our CEO and COO.
6. The legal requirement to obtain written consent from both parents for learners under 12 to receive counselling is a logistical challenge, given that many learners are raised by family members who are primary caregivers but not "parents". Many children are also raised in single parent households with little or no contact with the other parent. We learnt that in Greece, after years of lobbying, it was decreed that children in school were deemed to be under the care of the school staff, who could consent by proxy.
7. Having a healthy reserve has enabled us to continue caring for vulnerable children during this exceptionally challenging time where funding agreements were severed, budgets are cut and yet, at the same time, need is increasing exponentially.



IMPACT THROUGH INNOVATION: TASK SHARING

We continue to explore new ways to reach more learners while using available resources responsibly. One important approach guiding this work is task sharing, an evidence-based strategy widely used in global health systems.

Task sharing redistributes certain responsibilities from specialists to trained community based workers. In the field of wellbeing support, this allows frontline workers to provide early psychosocial care while specialists focus on more complex needs. The World Health Organization supports this approach as a practical way to expand access to care, particularly in low resource settings. Our model reflects this principle. Care Facilitators,

trained in Mental Health First Aid and school based psychosocial support, engage directly with learners. They listen, provide early support and identify concerns that may need further intervention. This allows our Care Practitioners, who are social workers or registered counsellors, to focus on complex cases, referrals and safeguarding. After a successful pilot of the Care Facilitator model, we partnered with the National Treasury Jobs Fund in 2023 and 2024 and opened up 68 jobs.

By investing in community talent and coordinating services effectively, we are expanding our reach while maintaining the quality of care that schools and learners rely on.

	2025	2024	VARIANCE
LEARNERS ENROLLED FOR C SERVICES	9 323	9 119	204
% OF ALL LEARNERS	12%	12%	
SESSIONS (TOTAL)	46 392	43 798	2 562
SESSIONS WITH CARE PRACTITIONERS	28 565	28 971	-406
SESSIONS WITH CARE FACILITATORS	17 827	14 827	3 000
AVERAGE SESSIONS PER LEARNER	5	5	

In 2025, our data shows the impact of task sharing, with Care Facilitators providing frontline support and enabling social workers to focus on complex caseloads.

FURTHER READING:

The following research offer further insight into the evidence-based approach of task sharing:

Patel, V., Weiss, H. A., Chowdhary, N., Naik, S., Pednekar, S., Chatterjee, S., and Kirkwood, B. R. (2010). Effectiveness of an intervention led by lay health counsellors for depressive and anxiety disorders in primary care in Goa, India (MANAS): a cluster randomised controlled trial. The Lancet, 376(9758), 2086–2095. Source: <https://shorturl.at/Qgly9>

Lund, C., Tomlinson, M., De Silva, M., Fekadu, A., Shidhaye, R., Jordans, M., and Patel, V. (2012). PRIME: A programme to reduce the treatment gap for mental disorders in five low and middle income countries. PLOS Medicine, 9(12), e1001359. Source: <https://shorturl.at/w7dVP>



“

My best time this year was when the Care Facilitator helped me with other learners who were bullying me, they don't bully me anymore.

ANNUAL M6 USER SATISFACTION SURVEY

POSITIVE IMPACT IN SCHOOLS

n = 1 349

- 90.2%** of respondents believe Community Keepers makes a **positive difference in their school**, contributing to a culture of care and wellbeing.
- 88.6%** felt that **learners trust the Community Keepers team**.
- 83.0%** reported seeing a **continuous loop of communication and interaction** between Community Keepers and the school community.
- 90.5%** described Community Keepers staff as **positive role models**, reflecting the values of **integrity, trust, professionalism and partnership**.
- 87.8%** felt that Community Keepers **delivers services as described during introductory and planning meetings**.

QUALITY OF WORKSHOPS AND SESSIONS

4.5 / 5 Average rating for the **quality of presentations, sessions and resources** delivered by Community Keepers.

Respondents highlighted the **interactive, creative and practical format** of workshops as a key strength.

WHAT RESPONDENTS SAID

“ I love how my daughter was able to open up to the Community Keepers team, and we were able to understand what was bothering her.

“ As a WCED social worker, I am grateful to have Community Keepers at the school. They are on the ground and ready to support learners. I value the opportunity to discuss cases and share ideas.

“ Your presence makes a visible difference in the school atmosphere. Thank you for caring not only about learners but also about teachers.

