



WHAT IS POSSIBLE?

The Impact
of Quality
Interventions
in 2025





DIRECTOR'S NOTE

When the Thrive by Five Report was released in 2025, South Africa was shocked to see that similar to the report before it, only 42% of children attending an Early Childhood Development programme were actually on track to start grade R.



What does this tell us? That access is not the same as quality and that access alone does not guarantee long-term change.

At Thanda, we've always believed that real change requires ongoing support, constant adaptation, and unwavering dedication to offering quality interventions. In 2025, we continued to deepen our impact through improved quality of our programmes, with increased reflection, data-led adjustments, and cross-training within the organisation.



In 2025 we also learned and innovated. We put together a Stunting Taskforce to start preventing the implications of stunting affecting more than a quarter of all children in South Africa; we opened our first Eco-ECD as a model for learning within a climate-resilient, closed-loop ecosystem; and we presented our proprietary Storybook-based ECD curriculum at the Centre for Childhood Development conference in Cape Town.

As we build on the lessons learned and impact created in 2025, we look to increased sharing and learning within these spaces because if we can all put the children in our communities at the core of our focus, we can more easily align and partner towards a better future for them.

Thank you for reading through the impact we created together in 2025!

Angela Larkan

Tyler Howard

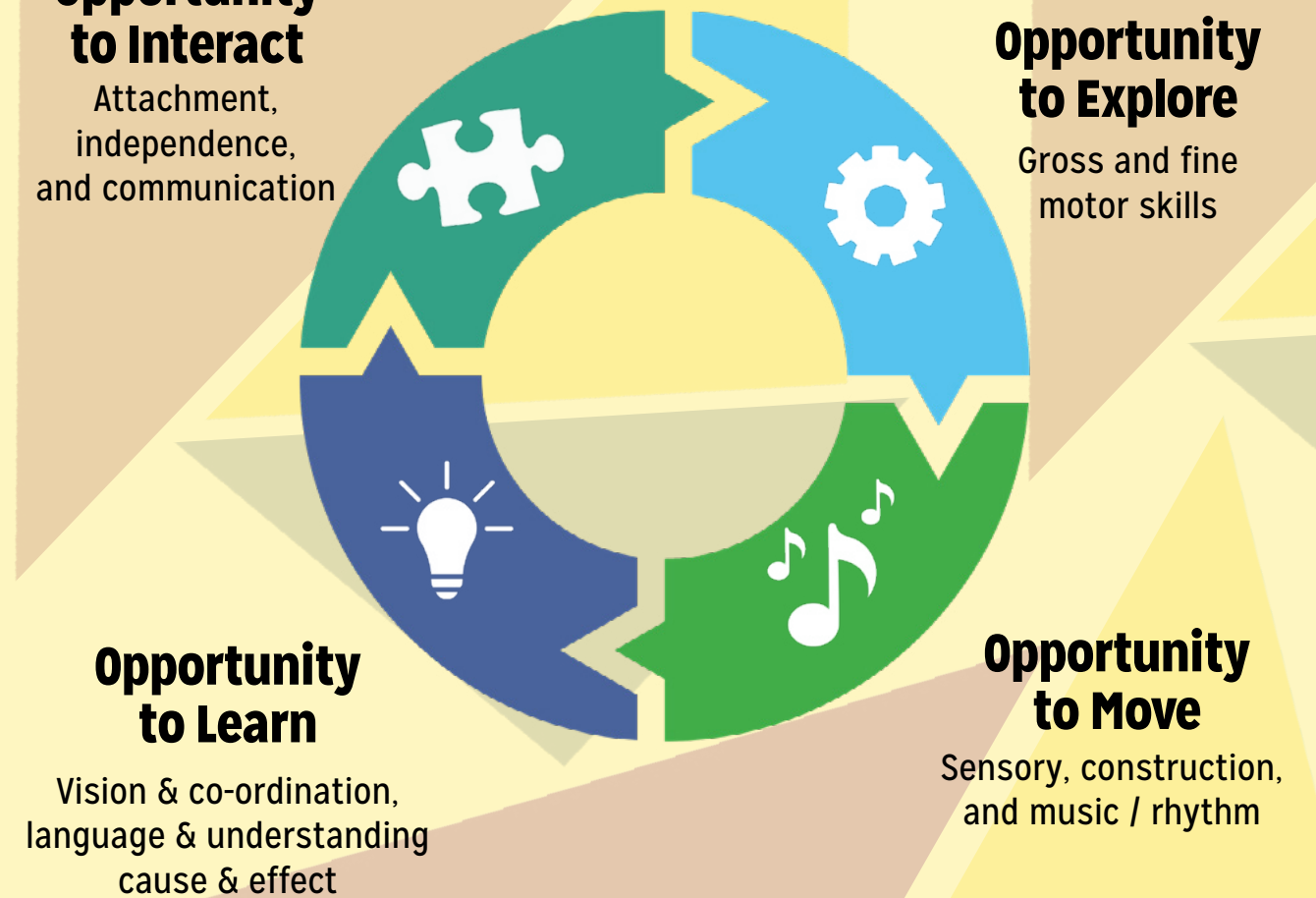


SUPPORTING BABIES & THEIR GUARDIANS



Opportunity to Interact
Attachment, independence, and communication

Opportunity to Explore
Gross and fine motor skills



Opportunity to Learn
Vision & co-ordination, language & understanding cause & effect

Opportunity to Move
Sensory, construction, and music / rhythm

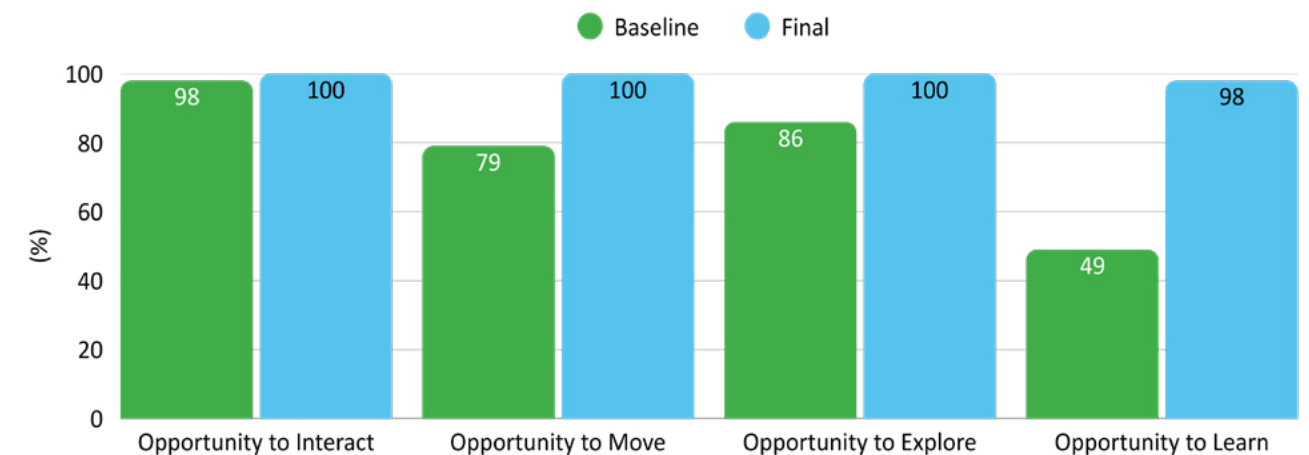
WITHOUT INTERVENTIONS

At the beginning of 2025 when they joined the Thanda Baby Programme, 34% of participants believed that babies only started learning at 6 months of age and 9% believed they only started learning at 1 year or older.

WITH *Quality* INTERVENTIONS

87% of guardians in Thanda's Baby Programme now believe that learning begins during pregnancy and the remaining 13% believe that it starts from birth.

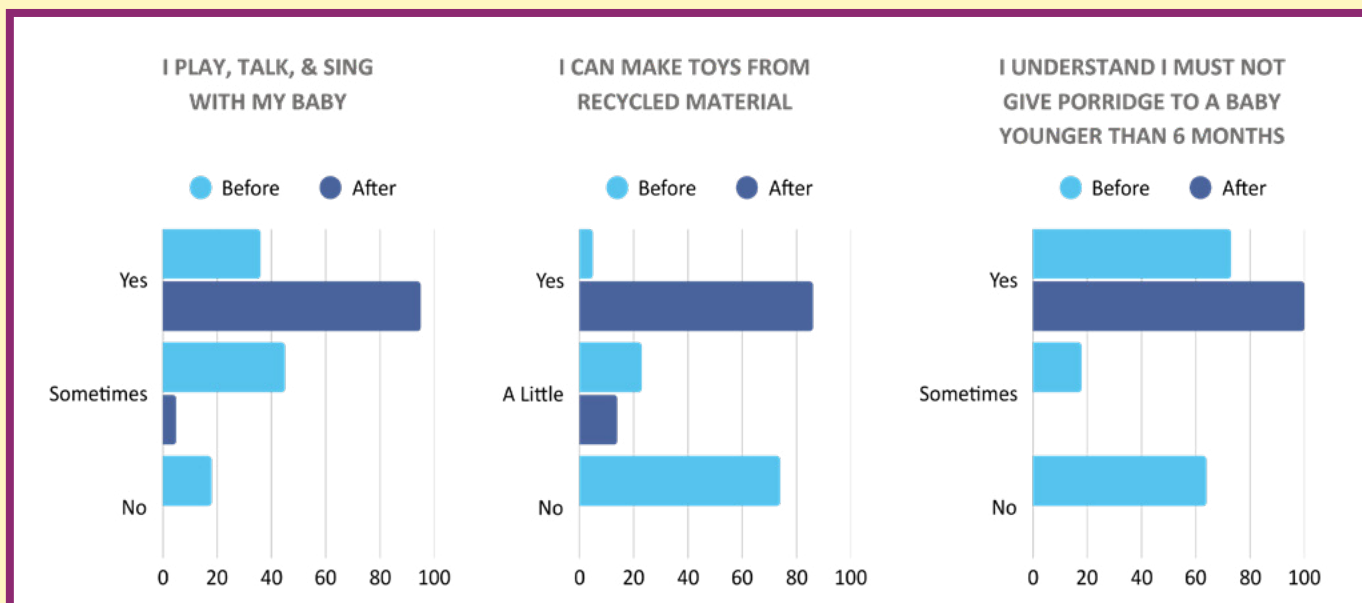
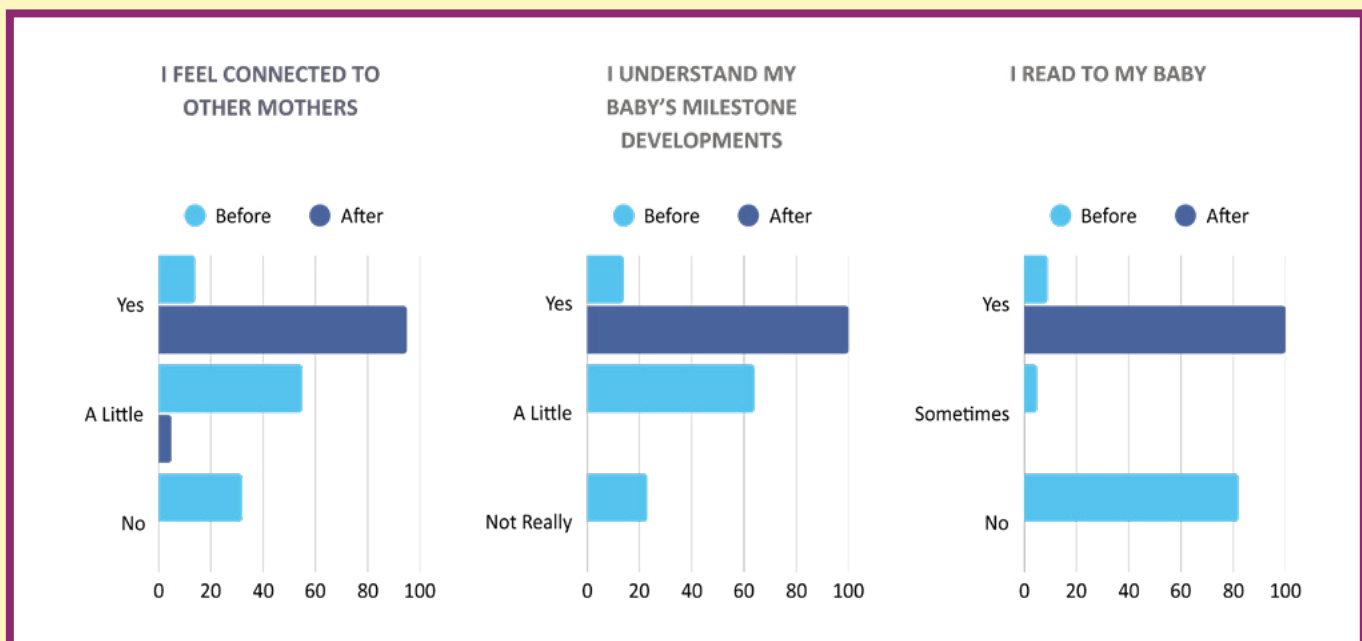
2025 BASELINE TO FINAL COMPARISON ACROSS ALL AGE GROUPS



