



600 reasons to feel hopeful

May 2026

Issue No. 14

May is Child Protection Month, and this edition is full of reasons to feel hopeful.

We reflect on what it looks like when a whole ecosystem of people and organisations shows up for children. From global recognition for the work being done right here at home, to caregivers singing and talking and playing with their little ones for the Brain Power Competition.

Two of our partners, SmartStart and goGOGOgo, received major international awards this month.

Their wins belong to the whole movement. We also share updates from the front lines: conferences, a learning lunch on babies and brains, a Perspectives webinar, Child Protection Month activities, and the Thanda Impact Report.

Lots to take in this month. We hope you find it as energising as we do.



Four weeks in, and the Brain Power Competition has taken on a life of its own. Entries have come in from all nine provinces and all 12 languages, singing mamas from Mpumalanga, a gogo in Limpopo playing handclap games, a father in KwaZulu-Natal teaching his children about love. Over 600 South Africans have entered so far, and the competition is open until 23 May 2026.

The competition invites parents, caregivers, siblings, neighbours and teachers to share the everyday moments that build young brains, through singing, storytelling, reading, playing or simply talking back to a babbling baby. Three rounds of weekly winners have already been announced, with R8 000 in cash prizes awarded each week.

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

Brain Power Competition
600 submissions & counting

Submit on WhatsApp



As delegates gathered for the Africa FASD Conference this month, conversations are increasingly shifting beyond awareness toward prevention, systems change, and the broader environments shaping children's lives.

This year, representatives from Hold My Hand and Rethink Your Drink campaigns gathered at the conference to present on "Designing Prevention: A Systems and Policy Approach to FASD in South Africa", exploring how alcohol harm intersects with inequality, maternal wellbeing, child nutrition, violence, and long-term developmental outcomes. The session focused on the need to move beyond individual blame and toward coordinated action that addresses the structural drivers of risk.

The conference also marked a significant moment for the sector, as the Foundation for Alcohol Related Research (FARR) prepares to close its doors this month after decades of pioneering work in FASD prevention, research, and advocacy in South Africa. FARR played a foundational role in building South Africa's understanding of FASD and developing community-based prevention approaches that continue to shape the field today.

As South Africa builds policy momentum around alcohol harm reduction, child wellbeing, and the National Strategy to Accelerate Action for Children, the conference served as both a reflection on progress made and a reminder of the urgent work still ahead.



May is **child Protection Month**, and two organisations have said it clearly and simply.

Dr Shaheda Omar, Clinical Director of the **Teddy Bear Foundation**, reminds us that the shield keeping children safe is built by all of us, not government alone, not social workers alone, but every adult in a child's life.

Megan Briede, Director of Programmes from **Save the Children South Africa** puts it just as plainly: when a child feels safe, everything else becomes possible.

Both videos are worth watching and sharing. Because child protection is a daily commitment that belongs to all of us.





What would it take for every child to reach their full potential?

It's the question at the heart of everything Hold My Hand does and this Child Protection Month, it feels more urgent than ever.

This episode of The Learning Lunch explores the National Strategy to Accelerate Action for Children (NSAAC), approved by Cabinet in December 2025. The strategy sets out ten priorities for improving the lives of children and teenagers, identifies critical gaps in services, and maps the interventions most likely to accelerate progress.

But government can't do it alone. The NSAAC calls for a whole-of-society effort and civil society is already answering that call through nutrition programmes, early learning support, afterschool care and more. The question now is how those efforts can better align with national implementation.

Mesuli Kama, Social Mobilisation Lead for the Hold My Hand Accelerator, joins the conversation to talk about how NGOs can find their place in this national effort and why it matters.

[Listen Here](#)

News From Our Community



SmartStart wins 2026 Skoll Award for social innovation

SmartStart has been named one of just three global recipients of the prestigious 2026 Award for Social Innovation, recognising its groundbreaking work in expanding access to early childhood development while creating economic opportunities for women and communities. Through an innovative social franchise model and strong public-private partnerships, SmartStart is helping thousands of young children access quality early learning programmes across South Africa.

[Read More](#)



A win for Jane and goGOGOgo

Founder of goGOGOgo, Jane Simmonds has been named a winner in the Wellbeing Programs category at the Women Changing The World Awards in Paris, recognising her work in supporting grandmothers caring for children and holding communities together across South Africa. Simmonds dedicated the award to the remarkable GOGOs whose resilience, compassion and leadership continue to create hope in difficult circumstances. The recognition celebrates the power of community-driven wellbeing and the vital role older women play in shaping healthier, stronger futures for the next generation.

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What shapes a child in the first 1 000 days?

The first 1 000 days, from conception to a child's second birthday, are a critical window for growth, development and lifelong wellbeing. In our latest Perspectives webinar, Rahima Essop (DGMT) was joined by Professor Mark Tomlinson, Ruth Mathys and Richard Lundie to explore what responsive caregiving looks like in practice, and what it takes to better support caregivers at every level.

[Watch Here](#)



Thanda's 2025 Impact Report

Thanda has just published its 2025 Impact Report and it's a compelling read. Their focus this year was on what becomes possible when quality interventions genuinely reach the people who need them. Because families and entire neighbourhoods don't just deserve "something", they deserve support that changes lives and trajectories.

[Read Report](#)



EARS App for teachers and parents to spot hearing loss

An innovative new AI-powered training programme delivered on WhatsApp is helping South African teachers identify possible hearing loss in children earlier, giving learners a better chance to succeed in the classroom. Undiagnosed hearing difficulties affect hundreds of thousands of children across the country, often leading to learning challenges, poor school performance and social isolation.

By training teachers (and parents) to recognise warning signs and intervene sooner, the initiative aims to close critical gaps in early detection and support. Training is easy and takes less than five minutes and just four days to get your hearX certificate.

[Read More](#)



Children's Act Amendment Bill 2026 approved by Cabinet

The approval by Cabinet of the revised Children's Act Amendment Bill is a major breakthrough for South Africa's Early Childhood Development (ECD) sector and the young children it serves. For years, many ECD programmes in poorer communities have struggled to register and access government funding due to complex regulations and limited support. The new Bill aims to change this by simplifying the registration process, recognising different types of ECD programmes and strengthening government support for under-resourced centres.

[Learn More](#)

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.



Ubuntu Inclusive Centre empowers children with disabilities by bridging education, health, and training services. Founded as an early childhood development (ECD) centre for children with disabilities, it has grown into a multifaceted organisation that now includes a training hub and an inclusive health clinic.



EyeCare4Kids' mission is to identify and address preventable vision problems in children across South Africa by providing accessible eye screenings, affordable corrective eyewear, and sustainable eye-care programmes in partnership with schools, healthcare providers, and community organisations.

Healthy
Brains
Global
Initiative



The Healthy Brains Global Initiative transforms & builds high-performing mental health services and systems that maximize outcomes for individuals. The project linked to this is a preventative maternal mental health programme.

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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!

