

The Church has the power to
significantly change South Africa by

giving all children a strong start to life



When you pay attention to the beginning of the story, **you can change the whole story.**

Raffi Cavoukian



"If you tenderly care for this little child on my behalf, you are tenderly caring for me. And if you care for me, you are honoring my Father who sent me. For the one who is least important in your eyes is actually the most important one of all."

LUKE 9:48 TPT

We all dream of a better South Africa, with a stronger economy, less violence and crime, better education outcomes, a healthier population, greater equality and social cohesion.

Economists have proven that the best possible way to change the trajectory of our country is to invest in and support the development of small children. This is most powerfully realised within the First Thousand Days (FTD) of life – a critical window of development from conception to two years of age. Currently 50% of children (more than a million young lives every year) are born into adverse conditions and will not receive the responsive nurturing care vital to realise their God-given potential. This is a great injustice.

For children to thrive, they must be in a caring family. For families to responsively care for their children, they need a supportive community. The Church is well-positioned, more so than any other institution, to be that community.

We, The Church, have the opportunity to significantly change South Africa by giving all children a strong start to life.

What Can The Church Do?

The Church has the potential to create modern day villages that surround and strengthen all parents and caregivers with children in the First Thousand Days (FTD) of life.

Like no other, The Church has the capacity and mandate to connect and care for parents and caregivers so that they, in turn, can provide responsive care for their little ones.

Church communities across South Africa are committing to become FTD-friendly.

This is achieved by initiating one or a number of the following activities:

- **Speak up** around FTD and the opportunity for Christians to connect and care for families in this stage of life.
- **Surround families** and provide support and encouragement that no other service provider can.
- **Create warm, welcoming and safe spaces** to help families feel supported and that they belong.
- **Pray** for and with families to bless and encourage them.
- **Equip and prepare** parents and caregivers to be able to provide responsive care.
- **Collaborate** with other churches and service providers to better serve families.

Together we can create opportunities for greatness to grow and thrive in our nation.



Why The Church?

The local church is already teaching, discipling, gathering and engaging families. These are unique strengths and assets that can be leveraged to intentionally strengthen families with young children.

Nationally, The Church is well-placed, unlike any other institution to connect and care for families so that children will thrive.

- The Church consistently engages with and speaks into the life of the **whole family**. It is an **established** role player with a trusted voice.
- It is one of very few organisations with a **national footprint and influence** that reaches even the most rural corners of South Africa.
- In all communities it has a powerful **multiplier effect** as church members interact and share with those outside of the immediate church community.
- It is also a **powerful network of social capital** (money, time, information, mobility, expertise, experience, acceptance and support) – everything that people share to improve the lives of others.
- Most importantly, The Church has a **purpose and mission** that includes little children. Throughout scripture we read about God's heart for children. It is not only adults, but also children who are invited to participate in God's story of reconciliation, redemption and restoration.

OUR OPPORTUNITY

In a recent study* conducted in the Western Cape, 70% of church leaders reported that there were no church activities created for 0-2, pregnant mothers or fathers. The rest indicated that very limited and infrequent activities took place. But, these same leaders also affirmed that The Church has a major role to play in FTD.

*Lundie, R., Hancox, D. & Farrell S. 2018. *The church's role in supporting human development in the first thousand days of life*. Cape Town: Common Good. Available from: www.commongood.org.za/earlylife

"I'm convinced that the local church is uniquely positioned and equipped to make a significant impact in the first thousand days of life. God has us on a very exciting journey at The Bay, and I believe that there are opportunities for local churches across the country to join hands in serving the youngest and most vulnerable children in our communities."

Sheldon Kidwell,
The Bay City Church

Why The First Thousand Days?

Supporting early childhood development is so powerful because:

It is a time of rapid development when foundations are laid for life.

A baby's brain, body and social development is at its most intensive during the earliest period of human life. During this phase, the brain makes one million connections per second and grows up to 80% of its total size. This is when foundations are laid for language development and becoming a socially competent adult who can relate to and trust other people.

During this phase the trajectory of a person's development is established.

How these foundations are laid will determine whether a child will flourish and thrive or struggle and survive. Out of every two children born in South Africa, one child's brain will be wired to learn, grow and succeed and the other child, often born into adverse circumstances, will have a brain that is wired to survive. These children struggle to learn, often end up dropping out school, and have difficulty finding and keeping work later in life.

The good news is that we know what supports and promotes healthy brain development, and the protective factors that counter and even mitigate some of the risks. This means that children who are born into adversity can still thrive.

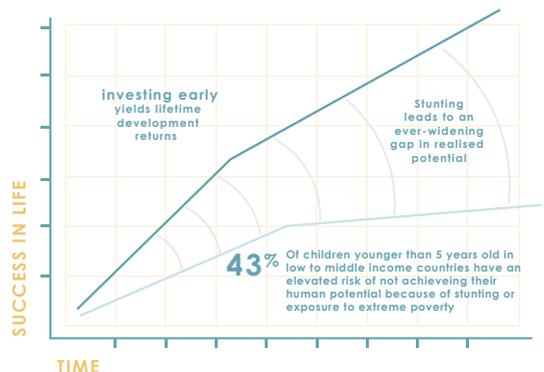
What do all children need to thrive?

All children need at least one loving, stable and responsive relationship with an adult.

An attached, loving, responsive, accessible engaged parent is vital for a baby's brain development. This responsive parenting is what will enable a child to be nourished, played with, talked and read to, protected and nurtured.

All families need a supportive community.

Even more enlightening is that research shows us that caregivers and parents who feel connected to a community of care and support – a modern day village – are far more empowered to be responsive parents.



The First Thousand Days determines trajectory for life

Sikunye, which means 'we are together' in isiXhosa, affirms the collective effort required to nurture young life and the importance of supportive relationships to achieve this.

Acknowledging that it takes a village to raise a child, Sikunye seeks to inspire, mobilise and equip The Church to support parents, caregivers and families to provide responsive nurturing care for their children in the First Thousand Days (FTD) of life, so that they can thrive and reach their God-given potential.

Sikunye is an initiative of Common Good – a South African NGO that creates opportunities for those marginalised by poverty and injustice to reach their full, God-given potential, and mobilises the church to engage and act justly.

We **raise awareness** through presentations of our research findings on the role of the local church in connecting and caring for families, so that children can thrive.

We **equip church leaders** and champions on how to lead their church to become FTD-friendly.

We **deliver training** for leaders and volunteers that is designed by and for local church communities including:

- Church-based home-visiting
- Antenatal and postnatal classes (in partnership with Flourish)
- Book-sharing (in partnership with Mikhulu Trust)

We **inspire our growing community of churches**, champions and volunteers by profiling and sharing what so many are already doing successfully on this journey. Our social media platforms and facilitated story telling events amplify the possibility and power the church has to change South Africa.

ACTIVATE YOUR CHURCH

Join hands with us as we connect with and show care for families with children in the First Thousand Days of life.

Go to sikunye.org.za to activate your church and receive a detailed guide on how to become FTD-friendly.



connect • care • thrive

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Sikunye is a Common Good initiative

