

## **How the Sunshine Association came into existence.**

Soon after the birth of her son Bran in August 1973, Sylvia Langenhoven together with a group of mothers of children with disabilities decided to start a babysitting programme for their children. Dr Joan Wagner, Paediatrician at the Children's Hospital, Johannesburg offered them the support to initiate this programme.

The mothers took it in turn to babysit once a week, giving the other mothers a break and offering each other vital support.

The group was offered a place by the Salvation Army in their hall in Braamfontein, this contact facilitated by Dr Wagner who continued to offer support and advice to the families.

The numbers of the children attending the project grew as word spread and help was forthcoming from various sources including Lily Lipman of the Hamlet, Doris Johnson of Gateway and Elmarie Lehoud, later of Casa do Sol. The Union of Jewish Women had been running a playgroup for children who were visually disabled. The number of children attending that group dwindled and Lily Lipman linked the Union of Jewish Women volunteers including Avril Gordon and Gail Whiteman to Sylvia's group.

The group progressed from meeting once a week at the Salvation Army to 3 days a week at the Greenside Scout Hall. To quote Sylvia Langenhoven, "The winter of 1976 was particularly bitter and the Scout Hall had no heating. The Parktown North Methodist Church had acquired the house next door to the church the Rev. Don Dinnie offered us use of the house, and so Sunshine Corner / Centre was born out of desperation and generosity".

According to Brenda Solarsh first director of the now Sunshine Association "when I started working with the school it was a playgroup run by Sylvia (Langenhoven) and concerned people. They were conducting a programme known as the 'Glen Doman Programme' that required many volunteers. The Union of Jewish Women and the Lions Club of Cyrildene were involved. I was asked by the Union to run a training course for the volunteers and that was the beginning of my 12 year involvement with the organisation which ended in 1991.

During this time professional staff were appointed and the school grew significantly. In my experience an excellent relationship existed with the Union of Jewish Women. They were one of the founders of the school. Mrs Leah Rosettenstein (Bloch) was on the Board when the school grew from an informal play group into a fully fledged school with professional staff and found its own premises. There are many individuals who played a part in the development of the school over the years and it was truly a partnership between parents, groups such as the Union of Jewish Women, Lions of Cyrildene, the Salvation Army, the Methodist Church, Anglo American, many others and most important of all the parents. I believe that the partnership is the most important issue"

## How the Sunshine Association grew and extended

In 1980, a mother of a child with a disability living on the East Rand made contact with the Sunshine Centre – Johannesburg. This determined lady, together with other committed mothers, were given assistance by the Sunshine Centre – Craighall to open up a Sunshine Centre – East Rand. Both the centres later went on, with the help of all stakeholders, to purchase property for the schools in their areas. It was during this time that the Sunshine Centre developed the START programme (Striving Towards Achieving Results Together) in partnership with the Transvaal Memorial Institute. This programme was designed for parents who were unable to bring the children to the centres. The Sunshine Centre also merged with the SAIDA Toy Library which offered a toy lending service and toy exchanges.

In the old political dispensation many NGO's operated in opposition rather than collaboration with the apartheid state. In the post – 1994 period, the relationship between the state and the civil society changed significantly and simultaneously the flood gates opened. The Sunshine Centre was overwhelmed by the needs of the Communities and in harmony responded by opening an additional two centres in Eldorado Park and Soweto and went on to form the Sunshine Centre Association as it is known as today.

**Present** – And so we come to Sunshine Association Centre (SCA) as it is today – a dynamic, progressive and innovative organisation in the field of intellectual disability, offering diverse services at many levels. All developments and services offered by the SCA have been a direct response to the needs identified in the communities in Johannesburg. The SCA services at present include:

**Early Intervention Centres:** SCA has three Early Intervention Centres (Craighall, Soweto/ Eldorado Park and Elsburg) which offer specialised stimulation and early intervention programmes catering specifically to the needs of children with developmental delays and intellectual / physical disabilities. The programme assists the children to acquire the skills relating to those areas identified as vital in child development. Therapists of different disciplines visit the centres regularly and work with the children, teachers, assistants and volunteers using a transdisciplinary approach. The centres school terms are similar to those of government schools and children have a regular school day from 7:30 to 1:00 Mondays to Fridays. The children do not live at the centres but are transported in from surrounding areas.

**Community Development:** SCA is involved in a number of collaborative initiatives with various communities in Johannesburg. These partnerships have been initiated in order to develop programmes to meet the needs of children with special needs and to assist families and communities that do not have access to the SCA Early Intervention Centres or might need assistance in building their own capacity as a centre. Sharing of skills, expertise, resources and training is central to the approach of the Sunshine Centre Association.

**Family Support Services:** The SCA links families to appropriate social or specialist services when necessary and START trained community workers create awareness and insight into disability and relevant services through talks in the community. The Home based programme consists of visits to families to teach skills regarding activities that are important for the child's development as well as emotional support where needed.

**Toy Library Services:** The Libraries cater for children who are at a developmental age below six years. The toy library offers a toy lending service and toy exchanges are done on a regular one to one basis with the parents / caregivers that in turn offer institutions with untrained and unskilled staff, practical guidelines and support.

**Training:** Sunshine Centre Association offers a range of courses aimed at supporting professionals, caregivers, communities and families in their support and development of children with disabilities.

- **START:** The START Home Intervention Programme has been in existence for 15 years. This is a unique home programme, indigenous to South Africa. It is designed to be used with children who are operating developmentally below the age of three years (i.e. they may be chronologically older than three years). There is an extension of the programme up to seven years of age now available.
- **ECD / Inclusion Programme:** The main aim of this programme is to create awareness of issues around including children with disabilities in regular programme and community life. Specific strategies and skills are developed which are tailored to the specific needs of the trainee group. This is a 2-3 day programme that is based on the belief that all children should have equal access to an education that will equip them for life as an integrated member of the community. The programme trains teachers, practitioners and volunteers in day care centres, pre- schools and classrooms, but it also involves the communities and society.
- **Disability Management for Day Care Centres:** this training programme is a practical course for those who need to manage day care centres which have disabled children in them. Trainees are required to have completed the START course before they commence training because this broad – based, hands – on course gives them guidance, skills and strategies to use in developing the potential of all children in the centres.
- **Classroom Management:** This is designed for caregivers or practitioners who manage classrooms daily as it includes daily programme construction, importance of routine.

**Sibling Programme and Youth Development:** The development approach adopted with families necessitates a focus on how the siblings are affected by the disability. This includes providing them with the skills and capacity to cope personally, as a part of the family unit and community. Leadership skills allow for the older siblings to become actively involved in the regular holiday programmes. The coming together allows for support from other children in similar situations.

**Volunteers Programmes:** Talks are held at various places such as churches, schools and hospitals to help recruit volunteers to become actively involved at the Early Intervention Centres. The process involves selecting, screening and training the volunteers to equip them with the necessary skills.

**Fundraising Department:** Fundraising department to ensure ongoing funds coming in order to sustain the organisation and build partnerships with donors. The fundraising department also ensures that all facets of the organisation are driving their own fundraising initiatives and the initiatives are in line with the organisational goals.