



**A Theory and Process Evaluation of the Learner Engagement  
Programme (LEP) Implemented by Just Grace NPC**

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## UCT KNOWLEDGE CO-OP

The UCT Knowledge Co-op facilitated this collaborative project between the Just Grace Learner Engagement Programme and the University of Cape Town.

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## **List of Acronyms**

ASP	After-School Programme
FAMSA	Family and Marriage Society of SA
LEP	Learner Engagement Programme
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
SA	South Africa
UCT	University of Cape Town
US	United States
YOP	Youth Opportunity Programme

## **Executive Summary**

### **Background**

The Learner Engagement Programme (LEP) is an after school dropout prevention programme that operates in Langa, a township located in Cape Town, South Africa. Langa is an impoverished township characterised by socio-economic challenges, such as high unemployment, violence, few economic opportunities and poor school infrastructure. The LEP aims to address learner disengagement of at-risk high school learners. It operates within the only five high schools in Langa: Langa High, Khulani High, Isimela High, Zimasa High, and Ikamva High. The programme is implemented by Just Grace, a non-profit organisation whose goal is to uplift the youth and community of Langa through educational, community and youth development programmes. Just Grace is funded by Trusts and Companies such as DGMT, Mineral Loy (Pty) Ltd, Swiss Philanthropic Foundation, Capfin (Pty) Ltd, Enigma Electrical (Pty) Ltd, Lot Emphanjeni (Pty) Ltd, Mergon Foundation, Dairycap CC.

### **Aims of the evaluation**

The evaluation aimed to determine: (a) the extent to which the programme design can realistically bring about the desired outcomes and (b) the extent to which the programme's planned activities are implemented with fidelity. A programme theory evaluation and process evaluation were carried out to address the following evaluation questions:

#### Programme theory evaluation questions

- 1) What is the theory and logic underlying the LEP?
- 2) Is the programme theory and logic plausible?

#### Process evaluation questions

- 1) Is the programme consistently servicing the planned target population?
  - a. To what extent are learners appropriately identified as at risk?
  - b. Which support services are used the most by learners?

- c. Are the programme services relevant to meet the learners' needs?
- 2) Are initial home visits being delivered according to planned programme procedures?
- 3) Are the programme staff adequately trained and equipped to work with at-risk learners and implement the programme's different components?

## **Methodology**

The choice of methods for this evaluation was informed by the evaluation questions as well as by the practical opportunities and constraints associated with Level 3 lockdown in South Africa in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Access to programme beneficiaries was restricted during this time and the risks and concerns associated with face-to-face contact compelled the evaluator to capitalise on available secondary data sources and data gathered from programme staff (through a focus group) to address the process evaluation questions

The programme theory evaluation was guided by Donaldson's (2007) systematic five-step framework in conjunction with Brouselle and Champagnes (2011) steps for a logic analysis. An initial LEP programme theory was developed using data obtained through a structured engagement with a purposive sample of four programme staff and a review of relevant programme documents. The plausibility of the programme theory was then examined in line with the best practice literature. Brouselle and Champagne's (2011) steps for a logic analysis were applied to guide process, which culminated into a reconstructed programme theory.

To answer the process evaluation questions 1-3, programme documents were systematically analysed. A focus group, which gathered programme staff's experiences of and insights into the current programme infrastructure, challenges, and organisational support, was also conducted. The focus group data was analysed using Krueger's (1994) framework for thematic analysis.

## **Key Findings**

The programme theory evaluation confirmed that the LEP initial programme theory and logic was plausible: the programme does incorporate a multi-level approach to tackling learner disengagement, targeting the individual, family and community. It addresses the psychosocial aspects that contribute to learner disengagement through the provision of one on one counselling,

a life skills programme and parental support groups and training. The programme also has elements of an effective after school programme with qualified staff, adequate resources and efficient programme practices. A few shortcomings were identified through the evaluation: the programme lacks academic support, early warning systems, specialised external partners, and behavioural outcome measures, which are crucial in preventing school dropout.

While the evaluator cannot conclusively determine whether the initial home visits are being delivered according to planned procedures (given the limitation of the data at hand), the process evaluation confirmed that the programme the criteria used to identify at risk learners are in line with the best practice literature. The process evaluation also revealed factors that compromised the effective implementation of the programme, including lack of commitment from partner schools, lack of trust in programme methods from parents/caregivers and a lack of staff safety when conducting home visits.

## **Recommendations**

Key recommendations discussed in this evaluation include the following:

- Development of an early warning system in tandem with partner schools as data on at-risk learners needs to be collected earlier in their school career and consistently to ensure the learner receives the necessary assistance timeously and suitable interventions are developed.
- Provision of an academic component as learners who are provided with academic support in addition to psychosocial support have a higher chance of school completion.
- Development of a behavioural monitoring system as effective programmes utilise behavioural outcome measures to assess programme effects on learners' behaviours
- Forging partnerships with external agencies to assist the programme in specialised areas as the programme would benefit by being embedded in a broader network of community-based organisations, NGOs, civil organisations, and government agencies trained to provide specialised support and assistance to their beneficiaries

# INTRODUCTION

## **Introduction**

This dissertation presents a formative evaluation carried out for the Just Grace Learner Engagement Programme (LEP). The LEP was designed to address the lack of engagement of at-risk high school learners in the township of Langa in Cape Town. The programme identifies and supports at-risk learners who require significant psychosocial support to meaningfully engage with the schooling system. A two pronged approach was used to evaluate the LEP. The first, a programme theory evaluation critically examined the LEP theory. Thereafter, a process evaluation was conducted to determine if the programme implements its activities according to the programme design. This chapter provides a background to the phenomena of high school dropout, a description of the implementing organisation Just Grace, and the history of the LEP. Thereafter the aims of the evaluation are described.

## **Background to the Evaluation**

High school dropout is a multifaceted global phenomenon that occurs in all countries with formal education systems (Masitsa, 2006). The South African Department of Education defines dropout as leaving school before completing a given grade in a given school year, and defined learner retention as the continued participation of a learner in the formal schooling system until the completion of compulsory schooling (Department of Education, 2011). Dropping out not only affects the learner but also affects their family and community. It undermines future opportunities and perpetuates negative consequences such as unemployment, low wages, low quality of life, and poverty (Moses et al., 2017).

In South Africa, the dropout rate remains relatively high with reports indicating that 60% of children who enrol in Grade 1 will drop out before completing the final year of high school (also known as matric year) and only 52% of learners will remain enrolled in school by the time they reach Grade 12 (Weybright et al., 2017). Compulsory education is from Grades 1–9, and within these grades, 95% of students remain enrolled in school. It is between Grades 10 and 11 that the most dropout occurs from at-risk learners, resulting in 50% of learners in any one cohort dropping out before reaching Grade 12 (Spaull, 2013, 2015). The dropout rate is also highly correlated with race as a result of the apartheid social, spatial and economic exclusionary policies that continue to produce inequality (Moses et al, 2017). According to the results of the 2018 General Household Survey, only 51.6% of black youth and 52.5% of coloured youth aged 22 – 25 had attained matric compared to 81.1% of white youth and 81.9% of Indian youth between 2009 and 2018 (Statistics South Africa, 2018). These results highlight the racial inequalities that continue

to persist in matric completion as many of the poorer schools attended by majority of the black learners still lack the educational resources to provide quality education (Lewis et al., 2008; Van der Berg et al., 2011).

### ***Learner disengagement and at-risk factors***

The decision to drop out is a complex and gradual process influenced by a myriad of interconnected factors. It has been widely acknowledged in local and international literature that there are multiple factors that influence a learner's decision to drop out and that these reasons do not operate in isolation (Branson et al., 2014; Hartnack, 2017). The decision is the outcome of a long process of school disengagement evidenced by indicators of withdrawal, such as poor attendance and unsuccessful school experiences, including poor academic outcomes or problematic behaviours from at-risk learners (Balfanz et al., 2007; Romero et al., 2018; Rumberger, 2004). Engagement is described as a multidimensional construct that involves academic engagement, behavioural engagement, cognitive engagement and psychological engagement, and these factors are influenced by contextual issues within the home, school and peers (Christenson, 2002). At-risk learners are described as learners who are unlikely to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to become successful adults and behave in ways that put them at risk of not completing high school (Fleisch et al., 2012). Sustained research (De Witte et al., 2013; Romero et al., 2018; Spaull, 2015; Van der berg et al., 2011) on educationally and economically disadvantaged learners (the target beneficiaries of the LEP) has painted a clear portrait of those most likely to fail and drop out or disengage from school and identified the associated reasons. Over the years, these factors have been consistently analysed in an effort to improve learner retention (Spaull, 2013).

### ***Drivers of learner engagement/dropout and retention***

Some theoretical models in the field of student retention found that the key factors or drivers that influence learner engagement and retention are individual, socioeconomic, environmental, institutional, and academic (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Tinto, 1993). Although Vincent Tinto's theory of student departure (1993) dates back to the 1990s, it is still highly relevant and suggests that a learner's decision to leave an institution is grounded in environmental factors, such as their academic achievement and social integration into the learning environment, as well as their personal attributes and background, including family, prior schooling and skills (Schreiber et al., 2014). Tinto's theory suggests that the degree to which a student is integrated into the academic and social life of an institution as well as the degree to which they are committed to their studies and the goals of the institution influence their engagement in school (Schreiber et al., 2014). His theory is highly relevant when considering learner retention and engagement

as he linked learners' personal attributes and background (e.g., family, skills, prior schooling and personal abilities) to their institutional experience, engagement/retention and educational outcomes (Schreiber et al., 2014). Thus, the more a learner's attitude and academic values align with that of their institution's and peers' and the more positive their schooling experience, the better their academic and social integration. Conversely, negative experiences distance the learner from the academic and social community of their institution and reduce their commitment and persistence to completing their schooling (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Bean and Eaton's (2001) student attrition model takes this further. Although this model is now two decades old, it captures four main factors that are influential in a student's intent to drop out: their socioeconomic status, their interaction with their institution, their environment (family support, approval, and future job opportunities), and their overall commitment to education (Aljohani, 2016). Bean and Eaton's model highlights that most variables that influence a student's decision to drop out are a function of the institutional structure, pertaining to factors such as curriculum, class size, teacher engagement, disciplinary processes, and school rules, which all weigh on an individual's decision to drop out. Cabrera et al.'s (1993) student integrated model of student retention builds on both Bean and Eaton's and Tinto's models. Cabrera et al. (1993) posited that encouragement from family and friends also plays a significant role in the decision to drop out in addition to the academic, social, environmental, personal, and institutional factors. These theoretical conceptualisations underpinned my understanding the critical role of learner engagement within the school and learning as they highlight the drivers of increased engagement and school completion, such as student participation, identification with school, social bonding and personal investment (Lee & Miu-Ling Ip, 2003; Nguyen et al., 2018; Rumberger, 2011).

In South Africa, research has been conducted in an effort to identify the main factors and reasons that influence learner disengagement/dropout within high school students. A study conducted by Masitsa (2006) in five educational districts in the Free State province of South Africa found that out of 24 factors listed, learners rated reasons related to their background (socioeconomic status, parental support, and personal circumstances) and experiences within the school (academic performance, discipline, and student teacher relationship) as their top reasons for dropping out. Inglis and Lewis (2013) also conducted research in a poor community school located in the town of Stellenbosch and identified extreme factors such as violence, gangsterism, substance abuse, neglect, and peer pressure to conform to truant and deviant behaviour as learners' top reasons for wanting to leave school. These factors were compounded by factors within the school itself, such as overcrowded classrooms, lack of resources, uncaring teachers, and stringent and often inappropriate discipline. Lack of economic and job opportunities within their

community were also listed as adverse factors. These two studies further reiterate the various issues facing at-risk learners in impoverished communities, which compromise their attempts to complete their schooling.

