



COMMUNITY CHILD RIGHTS WORKSHOPS: Reflections - 2020 pilot in West Coast District

16 MARCH 2021



**Commissioner
for Children**
OF THE WESTERN CAPE

**#littlevoicesMUSTcount
#kleinstemmetjiesMOETsaakmaak
#amazwiamancinciMAKAVAKALE**



Acknowledgements

Children and parents from the Matzikama and Bergriver Municipalities for participating and engaging in the Child Rights Workshops.

Government officials and Community Development Workers for their contributions to the success of the community child rights workshops, especially Wendy Bingham, Prudence Ramnath, Melonice Blanckenberg, Patrick Cornett, Jackeline Gorden, Frederick Booyse, and Frederico Smith.

Samantha Morris from the Department of the Premier for providing the Commissioner with administrative support, assistance with workshops in Matzikama Municipality, and capturing special moments on our child rights workshop journey.

Ann Cloete from the Department of the Premier for providing the Commissioner with assistance during the workshops in Bergriver Municipality.

Tessa Goldschmidt for copy editing and formatting this report, and our esteemed colleagues at the Creative and Client Services Unit for their graphic expertise.

Suggested citation:

Commissioner for Children. (2021). Community child rights workshops: Reflections - 2020 pilot in West Coast District. Office of the Western Cape Commissioner for Children.

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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:

1. **share the mandate** of the Commissioner directly with children in remote communities;
2. **advocate** with parents, legal guardians and primary caregivers to fulfil their responsibility as primary duty bearers of child rights; and
3. **monitor services** provided to children by government and stakeholders.

A pilot project, of parent and child workshops, was carried out in the Matzikama and Bergriver Municipalities within the **West Coast District municipality**. Between the 29 October – 2 November 2020, the Commissioner conducted four parents' workshops (**85 parents**), four children's workshops (**89 children**), and engaged with **9 government officials** in **Matzikama Municipality**. From 8 - 12 November 2020, another three parent workshops (**40 parents**) and three children's workshops (**58 children**) were conducted, in addition to engaging with **8 government officials** from Piketberg. A total of **8 child government monitors** (5 in Matzikama and 3 in Bergriver) and 4 helpers (in Matzikama) were recruited for the Child Government Monitors initiative.

The aim of this report is to document the key messages for each target audience; the findings from the community workshops; analysis of findings; and lessons and recommendations for future community child rights workshops.

The Department of Local Government played an invaluable role in connecting the commissioner with stakeholders in communities. The Commissioner conducted training with Community Development Workers (CDWs) to introduce the child rights framework and an ethical approach for working with children. Guided by the district and local level child focal persons in the Department of Local Government, CDWs recruited workshop participants. The Commissioner was the facilitator for each workshop.

Amongst the key messages shared with children and parents is that **#littlevoicesMUSTcount** with decision makers, and that children have dreams should be acknowledged and supported by parents, which should be nurtured within a healthy, stable home environment.

Findings of the workshop are presented in two parts- **safety mapping** and **service delivery inputs**. Services in these areas had many challenges which was exacerbated by poverty. The **quality of health care** and **insufficient resources** were great concerns. Stressors related to education included a high level of dropouts and the exorbitant costs of education in remote areas. There is a need for **prevention programmes, rehabilitation services**, and **organised sport** in all communities visited.

The Commissioner **recommends** that local government **build processes of capacitation to meaningfully involve parents and children in the integrated development plan**.

The aim of this report is to document the programme, activities and key messages for each target audience; the findings from the community workshops; analysis of findings; and lessons and recommendations for future community child rights workshops.



Introduction

The Western Cape Commissioner for Children developed a method for direct engagement with children in communities in partnership with the Department of Local Government. A special programme of activities was designed for these engagements. The aims of this initiative were:

4. to **share the mandate** of the Commissioner directly with children in remote communities;
5. to advocate with parents, legal guardians, and primary caregivers to fulfil their responsibility as primary duty bearers of child rights; and
6. to monitor services provided to children by government and stakeholders.

A pilot project was initiated in two municipalities in specific wards within the **West Coast District municipality**. From 29 October – 2 November 2020, the Commissioner travelled a total of 1 782 km to visit the communities of Bitterfontein, Kliprand, Putsekloof and Rietpoort, and Stofkraal and Molsvlei, which constitutes Ward 8 of **Matzikama Municipality**.

She conducted four (4) parent workshops (involving **85 parents**) and four (4) children's workshops (engaging **89 children**). The majority of the participants in the parent workshops were mothers or grandmothers (84) while only one (1) father from Rietpoort participated. **Nine (9) government officials** engaged the Commissioner on service delivery to children in Vredendal.

The Commissioner was also able to recruit five (5) child government monitors and four (4) helpers into her Child Government Monitors initiative. The younger children selected to represent children's groups are in their early years of primary school and would not be mature enough for the Child Government Monitors initiative, but they can still play an

invaluable role as helpers linking the Commissioner to the children's lived realities if they maintain contact with her.

Two weeks later, from 8 - 12 November 2020, the Commissioner travelled a total of 822 km to visit the communities of Redelinghuys, Eendekuil and Aurora which constitutes Ward 7 on **Bergriver Municipality**.

She conducted three (3) parent and three (3) children's workshops. The workshops involved a total of **40 parents** (including five fathers in Redelinghuys) and **58 children**. **Eight (8) government officials** gathered in Piketberg to engage the Commissioner on their responsibilities towards service provision for children. The Commissioner recruited **three (3) Child Government Monitors** during these visits.

This report will document the key messages for each target audience; the findings from the community workshops; analysis of findings by drawing out themes; and lessons and recommendations for future community child rights workshops.



The aim of this report is to document the findings from the community workshops; analysis of findings by drawing out themes; and lessons and recommendations for future community child rights workshops.



Key messages

The Commissioner's message to children in workshops:

1. the Commissioner for Children's Office **champions children's rights** with duty bearers,
2. **children are worthy of love** and have intrinsic values and strengths (superpowers),
3. children have **agency and can be active citizens**, and
4. **little voices MUST count** with decision makers.

Message to parents or legal guardians who are the primary duty bearers of child rights:

1. **children are rights holders**, and these rights must be fulfilled, promoted, and protected by parents as the primary duty bearers,
2. parents should be the **first child rights champions**,
3. children have **dreams and aspirations** which should be acknowledged and supported by their parents, and
4. children need a **stable, healthy environment at home** in which to grow and thrive.

Government officials and service providers, as secondary duty bearers of child rights, have a specific role to play when parents are unable to fulfil their duty of care.

The messages shared with them were to:

1. **fulfill** their designated roles in their professional capacity to the best of their abilities,
2. **align** their practice to a child rights approach,
3. **share** their story of success with children, in the communities served, to foster children's hope, and
4. **encourage** others to do their best for children.

Findings

The findings of workshops are presented in two parts.

Part 1, which is referred to as **Safety Mapping**, focuses on the perceived safety and danger present in the various communities from parents and children's perspectives.

