



Newsletter | First Quarter 2020

## Message from the Director

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) is presenting the world with a dynamic and unprecedented situation, having immediate, far-reaching, and yet-to-be-seen impacts on communities across the globe, especially those most vulnerable.

Our thoughts are with the many people who have been affected. Persona Doll Training, whose work is focused and dedicated to protecting our young children from abuse and other social ills, is trying its best to stay in touch with our communities through our social media platforms. During this challenging time we can only pray that our children and beneficiaries, mostly women, are safe from harm and domestic violence.

We postponed our training activities at the start of the lockdown period to ensure the safety of our training staff and beneficiaries.

We are confident that our work will continue past this pandemic as the psychosocial well-being of our young children and women is of utmost importance during and after the pandemic.

We try to stay in touch through the sharing of information and Phelisa Manyisane-Somciza and Pat Birkett have written a Corona Virus story and activities based on the Persona Doll Methodology. You can access the story by opening this link:

<https://docdro.id/tU6iHtQ>

As the world is confronted with this immense challenge, we must learn from history and recognize how crises of this caliber can alter our view of the world and our own lives for years to come.

Wishing you all the best during this period. Stay safe and healthy!

Delores Athiemulam

Director

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## **PDT's Response to our Current Environment**

As we reflect during our time in Lockdown, it has become very clear that children across our nation and in fact across the world are going to need support in processing the realities of COVID19. We believe that all the beneficiaries of our Persona Doll

Training over the past years are in a position to provide psychosocial support that will help children as they process the events of the past few months and the months ahead.

In a recent interview, Oprah Winfrey was talking about childhood trauma (poverty, violence, chaos). We were reminded that; - **“children are far more sensitive to development trauma than adults – those children who are well cared for in a nurturing environment are more likely to have a well wired brain .... They have a greater chance of functioning in the world...”**

We want to encourage all PDT beneficiaries to use their Persona dolls to support and encourage children to ask questions, discuss their anxieties and listen to their voices as they grapple with an understanding of what is happening in a COVID-19 environment in a bid to facilitate their well-being and ultimately “a well wired brain.”

## **"Put women and girls at the center of efforts to recover from COVID-19"**

**About the author | António Guterres**

António Guterres is the ninth Secretary-General of the United Nations, who took office on 1st January 2017.

*The COVID-19 pandemic affects everyone, everywhere. But it affects different groups of people differently, deepening existing inequalities. Early data indicates that the mortality rates from COVID-19 may be higher for men. But the pandemic is having devastating social and economic consequences for women and girls.*

*Nearly 60 per cent of women around the world work in the informal economy, earning less, saving less, and at greater risk of falling into poverty. As markets fall and businesses close, millions of women’s jobs have disappeared. At the same time as they are losing paid employment, women’s unpaid care work has increased exponentially as a result of school closures and the increased needs of older people.*

*These currents are combining as never before to defeat women’s rights and deny women’s opportunities. Gender equality and women’s rights are essential to getting through this pandemic together.*

*Progress lost takes years to regain. Teenage girls out of school may never return.*

*I urge governments to put women and girls at the center of their efforts to recover from COVID-19. That starts with women as leaders, with equal representation and decision-making power.*

*The pandemic has also led to a horrifying increase in violence against women. Nearly one in five women worldwide has experienced violence in the past year. Many of these women are now trapped at home with their abusers, struggling to access services that are suffering from cuts and restrictions.*

*This was the basis for my appeal to governments earlier this week to take urgent steps to protect women and expand support services. COVID-19 is not only challenging global health systems, but testing our common humanity.*

*Gender equality and women's rights are essential to getting through this pandemic together, to recovering faster, and to building a better future for everyone.*

## **Our Persona Doll Training and Activities for the 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter**

We are delighted to share some of the events that have shaped the first 3 months of our New Year.

It has been a privilege to work with the commitment and dedication of the women and men that we have met as we share the different programmes offered by Persona Doll Training SA. We have extended our Footprint to include new beneficiaries who have shown great enthusiasm in discovering a tool to add to their existing set of skills as ECD Practitioners.

# Support

## Early Inspirations

Our PDT trainer during a final support visit to one of our implementing partners, Early Inspirations in Port Elizabeth, shared the following from the discussions with the 4 trainers who are implementing Persona Doll Training:

### Where could we slot PDT support and guidance into the Early Inspirations programme?

The facilitators have agreed to incorporate persona dolls into every training programme they run, illustrating how PDT can in fact be part of the everyday curriculum and not only as an ‘add on’.

### The group was asked to capture how PDT has changed their mindset as facilitators if at all. Here are some of their responses:

- **It has clarified my deeper calling**
- **Our differences and similarities; putting myself in other people’s shoes; humility; change maker**
- **Awareness; kindness**
- **Being able to express myself not only non-verbally but also verbally in a calm manner**



# Support visit to Persona Doll Training (PDT) beneficiaries in Stellenbosch

The importance of support to teachers after Persona Doll Training was once again highlighted. Implementing the programme does not come without its challenges and the PDT trainer was able to support teachers who were struggling with the Persona Doll Technique, planning and managing the skill of open ended questions.