“ They make a huge difference in our lives and in the lives of learners. Several lives were saved through their support.

“ I am a Grade 12 learner. The study skills sessions helped me understand different learning styles, such as visual learning.

“ I am a Grade 8 learner. When I arrived at school I was scared. The Community Keepers team welcomed me and told me I could come to them if I felt overwhelmed.

“ I liked learning how to manage my feelings better, especially stress and anger.

“ I wish the school could add Community Keepers to the timetable.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- More workshops for caregivers, educators and learners are needed
- Educators would benefit from small group support spaces where they can share experiences regularly.
- Interactive, creative workshop formats were highly valued
- Workshop timing should consider educator and caregiver availability
- More detailed workshops with deeper discussion are requested



CASE STORY

RESPONDING TO SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY, LOW MOOD AND DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOUR IN SCHOOLS

Across many of the schools we serve, educators are seeing an increase in learners presenting with symptoms of anxiety, low mood and disruptive behaviour.

Learners are frequently referred for concerns related to stress, worry and bullying. In busy classrooms, heightened anxiety can often spill over into negative behaviour, making it difficult for both learners and educators to maintain a calm learning environment. One educator reflected on this challenge:

“

Many learners have been referred for stress, worry and bullying. This has been a real struggle for educators, as high anxiety in the classroom often fuels negative behaviour. To support them, we introduced simple calming tools and sensory activities. These strategies help lower stress, create calmer classrooms and reduce the chance of bullying spilling onto the playground.

As part of this support, we introduced practical sensory tools that educators could easily use in the classroom. During one session teachers learned how to make playdough, a simple activity that helps children regulate emotions and release restlessness.

“We introduced playdough as a sensory tool for creating calmer, more focused classrooms. Teachers enjoyed making their own playdough, laughing together when some mixtures did not turn out perfectly and noticing how relaxed they felt. They reflected that if the activity was calming for them, it would be even more beneficial for young learners, especially those who struggle with disruptive behaviour.”

Sensory tools such as playdough give children a constructive outlet for energy and emotions. These activities support self regulation, helping learners settle more easily and return their attention to learning. Educators have reported that these simple strategies can contribute to improved classroom harmony and readiness to learn.

Support for learner wellbeing also extends beyond the classroom. We hosted a caregiver session focused on positive caregiving strategies and creative play. Attendance at caregiver sessions has sometimes been inconsistent, making it encouraging

to see caregivers take time to participate and learn practical ways to support their children at home.

The session demonstrated simple, low cost activities that caregivers can do with their children after school and during school holidays.

Previous assessments have shown that many caregivers want to spend quality time with their children but feel unsure about what activities to try. Caregivers expressed excitement about taking these ideas home and creating new opportunities to connect with their children through play.

These findings highlight the importance of a collaborative approach to support within schools. By equipping educators with practical tools, supporting caregiver and creating safe spaces for learners to express their emotions, Community Keepers helps schools respond to these challenges with care, understanding and practical action.



In a recent population assessment of youth suicidal behaviour in South Africa, statistics confirm that approximately 22% of black South African youths endorsed suicide ideation or attempted suicide (Thornton, Asanbe & Denton 2019).

The study reported that, on average, the country faces a range of 4.2%– 15.6% of adolescents engaging in suicidal ideation, 2.4%– 12.5% plan an attempt and 1.9%– 6.3% follow through on a suicide attempt (Thornton et al. 2019).

Source: <https://shorturl.at/CvmNj>

IMPACT THROUGH INNOVATION: PILOTING A VIRTUAL CLINIC

As an organisation, we are fortunate to have a number of scarce resources in the form of mental health professionals - social workers, registered counsellors and psychologists - who are trained and registered to work with young people struggling with their mental health. Across South Africa young people, in schools, desperately need access to these services but the state ratio of 1:23 000 leaves many vulnerable young people standing in queues.

We have been invited to form part of an international research project with the Child Mind Institute and South African Medical Research Council in 2026, establishing and piloting a virtual clinic.



2 000
young people
age 6-17



**Major challenges our
children are facing:**
Low Mood/Depression
Symptoms of Anxiety
Disruptive Behaviour



20
members of
our team
will receive training

10.1% of young South Africans live with depressive disorders.
6.7% experience anxiety disorders.

