



CHILD GOVERNMENT MONITORS:

Reflections on 2020 engagements and achievements

2 MARCH 2021



**Commissioner
for Children**
OF THE WESTERN CAPE

**#littlevoicesMUSTcount
#kleinstemmetjiesMOETsaakmaak
#amazwiamancinciMAKAVAKALE**



Acknowledgements

2020 Child Government Monitors

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Alessio Marcus

Amahle Somo

Ambrose Philips

Andiswa Fortuin

Ayabulwa Mhlaba

Ayakha Tono

Beuton Links

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Suggested citation:

Commissioner for Children. (2021). Child Government Monitors: Reflections on 2020 engagements and achievements. Office of the Western Cape Commissioner for Children.

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Executive Summary

On 1 June 2020 the first Western Cape Commissioner for Children was appointed into office. The duties of the Commissioner are to: (a) ensure that children are made aware of the powers and duties of the Commissioner; (b) ensure that children are informed of the ways in which they may communicate and obtain a response from the Commissioner; and (c) consult children and organisations working with children on the work to be undertaken by the Commissioner.

Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, direct engagement between children and the Commissioner was established utilising WhatsApp. The Commissioner named this forum of children, directly involved in the Office's programmes and governance, Child Government Monitors. The aim of this report is to document the Child Government Monitors initiative.

The aims of the Child Government Monitors initiative are to: ensure **children are partners** in the development of the Office of the Commissioner for Children from its inception; enable children to **guide the Commissioner** on the rights, needs and interests of children in the province; and provide opportunities for children to render **input into the programmes** of the Office. Child Government Monitors must be under the age of 18 years and are either nominated by: (1) child rights organisations, (2) organisations working with children; (3) elected by children in a community (where the Commissioner conducts a child rights workshop) to represent them; or are (4) self-nominated. A total of 45 Child Government Monitors were recruited as the first cohort.

On 4 June 2020, the Commissioner formed a WhatsApp group named 'WCCC government monitors'. This forum intended to introduce the Child Government Monitors to each



other and acts as a learning platform for the monitors. Every Friday from 5 - 7pm the monitors participate in training sessions focusing on the role of the Commissioner, child rights and violations, understanding governance, and social justice. Weekly engagements with the Commissioner resulted in monitors creating hashtags for social media and art and poetry. Submissions were made to governance institutions such as the United Nations, African Peer Review Mechanism and South African Parliament, participating in webinars, as well as initiating the #Cancel-TheRewrite Campaign.

Child participation lessons included utilising social media platforms to connect with children, children preferred fun and easy to digest representations of their positions, and that adults still require preparation for child participation. The key achievements by monitors consisted of forming friendships, developing an understanding of different child realities, and submissions to the Commissioner and other governance institutions, and participating in staff selection interviews. Freedom of speech and child participation were highlights of the Child Government Monitors initiative.

The aim of this report is to document the forum of children directly involved in the Office's programmes and governance. The Commissioner named this forum the Child Government Monitors.



Introduction



"I myself never imagined myself in a position where I could have a say in making a difference. It gave me a sense of what I truly am capable of, she saw my potential and made me realise that my voice along with many other children's voices do matter and that we should not be silenced."

– Aimee

The Western Cape Commissioner for Children established a mechanism for linking directly with children, since the inception of this Office on 1 June 2020. According to section 14(2) of Western Cape Commissioner for Children Act 2 of 2019 that governs the Office, one of the explicit duties of the Commissioner is to:

- ensure that **children are made aware** of the powers and duties of the Commissioner;
- ensure that **children are informed** of the ways in which they may communicate and obtain a response from the Commissioner; and
- **consult children and organisations** working with children on the work to be undertaken by the Commissioner.

Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, this mechanism for direct engagement between children and the Commissioner was established utilising the WhatsApp platform. The Commissioner named

this forum of children, directly involved in the Office's programmes and governance, Child Government Monitors.

This report presents the reflections on the method and achievements from the initial seven months of the Child Government Monitors initiative. It documents:

- aims of the initiative,
- methods of recruitment,
- first cohort of monitors,
- approach to engagements,
- content of training,
- submissions to the Commissioner for Children,
- submissions to other governance institutions,
- presentations on webinars,
- independent campaigns,
- child participation lessons learnt,
- key achievements and successes by Child Government Monitors, and
- monitors' reflections.



RIGHT: The Commissioner for Children with Child Government Monitors (from left) Alessio, Khanyisile, and Zubair.



