



جائزة خليفة التربوية
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The Unlimited Child

Abstract

The Unlimited Child Program (UCP) is a transformative initiative addressing the educational needs of over a million children under the age of 6 in underserved communities. Through a highly scalable early learning model, the UCP has successfully shifted the learning trajectories of these children towards school-readiness, setting them on a path to future success. The initiative partners with existing crèches, training and coaching unskilled childminders to become proficient play-based Early Childhood Development (ECD) practitioners in just one week. This not only helps to better prepare children for school but also empowers the childminders as micro-entrepreneurs, transforming crèches into fully functioning ECD Centers. Learning Through Play is a cornerstone of the program, recognizing the crucial role of play in holistic child development. Play-based skills training is complemented by the provision of comprehensive early learning toy and resources kits to each new ECD center. Continuous training and development is another key feature, with practitioners undergoing a continuous professional development journey from foundational to ECD proficiency. This involves on-site coaching, mentoring, and off-site cluster workshops, to support sustained growth and impact.



The Unlimited Child:

An Innovative Approach to Unlocking Early Childhood Development Opportunities

Mrs. Candice Potgieter - CEO of The Unlimited Child

An Innovative Approach to Unlocking Early Childhood Development Opportunities

Massive, Exponential & Needing to Shift Lives-- at inception these were the words used to describe The Unlimited Child and the urgency of the work needed in Africa and beyond to change the world for our children and our children's children.

You may ask though why this urgency and why Early Childhood Development (ECD). Well, like Dr Seuss says, "Sometimes the questions are complicated, but the answers are simple."

- If a child does not have access to ECD their potential in life limited, and there is very little that can be done to change this.
- This foundation linking to the fact that the 3'Rs, Reading, Writing & Arithmetic are not formed and leads to a lifetime of insurmountable struggle.
- The solution - if we can commit to this foundation, quality early learning that makes a difference, we can change this now, every child is born with an unlimited potential.

A decade ago, this seemed like a pipe dream, nobody thought possible, today we can speak boldly of how this impossible is possible:

- The Unlimited Child has reached over 2 million children, created over 10 000 micro-enterprises not just shifting the lives of our children but also a female led childcare economy of ECD practitioners.
- The model shown to have the greatest impact in taking children from being at risk of never being school ready to being without a doubt school ready – this independent study being paid for by a consortium of the largest investors in ECD in South Africa.
- The unique model was developed from the outset with the innovative key principles of an ability to scale by its nature of being easily duplicated across any geographic context.

As a precursor to the discussion of this innovative model we shall examine the foundational attributes necessary for achieving exponential growth and scale within The Unlimited Child's Innovative Model & ECD Blueprint. These are the SCALE attributes show below.

S-C-A-L-E Attributes

Staff on Demand	The ability to tap into an existing skilled & flexible workforce to duplicate ECD programming
Community & Crowd	When the solutions provided are iterative, tried and tested in the community by the community and stakeholders are multilayered for sustainability
Algorithms & AI	This is using tech to optimize processes making it affordable, scalable, and allowing analytics to customize programming
Leveraged Assets	This is maximizing the use of existing resources & infrastructure
Engagement & External Partners	These co-partnerships between government, civil society and investors allowing for diverse networks & even greater reach

With the above foundation mind, we shall now review The Unlimited Child Programme. Across the world, informal childminding facilities have traditionally served as mere holding pens for children. Recognizing the systemic gap, of millions of children starting school unprepared and an unskilled care economy, The Unlimited Child's Programme aimed to transform these informal facilities into centres of early learning. Childminders are trained through skills development and capacity-building workshops bearing in mind existing educational frameworks, covering aspects such as:

1. Learning through play curriculum using specific toys and resources.
2. Social enterprise and microenterprise development.
3. Financial management and small business training.
4. Compliance within government standards and frameworks for working with children.

And as such the first part of the SCALE attributes is supported, that is, having **Staff on Demand**, a skilled and flexible workforce that could contribute to exponential growth of ECD.

Through this rapid skills development training, these childminders can now operate as ECD Practitioners within local communities and become part of The Unlimited Child's network of ECD Centres. Being part of a professional support network, now further supports the continuous professional development of ECD practitioners, that is, an agile approach of testing models within the community to ensure sustainability which forms the **Community and Crowd** attribute of scale.

The true potential of these childminding facilities are further unlocked by The Unlimited Child's model of supporting capital funding, play-based learning resources, infrastructure, and standardized nutrition through public-private partnerships, enabling access to wider funding opportunities to be accessed by this network of ECD Centres.

As The Unlimited Child's programme exists in the wider regions of Africa and having piloted in The Middle East, technology integration is forefront in maintaining a high quality ECD programme that is focussed on school readiness using play based methodologies. This technology integration includes a Learner Management System and a separate Quality Management System that incorporates **AI** & the use of **Algorithmic Analysis** whereby programming is tailor made to beneficiaries dependent on their environment and circumstances which specifically takes into account grassroots environments where access to quality programming may be compromised.



As stated by facilitating the process of supporting mere childminding facilities to become well-functioning ECD Centres the attribute of Leveraging Existing Assets is then met. To summarise The Unlimited Child's model capitalizes on existing childminding services, transforming them into economically viable independently owned ECD centres. Through this process these ECD Centres are able to access existing government subsidies as well as additional funding opportunities through the attribute of Engagement & External Partners. These ECD Centres are thus able to improve their facilities, resources, and service quality without an additional fiscal burden. Most importantly as an intended consequence this innovative approach allows for ECD systems and the childcare economy in countries to improve to ensure scalability and sustainability.

As can be thus seen by this paper, The Unlimited Child Programme has transformed the educational landscape for millions of children under six in underserved communities. Through a scalable ECD blueprint and model of skills development training, a learning through play curriculum, continuous professional growth, and scalability, the programme exemplifies a holistic approach to early childhood development.



The question often asked is can we as a society do better, can world leaders do better, can I do better? When I think about it, I go back to the words first used to describe The Unlimited Child during the early stages of inception: “Massive, exponential & needing to shift lives”. If we lay the foundation of our thinking to be like this, then I really believe that children across the world can be in safe hands – their potential and our future as a society can be unlimited, but let’s not forget the urgency of the now. A child under the age of six holds the greatest promise for a change in our society, that when we invest now in 20 years’ time, we can all live in a country and society that is educated, economically productive and a safe society – a society that thrives. Without a dream there is no plan, but a plan that has urgency, well now, I really believe that this can be a reality!