



Making the first  
1 000 days count  
10 times over!

February 2026

Issue No. 11

This past month the President's State of the Nation Address (SONA) gave us a moment to be excited about: "prioritise children with a clear focus on the first 1 000 days of a child's life".

Hold My Hand wants to make sure those early years get the support they need. In this newsletter, we'll share how those promises align with our action plan for children and families.

March also reminds us why this focus matters. It's World Hearing Day on 3 March and World Obesity Day on 4 March, two events that spotlight issues affecting South Africa's children. Early hearing detection and intervention is one of the catalytic interventions in the National Strategy to Accelerate Action for Children, so that no child's development is delayed simply because we missed the signs early on.

At the same time, World Obesity Day pushes us to talk honestly about nutrition. South Africa faces a double burden: high levels of stunting alongside rising child obesity. That's why improving child nutrition, restoring the Child Support Grant to the Food Poverty Line and tackling malnutrition in all its forms are central to the Strategy. When we talk about obesity, we must also talk about stunting, because both are signs that our food system isn't working for children.

Hold My Hand is driving accelerated action this month and beyond.

Let's all work together to make those first 1 000 days count!

**The Hold My Hand Team**

# SONA 2026

The National Strategy to Accelerate Action for Children sets out 10 priorities that need a whole-of-society push. Many of these priorities are echoed in what the President highlighted in the SONA and we can all help turn that direction into delivery.

## SONA 2026

### What it means for children

The President has foregrounded the National Strategy to Accelerate Action for Children, and supported by Hold My Hand, will focus on the first 1,000 days of a child's life and these priorities...



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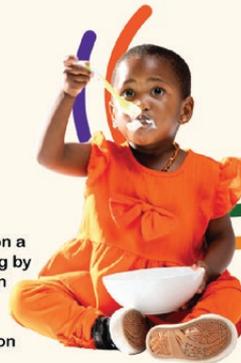


## SONA 2026

### Close the Food gap

#### SONA said

"This year, we will embark on a mission to end child stunting by 2030 and tackle malnutrition among young children, in line with the National Strategy to Accelerate Action for Children."



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## SONA 2026

### Strengthen Families

#### SONA said

"We will focus on the crucial first 1,000 days of a child's life."



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## SONA 2026

### Reduce Alcohol Harms

#### SONA said

"A major contributor to child stunting is excessive alcohol consumption, which can affect a child's development during pregnancy."



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## SONA 2026

### From speech to delivery

Implementation is key and we can all help move this from words to action.



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## SONA 2026

What's one thing you're doing to contribute?

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# Hold My Hand Webinar

 **17 MARCH**  
11.30am SAST

Live on  
 **zoom**

## Mapping the 'birth to three' landscape

New insights on caregiver support for responsive caregiving and early learning



**Moderator**

**Mikhaïla Steenkamp**  
Accelerator Lead: Language and Learning, **Hold My Hand**



**Tara Polzer Ngwato**  
Director Systems and Partnerships  
**Social Impact Insights Africa**



**Candy Day**  
Information Lead  
**Hold My Hand**



**Wilmi Dippenaar**  
Director  
**SAPPIN**



**Shelley O'Carroll**  
Consultant  
**Hold My Hand**



**Chantell Witten**  
Director Health Systems  
**Ilifa Labantwana**

Hold My Hand, in partnership with the South African Parenting Programme Implementers Network (SAPPIN), has completed a scoping survey of initiatives supporting responsive caregiving and early learning for very young children (birth to three years).

Join this webinar to unpack what we found, what's working, and what's missing.

We'll walk through the survey outputs and discuss how this can help funders sharpen investments and help organisations and government partners connect more effectively.

This survey is also the starting point for a shorter, ongoing survey that will be open to all organisations in this space, helping us build a live picture of growth and reach.

[Register Here](#)



## The Learning Corner

Introducing a new reflective space, our “Learning Corner” where we spotlight stories and share practical lessons from the field. Through short interviews with partners, we’ll highlight what’s working, what’s challenging and what we’re learning together.

If your organisation is working in hearing screening or inclusive learning, we’d love to feature your experience. Let’s keep learning from one another as we strengthen early screening and support for every child who needs it.