BELOW: The Commissioner for Children with Child Government Monitors Vimbai (left) and Lukhanyo (right)



children in a community (where the Commissioner conducts a child rights workshop) to represent them; or are (4) self-nominated. The nominated children must be under 18 years old, the age of majority according to the Constitution of South Africa and international child rights legal instruments. The children were assigned responsibilities or engaged in activities according to their age and evolving capacities. Once Child Government Monitors reach the age of majority, they were given the option of continued work with the Office of the Commissioner as mentors. They were informed that their inputs would not be recorded as part of any output representing the 'voice of children'.

Aims of the initiative



"I love how we come together and share our knowledge."

– Saadiq

Children's right to participate in all decisions affecting their lives is one of the core principles of the international child rights frameworks articulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Commissioner for Children intends for children to be involved in all aspects of the Office.

The aims of the Child Government Monitors initiative are to:

- ensure **children are partners** in the development of the Office of the Commissioner for Children from its inception;
- enable children to **guide the Commissioner** on the rights, needs and interests of children in the province; and
- provide opportunities for children to render **input into the programmes** of the Office.

Children were recruited from child-led campaigns, nominated by child rights organisations for their leadership abilities, recruited by self-nomination to represent a particularly marginalised sector of children, and elected by children as representatives of small rural communities. The first recruitment method was approaching children from **child-led campaigns**; for example, learner leaders from Elsie's River High School initiated a campaign asking the President to restart the school year in 2021 because of the pandemic. These children were referred to the Office of the Commissioner by educators.

Another method of recruitment was reaching out to **child rights organisations** to nominate civic-minded children. Organisations, such as PeaceJam, were requested by WhatsApp or email to nominate children interested in working directly with the Commissioner on child rights and governance. The Commissioner directed an open invitation for nominations to the **child rights sector forums**, also operating as WhatsApp groups. From this request, a child identifying as transgender requested to join the Child Government Monitors to represent their experiences as a

Methods of recruitment

Child Government Monitors are either nominated by: (1) child rights organisations, (2) organisations working with children; (3) elected by



"I think the best part of being part of this group was being able to feel a connection with South Africa. As well being able to talk to like-minded peers who want to make a change. I love my friends, but I don't often talk about these things. Also, the fact that I am a part of a group that is making a change. Also, to be able to share my story."

– Xanny



The Commissioner for Children with Child Government Monitors Robin (left) and Vimbai (right)

gender non-conforming child. On these forums, two organisations, namely Rx Radio and the Disabled Children's Action Group, also nominated children with disabilities to connect with the Commissioner. This first round of nominations mostly included children from the urban area. However, some children were nominated from areas outside the City of Cape Town, including Stanford, Malmesbury, Knysna and Franschoek. When the Child Government Monitors became more comfortable with the Commissioner and understood the initiative's intention, they **nominated peers** they believed would suit the purpose. Children born in other countries, who experience xenophobic discrimination in South Africa, were also included in this first group.

A special invitation was extended to **Child and Youth Care Centres managers** to nominate children in State care. Due to the constraints of government restrictions on movement to manage the pandemic's effects, the recruitment drives yielded children mostly living in urban areas who had the resources to communicate with the Commissioner using their mobile phone or that of a legal guardian or parent.

Children born in other countries, who experience xenophobic discrimination in South Africa, were also included in this first group.

When movement restrictions lessened, the Commissioner travelled to two municipalities in the West Coast District Municipalities — Matzikama and Bergriver Municipalities. The visit included experiences of children living or schooling in Bitterfontein, Nuwerus, Kliprand, Rietpoort, Molsvlei, Putsekloof, Stofkraal, Redelinghuys, EEendekuil and Aurora. She conducted seven community **child rights workshops** and invited the nomination of at least two Child Government Monitors from each workshop. Children as young as ten years old were nominated as community representatives.

After at least three months of consistent engagement between the Commissioner and the Child Government Monitors, the Commissioner for Children promoted twelve (12) children to form her



Advisory Council. The criteria for monitors to be promoted into the **Advisory Council** include:

1. being a **child rights self-advocate** who is willing to draw on personal lived experience to improve law, policy, and practice;
2. being **committed to the institution building** and proactively suggesting ideas to improve the operations of the Office of the Commissioner for the Children;
3. apply their **special skills and talents** in the group (for e.g. analysing discussions); and
4. **representing the Child Government Monitors Group in other forums**. The Commissioner requested these children in the Advisory Council to participate in additional activities such as attending webinars to share their views on matters affecting children and give specific advice, for example, on the Commissioner's office site and staffing.

The first recruitment process resulted in the first cohort of 45 Child Government Monitors. However, some of the children indicated they were not interested in continuing with engagement due to their school workload or not being interested in the 'political' tone of engagements. Thus, after the first six (6) months, 42 Child Government Monitors still actively engaged with the Commissioner. Albeit in the main WhatsApp group 12 were most active in communications.