Part 2 comprises of **service delivery inputs** from both parents and children. These inputs highlight concerns about and recommendations for

service delivery of the departments of Health, Education, Social Development as well as Sport and Culture.

Flipcharts were used to record views of participants, which was also audio recorded. Recordings were transcribed and interpreted in English. Data is available upon request.



RIGHT: The Commissioner for Children explaining the focus and branches of Government using three plates of biscuits in Eendekuil.



Part 1: Safety mapping

The first substantive discussion between the Commissioner and parents or children was the development of a community safety map. This activity entails drawing on key community landmarks. Parents, and then children, are asked in their separate workshops where the safe and dangerous spaces are for children in the community.

KLIPRAND

The story in the text box below is a narration of the community map of Kliprand by Geané Oortman- a grade 9 learner at **Hoërskool Nuwerus**.

"Ek wil net graag praat oor Kliprand, is 'n klein gemeenskap. Hier is 'n skets van hoe ons Kliprand opgesom het. Die is die gemeenskapsaal. Ons gaan hier kliniek, ons hou danse hier binne, basaar word hier gehou en whatever word ook hier gehou, sing aand en daar is 'n kantoor en 'n biblioteek is saam hier by die gemeenskap. En dan het ons 'n sopkombuis waar die gemeenskap kos by kry. 'n Kleuterskool waar baie min kinders skoolgaan en 'n bejaarde klub vir die ou mense.

Dan is dit skool, die Laerskool, Nuwefontein Primêr, 'n baie klein skooltjie maar baie respek en hulle is baie gehoorsaam vir meneer en vir juffrou. Dit is die enigste skool wat netjies is in die Distrik Munisipale Area (DMA) gebied wat ek al opgelet het. En dan het ons 'n Kaap Agri en die VGK Kerk, hy is ook daar by die skool by Nuwefontein Primêr.

Donny, die algemene handelaar waar die mense altyd daar hulle inkopies gaan doen. Dan het ons 'n huis winkeltjie, sy naam is Japie Tuckshop. Dis basies al wat hier in Kliprand aangaan."

English Interpretation

"I want to talk about Kliprand, it is a small community. Here is a drawing of how we depict our community. This is the community centre. We attend a clinic here, we dance here, we host bazaars here and whatever else, it happens here, musical evenings and there is also an office here and a library at the community centre. Then we have a soup kitchen where the community can receive food. There is a creche but very few children attend, and we have a club for seniors.

Then we have a school, Nuwefontein Primary School, a very small school but there is a lot of respect there and the children are very obedient towards the educators. It is the only school that is so neat in the entire District Municipal Area that I have noted. Then we have Kaap Agri and the VGK church - this is also at the school primary school.

Donny is the name of the general dealer where people shop. Then we have a small house shop named Japie Tuckshop. That's basically all that happens here."



RIGHT: Children's map of Kliprand community.

The children's reports of dangerous and safe places and spaces are as follows:

AURORA

SAFE PLACES

- Community centre - "Bymekaar vir funksies" (Together for functions)
- Church - "Geloof, Here" (Faith and God)
- Shops - "Sweets, Kos" (Buying sweets and food)
- Hostel - "Veilig woon" (Live safely)
- School - "Leer om iets te beruik" (Learn in order to reach your goals)

DANGEROUS PLACES

- Community centre where no social distancing takes place
- Shops - "Besoeiding" (Litter)
- School - "Rook dagga, kinders nou en dan geslaan, kinders gebully deur ander kinders" (Smoking marijuana, children are beaten by adults sometimes, children are bullied by other children.)

BITTERFONTEIN

SAFE PLACES

- Community centre
- Sports field
- Clinic
- Church
- Homes
- School
- Shops

DANGEROUS PLACES

- Homes
- Bars
- Petrol stations
- Shops

EENDEKUIL

SAFE PLACES

- Homes - "Blok - somtyds goeie ouers" (In the block there are some good parents)
- Sports field - "heining, groot mense" (At the sports field there is a protective fence and there are adults who keep us safe)
- School - "Som mense, somtyds goed" (Some adults are good sometimes)
- Community centre / Clinic "heining, groot mense" (At the community centre / clinic there is a protective fence and there are adults who keep us safe)

DANGEROUS PLACES

- Homes - "Blok - slaan met stoke, gooi bierbottels" (In the block at home there is hitting with sticks and beer bottles are thrown around)
- Sports field - "seerkry, bierbottelstukke" (At the sports field you can get injured from the broken beer bottles on the ground)
- School - "Slaan" (We get beaten)
- Graveyard - "Hokke, gespook, slange, skerpione" (Dangerous and haunted structures, snakes, scorpions)

PUTSEKLOOF

SAFE PLACES

- Church – “Geloof” (faith)
- Creche – Education

DANGEROUS PLACES

- Dam – “Verdrink” (Children drown)
- Park – “Val jou wind uit” (Lose your breath because of a fall)
- verkoop aan kinders, verkoop ‘ganja’, maak stoppe, ‘outdoor’ stop, pille soos buttons and tik” (Produces alcohol and sells to children, sells marijuana and drugs like ‘buttons’ and ‘tik’)
- Community centre – “dans, vloekery, drinkery, bakleiery” (When dances are held there is swearing, drinking, and fighting)

REDELINGHUYLS

SAFE PLACES

- Church – “bid vir jou, Jesus, Bybel” (They pray for you, Jesus, Bible)
- Oase (restaurant) – “kos” (Can buy food)
- Dorphuis (lodge) – “eet, slaap, kuier, swem” (eat, sleep, stay over, swim)
- Clinic – “Gesond” (Keep us healthy)
- Municipality – “Daar is ‘n biblioteek, strate skoon, plek veilig” (There is a library there, the streets are kept clean, the place is safe)
- Police station – “veilig hou” (keeps us safe)

DANGEROUS PLACES

- Police station – “maak onskuldige mense seer, slat/vloek die mense” (Hurts innocent people, hits and swears at people)
- Liquor store – “alkohol mos jou lewe op, brand jou uit”

- (Alcohol messes up your life, burns you out)
- Church – “stof in die kerk, mense kap aan”
- (The church is dirty and in disrepair, but people continue)
- Oase (restaurant) – “Maar die goed is duur”
- (The food is expensive there)
- Dorphuis (lodge) – “bruin mense kan nie daar gaan nie, kos geld”
- (People of colour cannot go there, it is too costly)
- Church – “afgebrand, nog nie skoon”
- (Burnt down, not yet cleaned)

RIETPOORT

SAFE PLACES

- Catholic church and hall
- Shop (4 have positive attributes)
- E-centre

DANGEROUS PLACES

- Dam – “Drie kinders verdrink” (Three children have drowned)
- Park – “Val jou wind uit” (Lose your breath because of a fall)
- Shops – (3 out of 4 are also dangerous)
- Shebeens “Smokkelhuise”
 - Community centre – “Dans en bakleiery”
(When dances are held there are fights)