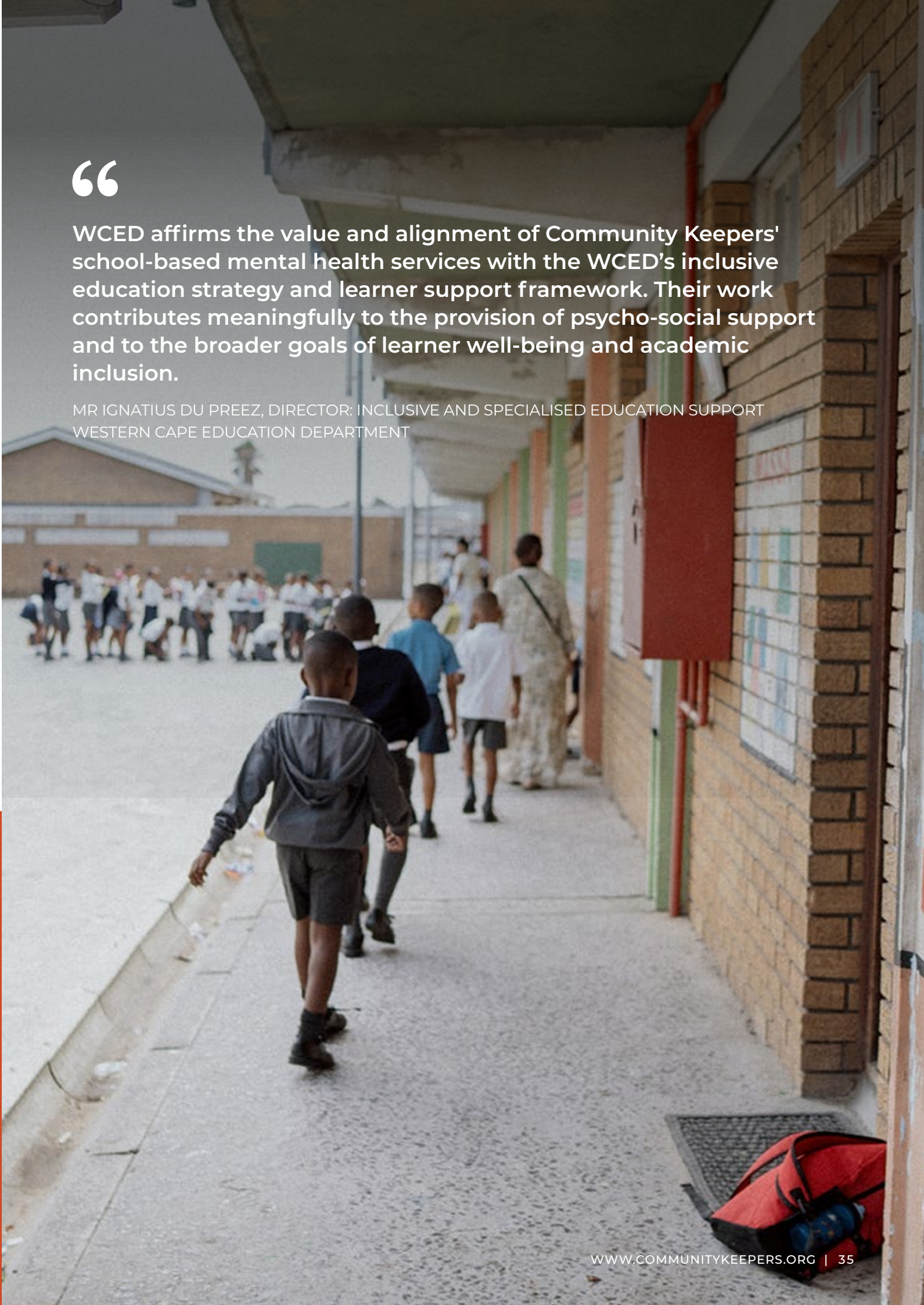
Systematic review and meta-analysis of child and adolescent mental health in South Africa.
Source: <https://shorturl.at/vIXeD>

This work was funded by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF) Global Center for Child and Adolescent Mental Health at the Child Mind Institute. Additional support was provided by the South African Medical Research Council.

“

WCED affirms the value and alignment of Community Keepers' school-based mental health services with the WCED's inclusive education strategy and learner support framework. Their work contributes meaningfully to the provision of psycho-social support and to the broader goals of learner well-being and academic inclusion.