First group of monitors



“Meeting each other and standing together. And being the voice. Breaking away and chatting to bright people, full of life, who are strong and bold. And welcomed and accepted as your own.”

– Lukhanyo

Two members of the Representative Council of Learners (RCL) at Elsie's River High School and one prefect were the first Child Government Monitors. As the Head of her RCL, Chelsey initiated the letter-writing **campaign** to the President, to stop the school year because of the pandemic. Malika's letter went viral on social media, and she received a response from the Presidency noting they had received her letter by email. Jaylin was also part of the RCL but did not actively participate in this campaign, as she was not in matric. However, she motivated to the Commissioner that she would like to form part of the Child Government Monitors group as she was interested in child rights issues. These three girls officially became the first Child Government Monitors.

Child Government Monitors were selected from another **school-based project** based in Belhar. In 2019 and the start of 2020, Professor Barbara Boswell implemented writing skills workshops at the Belhar and Excelsior High schools with the Librarian of Belhar High School. The librarian nominated a few children from these groups.

Every year since 2011, a country-wide process ensues to elect **child parliamentarians**. This initiative was started by the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund (NMCF) and the national Department of Social

Development (DSD). They later partnered with Save the Children South Africa, the Parliament of South Africa, UNICEF, and the Department of Basic Education. Ms Monica Makaula, in the Office of the Western Cape Premier, describes the process as follows:

“Provinces work with non-governmental organisations (NGO's) under the guidance of DSD and municipalities to mobilise the children to attend a provincial workshop. In that provincial workshop, the children nominate their representatives for the (national) Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament.”

Immediately after the 2020 session of the Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament on 2 June 2020, Ms Makaula linked the Commissioner with the Western Cape cohort of child parliamentarians. The child parliamentarians requested this link to the Commissioner. This group was invited to join the Child Government Monitors and five (5) accepted this invitation. One of these child parliamentarians demonstrated extraordinary commitment and was referred to by the Commissioner as the 'Secretary General' for his role in group management.

The Commissioner attended a webinar on the right to education organised by Equal Education, an advocacy organisation working directly with learners who are self-known as Equalisers. After this session, one of the **Equalisers** approached the Commissioner by email to nominate herself as a Child Government Monitor.

Rx Radio is the only radio station in Africa with exclusively child reporters. Child reporters were patients of the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital (one of only a few specialised children's hospitals in Africa) where the radio station is based. This hospital is located in





"[Christina] maybe have a little personal touch, for example, asking people how they are, what's new or so. And then starting with a lesson."

– Jaylin

Rondebosch, Cape Town. Rx Radio nominated two child reporters to be included in the Child Government Monitors, including one child **living with disabilities**. The Disabled Children's Action Group was keen to include children with disabilities in the first cohort of Child Government Monitors, and they nominated one child representative.

The Commissioner approached Triangle Project to nominate children from the **LGBTQI+** community. They nominated children living outside of the City. After hearing about the call for nomination from their mother, another child, self-identifying as transgender, nominated themselves to be a Child Government Monitor. Their mother worked in the queer rights sector.

A child mental health **rights activist** contacted the Commissioner via her Twitter account to arrange a meeting. During the meeting to explain the work of the organisation he had started, Swim for change, the Commissioner offered him the opportunity to join the Child Government Monitors.

Other organisations providing nominations included **PeaceJam** (based in Ocean View) and **New World Foundation** (based in Lavender Hill).

A special request was directed at **Child and Youth Care Centre** Managers to invite children to join the Child Government Monitors. By the end of November 2020, three children participated by using direct messaging on WhatsApp on their mobile phones or the centre manager's phones.

At the end of October, the Commissioner conducted **child rights workshops** in rural communities. As a result of these workshops, eight more Child Government Monitors were elected by the children who participated in the community workshops.

A total of 45 Child Government Monitors were recruited as the first cohort. Three candidates later declined due to reasons including school workload. Of the 42 Child Government Monitors, 12 were most active in conversing with the Commissioner and were promoted to form her Advisory Council.



RIGHT: The Commissioner for Children and Alessio on visit to a music school.



Approach to engagements



“For me I would say meeting new people. Greeting a life thrilling experience in right and wrong in constitutional terms. Setting a print as a government monitor with the rest on the Group and the Commissioner.”

