



COMMUNITY CHILD RIGHTS WORKSHOPS:

# Hessequa Municipality 2021

5 OCTOBER 2021



**Commissioner  
for Children**  
OF THE WESTERN CAPE

**#littlevoicesMUSTcount  
#kleinstemmetjiesMOETsaakmaak  
#amazwiamancinciMAKAVAKALE**

## Acknowledgements

To the children in Hessequa, thank you for sharing your dreams, worries, and recommendations with us. We wish you every success in life.

Stakeholders, thank you for your reception and willingness to converse on matters that affect the lives of children, youth, and adults in society. Rosette Mkize (Municipal Directorate Community Services), thank you for your effort and dedication in developing a programme of engagements engagements. To Mr. Mias du Plessis (Western Cape Education Department), thank you for the guidance and support in connecting us with schools in Hessequa. Wendy Bingham (Provincial Department of Local Government), thank you for your continued support of our Community Child Rights Workshops. Samantha Morris (Department of the Premier) thank you for offering the best administrative support we could ask for.

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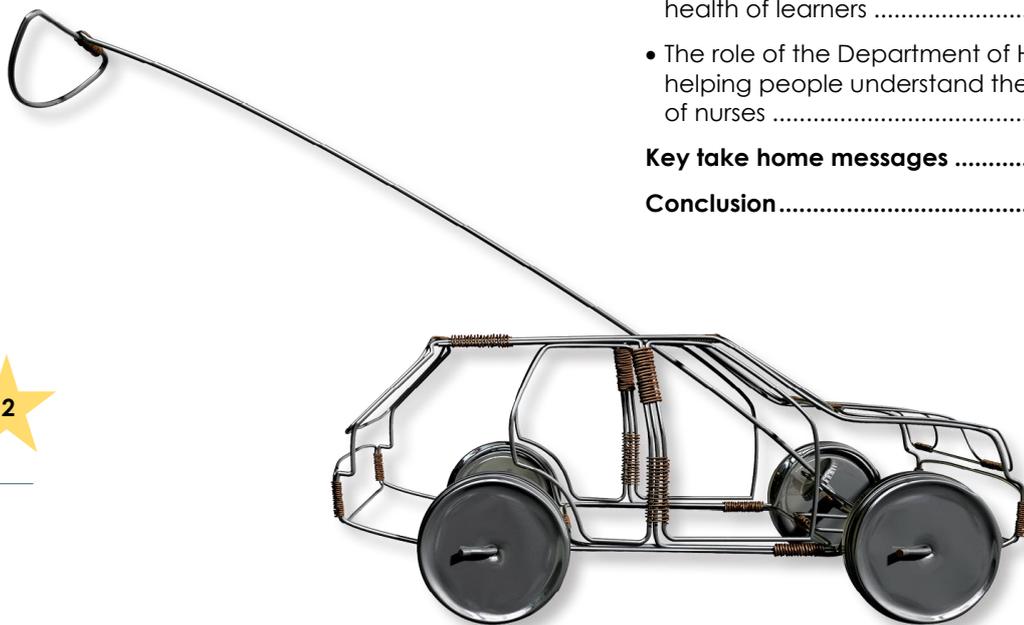
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## Executive Summary

The Western Cape Commissioner for Children developed a method for direct engagement with children in communities in partnership with the Department of Local Government. The aims of this initiative were to:

- **share the mandate** of the Commissioner directly with children in remote communities;
- **advocate** a child rights approach with stakeholders and parents; and
- **monitor services** provided to children by government and stakeholders.

The Western Cape Commissioner for Children visited Hessequa Municipality from the 23 March to 31 March 2021. The municipality is an interesting mix of balmy sea-side retirement communities, well-resourced main towns, and disadvantaged and underdeveloped communities. The Commissioner conducted workshops with 520 Grade 8 and 9 learners at eight (8) schools in the Municipality. Children were asked about their dreams and worries and their recommendations for the government departments of Education, Health, Social Development, and Cultural Affairs and Sport. Four (4) child government monitors were recruited in the municipality.

This report documents the method of the engagement with children, findings from their inputs on dreams and worries, and recommendations for government departments. This is combined with the inputs of adults and observations of the Commissioner.

Findings from children's inputs are presented in two sections according to activities carried out in the workshops. Children's dreams include their professional aspirations, the lifestyles they would like to have, as well as their ideas of supporting their families and contributing to society. Children's worries highlighted the social ills in society such as abuse, violence, and the lack of safety in communities, poverty, as well as school experiences, and their concerns about the future.

Children raised various recommendations to departments. Recommendations for the Department of Education included respecting children's dignity rights and addressing inequalities in resources and infrastructure. For the Department of Health, children suggested amongst others the ethos of caring health professionals. For the Department of Social Development children drew attention to increasing resources toward prevention, support, and rehabilitation services. For Cultural Affairs and Sport children pointed out the lack of sport infrastructure and sport opportunities in their communities.

Key take home messages relate to the narrative of innocent childhoods not being true. Adolescents are able to think abstractly and deeply about the world and their place in it. Children should be seen as partners in governance and spaces to learn from their experiences must be created by government structures to reflect on service provision. The critical question to answer, as the Commissioner's tenure progresses, is:

**What is needed in the system of governance and decision making to re-orientate child rights duty bearers — parents and government — to the expressed needs and interests of children?**

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*This report documents the method of engagement with children, findings from their inputs on dreams and worries and recommendations for government departments.*

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## Introduction

Community Child Rights Workshops (CCRWs) is one of three child participation models practiced in the office of the Western Cape Commissioner for Children. The office is an oversight mechanism for the Western Cape Departments of Education, Health, Social Development, as well as Cultural Affairs and Sport. CCRWs are planned in collaboration with the Department of Local Government who is instrumental in the planning and implementation phases of the project.

The objectives of the CCRWs are to:

- share the **mandate** with children and adults;
- **advocate** a child rights approach with stakeholders; and
- **monitor services** provided to children by government services and civil society stakeholders.

While CCRWs enable the Commissioner to engage directly with children to fulfil her mandate, it also provides us with an opportunity to walk the streets and converse with children and adults in communities, thereby enhancing our understanding of the conditions in which children live and are expected to thrive in. In addition, CCRWs are also a means for recruiting Child Government Monitors for the office. Child Government Monitors share their childhood experiences with the Commissioner, ensuring that she remains aware of the challenges and needs of children in different communities throughout the province. Recruiting monitors at CCRWs permits the Commissioner to maintain a connection with the municipalities after she visits.

This report documents the method of the engagement with children, findings from their inputs, and recommendations they make to government. This is combined with the inputs of adults and observations of the Commissioner for Children in Hessequa municipality. The report provides an overview of children's lived experiences and their hopes for improvements in their circumstances.

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*Community Child Rights Workshops provide us with an opportunity to walk the streets and converse with children and adults in communities, thereby enhancing our understanding of the conditions in which children live and are expected to thrive in.*

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*Left to right: Tessa Goldschmidt, Ms. Rosette Mkize, the Commissioner for Children, and Mr. Mias du Plessis education circuit manager in Hessequa.*





ABOVE: Slangrivier Library

## The character of Hessequa Municipality

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Child Population:  
16 269

89.7% of children attend school

14% of youth aged 15-19 years are multidimensionally poor

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The Western Cape Commissioner for Children visited Hessequa municipality, situated in the Garden Route District in the Western Cape Province, from the 23 March 2021 to 31 March 2021. The Hessequa region covers 5 main towns namely Heidelberg (ward 5 and 9), Slangrivier (ward 4), Riversdal (wards 6,7,8), Albertinia (ward 2), and Stilbaai (wards 1 and 3).

According to the 2016 Community Survey, Hessequa has a population of 54 436 people, with the child population being an estimated 16 279 children<sup>i</sup>. Approximately 0.2% of these children have no living parent, and roughly 89.7% of school aged children (5 to 17 years old) attend school<sup>ii</sup>. There are a total of 19 schools in the municipality, 12 of which are no-fee schools<sup>iii</sup>.

Less than half of the population has some primary school education (44.6%) with only 8.9% of the population having completed high school<sup>iv</sup>. A closer look at the 2011 Census statistics on youth and education show that 29% of youth aged 20 to 35 years achieved matric, while 67% of youth aged 16 to 17 years achieved Grade 9<sup>v</sup>.

Over the past few years, the Gini coefficient in municipality increased from 0.54 in 2012 to 0.56 in 2018, demonstrating an increasing gap between the rich and poor<sup>vi</sup>. The average household income in the municipality is estimated at R57 300 per annum<sup>vii</sup>. Approximately 14% of youth aged 15 to 19 years are considered multidimensionally poor<sup>viii</sup>. This means that youth are deprived of at least three dimensions of poverty (water and sanitation, health, housing, nutrition, information, and education)<sup>ix</sup>. In 2020, it was reported that Hessequa had an unemployment rate of 7.2% — the lowest in the Garden Route District<sup>x</sup>. However, with the current pandemic this number may be higher.

Hessequa is not much different from other municipalities in terms of the prevailing **social ills** plaguing certain communities across the country. The municipality is an interesting mix of balmy seaside retirement communities (like Gourits), well-resourced main towns (like Riversdale), and clearly disadvantaged and underdeveloped communities (like Bietouville). This profile illustrates starkly Apartheid legacies of separate development.

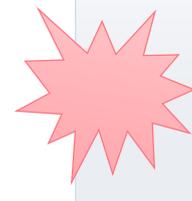
Impressions of the municipality were informed by the meetings with key government officials. We conducted first engagements with Mr. Mias Du Plessis (Western Cape Education Department) and Ms. Mkize (Community Services) as well as Sister Braaf and Dr. Van Tonder (Western Cape Department of Health). A constructive meeting was also conducted with regional and local

representatives of the Department of Social Development — Ms. Parks, Ms. Hendricks, Ms. Jobelam and Ms. Grundlingh. We later also engaged Mr. Neethling and the Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport team. They shared many interesting insights about the municipality in relation to education, health, social development, as well as sport and recreation.

### The key Insights gleaned from meetings with stakeholders:



There were schools that offered Grades R-12 in the main towns, while in some communities, primary schools ended at Grade 8 or 9. When schools end at Grade 8 and high schools do not accept learners because they are too old, it creates difficulty for young people to access the FET phase. The **transition** from primary schools to high schools was very difficult for learners for many reasons including coming from different backgrounds and adjusting to new environments. This may lead to high drop-out rates resulting in low functional literacy rates.



The public health system is a **nurse-driven** service. Referrals are made to doctors and specialists. The public still believes in consultations with doctors as the main indicator for a good health care system. Nurses are reportedly overburdened with the high level of demand and limited resources to meet community needs. This may have negative results for the ethos of care with patients.



Focusing on **family preservation and reunification** is key to healing the trauma experiences in communities. Prevention and support programmes, especially for parents and healthy intimate partner relationships, are vital. Analysing the case files, for example child protection cases, and learning from test cases are used to improve intervention strategies.



Wellbeing programmes such as sport, homework, traditional games, and skills development initiatives have been hard hit by the constraints of COVID protocols. Mass participation; Opportunity and access; Development and growth (MOD) programmes that operate at school have been implemented in a stop-start manner during the pandemic. MOD programmes are offered by the Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport at schools. The commitment of the staff to connect with youth on the margins in their communities is heartwarming and speak to the ethos of being **holistic community development practitioners**.

## Method of engagement with children

A sample of **520 Grade 8 and 9 learners** participated in workshops with the Commissioner for Children at eight (8) schools in Hessequa Municipality. Workshops were conducted during one to two periods of the school day.

The circuit manager in the municipality, Mr. Mias du Plessis, was informed of the workshops and facilitated communication between the Commissioner and school principals. Children who participated in the workshop were required to sign an assent form and their parent(s) a consent form. The consent forms were managed by the schools and later we determined that there were many more children who attended the workshops defying parental guidance. Schools were informed that parental consent was needed and, in the workshops, reiterated that parental **consent forms** were disseminated.

Two activities were used to gather information from children. The first activity was framed as two questions. The first question was, what is your **dream**? This activity was intended to understand children's perspectives on their future. They were asked to share an authentic, personal account of their dreams. Children were advised not to limit their dreams to professional aspirations.

The second question was, what are children's **worries** in your community? This activity intended to explore aspects that children are concerned about. Children were advised that this should not be a personal worry but one that reflects on the childhood experiences in their communities. Children were provided with the WhatsApp number of the Commissioner for Children if they wanted help to resolve a personal

worry. The dreams and worries were written up on cards and submitted to the Commissioner who protected data sources and analysed data thematically.

For the second activity, children were divided into groups and requested to produce posters with **recommendations** for government departments. They were advised to address their recommendations to the Departments of Education, Health, Social Development, as well as Cultural Affairs and Sports. These are the Departments for which the Commissioner is mandated with an oversight role. Children's posters were photographed and transcribed to thematically analyse the content.

While the children wrote their dreams and worries submissions on cards and when they were drawing their posters the Commissioner could engage some children in discussion on topical issues that emerged, either as groups or individually. This was very insightful as one could gauge what was top of mind for children and why they were interested in attending a child rights workshop. Most notably, they were intrigued by the topic of rights for children and wanted to meet a child rights champion. Despite their parents being wary of them being exposed to this content. This indicates that parents may not be acceding participation and autonomy rights to their adolescent children commensurate to their evolving capacity.

At the end of each workshop, all children were given the opportunity to self-nominate to become a child government monitor.

