



HOPE

Focus on iThemba
2025 Annual Report

2025 was the beginning of something bold.

A year of planting vision, deepening roots, and choosing faith-filled commitment to the work entrusted to us and the many lives it reaches.

With grateful hearts, we honour the friends, partners, and donors whose unwavering support helped transform lives and bring hope where it is needed most.





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With roots on the iThemba Campus in Hillcrest, KwaZulu-Natal, and a growing presence in Knysna, Western Cape, we are a public benefit non-profit organisation committed to **making a lasting impact** on low-income communities for over 20 years. We recognize the significance of education to transform lives and believe that this transformation begins with nurturing the minds of young children.

While our primary focus is on supporting a child's holistic development, our reach extends far beyond this. Through the work of our various Programmes, we also impact families, teachers, and micro-enterprises in the form of our Pre-Schools, all of which are spheres of influence that directly affect the growth of a child.

OUR VISION

Growing Hearts and Minds

OUR MISSION

To be a catalyst for contagious joy by providing life-altering positive change by investing in children through quality education.

At the heart of our work is the belief that every child has limitless potential. We nurture that potential through quality education and purposeful investment in their future.





The early years shape up to 90% of brain development — gaps at this stage can have lifelong consequences.

EARLY FOUNDATIONS BUILD SUCCESSFUL FUTURES



33 % of children under age 5 attend formal early learning programmes



2.2 million children aged 0–4 are not enrolled in early learning



< 50 % of enrolled children meet expected early learning milestones



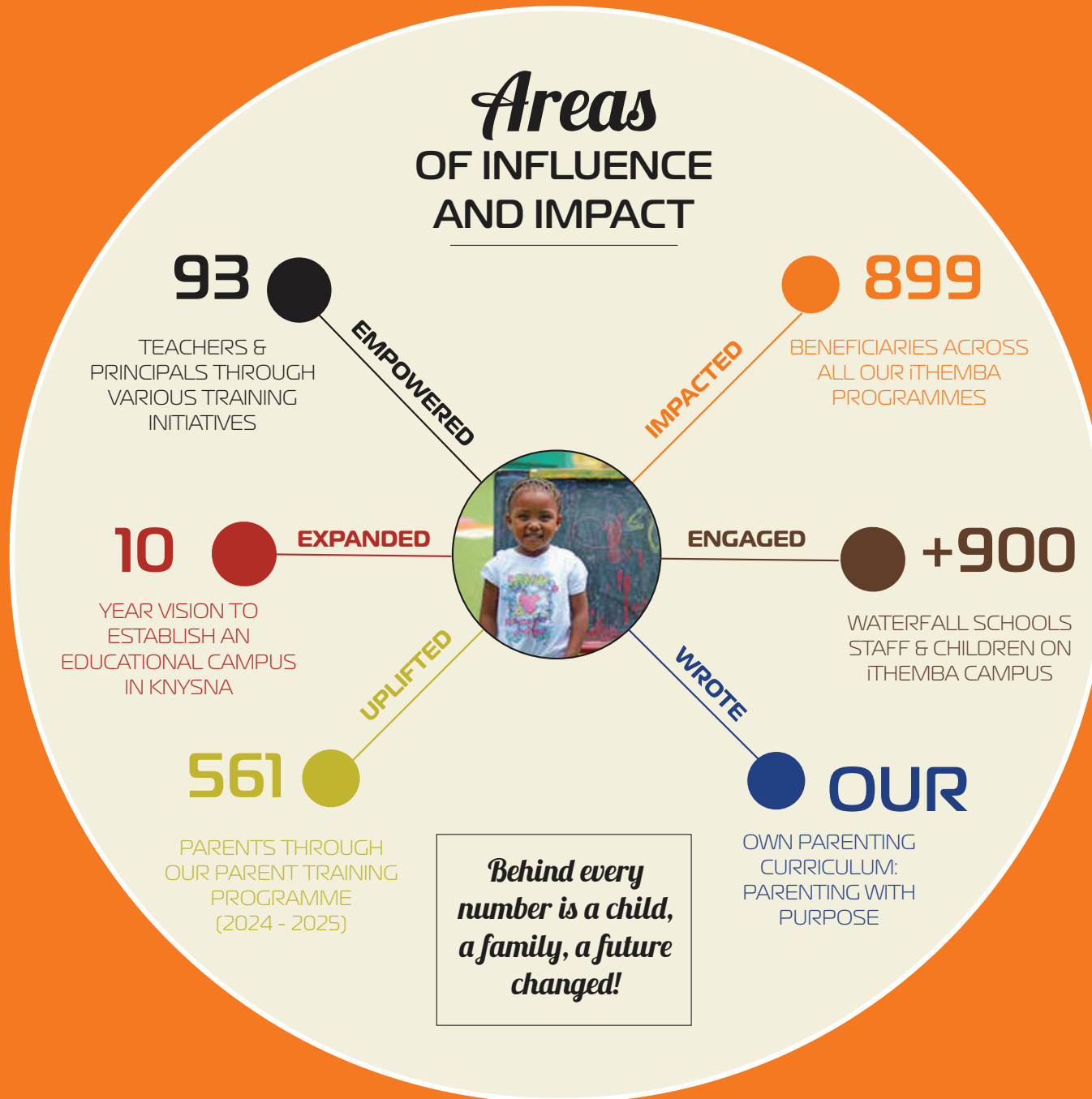
SCHOOLING: ACCESS VS OUTCOMES

While an estimate of 97% of children attend school by age 15, approximately only 64% remain through to age 18. Many learners struggle with basic reading and comprehension, reflecting gaps in early learning and classroom support.

METRIC	VALUE
School attendance by age 15	+ - 97%
Remain in school to age 18	+ - 64%

Despite high overall attendance, disparities in resources and support mean that learners in under-served communities are far less likely to achieve strong learning outcomes.

WE ARE WORKING TOWARDS CLOSING THIS EDUCATIONAL GAP!



Highlights

1



PURCHASING THE LAND
IN KNYSNA THAT WILL BECOME
FOREST EDGE SCHOOLS
& SEEING THIS VISION UNFOLD

3

THE EXPANSION OF
OUR IMPACT-LED
PROGRAMMES TO
INCLUDE
TRINITY SCHOOL
KNYSNA

5

MARKING A YEAR
OF GROWTH,
OPPORTUNITY &
TRANSFORMATIVE
IMPACT

4



OUR ITHEMBA
SCHOLARS PROGRAMME
GROWING TO 16
CHILDREN

2



CELEBRATING
LONG-STANDING
PARTNERSHIPS
WITH FRIENDS &
DONORS