– Vimbai

On 4 June 2020, the Commissioner formed a **WhatsApp group** named **‘WCCC government monitors’**. This forum intended to introduce the Child Government Monitors to each other and as a learning platform. It built rapport and a trust relationship and between the children and the Commissioner. The Commissioner is the only adult in the WhatsApp group. Children who needed to use the mobile phones of adults were not included in the group to ensure that children were protected from adults who were not vetted to work with children. Nor were children in State care included in the WhatsApp group, this was to protect their identity. However, when the Commissioner communicated with children by direct messaging, their views were shared by the Commissioner on the group forum. This group’s communications are primarily conducted in English. When children from rural communities joined as Child Government Monitors, the Commissioner established another WhatsApp group forum named ‘Afrikaans Kind Monitors’. The preferred language of communication differed from the first group and these group discussions were conducted in Afrikaans. Some of these Children Government Monitors living in the rural areas also used email to write to the Commissioner, for example, using a government E-centre based in Rietpoort.

Since 15 June 2020, the Commissioner scheduled a two-hour discussion/training session every Friday evening from 5 – 7 pm with agreement from the Child Government Monitors. These sessions served as a regular meeting space for the first cohort of children working with the Commissioner. The WhatsApp group provided a platform to inform monitors about the

The WhatsApp group provided a platform to inform monitors about the establishment of the Office, share an understanding of child rights issues and concerns, and to educate about governance.

establishment of the Office, share an understanding of **child rights issues** and concerns, and to educate about **governance**. The Child Government Monitors soon understood the purpose and nature of engagement between themselves and the Commissioner.

On 2 June 2020, a Child Government Monitor articulated their first formal submission to the Commissioner. The first submissions solicited in the WhatsApp group was tendered by Chelsey Botha- a poem on her fears about returning to school during the pandemic. The next submissions from the group resulted from a task set by the Commissioner during a training session. These submissions were in the form of **artwork, poetry** and **position pieces** on equality and dignity rights. Over time, the discussions became more topical and responsive to the opportunities for engagement in governance. The Commissioner would then request those skilled at poetry to produce specific topical inputs or ask a skilled writer in the group (whom she referred to as the ‘editor-in-chief’) to pull together position pieces as a topical submission. Child Government Monitors soon became familiar with the cycle of identifying an opportunity to participate in governance, conducting a focused discussion (sometimes spanning several weeks), and compiling submissions (either to the Commissioner or via the Commissioner to another institution). By the end of the first six months, the first cohort of Child Government Monitors had become adept at producing submissions.

Content of training



“Everything, starting from learning about the government. Learning about children’s rights. Having our little voices heard. Learning and understanding other people’s opinions. Meeting new people with great minds. Meeting Christina, of course.”

– Amahle

The training of the Child Government Monitors started on 4 June 2020 via WhatsApp group chat. They agreed to meet with the Commissioner every Friday from 5-7pm for training sessions. Initial training sessions focused on the **role of the Commissioner for Children**. Subsequent training sessions focused on: **child rights, understanding how government works, social justice issues, understanding legal instruments framing child rights, and topical child rights violations**.

The topics were proposed by either the Commissioner or the children in the group depending on current interests. There was no real structure to the training programme. When the Commissioner was unable to attend a scheduled training session, the children conducted sessions on their own. The training initiative will need to be analysed and a more set training designed to make it easier for new children to join the group and feel as if they are on par with the rest of the group.

Training Sessions

Session 1:

- Getting to know you
- Creating Hashtags: Rights and Quality Education

Session 2:

- What's in a name?
- Group Work: Rights Hashtags translation and child rights

Session 3:

- Constitutional rights
- Government Structure Part 1: Branches and Levels
- Human rights: Xenophobia, discrimination, violence

Session 4:

- Rights Poetry Submission
- Brand creation of the Office
- Government structure Part 2

Session 5:

- Creating a social media campaign: Learning in COVID-19
- What is the role of the Commissioner for Children?
- Adult-child communication

Session 6:

- Government budget terms

Session 7:

- Vote on the brand concept colour scheme
- Child participation in faith communities
- Budget Practice

Session 8:

- Child Poverty, risk factors, social grants

Session 9:

- Mainstream and special schools
- Definition and functions of RCL and SGB
- School Quintile System
- Employment of educators
- Public ordinary schools vs Independent schools
- Choosing an Office slogan

Session 10:

- Equality in Education Part 1

Session 11:

- Equality in Education Part 2

Session 12:

- Slogan feedback from Parliament

Session 13:

- Advocacy Activity: How can children's voices reach decision makers?

Session 14:

- Dignity rights

Session 15:

- Sexuality: Healthy and Unhealthy relationships

Session 16:

- Sexuality: Sex, gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation



Session 17:

- Alternative care

Session 18:

- Sexuality: Sexuality education in schools
- Submission on RCL and sexuality education in schools

Session 19:

- Group led session: school, lessons learnt in CGM training

Session 20:

- Alternative care and fatherhood

Session 21:

- Parenting and child rights
- Medium term budget policy

Session 22:

- Meeting: Office update

Session 23

- Parenting, discipline, and child rights

Session 24:

- Group-led debate: Is an unemployed parent also a good parent?

