

Foundation establishes programme to support women

The Angus Gillis Foundation (AGF) has established the Early Childhood Development Programme (ECD) which equips and trains women with the skills and confidence to address the needs of their communities. The AGF is a charitable organisation - supported by FNB - which encourages women in rural communities to take active steps in controlling and positively shaping their lives, and the future of their children and communities.

Under the development programme community-run safe parks or informal pre-schools have been formed to provide a safe and stimulating environment for local children to play and learn. Development within each location is designed to address the specific needs of the respective communities.

Lucy O'Keeffe, director at AGF says they place strong emphasis on developing and mentoring ethical, transformative and service-oriented leadership which is sorely needed at every level in South Africa. "Individuals act as role models and champions for change in communities and we are honoured to work alongside incredible, strong and dedicated rural women who are playing this role."

Fulfilling their potential

Development is not only about material resources, it is about enabling people to recognise and fulfil their potential. "There is a vast amount of human potential, such as skills, knowledge, talent and assets, in our rural communities which is so often suppressed and unrecognised. Safe parks focus on providing after school care whilst others run full daily programmes. These services are run on an entirely voluntary basis and the Angus Gillis Foundation provides training and support to the women's groups," explains O'Keeffe.

Training, development and education at all level are key fundamentals that FNB looks at. "It's great to see organisations like AGF taking an active role in developing and assisting women in rural areas. They have made a difference to the communities they operate in," says Howard Arrand, CEO of the FNB Fund.

A social space for women

The majority of children in South Africa lack access to quality ECD services especially in rural areas. As part of a broader self-help group approach, the community-run safe parks not only benefit the children that they serve on a daily basis, but they also become a social space for women to share their challenges and to build relationships and networks of support.

"Starting positively by acknowledging and valuing what people already have is intrinsically empowering and, more importantly, it shifts the power dynamic and enables individuals and communities to become equal partners in the development of initiatives rather than simply beneficiaries," adds O'Keeffe.

"We will continue to support organisations like the AGF, who place great importance on the upliftment and empowerment of women in society," concludes Arrand.

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