More studies conducted in South Africa have identified individual risk factors for negative educational outcomes, with results from cross-sectional and longitudinal analysis suggesting that learners from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds are likely to repeat grades, progress slowly, experience more concentration problems, and drop out before completing high school (Branson et al., 2014; Lamb & Markussen, 2011; Schreiber et al., 2014). Branson et al. (2014) drew on data from the National Income Dynamics Study Wave 2, which provided the first nationally representative longitudinal data collected in South Africa, making it possible to study transitions in and out of school, across grades and into work in ways not previously possible. These authors illustrated the high levels of grade repetition and educational deficiencies evident in under-resourced South African schools and showed how school completion for learners in economically disadvantaged areas presents a significant hurdle, resulting in very few learners successfully matriculating. In addition to these factors, historical complexities and context should also be taken into account when assessing the rate and reasons for learner dropout (Hartnack, 2017). The economic exclusion of the majority of the black population alongside a segregated education system has had a direct negative impact on the quality of education and academic outcomes of learners in previously disadvantaged schools and communities in South Africa (Hartnack, 2017; Romero et al., 2018; Spaull, 2015; Van der Berg et al., 2011). This systemic structural inequality together with endemic social ills challenge how schools are able to retain learners in disadvantaged communities and for those in the school system, the extent to which they are able to perform academically.

### ***Evaluations of high school dropout programmes***

Thus far the focus has been on the literature on student/learner retention, we now turn briefly to the literature on interventions to retain at-risk students/learners. Despite the complexity of the factors presented above, many strategies and interventions have been developed by, for instance, governments, civil society and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to tackle learner retention and combat disengagement in economically disadvantaged communities. These interventions range from relatively simple actions, such as providing financial assistance to learners through scholarships, to far more comprehensive interventions that address individual, academic, social, and institutional factors (Murray & Tietjen, 2014). As Sinha et al. (2005) suggested, schools do not exist in isolation but are embedded in communities and contribute to their overall wellbeing. These authors contend that schools struggle to

provide the necessary support to learners, and for this reason after-school programmes (ASPs) are one solution designed to redress many of the systemic and social ills that are part and parcel of particular communities. Where schools struggle to provide the necessary support to learners, ASPs are able to step in and address many of the systemic and social ills that are part of particular communities. Here I argue again that multiple and holistic strategies should be used to tackle learner retention to ensure the best possible impact and that a ‘one size fits all’ approach is not practical.

It is evident from the literature outlined above that no single approach is comprehensive enough to account for the complicated set of factors that interact to influence learner engagement/retention, and therefore, interventions that seek to address learner engagement/retention should address more than one of these influences concurrently (Kuh et al., 2006).

Dockery (2012) suggested that learner retention programmes should not only focus on academic outcomes but work with the learner to address the environmental, institutional, and socioeconomic factors affecting them in order to bring about effective change. A review of evidence-based substance abuse, violence and dropout prevention youth development programmes found that effective programmes used more than one strategy, often incorporating a combination of personal assets and skill-building, academic support, and family outreach (Lehr et al., 2003).

### ***Dropout prevention best practices***

To date, several international learner retention/dropout practice guides have been published (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015). These guides provide recommendations for best practices based on research and expert opinion that suggest that learner retention efforts depend largely on the types of strategies used, making evidence-based programmes crucial (Dynarski et al., 2008). A report on effective, evidence-based dropout prevention programmes for the US National Dropout Prevention Centre identified the following components as essential from 44 successful interventions (Hammond et al., 2007). Time was identified as a key component, meaning that programmes need to be implemented for a long enough period to have a visible impact on problem behaviours, and a minimum of 9 months and an average of 12 sessions per participant were suggested. Second, the use of behavioural outcome measures was proven necessary to monitor results. Lastly, multiple strategies need to be utilised such as building social competency skills, communication and life skills and the provision of academic support (Catalano et al., 2004; Hammond et al., 2007).

The following sections of this chapter focuses on the description of Just Grace LEP, including its origins, the key human resources responsible for the LEP implementation and the different programme activities. The information used to generate the programme description was obtained from programme documents and preliminary discussions with the LEP staff and the programme director. Programme documents used include the 2019 Annual Report, the Youth Opportunity Manual, the Implementation Dashboard document, a grant request proposal, and the Langa UpCentre Proposal.

### **The Implementing Organisation**

Just Grace is a non-profit organisation based in Langa, a township in the Western Cape. Its goal is to uplift the youth and community of Langa through educational, community and youth development programmes. The organisation operates from Langa High School and is funded by Old Mutual, the Swiss Philanthropic Foundation, the Learning Trust and the New Zealand Embassy.

### **Context of Just Grace**

The township of Langa has a high rate of learner dropout. It is a township suffering from the South African apartheid legacy of economic and educational segregation and is characterised by economic challenges, marked by high levels of poverty, high unemployment (40.33%), violence, poor schools, and little to no economic opportunities for its inhabitants (Africa, 2011). A lack of community structures, intellectual stimulation in the environment, vandalism, negative peer group pressures, and a negative attitude toward school and learning further hamper education in impoverished communities like Langa (Africa, 2011; Spaull, 2013; Van der Berg, 2007). As a result, students develop a negative academic self-concept, lack inspiration, and continue to struggle academically (Fleisch et al., 2012). Langa township also has a very young population, with 53% of the population aged between 15 and 39 years, and the school-going population aged between five and 19 years making up 22.87% of the total population (Statistics South Africa, 2011). Furthermore, of the population group that is older than 20, 2,2% have no schooling, 8,3% some primary schooling, 3,9% have completed primary, 45.4% have completed some form of secondary education, 33,1% have completed matric, and only 7% have higher education (Statistics South Africa, 2011). Of the labour force aged 15–64 years, 60% are employed and 72% of households have a monthly income of R3 200 or less (Statistics South Africa, 2011). These perverse socioeconomic dynamics along with the complex economic environment in South Africa lead to the difficulties that learners face on a daily basis in the educational system. It is for these reasons that Just Grace has chosen to operate within this particular township. It aims to assist the vulnerable community, develop the youth, and reintegrate at-risk learners back into school through its LEP.

*The next section contextualises the LEP and articulates why a programme like the LEP is needed.*

Just Grace implements several programmes targeted at the residents of Langa, and these consist of entrepreneur's, unemployed and/or employed individuals, high school learners their families and the broader community that resides in Langa. These programmes are Phakama Community Development Programme, Khula Entrepreneurship and Small Business Support Programme, Qhubeka! Youth Development Programme and the Phulisa School Strengthening Programme. As the organisation's goal is to provide holistic social services to the community, all programmes focus on one or more of the following: Education and training, business, community development, and psychosocial services. Although not related directly to high school learners, these programmes are relevant because they provide upliftment, incentives and support to the youth and adult community of Langa. Through the provision of these programmes to the community, Just Grace is able to target a number of risk factors affecting households within the community, such as unemployment, skills development, and youth and business development. This inadvertently further addresses the issue of school disengagement.

#### ***Phakama Community Development Programme***

The Phakama Community Development Programme provides a number of social services to the community, focussing on unemployment. The programme provides technical, psychosocial and one-on-one support (when required) to participants. Services offered are computer training, school/university/college or employment preparation, and general research on information pertaining to tertiary education, business and government social services.

#### ***Khula Entrepreneurship and Small Business Support Programme***

The entrepreneurship and small business support programme's aim is to equip community members with knowledge on how to start and maintain a business and how to ensure the business complies to laws and by-laws. The programme was developed because of a need identified by the Phakama Community Development Programme, where it was noted that a high number of individuals were in need of a general research service to help with information relating to new businesses and compliance within the business environment. The programme aims to address the barriers to entrepreneurship identified in the township economy, such as lack of access to capital, lack of information technology (computers and internet), low levels of education and lack of small business incubation.

### ***Phulisa School Strengthening Programme***

The Phulisa School Strengthening Programme was developed to provide practical support to high schools and learners in Langa. It provides the high schools with financial and legal advice and with key workshops that address the following: Subject choices for students in Grade 9, vision and goals for Grade 10s, aptitude tests and forming a career for Grade 11s, and career advice for Grade 12s. Other services provided are university, college and employment application assistance, computer training (provided on site at the school), learner attendance support and psychosocial services.

### ***Qhubeka Youth Development Programme***

The youth development programme was the first programme launched by Just Grace in 2012. Its aim is to support learners throughout high school, from Grade 8–12, and into tertiary education, training or employment through the provision of technical and soft skills. It is open to all youth residing in Langa. Technical programme activities include academic support, computer training, literacy, book clubs and computer coding. Programme activities are aimed at teaching students' soft skills and include life skills, leadership, entrepreneurship sessions, women discussion groups, career guidance, post school preparation, art and psychosocial support. The delivery of the soft and life skill programme activities are done under the Youth Opportunity Programme (YOP).

### ***Youth Opportunity Programme (YOP)***

The YOP is a semi-formal eight-week life skills course conducted once a week after school for the duration of one and a half hours. It is conducted at Langa High School and is facilitated by a community worker. Its aim is to teach the learner to set realistic goals for their life, have hope, increase self-awareness and self-efficacy as well as build confidence and resilience. The following eight topics are covered during the eight weeks: Building rapport, setting realistic goals, increasing self-awareness, developing self-efficacy, peer support, resisting negative peer pressure, problem solving, and use what you have (focussing on the strengths the learner already has at their disposal). Fourth year psychology students from the University of Cape Town (UCT) in conjunction with the UCT Knowledge Co-op developed a facilitator's manual for the programme. The manual contains the objectives of each session, the content to be delivered, the structure and activities designed for each session as well as the materials required for each session.

## **History of the Learner Engagement Programme (The evaluand)**

Piloted in October 2019, the LEP is the most recent addition to Just Grace. It aims to identify and support at-risk high school learners who require significant psychosocial support to reduce their disengagement from and/or to reintegrate them back into the schooling system. Just Grace identified the need that schools, and caregivers had to maintain and promote school attendance within the community of Langa thus creating the need for the LEP. Until October 2019 components of the LEP programme were implemented under the Qhubeka Youth Development programme, the Youth Opportunity Programme and the Phulisa School Strengthening programme. Previously, learners who displayed at-risk behaviours registered in these programmes received additional psychosocial and learner attendance support from the Just Grace community workers. Due to the high number of learners requiring this service Just Grace designed the LEP to focus exclusively on the needs of disengaged learners.

## **Description of the Learner Engagement Programme**

The LEP is implemented by three community workers under the supervision of a programme manager. Programme staff are experienced social workers and certified counsellors. The programme is open to learners in Grades 8–12 and operates in all five high schools in Langa: Langa High, Khulani High, Isimela High, and Ikamva High. The fifth school, Zimasa, is a primary school but also has Grade 8 and 9 classes. Learners identified as at risk of dropping out of school by teachers, community members, and/or parents are referred to the programme. At-risk learners in this context are described as learners who meet or exhibit one or more of a set criteria of behaviours and issues specified by the programme. The criteria are absenteeism, violent behaviour, substance abuse, poor academic performance, signs of abuse and/or neglect, signs of poverty, absent parents or caregivers, a lack of punctuality, as well as additional indicators deemed significant. The LEP uses a multipronged approach in an effort to assist and support at-risk learners. The following section examines the programme activities

### ***Programme activities***

#### ***Referral process and initial home visit***

When a teacher, parent, or community member identifies a learner as at risk, a referral form that describes the problem behaviour is filled out and sent to the LEP, and the learner is registered. Once registered, a community worker is assigned to the learner's case to conduct an initial home visit. The aim of the visit is to assess the learner's home situation, meet with their parent/guardian, create an intervention plan to address the learner's challenges, and finally, to invite the parents to be part of the programme and

participate in the parental support activities. The time frame between a learner being registered with the programme and an initial home visit depends on the reason for referral, its urgency, and whether or not the learner resides in Langa, as a handful of students who attend the high schools do not reside in the community.