GUARDIAN FEEDBACK

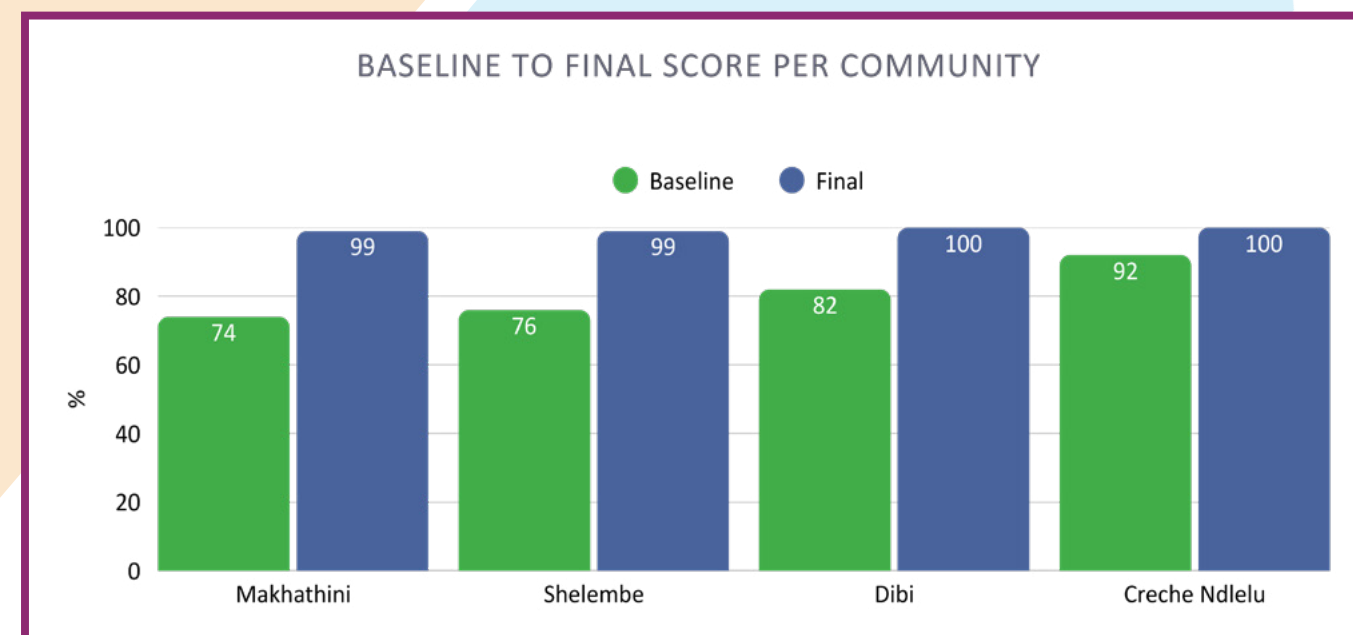
Mbali

My child is currently 8 months old, but I did not know that a child starts learning from birth. The little movements while in the stomach are all part of learning and growing! I live in a household where I am the eldest and I do not have any elders to assist me in raising my children, so coming into the group, I was and still am grateful to have other mothers and gogos who share their experiences, and even Sisi Mate (facilitator) who teaches us a lot.

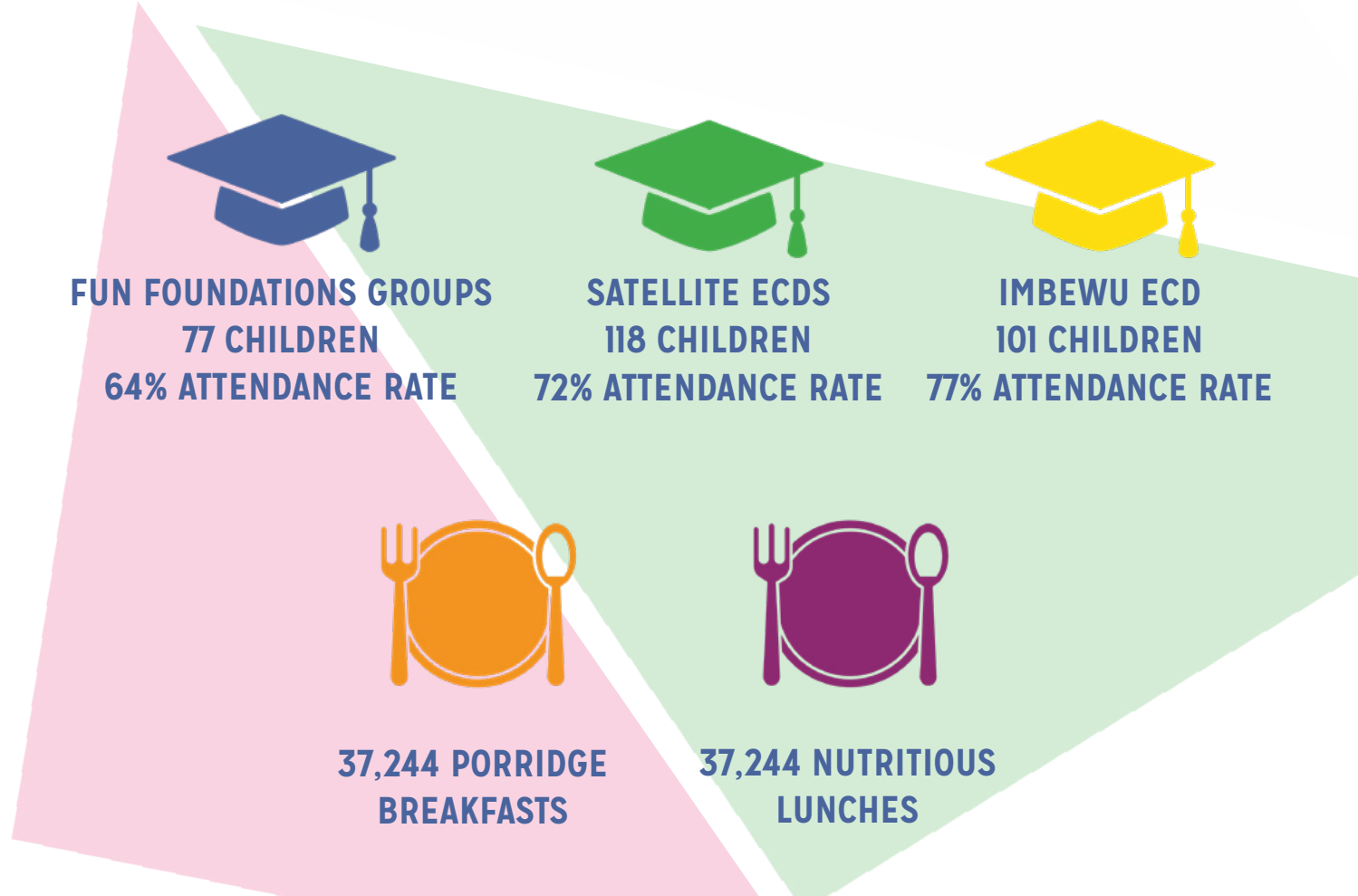


BABY PLAYGROUPS IN 4 NEIGHBOURHOODS

The overall assessment results for the babies who attended the playgroups showed that the neighbourhoods in which the Baby Programme has run since 2022, started with a higher baseline score (Dibi and Creche Ndelu) compared with those that have had Baby Programme available since only 2025 (Makhathini and Shelembe) This suggests that although the playgroups now involve different guardians, the neighbourhoods have retained knowledge over time.



ESTABLISHING BUILDING BLOCKS FOR CHILDREN AGES 3-5



WITHOUT INTERVENTIONS

Only 18% of children (if not attending an ECD) or 40% of children (if attending a Quintile 1 ECD) are on track to start Grade R.

(Thrive by Five, 2024)

WITH *Quality* INTERVENTIONS

82% of children who attend a Thanda ECD are on track to start grade R.