Session 25:

- Matric re-write
- Stress management strategies

Session 26:

- Successful campaigns

Session 27:

- Reflections of the CGM Initiative

Submissions to the Commissioner for Children

DISCUSSIONS AND DEBATES

Scheduled weekly Friday evening engagement sessions with the Commissioner led to vibrant discussions and debates which resulted in understandings of child rights and governance. These debates and discussions allowed the Child Government Monitors to chat through their knowledge of the issues presented and sometimes arrive at a consensus position. Consensus positions are then formatted and submitted to the Commissioner. The section below details the topics covered in the weekly engagement sessions with the Commissioner. Session topics were developed organically, depending on the interests of the children at the time.

HASHTAGS

One of the first key decisions for the Office of the Commissioner's governance was clarifying the mission statement. Child Government Monitors developed the key hashtags for the Office's Twitter feed which included **#littlevoicesMUSTcount**, **#OutSpokenTeens**, and **#DoYouRealiseMyRights**. These hashtags guided the campaigns of the Commissioner's Office. One of the hashtags in all three official languages of the province was elevated above the rest, becoming the Office's mission statement:

#littlevoicesMUSTcount

#kleinstemmetjiesMOETsaakmaak

#amazwiamancinciMAKAVALE



LOGO

The Commissioner's Office logo development process included other children in addition to the Child Government Monitors. The Child Government Monitors had the final say on the colour scheme, and notably outvoted the Commissioner's choice. The story of the logo development below was written up by the Commissioner as a blog post.

The logo was conceptualised from a child's perspective.

THE STORY OF OUR LOGO

On a quest to find a symbol for the Office of the Western Cape Commissioner for Children, the Commissioner studied the law that informs the powers and duties of the Office — basically her job description. From that she wrote a one paragraph children's story which captured the main ideas of what she wanted in the symbol.

With this in hand she ventured off to find collaborators. She asked the child government monitors team and the government design team to help design a bright and lovely graphic that will capture children's imaginations - a playful framing was required. The designers sat down and developed some concept logos.

The Commissioner's mission was to have as many children have their say. So she asked her allies in the child rights sector to reach out to #littlevoices to comment on the concept logos. Some of them even involved all the children in their families. The Commissioner was so happy when #littlevoices came pouring in from everywhere; from the far reaches of the province!

As each child selected their favourite option, the most beloved designs was revealed. All the opinions, inputs and comments were carefully analysed. The Commissioner then selected the logo that was the most popular and that included three of the children's most treasured elements: 1) children reaching for their dreams and conquering their circumstances; 2) children connected to each other or playing or acting in concert with each other; and 3) an adult supporting, loving, protecting them.

So a logo was conceptualised from a child's perspective, including children and chosen by children in the space of two weeks since the beginning of July 2020. Child participation made easy, fun and real!



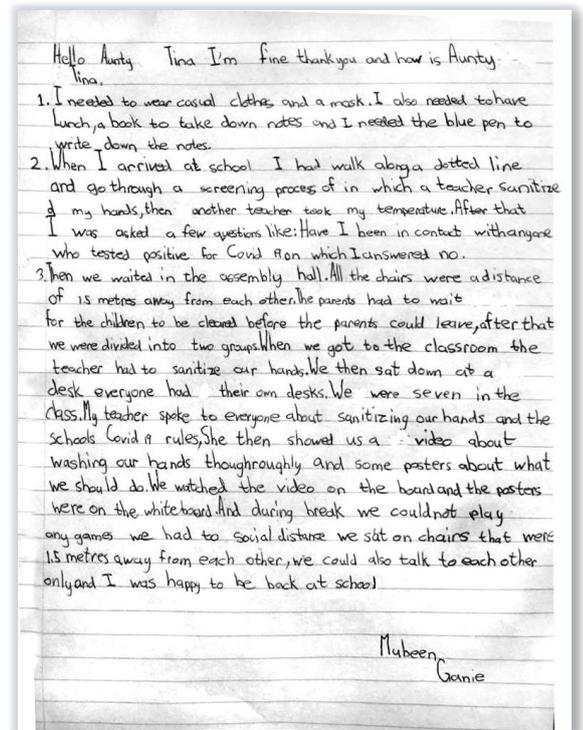
**Commissioner
for Children**

ART AND POETRY

Some Child Government Monitors expressed themselves well in **creative arts**. For example, Chelsey Botha wrote poems about her fears during the pandemic and returning to school for the first time during the pandemic. Lukhanyo Sonyamba wrote emotive poetry about child abuse and Youth Day. Chelsey and Lukhanyo wrote a collaborative poem on seeking help when experiencing child abuse. The Commissioner requested all Child Government Monitors to apply themselves to writing poetry or creating artwork to capture sentiments from one of the sessions relating to equality and dignity. The poetry and artwork were framed as a competition. Other children also submitted written work and art to the Commissioner. These poetry submissions can be found on the Twitter Account.