2025 has been a year of **meaningful impact at Focus on iThemba**. We know that the earliest years set the trajectory for future learning and development. When children are given strong beginnings, they grow into confident learners, resilient individuals, and young people equipped to thrive. This is why we invest so intentionally in these early years.

A significant strength in 2025 has been the addition of Tanya to our team as Early Learning Specialist. Since joining, she has brought valuable insight and oversight across our programmes, strengthening alignment, accountability, and shared practice. Through mentorship, classroom support, and programme refinement, she has elevated teaching standards and enhanced the learning environments across our schools. Her leadership has added measurable value to both teachers and children.

Through our iThemba Schools, including Bongani, Trinity, and our partner pre-schools, we are now reaching close to 1,000 children each year. In these classrooms, foundations are intentionally built to support cognitive, emotional, and social growth. We see children developing confidence, strengthening language skills, building resilience, and becoming school ready. Our commitment to excellence ensures that these environments remain structured, nurturing, and developmentally appropriate, because these years carry lasting significance.

Our Scholar Programme supported 16 scholars, each one intentionally selected and carefully supported. These are not simply bursaries awarded, but lives walked alongside. Through structured accountability, academic monitoring, and close partnership with families and schools, we are seeing consistent growth in performance, confidence, and personal responsibility. Financial barriers are removed, but just as importantly, encouragement, mentorship, and expectation are added. As a result, our scholars are not only remaining in quality education environments at Waterfall Schools, but are progressing with resilience, discipline, and a growing sense of purpose.

We are encouraged by the continued growth of our Parent Training Programme and the difference it is making within families. Parents are equipped with practical tools for structure, discipline, and emotional support at home. When parents are strengthened, children flourish, and the ripple effect extends into healthier, more stable communities.

Alongside programme growth, we have continued to strengthen governance and financial oversight to ensure that every contribution is stewarded with care, transparency, and long-term sustainability.



In Knysna, our footprint is steadily expanding as we respond to the need for affordable, private, Christian education. Through our Capital Campaign for Forest Edge Schools, we are laying the groundwork for a sustainable educational campus that will serve families for generations to come. Progress is intentional and measured, ensuring long-term impact for the Knysna community.