STOFKRAAL

SAFE PLACES

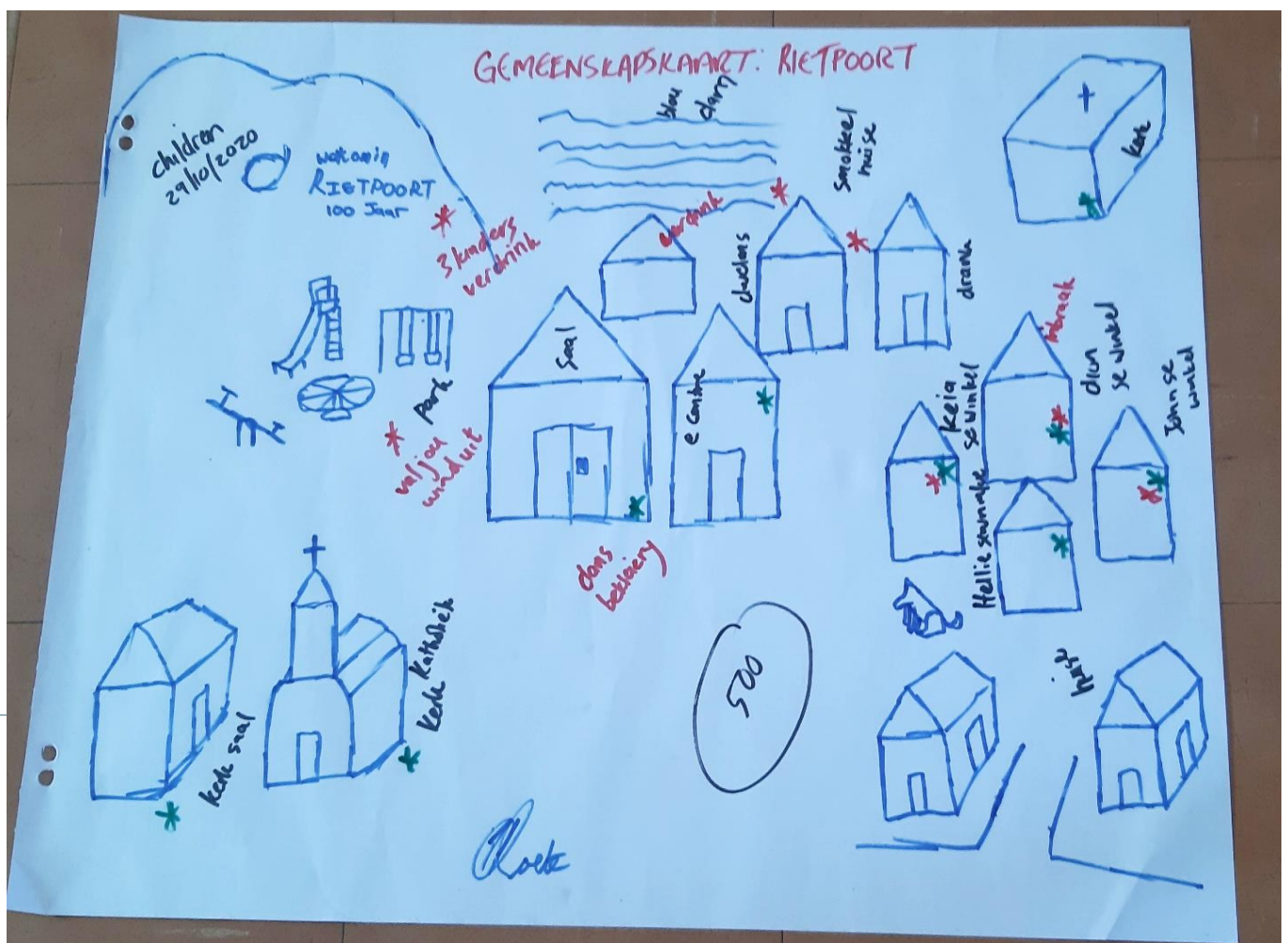
- Community centre – “Daar is a dak op” (There is a roof on it)
- Clinic – “medisyne, gesond hou” (Receive medicine and keeps us healthy)
- Homes – “Slaap, eet, kosmaak (Sleep, eat, make food)
- School – “Ons kan leer” (We can learn)
- Homes – “Word geslaan, breek en maak seer” (Get beaten, hurt, and ‘broken’)
- School – “Slaan deur onderwyser, daar word gebully, COVID-19” (Get beaten by educators, there is bullying, COVID-19)

DANGEROUS PLACES

- Shop – “gooi klip, steek brand, gooi papiere rond” (Throwing of stones, burning things, littering)
- Soccer field – “Varke is daar, baklei (There are pigs there and the adults sometimes fight)
- Park – “Val, seerkry, breek” (Fall, hurt yourself, break bones)



BELOW:
Children's chart of the
Rietpoort Community.





ABOVE: Children presenting their Mosvlei/Stofkraal community maps.

SUMMARY OF SAFETY MAPPING

Children enjoyed discussing and debating with each other about the positive and negative attributes of places and spaces in their communities. Parents were also requested in their workshop to complete a safety map for children in their communities. Their assessment of the safety of places and spaces closely matched the views of the children. Of note, parents almost always refused to identify where drug and alcohol abuse was happening. In some communities they told the Commissioner: “vra maar vir die kinders” (rather ask the children). They knew the children would be forthright and honest about these dangerous places, and children did not hesitate to disclose this information.

Most places and spaces children navigated in their communities could have safe and dangerous attributes.

They reported they need to use their skills to be aware of dangers while also recognising the positive attributes of the places they frequent.

The key message shared by the Commissioner during this activity is that children’s **homes** may be one of the most dangerous places for them to navigate because of domestic **violence** or substance **abuse**. This was acknowledged by parents and children in all communities.



Parents almost always refused to identify where drug and alcohol abuse was happening.

Part 2: Service delivery inputs

HEALTH

The **quality of health care** is a big concern in some communities. This was reported particularly in Aurora, Bitterfontein, Kliprand and Rietpoort/Putsekloof.

The **waiting time** at the clinics is a problem for the communities of Aurora, Bitterfontein, Eendekuil, Kliprand, Redelinghuys. In Aurora, the community requests **a full-time clinic**. There are reports of **insufficient medication and staff** at the clinics in Aurora, Redelingshuys and Rietpoort.