WHERE IS THE GREATEST CHANGE? GRADE 000

SATELLITE ECD

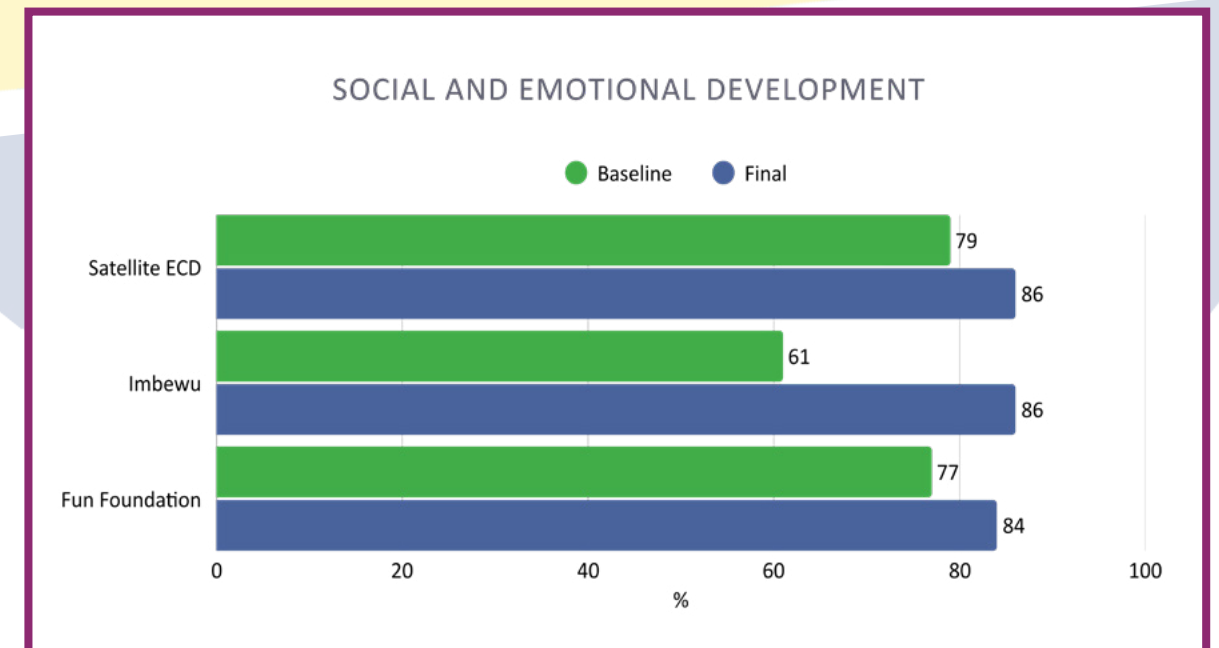
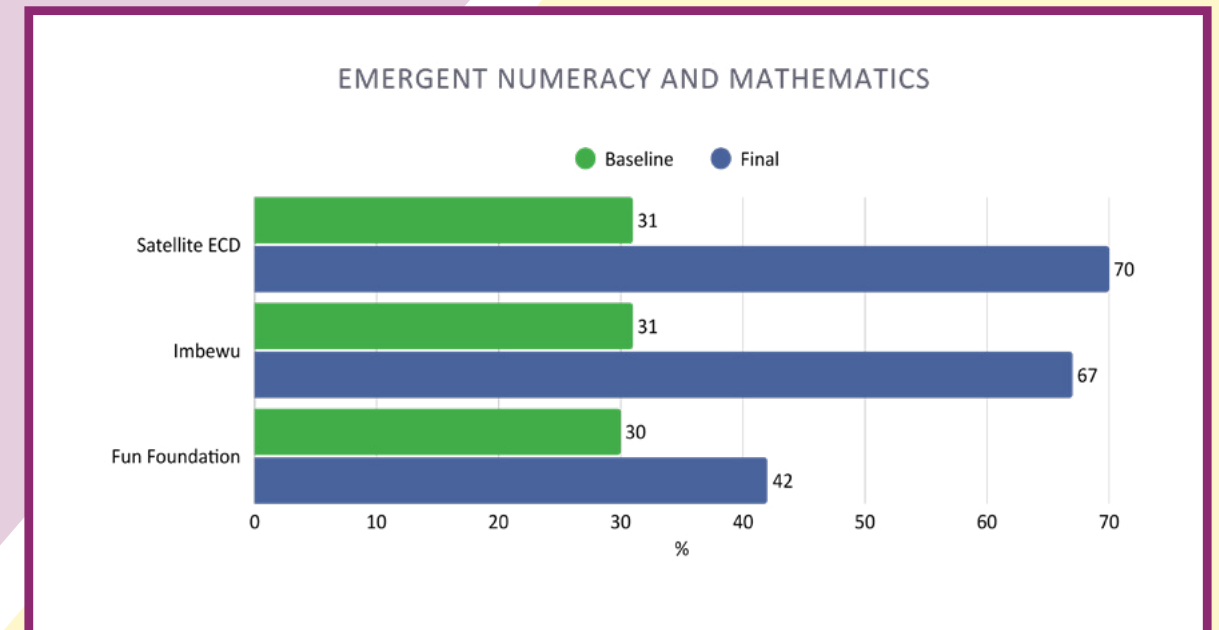
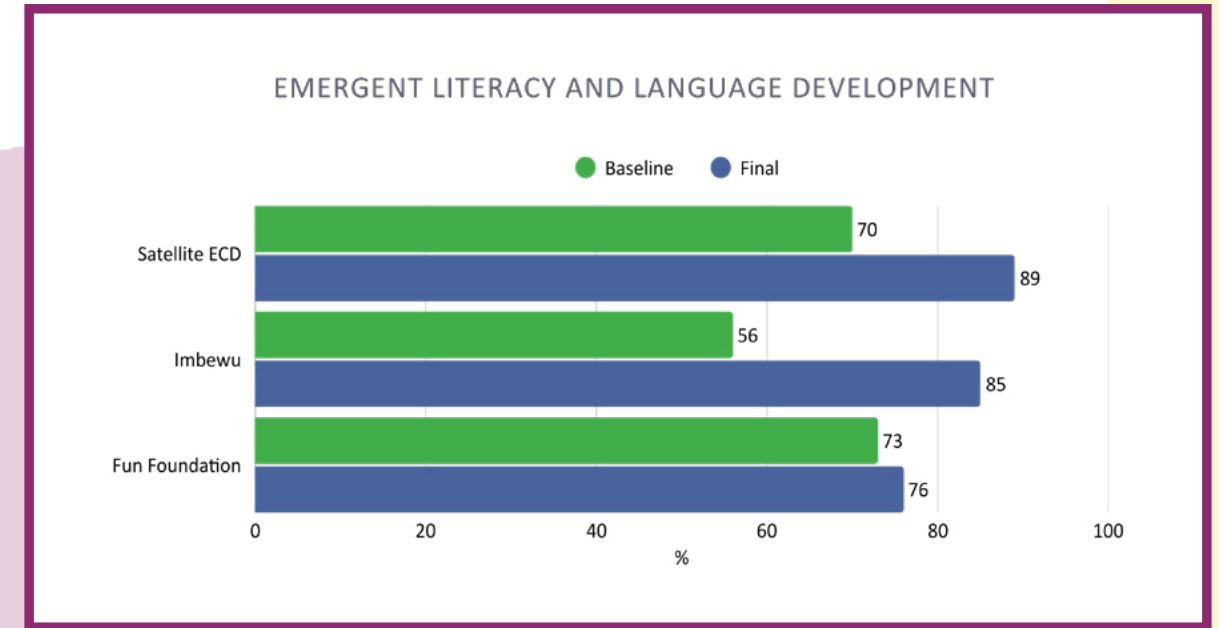
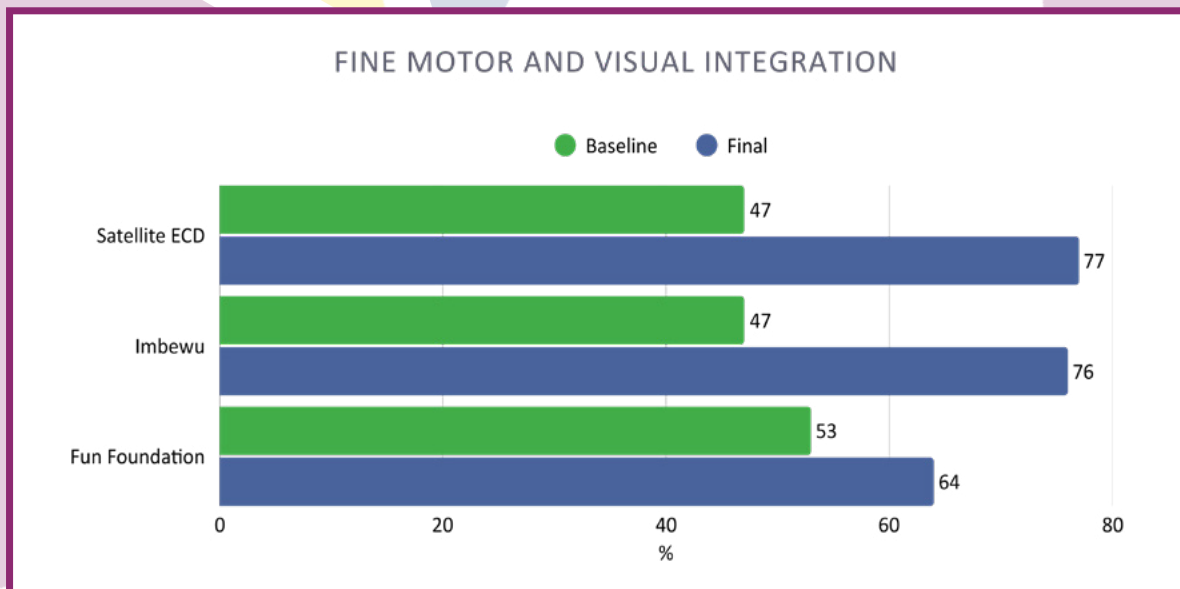
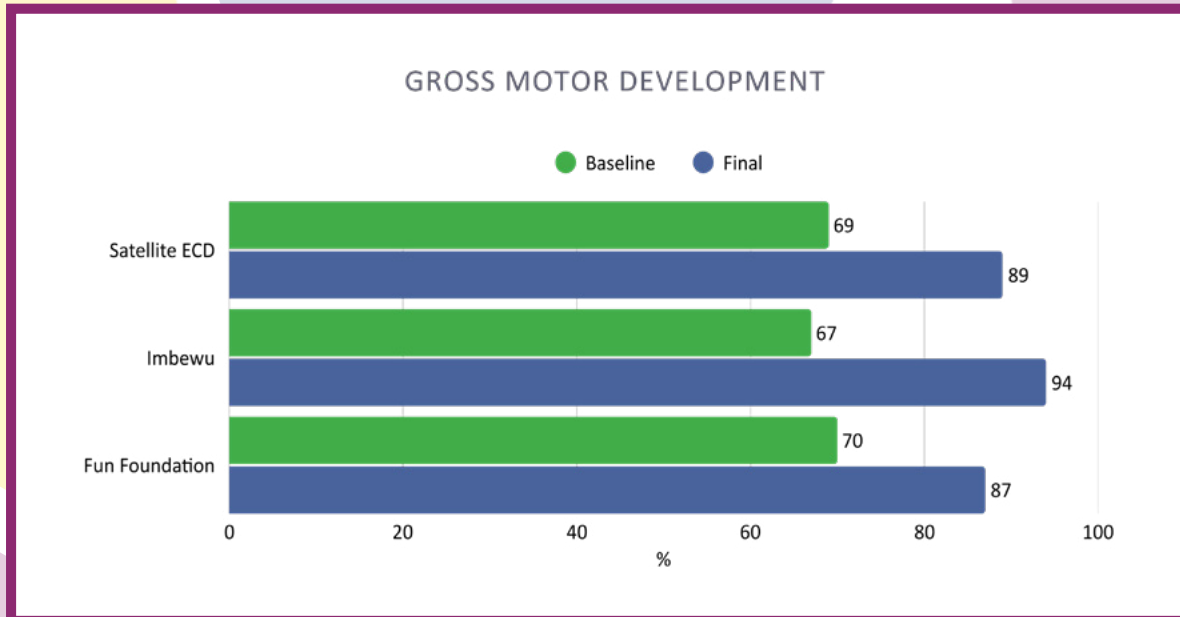
126% improvement in emergent numeracy

IMBEWU

116% improvement in emergent numeracy

FUN FOUNDATIONS

40% improvement in emergent numeracy



IMPACT OF QUALITY ECD INTERVENTIONS IN OUR RURAL COMMUNITY

GRADE 00

The independent Early Learning Outcomes Measure (ELOM) from DataDrive shows the potential of what a child can achieve, despite their socio-economic background.

31% of children leaving ECD in KwaZulu-Natal

42% of children leaving ECD across South Africa

18% of the children who had no access to ECD at all (which would be the case for the majority of the children in our community, if Thanda did not exist).

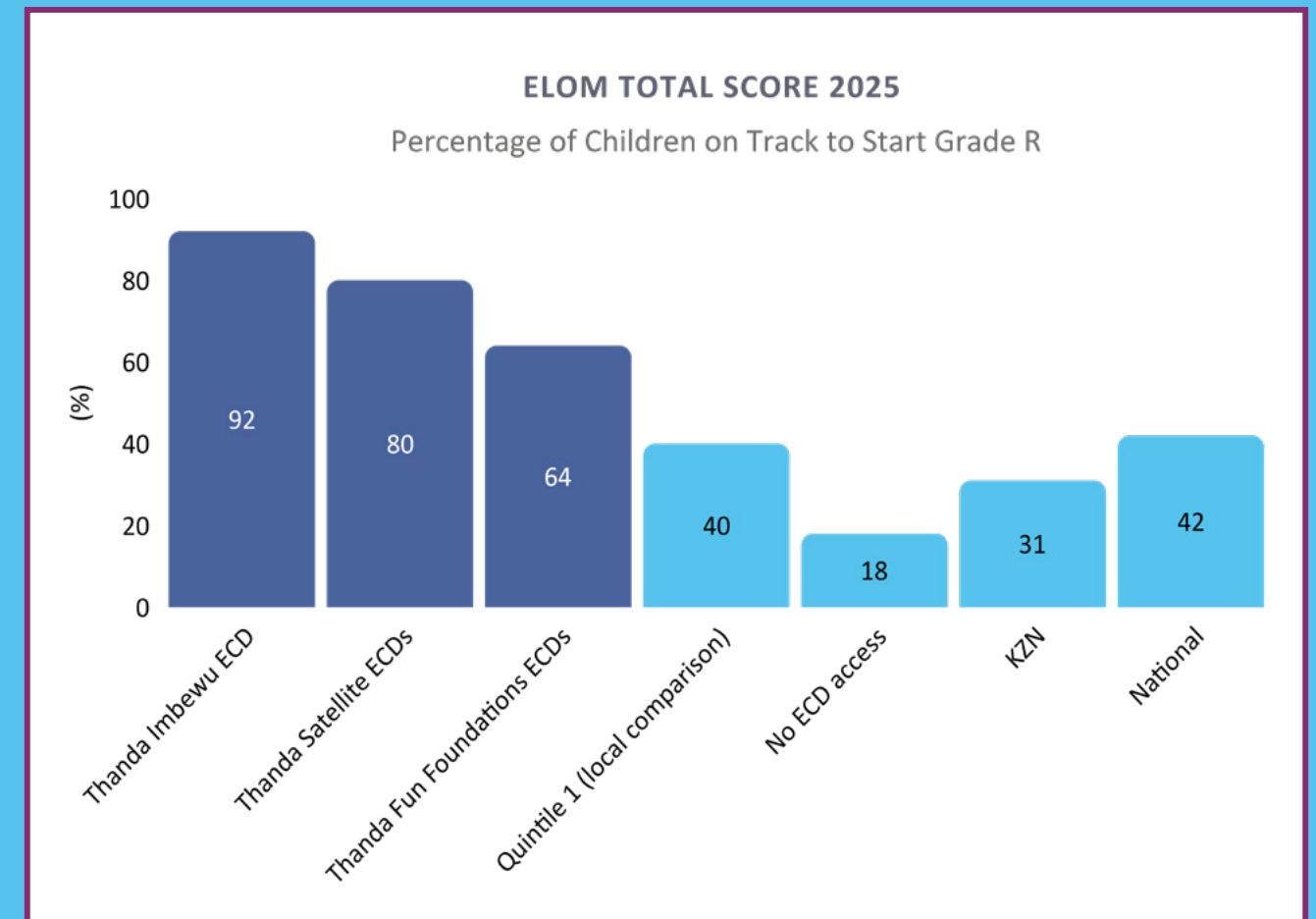
VS.