We step into 2026 with gratitude for the children whose lives are being shaped, for the families who trust us, and for the friends and donors who make this work possible. Your generosity does more than fund programmes. It strengthens classrooms, equips parents, supports teachers, and ultimately transforms futures.

Thank you for standing with us as we strengthen foundations and shape future leaders.



Tayla

Strong beginnings create strong futures. By supporting children, teachers, and families, we are nurturing confidence, resilience, and a love of learning that lasts a lifetime.





A YEAR OF GROWTH, LEARNING AND REFLECTION

2025 has been a year of remarkable journeys for our iThemba Schools in the Valley of 1000 Hills, Hillcrest and Bongani in Knysna. We supported an increasing number of children, who flourished in structured routines and are largely on track for Grade R success. Our iThemba Schools became **vibrant hubs of learning**, where strong leadership and deep community bonds made every day count.

Parents have been at the heart of this journey. Through the our Parent Training Programme, they are discovering new ways to support their children at home - strengthening families and reinforcing trust in our schools. Strategic partnerships with GROW with Educare Centres and the Knysna Educational Trust (KET) have brought new resources and learning opportunities, enriching classrooms and brightening children's days.

Alongside these successes, we are learning about the power of consistent routines, the importance of early-years support, and the need for inclusive approaches that welcome every child. With strengthened leadership, improved systems, and communities fully engaged, we move forward with confidence, knowing that every step we take is shaping children who are curious, capable, and ready to dream big.

Tanya Patten
Early Learning Specialist





Investing in Early Childhood Development is not just about education - it is about *shaping the next generation of skilled, capable and entrepreneurial citizens who will drive our economy forward.*

- President Cyril Ramaphosa
(BONA Pele 2030 Roadmap Leadership Summit)



With increasing recognition of the fundamental importance of quality Early Childhood Development (ECD) in South Africa, the Government has highlighted ECD as a top education priority, noting that early learning provides children with the foundational language, literacy and numeracy skills they need to succeed in school and beyond.

Data collected in the most recent national ECD census reveals an alarming reality: approximately 1.3 million children aged 3-5 years are currently not enrolled in any ECD programme, and an estimated 58% of children remain outside formal early learning settings, with significant disparities by income and location.

https://www.ewn.co.za/2025/08/04/early-childhood-development-eed-crisis-58-of-south-africa-s-children-not-enrolled-in-pre-schools?utm_source=chatgpt.com

THROUGH OUR WORK WITH OUR 12 ITHEMBA SCHOOLS, WE ARE CONFRONTING THIS REALITY HEAD-ON BY ACTIVELY WORKING TOWARDS CHANGING THIS NARRATIVE ONE CHILD AT A TIME.

In 2025, this Programme **served 791 children**, across our schools in underserved-communities in Hillcrest KwaZulu-Natal and Bongani, Knysna in the Western Cape. Our support encompassed on-going mentorship, monitoring and guidance, alongside accredited teacher training and parent empowerment through our Parent Training Programme.

OUR SUPPORT PROMOTED:

- ✓ Safe and nurturing learning environments for every child.
- ✓ Access to quality educational resources and materials.
- ✓ Inclusive classrooms supporting children with diverse needs.
- ✓ Stronger community connections fostering collaboration between schools, families and local stakeholders.



The ECD landscape we serve remains deeply under-resourced, with many teachers lacking formal training in early childhood development. Yet the success of quality ECD programmes depends on one critical factor: educators who are well-equipped, well-supported, and professionally trained. In an effort to narrow this gap in the system, we provide the teachers of our iThemba Schools with comprehensive training support. Working with accredited training providers, we offer teachers the **opportunity to upskill and advance themselves** in their practical and fundamental knowledge of ECD.



93

FEMALE TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS WERE EMPOWERED THROUGH VARIOUS TRAINING INITIATIVES IN 2025

- Orientation - short course
- Basic - short course
- Baby & Toddlers - short course
- Ongoing training with KET
- New Venture Training (Business)
- QCTO - Level 2 - short course
- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) - short course
- ECD 4 Africa (Sports & skills development) - short course
- NQF Level 4 - 2 year course
- NQF Level 5 - 3-4 year course





GRADE R READINESS

Grade R is a vital foundational year that lays the groundwork for a child's entire primary school journey. During this stage, children develop essential early literacy and numeracy, while also building confidence, curiosity and a love for learning,

Through play-based and structured activities, Grade R nurtures social, emotional and cognitive development - helping children learn how to communicate, collaborate and engage with the world around them. It is in this year that key habits, attitudes and skills are formed, equipping each child with the readiness and resilience needed to thrive in formal schooling and beyond.

