

Initiative to teach SA children through play

At the first-ever Africa Play Conference, held in Pretoria recently, the Lego Foundation and Sesame Workshop (the nonprofit organisation behind Takalani Sesame) announced a major five-year initiative to promote children's learning through play by harnessing the power of Takalani Sesame to reach children and caregivers through television, digital media, and targeted community engagement. The new programme builds on the Lego Foundation and Sesame Workshop's partnership in South Africa, which has brought opportunities for play-based learning to children and their caregivers since 2015.



Kerry Kaasen and Innocent Nkata with Takalani Sesame characters, Neno and Kani

As part of the new initiative, funded by a \$10 million (approximately R134,183,500) grant from the Lego Foundation, new Takalani Sesame segments and parent-facing videos promoting play-based learning will be featured on both TV and digital platforms. The initiative will also expand outreach programs in the Eastern Cape, Gauteng, and Free State provinces to help teachers, caregivers, and social workers facilitate meaningful play that contributes to children's learning and development.

Children have a natural potential to learn about the world through play, and the scientific community has found increasing evidence in recent decades that infants and children are constantly learning, connecting, and engaging with their surroundings through positive playful experiences. When children are not at school, they are usually with their primary caregivers — often the biggest supporters of children's learning — whose ability to nurture and guide playful learning can unlock the transformative power of education.

"Play provides one of the most powerful ways for children to learn and overcome setbacks, yet many caregivers and teachers are unaware of the benefits of play in children's learning and development," said Innocent Nkata, managing director of Sesame Workshop South Africa. "Together with the Lego Foundation and our beloved Takalani Sesame characters, we will bring the joys and benefits of play-based learning to millions of children and caregivers across South Africa and shift the perceptions around the educational value of play."

Through the new initiative, the Lego Foundation and Sesame Workshop are committed to creating an enabling environment where play-based learning is integrated into educational policy at the local and national level—putting play higher on the country’s agenda and creating a body of resources that can be integrated into early childhood programs across the country.

“There is an urgent need for rethinking how we equip children with the skills needed to successfully navigate an uncertain and complex world. Right from the outset, learning through play is the best way for them to develop skills such as problem solving or creativity,” said Kerry Kassen, Lego Foundation Initiatives Lead for South Africa.

The new initiative builds on earlier Lego Foundation and Sesame Workshop projects (Play Every Day and Play Well and Be Happy) that have helped caregivers in Johannesburg and surrounding provinces learn about the educational value of play through play workshops, empowering them to engage with children in ways that contribute to healthy development. Additional outreach programs in the Eastern Cape have provided hands-on learning in classrooms through kits containing Takalani Sesame characters and Lego Duplo bricks, along with teacher and caregiver training.

In addition, the foundation is working closely with UNICEF and the South African Ministry of Basic Education to secure the right policy reforms, curriculum development, and teacher development to ensure that learning through play is understood, accepted, and implemented. The methodology will subsequently be rolled out to more than 1,000 primary schools in the provinces where the Sesame Workshop initiative is currently active.

Sesame Workshop and the Lego Foundation will start rolling out their two-part initiative later this year across applicable media in the targeted provinces.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>