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520 Grade 8 and 9 learners participated in workshops with the Commissioner for Children at 8 schools in Hessequa

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## Activity 1: Dreams and worries

### Key Points

- Children's dreams focused on their professional aspirations, what they generally want in life, as well as their intentions to support their family and society.
- Children's main worries focused on abuse, violence, and safety, children living in impoverished circumstances, schooling, and worries about the future.
- Childhood is not, as traditionally believed, free of worry.



## Findings

### ACTIVITY 1: DREAMS AND WORRIES

A description of findings is presented in relation to dreams and worries which were submitted by the children attending high schools in the Hessequa Municipality, with some examples of their authentic phrasings as taken from their submissions on cards. Findings are presented per school, in the order that the workshops were conducted, then the submissions from the eight (8) schools were analysed according to the emerging themes. This section highlights the themes captured from children's dreams.

#### Professional aspirations

Children in the Hessequa municipality focused their dreams and aspirations mainly on future careers. They provided insight into the career they are aiming towards and the value of a qualification for their wellbeing.

Their career goals are discussed below per school in the order that the workshops were conducted.

At **Kairos Secondary School**, children who reported on their career or chosen profession as their main dream, offered a range of options which included medical professions such as becoming a **doctor** (the most chosen career option) as well as a **neurosurgeon, dermatologist, nurse, physiotherapist**, and **veterinarian**.

Other professions in the realm of science included becoming a

**scientist, engineer, electrical engineer, pilot**, and **technologist**.

Many children also reported interest in service professions such as becoming a **teacher** (the most selected profession), **social worker**, or joining the **army, fire services, police**, and **law enforcement**.

Professions in creative or performing arts included **chef, rapper, artist**, and **hair stylist**.

Technical or applied work included becoming a **truck driver, petrol jockey**, and **boilermaker**.

Some children aspired to be **entrepreneurs** and one child wanted to become an **accountant**. The aspirant accountant mentioned specific goals to move closer to their chosen career. The child wrote: "[I want] 7 distinctions in Grade 12 [to become an] Accountant [after I study at] University of Pretoria" "**[Ek wil net] 7 onderskeidings in graad 12 slaag [om n] Rekenmeester [te wees na ek by] Universiteit van Pretoria [getudeer het]**".

Finally, careers in sport included becoming a **professional rugby player** (the most popular sport option) or **sprinter**.

Some children just wanted a job without having to study for a degree ("**om te werk sonder a graad**"). Becoming a doctor, teacher or rugby player were thus the most popular career choices at Kairos Senior Secondary School.

RIGHT: Word cloud depicting professions shared by children at Slangrivier Primary School



At **Albertinia High School** a variety of career choices were included in the aspirations of the children.

Aspirations in sports professions included **rugby, golf, and cricket**. There were also many aspiring performing artists such as **singers, songwriters, dancers, and voice-over artists**.

Service and medical professions were also common choices for careers. Children wanted to become **doctors, teachers, police officers, join the army and navy, become a prison warden, psychologist, and fireman**.

Technical options included becoming an **architect or panel beater**, or an **“engineer that develops new technologies” (“Ek wil n engineer word om nuwe tegnologie te ontwikkel”)**.

Children were also intending to become **entrepreneurs**. Popular careers such as **lawyers and accountants** were also selected as career goals. The novel career choices included: becoming **“the best Youtuber”**, being an **“actress in Turkish film”**, and other careers not frequently chosen such as **botanist** also featured in their choices.

At **Slangrivier Primary School** service professions were amongst the most common career aspirations for children. Children wanted to become **teachers** (the most popular career choice), **doctors, lawyers, social workers, nurses, firefighters** as well as **police, traffic, law enforcement and army officers**. There were three aspiring **artists** and a **dancer**. Professional sporting careers included **rugby and soccer**. Technical careers included **driving trucks or fixing diesel engines**. Novel careers were to become a **fisherman** and **“a person who works at a zoo”**. The most popular career goals children articulated were to become a teacher or a doctor.



RIGHT: The Commissioner, Tessa, and Mr. Damons Principal at Slangrivier Primary



ABOVE: The Commissioner in conversation with children at Heidelberg High School

At **Heidelberg High** the range of careers mentioned were similar to other schools in this municipality. There were some aspirant medical professionals like **physiotherapists** and **doctors** as well as some sport professionals interested in excelling in **soccer, athletics,** and **rugby**. Service professions included **teaching** and **servicing in the army**. There are a few aspirant **creative artists**, and one child is interested in **engineering** and another in **architecture**. As per the municipal trend, doctors and teachers are the most popular professional choices.

At **Langenhoven High School**, there were some interesting career choices.

In sports, children wanted to excel at **rugby** (most popular sport choice), **netball, cricket, chess, hockey, athletics** as well as more novel sports such as becoming a **show jumper** or a **"Formula One race driver"**.

In the medical professions category, children are interested in becoming a **doctor** (most preferred option) — some wanted to specialise in pediatrics and gynecology, as well as to become a **physiotherapist, radiographer,** and **veterinarian**.

Even service professions included some interesting options such as becoming a **sniper** or the **police service**. Becoming a **teacher** was only selected by two children, a much less popular option than at other schools. The other professions that fit into the pattern in this area, included aspiring to be an **accountant, architect, or lawyer**.

Typical technical interests included becoming a **diesel mechanic** or **technologist**.

Creative or performing art options were to become a **dancer, singer, artist, poet, graphic designer, fashion designer,** and **photographer**.

The most common professional choice was to become a sports professional, followed by becoming an entrepreneur and then a doctor. There were some out-of-the-box thinkers in this group who identified potential careers such as becoming a **town planner, farmer, animator, baker, au pair, ceramicist** and even one aspiring **President**.

The children at Langenhoven had broader geographical horizons for their careers than at the other schools. Some unique dreams were:



“a dancer in New Zealand”, “study Chemistry at Oxford University”, “be a farmer in the USA”, and “an animator in Japan”.

Interestingly, the children at Langenhoven High School had a wanderlust that incorporated their professional aspirations.

At **Melkhoufontein Primary School**, children interested in medical professions wanted to become a **doctor** (most selected career option) and a **psychologist**. Service professions were also very popular such as being a **teacher** (most popular choice of service professions), being a **traffic officer**, or joining the **police, army, or navy**, as well as a **prosecutor** and **entrepreneur**. There were also those who wanted to venture into the performing arts to become an actor or rapper. Doctors and teachers were once again the most popular career choices.

Although we only worked with four (4) learners at **Gerrit Du Plessis High School**, we still conducted the dreams activity. Service professions namely **teaching, law, and architecture** were of particular interest. They wanted to achieve professional status to be an example of hard work in their community and to contribute to the success of the country.



ABOVE: Learner at Oakdale writing a letter to the Commissioner.

At **Oakdale Agricultural High School**, a diversity of sporting professions were the most popular choices for careers at this school. The boys articulated very precisely what they wanted to achieve. The sport codes they were committed to included: **cycling, tou trek, squash, tennis, athletics, rugby, cricket, or golf**. Some even wanted to become **sports coaches** in rugby, soccer, or hockey. They wanted to achieve national or international status in their chosen sport code. For example, one boy articulated: to participate in a tug of war world championship and to win gold (“**om by toutrek wêreld kamionskappe deel te neem en om goud te wen**”).

The medical careers mentioned included: to become a **veterinarian, dermatologist, doctor, or psychologist**. Service professions including being interested to join the **police service**. Technical careers included: **farming, aeronautical engineer, electronic engineer, mechanic, and biotechnician**. The unique careers included being a **hunter, guitar player, astronaut** and to become the **President**.





ABOVE: A workshop at Albertinia High School

Quite unique in the municipality was children's articulation of their religious convictions. This may lead to professions as priests or may mean that Christian values will permeate all they do in future. Children want to "serve God more" (**"om die here meer te dien"**).

Many boys also commented on their pathway to success. They wanted to complete grade 12 or become head boy at their school or achieve good results at school and university. One boy who is passionate about agriculture wants the subject to be taken more seriously and that the amount of agricultural schools should increase (**"ek wens daar was meer landbou skole en dat landbou meer ernstig opgeneem sal word in skole"**).

The clear pattern that emerged when looking at their inputs about career choices from the eight (8) participating school, was that the children wanted prestigious careers. According to their inputs, this would enable them to have lifestyles which were very different from what they are currently experiencing. The next section provides more insight into the lives they envision.



### Contemplations on life in general

Not all schools provided inputs on views of lifestyles, for example, Melkhoutfontein Primary School and Gerrit Du Plessis High School did not include general ideas about lifestyles with their dreams input. Children want to achieve success. This success is expressed in conceptions of a middle-class lifestyle. Below follow the inputs from children when they made specific comments about successful lifestyles.

At **Kairos Secondary School** some children articulated that they wanted to be successful. They measured that success by material possessions. For example, the size of their house, their car a BMW E30 or Audi S8, their pets lots of dogs and the place they will stay. For example, one child mentioned living in France. They also spoke of an improved life. This may mean they wish to ascend in social class or just improve their quality of life.

Respect and having happy children were also important aspirations for one child who noted: "My dream is to become a policeman with a respectful wife and children who

are happy" (*"My droom is om n polisieman wees met n respektief vrou en kinders wat baie gelukkig is"*). The wording used by this boy could also denote that he ascribes to the notion of being the head of his household and that his wife and children should respect his leadership position.

Children at **Slangrivier Primary School** have dreams of travelling. They want to *"go overseas"*, *"go to Newlands rugby stadium"*, *"visit Robben Island"*, *"live in Cape Town or America"*. Travelling to places in and around Cape Town is a goal for some and others wanted to venture across the oceans to live on different continents.

In **Albertinia High School**, children would like to be able to celebrate their achievements in the future. They want a good life and qualifications or money. "Live well with something behind my name" (*"lekker lewe met iets agter my naam"*). Some children would also like to travel the world. "My dream is to travel the world one day" (*"my droom is om eendag oor die wêreld te reis"*). Measures of success were articulated in the form of qualifications or having money or the ability to travel.

At **Heidelberg High** the desire to travel featured strongly with those who opted not to write about

professional goals. The places children wished to see included: the *"pyramids in Egypt"*, *"Parliament to see the President"*, *"America"* or even seeing the *"whole South Africa"* and many wanted to travel the world. One child noted: "My dream is to travel throughout the entire South Africa. I want to see how other people live across the world and see what they have achieved and what they do. How they work hard to gain material things" (*"Om deur die hele Suid-Afrika te reis. Ek wil graag sien hoe die ander mense leef om te sien wat almal bereik en doen. Hoe hard hulle werk en hoe hulle baie goedere op som"*).

When **Langenhoven High School** children reflected on life, they spoke about being *change agents*, being *an inspiration*, being *happy*, and becoming *successful* or just *someone* – a person who is recognised as having achieved by the community. A child wrote: "I want to be recognised in my community" (*"om raak gesien te word in my omgewing"*).

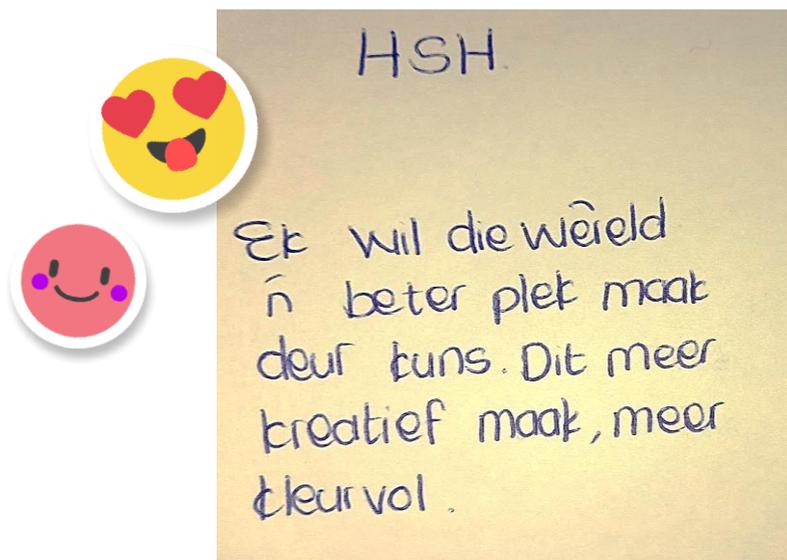
Some children wanted to be upstanding members of society. Success at Langenhoven was measured by emotional fulfilment which is different to what we found at other schools where success was measured by material possessions.

The concept of brotherhood came across strongly at **Oakdale** in relation to the social and family aspirations of the boys. They want to have brothers at school (*"om broers te hê hier by Oakdale"*), they want to be united with each other and develop mutual respect (*"om saam te staan met my broers en altyd respek te hê vir mekaar en anders"*), and they want to have friends (*"om vriende te hê"*). They understand that the social bond built with their fellow learners will be an important social network for them in the future.



RIGHT: Values at Albertinia High School

The children aspired to lifestyles of affluence with big houses and luxury cars. They want to travel the world, live in different places, and achieve great things that would make their families and communities proud of them. They also wanted to be able to contribute to their family and communities.



### Support to families and society

The ability to support their families and to help the vulnerable in their communities were expressed as dreams.