#### *Learner support*

Depending on the intervention plan, a learner is assisted in at least one of three ways. Three types of learner support are offered, namely 1) individual counselling 2) follow-up home visits, and 3) the Youth Opportunity Programme (YOP). The individual counselling is a service provided by the community worker at the school once the need for it has been acknowledged or when a learner personally requests a counselling session. The service is available for as long as the learner requires the support. The community worker also carries out follow-up home visits to assess the learner's progress and these visits continue for as long as the community worker sees it fit. Lastly should a learner require life skills they are recommended to attend the YOP,

#### *Parental support*

In addition to learner support, the programme offers parent support. Parents are offered counselling, home parenting skills training and weekly parent support groups. Parents are also encouraged to attend monthly discussion groups held at Langa High School. The monthly discussion groups are meetings set up by the community worker for parents and school representatives. The aim of these meetings is to strengthen the parents' relationship with the school, to get them more involved in school activities and for them to become community champions, promoting school attendance and motivating other parents to become involved in school activities. The home training provided for parents consists of one-on-one sessions conducted by a community worker to help the parent deal with a particular issue their child is facing. The weekly support group is an eight-week course facilitated by the community worker for two hours per week and it is designed to teach parents techniques to handle their children's behaviours as well as build a healthier relationship with them.

The section that follows presents the scope of the LEP evaluation.

### **Aims of the Evaluation**

Prior to embarking on the evaluation of the LEP a meeting was held with the Just Grace director to understand the needs of the evaluation. During this meeting the director highlighted that since the LEP

had been in operation for under two years and its components derived from its other programmes they wanted to assess if the activities and services they provided exclusively to disengaged learners were effective. The director also wanted to assess whether their programme staff were adequately trained and equipped to deal with the myriad of issues presented in disengaged learners. Thus, the organisation's evaluation needs were to centre around a) assessing the extent to which the programme design is suitable and effective to bring about the desired changes in the learners; b) assessing the quality of service delivery to their learners with a focus on their home visits, counselling, and YOP (taking COVID-19 into consideration); and c) assessing their participants' perception of the programme.

Based on these needs a formative evaluation approach was deemed the most appropriate. Formative evaluations are evaluations whose primary purpose is to gather information that can be used to improve or strengthen the design and implementation of a programme and are best conducted during programme development and implementation (Milstein & Wetterhall, 1999). They also focus on the internal dynamics of a programme in order to understand its strengths, weaknesses and the changes that occur within it (Stetler et al., 2006).

The aim of this formative evaluation was to assess whether the LEP is both designed and implemented in a way that takes into account the best practices and quality standards established in the literature. The current design of the learner support component of the LEP was also assessed in relation to the best practices established for learner retention programmes. The evaluation provides the LEP with valuable information on how to improve its design. In order to do this, a programme theory and process evaluation were conducted. The evaluation also sought to take into consideration programme participants perception of the programme. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic and its uncertainties, primary data collection from participants was not possible. The evaluation was conducted in January 2021 during Level three lockdown restrictions. Access to a wide range and number of participants for face to face interviews was not feasible due to school closures and mandatory sanitary protocols associated with Level 3 lockdown in South Africa. The evaluation thus drew on existing secondary data such as programme records and documents. Primary data collection was drawn through a half-day workshop with key programme staff who were working from the Just Grace offices and able to provide insights into the programme.

### ***Programme theory evaluations***

Programme theory evaluations assess whether a programme is designed in a way that enables it to achieve its intended outcomes (Rossi et al., 2018). They are also intended to assess the coherence of the theory

and whether it fulfils the theoretical demands of parsimony. This is done by assessing the underlying mechanisms that give rise to expected outcomes and the why and how it works (Brousselle & Champagne, 2011). Programme theory evaluations also refer to a variety of ways of developing a causal model that links programme inputs and activities to a chain of intended or observed outcomes and use this model to guide the evaluation (Rogers, 2008). According to Van Belle et al. (2010), programme theory evaluations are useful in the evaluation of interventions in complex settings and in the case of new types of interventions for which the understanding of the causal mechanisms needs to be established. This was therefore an appropriate lens to use to examine a programme such as the LEP.

Programme theory evaluations work best for complex interventions that cannot be standardised, have high levels of variance in context and content, and where the application of the intervention is tailored to work in its specific context or organisational setting (Walshe, 2007). The LEP can be considered a complex programme for the following reasons: The context of the intervention is specific to the township of Langa; the content and nature of the intervention varies and is tailored to the specific needs of the learner; the application process varies depending on the skill and experience of the programme staff and/or response of learners; and lastly, there are multiple outcomes that cannot be easily measured and quantified, for example, behavioural changes and the response of learners within their unstable socioeconomic environment. The programme also addressed the geographical and political setting, namely the township of Langa. It also contextualised dropout and learner challenges to complete school. The programme then established clear and logical steps to achieve its goal, which is to mitigate for attrition and disengagement of learners at school.

As programme theory evaluations assess the theoretical basis of an intervention, the why and how it works, the first step in the evaluation is to develop a programme theory. A programme theory, according to Chen (1990), can be described as a systematic configuration of stakeholders' implicit prescriptive assumptions (assumptions around how actions lead to impact) and descriptive assumptions (what the programme does to solve the problem) underlying the programme. It is normally depicted in the form of a causal diagram called a logic model that shows these cause and effect linkages assumed to connect programme activities with the expected outcomes (Rossi et al., 2018). As the implicit set of assumptions that steer the choice and design of an intervention are made explicit by means of a logic model, the causal pathways can then be evaluated (Van Belle et al., 2010). Munter et al. (2016) suggested that a programme theory represents a hypothesis that can be tested and further refined because it opens up the so-called black box between intervention and outcomes.

In order to test these causal pathways and determine the plausibility of the LEP underlying assumptions, a direct logic analysis was conducted. A logic analysis allows us to understand the subtleties of the causal pathways and validate the intervention's theoretical construction by applying sound scientific knowledge (Brousselle & Champagne, 2011). Assessing the plausibility/validity of the causal pathways in the LEP programme theory helped identify the important characteristics the intervention should have to achieve its outcomes and the optimum conditions required to facilitate the implementation to produce the effects (Rey et al., 2011).

### ***Process evaluations***

Following the theory evaluation, a process evaluation was conducted. A precondition for a process evaluation is a clear description of a programme (Moore et al., 2015). As highlighted above, the logic model outlines the programme in a way that presents its implementation plan or design (how it is supposed to work) (Rossi et al., 2018). A process evaluation focuses on the implementation process (inputs, activities, outputs) and are normally directed at one or both of the following two key questions: a) Whether the programme is reaching the appropriate target population, and b) whether its service delivery and support functions are consistent with the program design and in line with established quality practices (Rossi et al., 2018). In other words, a process evaluation assesses the degree to which an intervention or programme is implemented and delivered according to its programme design (Carroll et al., 2007). Process evaluations are also carried out to help identify factors that can help or hinder programme effectiveness and quality as well as clarify how and why organisational decisions are made, thereby informing programme improvement (Fox et al., 2016).

In summary, the theory evaluation was conducted in order to assess whether the LEP can realistically achieve its intended outcomes. The process evaluation, on the other hand, was carried out to assess whether the planned activities are being carried out as intended by the programme.

### ***Evaluation questions***

The evaluation questions are related to the plausibility of the programme theory, service delivery and organisational support.

#### ***Programme theory evaluation questions***

1. What is the theory and logic underlying the LEP?
2. Is the programme theory logic plausible

*Process evaluation questions*

1. Is the programme consistently servicing the planned target population?
  - a) To what extent are learners appropriately identified as at risk?
  - b) Which support services are used the most by learners?
  - c) Are the programme services relevant to meet the learners' needs?
2. Are initial home visits being delivered according to planned programme procedures?
3. Are the programme staff adequately trained and equipped to work with at-risk learners and implement the programme's different components?

# METHODS

## **Introduction**

This chapter describes the methods used for the programme theory and process evaluations, which were carried out sequentially. The evaluation used a qualitative exploratory research design. Using such a design enabled the evaluator to gather in-depth insights from the LEP staff and to understand and locate these insights within the unique programme context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Qualitative methods, such as focus groups were used. Secondary data sources such as relevant programme documents and selected literature were also accessed. The choice of methods for this evaluation was informed by the evaluation questions as well as by the practical opportunities and constraints associated with Level 3 lockdown in South Africa in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Access to programme beneficiaries was restricted during this time and the risks and concerns associated with face-to-face contact compelled the evaluator to capitalise on available secondary data sources and data gathered from programme staff (through a focus group) to address the process evaluation questions.

## **Programme Theory Evaluation**

To answer the evaluation questions Donaldson's (2007) systematic five-step framework and Brousselle and Champagne's (2011) steps for a logic analysis were used as a guide to conduct the theory evaluation. Steps 1, 2 and 3 describe the procedure used to answer evaluation question 1 and steps 4 and 5 describe the procedure used to answer evaluation question 2.

### ***Participants***

The evaluator used a purposive sampling strategy for the theory evaluation, whereby informants were selected because of the characteristics (and in this case the programme experience) they possess (Tongco, 2007). All five full time programme staff participated in the theory evaluation. The Executive Director, a white male, was in a unique position to provide insight into the LEP conceptualisation, design and evolution over the years. The director is also a founding member of Just Grace and is responsible for the oversight, design and implementation of all the Just Grace programmes and thus has visibility on how the different programmes fit together. Four programme staff made up of three black females, (one programme manager and two community workers) and one male community worker were engaged in the evaluation as they are responsible for the direct implementation of the LEP in the community. Three of the programme staff are qualified social workers and one is a certified lay counsellor. They also have

direct insight into the high schools, learners and parents who partake in the programme. The programme staff have also been with the LEP since its inception in 2019.

### ***Data Sources***

The theory evaluation used both primary and secondary data sources. The primary sources were programme staff, and the secondary sources were programme documents and social science literature. Relevant programme documents were selected and made available by the director and programme staff. These documents captured the Just Grace 2019 annual performance across its programmes, staff, funding and participant stories and achievements, Just Grace programme operations and processes, programme director profiles, the organisations future proposal for a community centre and programme information in a grant proposal document. The selection of data sources was guided by the evaluation questions and is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: *Data sources relevant to programme theory evaluation questions*

<b>Theory Evaluation questions</b>	<b>Methods</b>	<b>Source</b>
1) What is the theory and logic underlying the LEP?	Document Analysis	Programme documents: 2019 Annual Report Youth Opportunity Manual Just Grace Implementation Dashboard document Grant request proposal Langa UpCentre proposal
2) Is the programme theory and logic plausible?	Structured engagement with programme staff	Programme staff 3 x Community workers 1 x Programme manager
	Literature review & social science literature	Peer reviewed literature derived from electronic academic databases and search engines

The following section describes the procedure used for the programme theory evaluation.

### ***Procedure***

#### *Step 1 and 2: Engaging with relevant stakeholders and developing the first draft*

The first step in this procedure is to elicit the underlying logic and assumptions of the LEP from programme stakeholders. Thus, the evaluator first met with programme staff to get a better understanding

of the programme and its implementation from their perspective as well as gather information on the target population, programme activities and environment within which the programme operates. The two-hour structured engagement was conducted in a workshop format at the Just Grace offices situated at Langa High School. The evaluator facilitated the discussion using open-ended questions framed around the need for the programme, its target population, activities, desired goals and intended outcomes (see Appendix A). During the workshop the evaluator also prompted programme staff to articulate the mechanisms through which the programme activities were expected to produce the desired changes in programme participants. This process was iterative in nature, with the evaluator and programme staff going back and forth in a bid to distil the key underlying mechanisms. Through the facilitated discussions programme staff were able to map out collectively the inputs, key activities, opportunities and threats, and short- and long-term outcomes of the programme. Programme staff also identified a number of environmental and external factors they perceived as critical to the successful implementation of the programme. The data from this structured engagement was used in conjunction with the relevant programme documents (see table 1) and grouped into themes to develop an initial draft of the LEP programme theory.

