



HRD Stakeholder Engagement Strengthens Development Skills and Partnerships

By Sibabalwe Nkebe
NELSON MANDELA METRO

GQEBERHA - The Eastern Cape Department of Social Development, through its Human Resource Development (HRD) Unit, successfully hosted a two-day HRD Stakeholder Engagement Session in partnership with Nelson Mandela University from 27 to 28 January 2026 at the university's North Campus.

The engagement formed part of the Department's broader strategy to strengthen skills development, career management and the professionalisation of the Public Service, while deepening collaboration with key stakeholders in the education and training sector. The session brought together representatives from universities, institutions of higher learning, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, professional bodies, Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and other strategic partners [see pg2]

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MEC meets with Parents and Teacher in Graaff Reinet

Welcome to Cebolisiwe : Local Organisation hosts international funders

Inside Nolitha Community Based Rehabilitation Home Care Centre

Amathole Disability Forum shines spotlight on Albinism

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[From Pg 1] The stakeholder session created a platform for discussions on workforce planning, graduate pipelines, workplace learning and aligning academic programmes with the evolving needs of the social development sector. The focus was on equipping public servants with relevant skills, ethical grounding and practical experience to deliver responsive, people-centred services.

A key highlight was the keynote address by Head of Department M. Machemba under the theme *Professionalisation of the Public Service: Building State Capacity through Strong Partnerships and Collaborations*. He emphasised that strong partnerships between government and educational institutions are essential for attracting skilled professionals, improving career mobility and ensuring sustainable service delivery.

Participants explored ways to strengthen experiential learning, internships, bursary programmes and continuous professional development, while also highlighting the value of research collaboration and training programmes that respond to emerging social challenges. Stakeholders reaffirmed the importance of coordinated planning to ensure graduates entering the Public Service are work-ready and aligned with sector priorities, particularly in scarce and critical skills areas.

The engagement reaffirmed the Department's commitment to investing in its workforce as a foundation for effective governance. Through sustained collaboration with higher education institutions and partners, the Department of Social Development continues to advance a professional, capable and ethical Public Service that is responsive to community needs.

CONTRIBUTORS

Editor – in –Chief : Mzukisi Solani

Editor : Samora Madolo

Sub – Editor : S'busiso Sankqela

Writers : Nomalanga Lucwaba, Sibabalwe Nkebe, Siphumelele Mdyodyo, Mlamli Mfana, Xolisa Mgwatyu

Photography : Sibabalwe Nkebe, , Nomalamga Lucwaba, Mlamli Mfana.

Design & Layout : Akhona Peter & Sbusiso Sankqela

From Promise to Action: MEC Follow-Up Strengthens Partnership at Asherville

By Sbusiso Sankqela
SARAH BAARTMAN

GRAAFF – REINET - When MEC Bukiwe Fanta visited Asherville Senior Secondary School in Graaff-Reinet during the Back-to-School campaign earlier this year, a stakeholder engagement created space for honest reflection on challenges facing the school. School leadership and community representatives raised concerns around limited parental involvement and increasing disciplinary pressures among learners issues identified as barriers to academic progress.

Acknowledging the urgency of these concerns, the MEC committed to return to the school to engage directly with parents and support the development of practical solutions. The pledge highlighted the importance of sustained engagement rather than once-off visits.

On 16 February 2026, the MEC honoured that commitment, leading a delegation that included the Sarah Baartman District Municipality, Dr Beyers Naudé Local Municipality, and officials from the Eastern Cape Department of Education.

The follow-up session brought parents, educators and community stakeholders together in a constructive dialogue centred on strengthening accountability and support for learners. Discussions emphasised the role of parents in monitoring attendance, reinforcing discipline and encouraging learning at home, while educators highlighted the need for consistent communication and community-based support for vulnerable learners.



MEC Fanta addressing a Parents meeting at Asherville Senior Secondary School in Graaff Reinet.

Pic: Nombasa Dyasi

The MEC stressed that schools cannot operate in isolation and that progress depends on active parental participation and coordinated government action. The return visit demonstrated the value of responsive leadership and meaningful follow-up.

By coming back to the school and creating space for collective problem-solving, the MEC reinforced government's commitment to supporting educators, empowering parents and keeping learners engaged in education.

As the school community moves forward, the strengthened partnership between families, educators and government signals a positive step towards building a disciplined, supportive and learner-centred environment where every child can succeed.



MEC Visits Cebolesizwe Family Resource Centre to Support International Partnership

By Nomalanga Lucwaba
BUFFALO CITY METRO

DIMBAZA-The Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for Social Development, Ms Bukiwe Fanta, visited Cebolesizwe Family Resource Centre in Dimbaza on 29 January 2026. This visit was to support as the centre hosted international funders from Germany. Situated in the Zabalaza area outside King William's Town within the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality, the centre has become a vital community resource providing care, protection and support services to children and families.

The project started in 2005 and began receiving funding from the Department of Social Development around 2008. According to Project

Manager Siziwe Magobiyane, the organisation faced early challenges but has grown steadily through departmental support.

"In the beginning we found the going tough, but with the intervention of Social Development, things are not the same," she said.

The Department expressed pride in supporting the centre, recognising its important role in strengthening families and safeguarding children within the community. During the visit, MEC Fanta commended the centre's programmes and community-building initiatives, noting that they have played a key role in uniting residents of Dimbaza. She reaffirmed the Department's commitment to investing in sustainable interventions that uplift families and build resilient communities.

One of the visiting funders, Marlies Bauckloh, highlighted the long-standing partnership with the organisation.