Children from **Kairos Secondary School** express concern for the wellbeing of people who are homeless and children who are neglected. Some children said when they are successful, they will “**care for the homeless**” or “**build a children’s home**”. Others are concerned with the social fabric of the community. One aspirant policeman is motivated to use his position to **protect communities against the vagaries of drugs**. This becomes more personal when children consider the needs of their own families. One child expressed that they wanted to be able to look after their parents when they are old and frail (“**Te sorg een dag vir my ouers wanneer hulle oud**

**is**”). Thus, children are conscious about the challenges in their society that make people vulnerable, and they feel the need to solve these challenges. The challenges that children point out are heartbreaking and speaks volumes of the lived realities of adults and children who find themselves in difficult circumstances in this community.

At **Slangrivier Primary School**, children also wanted to facilitate building better lives for their families and the needy in their community. For their community, they wanted to **provide “homes for the poor”** and **provide food**. For their families, they wanted to be able to afford a **house, support and care for their parents, enable their sister to study, and live in a peaceful neighbourhood**. One child also dreamed of having a **good family** in the future.

Children at **Albertinia High School** clearly articulated their goals to improve their community and support their families. They believed they could innovate and make their communities more attractive to draw people to increase job opportunities. They also wanted the communities to be free of social challenges such as homelessness, drug abuse and violence. They wished that everyone should work together to achieve a better quality of life (“**ons almal moet saam as goepe kan werk**”). One child said: my dream is to improve my quality of life and help others” (“**my droom is om die lewe te verbeter en om ander te help**”). When children attain success, they would like to be able to buy a car and buy a big house for their family and care for them (“**groot huis en om vir familie te sorg**”).

At **Heidelberg High** children wanted to help others in need and support their families. One child said: “I want to care for my parents when I am an adult” (“**vir my ouers sorg as ek groot**

is”). The desire to help others in need, especially children, was also articulated – “one day I want to help people and children” (*“om eendag mense en kinders te help”*).

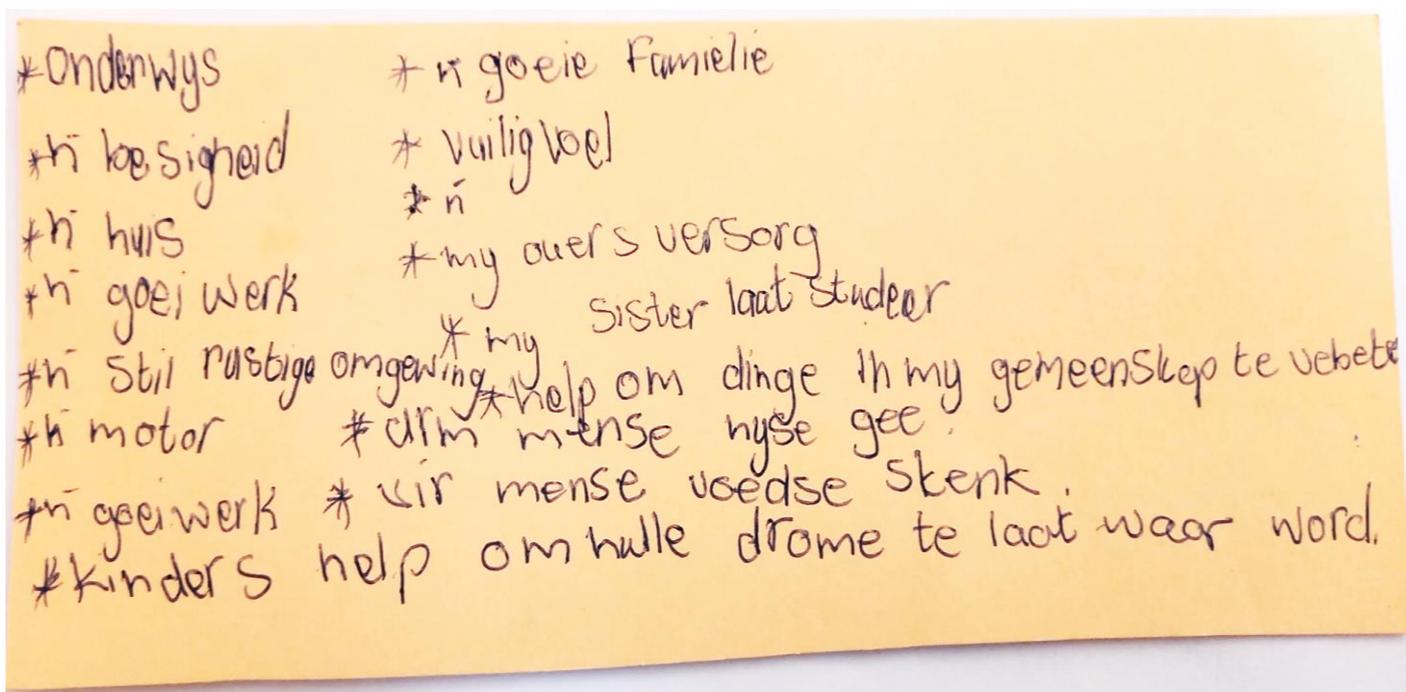
There was lots of empathy amongst the children at **Langenhoven High School** for the challenging circumstances in which some people lived, and an expressed goal was to help to change the world with his business (*“[ek sal n] besigheid [begin], ek wil die wêreld verander”*). Their concern for other children was that they should be housed, and safe as well as have positive schooling experiences. A child said they wanted: “to make school an enjoyable place for all children” (*“skool lekker te maak vir al die kinders”*). There were also other thoughts expressed about schooling by this group of children. They would like to have more empathic teachers and have some more freedom of expression at school. One child noted: “we want to wear our hair long in school” (*“langhare gedurende skooltyd”*).

They also spoke about how social norms affected girls. They wanted girls to be able to have better self-esteem, to be free to wear what they want and associate with whom they want without it affecting their reputations – (*“met seuns vriende te wees sonder date mense dink dat ons saam is of uitgaan”*) (*“Dat meisies n beter self-beeld kan he en dat ons gewone klere moet aantrek”*). The many layers of issues that emerged as dreams at this school was interesting and markedly different from all the other high schools we visited.

Children at **Melkhoutfontein Primary School** wanted to help others who struggle to live well. One child noted: “My dream is that young children stay away from drug dealers and that fewer children are murdered and raped” (*“my droom is dat jong kinders moet weg bly van die drug dealersaf. En minde kinders vermoor of gerape word”*). They were also concerned for the wellbeing of children, they wanted children to be safe and achieve wellbeing. Like children at other schools, Melkhoutfontein



RIGHT: Mr. Prince, Principal at Kairos, in conversation with the Commissioner



ABOVE: A dream card showing how worries may be embedded in children's dreams

They seem to be internalising narratives of gaining education and success in life to enhance prospects for their families and positively contribute to society.



children were also concerned for the wellbeing of the vulnerable in society.

**Gerrit Du Plessis** children wanted “to help other people and children who are experiencing hardships at home” (“**ander mense en kinders help wat swaar kry by hulle huise**”).

Some boys at **Oakdale** expressed empathy towards the vulnerable in society. They wanted to help “people and animals to have a home and be happy” (“**om alle mense en diere om n blyplek te hê en om gellukkig to wees**”), and to “help those going through difficult times” (“**vir ander mense te help in hulle moeilike tye**”).

They wish for a safer South Africa, free of racism (“**geen rasisme**”), and gender-based violence where everyone respects each other (“**almal wat ek ken te leer om respek te hê vir almal**”).

These boys also expressed a deep bond with their families and the need to make parents proud (“**om my ouers trots te maak**”). They are convinced they will make their parents proud if

they give their best in all that they do (“**die beste te gee in alles wat ek doen**”). They also feel it is important to be able to care for their parents when they age (“**vir hulle kan sorg as hulle oud is**”). Some boys expressed their understanding of how they would need to be good husbands and fathers (“**goeie man vir my vrou en pa vir my kinders**”).

## SUMMARY OF CHILDREN'S DREAMS

Children's dreams focused on their professional aspirations, contemplations on life, as well as support to families and society. They seem to be internalising narratives of gaining education and success in life to enhance prospects for their families and positively contribute to society. Some of their dreams were not self-centered but expressed their intentions to work towards the greater good.

## WORRIES

Submissions on worries were only requested from certain groups or schools since the time of the workshops were more limited in some cases. Some of the content of children's dreams submissions could be considered worries. The findings on worries will thus be presented thematically. However, information on worries will still be linked to each school.

### Abuse, violence, and safety

Children do not feel safe in their communities. This is evident across all schools. Children in **Albertinia High School** are concerned about the levels of child abuse in their community. One child articulated: "Albertinia children's biggest worry is that they are abused and raped" (*"Albertinia kinders se grootste bekommernis is dat hulle mishandel word en verkrag word"*). Another child expressed: "Here in Albertinia there are many children who are abused" (*"Hier in Albertinia is daar vreeslik baie kinders wat mishandel word"*). They have also seen how abuse affects children. A child said: "my friend is being abused and it undermines his self-esteem resulting in him doing the wrong things." (*"My vriend word mishandel. Dit breek sy selfbeeld en laat hom verkeerde goed doen"*).

Boys at **Oakdale** in Riversdale and children at **Heidelberg High School** were also concerned about child rapes and murders. Children from **Heidelberg High School** also noted that children are not free and safe to do what they want to be happy because they are afraid something will happen to them as adults hurt children sometimes" (*"Kinders voel nie veilig om iets te wil doen wat hulle gelukkig maak nie. Hulle is bang dat iets met hulle kan gebeur want mense maak soms ons kinders seer"*).

Albertinia High School children were also worried about child neglect: "My worry is that there are parents who leave their little children alone at home while they drink alcohol or sleep off a drunken stupor. What if something happens to those little kids?" (*"My bekommernisse is dat hier is ouers wat hulle klein kinders alleen by die huis los terwyl hulle dronk is of tief. Wat as iets gebeur met die are kleinkindertjies?"*).

Substance abuse was another area of concern for Children in **Albertinia High School**, especially drug and alcohol abuse amongst children themselves. They said: "The worry is that all children will start to abuse drugs. Underaged children's dreams will be contaminated by drug use. The fear is that children will not be able to achieve their dreams because of drugs." (*"Die bekommernisse sal wees wanneer al die kinders misbruik word van dwelms. Minderjarige kinders se drome word besmet deur dwelms te gebruik. Die vrees sal wees dat kinders hulle drome nie kan bereik as gevolg van dwelms"*). Boys from **Oakdale** reported that drug and alcohol use was even happening at schools and in the boarding school.

On gender-based violence, another child from **Albertinia High School** noted: "My worry is that I have a friend who lost her father and mother. Then she befriended a man who abuses her. But at least she has started to speak out about it now" (*"My bekomernis is ek het n vriend wat haar ma en pa verloor het. Toe*



*vat sy 'n man wat haar mishandel. Maar sy het darem nou eers gepraat daaroor”).*

There was also a concern about farm murders. A child from **Albertinia High School** said: “I want to live on a farm and marry a farmer. I worry about farm murders. It is not talked about much, but farm children’s lives are in danger” (*“Ek wil op n plaas bly en met n boer trou. My grootste worries wat ek het is oor plaasmoorde. Dit is nie iets wat baie genoem word nie maar kinders se lewens is in gevaar wat op plase bly.”*)

Similarly, boys from **Oakdale** were also concerned about murders and assaults of farmers.

Boys from **Oakdale** were quite concerned about being kidnapped. From a different perspective, children at **Gerrit Du Plessis** whose parents work on farms feel unsafe as a result of the distance to the school transport. They said: “They can get hurt while they are walking home. I am scared to walk home alone. The

other people around don't care.” (*“hulle kan seergemaak word terwyl hulle huis toe loop en ek is baie bang om alleen te loop en die ander mense gee nie om nie”).*

Some children did not even feel safe in town or were afraid about the safety in the neighbourhoods. A child from **Albertinia** said: “I am afraid someone burgles our home or mugs us when walking to the shops” (*“Ek is bang iemand breek in ons se huis en dat ons geroof word wanneer ons winkel toe loop”).*

Similarly, boys from **Oakdale** were afraid for the safety of their families in their home and personal safety when moving around town. One **Oakdale** boy expressed: “I am worried that my mom sleeps alone at home, and someone may burgle the house. We cannot walk freely in town because it is not safe.” (*“Ek is bekommerd dat my ma aleen by die huis aleen moet slap end at iemand dalk sal inbreek. Ons kan nie rond loop net waar ons wil in die dorp omdat dit nie veilig is nie”).*

Children from **Heidelberg High School** were also worried about safety in the streets, a child noted: “children are worried about people driving drunk and killing their friend or families as a result” (*“kinders is bekommerd oor mense wat dronk ry en meskien hul vriende of families dood dry”).* Additionally, boys at **Oakdale** worried that their personal possessions would be stolen.

Boys at **Oakdale** also worried about their own safety and that of their families during the COVID-19 pandemic. One boy said: “I think children are worried about parents and grandparents contracting COVID-19 and ending up in hospital” (*“ek dink die kinders is bekommerd oor as hul ouers of hul ouma en oupa miskien COVID-19 gaan kry en in die hospital beland”).*



RIGHT: Child Government Monitor Jodie Basson, learner at Kairos High School



RIGHT: Child Government Monitor, Cailin Steyn, learner at Albertinia High School



ABOVE: Learner reading the mandate of the Western Cape Commissioner for Children at Albertinia High School

Children highlighted worries related to the lack of safety in their neighbourhoods and towns. They were concerned about the levels of child abuse and the negative affects it has on children. There were concerns about drug and alcohol abuse amongst children. Lastly, children were worried about the health and safety of family members due to the pandemic.

