

ACTION LEAD:

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The Blueprint calls for a narrative co-created with families, providers, partners and community leaders, grounded in listening and shaped by their real voices. The work followed five steps:

- 1. Develop and test a listening guide**
- 2. Listen in the field, in three provinces**
- 3. Listen on social media**
- 4. Analyse the listening themes**
- 5. Synthesise the key themes of the narrative**

In-community deep listening interviews

We conducted 30 interviews with parents, caregivers and ECD practitioners in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng (May–July 2026), and distilled them into key insights.

We had scoped two narrative shifts: (1) from school-readiness to care, belonging and relationship, and (2) from scarcity to abundance in how communities are seen. The fieldwork supported both, and most of the Blueprint's other shifts too: foundational, expanded readiness, active partnership, and passive to powerful.

Tiktok analysis alongside deep listening

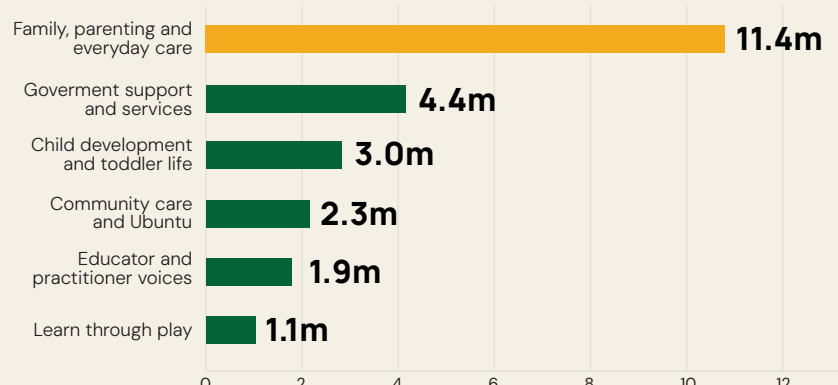
The interviews show what people already believe. They cannot show how those beliefs move at national scale, or where a shared narrative could be seeded and spread.

The conversation is already happening, and no one owns it. Searches for #MomTok, #SensoryPlay and #GentleParenting return millions of posts in which parents, grandparents and ELPs document exactly the everyday care the Blueprint wants to name and celebrate. #BanaPele is an emerging, uncoordinated signal, and #ECD carries 20K+ posts. None of it is connected: there is no shared hashtag, no trusted anchor voice and, critically, no one naming this as ECD. This mirrors the two opportunities the interviews describe, from a different angle.

Bana Pele has the social compact brand power to become the connective tissue for a conversation that would otherwise stay fragmented and misnamed.

Tiktok impressions by theme

Impressions, in millions:
South Africa – 1 Jan to 31 Jul 2026





What are we hearing

Hundreds of individual experiences converge around five ideas about what young children need to thrive. These are not campaign messages imposed from above. They synthesise what children, parents, grandparents and practitioners are already telling us: children need to be seen, heard, trusted as learners, held by a community and rooted in a place of their own.

Listening is not only about finding the right words. It is how a movement grows from the ground up: building trust, creating resonance and giving people a story they recognise as their own. The same ideas kept surfacing: love, attention, trust, safety, play, belonging and the freedom to speak. So did a tension in how adults hear children who question, correct or speak confidently. The aim is not to smooth it away but to understand it.

These five insights turn those voices into a shared narrative, without losing the people behind them.

1. OUR CHILDREN ARE SEEN

A child's first experience of care is knowing that someone is paying attention.

"I like when mommy plays with me and doesn't look at her phone." – Omiyo

"A parent's contribution comes down to whether they have time for their child, rather than pushing phones, TV and the internet on them." – Bongekile Jako, Kiddies Love Day Care, Motherwell

Parents and practitioners name love, attention, trust and time as good care. It is also the biggest TikTok narrative that is not about government (253 posts, 11.4M impressions). TikTok: "five minutes, phone down" moments with a gogo, a father or an aunt. It costs nothing, so poor communities are not lacking in it, and it asks every adult to look at the child in front of them.

2. OUR CHILDREN ARE HEARD

When children know they will be listened to, they learn that their thoughts, questions and feelings matter.

"Sometimes I don't ask for help because I think adults are busy." – Ivhananne

"Sometimes, because children these days talk back... it sits uncomfortably with you. But then you realise this is how they've been taught to speak up for themselves, so they can be understood." – Participant, Eastern Cape

This was the interviews' strongest and most detailed theme: children correcting adults on hygiene and manners, against older norms of deference. It is the narrative where the child is the actor.



3. OUR CHILDREN ARE BORN LEARNERS

Children are learning long before anyone calls it a lesson: through play, trying, watching, asking and doing things for themselves.

"If I make a mistake, I can try again and learn." – Musawenkosi

"Sometimes I know how to do it, I just need a little time." – Menka

Learning Through Play has zero negative sentiment, and toddler-life content has the highest positive share at 43.5% [on TikTok]. Families also look for "big school" markers, so the framing should pair confidence with readiness.

4. OUR CHILDREN ARE RAISED BY A VILLAGE

A child's world is held by many people: parents, grandparents, teachers, neighbours and others who notice, care and step in.

"Playing with my granny is my favourite because she laughs with me." – Daise

"We should all come together to raise the child." – Nomfundo Hlongwe, practitioner, Hibberdene

"We still need a setup where a child is surrounded by people, not surrounded by money, full stop." – Grandparent, Eastern Cape

5. OUR CHILDREN HAVE A PLACE OF THEIR OWN

An early learning centre can be more than somewhere a child spends the day. It can be a safe, familiar place for the child and a doorway to support for the whole family.

"A child who goes to creche seems to learn quicker and is less shy... My child is confident!"

– Smangele Jwana, mother, Lawley

The ELP is the child's safe, known place, and the one asset that connects the family to clinics, SASSA and Home Affairs. Community gardens, churches and WhatsApp groups each do one thing; the centre does all of it. This puts the early learning child on the community's map, and the ask of neighbours is to show up rather than donate.

WHAT'S NEXT?

- **Keep listening.** Bring more parents, practitioners, children and community voices into the conversation.
- **Test the emerging themes.** Use trusted creators and community storytellers to explore ideas such as children being seen, heard and recognised as born learners.
- **Amplify what is already resonating.** Action 10 will commission creative agencies to share and reinforce the emerging narrative, starting from the TikTok audit. Family care, everyday learning and Ubuntu are the strongest themes, and authentic community-led content consistently outperforms institutional messaging.
- **Turn listening into participation.** Create more ways for South Africans to add their own stories, experiences and reflections to the shared narrative.