"We have worked with Cebolesizwe for the past 20 years and are grateful that the people of Zabalaza opened their doors and hearts to us to fulfil our mission. As an organisation, we strive to assist communities by enriching them with skills and knowledge," she said.

For the 2025/26 financial year, the Department is supporting the centre with funding amounting to R153 367, enabling it to continue delivering essential services and expanding its impact within the community.

The visit underscored the value of collaboration between government, civil society and international partners in advancing social development and improving the lives of vulnerable families.

Nolitha Community Based Rehabilitation Home Care Centre : Restoring Futures



Pictured: Nolitha Centre in Msukeni Location. Pictures by Mlamli Mfana

By Mlamli Mfana

ALFRED NDZO - The Nolitha Community Based Rehabilitation Home Care Centre continues to play a vital role in supporting young people living with intellectual disabilities, reflecting the impact of community initiative strengthened by government partnership.

Established in 1992 by community members in the Dundee Administrative Area at Msukeni Location under the leadership of the Department of Social Development, the centre was created after home visits revealed that many children with disabilities were marginalised and neglected. The initiative sought to provide a safe, supportive environment where learners could access care, development opportunities and social inclusion.

Today, the centre serves learners with Severe Intellectual Disabilities from across Alfred Nzo District and surrounding areas including Kokstad, Flagstaff, Lusikisiki, Qumbu and Tsolo. Registered as a Non-Profit Organisation, it continues to receive Department of Social Development funding that supports services for approximately 60 learners. Through this support, the centre offers practical skills programmes aimed at building independence. Learners participate in activities such as

baking, gardening, carpentry, leatherwork, needlework, poultry farming, and hairdressing and personal hygiene training equipping them with life skills that enhance confidence and future self-sufficiency. Social workers remain central to the centre's work, providing psychosocial support, strengthening family involvement and ensuring accountability in the use of resources. Their role is particularly important as many learners arrive having experienced neglect or limited support at home.

The centre also contributes to local community development. Community members purchase products made by learners, promoting inclusion while the initiative has created eight employment opportunities for surrounding residents. Ongoing collaboration with government departments and partners including assistance with social grants, healthcare services, sports development, safety awareness and identity documentation continues to strengthen the centre's impact. The Nolitha Community Based Rehabilitation Home Care Centre stands as a strong example of how coordinated support and community commitment can restore dignity, unlock potential and advance inclusive service delivery for persons with disabilities.

VEP : Supporting Survivors of Crime

By Siphumelele Mdyodyo
CHRIS HANI DISTRICT

The Victim Empowerment Programme (VEP), led by the Department of Social Development, is a key initiative promoting restorative justice by placing survivors of crime and violence at the centre of care and recovery. Through collaboration with NPOs, the justice cluster and SAPS, the programme addresses the impact of crime on individuals, families and communities.

VEP recognises a victim as anyone who has experienced physical, emotional, psychological or financial harm due to criminal activity, including affected family members. Its service package supports survivors in moving from vulnerability to empowerment through:

Psychosocial support including trauma counselling and debriefing

- **Safe accommodation** for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and trafficking
- **Court support services** to prepare survivors and prevent secondary victimisation
- **Reintegration and reunification** into families and communities
- **Economic empowerment** through life skills and job training

While available to all survivors, the programme prioritises vulnerable groups such as women and children affected by GBVF, older persons, persons with disabilities, victims of human trafficking and LGBTQIA+ individuals.

The VEP is guided by legislative and policy frameworks that guarantee survivors' rights to dignity, information, protection, assistance and compensation.

How to Access Help

- Support can be accessed through:
- **GBV Command Centre:** 0800 428 428 (24/7)
- **USSD:** 1207867#
- **SAPS stations:** Referral to VEP coordinators
- **DSD local and district offices:** Direct assistance and referrals

The programme continues to strengthen coordinated support systems that restore dignity, promote healing and ensure survivors are not left behind.

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Amathole Disability Forum Advances Albinism Awareness and Community Inclusion

By Xolisa Mgwatyu
AMATHOLE DISTRICT

Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

For the past seven years, the Amathole Disability Forum has been mobilising communities across the Amathole District through awareness campaigns, educational talks, door-to-door outreach and community dialogues focusing on the rights and lived experiences of adults and children with albinism. The forum also provides skills development, psychosocial support and home-based care.

Forum chairperson Benny Masamanzi said the organisation currently operates in six municipalities within the district Ngqushwa Local Municipality, Raymond Mhlaba Local Municipality, Amahlathi Local Municipality, Great Kei Local Municipality, Mbhashe Local Municipality and Mnquma Local Municipality — with one caregiver in each municipality leading awareness activities.

“The forum was formed in 2017 by 107 people with albinism. Its objective is to destigmatise albinism by educating communities through various platforms such as radio, schools, clinics and community engagements,” said Masamanzi.

He explained that the forum’s mission is to serve as a conduit for accurate and authoritative information about all aspects of living with albinism.

“Our aim is to provide a space where people with albinism and their families in Amathole and across South Africa can find acceptance, support and fellowship,” he said.

Despite its impact, the forum continues to face challenges, including the need for greater parental empowerment around children’s rights and albinism-related issues, as well as limited funding to expand outreach.

“Budget constraints make it difficult for us to conduct more awareness programmes and reach additional areas, but we use social media as a platform to educate communities,” Masamanzi added.

The Department of Social Development has supported the forum since 2019. For the 2025/2026 financial year, the organisation received R114 394 under Programme 2.3: Care and Support to Persons with Disabilities, enabling it to continue its advocacy, awareness and support services.

Through sustained community engagement, the forum remains committed to challenging misconceptions, promoting inclusion and ensuring that persons with albinism live with dignity, protection and equal opportunities.

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