### Children living in impoverished circumstances

Children are concerned about the welfare of other children deprived of their basic needs. Boys at **Oakdale** were worried that some children do not have food to eat nor clothes to wear nor a bed to sleep in.

The children at **Albertinia High School** note that children resort to begging on the street to cover basic needs. They were also very concerned about children living and sleeping on the streets and said: "My worry is that I am afraid that children who sleep on the streets do not attend school. They must work for their basic needs and then they sleep at the homes of the people where they work."

*("My bekommernis en bang is dat die kinders buite slaap en dat hulle gaan nie skool nie. Hulle moet werk vir n lewe om vir hulle te bou. Hulle slaap by ander mense by wie hulle werk").*

Children at **Heidelberg High School** were also worried about homeless people. One child expressed: "I am worried about people who live in poverty and have nothing to eat" (*"Ek is bekommerd oor mense wat armoede het. Mense wat niks het om te eet nie"*). The children living on farms at Gerrit Du Plessis explain that parents sometimes do not even have enough money to send their children to school.

Children at **Albertinia** were also worried about the difficulties of being a single or teen parent. One child said: "My friend just has one parent, and they find it difficult to survive. I try my best to help." (*"My vriendin het net een ouer end it gaan bietjie swaar. En ek probeer my beste om hulle te help"*).

Children shed light on their concerns of children living in circumstances where their basic needs are not met. They were worried about children not having food to eat, clothes to wear, and homelessness. There were also concerns about the difficulties of single parenthood and teen parenting.

### Schooling

Children expressed worries in relation to experiences at school. Bullying and the effects of bullying on children self-esteem was highlighted by a boy in **Oakdale** who said: "One of the girls I know was bullied at primary school and she started cutting herself and thought about committing suicide." (*"Een van my vriendinne was in laerskool geboelie en sy het haarself gekrap en gedink aan selfmoord"*). Similarly, some children from **Langenhoven** High also raised issues of self-esteem and its link to reputation. A child noted: "For myself I worry about how when one makes one small misstep, people talk about it everywhere and then your reputation is ruined." (*"Ek dink vir my is dit dat as jy enige iets verkeerd doen selfs as dit,*

*klein is, word dit oorals vertel en dan kry jy n slegte naam"*).

Oakdale boys had many concerns about fitting in with friends which may be related to the differences of children's backgrounds. One child expressed this as: "Children are worried that their friends do not think they are cool." (*"Kinders bekommer hulle oor of hulle vriende dink hulle cool is"*).

Another worry raised by boys at Oakdale is the pressure to reach a certain status in sports. A boy said: "When you are not good enough to reach the A team in rugby or something like that." (*"Om nie goed genoeg te wees nie. Om nie A span rugby or iets te kry nie"*).

At **Albertinia High** concerns about friends related to the wellbeing of friends. One child said: "I worry and am afraid that my friend is changing, and he is going onto a wrong path even though I try to show him how to stay on the right path." (*"My bekommernis is dat ek is bang my vriend draai uit en ek is besig om die regte pad vir hom te wys maar hy wil nie woor nie"*).



RIGHT: Children capturing their artwork at Langenhoven High School





ABOVE: The Commissioner, Mr Karelse Principal at Albertinia High School, and Tessa

Children from **Heidelberg High School** linked these behaviours to peer pressure. A child noted: "Peer pressure. The influence of drinking alcohol. The influence of smoking. Making incorrect decisions." (*"Groepsdruk. Die invloed van drank. Die invloed van rook. Verkeerde besluite neem"*).

Academic achievement and fear of failure weighed heavily on children's minds. During the pandemic, children are especially worried that they are not receiving the inputs on the full curriculum as COVID-19 interrupts the schooling calendar, which may have an impact on their future. A boy at Oakdale said: "Children worry about whether they will pass their grade and get a good job because schools close due to the COVID-19 pandemic" (*"Hulle bekommer of hulle skool sal deur kom en n goeie werk kan kry as gevolg van COVID-19 wat die skole toe maak"*).

Children at **Oakdale, Langenhoven,** and **Heidelberg** use the word stress many times when they talk about understanding their schoolwork or tests and examinations. Their worries may indicate that many are struggling on a mental health level and require more support to help

them cope. Children believed that completing school would mean better opportunities for making a success of life rather than struggling to survive. One child articulated: "My worry is that children should complete their schooling rather than sit on the pavements in front of shops and beg for money for a cigarette. They should complete school and get a matric" (*"My bekommernis van kinders is dat kinders moet skool klaar maak en nie op winkel steppe kan sit en rande kan soek vir n seget nie. Hulle moet skool klaar maak tot in Graad 12"*).

Parental expectations are added stressors for children. Children, especially at **Oakdale, Albertinia,** and **Heidelberg** were concerned that they would disappoint their parents. For example, a boy from **Oakdale** said: "I worry about being a failure. Disappointing my parents. Not getting a good job and ending up not achieving anything in life." (*"Ek bekommer oor om n mislukking te wee. My ouers teleur stel. Om nie n goeie werk te kry nie en nerens in die lewe te kom nie"*).

In addition, Children were also concerned whether their parents could afford to send them for tertiary studies. The mental health of learners at school should receive more attention to attenuate their daily experiences of stress.

Children's main worries in terms of schooling were related to bullying, self-esteem, peer pressure, academic and sport achievement, fear of failure, as well as meeting parental expectations.

### The future

Worries about future prospects as well as future levels of local development also pre-occupied children. Children at **Oakdale, Heidelberg, and Gerrit Du Plessis** were worried about losing their parents to death while they were still young. A child at **Gerrit Du Plessis** explained: "The biggest fear for all of us is that we lose our parents. Because if they are no longer there who will love us and support us through difficult times?" ("*Ons almal se grootste vrees is om ons ouers te verloor, want as hulle nie meer die dag daar is nie, wie gaan ons lief het en in moeilike dae ondersteun?*"). These fears seem to relate to the pandemic

and many people dying. One child from Langenhoven expressed: "My worry is that many people are losing loved ones and are sad. I am also one of those people." ("*My bekommernis is dat daar baie mense is wat baie mense verloor en ongelukkig is en ek is ook een van dit*").

There were also concerns at **Heidelberg High School** about families going through tough financial times. One child wrote: "We are buying a new house and the place must be fixed up. The money matters are not looking good, and my father is stressed about this. I wish I could help him". ("*Ons koop n huis en ons huis moet reg gemaak word en die geldsake lyk nie goed nie en my pa stress so baie. Ek wens ek kon hom help*"). Children also worry about other family stresses. For instance, children from **Oakdale** worried that their parents would get a divorce or that they would be removed from their parents.

Children were concerned about the state of the environment and development within their communities. For children from **Albertinia** development limitations included:

RIGHT: The Commissioner, Mr. Eygelaar Principal at Heidelberg High School, and Tessa





ABOVE: The Commissioner looking at children's poster at Heidelberg High School.

Children take to heart the social dynamics in their contexts.

**lack of resources, lack of developments within the community, limited number of shops, limited WiFi hotspots, and few pedestrian crossings.** One child in Heidelberg High School was concerned about the pollution in the river (**"[My bekommernis] is oor die rivier wat so vuil is"**).

A child from **Albertinia** articulated the concern that children would never be taken seriously. They said: "I worry that we will never be acknowledged. That nobody will listen to our views. That people will also just push us away and never believe in us." (**"Ek bekommer dat ons [kinders] nooit raak gesien gaan word. Dat niemand ons menings gaan in sien nie. Dat mense ons altyd gaan weg stoot en nie in ons glo nie."**). This may indicate a hope that children's position in society may change in the future.

## SUMMARY OF CHILDREN'S WORRIES

The main areas of concern for children included: abuse, violence, and safety; children living in impoverished circumstances;

schooling and fear of failure; as well as worries about the future. Childhood is not, as traditionally believed, a time of innocence and free of worry. Children take to heart the social dynamics in their contexts. They also try to be problem-solvers of these concerns. They express that they are actively working towards being able to positively contribute to society, their community, and their families.

## ANALYSIS OF CHILDREN'S DREAMS AND WORRIES

### Prestigious career goals

The range of careers selected by many children included aspirations towards careers that are prestigious, for example, a doctor or rugby player or stable professions, for example, a teacher. Becoming a doctor may be the most prestigious career some children can conceptualise.

Prestigious careers also have notions of respectability attached to that. Children believe that their communities will acknowledge their achievements when they have a good career. These findings align with a previous study conducted amongst

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*They are conscious about the challenges in society that make people vulnerable, and they feel the need to help solve these challenges.*

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young people in the Western Cape<sup>xi</sup>. Research shows that approximately 78% of Grade 4 learners in South Africa do not have the basic reading skills they need by the end of the grade 4 school year<sup>xii</sup>. Yet, many children wish to have prestigious academic careers. Thus, the concern is whether children realise how much talent and hard work it takes to enter prestigious career paths and whether these options are realistic for them given their current performance at school or in sport.

It is clear from the findings that children realise education is a requirement in the quest for a good life. Adults should encourage children from a young age to explore a broad range of interests and talents, as well as different career paths to guide children in their decision-making processes. Children should be guided to be realistic about career options when their academic potential becomes clear. If they do not have the pre-requisites for the careers they dreamed of in early childhood, they should be introduced to all the options that fit their aptitude.

Without a supportive environment and encouragement from adults to explore their interests, adolescents may have confusion in career planning and may venture into adulthood without knowing where their interests and strengths lie<sup>xiii</sup>.

### **Transcending current realities**

Children strived for transcending current realities and achieving success by being qualified and being able to afford a lifestyle which includes large houses and luxury cars. They wanted to travel around their own country or even live and work overseas. With this wealth they wanted to help their families and communities. Children were concerned about their family's wellbeing and wanted to offer support to the needy in their community. They are conscious about the challenges in society that make people vulnerable, and they feel the need to help solve these challenges. The challenges that children point out are heartbreaking and speaks volumes of the lived realities of adults and children who currently find themselves in difficult circumstances.

RIGHT: Child Government Monitor Cailin Steyn and family with the Commissioner



## Activity 2: Children's recommendations for government departments

### Key points:

- Education- children raised issues related to the violation of dignity rights of learners, inequality of resources and infrastructure, discrimination, challenges with scholar transport system, and insufficient mental health support services.
- Health- children suggested more doctors and caring health professionals, enabling more compliance with COVID-19 protocols in schools, and the involvement of health professionals in health promotion at schools.
- Social development- children would like to draw attention to increasing resources towards prevention, support, and rehabilitation services for children; parental responsibilities towards nurturing children; and promote child abuse reporting by adults.
- Cultural Affairs and Sport- children pointed out the lack of sport infrastructure and opportunities in their communities; creating programmes which include differently abled children; gender equality in sport; and building viable alternatives to social ills to attract the attention of adolescents.



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*We need to affirm that their opinions matter and that their voices will be taken seriously when they raise issues of concern or make recommendations about improving society.*

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### Questioning social norms

Children questioned gendered and other social norms influencing the character of adolescence. They wished for more empathy and freedom for self-expression at school and in their community. Children seemed to be advocating for a change in society that would bring about more empathy and solidarity. This may indicate that children feel invalidated by adults and invisible in society. They would like to be recognised as worthy individuals who can contribute to their context even in their childhood years. However, they also seem to be appealing to adults to develop a better understanding of the adolescent life phase in contemporary times. Adolescence is a phase of life where identity issues surface strongly and young people need support to explore their identity without judgement and prejudice. We need to affirm that their opinions matter and that their voices will be taken seriously when they raise issues of concern or make recommendations about improving society.