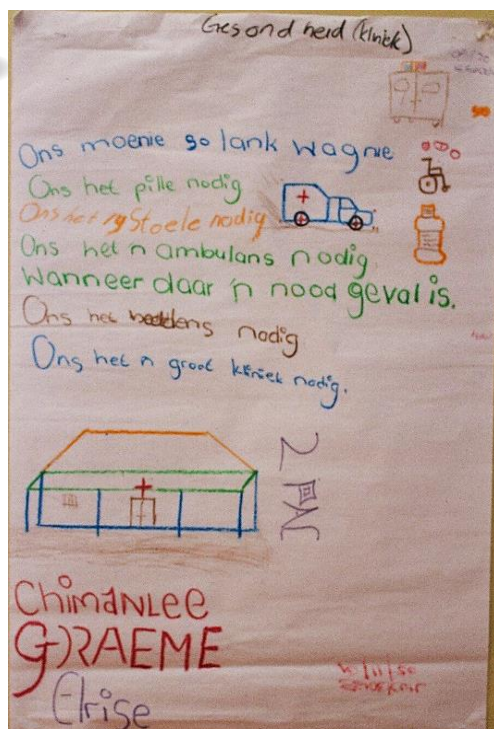
In Kliprand, the parents in the community complained the **nurses are rude** "verpleegsters is onbeskof." In Rietpoort there are reports of nursing staff that are disrespectful and too prescriptive - some medical personnel even coerce women into

being sterilised when they turn 40 years old. The treatment by the doctor is rushed, they say: "partykeer kom die dokter Woensdae dan hardloop hy ons af (sometimes the doctor comes on Wednesday then she runs through patients)."

When community members from Eendekuil need to **visit a specialist** in Piketberg, the travel to the specialist appointment is at the patient's expense. To get to their specialist appointments in Piketberg, community members in Aurora and Eendekuil report they need to spend R300-R400 on transport. The **ambulance services** are not regular and only comes to a certain point in the communities of Stofkraal and Aurora.

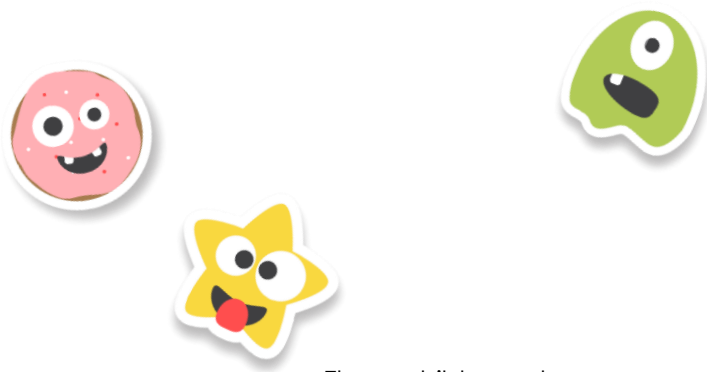
In Rietpoort concern was expressed about dead bodies that stay in the homes for hours. Women reportedly need to deliver their babies too because the ambulance is never on time. Their local midwife, who always averted disaster, is now ailing and aging. A range of concerns were expressed by parents with children having similar concerns.

Children in some communities considered the effect of **social challenges** on health status. The abuse of drugs and alcohol was of concern - "kinders moet wegbly van smokkelhuise af" (**children should stay away from taverns and shebeens**, Rietpoort/Putsekloof). The effects of **poverty and deprivation** on health was also considered - "genoeg kos by die huis" (**there should be enough food at home**).



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RIGHT: Children's insights on how health services can be improved in Eendekuil.



Children's inability to read is a great concern in the communities of Aurora, Bitterfontein, and Eendekuil.

The children have very similar concerns about health service provision as the adults in the community ie. the approachability of medical staff and their **lack of respect** for community members – “hulle moet leer om vriendelik te wees” (**they must learn to be friendly**) was an issue in Bitterfontein. The waiting times due to insufficient personnel and lack of correct and sufficient medication were raised as issues of concern by the children. This list of deficiencies in the health system from the children in Eendekuil typifies the comments of children in many other communities. They say: “Ons moenie so lank wag nie. Ons het pille nodig. Ons het rystoele nodig. Ons het 'n ambulans nodig wanneer daar 'n noodgeval is. Ons het beddens nodig. Ons het 'n groot kliniek nodig! (**We shouldn't wait so long. We need pills. We need wheelchairs. We need an ambulance for emergencies. We need beds. We need a big clinic!**)

EDUCATION

Educators' **commitment to teaching** was raised as a concern in the communities of Aurora, Bitterfontein and Eendekuil. In Bitterfontein parents said: “onderwysers sit altyd met die foon in die klas (**educators are always on their phones in class**).” According to parents in Eendekuil, the educators do not give adequate explanations of the work for the child to understand, and parents are unable to help because of their own literacy levels.

Children's **inability to read** is also a great concern in the communities of Aurora, Bitterfontein, and Eendekuil. In Bitterfontein, the parents commented on the reading inadequacies of primary school

children: “hulle ken nie drie letter woorde nie (**they cannot recognise three letter words**).” Parents spoke openly in all communities of children being affected by Foetal Alcohol Syndrome and requiring additional support.

The **drop out level** is high in the primary school years, as reported in Aurora and Eendekuil. For example, in Eendekuil, the parents are concerned that: “as ons kinders op Hoërskool kom dan los hulle sommer want hoe verder jy gaan, hoe moeiliker raak dit (**when our children start high school, then they drop out, as you progress it becomes too difficult**).

Parents explain that few kids progress from their primary school (which may go up to grade 9) to the high schools which may start at grade 10 in Bergriver municipality. They attribute this to the big adjustment that needs to be made to a new school and the primary school education not being enough to easily transition to the next grade. A mother from Putsekloof recommends: “Nou ek voel die onderwysers, en selfs die ouers, moet meer insit om hul kinders se opvoeding eerste te sit, dit moet eerste kom (**I feel the educators and parents must invest more in their children's education, it should be a top priority.**)

In addition, the **cost of attending high school** is taxing on parents with low-income levels. In Kliprand, where the high school is more than 80km away on a gravel road, parents pay R300 each weekend to bring their children home from the hostel and hostel fees are an added cost. There seemed to be no understanding of the policy of **fee-free schooling** for which low-income families are eligible. In some cases, the power of parents was overshadowed by the



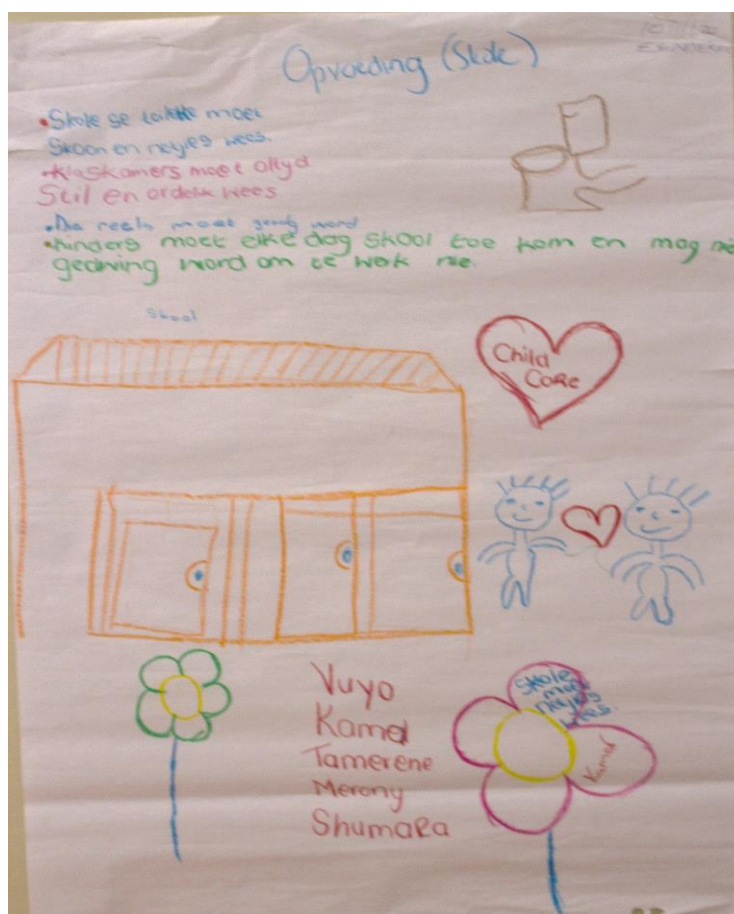
There is an expressed need for prevention programmes, as well as rehabilitation services in all communities visited. The key issues for intervention are drug and alcohol abuse and children leaving school prematurely.