MR IGNATIUS DU PREEZ, DIRECTOR: INCLUSIVE AND SPECIALISED EDUCATION SUPPORT
WESTERN CAPE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT



PARTNERING IN RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT



Department of Health and Wellness



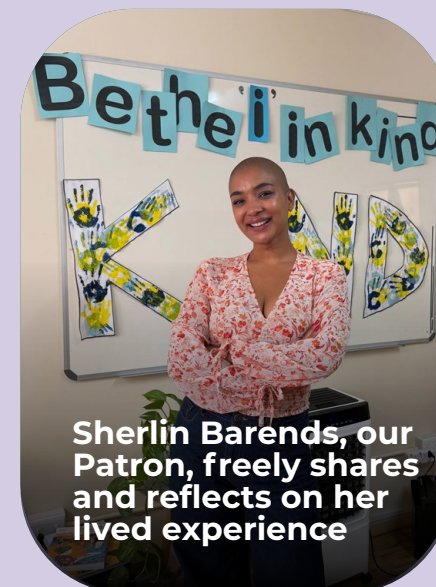
Collaborating with Emma Gibbons of Safe Space Therapy



Researchers from the Universities of Cape Town and Stellenbosch



George Moschos, former Children's Ombudsman of Greece



Sherlin Barends, our Patron, freely shares and reflects on her lived experience



Professional development facilitated by the UCT Alan J. Flisher Centre for Public Mental Health



DGMT and their ZeroDropOut Campaign host a collaborative workgroup exploring operationalising psycho-social support and bolstering teen wellbeing



#FeelThinkMove (#FTM) is a program focusing on emotional regulation skills for adolescents.

OUR GENEROUS SUPPORTERS



Art supplies donated by Marie Stander Art School Auction



Mandela Day with Red Rocket



Huis Marais fund counselling sessions for 40 learners at risk



Art supplies donated by Marie Stander Art School Auction



GBVF Response Fund site visit



CottonOn Australia site visit



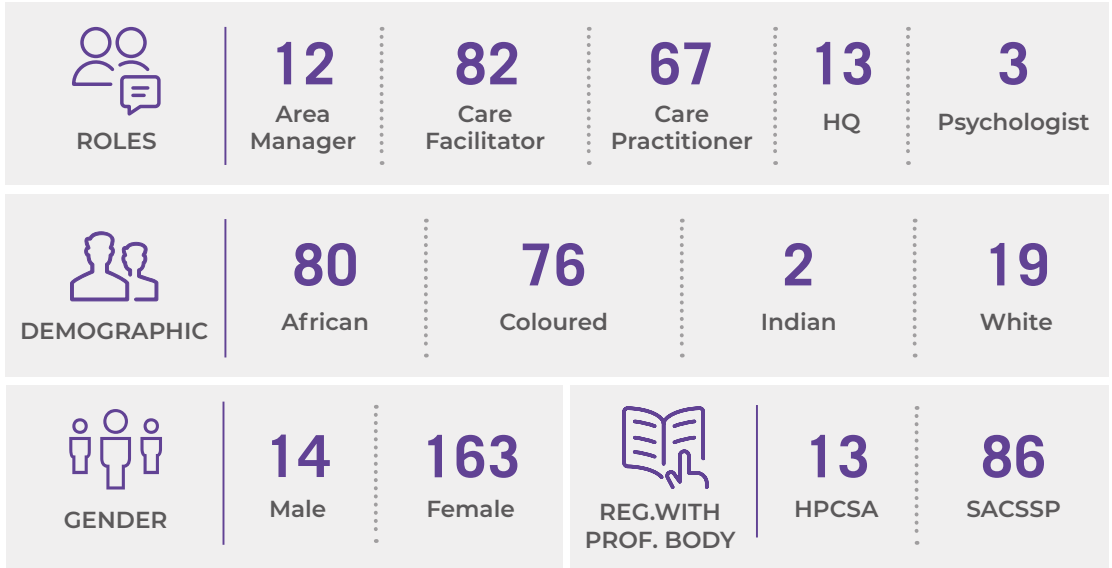
CoolPlay joined us for Mental Health First Aid Training



Representatives from the CottonOn stores, across South Africa, who raised the most money to support mental health, flew in to meet our team

THE TEAM

STAFF CAPABILITY AND DEMOGRAPHICS



It's difficult to describe to someone from the outside what it is like being a social worker. Especially as a social worker practicing in South Africa.