### *Step 3: Presenting the first draft to stakeholders*

Following the structured engagement with programme staff, an initial first draft of the LEP programme theory was circulated for review. Programme staff were invited to identify any deficiencies, fill any gaps, and correct any errors in the visual mapping. Feedback came from the programme director who requested that community support/activities be added to the programme theory. The community support activities included, LEP led campaigns held at schools by teachers and parents to encourage school attendance, and information awareness campaigns. The initial programme theory and adjustments post review are presented in chapter three under the theory evaluation results (Evaluation question 1).

### *Step 4 and 5: Assessing the plausibility and reconstructing the programme theory and logic*

Once the programme theory was finalised, the evaluator assessed the plausibility of the causal assumptions underlying the LEP programme theory (evaluation question 2) using Brousselle and Champagne's (2011) steps for a logic analysis. A logic analysis according to Brousselle and Champagne (2011) is an evaluation that allows one to test the plausibility of a programme's theory using available scientific knowledge. It assists in understanding the interventions strengths and weaknesses and analyses if the intervention is designed in a way that can logically produce the desired results. Three steps are used, and these are, building the logic model, developing the conceptual framework, and evaluating the

programme theory. Thus, the evaluator assessed the plausibility of the causal assumptions and identified best practices and quality parameters established in the literature for maximising the desired outcomes. Peer-reviewed publications were sourced, reviewed and analysed. This involved identifying critical components and characteristics of effective engagement/dropout prevention programmes and key implementation parameters.

To locate relevant literature, a search was performed using the following databases and search engines: Academic Search Premier, Africa-Wide Information, APA PsycInfo, Google Scholar, Humanities International Complete, SocINDEX with Full Text and SABINET African Journals. The online search included peer-reviewed papers and articles published in English and dated between 1995 and 2020. Keywords were identified and the following inclusion criteria were used to screen for relevant articles: a) Learner engagement/dropout programmes with a psychosocial component that targeted learners in secondary/high school from both developed and developing countries or disadvantaged populations; b) programmes that use multiple strategies/interventions that support the individual, family and community; c) outcomes related to school engagement, dropout, behavioural changes, family and social support, and life skills. Search terms used included a combination of, school completion, high school dropout, school disengagement, school counselling, life skills, parental support and after school programmes. Literature was prioritised if it had a strong focus on the effectiveness of dropout prevention programmes and strategies, looked at best practice examples and guidelines and included systematic reviews or meta-analyses of such programmes. Insights gained from the analysis of the literature were then used to interrogate the plausibility of the LEP programme theory as well as propose a new programme theory that included key aspects identified in literature and not (yet) included in the initial programme theory. The reconstructed programme theory is represented in chapter three under the theory evaluation results.

## **Process Evaluation**

The process evaluation sought to assess whether the planned programme activities are being carried out as intended. It also sought to identify factors influencing programme implementation and areas requiring improvement.

### *Data Sources*

#### Primary data

Primary data was collected through a two-hour focus group conducted at Just Grace offices and in line with COVID-19 health and safety protocols. Prior to this in a separate meeting the evaluator met with

the participants to obtain information for the theory evaluation. Focus group participants comprised of the four-programme staff (three community workers and one programme manager). The evaluation questions focused on eliciting staff views and insights into current programme operations and the challenges of operating within a COVID-19 environment, training and development, professional experience with at-risk learners, development needs, and their view on organisational support hence the decision to only focus on the programme staff. The programme staff also highlighted that they were comfortable to discuss their views in the presence of the programme manager. The focus group however deliberately excluded the programme director to ensure that the selected participants did not feel uncomfortable nor restricted when sharing their perspectives and experiences around programme implementation.

### Secondary data

Secondary data collected consisted of programme documents directly linked to the programme activities being evaluated. This data provided information on service utilisation and implementation fidelity. The documents were made available by the programme director and staff. The selection of data sources was guided by the evaluation questions and is presented in Table 2.

Table 2:

#### *Data sources relevant to process evaluation questions*

<b>Process evaluation questions</b>	<b>Methods</b>	<b>Sources</b>
1) Is the programme consistently servicing the planned target population?	Document analysis	Programme documents: Learner referral forms
2) Are initial home visits being delivered according to the programme procedures?	Document analysis	Programme documents: Initial home visit reports
4) Are the programme staff adequately trained and equipped to work with at-risk learners and implement the programme's different components?	Two hour focus group	Programme staff: 3 x Community workers 1 x Programme manager

The following section describes the procedures used to answer the evaluation questions as well as the data analysis.

## *Procedure*

**Evaluation Question 1:** Is the programme consistently servicing the planned target population?

A convenience sample of 25 learner referral forms (see Appendix H) was requested for analysis. These were provided by the programme manager. The referral form captures the following data: participant demographic information such as age, grade, sex, school and area of living. It also has nine categories into which an at-risk learner can be classified when referred to the programme, these are:

1. Absenteeism
2. Punctuality
3. Violent behaviour
4. Substance abuse
5. Poor academic performance
6. Signs of abuse and/or neglect
7. Signs of poverty
8. Absent parents/caregivers

## **Data analysis**

The referral forms were used to assess the degree of adherence to the selection criteria. Referrals that adhered to the selection criteria comprised of one or more behaviours that corresponded to categories on the forms. Referrals that did not adhere to the selection criteria comprised of forms that only listed behaviours/issues that fell outside the selection criteria. The evaluation also took note of the frequency of particular types of negative behaviours/issues for which learners were referred. This was necessary in order to identify the most frequently referred problems as well as to assess whether the referral process was accurately targeting the correct segment of the population as per the objectives of the programme.

It is noted by the evaluator that asking the programme manager for a sample of 25 forms leaves room for potential biases as the manager could have selected referral forms that were completed and that provided favourable data to support the programmes activities. Thus potentially misrepresenting the accuracy of the data collected from the referral forms.

**Evaluation Question 2:** Are initial home visits being delivered according to the programme procedures?

Upon registration with the LEP a community worker is assigned to a learner and an initial home visit is scheduled. The purpose of this visit is for the community worker to assess the learner's living conditions and current support system. A home assessment form (see Appendix I) is utilised during this visit to document the community workers findings. Thus, to assess whether the visits were conducted as per procedure a convenience sample of 25 home assessment forms were requested from the programme manager and manually reviewed by the evaluator. The 25 forms were not the from the same sample of 25 referral forms analysed above. Three categories of home conditions are listed on the home assessment form and colour coded with the colours green, yellow and red. The green category on the form represents situations present in a good home environment, the yellow category indicates less favourable conditions, and the red category indicates extremely poor conditions. Each category has a list of related questions to describe various aspects of the living situation. The list of factors includes parent/child-headed households, relationship with parents, number of employed adults, shelter, parental neglect, domestic violence, conflict within the family (see Appendix I for the complete list).

### **Data analysis**

The consistency and accuracy of the home visit forms were reviewed to assess if community workers were accurately representing the learners home situation as well as accurately capturing the information as required. An analysis of the reason for referral, learners' demographics and type of corresponding home situation was also looked at to ascertain whether in fact this corresponded to the goals of the programme in its focus on supporting at-risk learners. It should be noted that further validation methods of the home visits would need to be explored to ensure the accuracy of the report.

Furthermore, the evaluator notes that asking the programme manager for a sample of 25 forms leaves room for potential bias as the manager could have selected home assessment forms that were completed and that provided favourable data to support the programme activities. Thus, not accurately reflecting unbiased data that a random sampling method would have.

**Evaluation Question 3:** Are the programme staff adequately trained and equipped to work with at-risk learners and implement the different components of the programme?

Question 4 sought to assess the extent to which the LEP staff were trained professionally to work with disengaged learners as well as equipped to address the different issues that accompanied these learners. Since the implementation of the LEP required programme staff to be able to address several issues affecting the learners (not only school disengagement but factors that affected it such as family dynamics, poverty, domestic violence, crime) the evaluator sought to assess how equipped they were in dealing with

the wide range of issues they were faced with daily when implementing the programme. Data to address evaluation question 4 was gathered through a two hour focus group, comprising of four programme staff. The focus group took place at Langa high school, was facilitated by the evaluator and was conducted in English. A list of questions (see appendix B) was used to guide the discussion. The focus was to gain staff views and insights into current programme operations, challenges, training and development, professional experience with at-risk learners and their view on organisational support. Prior to beginning the discussion, the aims of the research, participant consent and confidentiality with regards to information shared during the focus group (see appendices C,D,E) was verbally explained to participants. An explanation of how the meeting would proceed as well as how participants could engage and contribute respectfully and freely was also provided by the evaluator. Once this was complete the discussion began. Throughout the discussion participants were given the opportunity to respond and /or express their own opinions on questions asked as well as respond to other members. At the end of the discussion, participants were thanked and told they would be informed when the results of the study would be available. The focus group discussion was recorded and transcribed so that it could be used during the analysis phase.

### **Data analysis**

To analyse the focus group data, a thematic analysis on NVivo was conducted in conjunction with the notes taken by the evaluator. The data was analysed using Krueger's (1994) framework analysis and this involved 1) familiarisation of the transcribed data by reading it over and over, 2) identification and grouping of similar themes across the transcript, 3) coding the themes 4) interpreting the themes as they emerged from the data, 5) a review and final reflection of the meaning assigned to each theme. This allowed for a number of different themes to be captured from the focus group raw data and for these themes to be developed and articulated further when interrogating the data. In so doing the five steps outlined here were adhered to. The different narratives were compared and considered within the context of the evaluation question.

### **Ethics Considerations**

Prior to collecting data for this evaluation, a proposal was sent to the UCT Faculty of Commerce Ethics in Research Committee and clearance was granted to conduct the research (see Appendix F). Before engaging with any of the participants they were provided with an information sheet detailing the reason for the study and its ethical considerations (see Appendix C). This information was also verbally explained to them by the evaluator. The participants were also required to sign a consent form to

participate in the research as well as a focus group consent form to take part in the focus group (see Appendix D and F). The consent forms clearly stated that participation was voluntary, that the information obtained would be confidential, anonymity was guaranteed and that the study would not identify participants in any documents using information obtained during this process. The forms also stated that respondents could withdraw from the interview at any time. All data gathered and used during the study, including recordings, transcriptions, notes and programme documents, were stored online in a password protected cloud that only the evaluator had access to. The Just Grace programme director also granted permission to access all programme data (see Appendix G).

# **PROGRAMME THEORY EVALUATION RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

## **Introduction**

This chapter reports on the findings of the theory evaluation. It first describes the programme theory and logic underlying the LEP answering evaluation question 1. An assessment of the plausibility of the programme theory and causal pathways are then presented and discussed answering evaluation question 2. Lastly, a new LEP programme theory is presented that includes key aspects identified in the literature and not (yet) included in the initial LEP programme theory.

## **Evaluation Question 1: What is the theory and logic underlying the LEP?**

An initial draft programme theory and logic was developed in conjunction with the programme staff. Upon completion it was presented to the programme director and staff via email for feedback on how accurately it captured the programme theory. The draft programme theory and logic were largely accepted by both programme staff and director, with minor additions regarding community support/activities proposed by the programme director. The draft programme theory is presented in Figure 1 and outlines the main components and assumptions underlying the LEP. It summarises the programme activities and outputs that lead to the desired outcomes of the LEP. The desired outcomes of the programme are increased learner and parental engagement as well as positive behavioural changes in both learner and parents.

