

Give your child a SmartStart to their educational career

 By [Shan Raddiffe](#)

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A child's educational journey doesn't start at Grade R - it starts much earlier than that. Unfortunately, the disruption to learning caused by the Covid-19 pandemic spread into early childhood development (ECD) as well, negatively affecting this crucial stage of children's educational growth.



Grace Matlhabe, founding CEO of SmartStart

Here we chat to Grace Matlhabe, founding CEO of early learning initiative, SmartStart, about their new national campaign which aims to keep children learning, whether they're in a classroom or at home.

■ **What is SmartStart?**

SmartStart is an early learning social franchise, which collaborates with partners to develop a network of trained and licensed practitioners who implement the same evidence-based programme to children, ages three to five, to improve their readiness for learning, school performance and overall life success. The organisation recognises the importance of the first five years in a child's life and provides an affordable solution to rapidly expand access to quality early learning in all communities.

■ ***Covid-19 has had a huge impact on ECD and the education industry as a whole. How has SmartStart evolved in reaction to this?***

Although Covid-19 restrictions have eased over the past few months, many caregivers are still choosing to stay safe and spend their time at home. As a result, we've had to re-imagine the way we provide support to caregivers in the communities where we work. By leveraging the power of our network, the internet and social media, we have been able to provide affordable and accessible quality at-home activities, so that no child gets left behind.

■ ***What else should we know about SmartStart's national campaign?***

SmartStart franchisors and practitioners will be hosting open days, monthly workshops, and meetings to build relationships with caregivers and share tips and tools. We will be sharing new materials regularly, which have been made available in English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu and Sotho. The aim of our campaign is to provide caregivers with the information and tools needed to make early learning for your child a success. The SmartStart website has new activities and stories that you can do with your child at home - visit parent.smartstart.org.za.

🏠 ***Tell us about SmartStart's expansion plans and vision for the future.***

This month, we launched our ECD learning hub in Soweto to deliver our programme to surrounding communities. Gauteng has the largest number of children in South Africa – almost 20% of the country's population is in this province. We also launched another branch in KwaZulu-Natal. This presents an opportunity for us to build partnerships and collaborations with potential practitioners, local governments, and municipalities in this area. The objective is to expand our footprint, reach more families, and close the gap in access to early learning for local children. By 2030, we aim to contribute to reaching one-million children between the ages of three and five annually.

🏠 ***How can people join the programme?***

Join us by visiting our website smartstart.org.za or send a message on WhatsApp to 087 240 5125, for new activities and stories that you can do at home.

SmartStart is available in all nine provinces - look out for the following organisations in your area:

KwaZulu-Natal – Empangeni

- LETCEE - Greytown
- TREE – Durban
- SmartStart branch – Empangeni

Northern Cape

- 3L Development – Kimberley

Free State

- Lesedi Educare Association – Bloemfontein

Limpopo

- Thembelethu Development Organisation – Gauteng
- Molteno Giyani Office

Gauteng

- Siyakholwa – Westrand
- SmartStart branch – Johannesburg
- LIMA – Pretoria (also in Pietermaritzburg)

Northwest

- ELRU – Rustenburg

Eastern Cape

- Siyakholwa – East London
- Khululeka – Queenstown

Western Cape

- Knysna Education Trust (KET) – Knysna
- ELRU – Cape Town
- Diaconia – Belville, Cape Town

Mpumalanga

- Penreach – Nelspruit

ABOUT SHAN RADCLIFFE

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