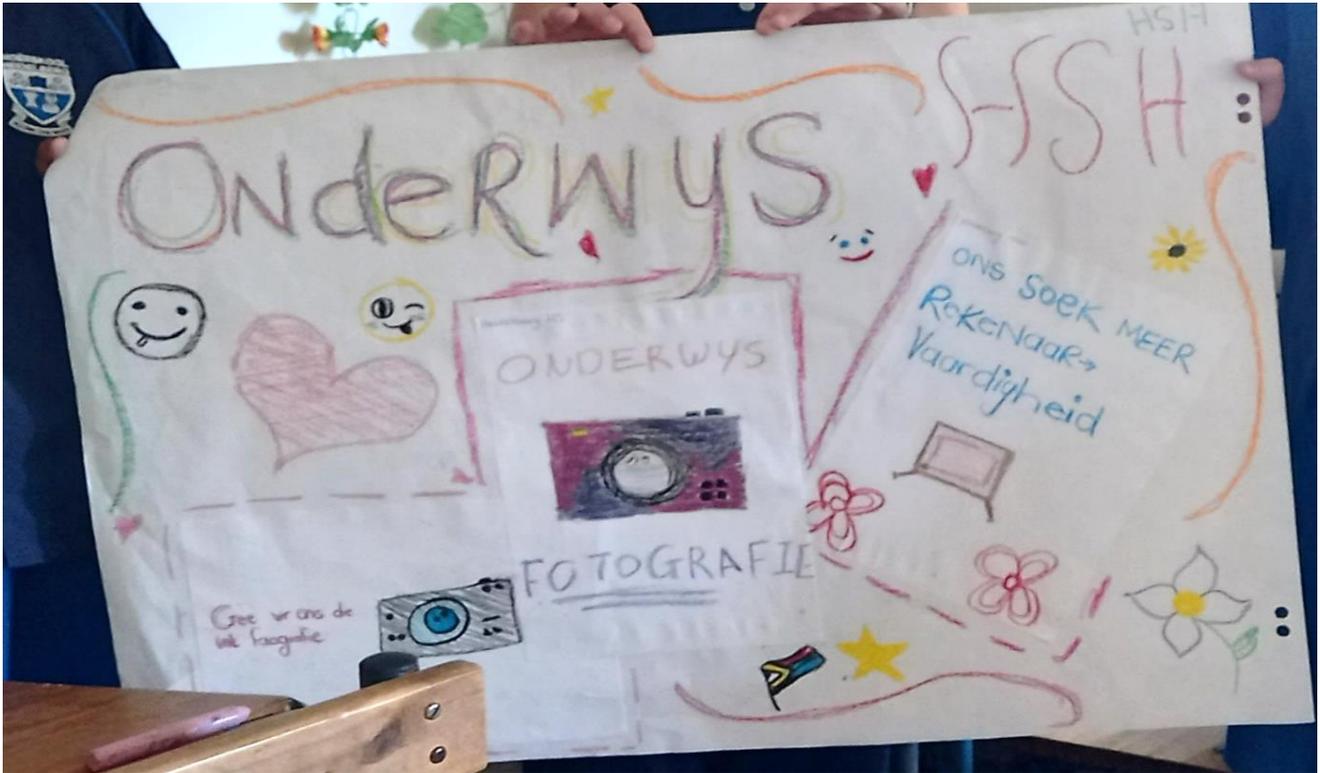
## Activity 2: Children's recommendations for government departments

The eight (8) schools participating in the Community Child Rights Workshops in Hessaqua Municipality were given an opportunity to draw posters providing advice and recommendations for service improvement. This activity provides the children with the opportunity to express their views using creative arts. The findings are reported by school for each department below. Then the key theme per department is discussed in an analysis section

### DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**Kairos Secondary School** learners were most concerned about the role and attitude of their educators.

Children noted in their posters that educators should not beat them, disrespect them, bully them, evict them from class, refuse to teach them, threaten to put them out of school and damage their self-esteem. One input from their posters read: "Everyone has the right to go to school and nobody can force us to



ABOVE:  
Recommendations  
for the Department  
of Education by  
children at  
Heidelberg High

leave school. No educator can refuse you access to a school. Educators cannot undermine our self-esteem." (**"Elkeen van ons het die reg om skool te gaan, en niemand kan ons forseer om die skool te verlaat nie. Geen onderwyser kan ons weier om skool te gaan nie. Onderwysers kan nie ons selfbeeld afkraak nie"**).

Another topic children mentioned was learning in a clean environment.

Children recommended that educators **respect** their right to education and children's right to be treated with **dignity**.

**Slangrivier Primary** children spoke of the need for the basic tools for learning and that classroom dynamics are not always conducive to learning. The basics seem to be hard to attain or afford at this school. A learner said: "Our children should have schoolbooks and textbooks. Children must have pencils. Children must have calculators at school" (**"Ons kinders moet kan skoolboeke en handboeke het. Kinders moet potlood he. Die kinders moet calculators in die skool hê"**).

Children seemed to be experiencing violence and abuse from peers and teachers. They referred to bullying amongst learners as well as lack of respectful treatment and even corporal punishment by teachers. A child noted: "The educators may not beat or mistreat learners" (**"Die onderwysers mag nie die kinders slaan of mishandle nie"**).

Children recommended that the **basic tools and environment for learning and teaching** should be in place, free of violence.

**Albertinia High School** children focused their input on inequality and discrimination at schools. They pointed out that there are schools still using pit toilets. They referenced a newspaper article titled "The right to dignity flushed away" on their classroom wall which noted that 913 schools have inadequate toilet facilities and 11 450 school still used pit toilets.<sup>xiv</sup> In addition to sanitation infrastructure, children also believed that some schools needed to increase in size as they were too small.

They noted that their own school could use more space to learn and a science laboratory.

A group of children were asked to do a poster on discrimination because two girls submitted letters on their experiences of discrimination. The group developed an anti-discrimination poster including the issues of racism, religious affiliation, socio-economic circumstances, and sexuality as some grounds for discrimination.

They believed that those who are guilty of discrimination should receive punishment in the form of detention.

Children recommended we restore **dignity rights** with suitable infrastructure for learning and equality rights at school by addressing discriminatory practices.

**Heidelberg High** children depicted on their posters that the spectrum of school subjects and availability of sport should be extended. One request was that photography be taught at schools as well as placing greater emphasis on teaching computer technologies.

They recommended that their school could also cover other needs that children have such as a soup kitchen for hungry children, a gym to improve physical fitness, music lessons to explore other talents children may have, a clinic, access to Wifi, and a science laboratory. The children also mentioned that other amenities such as the swimming pool, soccer fields, cafeteria which should be installed or improved. They believed that transport to school could also be facilitated by school bicycles.

Children recommended that schools improve **subject offerings, infrastructure**, and offer a range of **services** that improves access to school.

At **Langenhoven High** many posters focused on children's struggle with the workload and inadequate support to help them cope. Children call for longer breaks during the school day and longer vacation times which may indicate that they are overwhelmed by the expectations placed on them. They also wanted more supportive environments for learning such as computers to eliminate the heavy textbooks.



RIGHT: A poster on racism by children at Albertinia High School



ABOVE: Children creating a poster at Langenhoven High School

Children would like to have more friendly and patient teachers who spend more time after school hours to help those who struggle with the difficulty of the work.

Their mental health was reported as a cause for concern. One learner said: "We need to have less pressure because if you want to hear it or not, school pressure is one of the main reasons for our DEPRESSION!" (*"Minder druk op ons plaas want of jul nou dit wil hoor of nie, skool se druk is een van die grootse redes vir ons DEPRESSIE!"*).

Participation rights of children were not respected in the hierarchy of schools where only adults have a say. A learner said: "Children should also have a voice, not only educators and parents. You matter. You are also important" (*"Kinders kan ook n stem het, nie net onderwysers en ouers nie. Jy maak saak. Jy is belangrik"*).

Children recommended more **mental health services** to help them cope with school pressure.

**Mellkoutfontein Primary** children requested more furniture and educators as well as extra lessons. Children were very happy with the work done by the educators at this school. They say: "Good work, the educators are doing their job". (*"Goeie werk word gerdoen, onderwysers doen hulle werk"*). However, they do believe that children can benefit from after-school extra lessons, but they are aware that this would mean the school needs additional resources. They noted: "I believe that children need extra classes to improve in their schoolwork. More people are needed for extra classes." (*"Ek glo dat kinders moet ekstra klasse het om skoolwerk te verbeter. Meer mense om ekstra klasse vir kinders te gee"*).

Children recommended **extra classes** to improve their understanding of their schoolwork.

**Gerrit Du Plessis High** children were asked to focus their poster on scholar transport as the group consisted of learners living on farms. The school management expressed that their learners were acutely affected by the scholar transport system which exposed vulnerable children traveling from farms to school to many risks.

The children's poster recommended improvement to the scholar transport system:

- "To collect children a bit later at the bus stop because it is not always nice to board the bus in the dark. It is safer to board during daytime." (*"Om kinders n bietjie later op te tel soggens by die bus stop dan sal dit beter wees want is nie altyd lekker on in the donker te klim nie. Dit is meer veiliger in die dag"*).
- "In winter, they can start the school later and the bus must drive faster to get the children to school on time." (*In die winter kan hulle die skool later begin en die bus moet vinniger ry dat die kinders betyds by die skool kan aankom"*).

- "The government should send more busses so that children can be dropped off at their homes and be collect from there again." (*"Die regering moet meer busse uit stuur om die kinders te Vervoer tot by hul huise en weer daar kom optel"*).

Children recommended the **scholar transport system** should not place them at risk of harm.

At **Oakdale Agricultural High School** there was a concern amongst the boys relating to school management as well as whether less privileged children are receiving enough support. The food provided at the hostels was a big source of dissatisfaction. Children feel that those who cannot afford the school fees should pay less and should be provided with transport to come to school.

The issues on school management included unhappiness about the detention system, that staff may not be adequately qualified, that children should be treated fairly, regardless of race. The pressure from



RIGHT: A poster on scholar transport by children at Gerrit du Plessis High School

too much schoolwork was also an issue raised as well as the additional pressure of the extra mural activities.

Children recommended that the school consider being more **supportive and considerate** of the pressure that children are experiencing.

The education issues that children raised on their posters included: the violation of **dignity rights** of learners in schools by their educators; the importance of building **positive self-esteem** amongst adolescents; **inequality of resources** amongst learners in the same school and **inequality in infrastructure** provision across schools in the country; **discrimination** in schools on the basis of race, gender, religion and sexuality; as well as the lack of sufficient **mental health support** to help learners cope. These inputs

would require reflection on education policies focused on scholar transport, school nutrition, assignment of quintiles, and mental health services.

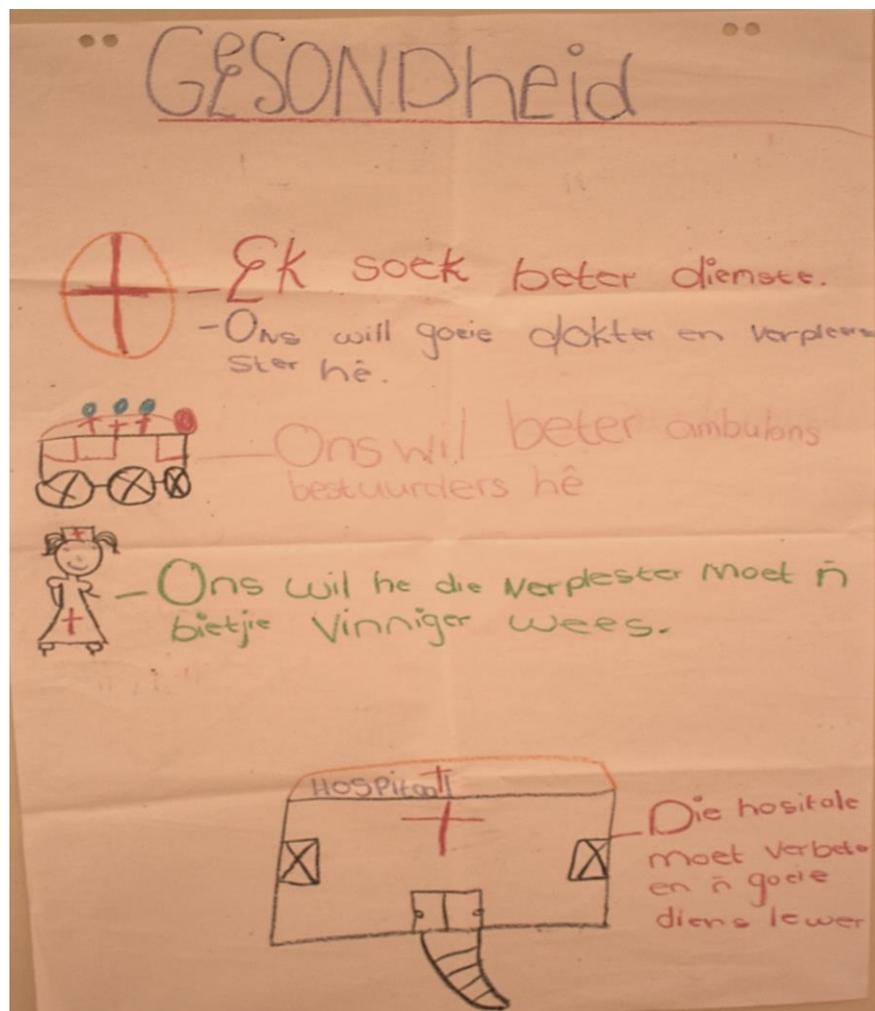
## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

**Kairos Secondary School** learners were most concerned about the COVID-19 pandemic, the overcrowded clinics and living in an environment that promotes good health.

The children promoted the prevention and treatment of chronic or serious illness. They mentioned all the vaccines and treatment we have for TB, HIV/AIDS Asthma, Cancer, and Jaundice. Children still believed in the need for doctors to treat the sick. They were concerned about adherence to COVID-19 protocols of



RIGHT:  
Recommendations  
for the Department  
of Health by  
children at Kairos  
High School





ABOVE: Poster created by children at Albertinia High School

sanitising and mask wearing at schools. They wanted health professionals to be more involved in health promotion at schools and recommended weekly school visits.

During the pandemic, children refer to the role they would like health personnel to play: "They must distribute masks and sanitise children on the playgrounds. Some children do not have masks because of their circumstances" ("**Hulle moet darem maskers kan uitdeel en die kinders saniteer by die speelgronde waar kinders is met hulle speelyd. Alle kinders het nie maskers nie as gevolg van omstandighede**").

When children are referred to clinics, their concerns were related to waiting times, older persons receiving medication timeously and hygiene. They also noted that healthy environments contribute to wellbeing and therefore the need for eating healthy food, drinking clean water, and living in clean environments.

Children recommend that we all stand together. Children recommended that government should provide **more clinics and health professionals** to promote healthy lifestyles and the prevention or treatment of serious illnesses.

**Slangrivier Primary** children focused their feedback on the behavior of nurses and improving service provision. Nurses were requested to: be better, be good, work a bit faster, work properly, provide proper medication, and not swear at patients. According to the children, doctors, ambulances, hospital services could also be improved. Children also mentioned wanting to live in safe environments and that we required more solidarity to beat COVID-19.