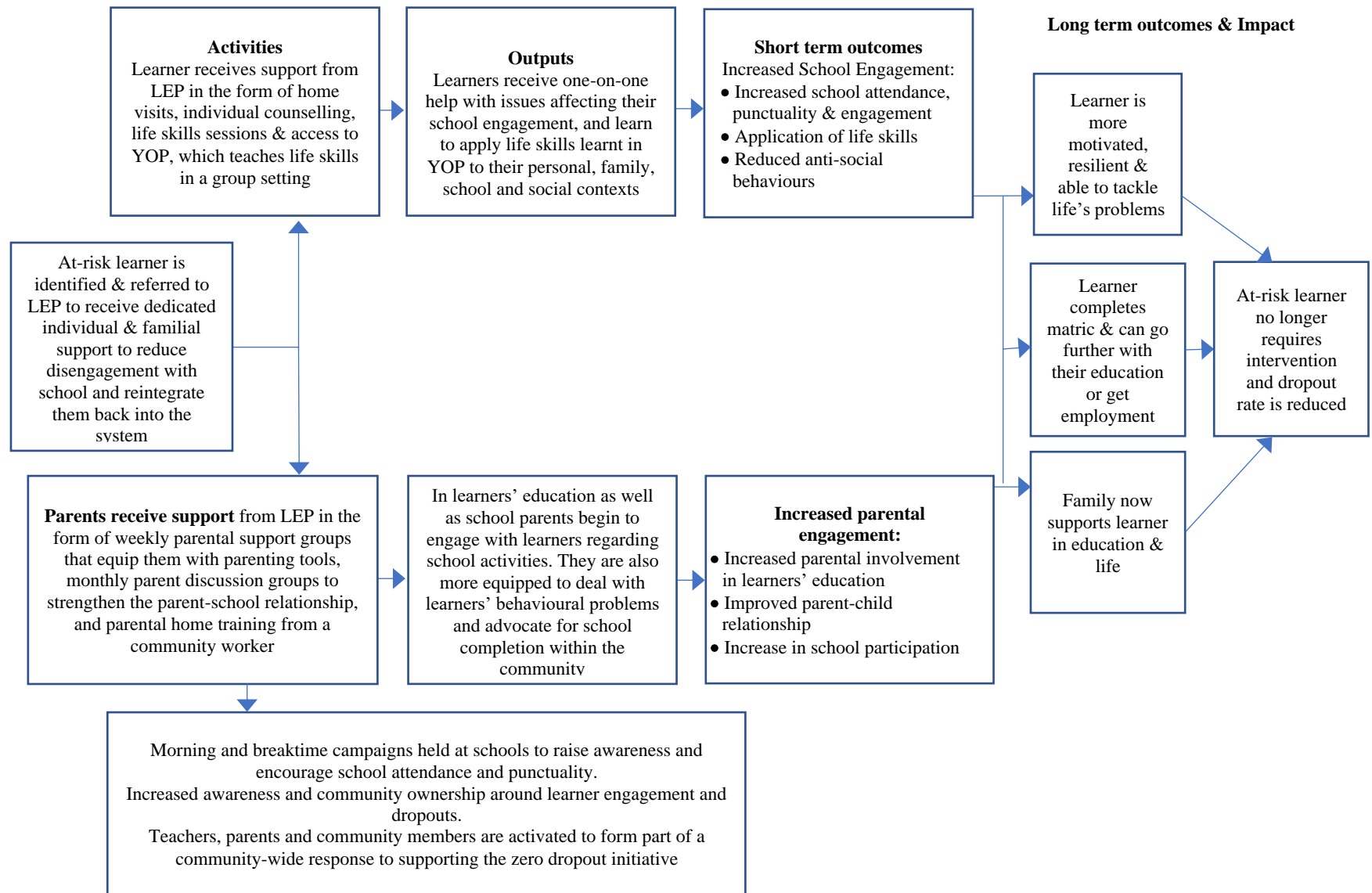


Figure 1: The initial programme theory

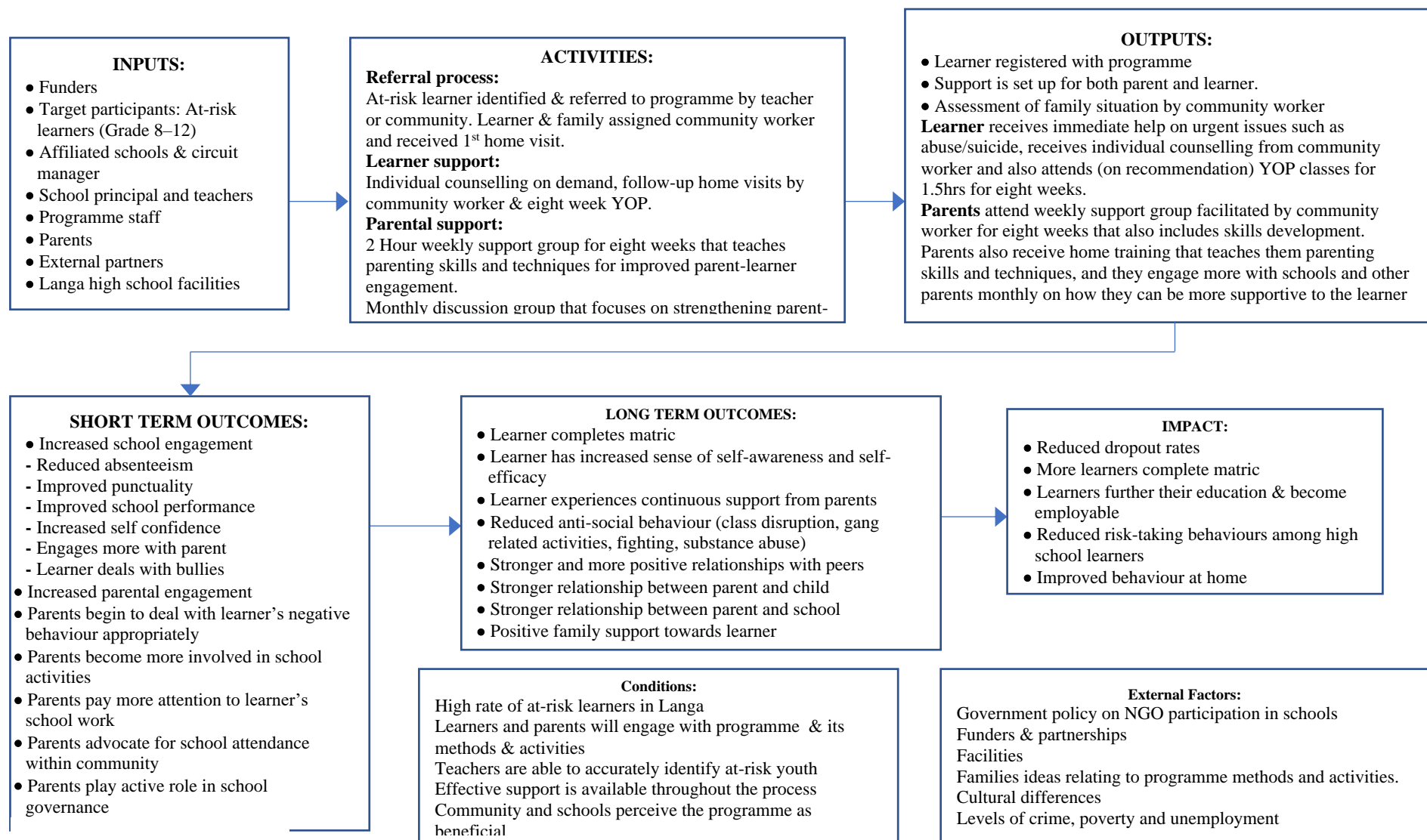


Figure 2: The LEP logic model

The programme logic presented in Figure 2 describes the inputs, activities and outputs that lead to the desired outcomes of the programme. In addition to the LEP activities, programme staff noted that there are external factors and conditions outside the control of the programme that contribute significantly to the success of the programme. These are listed in the programme logic in Figure 2 above.

The two most critical outcomes that measure the success of the programme are increased learner and parental engagement. Through programme activities and ongoing support from programme staff, learners are expected to develop positive behavioural changes that will eventually lead to increased self-awareness, a decrease in negative and risky behaviours and increased school attendance, which will lead to increased school engagement and ultimately school completion. For parents, programme activities are expected to lead to increased parental engagement in the learners' education and school activities, such as increased assistance with schoolwork, participation in school meetings as well as improved relations with the principal and teachers. Parents are also expected to take on a more active role within the community at large by advocating for school attendance and engaging in campaigns that encourage the youth within the community to attend and remain in school.

Although there are many other measures of success, the programme staff have highlighted that increased learner and parental engagement are considered to be the most significant and claim that the success of the programme depends on the achievement of these two aspects.

#### *External factors and conditions required for programme success*

Programme staff identified other factors that contribute to the success of the programme. These factors were separated into conditions (required for the programme to be successful) and external factors (factors outside the control of the programme). Conditions required for the programme to operate successfully included affiliated schools, as a priority, needing to perceive the programme as being beneficial and effective. This is a prerequisite so that they continue to support the programme activities and refer students. Teachers within participating schools need to be willing and able to identify at-risk learners, and follow the necessary steps required to refer them. Parents and learners in addition need to trust the LEP methods and believe that the programme will benefit them. External factors identified were, government policy on NGO participation in schools, availability of funds, successful partnerships, levels of crime and poverty in Langa and cultural differences.

We now assess the plausibility of the programme theory.

## **Evaluation Question 2: Is the programme theory and logic plausible?**

International literature on school dropout has made a number of recommendations regarding how the issue of school dropout can effectively be addressed (Balfanz et al., 2007; Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Davies et al., 2011; Dynarski et al., 2008; Hammond et al., 2007; Hartnack, 2017). These interventions can be aimed at systemic changes (policies and the school system) or they can be programmatic, that is, designed to bring about change at the individual level, incorporating family and community (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Lehr et al., 2003). As the LEP is a programmatic intervention aimed at the individual and family the evaluation focused on literature that describes best practices for programmatic interventions of this nature in order to assess the plausibility of the programme theory. Features of high-quality ASPs were also taken into consideration. It is important to note that there is no exact concept of what constitutes an effective learner engagement/dropout prevention programme. However, evidence from the literature shows that most learner engagement programmes employ a variety of solutions to address the various factors that impact at-risk students (Balfanz et al., 2007; Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Dockery, 2012; Lehr et al., 2003). There are also key programme components and considerations that need to be factored into learner engagement/dropout prevention programmes for them to be effective (Dynarski et al., 2008; Hammond et al., 2007). In the following sections, we take a look at the specific strategies and components required for learner engagement/dropout prevention programmes to be successful.

### *Key strategies of effective dropout prevention programmes*

According to the OECD (2012) The George Washington University's Centre for Equity and Excellence in Education states that interventions aimed at addressing learner retention need to be multilevel "tiered interventions" that not only include academic or financial strategies but also focus on psychosocial dynamics associated with retention, which include learners, teachers, peers, families, community and the support of the government to be effective. Dropout prevention practice guides suggest that the success of learner engagement interventions depend greatly on the types of strategies used (Dynarski et al., 2008; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; Freeman & Simonsen, 2015). From an evaluation of 21 dropout prevention studies Dynarski et al. (2008) identified the following six key recommendations for effective dropout prevention programmes: a) using data systems to accurately identify students at risk early b) providing adult advocates to learners at risk c) providing academic support and enrichment d) implementing programmes that improve students' classroom behaviour and social skills e) providing personalised learning environments and individualised instruction and f) providing rigorous and relevant

instruction to better engage students in learning. The US National Dropout Prevention Centre also identified 15 effective strategies that have the most positive impact on reducing school dropout (Smink & Reimer, 2005). According to the National Dropout Prevention Centre these strategies can be implemented as stand-alone interventions, however, they suggest that these strategies have the most impact when most or all of them are implemented by programmes (Smink & Reimer, 2005). The strategies are listed in Table 3.