Observations:

- Evidence that teachers at some of the centers were implementing the Persona Doll Approach – the children were familiar with the Persona dolls
- A teacher who had not attended the Persona Doll Training but had been informed and taught by her principal, who did attend the training, did really well when observed..
- The children were engaged during the sessions
- Some teachers had planned really well and It was nice to see the link between the (curriculum) themes and the dolls- one teacher did a story around seasons and summer in particular.
- The children enjoyed the sessions and were interacting with the doll.



# Persona Doll Training

**Constantiaberg Pre Primary School** – training for the entire staff at the school was negotiated towards the end of 2019. A slightly different model of delivery was decided on i.e. number of afternoon sessions to accommodate the working hours of the staff. The school funded the training and the purchase of Persona Dolls to be shared by the staff.

## **Thembelistsha Foundation – Grabouw**

We were excited to explore new territories and move beyond the borders of the Peninsula. We met a very enthusiastic and supportive Project Manager with eager ECD participants based at the Thembelitsha Foundation in Grabouw, who were unfamiliar with Persona Dolls and were excited to be learning a completely new skill. Well done to the organisation for getting a diverse group together, who engaged and participated in an awesome way. We look forward to a continued working relationship and successful implementation of the Persona Doll Approach. They will give us feedback via their Project Manager and complete a short M and E questionnaire to give us the information we need to continue offering a relevant service.

## **Western Cape Education Department**

We were excited to support the work of the Learning Support Advisors and Teachers during a Persona Doll Workshop in the Winelands. Practical activities helped the teachers in their groups to get to know each other at a slightly deeper level and highlighted the need for teachers to be sensitive to the diverse identities that exist within the groups of children they teach. The activities highlighted how all of us fall prey to and are influenced by our own experiences.

We were able to link the fact that our attitudes consciously, or unconsciously, affect our behaviours towards individuals. Our discussions raised the importance of awareness in terms of our own attitudes and the need for sensitivity amongst educators to not allow our own biases to influence our responses to the learners in our care.

We look forward to hearing from these teachers and advisors and how they have used their Persona Dolls to support a vulnerable group of children, especially those experiencing barriers to learning and development.



# Young Parent Programme

With the support of the Blaq Pearl Foundation in Mitchells Plain we completed a very successful three-day Young Parent Persona Doll Programme. Blaq Pearl did a superb job of recruiting 22 women in and around Mitchells Plain currently either involved in, connected to or about to engage with organizations supporting young teenagers and young adults faced with the ever-increasing challenge of either parenting young children, or about to parent a child. Many of the young people in question are still almost children themselves.

It was a privilege to work with a group of women who are entirely dedicated to tackling the challenges facing the young women they work with. They were also not averse to the challenges young men face.

Some of the challenges facing this phenomenal group include:

- Young mothers are very stressed
- Moms as young as grade 10 – attempt to change their mindset about who they are, break the cycle of ‘I am no good’
- Awareness, prevention counselling and support needed
- Change the dynamics in communities
- Change the negative light that young parents are viewed as



There was great enthusiasm to implement the programme and no one seemed at all daunted by the task at hand – this was mainly due to the fact that they were already working with young parents and teenagers. Whilst the methodology of using Young Parent Persona Dolls (slightly larger and “dressed” as teenager) is different, the power of Story Telling prevails as a tool to engage in meaningful and supportive discussions.



# Beneficiary Feedback

- **The content was an eye opener for me. It was fruitful and clear. Bullying is definitely the subject I will look at because learners are quick to tease each other in the schools.**
- **I admire how the 3 legs of support, namely: child, learner and educator has been continuously incorporated as a gold thread throughout the training. The use of how important it is to not just accept diversity but constantly practice it with the aid of persona doll dynamic.**
- **Will definitely implement the stories in the manual and use the personal dolls to encourage and support learners experiencing different barriers to learning, especially psycho-social barriers to learning.**
- **Training was insightful. The facilitators facilitated the training session very well. They were mindful, created opportunities to think beyond barriers and boundaries, as well as allowing and challenging one to think outside of the box to increase development. I'm grateful for the new information and an effective tool to use in order to address issues teenagers face.**
- **I learnt how to deal with teenagers. Each child is different; fear, trust, disclosure, referrals, teenage pregnancy, male behaviour – we could not have had better facilitators. Very understanding. They engaged with each of us and made us feel special; we got the right tools – can't wait to work with you again – we need more of this to reach more teenagers.**
- **The content and process of training was clear understandable and the group was vibrant. Training was on the people's level and everything was captivating – thank you for a fabulous programme.**

**“We rise by lifting others”**

# Future Training Events

These include:

- Training of Trainers Programme
- Centers of Excellence
- Intermediate and Senior Phase Persona Doll Training
- Persona Doll Training.

All of these events are subject to COVID19 Guidelines post Lockdown.

## For Training or Donations Contact Us:

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