92% of children leaving Thanda's Imbewu ECD

80% of children leaving Thanda's Satellite ECDs

64% of children leaving Thanda's Fun Foundations ECDs

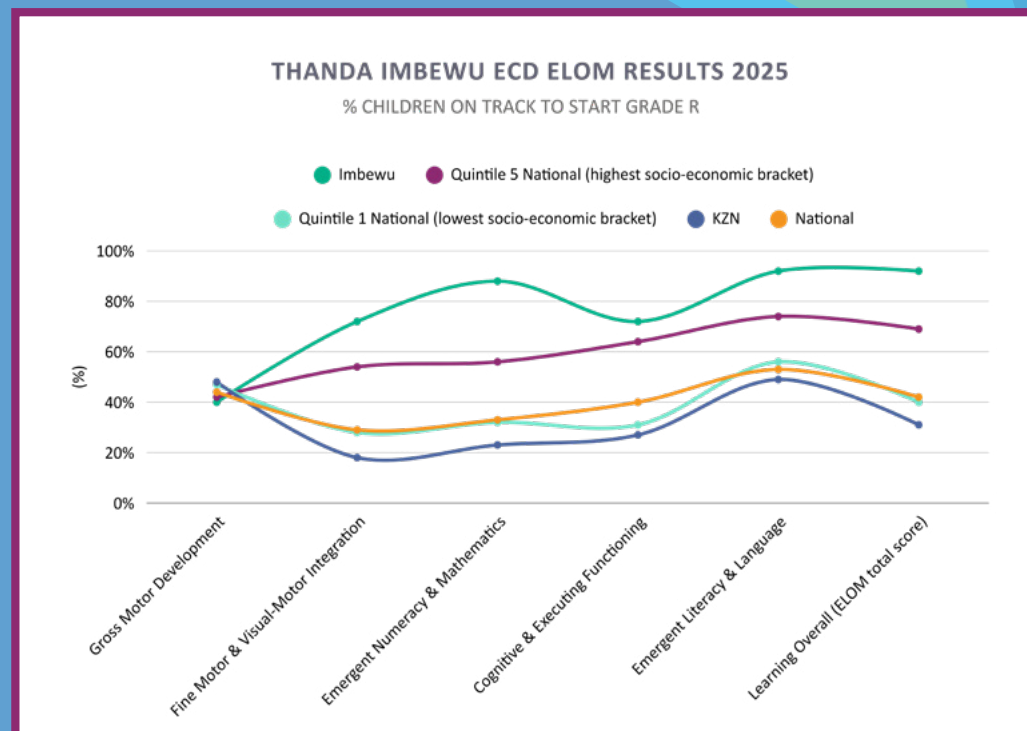
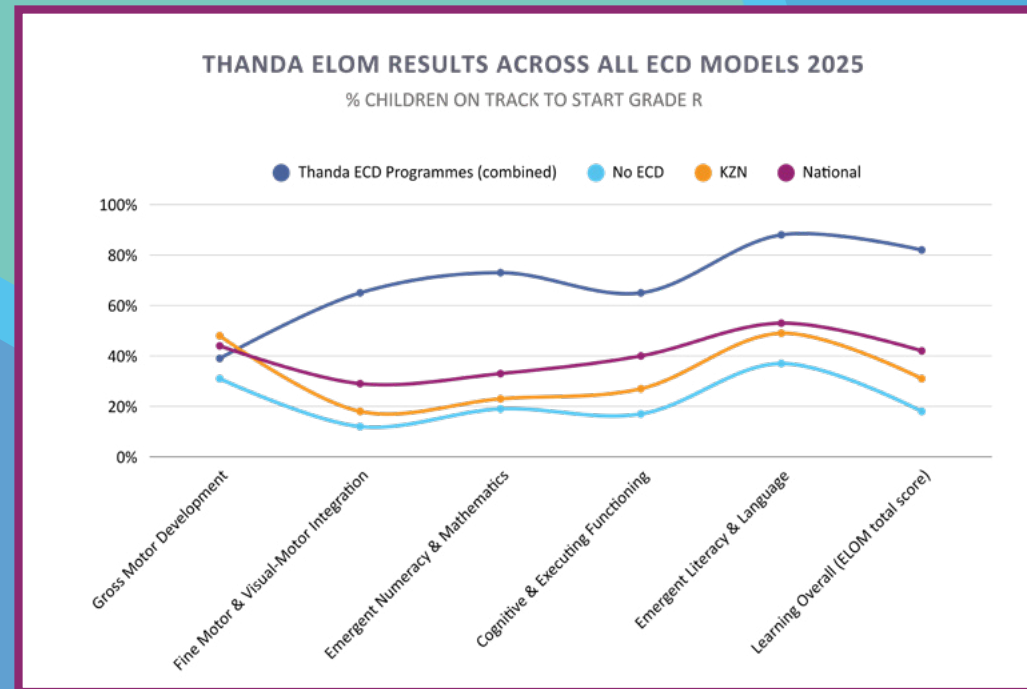
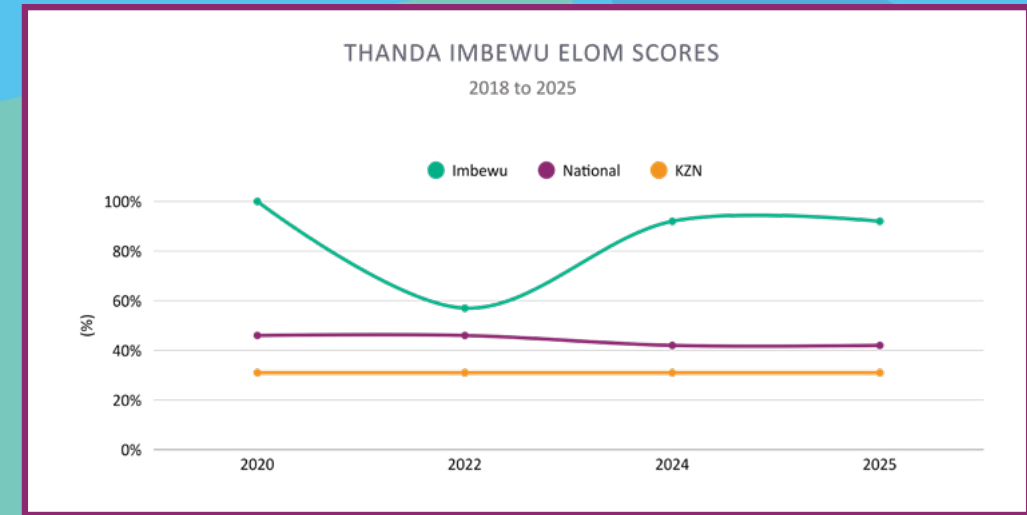
... are ON TRACK TO START GRADE R





Imbewu is Thanda's flagship ECD project based at the Thanda Community Centre. Thanda has been using ELOM to evaluate the children leaving our Gr. 00 Imbewu ECD Programme since 2019.

Imbewu's results show us what's possible for a child to achieve, despite their socio-economic background, when they have the opportunity to participate in a quality intervention.



GUARDIAN FEEDBACK

MRS SHEZI ON HER DAUGHTER LWANDE IN IMBEWU ECD

In the first few weeks that Lwande joined Thanda, I would meet uMalume (Thanda Driver) at the stop, he would update me about how Lwande's feeling and whether or not she cried in the car that day.

*At first, I thought he was just being friendly, but then I realised that **all Thanda people care about my child's well-being**, so if they care, why shouldn't I care? So, every now and then I started asking Miss Ngwazi about her progress. I would also share the things Lwande does at home. Like if she has to tidy where she was playing, she sings the tidy up song she says they sing at Thanda.*

There was also a time during the year where she was coming back with the books. At some point, I found myself reading those books by myself, and when she came back from school, I asked her to read it for me and we talked about the book. I enjoy the books that talk about nature because I love working in my garden. Lwande sometimes helps me in the garden and often shares stories about the food she eats at Thanda.

So I am very happy to know that Lwande is in a space that allows her to develop well. If it were up to me, Thanda would be up to Grade 12!

Lwande and Mrs Shezi reading a book together with her Thanda Teacher



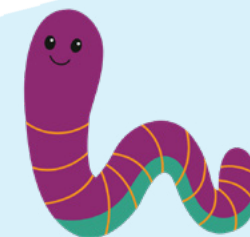
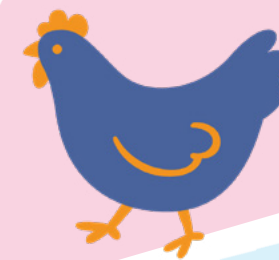


OUR ECO-ECD OFFICIALLY OPENED IN JANUARY 2025!

This model draws on principles from ecological design, traditional knowledge, and sustainability science to create an adaptable and enduring space for young learners that supports the natural environment. The project is a testament to the impact that thoughtful, systemic design can have on education by fostering holistic learning environments that are comfortable, inspiring, culturally-appropriate, self-sufficient, resource-efficient, and climate-resilient.



ACTIVITIES FOR HANDS-ON, IMMERSIVE, NATURAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES FOR THE CHILDREN:



- 10 Layer hens providing 3 eggs per week per child for a great protein boost!
- 3x pigs assist with biodigester waste management
- Vegetable garden
- Compost heap
- Seedling nursery
- Worm Farm
- Nature-based playgrounds
- Agroforestry food forests
- Closed-loop system for water retention
- Restoration of biodiversity



EMPOWERING CHILDREN'S HOUSEHOLDS & NEIGHBOURHOODS

Home Visits and Neighbourhood Learning Circles provide additional layers of support for children across Thanda's programmes.



726 children benefitted



1984 home visits



515 households supported



96 Neighbourhood Learning Circles

WITHOUT INTERVENTIONS

One in six South Africans suffers from anxiety, depression, or a substance use disorder and 41% of pregnant women in KZN are depressed, due primarily to childhood trauma, poverty, unemployment, HIV/AIDS, and a history of political and social upheaval.*

WITH *Quality* INTERVENTIONS

Stronger bonds are formed!

"I feel relieved because you find that at times they [Thanda Home Visitor] find me in a bad place emotionally, then they are able to motivate and educate me mentally and emotionally." - Guardian

*South African College of Applied Psychology. (2019). The shocking state of mental health in South Africa in 2019.

TOPICS COVERED IN LEARNING CIRCLES



Q1

Unusual vegetables: How to grow and cook them **AND** exploring entitlement vs responsibility

Q2

Farming from a South African Perspective **PLUS** the benefits of growing peanuts, peas and other legumes for increasing protein in the diet **AND** Understanding different perspectives (child vs guardian)

Q3

Different methods of food preparation and how this impacts the nutritional value **AND** Cultural diversity and parenting styles

Q4

2025 reflection **PLUS** cooking with peanuts and making peanut butter **AND** Understanding Perspective

Why are the Learning Circles so valuable?