Table 3:

*The US National Dropout Prevention Centre's strategies to reduce school dropout*

<b>Foundational Strategies</b>	<b>Early Interventions</b>
1. Systemic approach	4. Family engagement
2. School-community collaboration	5. Early childhood education
3. Safe learning environments	6. Early literacy development
<b>Basic Core Strategies</b>	<b>Managing and Improving Instruction</b>
7. Mentoring/tutoring	11. Professional development
8. Service-learning	12. Active learning
9. Alternative schooling	13. Educational technology
10. After-school/out-of-school opportunities	14. Individualised instruction
	15. Career and technical education

Source: Smink and Reimer (2005)

It should be noted that the integration of multiple strategies presents its own challenges when evaluating evidence-based programmes. This is because the outcome of learner engagement/dropout prevention programmes cannot formally be attributed to one specific component of the intervention, neither has the body of research on interventions been rigorous (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Dynarski et al., 2008; Wilson & Tanner-Smith, 2013).

*Key components of dropout prevention programmes*

Similarly, a number of key programme components have also been identified as essential to an intervention's effectiveness (Balfanz et al., 2007; Hammond & Reimer, 2006; Rumberger, 1995; Stout & Christenson, 2009). In an integrative review of 27 dropout prevention programmes, Lehr et al. (2003) found that successful programmes incorporated the following, a) a family outreach component, which included engagement and increased feedback to learners' parents or home visits b) an academic component, which included the provision of special academic courses, personalised methods of instruction and tutoring c) a personal/affective component, which included individual counselling,

participation in interpersonal relations classes and activities designed to enhance self-esteem d) school structure with the redefinition of the role of the teacher and a reduction of a class size and e) out-of-school work related experiences for learners, such as vocational training and/or participation in volunteer or service programmes.

### *Critical considerations for programme effectiveness*

Critical considerations include qualified and trained staff, experienced management, administrative support, continuous professional development for staff and a strong infrastructure that allows the programme activities and strategies to operate (Hammond et al., 2007). Programme resources, such as implementation guides and manuals, instructional materials and handouts, student and/or parent workbooks, home activities for families and self-help materials for students were also identified as necessary (Flannery et al., 2003). Lastly, effective programmes are said to focus on alterable variables that are within the control of the programme to change or influence, for example, learners behaviours and attitudes or family practices that support learning (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; Hammond & Reimer, 2006).

Having looked at the key recommendations, components and considerations highlighted as fundamental for effective dropout prevention programmes; we now briefly look at the key indicators of a quality ASP as the LEP has elements of an ASP.

### *Indicators/elements of quality after-school programmes*

Within the after-school field, much effort has gone into defining key indicators of quality and performance that distinguish successful ASPs (Huang, 2001). These efforts typically focus on two broad dimensions, namely structural features (physical facilities, staff characteristics, and financial and material resources) and process features (the day-to-day interactions occurring between staff and participants, the setting's psychosocial climate, and contribution, and the types of activities available) (Durlak, Mahoney et al., 2010). In 11 meta-analyses and reviews of ASP evaluations, the Harvard Family Research Project (OECD, 2012) identified the following elements to be part of high-quality programmes: Infrastructure, partnerships, and programme practices (Hammond & Reimer, 2006; Rhea, 2013).

Infrastructure refers to a programme's resources, staff management practices and programme administration. This includes, effective leadership, sufficient facilities, trained personnel, staff development, low adult-to-participant ratios, and continuous programme assessment (Hammond & Reimer, 2006). Partnerships consist of community and family collaboration. Families have been

identified to play a critical role in supporting programme activities through volunteering their time, mobilising resources, and inspiring their children to fully participate and engage in the programme (Beckett et al., 2002). When considering partnerships, community-based organisations, law enforcement, agencies, government departments, and civil organisations are important as they are able to provide resources, expertise, equipment, and facilities that the programme might lack (Hammond & Reimer, 2006). The last key element identified was quality programme practices. Due to the vast array of programme goals, structure, staffing and target audiences ASPs need to be flexible in order to respond to the changing needs of their participants. Programmes need to offer targeted interventions that appeal to participants, have age, culturally and developmentally appropriate materials that are administered at the right dosage in order to achieve desired outcomes (Beckett et al., 2002; Hall et al., 2003; Hammond & Reimer, 2006).

Quality ASPs lead to increased school attendance and participation, better academic performance, a more positive attitude toward school, greater future aspirations and lower dropout rates (Davies et al., 2011; Huang, 2001; Wilson & Tanner-Smith, 2013). Learners who take part in high-quality ASPs are also said to gain the skills they need to succeed in school, develop their communication and interpersonal skills, and maintain a positive attitude toward their community, education, and family (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; Huang, 2001).

#### *Programme theory plausibility*

We now turn to the programme and consider whether and in what ways it resonates with the literature presented above. We begin by comparing the strategy and components of the LEP with those mentioned in the literature as being fundamental to effective dropout prevention programmes in general and to the LEP in particular. This is demonstrated in table 4.

Table 4

*Presence and/or absence of effective strategies and components within the LEP*

<b>Key strategies of effective dropout programmes</b>	<b>Learner Engagement Programme</b>
Multi-level and integrated approaches that focus on individual, family and community engagement	Programme activities are designed to assist both individual and family. Counselling, YOP, initial home visits, parental support groups
Early data systems to identify at-risk learners	N/A
Provision of adult advocates	Assigned community worker to each learner
Provision of academic interventions	N/A
Personalised learning environments	N/A
Mentoring/tutoring	Community worker
<b>Key components of effective programmes</b>	<b>Learner Engagement Programme</b>
Adequate time in programme ( 9 - 12 months)	YOP run for eight weeks; Parent support group run for 8weeks; one on one counselling provided until community worker sees fit
Family outreach	Home visits and parental support group
Social and life skills development	Youth Opportunity Programme
Provision of psychosocial and adult support	One on one counselling and referral to external partners for specialised assistance
Reduction of school classes	N/A
<b>Effective After School Programme practices</b>	<b>Learner Engagement Programme</b>
Adequate programme resources, training materials, funding, experienced management and adequately trained programme staff.	<i>Qualified programme staff:</i> Programme director is a qualified chartered accountant, community workers are qualified social workers.
Continuous professional development for staff	<i>Adequate funding:</i> Programme funded by Old Mutual, the Swiss Philanthropic Foundation, the Learning Trust and the New Zealand Embassy
	<i>Training materials:</i> Programme utilizes a YOP manual
	<i>Professional development:</i> Programme staff attend refresher courses with FAMSA
Partnerships	Programme partners with South African Police services, Department of Social Development,
Culturally and developmentally appropriate materials and activities	YOP appropriate for high school learners
Adequate programme staff	Programme implemented by five full time staff
Target high risk behaviours	Counselling and YOP designed to address risky behaviours in learners

From the above comparison we see that the LEP programme theory is based on scientific and evidence-based strategies. It utilises multiple, key strategies and activities highlighted to be effective in addressing learner disengagement. It is designed to support the individual, family and community, it also incorporates two of the What Works Clearing House (Dynarski et al., 2008) guide's key recommendations, namely providing adult advocates (community workers) and the provision of a life

skills programme (YOP). From the strategies listed by the US National Dropout Prevention Centre (Smink & Reimer, 2005), the LEP incorporates one foundational strategy (school-community collaboration), one early intervention strategy (family engagement) and one basic core strategy (mentoring/tutoring).

The LEP also has elements of a quality ASP that are critical to achieving success, the infrastructure, partnerships and quality programme components, strategies and activities (Hammond & Reimer, 2006). All of these elements are incorporated into the LEP as evidenced by the process evaluation and programme documents. The LEP operates from Langa High school, where it has access to classroom facilities, uses programme manuals (YOP), and has adequate equipment (laptops, telephones, stationary). The programme is also adequately funded for its current operations. It is administered with appropriate staff management practices with an active programme director and dedicated programme administrator who assist with all facets of programme administration. All employees receive training on the programme, organisational policies, and child protection policy as part of the employment process. The programme also collaborates with external agencies such as the Department of Social Development, the South African Police Service, and Norton Rose Fulbright. However, although the programme has this type of collaborative relationship, collaborative partnerships with specialised external partners are lacking.

While the LEP includes several key strategies/components noted in the literature, it lacks the following elements: behavioural outcome measures and the minimum recommended treatment time. Effective programmes use behavioural outcome measures to assess programme effects on learners' behaviours (Flannery et al., 2013). This is something the LEP does not do. Feedback on learner progress in areas such as attendance, academic achievement and behaviour is not a standard requirement of the LEP, neither is it routinely collected. Effective programmes are also recommended to be implemented for a minimum of nine months on average, with a minimum of 12 sessions per participant required (Hammond et al., 2007). Currently, the LEP activities are not designed to be long term.

Thus, despite the LEP not meeting all the recommended criteria as presented in the literature, we can conclude that the LEP theory is plausible, as its design is likely to lead to positive outcomes and increased learner and parent engagement.

Having identified what constitutes a successful learner engagement programme using evidence from the literature around learner engagement/dropout prevention programmes as well as the key features of ASPs, we now turn our attention to the plausibility of the causal pathways. How likely is it that the planned

activities and processes work and are able to initiate positive behavioural shifts in learners and parents that lead to the desired outcomes of the programme?

## **Plausibility of programme activities**

### ***Learner referral***

A key recommendation highlighted is using data systems that enable accurate diagnoses that identify students at risk of dropping out (Dynarski et al., 2008). This recommendation aligns with the first activity in the LEP, which is the referral of at-risk learners to the programme using the referral form (see Appendix H). Using data-driven diagnostic methods is recommended before implementing intervention strategies for dropout prevention programmes (Balfanz et al., 2007; Dynarski et al., 2008; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016). Identifying at-risk learners allows programmes to develop targeted interventions that are aligned with the assessment of the problem. Data on student absenteeism, academic achievement, grade retention, disciplinary referrals and disruptive behaviours need to be incorporated into diagnostic tools and used as early warning signs and inform intervention strategies (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; Jerald, 2006). Allensworth and Easton (2007) and Balfanz et al. (2007) have identified attendance, behaviour, and course failure as the most vital indicators of dropping out of school. These are commonly known as the ABCs of dropout. If detected and addressed early and within a reasonable period, at-risk learners may be included in a programme that would mitigate these dropout risks and allow them to complete school. Therefore, using data systems in this instance learner referral forms, informs the programme of the types of factors that affect the learners and allows the programme to recruit their target audience and present appropriate interventions.

### ***One-on-one counselling and community worker support***

The second recommendation from the Institute for Education Sciences Dropout Prevention Practice Guide is that programmes should assign adult advocates to students at risk of dropping out (Dynarski et al., 2008). In recognition of this attribute, the LEP appoints community workers to at-risk learners to work alongside them throughout the intervention. It is widely acknowledged within the literature that supportive adults who appear caring and accessible to at-risk learners have been seen to wield significant influence over their decision-making practices and are essential factors in retention rates and school completion (Hughes & Theodore, 2009; Pennie et al., 2016; Sznitman et al., 2011; Wentzel, 2009). Adult advocates can model positive behaviour to the learner and provide guidance, leading to better decision making, reduced absenteeism, and increased school engagement (Herrera et al., 2011). These adults may

be within the school system itself, for instance, teachers or professionals such as school counsellors, or supportive adults, such as parents, social workers or coaches outside the school (Sznitman et al., 2011; Wentzel, 2009). Thus, the LEPs assignment of a community worker to each learner ensures a mentor who supports them throughout their intervention.

### ***Youth Opportunity Programme (YOP)***

The IES Dropout Prevention Practice Guide also recommends implementing programmes to improve students' classroom behaviour and social skills (Dynarski et al., 2008). These programmes, such as life skills courses, help learners develop life and socio-emotional skills (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; Hammond et al., 2007; Lehr et al., 2003). A component of the LEP that is similar to life skills is the YOP. Life skill education aims to provide learners with knowledge on risk-taking behaviour to develop skills, such as communication, assertiveness, self-awareness, decision making, problem-solving, and critical thinking, that promote constructive behaviour (Desai, 2010). By developing these skills, problematic and disruptive behaviours in and outside of school decrease as learners' develop the ability to apply the skills and tools they learn in real-life situations (Durlak et al., 2010). Consequently, by completing the YOP, a learner acquires new socio-emotional skills and can apply them to their own personal, family, and social lives, improving their self-confidence and relationships with their parents and peers.

