

# Building excellence through capacity building

## Identifying needs and priorities to improve quality

### INTRODUCTION

Early on in the work of the After School Game Changer (AS GC), we acknowledged that the quality of after school programmes in the province was about as good as the quality of the practitioners who provide the service. As such, in recognising the central role of those on the frontline, the AS GC team focused its attention on supporting the growth of practitioners' capacity and on helping to build systems to ensure that they will have the right support to excel.

Emerging from the first NGO Community of Practice event, hosted by The Learning Trust in 2016, it was clear that a shared Code of Conduct – standardising the protocols that govern how we work – was the first step in a bigger journey to professionalise the sector.

While the Code of Conduct was being developed, feedback from the sector indicated a need for effective tools to ensure psycho-social support to learners. For that project, we partnered with the DG Murray Trust to design, develop and pilot this module, aptly named, *From Surviving to Thriving*.

Core to the AS GC team's drive to understand the sector and what the programme offering entailed, we independently assessed government-run programmes, and co-developed an NGO assessment tool with The Learning Trust. What emerged from these assessments was that, unlike sports coaches who often took part in leagues and clubs themselves, very few of the practitioners leading creative arts programmes were artists in their own right. This realisation led the team to partner with the Baxter Theatre and ASSITEJ SA to offer Creative Arts Practitioner Training to the extended education sector.

These various interventions and offerings will all be integrated to some degree into the most recent

addition to the training suite, the Extended Education Practitioner Training Programme. This NQF Level 6 accredited qualification is aimed at acknowledging the exceptional work achieved in extended education across the province.

The ultimate goal of all this training is a pipeline of training opportunities – from ad hoc thematic workshops through to doctoral studies. Common to all programmes that the AS GC team is working on is the idea that by empowering practitioners through training, learners benefit. Similarly, training further assists with the professionalisation of the sector, leads to better quality programmes, builds capacity, results in greater coordination and helps to create networks of support. Read more about each of the training opportunities below.

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## PRACTITIONER CODE OF CONDUCT

When the After School Game Changer first began interacting with practitioners who provide extended day learning for learners in the Western Cape, one thing became clear. While many of these practitioners - drawn from schools, NGOs and other community organisations - had developed amazing child protection, social media, and other related policies, these had not been pulled together and shared. In addition, many other organisations and their staff who have a long history of working in the after school space, felt that they did not have the “required protocols” in place. An additional concern was how to define the best practice around those protocols. After extensive research and consultation, we drew up a Code of Conduct for Practitioners and Learners that informs our base training. For access to the Code of Conduct, please visit our website, or download it by clicking [here](#).



## FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

After school practitioners are closely observed by learners and, therefore, have to be aware of and in control of their own emotions. We partnered with the DG Murray Trust to assist practitioners to manage their own behaviour, relate to learners with confidence as well as to create an environment that is safe, inclusive and fun. We created *From Thriving to Surviving - A Handbook for Nurturing Learners' Social and Emotional Wellbeing in After-School Programmes*. While this handbook has already proven to be a valuable stand-alone tool, it was piloted with 24 practitioners working in two groups: one in the Cape Town metro and the other in the Winelands region. Training blocks were held during July and October, with a final debriefing session taking place in November.

During the training, practitioners were led to discover their own strengths and qualities. They learned to

prioritise their own social and emotional wellbeing by becoming self-aware, and learning skills such as self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making.

The emotional wellbeing of learners is particularly important since they are at the centre of any after school programme. Participants were shown ways to structure their programmes in a way that promotes the development of social and emotional skills in learners, as well as ways to address issues affecting their learners such as bullying and trauma. Practitioners were also advised on how to work with learners of different age groups - between 9 and 16 - based on their stage of development.

During the course and in the handbook, participants are introduced to a number of resources to enhance their after school programme. Those in the pilot

study were offered monthly unstructured face-to-face mentorship, and trauma counselling was made available through a third-party service provider. However, only a small number of participants made use of the trauma counselling services.

Feedback from participants has been very positive. “I recently did a motivational speech, and I told everyone about what I learnt at the training and mentoring. Especially about the training and how to relax yourself,” one said. “I don’t come from an educational level, but now I feel equipped about what to do and when to do it,” the same participant added.

Since its launch earlier this year, the handbook has become a popular resource for after school practitioners and is adaptable to anyone working with children. The handbook contains checklists, exercises and information, as well as case studies to help practitioners deal with common and less common situations that arise during their programmes. Contact details, such as who to call on should further assistance like counselling be required, is also included.

