

Changing the world, one child at a time

MIKA WILLIAMS

Two Mitchell's Plain Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDs) scooped top honours at the South African Early Childhood Development Awards held at the Town House Hotel in Plein Street last month. Soraya Abbas, principal of the Beacon Valley Montessori Based Educare, which opened its doors in 1997 and was registered with the Department of Social Development in 2000, was named runner-up in the Best ECD Centre – Urban category for 2016.

She believes that children are unique symbols of the universe as much as the trees and the stars. "They have a right to be here, to be loved, to be cared for, to be protected, to be safe and to belong. That is why we strive to embrace them in a safe, hygienic, stimulating and nurturing environment where holistic development can take place."

Ms Abbas, who currently takes care of 30 children, said her ECD provided relief for working and job-seeking parents during the day.

"We offer parental workshops and we intervene in households where alcohol and drug abuse as well as domestic violence are present.

"Our centre is registered with Sub-council 12 so that we can be

informed of all upcoming trends. Our centre also belongs to the Ward Hub 79 where we benefit from ward allocations."

Ms Abbas has also been the secretary of the Mitchell's Plain Educare Forum for the past 12 years. "The forum offers us fruitful information, an opportunity to engage with stakeholders and other educators as well as ongoing training from the Department of Social Development and the City.

"I am also a member of the South African Congress for ECD centres which is the only national body representing ECD centres countrywide," she added.

Chairperson of the Mitchell's Plain Educare Forum, Karrimah Jacobs, clinched the award for the best ECD centre. She runs Vision Kidz which was started in Colorado Park in 2007. It was registered in November 2012. "I was elated and surprised at the same time as I applied for this award with a mere hope of acquiring some recognition for my hard work in this field," she said.

Ms Jacobs has extensive experience in running an ECD and said during her 20 years as a foundation phase specialist, she had acquired a huge amount of knowledge pertaining to teaching, curriculum matters, admin-



■ Sadia Gamiet, Karrimah Jacobs and Soraya Abbas were awarded for their work at the South African Early Childhood Development Awards held at the Town House Hotel in Plein Street last month.

istration, workshopping, facilitation and networking.

"I also had the unique opportunity to teach in Kuwait for two years, and brought back knowledge which I still impart to my pupils and teachers today. I also have a facility which could be utilised to house children, as being an integral asset to my community."

Ms Jacobs said government was yet to grasp the importance of foundation building, pointing out that 80% of children's brain development takes place between the time they are born and their second birthday.

"I am also a member of South African Congress for Early Childhood Development that lobbies and advocates for ECD pupils and practitioners," said Ms Jacobs.

"President Jacob Zuma announced in 2015 that ECD

centres were considered a 'national good', yet we are still very far from that desired recognition," she said.

Of the Mitchell's Plain Educare Forum, which Ms Jacobs said a City official had described as one of the strongest forums in the Western Cape, she said: "We help with registrations of centres, capacity building and skills development of principals and practitioners and serve as a platform for speaking on behalf of our principals and practitioners."

Ms Jacobs said she had seen a paradigm shift in the way parents view ECD centres. "Parents need to realise that our centres are no longer 'dumping grounds' for children. "We no longer use the word creche as we are considered ECD centres where we educate children holistically and within their totalities.

"We are inclusive, meaning that we do not discriminate against any child. Unfortunately, we do not receive funding on the same scale as prisoners do, therefore, our parents have to know that ECD centres are forced to charge a fee which needs to be paid if they want the best for their children," she added.

ECD teacher at the Beacon Valley Montessori Based Educare, Sadia Gamiet, was named the runner-up in the best ECD practitioner category. "I have my Level 4 in ECD from Northlink College and I have been working here for almost two years. Soraya encouraged me to enter and I was surprised when I won," she said.

Ms Gamiet said she had always had an affinity for children. "There are many children in my family and I am used to them," she said.