professionals within the school governing body. For example, in Rietpoort/Putskloof the parents said: "die skool besluit namens die beheerliggarn (**the school decides on behalf of the governing body**).". This was different from Aurora where a mother, who attended the workshop, was obviously a very respected and vocal member of the school governing body. Moreover, parents did not know about the National School Financial Assistance Scheme (NSFAS), for children to proceed with **tertiary studies**. They were too fearful to encourage their children to proceed to a tertiary level due to the costs anticipated.

In all the community workshops many challenges within schools were foregrounded. Children reported to the Commissioner, when completing the community safety map, that **corporal punishment** is still being

used as a means of punishment in their schools. Parents in the Bitterfontein workshop strongly spoke out against corporal punishment in schools – "Slaan kry moet end kry! (**Being beaten must stop!**)". Children from Redelinghyus agree – 'Moenie kinders slaan nie (**do not beat the** Molsvlei/Stofkraal also extended this message relating to corporal punishment for educators to be attentive to the emotional wellbeing of children as well – "Moet ons nie hartseer maak nie. (**Do not make us sad**).". Other issues of concern were also reported.

Furthermore, children were inclined to reflect on their entire schooling experience rather than only focus on one aspect. For example, children in Bitterfontein reflected on the poor state of **infrastructure, lack of sports** and **absence of rewards systems** such as diploma ceremonies – "hulle





Children report abuse and neglect by parents as a main concern.

moet die skool service (they must do regular maintenance at school).” Clean or even new **ablution facilities** at schools were needed in reports from Eendekuil, Bitterfontein, Redelinghuys and Stofkraal. The children in Stofkraal/Molsvlei are asking for “nuwe toilette, want die ou toilette ruik goor! (**new toilets are needed because the ones we have now reek!**)”.

Children in Eendekuil reflected on the value of learning and that all children may not realise what they are foregoing by being absent from school – “kinders moet elke dag skool toe kom en mag gedwing word om te werk (**children must come to school every day and may be forced to do their work**).”

In the Redelinghuys and Rietpoort/Putsekloof workshop children emphasise that children must be taught good manners and respect at school – “kinders moet goed opgevoed word en ander respekteer (**children must be educated well and learn to respect others**).” Respect was also linked in the Rietpoort/Putsekloof workshop, to the right not to be bullied at school – “kinders moet nie gebullie word nie (**children must not be bullied**).”



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

There is an expressed need for **prevention programmes** as well as **rehabilitation services** in all communities visited. The key issues for intervention are **drug and alcohol abuse** and children **leaving school prematurely**.

The parents of Aurora say: “daar moet ‘n program wees vir ‘dropouts’ voorkommings werk (**there should be a programme for the prevention of school dropouts**).”

Parents who have their children removed for **abuse or neglect** feel unsupported by social development services. They say: “welsyn vat net kinders af hulle onderstaan nie overs (**social services only remove children from their parents and does not support parents**).” Parents are also skeptical of the appropriateness of the safety parents where their children are placed, they say: “sekere mense se kinders word verwyder en word ook toe geken aan voogte wat nie bevoeg is nie (**some people’s children get removed but the children get placed in care with parents that are not capable**).” Parents expressed that the places where their children are placed seem to be no better for the children than their own homes. A community activist parent in Eendekuil spoke of her voluntary work in the **child protection** space and encouraged parents in the workshop to do their best for their children. She reports that only the older women are interested in child protection and community work and that younger women want to be paid for their efforts, but this is not always possible. She emphasized that **community building** is everyone’s responsibility. Some parents in Rietpoort/Putsekloof also spoke passionately to encourage other parents to take care of their children.

In the communities of Kliprand, Bitterfontein and Rietpoort there is a

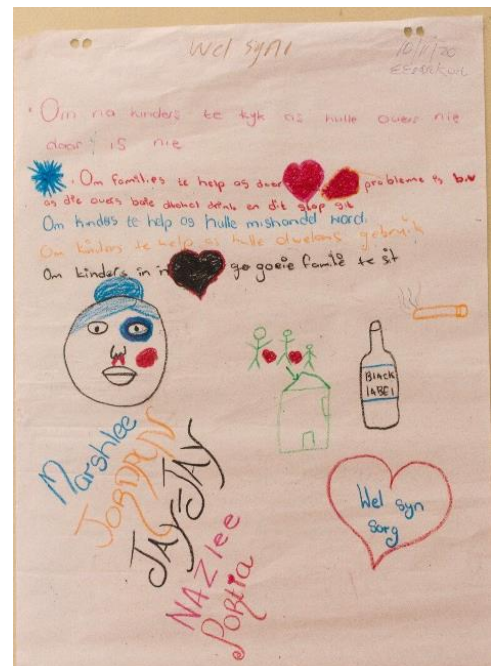
Communities are reportedly deprived of the amenities and opportunities for professional sports coaching, participating in sport competitions, and they are also unable to elevate their cultural activities to be acknowledge and adequately supported by government officials.



problem with applying for and receiving the **social grants**. Parents also raised the issue of the age of eligibility for child support grants. Kliprand parents report problems with applying for the grant in Vredendal as this incurs transport costs. They must also travel far to get the payments if the local shops do not help them to access their money. In Molsvlei/ Stofkraal parents shared stories of paying others to draw their money for them in the Northern Cape rather than pay the transport money to travel to the ATMs themselves, sometimes the pay point is at the local community centre.

In Rietpoort, the parents say the issue is: "op 18, word allpay gestop (at 18 years old the child support grant is stopped)." In the community of Rietspoort/ Putsekloof the parents say the lack of social grant brings depression for the parent which requires treatment. Bitterfontein parents ask: "watte rol kan SASSA en welsyn speel, interme van kinders wat 18 jaar oud is om sodoende steeds 'n grant te ontvang? (what role can SASSA and Social Development play, so that children can still receive a grant when they turn 18?)."

Children report child abuse and neglect by parents as a main concern. The children in Eendekuil express a need for child protection services: "om kinders te help as hulle mishandel word (to help children who are being abused)."