BELOW: Erin Balie's Art
RIGHT: Mubeen Ganie's
experience of is first day
at school.

EXAMPLES OF SUBMISSIONS





“So, what was best for me was the freedom of speech and expression. We could speak our minds and voice our opinions. Even though we were not always listened to in society. In this Group, Christina (CC) valued everything we had to contribute. Another thing... I never knew I had a poeting [poetry] side to me and through this group I could explore and express my creativity.”

– Ambrose



RIGHT: Child Government Monitors- Zubair (left), Khanyisile (middle), and Alessio (right)- taking notes during staff interviews.

SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILING

After 100 days in Office, on 9 September 2020, the Commissioner launched the official **Facebook (Childrens Commissioner WC)** and **Twitter (@ChildCommWC)** pages. These social media accounts keep the public informed of the activities in the Office. At first, the Commissioner used her personal Twitter page (@NomdoChristina) to update the public about the Office's activities. A key feature of these accounts was to post the submissions received by children and profiling of the Children's Advisory Council members. The following profiles of Advisory Council members were posted on the Facebook account with the fully informed consent from parents and the children: Alessio Marcus (21 September 2020), Chelsey Botha and Lukhanyo Sonyamba (29 September 2020), Vimbai Watamba (7 October 2020), Xanny Stevens (12 October 2020), Jaylin Badenhorst (14 October 2020), Saadiq Daniels (20 October 2020), and Christopher Kleynhans (5 November 2020).

STAFF SELECTION

In consultation with the People Management Department in the Premier's Office, the Commissioner arranged for Child Government Monitors to be involved in the Office's **interview panels** for staff placements. On 8 and 9 December, seven (7) Child Government Monitors could attend the online interviews from the Commissioner's home office. They were able to inform first the Commissioner and then the interview panel of their impressions of each candidate. The Priority Unit commended the Monitors for their honest input on prospective staff members (commendation recorded on Facebook on 9 December 2020).

The Priority Unit commended Monitors for their honest input on prospective staff members





Submissions to other governance institutions

AFRICAN PEER REVIEW MECHANISM (APRM)

As most Child Government Monitors still spend most of their lives at school, it was natural for them to discuss the **schooling system** during their weekly sessions. Guest inputs arranged by the Commissioner informed their discussions. These inputs took the form of voice notes or newspaper articles from key education experts, for example, Ona Xolo from the Legal Resources Centre and Astrid Coombes from Equal Education Law Centre. This resulted in four education-focused inputs: **Equity and Equality in Education, Inclusive Sex Education, Mental Health in Schools**, and **Representative Council of Learners**. One of the Advisory Group members was designated as Editor-in-Chief by the Commissioner recognising their ability and role in formatting and editing these submissions into one-page collages. Equity and Equality in Education.



"My favourite submission was inclusive sex ed!"

– Christopher

Here are some sentiments reflected in the education-focused submissions:

"Education is more than just education; it is about the **self-worth** of every child, it is about embracing **diversity**, and it is the power to create a commanding future. But education equity is above all of these. Education **equity** is Ubuntu because it reminds us that we are only human through the humanity of others."

"Based on youth opinions within our group and other young people, **inclusive sexuality education** will support youth and can lead to more fulfilled lives."

"As youth, we must promote lively **conversations** around mental health and show our peers that we care about them."

REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL OF LEARNERS

The Youth Specialist Commissioner on the National Planning Commission invited the Child Government Monitors to participate in the South African Institute for International Affairs Youth African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) submission. The Child Government Monitors tendered the four education system submissions as their contribution to this project. The final submission will be sent to the South African government's APRM coordinating committee in February 2021.

UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (UNCRC)

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child called for children's input into the **List of Issues Prior to Reporting**. The Commissioner asked each Child Government Monitor to distil a question for the South African Government. She then collated the submissions. These questions were translated from English into Spanish and French (by children's sector partners). The cover letter (explaining the link between the Western Cape Commissioner for Children and the Child Government Monitors) and their questions and submissions were uploaded onto the Child Connect website on 19 December 2020.





“The best part for me was that we were actually able to have our opinions heard in things that I never even knew about like the Children’s Act and the post about sexuality etc. I really liked that we all came together to bring across a message that we all believed in and that people took note of us. I loved that we were involved in major things in the country.”