But I'd like to try, and here's what I'd say: Being a social worker is like standing in a field where small fires burn everywhere at once. Some flicker quietly in the distance, easy to ignore if you didn't know what they could become. Others roar right in front of you, consuming homes, families, hope. And you are there with your hands, not a firetruck, just your hands, trying to contain what you can.

You learn quickly that you cannot put every fire out. That truth settles into your bones in a way that is both humbling and unbearable. There are days when the smoke follows you home, clinging to your clothes, your thoughts, your sleep. You replay conversations, wonder if you missed something, if you could have done more, if someone needed you just five minutes longer. You know that some stories will not end how you had hoped.

But then, in the middle of all that heat, there are moments. Moments that make it easier to live in the tension of social work, the heartbreak and the hope, the urgency and the waiting, the bending, but not breaking.

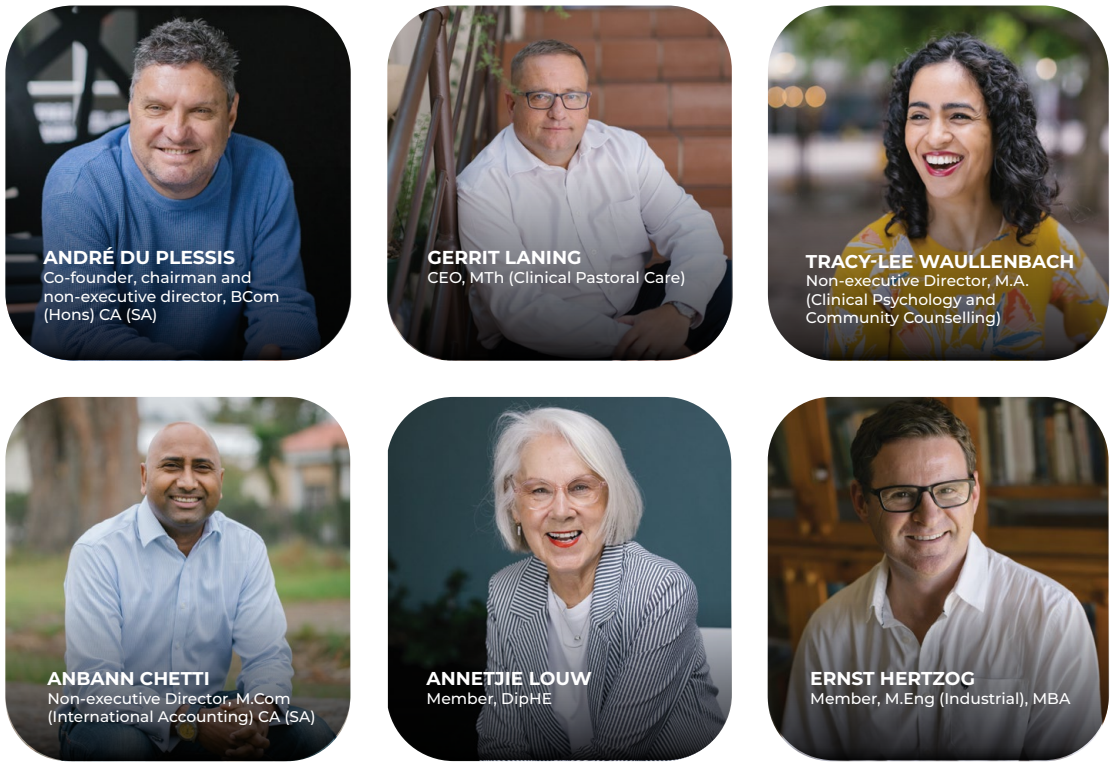
A child laughs when yesterday they wouldn't speak. A parent tries again. Someone chooses, against all odds, to hope. And those moments feel like water, cool, fleeting, but real, lingering just long enough to remind you why you stay.

– Anine de Lange, CK Social Worker

RISK HEAT MAP

RISK NAME	IMPACT	LIKELIHOOD	INHERENT RISK
Financial sustainability in this economy	Catastrophic	Possible	High
Human capital and staff turnover	Critical	Likely	High
Safety and security: Sites, infrastructure, equipment and staff	Serious	Likely	Insignificant
Sustainability due to expansion	Significant	Likely	Low
Space constraints	Significant	Likely	Low
Confidentiality and data safeguarding	Significant	Likely	Low
Clearance checks	Minor	Likely	Insignificant
Quality of services impacted by growth	Minor	Rare	Insignificant
Change in provincial education department protocol and policy on external organisations working in schools	Minor	Rare	Insignificant
Organisational culture	Minor	Unlikely	Insignificant
Climate change and natural disasters	Minor	Likely	Insignificant

Our Board of Directors provides guidance, oversight and support as we work to strengthen the wellbeing of learners and school communities. Their leadership reflects a shared commitment to partnership, trust, integrity and professionalism – ensuring we remain grounded in our values and focused on our mission to create safe, supportive spaces where learning and development can thrive.