ABOVE: Eendekuil children's poster of recommendations to the Department of Social Development

In Redelinghuys, the children recommend: "vat die kinders weg wat probleme het na 'n veilige plek toe (remove children from their homes if there are problems and find them a safe place to stay)." Bitterfontein children shared their thoughts about the work of social development in relation to child protection: "mees belangrikste werk om kinders weg te neem van ouers. (most important work is to remove children from parents)."

The children in Eendekuil listed all the ways **developmental social welfare services** can benefit them: "om na kinders te kyk as hulle ouers nie daar is nie, om families te help as daar probleme is en die ouers baie alkohol drink en dit stop, om kinders te help as hulle mishandel word, om kinders in



goeie families te sit, om kinders te help as hulle dwelms gebruik (**to take care of children when their parents are no longer with them, to assist families when there are problems and to assist when parents drink too much and stop the alcohol abuse, to assist children when they are abused, to place children in good families, to assist children when they are using drugs.**).

SPORTS AND CULTURE

A list of sports and cultural activities which were needed was highlighted in all community workshops. In Kliprand and Eendekuil the communities report there is no **organised sport**. The parents of Eendekuil say: "hier gaan niks aan nie (**there is nothing happening here**).". Rietpoort/Putesekloof, Bitterfontein and Stofkraal/Molsvlei require **better sports facilities**. The kids of Rietpoort say: "op die atletiekbaan moet gras wees (**there should be grass on the athletics track**).". All the communities require more sports facilities. Rieldans (traditional dance for this area) is a favourite cultural activity in most of these communities. Communities are reportedly deprived of the amenities and opportunities for professional sports **coaching**, participating in sport **competitions**, and they are also unable to elevate their **cultural activities** to be acknowledged and adequately supported by government officials.

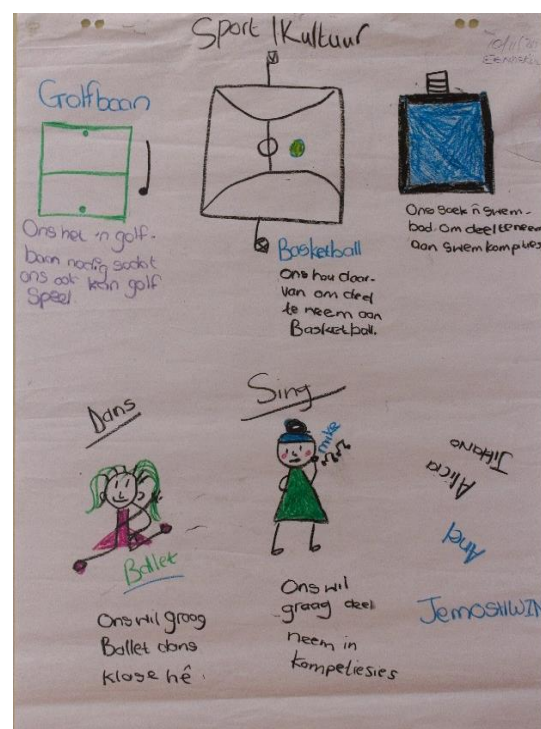
In Aurora, the value of libraries as community development hubs was discussed by a library assistant who attended the parent workshop. She

explained how she supplements children's education with reading and art programmes. Parents are involved in book clubs and crafting. The parents attest to the value this adds to the community and the development of their children.

The children would like to be able to participate in **all types of sporting and cultural activities**. The list includes: "**gym, swimming, athletics, soccer**" from children in Aurora. In Bitterfontein, children are interested in: "**rugby, soccer, athletics and cricket**." Eendekuil children are interested in: "**golf, basketball, swimming, dance and singing**". The activity interests in Redelinghuys are: "**netball, rugby, tennis, cricket and soccer**." The Bitterfontein, Rietpoort/Putesekloof and Molsvlei/Stofkraal were also genuinely concerned that the facilities for conducting normal school sport such as athletics is littered with stones and thorns – the children in Molsvlei/Stofkraal request: "**klippe wegvat en dorings (take the stones and thorns away)**". Their requests seem very basic, such as a **grass athletics track**.



RIGHT: Eendekuil
Children's drawings of
sports they would like to
participate in.



Officials acknowledged that the work ethic in the public service may need to be addressed to optimise governance.

SERVICE PROVIDER INSIGHTS

Government service providers in Piketberg and Vredendal were engaged on the children rights approach of the Commissioner for Children. She explained the **duty of care of government** towards children. Government must create an **enabling environment** for children's growth and development as well as stepping in to take care of children directly when parents are not able. Government stakeholders must also balance children's protection, provision, and participation rights.

The child participation or autonomy rights orientation was a **mind shift** for some who attended the workshop. A police representative in Piketberg noted that this paradigm was very different to the one they currently employ when engaging children. He realised: "**when we deal with children, we must not shout them down.**"

Government officials also reflected that they need to be more reflective of their practice and whether all officials are doing the best for children. A social worker in Piketberg

narrated a case where a victim of violence was sent from one service provider to the next instead of one service provider addressing the matter comprehensively. Officials also acknowledged that the **work ethic** in the public service may need to be addressed to optimise governance. They said: "**people don't want to work; we need to work together.**" They would like to see more commitment to the **whole of society approach** to development.

Children's participation in shaping service provision is not commonly practiced. The Commissioner presented the work of the children from Eendekuil to the service providers at the workshop in Piketberg. The official from Department of Health noted that children articulated very credible inputs for service provision and reflected that **children are not consulted as service beneficiaries.**

guide services, but the Commissioner advised that **consulting children required specialised expertise and protection measures.** Building



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RIGHT: The Commissioner with service providers at a workshop in Vredendal.





ABOVE: Learner elected as Child Government Monitor

structures for active citizen participation starting with younger citizens was discussed in the workshop in Piketberg.

There was clear commitment amongst stakeholders who attended the meetings with the Commissioner to improve service provision to children. Officials in Vredendal appreciated the vision of the Office to reimagine and remake childhoods. In Piketberg, officials commented that the 'paper models,' to improve development and rights outcomes, need to be implemented. They also expressed a 'sense of urgency when working with remote communities.' Noting that officials must do their best to **take services to the people** in multidisciplinary teams.

The centralisation of services in main towns was a concern. For example, a Mass Participation; Opportunity and access; Development and Growth (MOD) centre was moved from

remote Redelinghuys where it is sorely needed to the main town of Piketberg. These insights from government officials provided valuable information to the Commissioner for Children about the **ethos of care** of service providers.

There was a clear commitment amongst stakeholders who attended the meetings with the Commissioner to improve service provision to children.

ANALYSIS

THE COSTS OF MARGINALISATION AND DISADVANTAGE

Living in a remote community results in **additional costs to community members** just to be able to survive and go about daily living.

