

Digital-based support group for parents of children with disabilities

SOUTH AFRICA / SHONAQUIP SOCIAL ENTERPRISE – PARENT NETWORK

In 2020 Shonaquip Social Enterprise, based in Cape Town, South Africa, launched the Parent Network, a community-based digital support group for parents of children with various disabilities. The network provides peer support, expert knowledge-building, and referrals for health, education, and social services, while monitoring policy implementation locally. It is accessible online from smartphones as well as in person through designated volunteers. Between 2020 and 2022 the Parent Network has grown to more than 1,000 parents.

Problem targeted

Parents of children with disabilities in low- and middle-income contexts often lack the knowledge to address barriers that are excluding their children from health, education, and social services.

Solution, innovation, and impact

Parents connect to the network on their phones daily, and those without smartphones are reached by other Network Parents who relay information to these households and complete research and monitoring with the families. Network Parents run weekly workshops in their province on topics such as rights, inclusive education, and medical issues. Initially starting on WhatsApp, a dedicated app was launched in 2021, which has been translated into five official South African languages. Parents have successfully referred their children to receive health services, including assistive technology, as well as into early childhood development programmes or schooling. They have also re-activated cases of abuse against their children that had been thrown out of the justice system and have supported each other during COVID-19.



The community-based Parent Network in South Africa has more than 1,000 participants.

models, including a membership fee and donations from community businesses. Their tie to the Uhambo Foundation enables them to offer tax benefits to donors. Training and administration are donated by Shonaquip Social Enterprise. The aim is to be financially self-sustaining while securing funding and tech support for data management, to continue growing nationally, and to increase the number of Network Parents in each district. In addition, the Parent Network intends to step up its lobbying efforts to establish the initiative as a public policy.

“You are your child’s mouthpiece.”

Anita August, Network Parent,
Shonaquip Social Enterprise

Outlook, transferability, and funding

The Parent Network is expanding. Research funding from the Uhambo Foundation enables parents to be upskilled as researchers and to connect via mobile data; and parents are exploring alternative funding

FACTS & FIGURES

Start: 2020

- Over 1,000 parents connect to the network on their phones daily.
- A dedicated app has been translated into an additional five official South African languages.
- *A project of Civil Society.*



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