Things like, the fact that as neighbours we are scattered, as soon as we get there we re-unite, talk, share ideas and have opinions. Also with some of us still young, we get to have elders there to listen and take advice from. And seeing progress as young ones, it really helps me there and to have relations with the community.
– Learning Circle participant



SUPPORTING CHILDREN LIVING WITH DISABILITIES



32 children living with disabilities involved in programmes



493 home visits



2 therapy days with occupational and physical therapist



8 children were assisted in successful achievement of care dependency grants

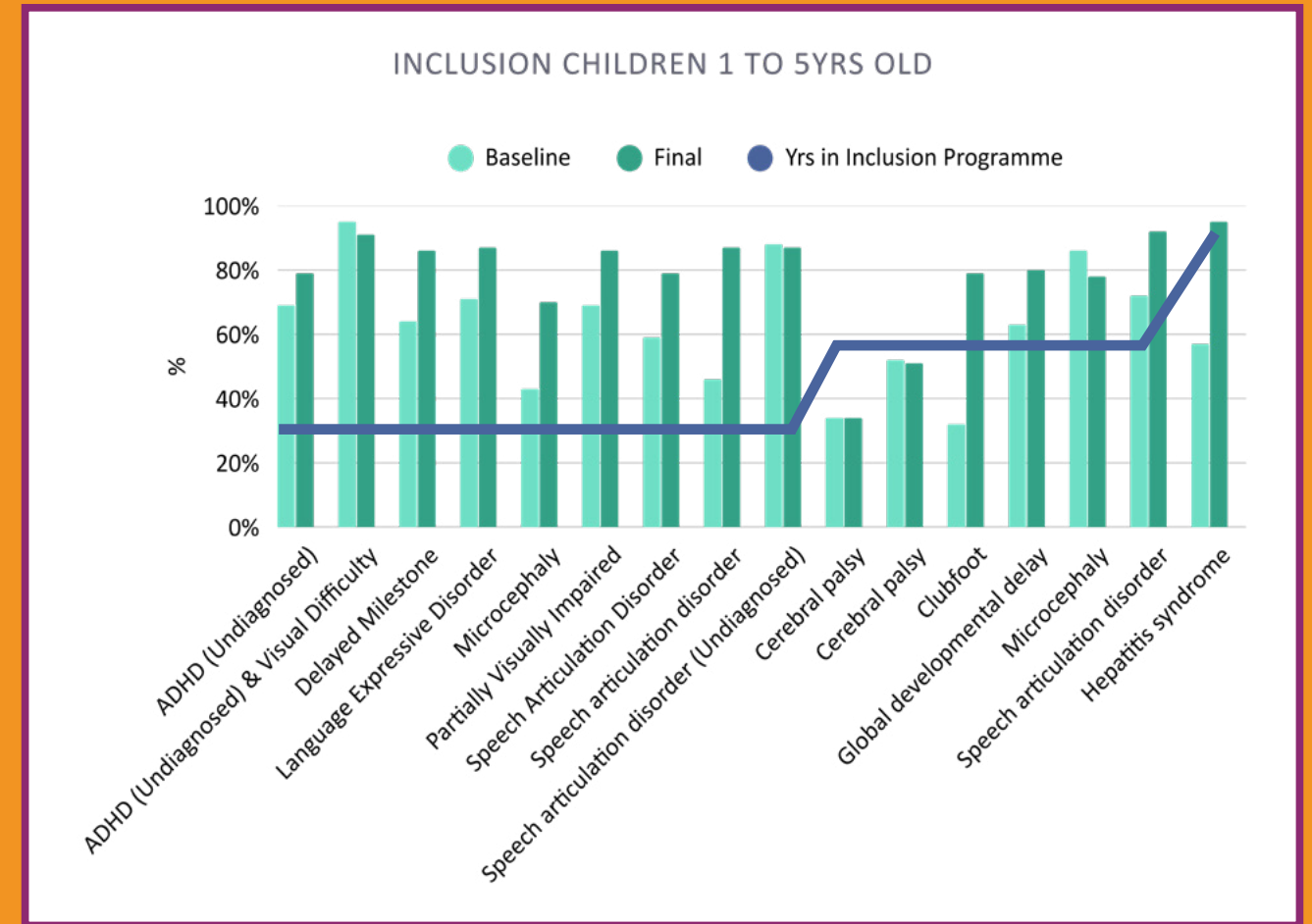
WITHOUT INTERVENTIONS

70% - 90% of children with disabilities in South Africa are not in school at all - these children remain at home with little acceptance, interaction, or stimulation.*

WITH *Quality* INTERVENTIONS

100% of children living with disabilities in community surrounding Thanda are included in programmes and 69% of these children strengthened skills in a notable way in 2025.

*Dr. Majoko & Prof. Phasha, The State of Inclusive Education in South Africa and the Implications for Teacher Training Programmes. British Council, UNISA, MIET AFRICA. 2018.



RESPITE PROGRAMME FOR CHILDREN WITH CEREBRAL PALSY

Pilot launched in 2025.

The Respite Programme Pilot enabled children with Cerebral Palsy to attend all-day sessions at Thanda where they engaged in multi-sensory activities together. Importantly, these sessions allowed their guardians essential rest so they are better able to support the children at home.



THANDUKWAZI CONTINUING SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AGES 5-9

WHAT IS IT? Children in Grades R-3 engage in hands-on, fun activities designed to build academic and life skills for success—both in school and beyond

WHO? 230 children in 18 Thandukwazi groups with 77% attendance (3% higher than 2024).

MEALS? 1,916 maize meal porridge breakfasts **AND** 11,463 hearty lunches



WITHOUT INTERVENTIONS

Approximately 74% of classrooms experience over-crowding.*

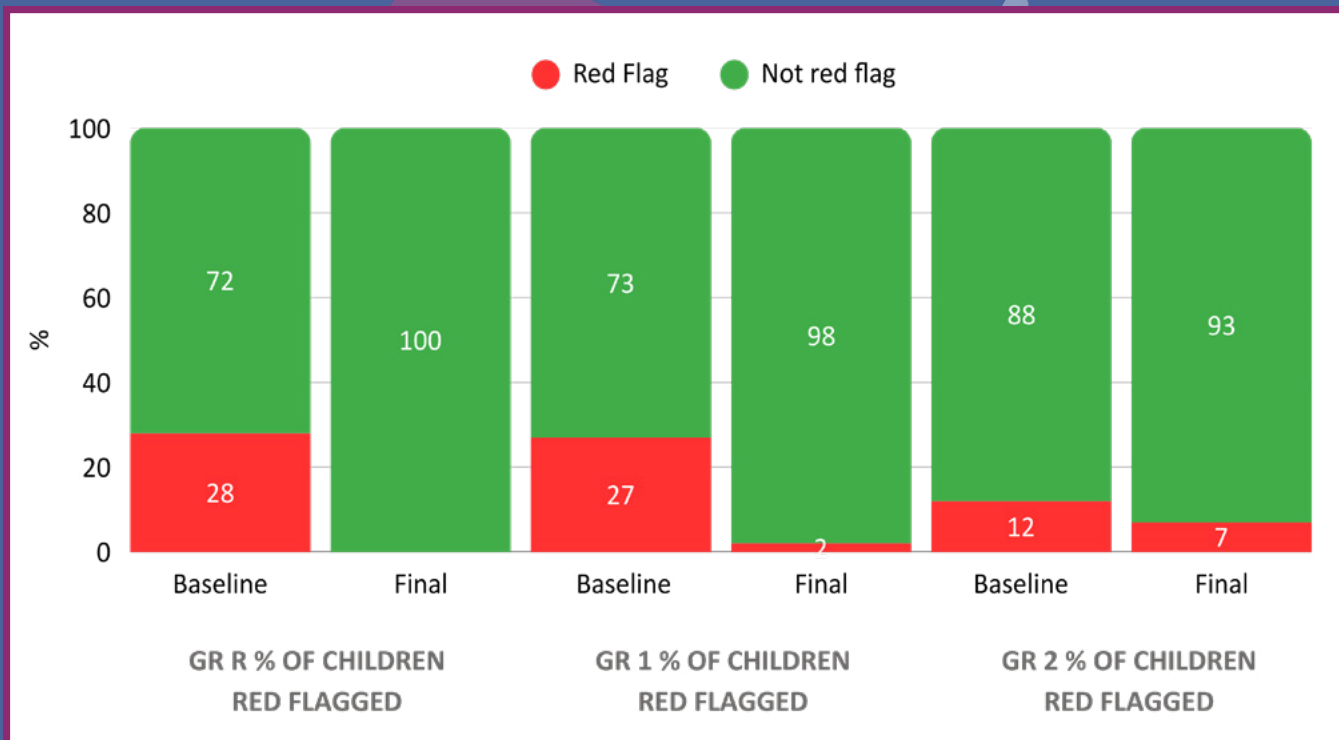
WITH *Quality* INTERVENTIONS

100% of tested children who attended Thandukwazi were ready for grade 1 at the end of 2025

* No Space for Us, Equal Education, 2021.



We use the Red Flag Assessment tool, developed by our partner Siyakwazi to evaluate 9 areas of competence = coordination, writing, memory, counting, pattern recognition, and the ability to follow instructions. Children who complete fewer than six receive a 'red flag,' signaling areas where additional support may be needed.



LITERACY PROGRAMME – REACH OUT TO READ



WHAT IS IT? This is the first ever phonics programme designed for children in Grade 1-3 learning to read in isiZulu.

WHERE IS IT? Based at Msinsini Primary School and facilitated by our specially trained Thandukwazi facilitators during the school day

WHO? 92 children in 140 sessions at Msinsini Primary School, facilitated by our specially trained Thandukwazi facilitators during the school day.

Grade 3 learners continued to strengthen their fluency skills, with **passage reading improving by 58% in 2025.**



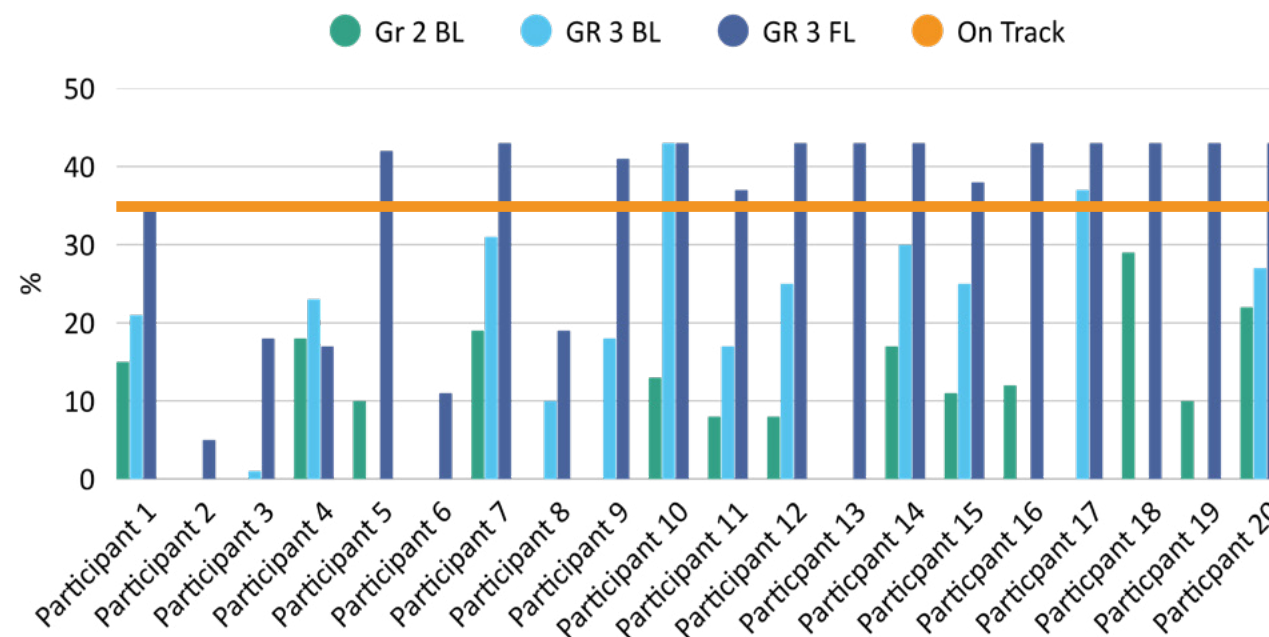
WITHOUT INTERVENTIONS

Only 30% of learners in Grades 1 to 3 are reading at their grade level in their *home language* across South Africa.*

WITH *Quality* INTERVENTIONS

70% of Grade 3 learners attending Thanda Literacy Programme are on track for reading.