First it must be acknowledged that there are **structural issues** that resulted in the location and contexts of each of these communities. Apartheid legacies of creating labour camps and paying workers on a dop system are still evident today. The ward councilor expressed: "baie van die drank probleme wat ons vandag het, kom weens die dopstelsel want ons mense was met wyn betaal. (**many of the problems with alcohol abuse today come from a dop system implemented when people who worked on farms were paid with alcohol instead of money.**)"

Parents and children speak freely about the abuse of alcohol and the effect of **Foetal-Alcohol Syndrome** bedevils children's development and their ability to succeed in education. All communities cried out for additional support for their children to enable them to achieve basic literacy and numeracy.

The second issue of concern is that none of these communities had a **tarred access road**. For example, the Kliprand community is accessible on an 80km gravel road from the

tarred N7 (Cape to Namibia Route). The length and quality of the road resulted in many additional hardships such as feelings of isolation.

Third, the geographical location of remote communities as well as the lack of adequate **infrastructure** and quality services, is a great disadvantage to the optimal development and fulfillment of rights of children. Certain communities describe themselves as being 'cut off' or 'left behind': "Rietpoort – een van die agtergeblewene dorpie in die Wes-Kaap. (**Rietpoort is one of the towns left behind in the Western Cape.**)" A parent in Rietpoort said: "ons kan nie bel nie want ons het glad nie sein in Rietpoort nie (**we cannot make phone calls because there is no mobile phone signal.**)"

In Kliprand, mothers spoke of "geen opvangs en privaat wifi" (**no signal and private WiFi**). The lack of mobile phone infrastructure in the community cuts them off from the outside world. Although they have an E-centre in Rietpoort, the parents are not able to use it. According to the Community Development Worker, the children and the youth rarely use it too because they were not adequately trained.

In Kliprand, the length of the gravel road was the feature that cut them off from others. The mothers sighed when sharing all the impediments the road brought to their lives. They used words like: 'ten duurste" (**very costly transport costs**), "kar breek, ongelukke" (**cars break down and accidents happen**), "kraam by die huis" (**give birth at home**), "een keer 'n maand R1800 - R2000 tot Vredendal" (**once a month we collectively pay R1800- R2000 to hire a taxi to Vredendal**).

There is a very real monetary burden to be borne in these communities to travel anywhere. For example, in

All communities cried out for additional support for their children to enable them to achieve basic literacy and numeracy.



People living in these remote communities have very modest incomes and some of these costs are simply unaffordable which compromises their rights to education and health.



Kliprand families pay R300 for private transport every weekend for their children to be transported to High School. The cost of transportation, for hospital appointments, from Aurora or Eendekuil to Piketberg is between R300-R400, and R1200 from Rietpoort to Vredendal. People living in these remote communities have very modest incomes and some of these costs are simply unaffordable which compromises their rights to education and health, in the examples above.

There is an outcry for **support and partnerships** with government to improve the development of the communities – the infrastructure and the people. There is a recognition of legacies of the past that caused deprivation. A ward councilor reflects: “op plaasgemeenskappe moes kinders vroeër die skool los dat hulle hul ouers kan help werk van die huis af (**in farming communities children left school prematurely to help their families to survive.**)” This led to development backlogs and disadvantage. Parents appeal for development support: “ek sien nog niks wat die ‘government’ doen vir ons platteland se skole (in Redelinghuys) soos wat hulle maak vir die betalende skole. Vat vir ons aan die aan die hand, asseblief. (**I do not see what government is doing for rural schools compared to fee-paying schools. Please walk hand in hand with us in a journey to development.**)”

Arguably, there is a debt to be paid by society to these remote rural communities and no evidence of the willingness to make these reparations.

DREAMS DEFERRED AND THE ETHOS OF CARE

Parents are almost too **scared** to hope and **dream** for a better life. They spoke with sadness of not realising their full potential and not being able to reach the professions they once dreamed of achieving as children. They also dreamed of becoming ‘social workers, policewomen, educators, nurses, secretaries, magistrates, dentists, community workers, and lawyers.’

Parents dream that their children can achieve this now. Children’s aspirations in Aurora, for example, included: “polisieman, kantoorman, maatskaplike werker, prokureur, akteur, bewaarder, dokter, Springbok rugbyspeler, lugwaardin, onderwysers” (**policeman, office worker, social worker, lawyer, actor, prison warden, doctor, Springbok rugby player, air hostess, educators**). In Redelinghuys the parents shared that the children have big dreams, but parents have no money to make their children’s dreams come true. There is a sense of hopelessness.

The dignity of adults is further affected by disrespectful treatment from service providers. They felt robbed of agency, stripped of dignity, and had their privacy violated. Clinics especially, were talked about as spaces and places where adults felt disrespected. Children also noted the way some secondary duty bearers violated their rights, especially educators. Children in all the communities the Commissioner visited reported corporal punishment was still administered in schools. This dehumanizing treatment violates the dignity rights of both parents and children.



There is an aspiration to improve parenting practices amongst parents across all communities.



THE WEIGHT OF PARENTING RESPONSIBILITIES

Parents experienced many **challenges** in their roles as primary duty bearers of children's rights. Parents in Redelinghuys reflected: "kinders luister nie omdat ons nie reg praat nie en ouers praat nie mekaar moet in nie maar baklei met mekaar" (**children do not listen to us as we do not talk politely with them and we as parents do not encourage each other instead we fight with each other**). They also confirmed that **drug and alcohol abuse**, the effects of **poverty**, and **violence** characterised their lives.

In Putsekloof and Rietpoort parents struggled to keep their children indoors away from the dangers in the community as they are experimenting with smoking. But others in the group say that children do as the adults around them do. There is an awareness that parents model behavior to children and that children may grow up to be similar types of parents to what they see.

The Commissioner encouraged parents and children to affirm unique talents and strengths by remembering children have unique 'superpowers'. In Bitterfontein the children listed: "omgee, respek, dapperheid, waardeur, gevoelens, eerlikheid, vertrouwe, dankbaar" (**caring, respect, value, feelings, honesty, trust, thankfulness**).

In Redelinghuys children listed the following attributes and talents as superpowers: "houding, vingerprint, sing, dans, maniere, Rugby, Netbal, Skaak" (**attitude, fingerprint, sing, dance, manners, Rugby, Netball, Chess**). The parents and children understood that these talents for sport, for example, could lead to careers.

There was an **aspiration to improve parenting practices** amongst some parents across all communities. In Bitterfontein, one mother expressed that she would like to be a "goeie ouer" (**good parent**). In this community

parents express they would like to be able to support each other by: "praat oor probleme, bak brood, gemmerbier, roosterkoeke, koeksisters" (**talking with each other about their problems, bake bread, gingerbeer koeksisters**). There is a high-end shop selling homemade products in this community. However, none of the produce comes from the people who live in the community. Instead, the items all come from established brands. The Commissioner queried from the parents whether there is an opportunity for them to sell local produce to this shop.

In Kliprand the mothers talk about the existence of a youth club, seniors club and women's service that are good support systems. Parents in Putsekloof/Rietpoort believe they can support each other by listening to each other, asking each other for advice, being a parent to everyone's child, get help from each other for children's schoolwork, and not humiliating children by calling them 'stupid'. **Community systems of support** can be valuable for struggling parents.