Children recommended that improvements in health services could start with more **professional behaviour** from nurses as frontline workers.

At **Albertinia High School** children's inputs highlighted risky teen behaviour, COVID-19 prevention, and some of the positive health services that the government provides.

Children mentioned that a range of services could be accessed at clinics. They said: "They test people for COVID-19. They provide pills and spectacles. They provide free health services. Children are born. They provide dental services." ("**Hulle toets mense vir COVID-19. Hulle verskaf**

**pille en brille. Hulle verskaf gesondheids dienste verniet. Kinders word gebore. Hulle versak tandoarts dienste”).** Children understood very well the prevention strategies for COVID-19 and encouraged all to comply to keep safe.

Many inputs mentioned risky teen behavior such as premature, unplanned sex, as well the use of alcohol and drugs. They listed their concerns as follows: children using alcohol and drugs, teen pregnancy, fetal alcohol syndrome, HIV/AIDS, unprotected sex, rape.

They recommended: “Mothers may not use alcohol when pregnant. Stricter regulation on the use and sale of drugs. Test regularly for HIV/AIDS to know your status. If you have sex, use a condom. Do not touch the blood of others, use clean gloves.” (**“Moeders mag nie alkohol gebruik tydens swangerskap. Streng maatreels vir die gebruik en verkoop van dwelms. Toets gereeld vir MIV en VIGS, sodat jy jou status ken. As jy seksuele omgang het gebruik kondome. Moenie aan almal se bloed raak nie, gebruik skoon handskoene”).**

Other groups noted: “If you are under 16, you may not have sex. To prevent sexually transmitted diseases, use a CONDOM” (**“As jy onder 16 is, mag jy nie seks he nie. Om seksuele oordraagbare siektes te voorkom, gebruik a KONDOOM”).** They placed the responsibility on girls to keep safe. They said: “Girls should be wary of who they associate with.” (**“Meisies moet versigtig wees oor saam wie hulle meng”).**

Children recommended **sexual and reproductive health services** and rights for adolescents.

**Heidelberg High** children spoke about the role of good doctors and appropriate medication in the health system. They said: “We must get more doctors to heal people.” (**“Ons moet meer doktors kry om die mense gesond te maak”).** But they also made two other forward-thinking recommendations: “Children need an emergency medical kit. We need a safety clinic at school to keep children healthy. More environmentally friendly hospital buildings” (**“Kinders benodig a noodhulpkussie. Ons skool benodig n**

RIGHT: Ms Mkhize, the Commissioner, Dr. van Tonder, and Sister Braaf at Riversdale Hospital





ABOVE: The Commissioner and Tessa at Oakdale Agricultural High School

**veiligheidskliniek on kinders gesond te hou. Meer natuurvriendelike hospitaal geboue”).**

Children recommended that schools have **onsite clinics** and children be equipped with basic first aid supplies.

**Langenhoven High** children focused on health facilities for children, the importance of living in a healthy environment, and good services for the most vulnerable. Children would like us to address hunger, give children with disabilities an opportunity to showcase their talent, and provide speedy services for the aged. They also focused on special health services for children. Some noted: “A fee-free hospital or clinic is needed for children and a nurse at every school who visits once a week to ensure every child is still healthy.” (**“n Hospitaal of kliniek wat nie gemik is op betaling nie, sal beter wees vir kinders. n Verpleegster by elke skool te hê wat een keer n week skool toe ko men seker maak dat elke kind in die skool nog gesond is”).**

The children also talked about their own responsibility in keeping healthy such as wearing masks during COVID, drinking clean water, a healthy environment, eating healthy foods, and throwing waste in the bin. They said children must exercise agency:

“children must start making their own choices” (**“kinders moet hul eie besluite maak”**) according to the health lessons they receive in their life orientation curriculum. Children recommended promoting personal **responsibility** for good health, even amongst children.

**Melkhoufontein Primary** children presented posters on caring health professionals, healthy lifestyle choices, and prioritising those who are sickest at hospitals and clinics. They placed particular emphasis on the attributes of good health professionals and the effect they would have on the wellbeing of patients. They said: “Good people must work in health care, who look after people well and care for them, in order for patients to be happy” (**“Goeie mense vir die gesondheidswerk wat goed kyk na die siek mense en baie omgee vir hulle. Sodat hulle ook baie gelukkig is”).**

Children recommended we have **caring health professionals.**

**Oakdale** boys depicted on their posters there is not enough health care services especially for those who live in impoverished circumstances. They wanted more hospitals and clinics, health care workers, beds in

ICU and attention to ambulance services. They also would like to see more COVID PPE such as sanitisers and masks. They spoke of the health needs of the particularly vulnerable such as the aged, the hungry, and children living on the street. Fortunately, they also realised that this would require more funding. They lobbied: "Give more funding to health services" ("**Gee meer vondsing vir gesondheids dienste!**"). The ideas which they thought were novel included condoms in school toilets and colourful hospitals.

Children recommended we **increase funding for health services** to serve the most vulnerable.

The issues raised for the Department of Health to consider included: children's belief that doctors are needed on community level to treat the sick; the **ethos of care** from nurses; enabling compliance with COVID-19 protocols in schools by providing personal protective equipment and a culture of adherence; as well as health professionals involvement of health promotion in school.

## DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

**Kairos High School** children were particularly interested in the abuse and neglect of children in their communities. They said children must be helped by government when they experience tough times, need food, living in impoverished circumstances, and when they are abused and neglected by their parents. A quote illustrating their concerns on their posters read: "parents have parties abusing alcohol while their children go to bed hungry" ("**ouers wat dronknes hou terwyl kinders hinger gaan slap**").

Children expressed the need for more resources to support those in need: "Appoint more people to help. Make sure children receive the correct support. Always be available to support people when needed" ("**Meer mense aanstel. Assistentie vir hulp. Seker maak kinders kry die regte hulp. Altyd daar wees as mens nodig**").



RIGHT: Poster for the Department of Social Development by children at Heidelberg High School



ABOVE: Juliana Grundling (front left), Ingrid Parks (front right), the Commissioner, Tessa, and Kholiswa Jobela (back right)

The children recommended increasing direct **grants** to vulnerable populations and that active, consistent support of the Department of Social Development when needed.

**Slangrivier** children emphasised their rights to a family, happiness, love, respect and understood the role of the Department of Social Development to ensure children's safety with their parents and the responsibility to act if children are abused by their parents. In the case of abuse by parents, the children in the workshops understood that children in need of care and protection must be placed elsewhere, where they could be in good hands. They urged other adults to step in and report abuse of children. The ultimate aim is that parents must treat their children well and care for them (**"ouers moet hulle kinders reg behandel en mooi oppas"**).

They recommended that the Department of Social Development step in when children are **abused** by their parents.

**Albertinia High School** children asserted that parents must protect them, they said "Our parents must protect us" (**"Ons ouers moet ons beskerm"**).

Children's posters expressed concern about whether children who lived in impoverished circumstance have enough food to eat. They said: "The department of Social Development must give more food to those who need it." (**"Die welsyn moet meer kospakkies vir die dehoeffige mense uitgee"**).

They also expressed the role of the Department of Social Development in relation to child protection and prevention programming.

Children recommended more **prevention programming** be conducted during school holidays.

**Heidelberg** children emphasised the need for rehabilitation and support programming for drug use, in addition to the need to make sure children had basic needs like food and clothes. They wanted government to step in with rehabilitation programmes. Children noted: "Children cannot do it alone. Everyone needs a helping hand" (**"Kinders kan nie dit alleen doen nie. Almal nodig n helping hand"**).

They understood the role of Social Development to be: "the welfare helps to improve the circumstances of children and support children who are being abused" (**"Welsyn help om kinders se omstandighede te verbeter."**



**Kinders wat mishandle word te ondersteun”).**

Children recommended **support and rehabilitation programming.**

**Langenhoven high** children reiterated their need for positive attention, love, happiness, food, clothes, and care.

They conveyed that the role of social workers in the lives of children was very important, especially in relation to domestic violence. Children said: social workers must make sure that children are treated well. They should come to talk and play games with children to make them feel welcome, safe and that they are important and special (**“Maatskaplike werkers moet seker maak dat kinders reg behandel word. Hulle kan meer na plekke toe kom om met kinders te praat en kom speletjies speel met die kinders. En om meer kinders te laat welkom voel en ook veilig en laat julle ook voel hulle voel belangrik en spesiaal”**).

They also asked for a special children’s home or foster parents in Riversdale for homeless children because they feel very sorry for children in these circumstances.

Children recommended that social workers play a more proactive role in making sure children are well treated at home, in schools, and in communities.

**Melkhoufontein** children noted that only some children’s needs are satisfied, while others are neglected.

They said: “we feel Stillbaai social workers are neglectful because when we look around our community, we see few children’s rights being considered” (**“Ons voel Stilbaai welsyn is bietjie nalatig, want soos ons in die gemeenskap rond kyk word baie min kinders se regte in ag geneem”**).

They especially pointed out that children in homes where alcohol and drugs are abused, need attention as well as when there is no food to eat.

Children should be helped if they are processing trauma. They are also concerned about justice for children who are raped and murdered. Children wanted social workers to help children stay away from drug dealers, keep children in school and keep children safe.

Children recommended that social workers ensure all children enjoy their **rights** to food, safety, and education.

**Oakdale’s** boys wanted children to have homes, hygiene, food, and safety. They envisaged a world where we provide good families and homes for children by adoption rather than institutional care. They want children to be loved, not rejected.

The way they understood discipline was concerning. Whereas some sentiments on the posters expressed



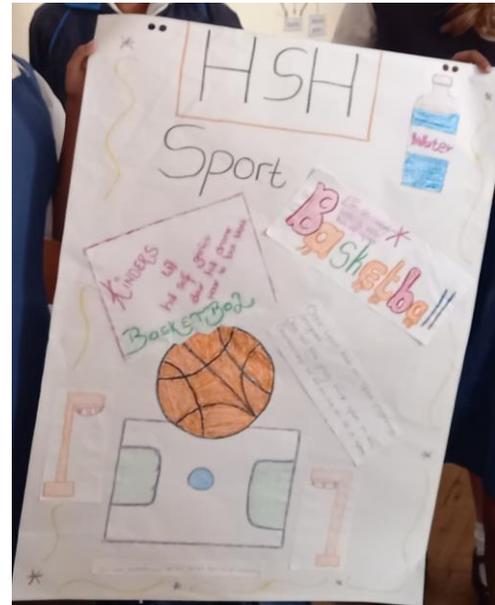
that children should have good families, others expressed that it is their own fault they are being abused. The boys said: "When children do wrong, there must be corporal punishment to correct them! But we should not hit a child for no reason. Children must be disciplined it is most important! It is in the Bible" (**"Wanneer kinders verkeerd doen moet hulle reggehelp word deur lyfstraf! Maar daar moet nie verniet aan n kind geslaan word nie. Kinders moet getigdig word dis die belangrik. Dit staan in die Bybel"**). One quote read: "I am abused, because I am naughty" (**"Ek word mishandel, want ek is stout"**).

The boys seemed to confuse being loved with being abused. This is not surprising in a country that has allowed corporal punishment of children by their parents to continue for so long. Much needs to be done to address this mindset, as corporal punishment has been outlawed in all settings. Adults also do not seem willing to understand the link between physical punishment of their children as being the genesis of the culture of violence in the country.

Not all children held the same view, as some children called for an end to abuse, they said: **"dont hit, rather speak"**. Children believe they are valuable to the world and will make a difference.

The boys at Oakdale recommended every child have a **good home**.

Children would like to draw attention to increasing resources towards prevention, support, and rehabilitation services for children; parental responsibilities towards nurturing care of children; and promote child abuse reporting by adults. It was sad that children internalised the need to be punished violently when they do not behave well. Children also seem to want the state to demonstrate what nurturing care entails by sending social workers to play with children.



ABOVE: Poster created by Heidelberg High School children

## DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS AND SPORT

The children at **Kairos** reflected on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on sports participation. They said: "The COVID-19 should go away so that rugby can start." (**"Die COVID-19 moet weggaan dat die rugby kan begin"**). Usually they play cricket, rugby, soccer and compete in athletics with other schools. From the perspective of culture, children reflected on and agreed with religious tolerance and mother-tongue expression, as well as participating in one's own cultural activities.

The children recommended that we need to do all we can to beat the virus in order to return to normalcy.

**Slangriver Primary** children created collages depicting their ideas of sport and culture. Main ideas included: women in sport, exercise, sports facilities, and family togetherness at events.

Children recommended government provide a sports stadium in their community and sport excellence is fostered by professional coaches, equipment, and attire for rugby at school.

The love for rugby was shared by many in this municipality. Some children from **Albertinia** shared: "Rugby is an important sport. Everyone participates in rugby. Rugby is not for sissies. Rugby is a sport where you can experience many injuries." (*"Rugby is 'n groot sport. Almal neem deel in rugby. Rugby is nie vir sussies nie. Rugby is n sport waar jy baie seerkry"*).

Another poster from this school portrayed the children's interest in playing pool. It was compared to contact sport like rugby, noting that there are no injuries, and you can win lots of money. Children also commented on the importance of wheelchair basketball in their community.

The children also mentioned how the pandemic was curtailing sport and culture activities and even normal interactions with peers such as communicating and exercising together. Not being able to hug friends because of COVID social distancing prescriptions was also lamented.