### ***Parental support***

We now turn to parental support activities. Parental engagement refers to a collaborative effort between families, schools, and communities that educate and equip parents to become better involved in their children's education (Goodall, 2018; Muller, 2009). Parental involvement is described as a parent's active participation in their child's education, which may include activities such as helping with homework, attending parent-teacher nights, consulting with the school, and talking to the child about their educational prospects (Emerson et al., 2012; Keane, 2007; Makgopa & Mokhele, 2013). Research (Barbour et al., 2018; Emerson et al., 2012; Keane, 2007) shows that increased parental involvement and a positive home learning environment have been linked to higher academic performance, better attendance and improved behaviour among at-risk students. In a review of nine meta-analyses exploring the effects of parental involvement on academic achievement, Wilder (2014) found that academic achievement was positively associated with parental involvement for learners of various ages and ethnicities. From this literature, it is evident that the parental support component is a plausible component

of the LEP, as its activities are designed to increase parental engagement and involvement with both the learner and school.

It is clear from the literature that the interventions designed by the LEP will positively impact the learner and parental engagement. We can conclude that the causal assumptions made by the programme are indeed plausible.

### ***Step 3: Reconstructed programme theory***

While the LEP includes some of the key recommendations and implements some of the recommended strategies, it does not address all of them, mainly providing academic support as recommended in the What Works Clearing House practice guide. Additionally, the LEP does not include other strategies such as providing safe learning environments, early childhood literacy education, alternative schooling, out-of-school activities, or active learning that the US National Dropout Prevention Centre lists. Neither of these is within its scope and would require substantial modifications to the LEP since they would need to be implemented by the schools and/or other external agencies. Considering all these elements, a new programme theory was developed that takes into account the recommendations and components that the LEP is not currently implementing. The reconstructed programme theory is represented in Figure

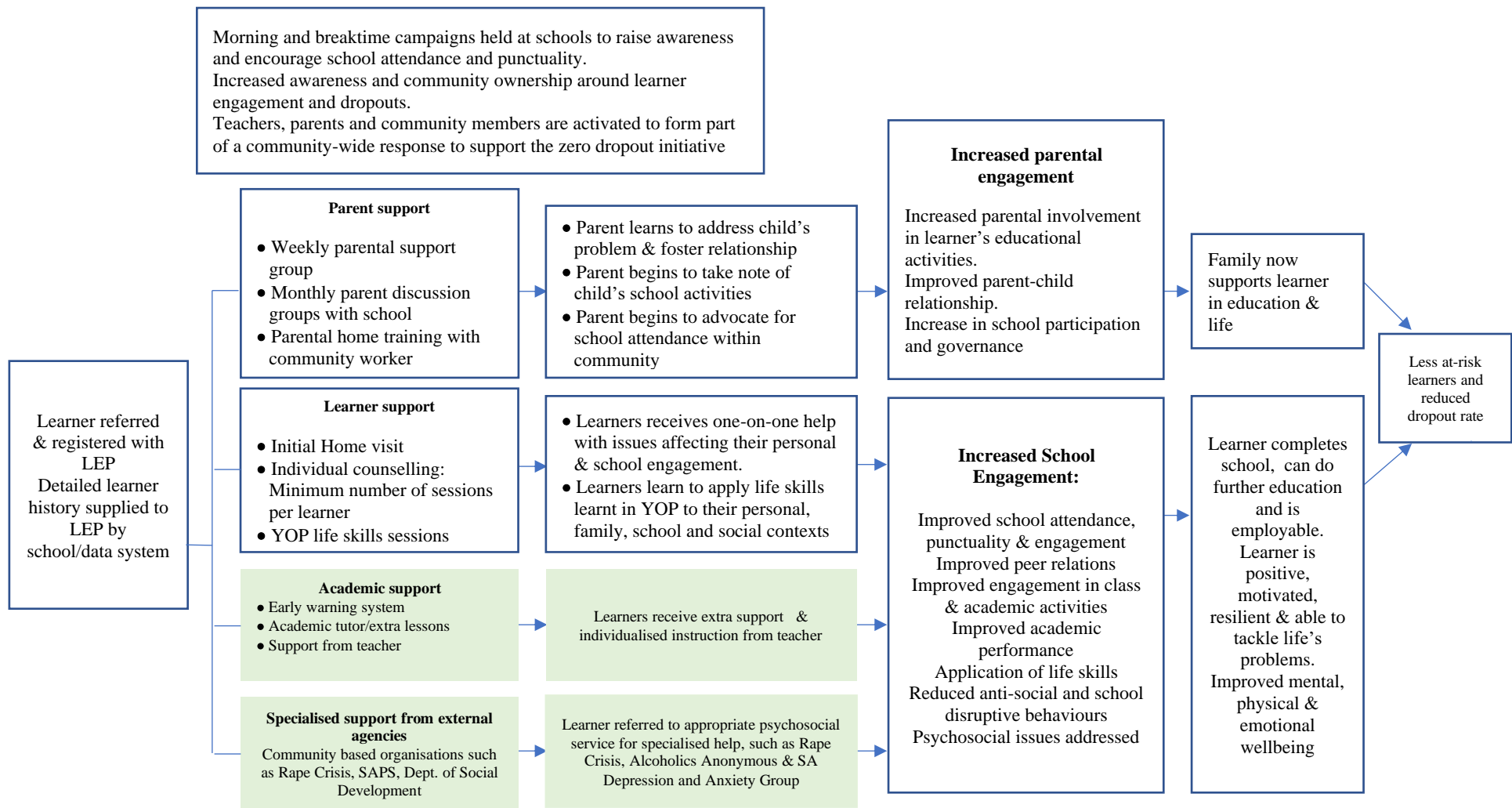


Figure 3: The LEP reconstructed programme theory

## PROCESS EVALUATION RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of the process evaluation was to assess (a) if the programme is consistently servicing the planned target population, (b) the extent to which the home visits are delivered according to planned programme procedures, and (c) extent of organisational support and adequacy of resources available. The following sections outline the results of all five process evaluation questions.

### **Evaluation Question 1: Is the programme consistently servicing the planned target population?**

*To what extent are learners appropriately identified as at risk? Does the programme use the correct criterion to classify learners as at risk, based on established literature?*

Analysing the selection criteria on the learner referral form allowed us to assess whether the LEP was consistently serving its intended target population. During the period under evaluation, October 2019 to January 2021, 289 learners were referred to the LEP. Table 5 sets forth a breakdown of referral data for the period under evaluation as provided by the programme manager.

Table 5:

*Total referral data per category*

Absenteeism	115
Punctuality	34
Violent behaviour	29
Poor academic performance	40
Signs of abuse and/or neglect	11
Signs of poverty	9
Absent parents/caregivers	9
Other	43

Of the 25 forms reviewed, eight students were referred for one problem only (absenteeism/punctuality/poor academic performance/signs of abuse and/or neglect), 12 learners were referred for two problems, one of which was absenteeism and/or punctuality/poor academic performance. Three learners were referred for three issues (absenteeism, substance abuse, and/or violent behaviour), one learner was referred for four issues, and one learner was referred for five issues, all within the listed categories.

All categories listed on the referral form relate to characteristics of learners at risk of school disengagement or dropout. These are, poor attendance, ineffective school experiences, poor academic outcomes, problematic behaviours, and poverty are indicators of withdrawal (Balfanz et al., 2007; Romero et al., 2018; Rumberger, 2004). Similarly, Allensworth and Easton, (2007) cite poor attendance, deviant behaviour, and course failure as significant dropout indicators.

Most referrals (17) relate to absenteeism, punctuality, and poor academic performance. Ten of the 25 forms listed violent behaviour and/or substance abuse, one described a heavily pregnant student, and two listed poverty, issues that are outside the scope of the LEP. They would require the input of outside agencies, such as the Department of Social Development and community-based organisations and NGOs that deal with such issues. Despite these problems, the LEP is well-positioned to address the issues most of the learners have. As a result, we can conclude that the LEP uses the right criterion to identify its target population, and, in doing so, it is consistently servicing its target population.

***Which support services are used the most by learners? Are the programme services relevant to meeting the learners' needs?***

In total, 289 learners were referred to the programme between October 2019 and January 2021, when the evaluation was conducted. Community workers conducted 260 unique home visits, suggesting that nearly every learner referred to the program had his or her home visited. Of the total learners referred, 108 received one-on-one counselling, and 54 attended the youth opportunity programme. Although 289 learners have been referred to the programme, the services they use are either recommended by the community worker or requested by the learners themselves, which makes one-on-one counselling the most utilized service. The high attendance numbers of the program activities suggest that the LEP services are relevant to meeting the needs of at-risk learners. Additionally, 33 parents of learners on the programme received one-on-one counselling, and 67 attended weekly support groups for a period of on average four weeks.

**Evaluation Question 2: Are initial home visits being delivered according to planned programme procedures?**

When a learner registers with the LEP, a community worker is assigned, and an initial home visit is scheduled. As part of home visits, community workers use an assessment form (see Appendix I) as a guide for assessing and documenting the individual's living situation. Green, yellow, and red are the colours used to indicate three different categories of home conditions on the form. Based on the analysis of the 25 home assessment forms (Table 6), eight learners had a living situation in the green category with

a minor concern listed in the yellow category, which were be school complaints about behaviour and academics. Fourteen learners were classified in the yellow category which meant that their home conditions were less than ideal and had more serious issues such as lack of interaction between the parents and the children, all family members unemployed and parents intentionally or unintentionally neglecting the children. Two students had concerns across all categories, including the red-category issues of being a child-headed household, being involved in gangs or substance abuse, being suspended from school and/or not having basic housing. All of the home assessment forms contained detailed notes about the learner's situation from their parents and community worker. Table 6 shows the category of risk the homes have been classed into

Table 6

*Home assessment forms data*

<i>School</i>	<i>Assessment forms (N-25)</i>	<i>Home category</i>		
		<i>Green (N-8)</i>	<i>Yellow (N-14)</i>	<i>(Red N-2)</i>
<b>Ikamvalethu</b>	5	3		2
<b>Isilimela</b>	9	1	8	
<b>Khulani</b>	2	2		
<b>Langa</b>	7	2	4	
<b>Zimasa</b>			2	

The categories used to assess the learners home situation in the programme correspond with the background factors listed within the literature as influential to a learners decision to drop out. As the literature has noted, the decision a learner makes to withdraw from school is heavily influenced by their background (Schreiber et al., 2014). Researchers Masitsa (2006) and Inglis & Lewis (2013) also found that the top factors that influence a learners decision to drop out of school are their socioeconomic status, parental support (including their education, income, occupation), and their personal circumstances such as teenage pregnancy and substance abuse. These factors were evident on the assessment forms.

Also noted on the assessment forms were the overaged learners: nine of the 25 learners in Grade 12 were aged between 19 and 22, one in Grade 11 was aged 22, two in Grade 9 were aged 16 and 18, and one in Grade 8 was 15 years of age. Seven learners were living with a relative, and the two in the red category were child-headed households. Fifteen learners lived with one biological parent, and one form lacked information about the family. While the data gathered from the home assessments is consistent with research that indicates that at-risk learners in under-resourced communities are challenged by various issues that impede their progress toward completing their education (Branson et al., 2014; Lamb &

Markussen, 2011; Masitsa, 2006) other methods of assessment/analysis will need to be considered to validate that the programmes procedures are being adhered to during home visits.