“I really like the title of the Handbook: ‘surviving to thriving’ this captured me ... I used it the other day, I went through one of the stories for the students and they found it inspiring. I told them that we are struggling now, but if you endure, you will thrive, you need to work hard and you will thrive,” another participant offered.

According to Chiara Baumann, Innovation Manager of the DG Murray Trust, “Despite many practitioners having years of experience, there were a number of fundamental light bulb moments that need to be instilled from the start when working with children.” She explained that the need for additional training and support became clear during the course of this training – specifically with regard to more information on referral pathways and assistance resources, intensive training on how to respond to trauma in others and more information on Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

“Going forward, it is important that specific criteria be developed for suitable practitioner trainers. It is recommended that it is someone who has a deep theoretical understanding of mental health and wellbeing, and grasps principles of emotional intelligence, combined with practical experience of working with children and adults in adverse contexts,” Ms Baumann recommended.

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## CREATIVE ARTS

When we assessed the government after school programmes available in no-fee and low-fee schools last year, we found that while sports coaches often practice at a level of mastery and skill, this was not the case with the arts. As a result, Western Cape learners in these schools receive at times inconsistent or inadequate arts training. We, therefore, looked to ignite the passion of arts coaches already in the system. This we would do by working with them for a year to improve the quality of their instruction, and by offering a showcase opportunity for them and their learners.

Earlier this year, along with facilitating partner, ASSITEJ SA, International Association for Theatre for Children and Young People, we held two residential training blocks for approximately 60 practitioners from all over the province. The first block occurred during the Cradle of Creativity Festival in May, while the second round of training took place in July at the WC Sport School.

The training covered all aspects of theatre, including creating characters and characterisation, themes, structure and plot, music and dance. Augmenting these, were sessions on improvisation, choreography and tips for directors. The training was supplemented by a handbook, the *ASGC Playmaking Manual*, and mentorship between training blocks.

Groups are currently working to showcase to their small cluster school groups. In the new year, they will

showcase to their community and in March 2018, the best showcases will take part in the Zabalaza Theatre Festival at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town.

Talking about her learners practising for the showcase, participating coach Nandipha Sandlana had this to say: “It encourages goal setting in our classes and helps our youth to end the year with a feeling of academic and other achievement.”

Yvette Hardie, Director of ASSITEJ SA, agreed: “Working with the After School Game Changer project has been a very worthwhile project for ASSITEJ SA, as we believe in the power of the arts to transform the lives of children and young people. For most children and young people, having a skilled, passionate coach to inspire them in the arts becomes a gateway to potential growth and development as a person. By equipping coaches with skills to deliver on drama, dance and music workshops with their groups, we have seen a growing confidence and sense of empowerment in members of the team, and in the children they reach.”

“We hope that we will be able to further invest in building an arts-rich culture in communities through networking between coaches and schools, and finding and developing local showcase opportunities, so that children and youth are able to share their enthusiasm and passion for the arts in local forums throughout the year,” Ms Hardie added.



## AFTER SCHOOL PRACTITIONER TRAINING QUALIFICATION

Kicking off with an initial cohort of 57 participants from across the province, the Extended Education Practitioner Training Programme, also known as the After School Practitioner Course is the latest training introduced this year – launched on 19 November. This course is the fruit of an exciting and meaningful partnership between the Western Cape Government, Community Chest, Stellenbosch University and Rutgers University (USA). The aim of the NQF Level 6 accredited qualification is to equip practitioners to design and execute quality programmes against an agreed set of norms and standards.

The 18-month certificate course is hosted at Stellenbosch University. The programme consists of five residential blocks of 4-5 days each, as well as assignments in participants' own time. The focus is on the development of problem-solving, decision-making, communication, administration and project management skills – in complex and varied environments.

Speaking at the launch of the Extended Education Practitioner Training Programme, Mr Brent Walters, Head of Department for the Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport (DCAS) said that while the AS GC has been running for a number of years, during which time training was done on an ad hoc basis, “We now believe that we will be better able to service the space by professionalising the sector.” Introducing

the cohort, he added: “Our first participants have come through a rigorous process of meritorious selection to be part of a pioneering exercise in the history of the region.”

Mr Walters concluded his speech by saying: “As the future beckons, we need to remain at the forefront of developing role models for others to emulate, but our bigger challenge is in getting our young people engaged in something constructive whether they are excellent at it or not ... as long as we can create the passion, the desire, the belief, the focus and the dream, we will be doing our duty to build South Africa ... one young person at a time.”

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