WHY DO WE PLACE SUCH AN IMPORTANCE ON GRADE R READINESS IN OUR SCHOOLS?

Early Childhood Development is the cornerstone of a child's educational journey. When children are nurtured with rich, age-appropriate learning experiences, they develop essential skills in literacy, numeracy, language and social-emotional abilities that prepare them to thrive in Grade R. They enter school confident, curious and eager to learn. Gaps in early learning can have lasting consequences, leaving children struggling with reading, writing, and social interaction, and undermining their confidence, motivation, and future success.

A key component of our iThemba Schools Programme is monitoring the readiness of children in Grade 00 (ages 4–5). This is done through triannual assessments conducted at the beginning, middle, and end of the year.

Facilitated by our Early Learning Specialist and ECD Monitor, these assessments track each child's progress against Grade R readiness criteria. The insights gained enable us to tailor our support to the specific needs of the child, while also strengthening the capacity of teachers and the wider school environment.



290 Gr00 children progressed to Grade R in 2026

136 Boys

154 Girls



SUCCESS STORY

BONGANI PRE-SCHOOL, KNYSNA WESTERN CAPE

Bongani Pre-School stands as a beacon of hope within its community, a nurturing space where 67 children are not only safe, but deeply valued, joyful and inspired to learn. Each day, classrooms are filled with curiosity, laughter and the steady building blocks of early development, laying a strong foundation for every child's future.

This consistent, quality care has earned the trust of families and the wider community, with more parents seeking a place for their children within this supportive environment. As the school has grown, so too has its impact, with children thriving socially, emotionally and academically as they prepare for formal schooling.

In response to this growth, Bongani reached an exciting and significant milestone - extending their offering to include Grade R from 2026. This decision to expand and introduce a Grade R classroom reflects both the success of the school and a deep commitment to adequately preparing a child for foundation phase learning. This next step ensures that children who have been nurtured in these early years can continue to learn and develop in a familiar, trusted space during this critical stage of school readiness.

The expansion into Grade R is more than an additional classroom. It is a testament to what is possible when quality Early Childhood Development is accessible, consistent and rooted in care. It represents opportunity and the promise of a brighter future for every child who walks through Bongani's doors.

MORE THAN A SCHOLARSHIP. IT'S A LIFE-CHANGING OPPORTUNITY

Every child who belongs to our iThemba Scholars Programme is an author of their own life's story, a remarkable story that we are privileged to help shape.

THIS PROGRAMME PROVIDES A NURTURING SPACE WHERE THESE BOYS AND GIRLS CAN DISCOVER THEIR GOD-GIVEN POTENTIAL. EACH YEAR WE CELEBRATE THE GROWTH OF THEIR PERSONALITIES, CHARACTER AND ABILITIES.

Throughout 2025, we **supported 16 scholars** across the Waterfall Schools Campus. Each scholar achieved a 100% pass rate across all subjects and grade levels, a testament to their resilience, growth, and commitment - even in the face of personal and academic challenges.

Tanya Patten, our Early Learning Specialist shares, *"what is extraordinary about this Programme is the bond and relationship we form with each and every child. We are intentional in supporting their educational journeys and everything that this encompasses. We walk a road of growth together."*



16
Scholars
Gr0000 to 11

11
Girls

5
Boys

CELEBRATING ACHIEVEMENTS

- ✓ A Grade 10 scholar maintained an Outstanding Achievement status of an average between 89 - 93%.
- ✓ A Grade 11 scholar was selected to participate in provincial trials for Netball.
- ✓ A Grade 9 scholar received half-colours for Choir and recognition for improvement in her academics.



