



Your brain power is needed

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Welcome to Hold My Hand's April issue, and this month, we're excited to share some big moments. A brand-new competition celebrating the people who build children's brain power every day.

We release a new policy brief "Birth to three" on why the first three years of life deserve far more attention and investment; place a spotlight on maternal nutrition advocacy at the South African Human Rights Commission, and share useful new resources on strengthening early childhood development.

Plus, meet some of the community organisations joining the movement and check out upcoming webinars you won't want to miss. Let's get into it.

Warm regards,

The Hold My Hand Team

Brain Power



Competition



Is your child a future leader?
It starts with you.

Show us your Brain Power!

Did you know that 90% of a child's brain develops before age five? That means the singing, storytelling, reading, playing and chatting that happens at home every day is building the foundation for a child's lifelong learning.

The Hold My Hand Brain Power Competition is now open and we want to see how you're wiring young brains for success. Whether you're a parent, gogo, sibling, neighbour or teacher, share a 30-second video, voice note or photo showing the everyday moments that build brain power. Think reading together, making up songs, playing with pots and spoons, or simply answering a toddler's endless questions.

The competition is open in all 12 official languages, with R8 000 in cash prizes awarded weekly.

To enter:

Send the words "**Brain Power**" to **0600 411 111** on WhatsApp.

[Submit on WhatsApp](#)



HOLD MY HAND
POLICY BRIEF SERIES

Birth to three: investing early in lifelong development

Building a collaborative and coordinated system of responsive caregiving and early learning for South Africa's youngest children



New policy brief: Why the first three years matter most

Brain development is most rapid and sensitive between birth and age three. It's in this window that everyday moments, talking, playing, responding to a baby's cues, build the neural foundations for memory, attention and emotional regulation. Get this right, and you set a child up for life. Miss it, and developmental gaps become embedded long before they ever enter a classroom.

The policy brief, *Birth to three: Investing Early in Lifelong Development*, published by Change Ideas and Hold My Hand, makes the case for a national shift in how South Africa supports its youngest children. While real progress has been made in early learning for four and five-year-olds, the vast majority of the country's

one million babies born each year receive their most critical developmental stimulation at home, often with very little structured support for their caregivers.

The brief argues that the barrier isn't affordability but financing design. At an estimated R350 per caregiver, light-touch parenting support can be delivered nationally. What's missing is a dedicated financing mechanism and a coordinated strategy to reach families where they live.

The question isn't whether South Africa can afford to invest in the first three years. It's whether we can afford not to.

[Read the policy brief](#)



Maternal nutrition in the spotlight

Maternal nutrition in the spotlight – a case for the Maternal Support Grant

South Africa produces enough food to feed its people, but too many pregnant women living in poverty can't afford a nutritious diet. This has serious consequences for mothers and babies, especially during the first 1 000 days of life when nutrition shapes a child's brain development, growth and long-term potential.

The Maternal Support Grant (MSG) Advocacy Coalition, of which Hold My Hand is a member, recently presented its case to the South African Human Rights Commission's national investigative hearing into food systems. The coalition's message was clear: there's a critical gap in South Africa's social protection system. Pregnant women living in poverty have no dedicated income support during pregnancy, the very time their nutritional needs are highest.

The proposed MSG would provide a monthly grant from the second trimester through to three months after birth, bridging the gap until the Child Support Grant kicks in. At an estimated cost of around R2 billion a year, it could generate savings of R13.8 billion in averted health costs alone. The systems and evidence are in place. What's needed now is political will.

[Read the coalition's submission to the SAHRC](#)

[Read the MSG Coalition's announcement](#)

[**Read policy brief – Closing the protection gap**](#)

News From Our Community



The role of the health sector in supporting parents and caregivers

This webinar, taking place on 22 April 15.00 - 16.00 SAST, will explore how the health sector can better support parents and caregivers, from pregnancy through childhood and adolescence by integrating evidence-based support into routine health services, strengthening health workers' practices, and fostering coordinated care within and across sectors.

[Register](#)



The Perspective series: small things, big changes for little people

This Perspectives Series session asks: What does responsive caregiving look like in practice? Why does it matter in the first 1 000 days? And what are the priority actions at household, community, service delivery and policy levels to better enable caregiving?

[Sign Up](#)



Clear vision: a foundation for every child's potential

The National Department of Health's World Optometry Week webinar aligned with the National Strategy to Accelerate Action for Children (NSAAC). Hold My Hand's Noxolo Gqada emphasised that vision is a cornerstone of early childhood development and "brain power."

Structural reform is urgent: South Africa must move beyond sporadic interventions toward Universal Vision Screening. By integrating eye health into primary care, we ensure no child's potential is dimmed by preventable impairment. We remain committed to systemic shifts that provide every child the clarity to learn and thrive.

[Find Resources](#)



Closing the food gap: systemic solutions

The launch of FoodForward SA's 2026 *State of Household Food Insecurity* report revealed sobering data: food insecurity has spiked, with 17.8 million South Africans now affected, a crisis driven by soaring living costs and unemployment.

Addressing the audience, Noxolo Gqada, our Strategy Lead, highlighted that while 29% of our children under five are stunted, South Africa actually produces enough food. The "gap" isn't a lack of supply; it's a systemic failure in access and coordination.

We are advocating for structural shifts, from resource mobilisation to protecting the "first 1 000 days" and supporting adolescents.

[Read Article](#)



Hands-on experience learning issue 33

The latest issue of DGMT's *Hands-on Learning* (Issue 33) unpacks what the 2024 Thrive by Five Index reveals about young children's development in South Africa. It looks at how on-the-ground interventions are helping reduce chronic malnutrition, get children ready to read and do maths, and support parents to give their children the best start through responsive caregiving. It also tackles structural barriers, like the thousands of early learning programmes locked out of state support because they can't meet registration requirements.

A rich resource for anyone working in or advocating for early childhood development.

[Download](#)



Join Book Days to explore the role of books and reading

Join Book Dash on 21 April from 10am-12pm to explore the catalytic role of books and reading for the health and wellbeing of young children.

The session will cover:

- the landscape and systems around early-years book usage in healthcare
- research around the impact of books on young children's health and wellbeing
- different distribution models and uses of books in healthcare settings
- best practice case studies from healthcare practitioners who use books in their programmes and who have seen the benefits.

It's for everyone who is already using books in their programmes with young children, as well as anyone who would like to start introducing books.

[Sign Up](#)

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.



FETCH unlocks the potential of young people and their communities to fetch the future they aspire to. Rooted in research and grounded in local communities, FETCH champions an approach to youth well-being and employability that centres on innovative, trauma-informed Multidimensional Coaching and strong community networks.



Imveli Research, Training And Awareness NPO mission is to enhance food security, promote social cohesion, and improve the overall well-being of vulnerable communities in Potsdam Village, East London, South Africa.

Our vision is a food-secure and socially cohesive community, where vulnerable groups have access to nutritious food, skills training, and economic opportunities.



The Children's Resource Centre is a national, membership-based movement of children and young people working to build a society that supports children's development, voice and agency.

Founded on three core values: respect yourself, respect others and respect your environment. The organisation gives children and young people the tools and platform to engage actively in decisions about the issues that affect their lives.

[Join Our Community](#)



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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



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!