Children recommended that **more opportunities** be facilitated in Albertinia for children to demonstrate their talents, for example in golf.

At **Heidelberg high**, some children expressed there are very few sporting programmes, and they would like to

participate in more sporting codes such as basketball, which is a team sport. Others focused their recommendations on school sport and noted that tennis is undersubscribed at their school. They would also like to participate in horse riding, hockey, soccer as well as hurdles in athletics at school.

Children recommended that sporting **opportunities and coaches are improved** because sport benefits self-esteem.

COVID-19 has interrupted the ability of children to play sport for long periods. They are cognisant of the pandemic and query whether it is not possible to continue with sport while complying with COVID-19 protocols.

At **Langenhoven high**, children understood that sport was a positive distraction from social ills affecting them. They said: I feel that sport at school should be expanded upon. Most learners should participate in sport and sport must be an attractive option for children" (*"Ek voel hulle moet by die skole meer sport aktieweiteite doen. Die meerderheid van leerders moet aan sport deelneem en sport moet kinders se aandag trek"*). The learners were interested in a range of sporting codes and made specific suggestions for improvement that centred on the facilities or the gear.

RIGHT: The Commissioner and Tessa, the MOD centre team, and Mr. Neethling outside Riverville Stadium, in Riversdale



## Inputs from adult stakeholders

### Key points

- ECD educators need information about the migration from Department of Social Development to the Department of Basic Education.
- Departments of Cultural Affairs and Sport and Social Development expressed their commitment to prevention programming to build resilience of children and youth.
- More funding is needed to provide the services families need in communities.
- There is acknowledgment that both parents and the education system must partner to guide children in their growth and development.



Some children highlighted the need for gender equality in sport. They said: "girls and boys can play all sporting codes" ("**Meisies en seuns kan alle sport speel**").

Children recommended that learners at school be encouraged to participate in sport to promote an **active and healthy lifestyle**.

Equal opportunities in sport for all genders was also reiterated in **Melkhoutfontein Primary School**. They pointed out that there are many gender biases in sport. For example, netball is not promoted for boys and rugby is not promoted for girls.

Children recommended that **gender biases** in sport should be addressed.

Children at **Oakdale** appreciated the value of school sport as many aspired to become sporting professionals. Participation in sport can lead to injuries and children articulated that they need good medical attention when they become injured. The boys at this school were also concerned about schools who had less equipment. They noted: "Better equipment for schools in need" ("**Beter toeristing vir behoeftige skole**"). The children recommended that school sport be taken seriously as it could lead to career opportunities.

Some children approached this topic from the perspective of sport in schools. Issues raised by children include: the availability of sport infrastructure and opportunities in their communities; creating programmes which include differently abled children; gender equality in sport; and building viable alternatives to social ills to attract the attention of adolescents.

## Inputs from adult stakeholders

### PARENTS AND ADULTS' EXPERIENCES OF SERVICE PROVISION

We were most successful at talking with a few parents near their homes or at their places of work. Almost nobody was willing to talk with us at the service sites. COVID-19 health protocols and precautions meant we were not able to convene groups of parents for workshops. We made great effort to visit communities for direct engagements with residents. The Commissioner for Children visited Slangrivier, Heidelberg, Riversdale, Kwanakhuthula, Albertinia, Melkhoutfontein, Stilbaai, Bitouville, and Gouritsmond. In so doing, we were able to gain some insights into the lived realities of children in those communities.

In selected communities, we were able to visit clinics, sports fields, child protection services, and creches. The following impressions were gathered from our own observations, parents, or adult residents of communities, as well as from service providers in the areas. This information builds on the insights provided by the children above.

## SLANGRIVIER

Slangrivier was the first community we entered on our travels from Cape Town into Hessequa Municipality. There were no gravel roads to traverse, some roads were not even paved. We drove past a recreation site — Jonique Johannes Nature Park—, and later heard it was named after a child who had drowned. Driving through the community there were many adults and children at home albeit that it was a school day. The children were subject to a rotational school programme. We stopped where there were women sitting outside to explain who we were and what our intention was in visiting their area.

**Not many adults wanted to engage us when we invited feedback to government departments.** One parent in Slangrivier, working as part of an Expanded Public Works Programme, shared with us her experiences with health services.

Her impressions of these services were generally negative. She believes she is not taken seriously at the clinic, whereas other clients seem to be helped. She says: “I left there feeling like a dog” (*“ek is soos n hond daar uit”*). She also related other problems with social services off the record. Her colleagues, working with her, declined to add or confirm her statement.

Since visiting Slangrivier was unscheduled, we drove around and popped in at a creche without an appointment. The principal listened to the Commissioner for Children’s mandate with interest and asked us about the **migration of ECD** from the Department of Social Development to Department of Basic Education. She asked about the implementation plans for this migration. She said: “I see on Facebook that 4-5 years will move to WCED, will that happen with all pre-school children? Will it only happen in some provinces or all provinces?” (*“Ek sien op Facebook die 4-5 jaar ggan implementer word na WKOD, gan dit met alle kleuters gebeur? Gaan dit in alle provinsies gebeur, of net in seker provinsies?”*). While speaking informally, she spoke of great expectations in relation to the size of the subsidy as well as the salaries and benefits for staff. This lack of transparency about the implementation plans for migrating



RIGHT: The Commissioner and Ms Prins Principal at Groenie Die Drakie Creche, in Slangrivier



ABOVE: The Commissioner in conversation with Sister Loretta Gordon at Heidelberg clinic

early childhood development to the Department of Basic Education is causing great expectations on community level, that will need to be mitigated if they are not realised.

## RIVERSDALE

Our destination for the end of the first day was Riversdale, a clearly well-established and resourced town. Later in the week, when we visited Gerrit Du Plessis High we realised that Apartheid legacies of separate development persist. A ray of hope for racial integration was our visit to Langenhoven High School, where children of all races engaged easily with each other. However, the consistency in uniforms conveys that this is a fee-paying school, which would appeal to more monied parents.

We engaged the child protection agency in the area who told us tales of a Murder City which we would visit later when engaging DCAS. The social dynamics in the black communities were further confirmed by the local Department of Social Development. Realities of deprivation and violence was the order of the day in some parts of the Riversdale community.

All these service providers spoke of areas where intimate partner violence and child protection issues were rife. The effects of poverty, exacerbated by the pandemic, were noted by the increasing need to provide food parcels to more and more households in need. Early withdrawal from school amongst youth create vulnerability to alcohol and drug addiction as well as anti-social behaviour. Both DCAS and DSD expressed their commitment to **prevention programming** to build resilience of children and youth with adverse experiences in their communities.

We also visited another ECD where practitioners were at the end of their career tenure and concerned about their retirement. They noted that they worked for decades to care for children but felt they were undervalued for this role. They would also enter their retirement with very little savings and will likely be dependent on their children or state grants. During the COVID-19 pandemic the ECD sector were hard hit by school closures which meant no income was earned. Their struggle to access the special compensation fund from government caused much frustration and disheartenment.



## HEIDELBERG

Heidelberg, albeit a bit smaller than Riversdale, also had good infrastructure in the main town. However, black communities had a similar character to those we saw in Riversdale. We had the privilege of visiting the home of a self-nominated child government monitor in this area. Her grandmother was able to connect with me, confirming my details on posters in the main town, to express her granddaughter's interest in working with my office. The family had moved back to their ancestral area after living in a township in Cape Town for some years.

Appointments we organised with a local child protection agency and a creche and well as with the local clinic, gave us more insight into service provision sites. A social auxiliary worker at a child protection agency in Heidelberg spoke of a lack of **financial resources** to help families. She noted: "Our aim is to protect children, but we have limited funding to really help the children and to send parents for help if they have problems with substance abuse. So, we are just here to help the child and their parent." (**"Ons doel is om die kinders te beskerm maar ons het soms min befonding om die**

**kinders rerig te help en veral om die ouers te stuur vir help veral as hulle problem het met dwelms of alcohol. So ons is eintlik net daar om die kinders te help en die ouers te help"**). She was a young professional who impressed us with her passion for her work.

When we engaged the ECD educators, situated right next to the child protection agency, they spoke about their **salary** as well as retirement benefits. One educator in Heidelberg said: "I am working at the day care center for more than 20 years. The salary is not much, it feels like it's just enough to buy chips and sweets. I am committed to my job but at the end of the month you must be able to feel happy with the salary you receive." (**"Vir meer as 20 jaar is ek besig in die dagsorgsentrum. Die salaris is maar nie baie nie, dit voel ek kan se dis net genoeg vir chips en lekkers. My hart is in my werk maar teen die einde van die maand moet ons darem oork gelukkig ook kan wees as ons daai salaris ontvang"**). This is a typical story of how care work performed by women is not properly remunerated. They invest so much of their lives to caring for their own and others' children and society does not value this contribution appropriately.



RIGHT: Child Government Monitor Jodie Basson and family with the Commissioner





ABOVE: The Commissioner with Ms Meyer and Ms Slawers at Neskuikentjie Creche in Heidelberg

In Heidelberg, we were able to visit the clinic. The orientation and commitment of the sister in charge was heart-warming. She wanted to do more **health promotion**, especially in schools. She even spoke about supporting teens at schools with contraception but notes that this issue was still too controversial, even between the departments involved. She noted: **“The door must be opened with (the Department of) Education”**. She also reported that youth were struggling with mental health issues during COVID times. This professional was in touch with the priority concerns amongst teens and would be a wonderful leader for creating adolescent friendly services. She also spoke very gently with a mother waiting to receive services with her child, asking if she would speak with us. Her tone made the mother at ease to speak with us.



The mother at the clinic in Heidelberg chose to comment on Education not Health. She said: “De Waalville Primary is not a brick school. I would appreciate it if children had a school built with bricks. Can the educators increase the homework for children so that they do not loiter on the streets, but focus more on their education?”

**“De Waalville is a skool wat nie a geboude skool is nie. Ek sal dit baie waardeur dat kinders n geboude skool moet kry wat uit die grond gebou is. En dat onderwysers probeer om kinders meer huiswerk te gee dat kinders minder op die straat kan wees en meer tyd kan spandeer aan hulle skoolwerk”**). The education and health of her children were important enough for this mother to seek services and take the opportunity to provide feedback to government via the Commissioner for Children.

### ALBERTINIA

Aside from working with the children at a school in Albertinia and visiting the home a child government monitor, we also spoke with adults and parents living in Albertinia working at a Game Lodge over the weekend. A few parents and adults were willing to discuss education and health services in Albertinia

An adult resident of Albertinia shared about the difference in the **ethos** between the two schools in the community. He said: “The difference between the two schools in Albertinia is the discipline and order. I think if we pay attention to the order and

discipline of the primary school then it will also come to the standard of the high school. Fifty percent of the order comes from the home and fifty percent from the school. If the child comes from the order of the home, then the child will be able to comply with the order presented at school." *("As ons aan onse laerskool se order en disipline kan kyk sal dit ook op die standard kom wat die hoërskool is. As daar disipline is in n kind se lewe of n order or a rouitiene dan is die kansse beter vir die kind om te leer. Want dan skep jy n atmosfeer en a platvorm vir die kind om iets te leer. Vyftig persent kom van die huis af en vyftig kom van die skool. As die kind met die orde van die huis af kom dan sal die kind die order by die skool toepas. As ons kommunikasie kan hê tussen die skool dan sal dit ook n groot verskil maak en die order stelsel verbeter. Meer vergaderings hou, meer bymekaar kom. Die WhatsApp groepe werk goed").*

A mother employed at the Game Lodge commented on a school in Albertinia. She said: "I am very impressed with the school since Mr. Karelse returned. Everything is in order. It is good that he conducts an interview with parents when you

apply for your child then you have a relationship with the principal from day one. He is hands-on. My daughter enjoys being with her friends at school. She likes her homework. I think it is because I help her, and she we have bonding time. She tells me every day what she liked and did not like about school" *("Ek is baie beindruk vandat Mnr Karelse weer terug is is alles weer terug in order. Vir my is dit n baie goeie ding dat hy eers n onderhoud saam die ouers doen wanneer jy inskryf vir die kind. Jy het daai verhouding van dag een af saam met die hoof. Hy is baie hands-on. (My dogter) geniet dit saam haar maatjies. Sy geniet die huiswerk. Ek dink die rede is ek help haar daarmee so ons het daai bonding time. Sy se vir my elke dag wat het sy geleer en waarvan sy gehou het en nie gehou het nie").* There is acknowledgment that both parents and the education system must **partner** to guide children in their growth and development.

A father from Albertinia shared his disenchantment with clinic services in the community when he took his daughter for a problem with her eyes. He said: "We got there after 2 o'clock, we sat outside as you can't



RIGHT: The Commissioner with Ms Scholtz, Ms Katjie, Ms Jacobs, and Ms Fielies at Bollie Konyn Creche in Riversdale



ABOVE: The Commissioner in Bietouville

just go in. We waited for over 30 minutes or 45 minutes, and nobody came out. The weather was bad; it was starting to rain. One lady came out, the one that checks temperatures and symptoms for COVID-19. The lady told my girlfriend that the pharmacy in the clinic was closed so we cannot be helped. We need to come back. We just stood up and went home. My child got no help, no nurse came out, we were not called in. I did not (go back). Because if you go back then maybe it's the same." His sentiments were validated when we visited the clinic.