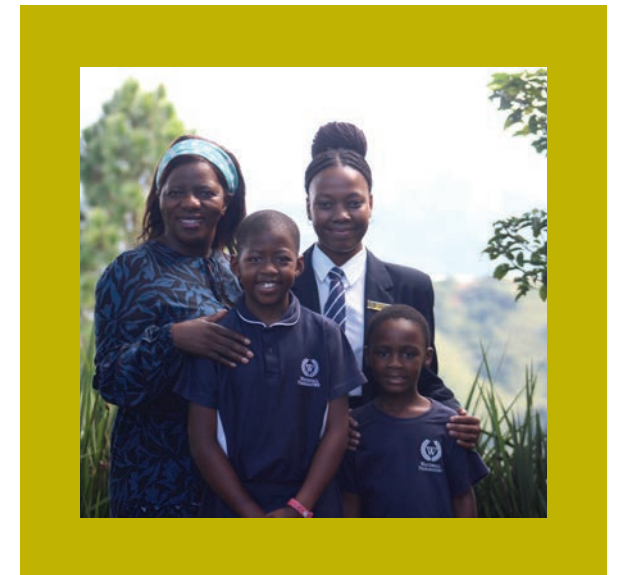
The iThemba Scholars Programme has made a tremendous difference in my child's life. She has learned to speak English fluently and communicates confidently with others. In our family, she is the first child to attend a multiracial school and to speak English so well. Attending such a high-quality, advanced school has broadened her mind in so many positive ways.

- Parent of a Grade 3 Scholar
(Joined us in Gr000 in 2019)

In 2026, we will celebrate the **10-year anniversary of this Programme**. It is remarkable to reflect on what has been achieved in just a decade, the lives touched, the milestones reached and the potential unlocked, and to imagine what the next ten years will bring.

Like with the children, the Programme has evolved over this course of time, continually adapting to meet the needs of each scholar. Our experience has taught us that educational journeys are never linear, and that every child requires a unique combination of guidance, encouragement, and resources to thrive. Through the tailored support of our Early Learning Specialist and Social Worker, we walk alongside each scholar, working closely with their teachers and parents to provide the strongest possible foundation for learning, growth, and future success.

Over the years, this intentional, holistic approach has allowed us not only to support academic achievement, but also to nurture resilience, confidence, and character- qualities that will **carry our scholars far beyond the classroom**. As we look to the future, we remain committed to strengthening this support and ensuring that every child who joins the Programme can flourish to their fullest potential.





SUCCESS STORY

NOSIPHO MALINGA - GRADE 11 SCHOLAR

Nosipho's journey with Focus on iThemba began in Grade R. From early on, she was described as a friendly and respectful girl with strong leadership abilities - 'a change maker in the making' a teacher once wrote.

Over the years, we have had a front-row seat to watching this quietly confident young girl blossom into the capable, talented and passionate young woman she is today. A relationship spanning 12 years has shown us the profound impact that meaningful investment in a child's education can have.

Reflecting on her journey, Nosipho shared:
"Focus on iThemba's impact goes beyond scholarships. It's about empowering our young minds, fostering growth and unlocking potential. I am honoured to be a part of this journey and look forward to making the most of this opportunity. Thank you for believing in me."

In 2026, Nosipho will begin the final chapter of her schooling in Grade 12 at Waterfall College. As one of the first two iThemba scholars to reach this milestone, she has helped pioneer the journey for those who will follow. Her success is deeply significant, for us and for Nosipho alike, as it exemplifies the transformative impact of the iThemba Scholars Programme and the promise it holds for future generations.



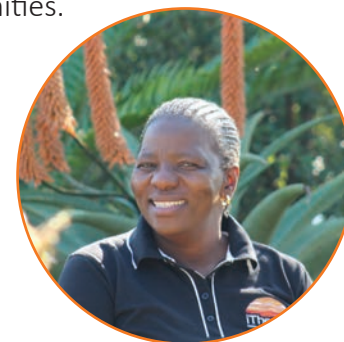
EMPOWERING PARENTS. TRANSFORMING FAMILIES

The Parent Training Programme is designed not only to equip parents and guardians with the skills to raise capable, confident, and responsible children, but also to create a **transformative space for self-reflection**. Many participants discover how their own childhood experiences shape their parenting styles, uncovering patterns they may not have realised before. The programme provides a safe, supportive environment where parents can share their struggles, past traumas, and mistakes without fear of judgment - finding understanding and encouragement in the shared experiences of others.

For many parents, meeting their children's basic needs is a source of worry, particularly when financial constraints make them feel they are falling short. Some fear their children view them as failures, echoing feelings they may have carried toward their own parents during adolescence. Through this programme, parents gain practical tools and strategies to navigate these challenges with confidence and resilience.

