



An introduction to the Early Learning Resource Unit (ELRU)

Our Vision

Building tomorrow, today for every child.

Our Mission

Building tomorrow, today by facilitating better child outcomes for children in vulnerable communities through effective early intervention programmes.

About Us

The Early Learning Resource Unit (ELRU) is a non-governmental organisation that specialises in the delivery of quality Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes in impoverished communities of South Africa. We aim to improve the cognitive development and executive functioning skills of young children through integrated service delivery in order to increase their attendance and success at school.

Since 1978 we have been a pioneer for the rights of children. Our goal is to achieve universal coverage and capacitate the primary caregiver to ensure that all children ages 0-6 living in poor communities have access to quality ECD services via an ELRU programme.

ELRU has developed a holistic model of intervention that focuses on pulling services together via partnerships and collaboration and therefore facilitates access to the full 'Essential Package' of services (nutrition, health, social services, and stimulation for early learning) which is delivered through our:

- Home-visiting Family and Community Motivator (FCM) Programme which covers the first 1000 days (conception to age 2)
- Community-based Playgroup Programme (age 3-5)
- Whole Centre Development Programme (age 0-6)
- Training and capacity building material

Through these programmes, vulnerable children are given a good start in life with the opportunity to thrive.



Our Approach to ECD

By capacitating the adults through ELRU Programmes, children are surrounded by circles of support that are age-appropriate and stage-specific, from conception to the time children enter grade R.

ELRU's fundamental focus is on the urgent and immediate needs of the vulnerable child that will support their social, physical, emotional and cognitive development and wellbeing for life. Our belief is that the parent is the first teacher, and as a child's responsiveness begins within the womb, every interaction is a learning opportunity and cannot afford to be wasted.

Our model focusses on the primary caregiver. ELRU's comprehensive training and capacity building interventions equip pregnant women, mothers and fathers, facilitators, ECD practitioners and Principals with the support they need to nurture and shape the children in their care.

Due to the risk, sensitivity and rapid growth rate during the first six years of life, access to nutrition, health, social services, stimulation for early learning and caregiver support are crucial for holistic development. Collectively, these elements are referred to as the 'Essential Package', in alignment with the SA National Integrated ECD Policy. ELRU's strength lies in facilitating access to all five of these elements which are integrated into all programmes, either directly or through referrals (where necessary) and this sets us apart.

Delivery of the Essential Package is accomplished through the following interventions:

- **Family and Community Motivator (FCM) Programme**

Home based

Our Family and Community Motivator (FCM) is aimed at the first 1000 days (conception to 2 years) when the foundations of all learning take place and whereby the home as the key enabling environment. The goal is to nurture the mother's well-being and children's early development through good nutrition, maternal and child health care, opportunities to play and learn, as well as facilitating access to social protection services. The pregnant mother or primary caregiver is supported and equipped with tools and skills that will promote healthy growth and encourage the young children in their care to flourish.



- **Playgroup Programme**

Community based

Structured learning and play are brought to the communities of vulnerable children (age 3-5 years) whose families do not have access to- or cannot afford a formal ECD Centre. Playgroup facilitators are unemployed mothers or caregivers from the local community. Play and stimulation enhance language, physical, cognitive and socio-emotional development of young children. The Playgroups curriculum is implemented through the SmartStart franchise model.

- **Whole Centre Development Programme**

Centre based

The Whole Centre Development Programme provides holistic support to community ECD centres through skills training, mentoring and capacity building of ECD practitioners. This ensures the delivery of quality early learning programmes that can be implemented in a classroom environment that is conducive to optimal learning. Many centres are unable to become registered and meet the Department of Social Development requirements due to upgrade and resourcing needs. We provide ECD Centres with infrastructure support, and facilitate the centre registration process.

At the heart of the ELRU's strategy we remain committed to addressing the greatest challenges facing ECD i.e. **access** for all children to **quality** ECD services. In doing so, we seek to build tomorrow by setting young children on a positive life trajectory today which will develop their readiness to learn, improve success at school and help them to realise their potential. This, in turn, secures not only the success and well-being of our children but also a prosperous future for our country.

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