When we visited the clinic, the sister in charge shouted that she was too busy to see anyone, not aware we were already at her door. She continued with her work, while we stood asking a few questions. Her main concern was: "The service demand is too much" (*"Die lading is te groot"*). She said they manage as best they can with fewer nurses, which results in long waiting times. We found queues in every area of the clinic although it was already late afternoon. Nobody at the clinic was willing to comment on service provision.



## GOURITSMOND AND BIETOUVILLE

Part of the weekend was also spent on an unscheduled visit to Gouritsmond and Bietouville, in search of the boundary of the municipality. Gouritsmond was a sleepy, retirement town for the wealthy with very few people about. By contrast, just a few kilometres on the same access road, is a small township called Bietouville.

In Bietouville, two mothers told us that the **health services** mobile visits every Thursday. They need to go to a doctor in Albertinia and they can drive with the ambulance which does not incur costs. The nurses are friendly. Children attend **school** at Oker Primary or Albertinia High School by bus, which collects them at 6:30 am and returns them in the afternoon. The **social workers** come to visit specific families. There are **no prevention or development programmes** from the Department of Social Development. The child grants can be withdrawn from an ATM in the community.

A father from Bietouville shared: “I feel wonderful about being a father. But I see many children on the streets. It is as if their parents do not care for them. Children are on the street whole night, half of the night. That is not how it should be, especially for school children. The (parents) sit in their houses doing their things while their children are in the street” (“*Dis vir my wonderlik om n pa te wees. Maar dan sien ek op straat is baie kinders.*”).

*Dis as of hulle ouers nie omgee vir hulle nie. Kleinjies en grootes is heel nag of half nag op die strate. Dis nie eitlink wat moet gebeur mos nie. Veral nie moet n skoolkind nie. Die (ouers) sit in die huise en hulle goedjies besig terwyl die kinders op die strate is”).* This cohesive family seems to be very special, judging from the support they give to the children and youth in their family.

The Commissioner's impressions of the community are captured in the vignette below.



### The story of Renald and Caroline of Bietouville

Systems failure is best understood from real life stories of broken dreams. As the Commissioner for Children, I set out to find the communities at the edge of Hessequa Municipality and drove towards Gouritsmond. Just a few kilometres before Gouritsmond, on the same access road, we found the community of Bietouville. The first people we come across were youth seemingly high on drugs. We do a quick community drive through. A friendly family standing by their fence, waves at us. We drive around a corner and see an approximately 6-year-old boy aims and shoots a gun at a girl of similar age, a toy gun. But still this image haunts me. We drive full circle and arrive back at the house of the friendly family on a corner.

We find two young people sitting on plastic and makeshift chairs outside the house. Two ladies and one toddler, who is about to sleep, are standing by the fence, surveying, and engaging in the doings of other community members. We ask if we can chat for a bit. I leave the car parked on the road. Later, I am jokingly chastised by a community member and asked to move the car to the pavement. I do so, joking that I can't pay the R2000 fine she threatens me with.

I go to sit on the grass on the pavement in front of the two young people. They agree to help me understand their experiences of schooling. One wants to become a social worker and the other a doctor. Both left school after completing only Grade 8. Reno is 20 and works as a cleaner at a guest house and Carol is 18, and without employment. One of the aunts at the fence tells me one gets R120 for cleaning per day. Reno likes his employer; he says they encourage him to finish his schooling. He shows us the application forms for an online school which costs R12 000 per year. But we later hear his phone hardly works and we wonder how he will connect to online studies. He is hoping the ward councillor will give a solution for the payment to the online school.

They both attended Oker Primary School in Albertinia which goes until grade 8. The school bus collected them at 6:30am each day. When Reno finished Grade 8, he was already 18 years old. They did not want to accept him for Grade 9 at Albertinia High School, saying he was already too old. Carol says she was accepted into the high school. The high school principal encouraged her to stay at the hostel, but she refused because she could ride the bus in every day. When he insisted, she says she told him she would not come to school anymore. And she did not. I asked if she believed this decision served her well.



I said I would work with them to try to find all the government processes to re-integrate them into education. I suggested college. Reno noted he visited the college in Mossel Bay and was told he needs to have passed grade 9, at least. I recommend they look at other options for skills training and employment perhaps as a community health worker (for the aspirant doctor) and as child and youth care worker (for the aspirant social worker). I make a mental note to check if either of these requires matric as a minimum qualification.

They do not seem to be like the other young people in their community who are addicted to drugs. They have their family close by, loving and caring for them. Family support will go a long way to restoring their self-belief that they can live good lives. They will need it because their road ahead will not be without more challenges and disappointments. They do not have that precious grade 9 report. So, they will need to be positive, creative, and determined to find gainful employment and continue their education. Will they find the inner strength to continue to resist the negativity around them and focus inwards to their own development?

It is four months since our visit. Despite daily communication between myself and Renald, we seem to be no closer to a solution. We finally set our sights on trying to have them access the Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) system.

I call the ABET coordinator in the municipality who tells me there is a class in Riversdale but none in Albertinia, the closest town to Bietouville. It will cost Renald and Caroline R 2000 for transport per month. That is more than he earns.

The co-ordinator helpfully agrees that if they find a retired teacher, she will work with the teacher so that they can complete their course from their homes. They go off to Gouritsmond in search of a willing teacher. But they find none.

Despair sets in. Will this ever be possible? Should they just give up? I explain that I have raised their dilemma with the administrative and political head of education. They promise to investigate not having schools end at Grade 8 but rather at Grade 7 or 9 (as is the case in some rural areas). But this does not solve Reno and Carols dilemma.

He reverts to research into private education and talking with the ward counsellor. It is disheartening. Even with the best will in the world, nothing seems to work.



RIGHT: The Commissioner and a friendly family in Bietouville





ABOVE: The Commissioner with staff at ACVV, Riversdale

## KWANOKUTHULA

A social worker from a **child protection agency** in Riversdale facilitated a community visit to Kwanokhuthula which included one of the most informal housing settlements we encountered. We parked our cars near the local ECD centre, which seemed to have good infrastructure, but it was non-operational. We were able to engage some parents in the community. One father expressed his distrust in the Riversdale clinic, he said: **“people died there”**. Other community members talked with the social worker about identity documents needed by children who were born in other countries. The children in the community played with each other in the street and commented about how they get to school and which schools they attend. They seemed very happy in play. The visit to this community once again confirmed legacies of separate development.



## Analysis

### THE ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN ADDRESSING CHILD ABUSE

Children understood that government needs to step in when parents are unwilling or unable to care effectively for their children. They also understood that children had the right to live in safe and happy families. They were concerned about child abuse by parents. Some even articulated internalised feelings of deserving abuse. At some schools, there was a vociferous defense of the need for parents to discipline children with violence. Child abuse may have various negative impacts including placing children at risk for low self-esteem and educational difficulties.<sup>xv</sup>

More needs to be done to address violence against children — be it in their homes, schools, or communities.

Children recommended prevention programming to address the many challenges they face, including support to parents who need to care for their children in a nurturing manner.

## THE ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO ENSURE SCHOOLS ADDRESS INEQUALITY, VIOLATIONS OF DIGNITY AND DISCRIMINATION

The children at all schools who participated in the child rights workshops in the Hessequa Municipality referred to social justice concerns. They were acutely aware of the injustices in society and that some children were also discriminated against for matters relating to their circumstance or identity, even at their schools. When children experience discrimination, they are at risk of developing anxiety, depression, and a negative self-esteem<sup>xvi</sup>. They called on adults in the society at large to protect children from these experiences. It weighed so heavily on them, that many expressed they would be change makers when they reached adulthood and achieved success. Equality and dignity are the cornerstones of our South African constitutional democracy<sup>xvii</sup>, yet they seem to be the hardest rights to realise, especially by children.

## THE ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION IN ADDRESSING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF LEARNERS

Children at more than one school reported not being able to cope with schoolwork and the need for extra classes or mental health support. They found that schoolwork was difficult for them, and the pressure placed on them by the adults in their lives was placing them at risk of mental illness – there was specific mention of depression. They were feeling overwhelmed and exhausted calling for longer breaks during the day and longer vacation periods.

The lack of sufficient mental health services at schools has also been an issue raised by the Child Government Monitors, especially noting that these services are especially needed during COVID times. With the current COVID-19 pandemic and its associated stressors, children's mental health requires prioritisation and more attention than before<sup>xviii</sup>. Promoting mental wellbeing and protecting adolescents from adverse experiences and risk factors are critical for their current and future health and wellbeing<sup>xix</sup>.



RIGHT: The Commissioner and Mr. Flores Principal at Gerrit du Plessis High School



ABOVE: The Commissioner for Children

When engaging the Department of Education and Health, I realised these services were woefully underfunded and deprioritised. Yet, children keep saying that a wellness approach is integral to their ability to learn and cope.

### THE ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH IN HELPING PEOPLE UNDERSTAND THE VALUE OF NURSES

The Primary Health Care system is nurse-driven. Not many people know or realise this. Thus, children equate access to a good doctor as the measure of the success of the primary health care system. Nurses can do more to be better ambassadors of this system with a caring, approachable, and non-judgmental attitude. When people receive poor quality health care services, they may shy away from using the service<sup>xx</sup>. This could result in a greater burden of illness, placing more demand on an already struggling healthcare system. A culture shift within the health system, one where good health is a partnership between patient and health care provider.



### Key take home messages

- The narrative of innocent **childhoods** is not true, as adolescents are able to think abstractly and deeply about the world and their place in it.
- Children deserve good parents who are able to provide a **nurturing** home environment.
- Children should be seen as **partners** in governance and spaces to learn from their experiences must be created by government structures to reflect on service provision.
- The Commissioner for Children's office must be a reliable source of information, presenting the **authentic** voice of the child.



## Conclusion

Community Child Rights Workshops are proving to be a very effective means for the Commissioner to engage children and understand their lived experiences first-hand. The data collection and implementation methods may be adapted from area to area depending on what the COVID-19 health protocols permit. There are aspects of the data collection methods that ensures some data can be compared across municipalities.

In the Hessequa Municipality, the Commissioner for Children was able to visit schools, ECD centres, child protection agencies and sports facilities. To strengthen the monitoring duty of the Commissioner, rigorous tools will be developed to work more effectively. The investigations duty of the Commissioner is enabled by good relationships with government as enquiries and complaints can then be efficiently processed. Deeper child rights investigations will be conceptualised going forward. For example, the Commissioner intends to understand the situation of children in state care more fully.

Child participation work forms a strong basis for gathering qualitative information which can inform research outputs.

Community workshops are also an excellent means to advocate the promotion of child rights on community level with parents and service providers, lobbying these duty bearers to fulfil their responsibilities towards children. The reports from these workshops also provide good primary information on which the Commissioner can build or strengthen her advice or recommendations to the government departments for which she has oversight responsibility.

The critical question to answer, as the Commissioner's tenure progresses, is:

**What is needed in the system of governance and decision making to re-orientate child rights duty bearers — parents and government — to the expressed needs and interests of children?**





# Unique Dream Cards

HSL  
 My droom is om uit te stuij. Ek wil besigheid bedryf suk gesvolle Marcus Lemonis; Bill Gates te wees  
 bo my omstandighede in die inbeweeg om in man soos bv.  
 29 Maart 2021

Ek wil amerika toe gaan en vir die kinders afrikaans leer. Ek wil n onderwyser daar wees  
 Ek wil met n vliegtuig vlieg  
 gongriner

HSL  
~~Ek wil grom~~  
 - My droom is om n fashion Designer word.  
 - Wat n besigheid oorsce het met al my produkte.  
 Wat ek Ek wil ook met groot name werk soos tom Cruise, ens.



HSL  
Die droom van kinders in Riversdal  
 Om raak gesien te word in die omgewing.

Die beeld wat ek sien in Suid-Afrika is dat as iemand verby loop of ry net sal groet of iets mooi se soos hulle dag beter gaan.  
 En dat n mens nie bang moet wees om in die aard te gaan loop of draaf nie.  
 En dat as jy jou kar oop los dat die kar nie gesteeek sal word nie en dat jy nie bang sal wees as jy jou duur goet goed alleen los nie.  
 Oaktale

My Droom

My Droom is ek wil in space gaan ek wil sien wat is daar  
ek wil op die maand staan en kyk na die ster dan kan  
ek dit ~~versteel~~ versteel hoe lyk dit daar dit is mooi  
en die ster skyn en ek wil graag die ster was en  
ek wil dit saam bring as my vriende nie glo ek  
was daar nie.

slangrivier



7 onderskeidings in graad 12 slaag  
**Rekenmeester**

Universiteit van Pretoria.

Kaivos

Melkhoufontein

EK wil die werêld verken en n Rymkletsse word.

Albertinia

My droom is om  
die beste "youtuber"  
te wees.

Hsh om rond te loop sonder om bang te wees dat ek gevat gaan word en  
met seuns vriende te wees sonder dat mense dink dat ons saam is  
of uitgaan.

**EK wil n dokter  
word**

Kaivos



Albertinia:

My droom is om n Turkse aktrise te word en  
asook om Turkeytaal te praat. Ek wil ook  
n Wrestling vroue superster wees. Dit is  
my 2 drome.

53

Om te gaan werk  
sonder n graad

Kaivos

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**Commissioner  
for Children**  
OF THE WESTERN CAPE

**#littlevoicesMUSTcount  
#kleinstemmetjiesMOETsaakmaak  
#amazwiamancinciMAKAVAKALE**