

GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
COLLABORATING RESEARCH PARTNER IN THE
COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE FOR SOCIAL
SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING TO IMPROVE
CHILD WELLBEING OUTCOMES RESEARCH PROJECT

ASASWEI CONFERENCE

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GAUTENG
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GROWING GAUTENG TOGETHER

INTRODUCTION

- School Social Work is an essential learner support service in schools which is an investment in our children's' futures.
- School Social Work services are integrative and adopts an Ecological approach - Children should receive the responsive, nurturing and protective care and support they need to survive and develop to their full potential in all settings, from the family, through to the school and the community.
- The Gauteng School Social Work Programme, formalised in 2018 is a collaborative effort between GDE & GDSD to provide social work and psychosocial support services to learners in schools.
- The CoP project collaborated with the Gauteng Department of Social Development (School Social Work Programme) in implementing the CoP child-family-school-community model in five CoP schools.



BACKGROUND

- Children today are increasingly victims of many social forces that negatively affect their role as learners.
- Families, communities and societies are in a state of change. Until this change stabilizes, children's unmet needs albeit: physical, social and emotional, will continue to interfere with their ability to learn and adjust in schools.
- Psychosocial support in schools aims to help children develop to the best of their ability and to participate meaningfully in the learning process.
- Securing social work services in schools promotes prevention, prompt identification and intervention of conditions or circumstances that impede on learners' academic achievement.
- GDSD is a key stakeholder in the Integrated School Health Programme which is a commitment to provide health and social services in an integrated manner.
- The Department of Social Development's role in the ISHP is to provide counselling on social issues and assist learners to access referral services.
- The intended outcomes of ISHP are:
 - Increased number of learners receiving social services in schools;
 - Improved collaboration among stakeholders providing services to learners in schools;
 - Accessible and user-friendly social services to learners;
 - Capacitated communities pertaining to childcare and protection.



Highlights/benefits working in the COP partnership

1. CONNECTING AND FORGING RELATIONSHIPS

- Created and nurtured relationships with stakeholders across the school setting: e.g. working with SBST's, School Safety committees, scholar patrol.
- Solid, relationships and good communication established with schools.
- Promoting interpersonal element: valued connection with learners, families and educators.
 - Building strong relationships, reaching out and supporting families.
 - Relationships/collaborations with educators and school principals were enriching and rewarding. These interactions proved to be a valuable source of satisfaction.
 - Sense of making a meaningful contribution, feeling worthwhile, feeling joy when changed is observed.
 - Improved relationships amongst family members – self awareness, problem solving and conflict resolution.
- Opportunity to grow and learn from their connections with school staff and COP social workers.
- Appreciation of the views/perceptions educators shared about learners.
- Active articulation and engagement in Local Level CoPS (school-based care and support team coordinated by CoP social workers) with practitioners and service providers in the community – panel discussions, home visits, working/networking with LLCOP and community partners to address needs and challenges of learners and families.
- Peer support, sharing experiences, exchanging ideas and resources was a valued source of satisfaction.



Highlights/benefits working in the COP partnership

2. IMPACT

- Opportunity to put School Social Work services on the map - school community more aware of the school social work service offered by DSD.
- Increased referrals, connecting and linking learners and their families to social services and other practitioners e.g.
 - Community Health Clinics,
 - DSD's Sustainable Livelihoods Programme for material assistance (food parcels and school uniform);
 - Referrals to Dept of Home Affairs for assistance with grant applications;
 - Referrals for child protection, care and other services;
 - Conducting home visits: Assessing family circumstances, monitoring progress of family strengthening programme, addressing learners absenteeism, poor school performance; providing parental support, managing behaviour, alternative disciplinary measures;
 - GDE educational psychologist – learners identified with special learning needs;
 - SANCA for substance abuse referrals;
 - Burial assistance - Ward Councillor;
 - Bereavement counselling and support.
- Reinforced the importance of their role in their school – referrals, conducting awareness programmes, facilitating statutory interventions, conducting home visits to assess family circumstances and provide support.
- Local Level COP meetings assisted the school staff understand the roles and responsibilities of the DSD Social workers and those of the COP social workers.



Highlights/benefits working in the COP partnership

2. IMPACT

- Consistent referrals, responsive turnaround times for social work interventions more effective.
- Reinforced the importance of DSD social worker roles in schools – referral process, conducting awareness/prevention programmes, facilitating statutory interventions, conducting home visits to assess family circumstances and providing counselling and support.
- Social workers felt empowered, knowledge and skill development.
- Local Level CoP (LLCoP) meetings assisted school staff understand the roles, responsibilities, boundaries of the GDSD and COP social workers.
- Participated in the development of individual intervention plans for red-flagged children during LLCoP meetings.
- Identification, implementation of short-term interventions and follow up on CoP children and families.
- Accountability of stakeholders.
- All CoP case files closed.
- Information workshops facilitated with CoP schools on DSD school social work services and referral processes.
- Development of a DSD training plan for implementation of Sihleng'imizi (Family Strengthening) programme roll out in schools.
- Integration of the Sihleng'imizi principles and themes in other developmental programmes.



Highlights/benefits working in the COP partnership

3. CONFIDENCE IN THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COP MODEL

- Useful, effective tool for practice.
- Holistic, comprehensive model concerned with the “WHOLE” child, Identifying their needs and strengths and responding appropriately.
- Children have access to a full basket of services.
- Closed gaps for learners not receiving any form of social services.
- Learning from the practice model e.g better understanding of child well-being domains and integrating these into developmental or risk/safety assessment tools.
- Appropriate, relevant early intervention to improve wellbeing of children in the critical developmental years of their lives.
- Identified social workers trained for COP School intervention, provided meaningful social work interventions instead of only operating in crises management mode/firefighting.
- Reinforced benefits of a collaborative and interpersonal professional community within the school.
- Demonstrated value of service integration and stakeholder collaboration.
- Enhanced co-operation and minimized silo mentality.
- Better integration and engagement with all levels within the school setting.
- Reinforced the importance for proper record keeping, thorough documentation of services rendered and tracking progress.



Challenges

- Insufficient time to deliver services during contact time.
- Parental involvement.
- Resource constraints.
- Limited time to engage in regular supervision sessions.
- Pace of referrals post COP termination slowed down.

Recommendations

- Sharing and replicating best practice through scale up and institutionalization of COP project across more schools in Gauteng.
- Greater collaboration with DSD partners to address the issues facing children together in a smarter manner.

Conclusion

- A Multi sectoral approach between key stakeholders serving children and families to better understand their needs and develop solutions to address their challenges cannot be overemphasized.
- The COP model as a learner support, systems-oriented practice model, is an effective approach in improving better social outcomes for children.