Most women are involved in care work either for others or in their own homes. Fathers are absent from community life, one mother said: "ons sê maar hulle werk (**let us rather say they are away at work**). In Putsekloof / Rietpoort the mothers and the children say the fathers "het gaan seep koop" (**literally translated means fathers have gone to buy soap after the child is born which refers to fathers absenting themselves**)."

Employment for men from Kliprand includes working on sheep farms, with the railway, they build sanitation systems. Whereas, in Putsekloof/Rietpoort men are engaged in season a farm work (sheep and grapes), they are contracted for building work. Mothers are the driving force in their homes and communities and the primary caregivers of children.

There was a **champion for children** in almost every community the Commissioner visited during this pilot initiative. Champions were sometimes parents (Putsekloof/Rietpoort), afterschool programme leaders (Bitterfontein and Redelinghuys), principals (Eendekuil) a librarian (Aurora), community worker (Bergrivier Municipality) and older children (Kliprand). These champions were of **great support to parents and excellent role models for children**.

These children's champions encouraged the parents in the communities to do better for their children and supported parents with their responsibilities. For example, in Bitterfontein, a parent group (led by one of the mothers who attended our workshop) started a voluntary initiative to support children in after school care programmes with reading and arithmetic.

In Aurora, the library assistant was commended by the mothers for her role in making the library a hub of community development and a support to children's education. One

such champion said: "Ek is Katerina Swartz (van Eeendekuil) en ek werk saam met die Welsyn. Ek is daar vir kindertjies" (*I am Katerina Swartz and I work with social services. I am there for children.*) Champions extended themselves to support their communities and help children.

The Commissioner reiterated that parents are the first legal and moral duty bearers to realise children's rights. It was heartening to see the commitment of some parents, especially mothers to their parenting role. However, the invaluable role of other community children rights champions must be acknowledged. These champions are an added force to make sure children rights are promoted in their communities.

There was a champion for children in almost every community the Commissioner visited during this pilot.



CHILDREN AS ACTIVE CITIZENS



The Commissioner undertook to share the information the children provided with the top officials and politicians, in the province and in their respective district, who have the responsibility for leading government interventions.

The Commissioner for Children conducted these workshops in remote communities to model **children's participation** in governance. The engagements with children, their parents and government and other service providers created the opportunity to refocus on the wellbeing and rights of the child in our society. The Commissioner spoke with adults to encourage them to fulfill their duty of care and support towards children. Children were engaged to share knowledge and skills for them to influence governance.

Most of all, the workshops helped children realise that their voices were listened to in relation to their dreams development challenges. They were provided with an opportunity to make **recommendations** to the government departments for which the Commissioner plays an oversight role. They were assured their voices would count. The Commissioner **undertook to share the information** the children provided with the top officials and politicians, in the province and in their respective

district, who have the responsibility for leading government interventions.

The children selected a child representative to work with the Commissioner as a **Child Government Monitor**. These Child Government Monitors keep the Commissioner connected to the lived realities of children in the communities that she visited. It provides a feedback mechanism for the Commissioner to report back to the children. These representatives also link the children in these remote communities to other policy and law reform process which affect their lives. Providing the children in these remote communities with the opportunity to influence the decisions that affect their lives, by working with the Commissioner's Office as a platform for their voice.



RIGHT: The Commissioner documenting workshop feedback.



Lessons Learnt

The pilot of the community child rights workshops strategy implemented by the Commissioner for Children yielded the following lessons:

- mechanism for the realities.
- Engaging directly with adult community stakeholders models a **child rights approach**.
- Providing children with an **opportunity** to feed into governance affirms them as active citizens.

There are some improvements that need to be made to the implementation model including:

- **Increasing capacity** in the Office of the Commissioner for Children to plan, implement, and report on the community child rights workshops.
- Requesting the Department of Local Government to recruit **more fathers** to participate in the workshops.
- **Including educators** as a key stakeholder group in these workshops for delivery on children's rights.
- Although adolescents are better equipped to act as community representatives, the involvement of both **adolescents** and **younger children** in workshops are valued.

The key take home messages of this report are:

- **Children should be involved** in all decisions affecting their lives.
- Parents should be the **primary champions** for children's rights.
- Government should build the **capacity** to consult children as service delivery beneficiaries.
- Commissioner for Children's Office must be a **platform** for children's voices to be heard and to make their voices count with decision makers.



Conclusion

This was the pilot of the Community Child Rights Workshop initiative which will be used as a means to achieve several of the Commissioner's powers and duties.

This visit enabled the Commissioner to **monitor** the impact of government service delivery from the feedback of children and their parents as the users of the services. Documenting service beneficiary feedback will be one of the most important hallmarks of these visits to communities.

The Commissioner was able to respond immediately to **requests for investigation** of a matter referred in these workshops. The format of investigation is to contact the Head of Department to make an enquiry of a case that requires feedback to a parent to child. The sound working relationships with Heads of Departments ensures quick responses to the person making the enquiry.

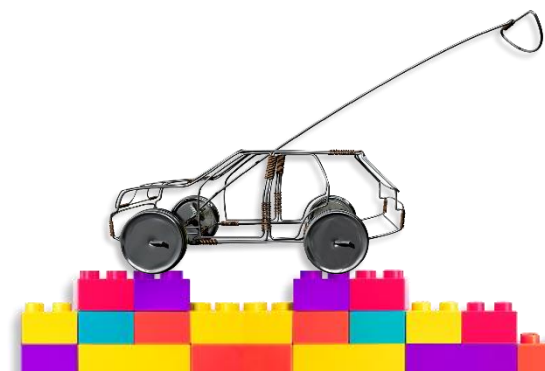
The workshop is a method to gather qualitative data from communities on the lived experiences of children. These inform **research** into the character of childhoods in the province.

Conducting conversations with children and their parents during these workshops, about children's rights, is a first step in creating **awareness and educating** society about the legal instruments that promote and protect children's rights.

The information gathered about government services forms the basis of **advice and recommendations** the Commissioner can provide to government departments. After each series of workshops, the Commissioner will engage Heads of Departments to share an analysis of the information the Commissioner has gathered.

After the visit to the West Coast, the **Commissioner for Children recommends** that **local government build processes of capacitation to meaningfully involve parents and children in the integrated development plan**. The implementation of the recommendation will be tracked by the Western Cape Commissioner for Children.

Community Child Rights Workshops enable the Commissioner to raise awareness of the mandate of her office (by disseminating posters), enables **child participation** in the work that she does (children share service impact information), connects children in far flung communities directly with the office of the Commissioner (representatives of the children's workshops become Child Government Monitors with whom the Commissioner communicates with on a weekly basis).





ABOVE: The Commissioner for Children at a parent workshop in Rietpoort.



ABOVE: The Commissioner and Children at a workshop in Stofkraal.

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**Commissioner
for Children**



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OF THE WESTERN CAPE

**#littlevoicesMUSTcount
#kleinstemmetjiesMOETsaakmaak
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