– Zubair



SOUTH AFRICAN PARLIAMENT

The Portfolio Committee on Social Development in the Parliament of South Africa issued an invitation for inputs into the **Children's Act Amendment Bill B18-2020** which aims to update the entire Children's Act 38 of 2005 as amended in 2007. This was an ideal opportunity to be involved in a law reform process on a matter that directly affected them. The Child Government Monitors attended preparatory sessions online with the Children's Institute to inform their submission. However, they resorted to their comfortable discussion and debate method to formulate ideas towards the Amendment Bill. The focus of their concerns was the relationship between parents and their children, and when the government should step in to rescue children from abusive parents.

The Commissioner for Children asked one of the Advisory Group members to collate the inputs of the Child Government Monitors under headings. The headings were also used to guide other Child Government Monitors who were not part of the main WhatsApp group (as they did not have mobile phones). They tendered their inputs by email. Three Child Government Monitors (who are children in State care) also managed to send their inputs under the key headings provided. The Commissioner was then able to formulate and tender a submission, checking with the Child Government Monitors before determining the key messages. The submission was tendered from the Western Cape Commissioner for Children and the Child Government Monitors, working with her Office.

PRESENTATIONS ON WEBINARS

The Child Government Monitors were invited to participate in webinars with the Commissioner including a Youth Day webinar with the **Premier**, and **Iziko Museums** webinar on Heritage Day. The Commissioner was requested to make an input on child participation in **faith communities**. She engaged the Child Government Monitors and three provided input on questions set by the Commissioner. These inputs represented three different faith perspectives – Christianity, Islam and African traditional religions. Transcribed answers were read into a webinar. This input was so impactful that the Commissioner was asked to share these inputs in an international webinar. Two of the three children were able to read and share their inputs at this international seminar.

INDEPENDENT CAMPAIGNS

Two Child Government Monitors (who were completing their final matric examinations) approached the Commissioner about the government's unprecedented decision to have matriculants rewrite leaked papers. The matter was discussed in a Friday session. By the end of that Friday session on 4 December 2020, the Child Government Monitors had articulated their position. The position was edited and formatted into a collage. Another Advisory Group member created a poster. They titled the campaign- **#CancelTheRewrite**. On Sunday, 6 December 2020, the Commissioner shared this with key education sector advocates. The Child Government Monitors released their poster and collage launching their campaign on social media. Other education sector players responded to the campaign by developing their own positions. The matter was also aired in court by an education union and specific children represented by a strategic

litigation organisation. By Friday 11 December 2020, the urgent court appeal succeeded and the court

overturned the government's decision to rewrite. The Child Government Monitors were thrilled by their contribution to this campaign.

Monitor's #CancelTheRewrite Graphic



"For me, influencing the movement of the cancellation of the rewrite. That was, for me, amazing and historic."

– Ambrose



Child participation lessons learnt

The main lessons emanated from the adaptation of engagements with children to fit **online platforms**. Social media platforms were used to connect with children.



“We learned so much in this group! We learned about child participation and were also allowed to give our opinion about the fact that child participation processes never get followed but should be followed.”

– Alessio

- The Child Government Monitors WhatsApp group discussions needed to establish the same rapport and trust **relationships** as in person engagements. The Commissioner opted for an organic (go with the flow) approach to discussions and debates with children at a regular time each week. This created the structure for them to develop an understanding of child rights governance and develop child rights positions.
- Social media also provided new ideas for **activities** such as developing hashtags which became a novel, new-age formulation for a mission statement that is child-friendly.
- Consultations with a broader **spectrum** of children became possible online. Child rights organisations partnered with the Commissioner and requested their adult facilitators to generate diverse input into the selection of a logo design for the Office.
- Publicly **profiling** Children's Advisory Group members on social media acknowledged their invaluable contributions to the Office. The Commissioner engaged with parents to decide on this full reveal of children's identities online.

The second lesson was children preferred **fun and easy** to digest representations of their positions.

- **Art and poetry** were effective ways for children to express their feelings on complex topics.
- Submissions in the form of one-page collages or **posters** were the preferred child-friendly format for positions developed by the Child Government Monitors.

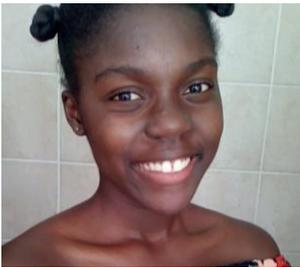
The third lesson is that **adults still require preparation for child participation**. The Commissioner built facilitated engagements between adults and children by creating child-friendly mechanisms for children to be involved in governance processes.

- **Advocacy** was needed with government structures to include children in the recruitment of staff which is considered a highly technical exercise.
- Formal submissions to governance institutions still sometimes needed to comply with set **submission requirements** and the Commissioner worked to translate the inputs from Child Government Monitors into required templates.
- Children were encouraged to represent their views in their own **child-friendly** formats, where possible, rather than try to understand adult submission formats.
- **Systems change** is needed for children to represent their own perspectives.