Looking ahead to 2026, the outlook is positive. With growing engagement, the programme is **building a network of empowered parents and guardians**, helping children grow up feeling loved, supported, and hopeful- ready to thrive despite any challenges at home or in their communities.

Lunga Nxumalo
KZN Course Co-ordinator and Social Worker





UNDERSTANDING THE PARENTS WE SERVE

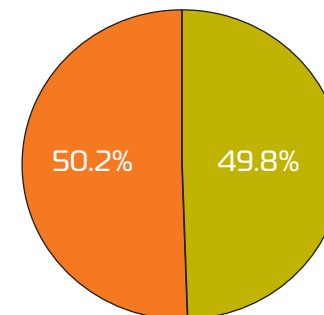
Behind every data point is a parent navigating daily challenges across KwaZulu-Natal and Knysna - high unemployment, diverse family structures, and the demands of raising children in often difficult circumstances. The majority of participants are women, many serving as primary caregivers, alongside a growing number of fathers, reflecting a more inclusive approach to parenting.

This programme is more than training; it's fostering reflection, healing, and confidence. Parents are learning to replace fear with intentional care, punishment with discipline, and uncertainty with patience. As one participant shared, "This course has changed how I see parenting, I'm more intentional with my children now."

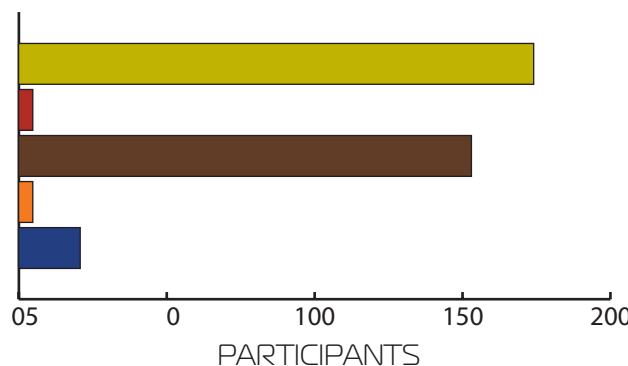
Through these shifts, parents are creating stable, nurturing environments where children can thrive, strengthening both families and communities.

WHAT THE NUMBERS SHOW

179
Parents
Graduated
In 2025
(KZN & WP)



AGE RATIO
49.8% BELOW AGE 30
50.2% ABOVE AGE 30



DEMOGRAPHICS

174 FEMALES

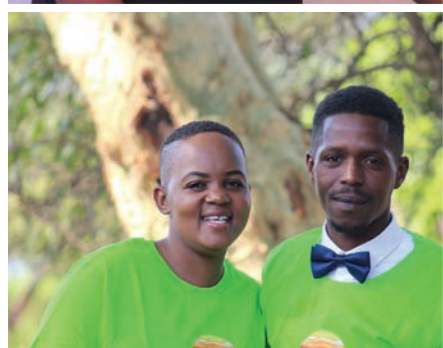
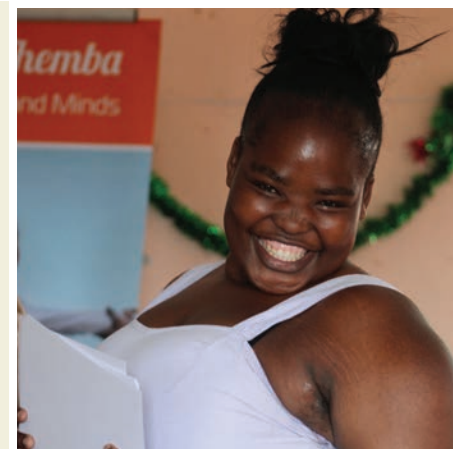
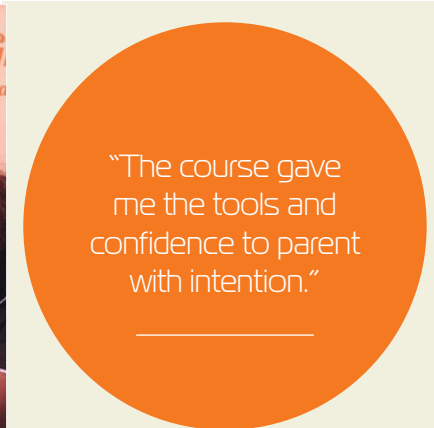
5 MALE

153 BIOLOGICAL MOTHERS

5 BIOLOGICAL FATHERS

21 GUARDIANS (RELATIVE)

More than half of the programme's graduates were unemployed, highlighting the challenging context in which this programme operates. In KwaZulu-Natal, 38 participants who did not complete the course were teenage mothers, underscoring the urgent need for accessible parenting support.



