



Community Learning Pods in Early Childhood Development

Tej Preet Kaur

Strong Start

Nairobi, Kenya

www.strongstart.co.ke

Strong Start

An early childhood development company that supports families with young children in Kenya

- We specialize in providing **quality curricula, skills training** for domestic staff members, **effective tools** to support parents, and **milestone driven assessments** for clear development tracking. We believe that these factors offer children healthy and stimulating environments to thrive.
- A key portion of our work focuses on supporting women in the caregiving industry. We believe that all caregivers deserve **healthy and safe working conditions, job stability** and **fair living wages**.
- Strong Start's vision aligns with the 2019 Mombasa call to action to create awareness in nurturing care practices amongst parents and caregivers in order to support strong and healthy early years for all children.



COVID-19

School closures in Kenya enabled community responses to early childhood development

Impact of COVID-19 on Caregivers

- The caregiving industry in Kenya was impacted from the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic, as families experienced job loss and job insecurity.
- Hiring stopped and cutbacks were made, while the workloads of domestic workers who remain employed increased.
- Work from home setups and school closures resulted in children being home and requiring structure, stimulation and care, adding extra responsibilities to already strained households.

Micropods – A Community Driven Response

- Amid the challenges, opportunities to rethink early childhood development from a community perspective surfaced.
- Instead of sending children in their early years to educational institutions, we saw an opportunity to return ECD to homes, neighborhoods and communities.
- We started working with micropods to support parents and caregivers who were tasked to plan and implement homeschooling practices from home.
- **Micropods** are a group of parents who bring their children together to play and learn, while agreeing to limit their exposure to people outside of their pod. This limits COVID exposure while enabling social engagement and pandemic learning
- Relieves parents from the time-consuming task of planning and preparing play and learning opportunities for their children at home, while promoting caregivers' roles and value within homes and communities as educators.



Achievements

Supporting caregivers and providing quality programming for children

- Strong Start is working with neighborhood micropods to provide quality play programs while supporting caregivers with skills training, curricula and materials to implement best caregiving practices in homes and neighborhood micropods.
- Micropods are shifting the focus of quality early child development learning from schools and daycares, and back to neighborhoods and communities.
- Strong Start is working with caregivers to implement play and learning at home and in their communities by providing technical skills training in early childhood development, homeschooling and household management
- Our ongoing engagement with with micropods not only provides opportunities for caregivers to gain industry skills and receive implementation tools in early childhood development, but it also enables caregivers to connect with peer networks of support within their work communities to enable peer learning.



Challenges

Covid measures and social distancing requirements increase costs of program development

- In order to practice strong health and safety protocols, micropod sizes are limited between 3 – 6 children, creating higher overhead costs
- Strong healthy and safety measures limit micropods to outdoor spaces, and therefore limiting access to families and communities who have access to outdoor space (i.e. homes, parks, community centres)
- Lack of information on the reopening of schools limits organizational ability to plan and prepare for successive terms.

The Way Forward

Building long-lasting and scalable community solutions

- With the pandemic still looming before us, we anticipate the need for families to implement community-based learning systems within their homes and communities to grow.
- We expect caregivers to continue requiring homeschooling and caregiving tools and support, as the pandemic continues to impact the economy.
- In order to reach scale, we require a blended learning design, where we can lower the cost of training and introduce our quality play curricula to more households in Kenya.