EGRA ASSESSMENT GRADE 3 PASSAGE READING JOURNEY
GRADE 2 BASELINE TO GRADE 3 FINAL



* Department of Basic Education's Funda Uphumelele National Survey (FUNS) - 2026 report



SIYAZAZI—DETERMINING ‘WHO AM I?’

WHAT IS IT? Siyazazi sessions take place on Saturdays, with grades 4&5 attending on alternate Saturdays to grades 6&7.

WHO? 263 children with 75% attendance (increased by 6% compared to 2024).



WITHOUT INTERVENTIONS

Only 37% of children in Grade 5 are on track for mathematics.*

WITH *Quality* INTERVENTIONS

Using fun and engaging learning methods, we see large improvements in numeracy based competencies – grade 6 children in Thanda improved their measuring capabilities by 103% in 2025.

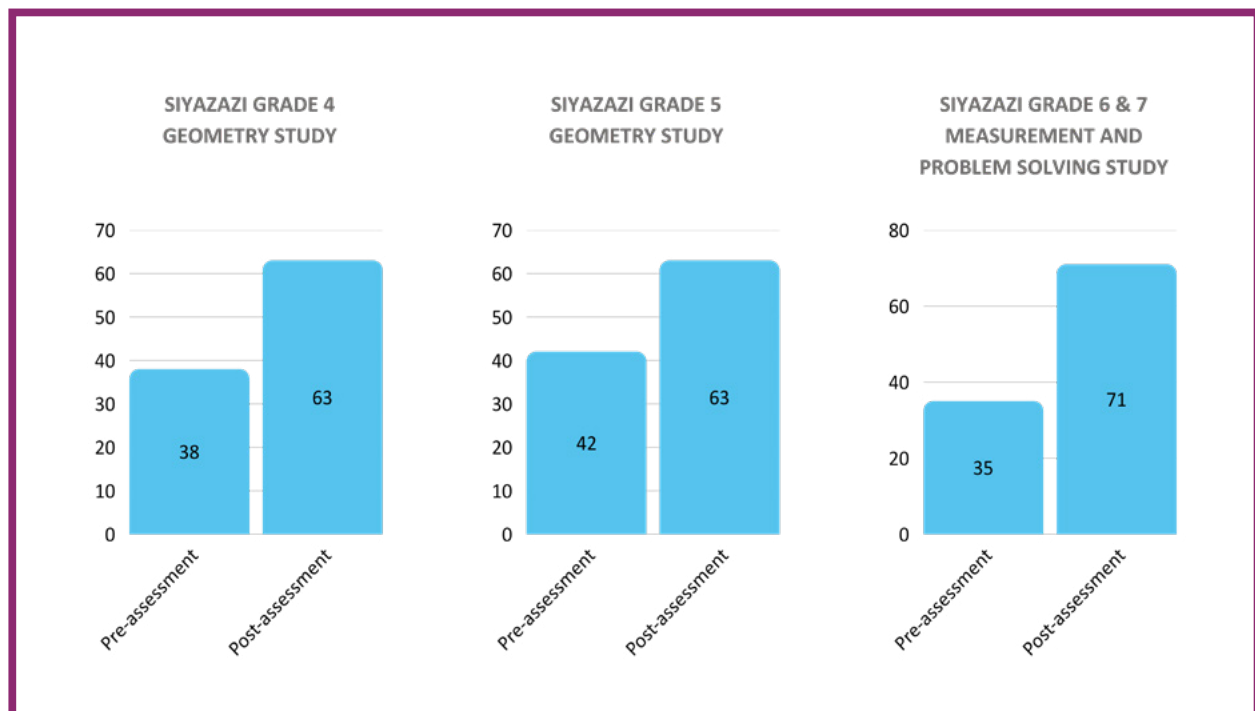
*J. Gondwe. Mathematics Performance of South African Primary School Learners- Lessons from TIMSS 2019.

FACILITATOR FEEDBACK FROM SINDY FOR THE CREATIVE ARTS ELECTIVE

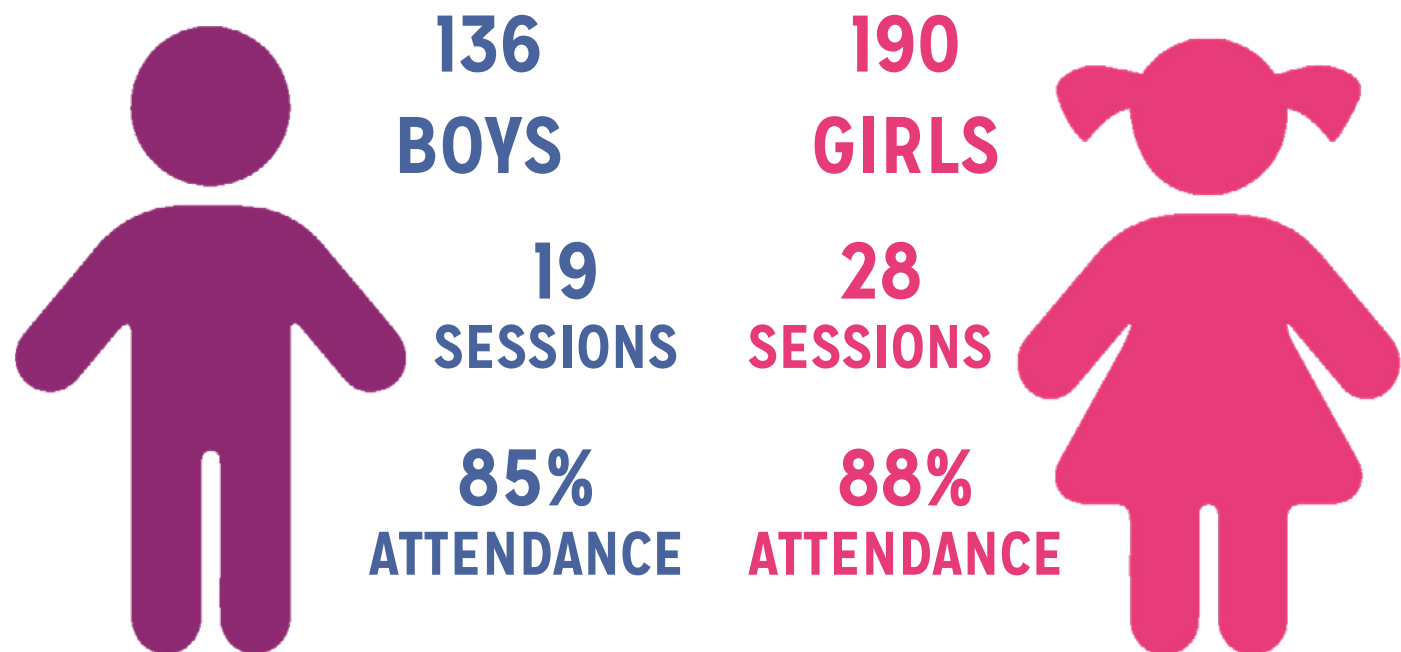
The kids had an incredible year in 2025, exceeding expectations and crushing their goals! We took part in various art exhibitions and they loved drawing for these because it let them showcase their passions and skills. The excitement to show off their talent to other kids at Thanda and their parents was striking.



To align with the Mathematics CAPS curriculum, we had some fun exploring geometric concepts with our grade 4&5 children using tangrams and learned measuring concepts with our grade 6&7s using an ancient board game.



BOYS PROGRAMME AND GIRLS PROGRAMME



WITHOUT INTERVENTIONS

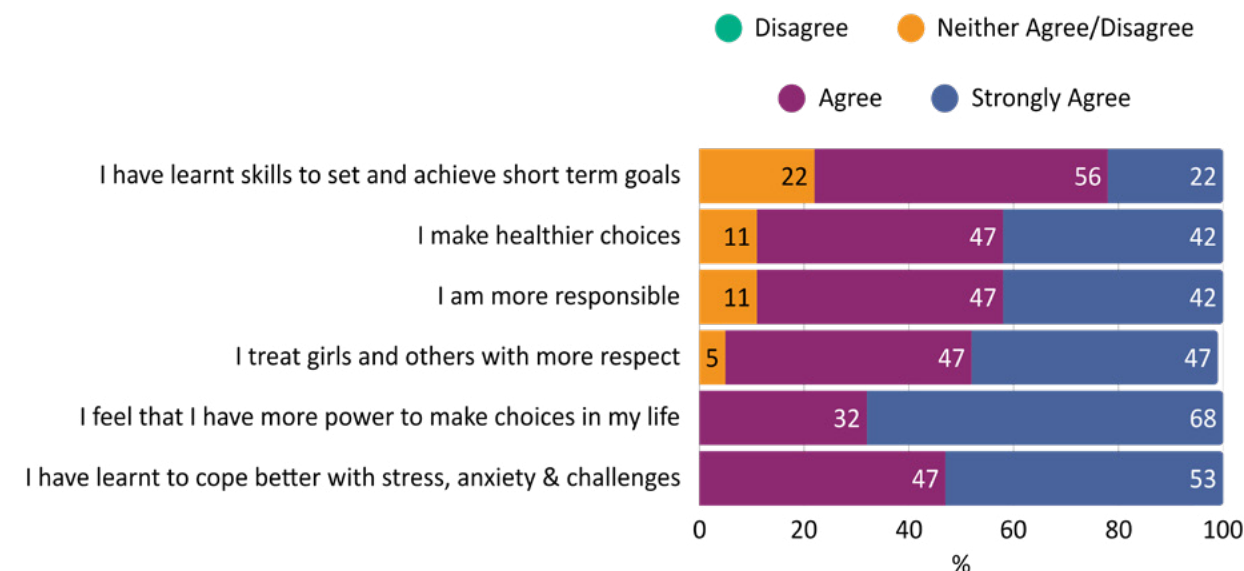
61.2% of South African high-schoolers assessed reported anxiety symptoms at clinically significant levels, and 19.7 % experienced depressive symptoms.*

WITH *Quality* INTERVENTIONS

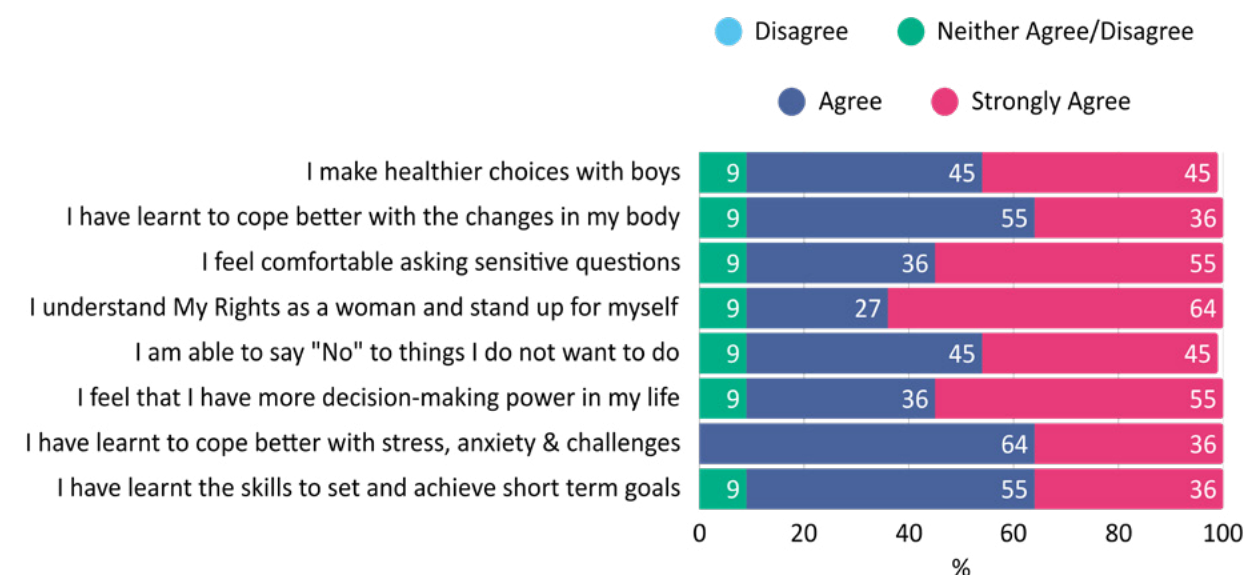
Through Thanda's Boys and Girls Programmes, 100% of boys and girls between grades 8 and 11 report being able to cope with stress, anxiety and challenges.

