

# Project Playground

## CREATING A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR CHILDREN IN LANGA

WORDS **LENA ÅSBERG**

Children the world over, do not live under the same conditions. Some get to play and learn, whilst others have to deal with poverty, violence and social struggles. Based in the township of Langa, Project Playground arranges after-school activities for children, in order to improve their self-esteem and provide meaningful programmes. 'We don't strive to make stars, we strive to make better human beings', says operation manager Mapanya Sogoni.



*Class B8 is part of Project Playground's Play and Learn programme. Here the children try out hula-hooping on the playground. In the background is the container, where children can go if they want a peaceful area to read or relax.*

**Photo: Lena Åsberg**

Class B8 (kids younger than eight) is scheduled at the playground and dozens of young children enter the astro-covered yard. 'Look at me, look at me', a little boy cries. He is holding an orange skipping rope in his hands, ready to show off his new skills. He jumps fast with his eyes closed and tongue slipping out of the corner of his mouth. Next to him a group of giggly girls are hula-hooping. Excited shrieks and laughter fill the air. Mapanya explains that all classes at Project Playground are structured and goal based. 'We work hard to produce responsible, disciplined individuals. The B8 class however focuses more on letting children be children, since many of them have been robbed of their childhood due to various unfortunate circumstances.'

Mapanya emphasises the importance of getting to know all the new children and explains that Project Playground makes home visits to everyone in order to learn about their environment and circumstances.

### Low self-esteem in townships

Langa is the oldest township in Cape Town with a population of over 50,000 people according to the Census of 2011. Fifty percent of the population in Langa are 18 years old or younger, and approximately 40% are unemployed. The poverty and lack of extramural activities in the township increases social issues like criminality, teenage pregnancy and alcohol and drug abuse.

Five years ago Frida Vesterberg, one of the co-founders of Project Playground worked as a volunteer in Langa at an organisation focused on sexual education, in order to prevent teenage pregnancies and the

**'Humanity's legacy of stories and storytelling is the most precious we have. All wisdom is**

spread of HIV/AIDS. There she realised that the real problem was not only a lack of information, but also a lack of self-esteem among children. They did not have any hope for the future. 'They must have their own will and understanding of why they should care about themselves but one has to work with their confidence and selfimage before one can regulate their lives,' explains Frida.

**in our stories and songs. A story is how we construct our experiences.' – Doris Lessing, British writer & Nobel Prize winner.**

Frida decided she wanted to do something about the situation for the children in Langa and together with her friend Sofia Hellqvist, she founded Project Playground in 2010. Project Playground's main focus is the rights of children and their long-term development. The organisation is partly based in Sweden and partly in Cape Town. The marketing and PR of the organisation is done in Sweden and most of their capital comes from fund-raising and sponsoring from Swedish companies, whilst the operative parts take place in Langa.



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## **Different programmes**

Project Playground has three different divisions: *Play on Wheels*, *Great Corner* and *Play and Learn*. *Play and Learn*, or *PAL*, is the widest programme, engaging the children in after-school classes in sports and culture, with football being the most popular activity. There are six different divisions, with daily classes and a football league during weekends. *Play on Wheels (PoW)* is a daytime programme shaped for disabled children and young adults. The programme currently has twelve participants with different disabilities such as Down syndrome and Cerebral Palsy. *Great Corner* aims to bring an understanding to the problem of crime and violence among the youth in Langa and provides social support like play therapy for children who are victims of violence or traumatised by other experiences. All programmes are run by qualified teachers.

'If we notice that there is an emotional challenge and the kid is struggling with development, we also have a social worker who deals with that kind of issue', explains Mapanya. In total, there are 32 staff members working at Project Playground, but the organisation is growing. In March this year, Project Playground will start a new branch in the township of Gugulethu and then they have to hire at least 20 new employees. The operation in Gugulethu will be similar to the one in Langa with about 400 new children.

