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Importance of Learning through Play in Parent-Child Relationships in South Africa

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The LEGO Foundation and Sesame Workshop, the nonprofit organisation behind Takalani Sesame, announced the results of a multi-country research evaluation of Play Every Day, a program designed to shift parent and caregiver perceptions about the educational value of play and to encourage play that contributes to children's early development and learning outcomes.

The 'Play Every Day' program empowered caregivers to effectively guide children in learning through play in South Africa. The LEGO Foundation and Sesame Workshop, the nonprofit organisation behind Takalani Sesame, announced the results of a multi-country research evaluation of Play Every Day, a program designed to shift parent and caregiver perceptions about the educational value of play and to encourage play that contributes to children's early development and learning outcomes.

The impact evaluation, conducted by an external evaluator, found significant changes in parents and caregivers' perceptions of play and play-related behaviour, as well as improved confidence of parents and caregivers as play mentors for their children.

Over the course of a 12-week intervention in low-resource communities in South Africa, India and Mexico, Sesame Workshop conducted weekly in-person play workshops or home visits, in addition to reminders utilising WhatsApp and other digital platforms and community events. The research in South Africa was conducted in IsiZulu, IsiXhosa and Sesotho in the communities of Orange Farm, Alexandra, Diepsloot and Braamfontein. Caregivers participating in the Play Every Day program in South Africa reported:

- Increased frequency of play by 15%
- Increased confidence as "play mentors" for their children through quality play time, with an increase of 18%
- Increased confidence using recycled materials such as plastic bottles, cans, and cardboard rolls as play objects, with an increase of 19% in South Africa
- An increase of 19% in the ability to make everyday activities playful
- An 11% increase in the link between pretend play as a foundation for academic learning

The research findings will inform the upcoming Takalani Sesame 'Learning Through Play' Initiative, which will reach millions of children and caregivers across South Africa through television, digital media, and targeted community engagement. The findings will also inform a USD \$100 Million Humanitarian Play Program to support children affected by the Rohingya and Syrian refugee crises. The Play Every Day program empowered caregivers and children to learn together, rather than in parallel, providing valuable insights for the development of caregiver-child programming.

"With such a large portion of the South African population being in low-resource settings, this research is invaluable and will guide Takalani Sesame programs in South Africa. We continue to educate caregivers and teachers on the benefits that Learning through Play provides, as one of the most powerful ways for children to learn, develop and overcome setbacks," said Innocent Nkata, Managing Director of Sesame Workshop South Africa.

The facilitated workshops, implemented through local community partners, provided primary caregivers with content that is easy to replicate at home to improve caregiver confidence in playful learning techniques and provide new ideas for engagement with children, such as building toys with recycled materials and playing pretend using everyday household items. To ensure culturally relevant and effective interventions, the 12-week intervention was preceded by three pilot phases between November 2016 and May 2018 that tested a variety of play activities, materials, and methods of facilitation for each country.

"The LEGO Foundation is working to build a future in which learning through play helps all children grow into creative, engaged, life-long learners. Parents and other primary caregivers are fundamental to this aim as they are children's first teachers and playmates. We are excited about the positive results from the Play Every Day program. We hope that these insights will inspire and

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empower primary caregivers in in South Africa to harness the power of learning through play," said Kerry Kassen, LEGO Foundation Initiatives Lead for South Africa.

The findings have been announced as we celebrate World Play Day.



To mark this important day, Sesame Workshop and the LEGO Foundation are partnered with Cotlands and Kagiso Trust to host an event at the Multipurpose Centre in Sasolburg on 1 June 2019. Takalani Sesame Muppets Zuzu and Kami joined over 300 children to highlight this year's World Play Day theme, "Play is a right." The event featured songs, dancing, and play activities for children.

"We're deeply committed to bringing learning experiences to children across South Africa through Takalani Sesame, and we too believe that play is a right for all children," adds Mr. Nkata. "This World Play Day, we have a lot to celebrate; with the new research findings, we will be able to build upon our work to ensure that every child has access to positive, playful experiences."

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