* M A A Strydom, P J Pretorius, G Joubert. South African Journal of Psychiatry, Vol 18, No 3 (2012). Depression and anxiety among Grade 11 and 12 learners attending schools in central Bloemfontein

GRADE 8 TO 11 BECAUSE OF BOYS PROGRAMME



GRADE 8 TO 11 BECAUSE OF GIRLS PROGRAMME



BOYS LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME & GIRLS LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

WHAT IS IT? The programme is designed to develop key skills, including self-esteem, communication, sense of agency, problem solving, self-awareness, identity and responsibility, through the curriculum and related activities.

47 BOYS **23** **78 GIRLS** **41**
ENROLED SESSIONS **ENROLED SESSIONS**



WITHOUT INTERVENTIONS

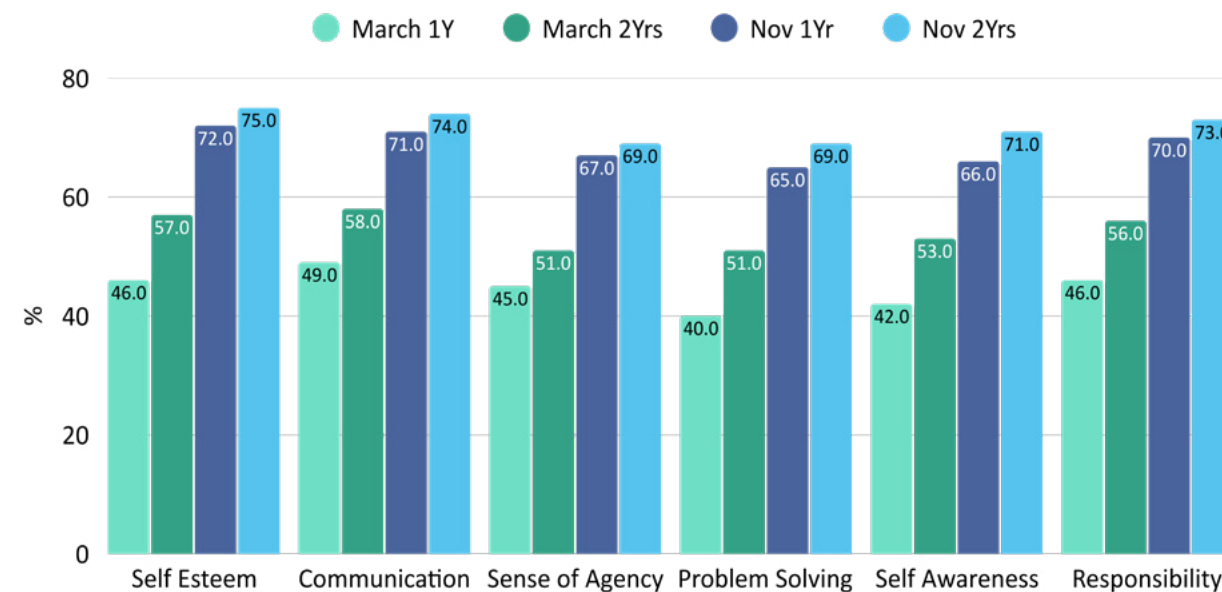
Girls scored only 46% in self-esteem upon entering the programme.

WITH *Quality* INTERVENTIONS

63% improvement in self esteem of the girls who attended the Girls Leadership Programme over a 2 year period.



AVERAGE SCORES IN SELF MANAGEMENT & INTERPERSONAL SCORES
 BASELINE VS. FINAL





THABISO, BOY'S LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME CO-ORIDINATOR

A highlight from the weekend away to Twinstreams was the World Trade Activity. This saw the boys assigned different countries and required to trade natural resources with each other. The boys had fun negotiating terms and making trades and the activity opened a lot of questions about poverty, wealth and the protection of natural resources.”

CHANGES IN BEHAVIOUR

The girls felt that they had improved in confidence, courage and kindness with one another. They also shared that they felt unthreatened by each other and that jealousy had been turned into joy at each others' successes. Within the group the girls felt secure, listened to, and that differences among them were accepted.

FAVOURITE ACTIVITIES

Favourite activity; martial arts

Favourite theme; Self-Knowledge and Self-Actualisation

SKILLS LEARNED IN 2025

- Perseverance, coping with setbacks and lack of resources in their lives, and how to be resilient.
- Co-operating with the peers in class and teamwork
- Sportsmanship and mutual respect
- Self-confidence. This newly found assurance flows into all areas of their life: academic through to social interactions.
- Participation (connected to self-confidence) saw each girl eager to contribute to the programme evaluation conversation.
- Communication



GRADE 8+ SKILLS PROGRAMME



WITHOUT INTERVENTIONS

About 45.1% of South Africans aged 15–24 are NEET (not in employment, education, or training). Many of these youth have only matric or less, suggesting school did not equip them with employable skills.*

WITH *Quality* INTERVENTIONS

119 children learned the basics in a selection of marketable skills, helping them to explore their interests and making them more employable after leaving school.

*Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS). Statistics SA. Q1 2025.

HAMBANOLWAZI & THANDA LIBRARY



BOOKS BORROWED

Programme	2025	2024
ECD Children	4592	3351
ECD Facilitators	1303	531
Home Visiting	44	44
Inclusion	25	8
CYD Children	5621	5455
CYD Facilitators	574	332
Other Programmes	1748	1822
Overall Total	13913	11543



WITHOUT INTERVENTIONS

43% of South African households with young children have no books at all in the home.

WITH *Quality* INTERVENTIONS

12,348 books borrowed by children and community members through Thanda's Mobile Library in 2025.

*Department of Basic Education and UNICEF South Africa. 'Caregiver knowledge, attitudes and practices on play-based learning in children from birth to 6-years old'. 2023



BUILDING FOOD SECURITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Since 2016, **R 42,723 571** worth of nutritious fresh produce has been harvested and **92% OF ALL PRODUCE** grown over this period was retained in the local community.

4 new farms were added to Nisela in 2025.

2025 TOTAL SOLD
R 3,074,692

2025 TOTAL PRODUCTION
R 9,454,578

WITHOUT INTERVENTIONS

Average local annual household income is R14 600 (51% below the South African food poverty line).

WITH *Quality* INTERVENTIONS

6,986 household members have access to fresh, organic food grown in their own garden.

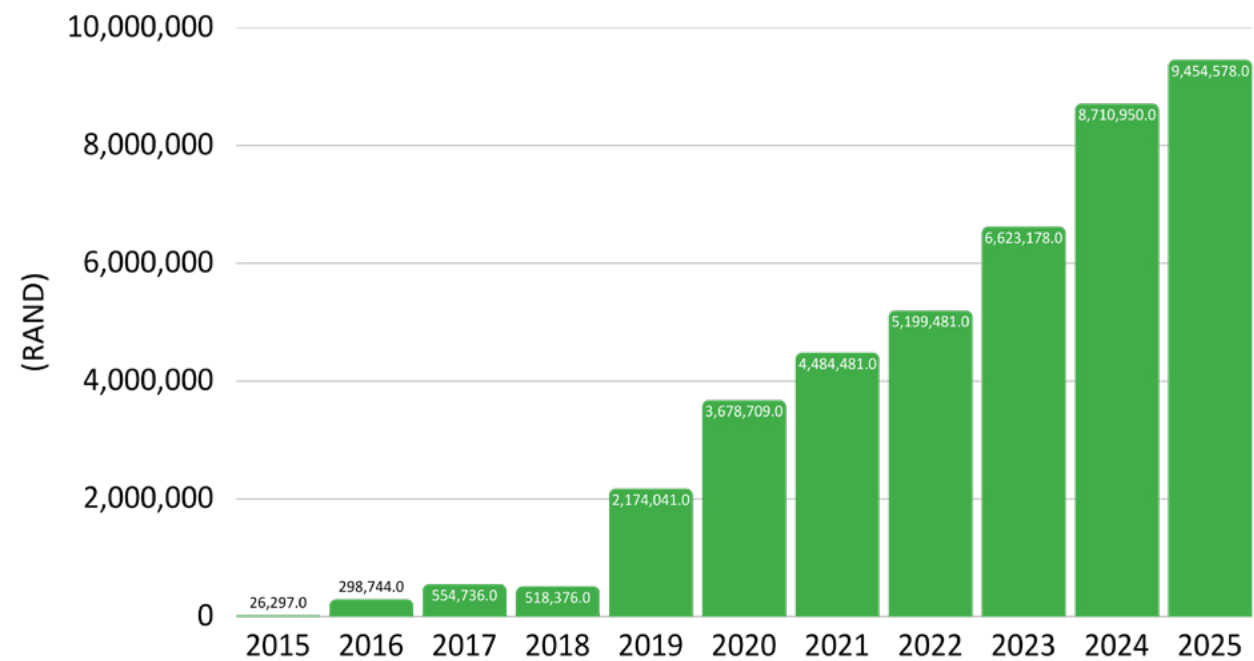


PHUME NGOBESE JOINED ONE OF THESE NEW FARMS (BEREA FARM) AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR.

I have definitely grown not only as a farmer, but as a person. In terms of knowledge, I can say I am laps ahead from where I was in the beginning of the year. My way of thinking has been reshaped because now I can imagine the endless possibilities that can come with working hard and farming. I now know the most basic things, like which seasons to plant, what to plant, how to plant and why. I think, despite having a bit of farming knowledge that I received from my father - it was never this detailed.

FOOD SECURITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRODUCTION

(2015-2025)



NISELA

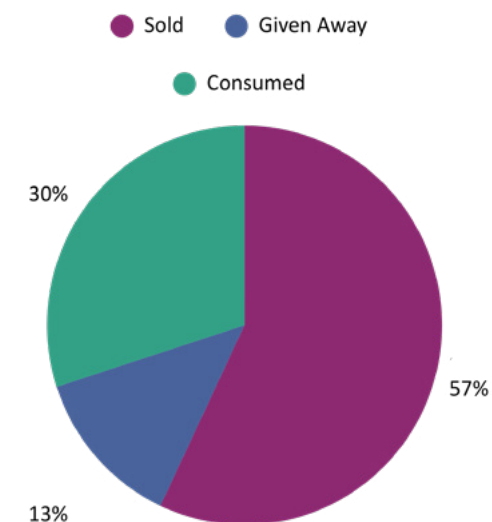
We offered well-rounded and highly effective training & mentoring to our 381 (active!) farmers on 33 farms in our Nisela Programme in 2025, as well as access to bio-inputs.

IN 2025 THANDA INCREASED FOCUSED ON:

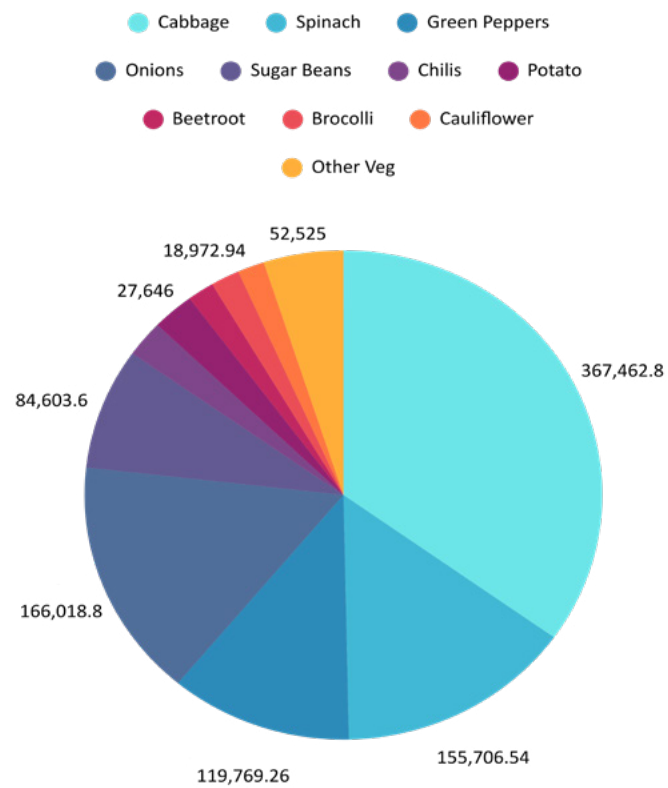
- Entrepreneurial Farmers to help them learn how to see their farms as businesses and to scale them.
- Youth Farmers as these are the up-and-coming farmers who will be the future of food provision in the area. To this end we began a TRAILBLAZER programme for those who are serious about working hard to expand their efforts. Through this project two farmers were selected to start farming on a larger scale with Thanda's help.