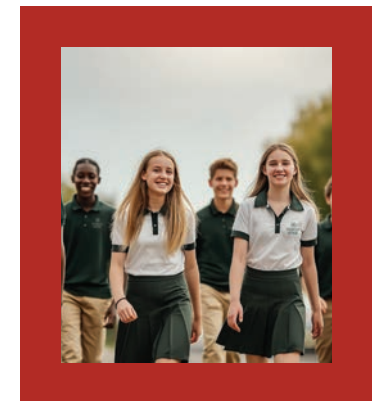
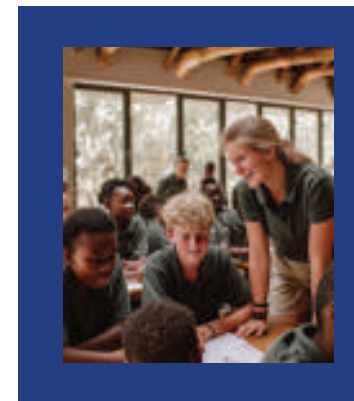
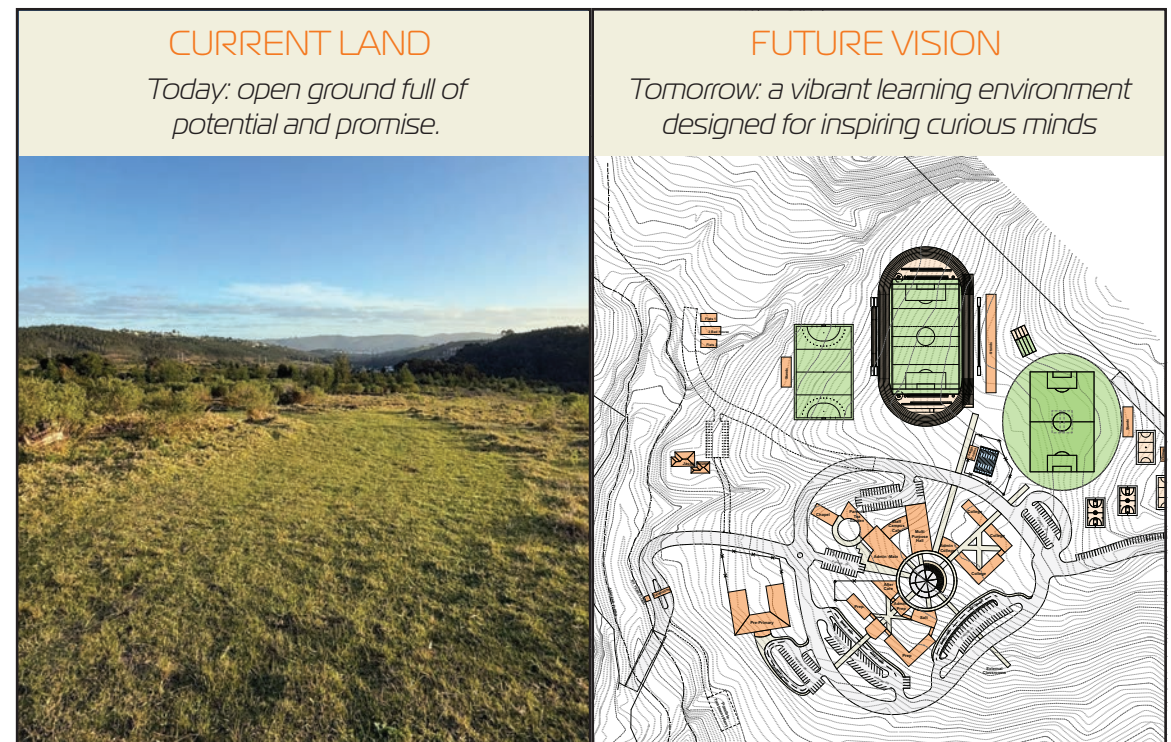
A GROWING VISION OF HOPE FOR KNYSNA

THE YEAR BEGAN WITH A BOLD AND AUDACIOUS 10-YEAR VISION: ESTABLISHING AN EDUCATIONAL CAMPUS IN KNYSNA THAT EMBODIES OUR COMMITMENT TO CREATING LASTING, TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT IN THE COMMUNITIES WE SERVE.