Key achievements by the Child Government Monitors



“As Roosevelt once said great minds discuss events... I am honoured to be surrounded by young, intelligent and broad-minded people that are making power moves.”

– Mwilu

- Strong **friendship** bonds formed in the group.
- Developing an **understanding** of different child realities.
- Presenting viewpoints and reaching **consensus**, as well as developing tolerance for disagreements.
- Poem submission to the Commissioner on the first day back at school during a pandemic on Twitter (Chelsey, 2 June 2020).
- Poem submission to the Commissioner for child protection week on Twitter (Lukhanyo, 11 June 2020).
- Poem submission to the Commissioner on COVID pandemic fears (Chelsey, 11 June 2020).
- Campaign **hashtags** developed for Office of the Commissioner for Children in 3 official languages (15 June 2020).
- Poem submission to the Commissioner for National Youth Day (Lukhanyo, 16 June 2020).
- Commissioner for Children Office logo approved (20 July 2020).
- Child Government Monitors' inputs were shared in a **webinar** on 'Faith Communities Responding to Children during COVID-19' pandemic (5 August 2020).
- Poetic reflections on the Commissioner for Children's Office as a platform for child voices (Ambrose, 13 August 2020, Chelsey, 9 August 2020, Lukhanyo, 9 August 2020).
- Museum webinar – "Generation Equality: Realising Women's Rights for an Equal Future" on 9 August 2020 (Lukhanyo, Chelsey and Ambrose attended).
- Child Government Monitors provided advice on potential **Office site** of the Commissioner for Children (Jaylin, 14 October 2020).
- **Advisory Council Members** featured on the Commissioner for Children's Facebook page (Christopher 5 November 2020, Saadiq 20 October 2020, Xanny 12 October 2020, Vimbai 7 October, Alessio 21 September 2020).



RIGHT: Jaylin and the Commissioner for Children





“Without children being involved in what is going on around them, how will children’s voices be heard? So, I think that we should involve children in everything that involves them.”

– Ambrose

- **Equity and equality in education** submissions to the Commissioner for Children (4 November 2020).
- **Inclusive sex education** submission to the Commissioner for Children (7 November 2020).
- **Mental Health in Schools** submission to the Commissioner for Children (8 November 2020, first featured 14 September on the Commissioner for Children’s Facebook page).
- **List of Issues Prior to Reporting (LOIPR)** to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (19 November 2020).
- Education submission to the **South African Institute for International Affairs** towards a submission to the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) (19 November 2020).
- Child Government Monitors featured in a **Mail and Guardian newspaper** article, Malika and Saadiq (20 November 2020).
- Child Government Monitors and Western Cape Commissioner for Children’s **Children’s Act Amend-ment Bill submission** to Parliament of South Africa (27 November 2020).
- **Gender Based Violence Poetry** featured on Rx Radio, by Chelsea and Lukhanyo (28 November 2020), First featured on Commissioner for Children’s Facebook page on 29 September 2020).
- Child Government Monitor accompanies Commissioner for Children on a **monitoring and education visit** to a children’s music academy as part of job shadowing, Alessio (3 December 2020).
- Child Government Monitors are included in **staff interviews** for the Office of the Commissioner for Children, 7 monitors attended (8-9 December 2020).
- Initiated a **#CancelTheRewrite campaign** (7-11 December 2020).



Conclusion

The Western Cape Commissioner for Children commenced her term of office during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Mandated with the duty to **engage children**, the Commissioner developed a **strategy to connect** with children primarily on social media. The main lessons learnt from conducting engagements on a **WhatsApp** platform is the imperative for an informal tone to build a **rapport and bond** with the children which would happen more naturally and be easier to do in a face-to-face engagement and that children should guide the choice of topic for discussion. The Commissioner led the **training sessions** by framing questions or preparing expert inputs into the sessions. Once, the Child Government Monitors became more focused and adept at topical conversations, the Commissioner requested them to write **position**

papers which were later developed into formal submissions, either to the Commissioner or another governance institution. Children were encouraged to make **formal submissions** in the form of, for example, **art, poetry,** and handwritten **essays** which were eventually formatted into one-page collages which was the preferred presentation style. The Commissioner informed Child Government Monitors when opportunities existed to make key **inputs to national and international child rights governance institutions.**

BELOW: The Commissioner for Children with children at a community child rights workshop.





**Commissioner
for Children**
OF THE WESTERN CAPE

**#littlevoicesMUSTcount
#kleinstemmetjiesMOETsaakmaak
#amazwiamancinciMAKAVAKALE**