Kraal manure delivered in KGs	106,800 kgs
Chicken manure delivered in KGs	41,100 kgs
Nitrogen rich biodigester liquid applied at 36 farms	2,585 litres
Pressmud delivered in kgs	42,500 kgs
Home made 'apeche' for pest control distributed	1,889 litres
New BioNeem Oil for pest control distributed	10,300 litres

NISELA 2025 TOTAL SOLD, CONSUMED & GIVEN AWAY



NISELA 2025 Q4 TOP SOLD VEGETABLES



SIMPHIWE IS ONE OF THOSE FARMERS, HERE HE SHARES WHAT THANDA TAUGHT HIM IN 2025

I have learnt and benefited from being a part of the Nisela Trailblazers workshops at Thanda. There is a course called Entrepreneurial Essentials that I enjoyed very much and found to be very helpful.

It covers all the basics of starting a business, including creating a business plan, how to develop and conduct research, and marketing skills.

Initially I was very shy, but now I am able to speak to people and advertise my business. Learning about sales, costing, pricing, and general bookkeeping has also opened my eyes and helped me understand how to cost and manage the money that comes out of and goes into the business.

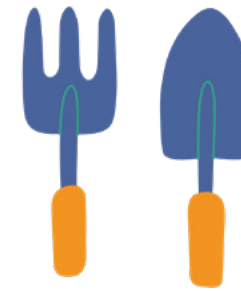
I can now also budget. Yoh, I won't lie, budgeting was my weakest point, but now I am able to track how I spend and balance my finances.

Thanda has really helped me and I am very grateful. I wish this opportunity for every young person. I didn't even know the difference between TAX and VAT. I am definitely a better person now in the way I think about and view my business.





BUILDING RESILIENCE AT HOME THROUGH HOUSEHOLD GARDENS



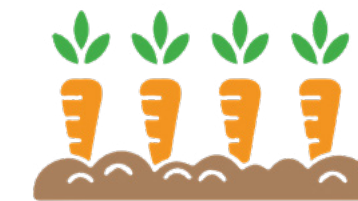
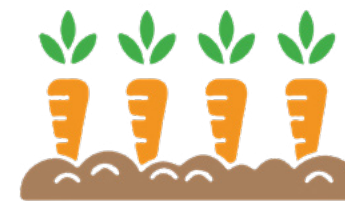
790
HOUSEHOLD
GARDENS



125 NEIGHBOURHOOD
LEARNING CIRCLES



4709 HOUSEHOLD
MEMBERS
SUPPORTED
THROUGH THE
GARDENS



STARTING TO ADDRESS STUNTING: INCREASING THE AMOUNT OF PROTEIN GROWN AND CONSUMED LOCALLY IN 2025:

261% increase in plant based protein consumption
MAJORITY OF HOUSEHOLDS planting peanuts and legumes

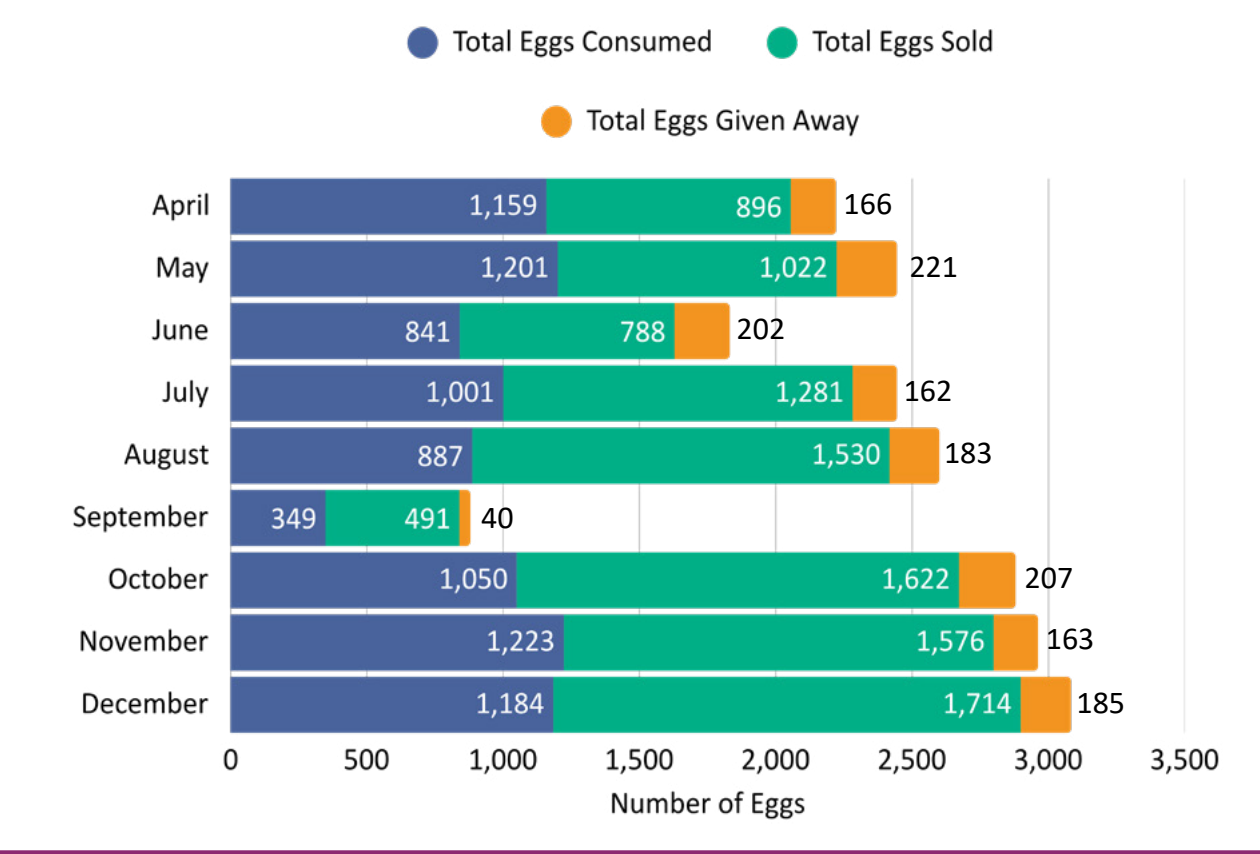
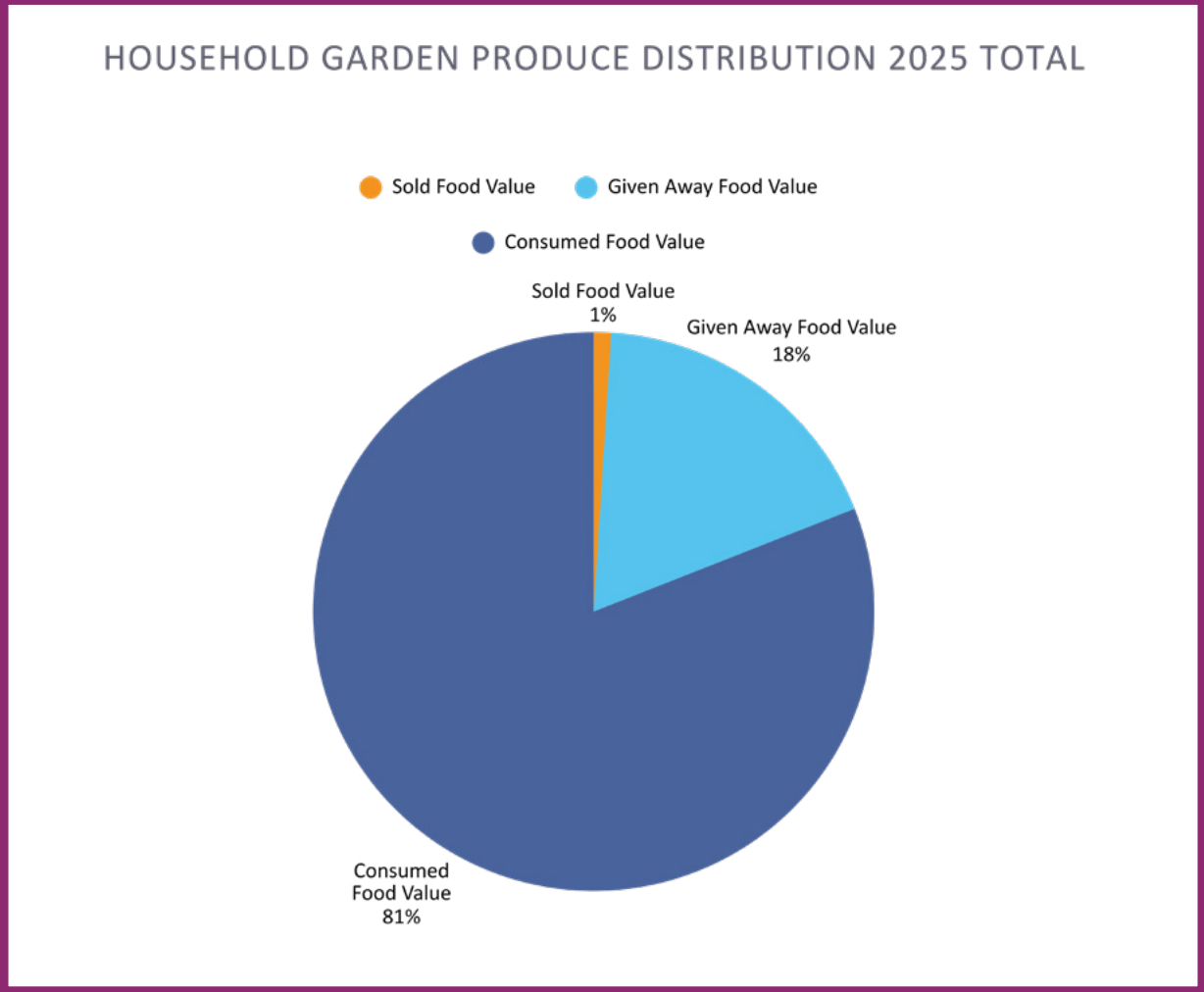
With just **125 LAYING HENS**, at the start of this project in April 2025, produced eggs worth R47 799, **111 531G PROTEIN**, which was consumed in the local community, and **72450 G OF PROTEIN** consumed by members of the 25 pilot households.



HOUSEHOLD GARDENER FEEDBACK:

Mrs Shezi, who was struggling with pests speaks of the value of Thanda's learning circles: *"Of course the one I found most valuable was the session about combatting pests and how to make nutritious meals. It was helpful because everyone was sharing their challenges with their gardens and even their families too. It made me feel okay, like my challenges can also be resolved. It is normal to have challenges. We also receive seedlings to grow vegetables that we are not familiar with, so being in these meetings is always beneficial. I did not know how to cook brinjal but now I do. My favourite way to prepare them is making them part of my stew or grill them."*

I do hope to continue growing my garden. I see the value of having food growing at home. There have been times when it would be mid-month and we would be low on groceries and I would just harvest vegetables from the garden. This garden has saved me so many times I cannot even count. Sometimes, I think what if I gave up, where would I be? Where would I be without Thando's (her mentor) guidance?"



PARTNER WITH US

Thanda is a registered Non-profit organisation (085-981-NPO) and Public Benefit Organisation (930031027). We currently have over 30 partners working toward building a stronger community in Mtwalume. As our work grows, however, so does our need for more partners.

Contact us at info@thanda.org if you would like to explore a possible partnership!



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