## **Home visits & positive parenting**

Mapanya emphasises the importance of getting to know all the new children and explains that Project Playground makes home visits to everyone in order to learn about their environment and circumstances. 'I know all the kids in the organisation. Some are new now, but in June I will know everyone,' says Mapanya. He explains that Project Playground also tries to engage parents and other care takers in the community to make the positive results sustainable. Good care-giving for children, especially in the early years, is essential to each individual child's well-being and development. Therefore, parent meetings are scheduled every month as an opportunity for Project Playground to give and receive feedback from the parents.

Play time for class B8 is almost over and all the kids gather in the classroom. They line up in two rows, one with girls and one with boys, waiting to receive a tooth brush from their teacher. Teeth-brushing is scheduled as part of class activities for the toddlers and they all seem excited about it. 'We want to encourage the kids to brush their teeth.' Mapanya explains. 'Some families do it at home, but most don't,' he adds.

Yes, there are many ways to encourage self-development and self-esteem among children. Teeth brushing, hula-hooping, football, dance, arts and parent meetings are just some of the ingredients in Project Playgrounds successful recipe. 'Our vision is a safe world where all children grow up with faith in their future and a possibility to affect their own life,' says Mapanya.

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[www.project-playground.org](http://www.project-playground.org)



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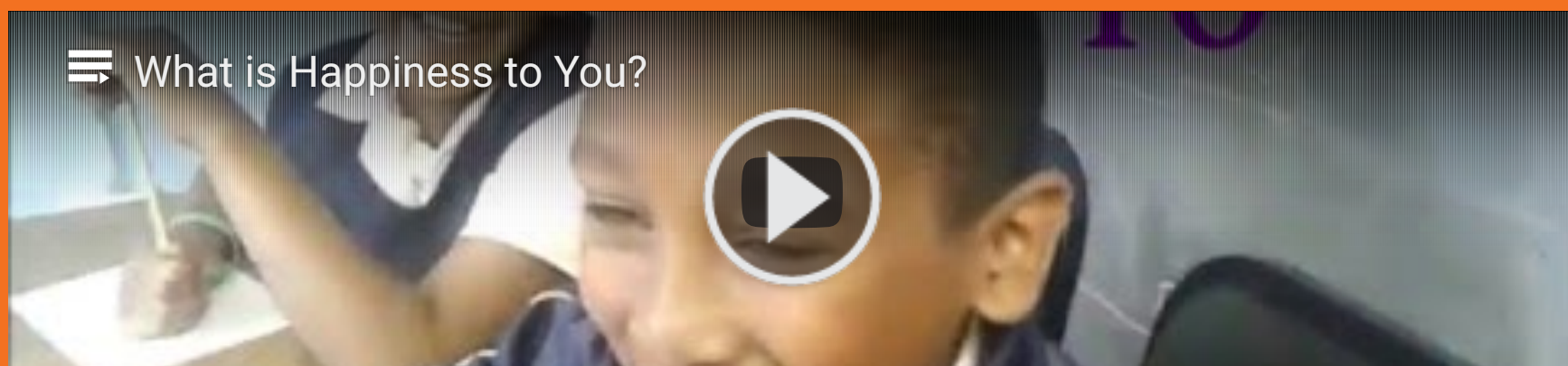
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I think as you reach the end of something, you begin to look back. Throughout my whole time in South Africa, I've kept my gaze forward - focusing on the future, what work there is to be done. Throughout these final weeks, however, I've turned my gaze and begun to look back.

## Rocking the Daisies

Rocking the Daisies (RTD) celebrated its 10th birthday with a bang - four days and three nights of one massive, non-stop party. People of all shapes, sizes and colours turned up to celebrate their common love of music and fellowship alongside others in the vibrant rainbow nation.

## The Heritage Day Journey

This past Thursday we celebrated 'Heritage Day' in South Africa by hiking Cape Town's famous Table Mountain. Heritage Day is a public holiday meant to bring people together, across all spectrums, to celebrate our differences, and at the same time faithfully recognise that we're all in this together. The idea behind all of this is to remember where you come from, what makes you unique to your walk of life, and celebrate what got you to where you are now - South Africa.

## Growing Up in a Polygamous Family

When you think about polygamy in South Africa, an image of President Jacob Zuma immediately comes to



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