While ambitious, this vision is grounded in faith, partnership, and perseverance, the same spirit that brought the iThemba Campus and Waterfall Schools in Hillcrest, KwaZulu-Natal, to life. That same spirit now guides the development of this Knysna Campus.

This vision came in response to the growing need for affordable, private, Christian education in Knysna, that offers families a complete educational pathway from 4 months to Grade 12. An encouraging step towards this vision coming to life was the **successful purchase of the land** that will house Forest Edge Pre-Primary, Forest Edge Preparatory and Forest Edge College.

As we faithfully take steps towards the development of this campus, the **momentum of this vision is alive** in the thriving schools that are operating off site, Forest Edge Pre-Primary (currently called Queen-Bee Pre-Primary), Forest Edge Preparatory and Forest Edge College. It is already taking shape in the classrooms, playgrounds and daily lives of the children for whom Forest Edge is already a place to grow and belong. Every milestone, from adapting temporary spaces to nurturing these early learners, brings us closer to a permanent home where the full promise of Forest Edge Schools can flourish.





Another significant highlight has been the opportunity to broaden our impact in an underserved community in Knysna through **our collaboration with Trinity School**, a vibrant primary school that supports 130 children.

Trinity School is more than a place of learning; it is a nurturing and resilient community where children are supported to grow academically, personally and spiritually. Through this partnership, learners are gaining access to enriched educational support that strengthens foundational skills, builds confidence, and creates pathways for future opportunity. At the same time, educators are being equipped with tools and support to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom.

As this partnership continues to grow, we look forward to deepening our impact and supporting even more children to thrive within this inspiring school community.



1

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF
TRANSFORMATIVE
PARTNERSHIPS WITH FOUR
PRE-SCHOOL PARTNERS

2

FIRST ITHEMBA SCHOLARS
ENTER THEIR MATRIC YEAR

3

EXPANDING THE REACH
AND LIFE-CHANGING
IMPACT OF OUR PARENT
TRAINING PROGRAMME

4

GAINING MOMENTUM IN
THE DEVELOPMENT OF
OUR KNYSNA EDUCATIONAL
CAMPUS

5

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS
OF A CAMPUS
PARTNERSHIP WITH
WATERFALL PRE-PRIMARY

6

DEEPENING CONNECTION
AND SHARED IMPACT WITH
OUR DONOR COMMUNITY



Thank you!

The impact we achieved in 2025 is a testament to the generosity, heart, and care of our friends, donors, and partners. Your support makes the life-changing programmes we steward possible, and we are deeply grateful for the trust you place in us.

Every child whose **confidence** grows,
Every teacher whose guidance is **strengthened**,
Every school whose classrooms **flourish**,
Every parent **empowered** to nurture,
Every community **touched** by our work,
all of this is made **possible** because of YOU!

Thank you for walking alongside us. We look forward to another year of transforming lives together!

Focus on iThemba is guided by a dedicated board of six directors who generously contribute their hearts, expertise, and strategic insight to our mission. Their collective wisdom and governance ensure that we remain accountable, sustainable, and effective in delivering meaningful impact.



DANIE VAN DEN HEEVER
Founder and Chairman



JUDY VAN DEN HEEVER
Co-founder



RUDI VAN DEN HEEVER
Group CEO

LEANNE VAN DEN HEEVER
Executive Director



MEGAN LAUBSCHER
Executive Director



TAYLA-ANNE GOSS
Executive Director





TAYLA-ANNE GOSS
Team Leader



SHELLEY BARRON
Marketing & Donor Relations



TANYA PATTEN
Early Learning Specialist



KERRY CLAYTON
Business Manager



LUNGA NXUMALO
KZN Course Co-ordinator

JACKY MAC GREGOR
Donor Relations Assistant



LENE VENTER
Bookkeeper



BUSI KHUMALO
ECD Monitor



PRUDENCE MBAMBO
Housekeeping





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Every child
holds limitless
potential, and we
are committed to
nurturing it through
quality education
and meaningful
investment.



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