[Email Us](#)

# News From Our Community



## Embrace Birthing Survey

On 11 March, Embrace: The Movement for Mothers, will launch a new report on obstetric violence in South Africa, hosted at Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALS), Wits University. For years, women have shared stories of disrespect and mistreatment in maternity wards. Now, the first prevalence survey of women's birth experiences in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal gives us a clearer picture of how widespread this is and why it matters.

Join them as they share the findings and explore how we move from policy to real change for mothers and babies.

[Learn More](#)



## “No one must stay hungry” Children show us the way

As reported in a News24 article “No one must stay hungry”: Grade 4 pupils want safety, food as SA adopts child strategy,” their message echoes the heart of the National Strategy to Accelerate Action for Children (NSAAC).

One in four (28.8%) children under five are stunted due to chronic malnutrition, limiting their growth, learning and future opportunities. The NSAAC responds with practical steps, from restoring the Child Support Grant to the food poverty line to improving child nutrition and protection.

[Read Now](#)



## Mikhaila Steenkamp joins Hold My Hand team

Mikhaila Steenkamp has joined us as Accelerator Lead: Language and Learning in the Hold My Hand team as a full-time member. She has a background in language teaching, action-focused education research, and strengthening teacher education programmes to improve outcomes for all children.

Mikhaila can be reached at [mikhaila@holdmyhand.org.za](mailto:mikhaila@holdmyhand.org.za).



## School Dropout: Hanging by a Thread

The Zero Dropout Campaign challenges the idea that school dropout is inevitable, working with partners nationwide to help learners complete Grade 12.

Their latest report, School Dropout: Hanging by a Thread, highlights the role of psychosocial support in keeping learners on track. Launched last month at the Iziko South African Museum through an immersive exhibition, the publication forms part of their ongoing research series aimed at changing how South Africa understands and responds to dropout.

[Read More](#)



## Youth Capital unpacks the latest QLFS

Youth Capital unpacks what the latest Quarterly Labour Force Study (QLFS) is actually telling us about youth unemployment: who is excluded, how entrenched long-term joblessness has become, and why small quarterly shifts can obscure a much more structural problem.

This isn't a summary of the stats. It's an attempt to translate the data into insight, connecting the numbers to lived realities, current policy debates, and the questions we should be asking as we continue our work across employment, skills, and inclusion.

[Join the Youth Capital community now.](#)

[Read More](#)



## Hearing care for all children: unpacking the WHO mandate in a South African context

In support of World Hearing Day, the South African Speech-Language-Hearing Association (SASLHA) will host a free webinar titled:

Hearing care for all children: unpacking the WHO mandate in a South African context

[Register Here](#)

# Our Community

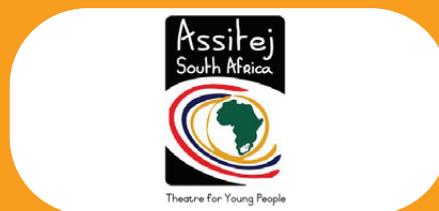
Meet some of our new community members!

We're growing, and it's beautiful to see more hearts and hands joining the journey.



## MobiMom.com

MobiMom.com is a mobility and care platform created by mothers, for mothers. MobiMom was born from the founder's personal experience of recovering from a C-section while struggling to access safe and respectful transport to and from hospital.



## ASSITEJ South Africa

The International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People (ASSITEJ) South Africa is a national network organisation dedicated to promoting and supporting access to quality theatre and arts experiences for children and young people across the country.



## Stars Under The Stars

Stars Under The Stars is a creative space for children where self-expression, imagination, and curiosity are nurtured through art. It is not an art school, but a safe and intentional environment where children are encouraged to explore their ideas, express themselves freely, and develop confidence in their own creative voices.

[Join Our Community](#)



## Stay connected

Get the latest updates, inspiring stories, and ways to make a difference by following us on social media.

Together, we're creating a brighter future for South Africa's children and teens. Thank you for holding hands with us on this incredible journey.

Want to share your latest news?  
Drop an email at [news@holdmyhand.org.za](mailto:news@holdmyhand.org.za)



## Together, we will change our future.

Thank you for being a vital part of our mission to put children at the center of our future. Your involvement makes all the difference!