

SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF DR ERIC ATMORE

Since 1980 I have been significantly involved with programmes focusing on children and child rights at four organisations.

On graduating from the University of Cape Town with an Honours degree in Community Work, in 1980 I started out as a community fieldworker at the **Foundation for Social Development**. My work here involved working with young people aged 12 to 21 years from Bishop Lavis, Elsies River, Valhalla Park and Kalksteefontein amongst many communities. These youth were either in gangs or susceptible to gang influence. I was responsible for planning and implementing social development programmes which aimed to draw young vulnerable youth away from gang activities and gang influence. As part of the programmes we worked with families getting children into schools, assessing children's health and nutrition needs, referring youth to social work counselling services and many other activities. We worked with about 1,000 youth each year. After 3 years I moved on to take up a position as Director of the Lady Buxton Children's Centre, a branch of Child Welfare Society.

From December 1982, I was Director of the **Lady Buxton Children's Centre**. The programmes offered included a Department of Education-funded Pre-Primary school, a Day Care Centre and a Breastfeeding Clinic. I was employed following an inspection of the facility by the then Department of Social Welfare that found that the programmes provided were way below the quality that the department wished it to be. The department gave the Lady Buxton Management Board time to employ a Director and to get the quality of the service to an acceptable standard, otherwise they would de-register the facility. At this time the facility took only children who were classified as "white" under the Population Registration Act.

Working with the Management Board I undertook from the first month to provide a "non-racial" service notwithstanding that this was breaking the law. The Lady Buxton Children's Centre, together with two other Day Care centres, became the first three non-racial facilities, enrolling children who were not classified as white. Whilst we were advised by the Department of Welfare "not to take non-white children (as they called it), we ignored this. From January 1983 the Lady Buxton Children's Centre was fully non-racial.

I restructured the organisation and introduced a subsidy programme for "poorer parents" and for single parents, some of who worked as domestics in Claremont. We sold a piece of unused land and used the income to build a state-of-the-art Day Care centre and Pre-Primary School for 170 children on the site. This Centre still stands today. In May/June of 1987, I was approached to apply for the vacant post of Deputy-Director of the **Grassroots Educare Trust** and started on 1 August 1987.

The scope of the work at Grassroots was wide and diverse and embraced some 120 ECD centres in urban Cape Town and in the rural areas up the West Coast and inland.

My role was leadership and management of the children's programmes at Grassroots and involved leading a team of some 60 staff at its peak. My responsibilities included programme development, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation of activities, ensuring that programmes remained within budget, and reporting to donors on how funds had been spent.

Much of my work at this time covered advocacy and lobbying and preparing early childhood development policy for the National Education Policy Investigation, a think-tank funded by foreign governments that was preparing policy and programme options for a democratic government in waiting. In 1992, following this I was appointed to the South African Study on Early Childhood Development, a World Bank funded initiative to draft early childhood development (ECD) policy for the new democratic government of South Africa. This report was published in 1994 and is the foundation of what we know today as Grade R provision.

With the completion of the South African Study on Early Childhood Development, I asked myself: "So who is going to support government in making this a reality?" This led to me establishing the **Centre for Early Childhood Development**, opening our doors on 1 August 1994. This involved recruiting Management Board members, setting up policies, systems and procedures, developing children's programmes, raising the funding to provide these programmes, ensuring good governance and compliance, recruiting staff and implementing the programmes. Programmes developed include: ECD teacher training, providing physical infrastructure, providing education equipment, leadership training for leaders in the children's sector nationally, policy development, and advocacy and lobbying for the rights and protection of children.

Over the years these programmes have expanded from the Western Cape to all nine provinces of South Africa and also into African countries; Ghana, Namibia and Swaziland, mainly through training of teachers.

I built the organisation up to 20 staff with a budget of R 16.8 million in 2018/19.

I have been consulted on early childhood development by national Education Ministers Professor Sibusiso Bengu, Professor Kader Asmal and Dr Naledi Pandor at various times.

The Centre for Early Childhood Development is still going strong after 25 years. It is well endowed and has an international reputation for programme quality and innovation.

In addition to the above, in January 2009, I was appointed Adjunct (part-time) Associate Professor in the Department of Social Development at the University of Cape Town.