GENERATING INCOME TO STRENGTHEN OUR IMPACT

We continue to explore sustainable ways to strengthen and expand our work in schools. Alongside donor funding, trade income plays an important role in supporting our programmes and sharing our expertise with others who are working to support learner wellbeing.

This income is generated through a combination of school contributions, consulting services and training programmes. R556 820 was raised through partner school contributions which cover a portion of the annual cost of services. Through this, a more sustainable model can be created.

Our training programmes are structured to build mental health first aid skills progressively.

- Learn2Know (Level I) introduces the foundations of socio-emotional literacy.
- Learn2Listen (Level II A) focuses on developing listening skills and supportive responses.
- Learn2CARE (Level II B) introduces our CARE model and practical approaches for responding.

Beyond these levels, our Continue2Learn supervision and advanced learning modules provide ongoing guidance and professional development for practitioners applying these skills in real contexts.



Through these initiatives, we not only strengthen our own sustainability but also contribute to building wider capacity for supporting learner wellbeing.

TRADE INCOME

R556 820 funds raised through school contributions

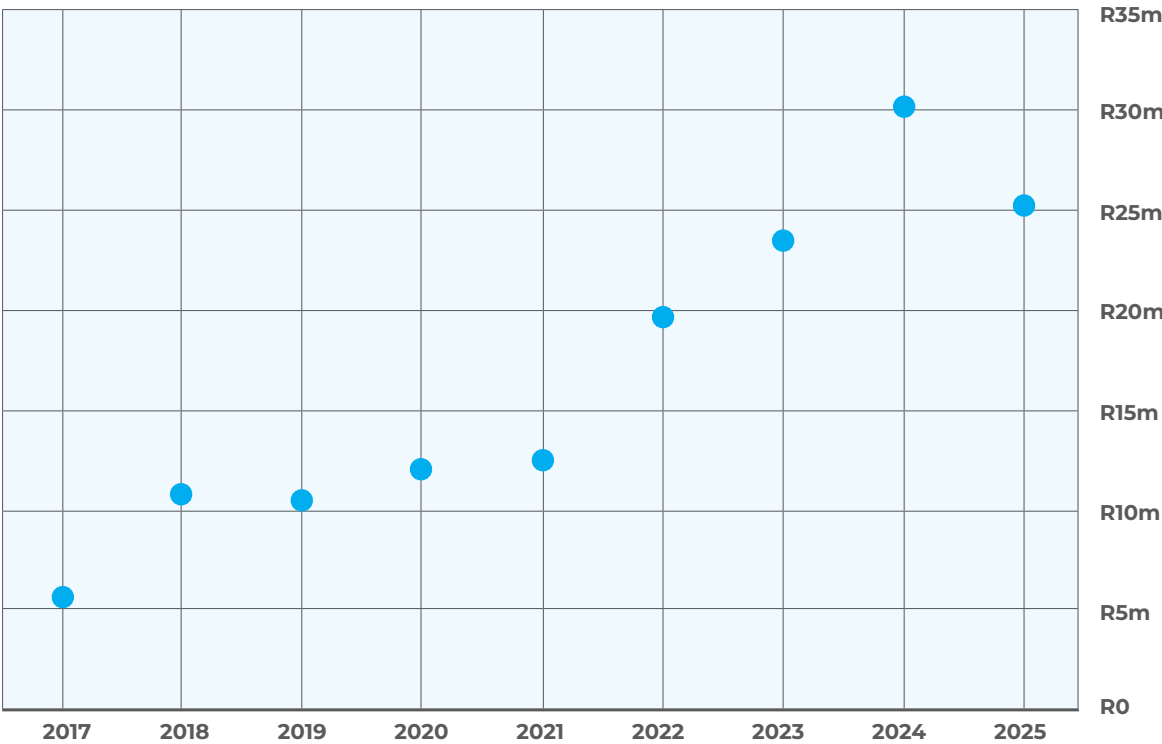
R35 054 funds raised through training and consulting

