

COSATU's Jabulile Ndlovu Educare Centre

Debbie Mbete

The Jubulile Educare Centre opened on 1 October 1992. It is seen as an attempt to develop a model which could be used when negotiating for workplace educare centres.

The impetus for the formation of the Jabulile Ndlovu Educare Trust and the setting up of the first centre, arose from a resolution on gender empowerment taken at the eighth congress of the South African Communist Party (SACP) in December 1991. Participants argued that practical measures should be taken to assure the rights of women, especially that of working class women. Follow-up meetings were held, involving women from the SACP, COSATU and its affiliates. Initially, representatives from the ANC's Women's League were also involved. The objective of these meetings was to push for a programme of establishing workplace creches as part of a campaign for parental rights.

There are seventy five children at the centre, aged between six months and six years. The emphasis of the centre has been on educare - caring, nurturing, teaching and preparing the older children for the first school year and school entrance exams. Workshops on health care have been held for staff and parents by the South African Health and Social Services Organisation. Past workshops have dealt with issues like nutrition and malnutrition, child illness and diet. Additional workshops are planned to run throughout the year.

Supportive Parents

Mothers and fathers have shown a great interest in and support for the educare centre and its objectives. The COSATU Gender Forum is also kept abreast of developments at the centre. This has generated great interest among women workers, and a concern for the expansion of the centre in Johannesburg and the setting up of similar centres in other regions. At present, we have a waiting list of 184 children.

All activities of the Centre - parents meetings, our first Christmas party and our first anniversary celebration have been well supported by parents. The Centre also held a small celebration with For the Love of Children (FLOC) and Kiddie's Corner on International Children's Day, 1 June at the Johannesburg

City Hall. The event was covered on CCV TV news that evening. All in all a very successful first year.

After the initial meeting with union members, the present co-ordinator, Debbie Mbete, was asked to do a feasibility study on the needs and resources for setting up the project. She networked with a number of child care organisations and contacted local funders to obtain initial funding for the project.

Setting Forth

On 17 July 1992, the centre opened its doors to four children, aged between seven months and three years. Estelle Holtzan, a trained educare teacher, joined the project. The period until October was a time of learning for both the trustees of the project and staff. Eight additional members of staff were recruited, with varying levels of training and experience in the field of child care. A number of these had been retrenched or were unemployed.

Positive responses for the funding of the centre were received from Liberty Life and Gencor, to see the centre through its first few months. Contact was made with the international trade union movement, and international



Photo: Afrapix

government and non-government organisations. Not all responses were positive. This was also a process of learning, however, about dealing with funders, and setting clear tasks for the project which would contribute to continued local and international support. Clear goal setting is also essential to meeting the objectives of the project and ensuring its continued existence.

On 1 October, the centre opened on a single floor. This had previously been occupied by a diamond cutting factory and required a fair amount of cleaning and renovation. During the course of the past year, partitions have been put in, the kitchen and toilets have been replumbed and security bars have been placed around the outside play area on the roof. The play area has plastic sand-



Workers are fathers, care-givers and role models. Photo: Afrapix

and-water pits, some swings and other equipment. But most of the work of making the centre look homely and bright has been done by the staff and the children.

Parents pay a fixed amount of R100 a month as fees, plus R5,00 a month for fruit. Parents have also contributed a number of once-off costs like mattresses, sheets and aprons. Fathers and mothers have worked together to photograph and video-tape activities at the centre. They organised a fund raising music concert in April 1993. Fathers were centrally involved in this event, which was organised by Anthony Stevens, a parent and musician. Male workers in COSATU have also been supportive of the initiative, particularly in approaching employers for funding.

The Future - Campaigning for Workplace Educare

The next major goal of the centre is to develop the area of training and skills in educare. The availability of people with suitable skills is a must for the development and expansion of the project over the next five to ten years. Such skills would include skills in organisational development, group dynamics and project management.

The present staff at the centre are women. We had one male on our staff, who remained with us for only three months. The centre intends to recruit male educare workers in the future. A good gender balance is seen to be important for the welfare of the children.

We have also established a relationship with Johannesburg City Health, where four staff members attend training classes two afternoons a week. City Health is also willing to make a contribution towards the financing of the centre, on receipt of an audited financial statement.

The future of the project in educare depends on many things - the dedication of parents and staff, campaigning for workplace centres, funding from local employers and local government and support from interested members of the public. Any person is welcome to visit the centre. Prior arrangements can be made with Debbie Mbete at 402 9436.

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Jabulile Ndlovu Educare Centre*