FUNDING SUPPORT

“

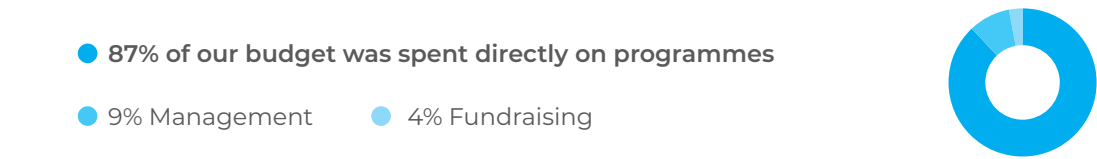
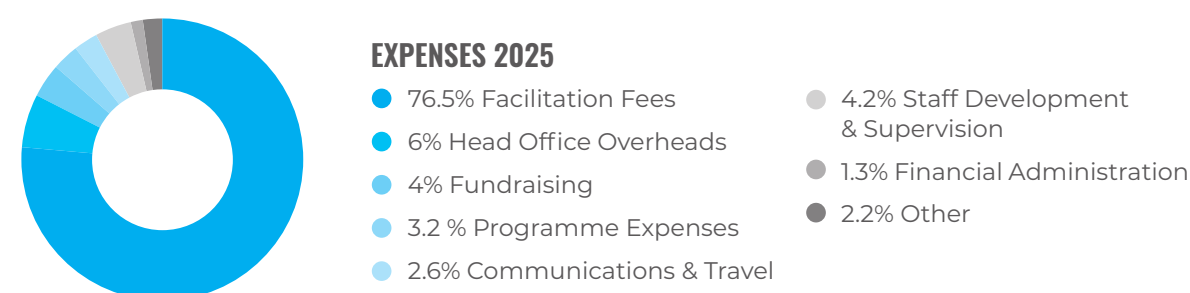
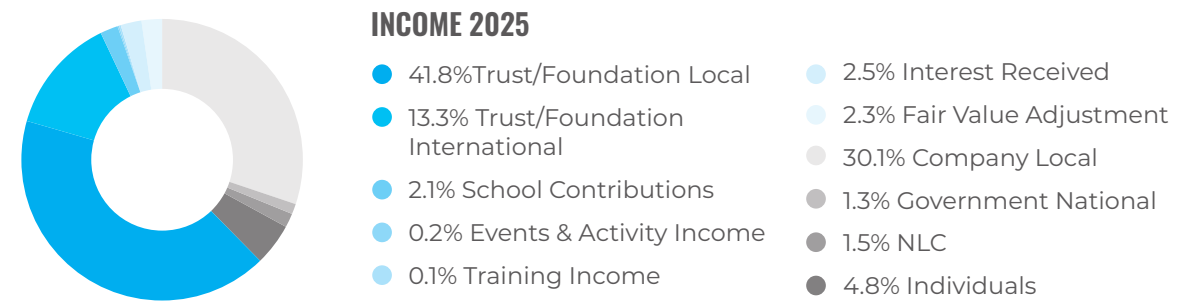
I quoted Isak Denisen (author of Out of Africa) before on why God made the Earth round (so that we cannot see too far into the future). This year’s global geopolitical turmoil certainly cemented this thought. But, just as one becomes despondent, we read your report, listen to your passionate presentation and hear about your plans to help even more children. It reminded me of another Dinesen line; “When you have a great and difficult task, something perhaps almost impossible, if you only work a little at a time, every day a little, suddenly the work will finish itself.” This is exactly what you do! Except, you don’t work a “little” every day, you do a lot, and you are at it relentlessly. We value and appreciate this very much. SA’s children are being neglected by caregivers, society, the state and often even the very learning institutions they do attend. However, thanks to Community Keepers, so many children in (at least) 89 schools can look forward to a better future – it is not a surprise then that you have made it onto the HundrEd Top 100 Global Education Interventions to watch second year running: - CK Funder

TOTAL DONATION INCOME (AFS)



*Payment of a USA grant (R3.6m) pledged in 2025 was unexpectedly delayed and carried forward into 2026.

FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP



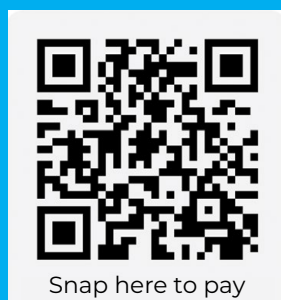
OUR FUNDERS

Abax Development Trust, ASL, Axiom Education, Capitec, Child Mind Institute, Clemengold Foundation, Equalizer, Gbvf Response Fund 1, Good Hope Literacy, Het Jan Marais Nationale Fonds, HCI Foundation, Huis Marais, Jakes Gerwel Funding Trust, Jannie Mouton Foundation, Marie Stander Art School Auction, Michael And Susan Dell Foundation, Millennium Trust, Nation Builder, National Lotteries Commission, National Treasury Jobs Fund, Otto Foundation, Rachel Du Toit Charitable Trust, Red Rocket, Remgro, Rupert Educational Foundation, Spier, Star Foundation, The Cape Wine Auction Trust, Wenhold Familie Trust, Woolworths MyDifference.

We acknowledge the very generous contribution of a loyal group private individuals who support our work. We are grateful to our partner schools who faithfully make a token contribution. Raising additional funds through the selling of our expertise, is key to our sustainability. We would like to thank the organisations who have paid us as speakers at events, requested consulting services and booked mental health first aid training.

For a complete version of the 2025 Audited Financial Statements, please go to www.communitykeepers.org or send us an email at info@communitykeepers.org. As in previous years, we are most grateful to be able to report that a private individual has funded all head office overhead costs, ensuring that 100% of all other funding received is used exclusively for the interventions at our school-based offices.

DETAILED ACTIVITY INCOME STATEMENT	2025	2024
	R	R
INCOME		
Activity income	49 950	20 312
Donations received		
Het Jan Marais Nationale Fonds	352 000	320 000
NLC (National Lottery Commission)	408 223	-
Other	23 639 729	23 729 201
Events income	-	12 959
Government grant	333 761	5 861 109
Schools' contributions	556 820	306 604
Training income	35 054	112 924
LESS: OPERATING EXPENSES		
Accounting fees	(226 553)	(264 437)
Assets smaller than R7 000	(25 188)	-
Auditor's remuneration	(45 700)	(20 900)
Bad debts	(39 144)	(200 304)
Bank charges	(29 431)	(38 537)
Computer expenses	(68 659)	(50 481)
Courier fees	(11 653)	(6 310)
Depreciation	(746 423)	(689 855)
Employee costs	(30 518 605)	(28 442 663)
Events expenses	-	(21 273)
External monitoring and evaluation-programme audit	-	(170 087)
Facilities erected and maintained	(127 678)	(328 428)
Insurance	(244 842)	(169 733)
Lease rentals on operating lease	(82 422)	(118 155)
Legal expense	-	(1 000)
Loss on write-off of other assets	(240)	(129 064)
Media and marketing	(277 192)	(160 587)
Municipal expenses	(3 195)	(11 208)
Office equipment expenses	(116 697)	(332 569)
Office expenses	(7 028)	(8 143)
Printing and stationery	(194 011)	(287 574)
School offices refreshments	(105 588)	(103 417)
School services	(434 773)	(441 147)
Staff professional registration fees	(75 560)	(85 006)
Staff supervision	(1 033 702)	(390 420)
Staff welfare	(64 769)	(78 305)
Subscriptions	(164 150)	(165 646)
Sundry expenses	(71 313)	(25 935)
Telephone and fax	(571 675)	(521 430)
Training	(346 332)	(478 059)
Travel - local	(372 080)	(437 390)
Travel - overseas	-	(53 511)
Total expenses	(36 004 603)	(34 231 574)
NET DEFICIT	(10 633 066)	(3 868 465)
Plus:		
Investment income	657 036	1 029 991
Fair value adjustments	625 191	401 680
DEFICIT FOR THE YEAR	(9 350 839)	(2 436 794)



Community Keepers NPC
Investec Bank Limited
Branch: 100 Grayston Drive
Branch Code: 58 01 05
Account Number: 10011917783
Swift code: IVESZAJJXXX

2024 REPORT

<https://shorturl.at/eILbV>



Community Keepers has been verified by iZinga Assist. This recognition reflects our ongoing commitment to compliance, transparency and delivering real impact in our community.

REPORT DESIGN AND LAYOUT: Because Stories

PHOTO CREDIT: Ode to the Road and Love Made Visible

All images, quotes and stories used in this report are provided with consent of the respective individuals.

Community Keepers is a registered South African non-profit company:

2008/013270/08 067-754-NPO PBO 930030162

UK – Affiliation with Community Keepers UK (1173232)

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