**Evaluation Question 3: Are the programme staff adequately trained and equipped to work with at-risk learners and implement the programme's different components?**

As part of the process evaluation, feedback was obtained through a two-hour focus group discussion with the four programme staff. The discussion focused on the adequacy of training and general programme support features necessary for the successful implementation of the programme. Based on the focus group data, it became clear that several contextual factors impact the programme's effectiveness. These factors were highlighted to be school commitment, learners' capacity to engage, parent/caregiver trust, and partnerships and are described in the section below.

*Adequacy of training*

The LEP employs individuals who are qualified social workers to work as their community workers. Where a community worker is not a qualified social worker, they are sent on a basic counselling course provided by the Family and Marriage Society of SA (FAMSA) that provides the necessary support for the community workers to qualify for the tasks that they will engage with in the programme. Three of the four community workers are qualified social workers who worked as social workers prior to joining the LEP. One of the community workers has been trained by FAMSA during her tenure with the LEP and is now a certified lay counsellor. All the qualified community workers had experience working with families, adults and children prior to joining the LEP. All four programme staff indicated that they have also completed refresher courses with FAMSA while working on the LEP, where they engaged with topics such as empathy and how to approach families as well as address more difficult topics with participants. They also felt that a social work degree was critical in order to carry out the many responsibilities of a community worker. The staff highlighted that they relied heavily on their social work training as it equipped them with the competencies required to deal with the socio-emotional aspects of their work. They also indicated that because of their social work training they knew how to handle unanticipated problems with learners and their families. This is in line with Durlak and DuPre's (2008) suggestion that programme staff who have the required skills and are confident in their ability to carry out their tasks are more likely to implement programmes efficiently– such as the LEP. This is highlighted in the following quotes by two staff members:

So, you definitely need someone who has got the knowledge. Some sort of counselling training. Some sort of ... I would say like a social worker degree.

But really the training is needed, because you can't just send someone. There is this child, this child hasn't been coming to school for so many days. When you get there, the parent is blocking you already. No, I'm here for so-and-so who is not attending school. How is it any of your business? You see. So you really need someone who is trained.

The LEP programme staff also noted that when they began their employment with the LEP programme, there had been no role specific training provided by the programme, something they considered important. The staff also felt the need to be given specialised training so as to deal with the more serious issues that they found lay behind an initial referral. Despite this issue of additional training, programme staff felt there was adequate programme support as they were provided with one-on-one debriefing sessions with a supervisor who sits on the Just Grace Board, a dedicated programme administrator and a hands-on programme director who assisted with any organisational support that they may require.

### ***General programme support features necessary for successful implementation***

#### ***School commitment***

This relates to the level of commitment to the LEP required from partner schools. There was consensus among programme staff that the levels of commitment required of partner schools were high and that there is a need to forge stronger relationships in order for a sustained solutions to learner disengagement to be adhered to. They reported that when the LEP was launched in 2019, part of the launch activities included arranging meetings with school principals and teachers to present the programme. However, they felt the school teachers did not initially take the LEP seriously. It was only after continuous engagement and proof of tangible outcomes of changed learner behaviour that the relationship with the schools did their commitment to the programme improve. In addition, the staff also noted that teachers informed them that the government had appointed social workers in the schools. Still, no progress was seen in the learners' behaviour and performance. This fact impacted how the schools accepted the LEP programme as they felt somewhat cynical that the programme would positively impact the learners. As highlighted in the two quotes below:

Okay, another challenge, it was not easy to build a relationship with the Schools. At first, they take us not seriously, but as the time goes on we always met with them, sit down with them and tried to persuade them. Then we worked together very well.

They have that thing in their mind that they work with Social Workers because some of the teachers told us that "we" always work with the Social Workers, but they don't care. They just listen and go without even helping these Learners. So, what is the point

Staff also felt that not all the high schools fully supported the programme activities of the LEP, including morning campaigns. This, the staff highlighted, was manifest through referrals and how they encouraged students to attend and complete the LEP. As highlighted by programme staff

We have a Morning Campaign Programme here, so we have discovered that some Teachers, from other Schools, most of the schools do not support the programme. As a result, we have encountered challenges of Learners, who constantly and consistently are coming late from School. We have one School that we can say it has been very supportive, Isilimela only.

The staff were adamant that there was a need for all the schools to support and commit to the programme so that teachers could refer more learners and encourage them to attend the programme.

### *Learners' capacity to engage*

This relates to the need for learners to voluntarily engage with and adhere to the programme for successful outcomes. Programme staff highlighted the need for learners to engage and complete all recommended activities for them to benefit from the programme. Staff were also concerned that in some schools, negative behaviour was so pervasive that learners did not see these as serious problems. The fact that the learners were unable to register their behaviour as being undesirable hampered their ability to engage and fully adhere to the programme. The staff also noted that learners were hesitant to open up to them as they were afraid that they would share their issues and this negatively impacted the learners' propensity to engage with and adhere to the programme. As one community worker stated:

The thing with the students, because if they feel like you are going to talk about their issues, how do you bridge that gap with them? How do you make them feel comfortable to trust you that you're not going to say anything?

Or I might tell the teacher, and the teacher might say that in the whole class the other one is that, they don't come back, even though you see that this learner has a challenge, they don't come back for a second session or a third session. Maybe the child will come for the first and second sessions; for the third session, she doesn't come. They think, for example, you know when you're talking to someone with your problem

The community workers further indicated a need for a more apparent distinction between the LEP programme staff and the school social workers. Learners needed to have confidence in the LEP's independence from the school as the lack of trust and confidence arose from the fact that the identity of

the LEP staff and the school social workers was not distinct. As a result, learners were not turning to the LEP despite needing assistance. This is reflected in the following quote:

They take us as if we are their teachers. Now they were 'scared' to share their challenges with us. They were so scared to share, they would say, no, you're going to tell everybody about what I've shared with you. They don't know if social workers are doing a different job than the teacher.

### ***Parent/caregiver trust***

This related to the difficulty programme staff face when trying to engage with parents/caregivers. The staff felt that some parents did not trust them and had different expectations of the programme, for example, the anticipation for the programme staff to provide financial and material assistance to the family's requirements that were outside their scope. This they felt impeded their ability to successfully deliver some of the programme activities and reflected poorly on their ability, yet they were more than capable. This is reflected in the quote below:

Or the child's jersey has holes here, and sometimes in terms of uniform, then we don't have the funding to support the learners in terms of uniform. Which is, those are the expectations of our clients.

Parents/caregivers' lack of trust and misgivings about the programme impacted the working relationship, complicating it. Some parents found it challenging to take steps and trust the programme staff, fearing that they might be judged on their parenting abilities. As a result, some parents/caregivers were hesitant to open up and be frank about the problems they were experiencing with the learner. The concerns around cultural sensitivity were also raised as staff pointed out that some parents were reluctant to discuss personal issues with outsiders due to their particular cultural values and beliefs. Some did not trust the intervention methods proposed by the programme. This can be seen in the following quotes:

The challenges we encounter sometimes; we see the parents that are, they are very rude, but you need to be patient with them. Or they want to know 'why' you are here. Are you there to judge them with the programme? So, you need to explain yourself before they can talk. It's not easy.

You see, so I don't know if ... the other thing is that we, as black people, we still don't take counselling as something that can change our lives or our perception or can help us. I still think there is still that 'mind you, I can do things myself. I can manage on my own'.

The issue of trust is an apparent obstacle for the programme staff. Additionally, it is a common theme in the counselling psychology discipline, as the historical foundations of counselling and psychological

practice in South Africa, in particular, have been said to be biased toward Euro-American psychological theories and interventions (Bantjes et al., 2016). As a result, there has been a growing recognition of the necessity for culturally sensitive psychological interventions to consider cultural differences among racial groups. Practitioners have also been encouraged to engage in the indigenisation of counselling ideas and practices and to use community psychology (Stead & Watson, 2006). Community psychology focuses on topical issues such as school bullying, at-risk youth, teenage pregnancy, and parenting skills (Bantjes et al., 2016). The LEP currently utilises community psychology through its parent support groups and YOP. However, the challenge remains of the need to encourage parents to engage with them and to trust the interventions design.

### ***Partnerships***

This relates to the need for the programme to partner with outside agencies and NGO's or community-based organisations (CBOs). The programme staff stressed the need to partner with more community-based organisations, NGOs, and other external agencies who could provide specialised support to deal with complex issues and situations outside the programme's scope. Experienced partners could pick up on concerns about the learners and/or household situations and be willing to take referrals from programme staff. This would be especially applicable when the staff themselves feel overwhelmed because they are not adequately equipped to deal with entrenched problems of poverty such as teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, suicide and violence. Currently, the LEP is working with the following community-based organisations: Safety Patrol, which is an organisation that deals with safety in Langa; Langa for Men, which is an NGO that focuses on gender-based violence (although they also refer their clients to the LEP community workers for assistance), and Project Play Ground (PPG), an NGO that works with young children. The staff also acknowledged how critical it is for the LEP to partner with further education and training colleges that provide night school to refer learners who had already dropped out and are unable to return to mainstream schools because of their age or other reasons to complete their education.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this evaluation was to provide Just Grace with information that can be used for the improvement of their LEP. As the director highlighted their need for the evaluation was to provide information on how effective the newly established LEP is as well as assess the adequacy of their processes and programme staff to effectively implement the programme. Thus, a programme theory evaluation and a process evaluation were carried out. The overall goal of the theory evaluation was to assess the LEP's underlying logic and its plausibility. The process evaluation was carried out to assess whether planned activities are being carried out as intended by the programme and to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation process. This next chapter provides key recommendations that could be used to improve the programme. The recommendations are based on findings from both the theory and process evaluation. The limitations of the evaluation are also discussed.

The recommendations

### **Early warning systems (EWS)**

Firstly, it is recommended that the LEP include early warning systems (EWS) and academic support in its strategy. The literature (Balfanz et al., 2007; Dynarski et al., 2008; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016) has identified three aspects crucial for school completion: attendance, behaviour and course performance, commonly known as the “ABCs” of dropout as they are strong indicators of school completion. The same literature also suggests that the earlier these characteristics are identified within at-risk learners, the better their chances are of completing school. This indicates that data on at-risk learners needs to be collected earlier on in their school career and consistently to ensure that the learner receives the necessary assistance timeously and ensure that suitable interventions are developed (Allensworth & Easton 2007). Because the LEP has been in operation for under two years (since October 2019), it currently assists learners who are identified as at-risk and who have been referred at a somewhat late stage. There is limited historical behavioural information provided as the data captured at the time of referral only pertains to behaviours currently presented by the learner. No other behavioural history is provided to the programme by the teachers/schools. As a result, learners receive assistance when it may be too late. For example, referrals of learners in grade 11 or 12 who are at crucial stages in their school career might be too late to have effective corrective behaviour changes to ensure school completion.

Frazelle and Nagel (2015), in their Practitioners Guide to Implementing Early Warning Systems developed for the Institute of Educational Sciences (IES), suggest that for an effective EWS, five core

components need to be implemented in the system. These components are 1) the establishment and training of a team to utilise the early warning system, 2) the identification of accurate indicators 3) the design and utilisation of reports 4) the development of appropriate interventions to individual student needs and 5) the evaluation of student progress and intervention effectiveness. Thus, this study suggests that per the IES guide and in conjunction with their partner schools, the LEP is encouraged to develop an early warning system that resonates with the ABC predictors of high school completion. This would also imply that the programme invests in a training initiative for the teachers on using the EWS tool, maintaining reports on student data, and evaluating the learners' behavioural and academic outcomes over time. It is recommended that data captured in such an early warning system focus on school attendance, academic performance, truancy/chronic absenteeism and other evidence of devious behaviour and incidents that required disciplinary action.

### **Academic Support**

This evaluation study also recommends that the programme incorporate an academic component into its strategy to complement its psychosocial support. Studies on high school dropouts have shown that at-risk learners who are provided with academic support in addition to psychosocial support have a higher chance of school completion (Lehr et al., 2003; Sinha et al., 2005). It is also well-known that due to the historical complexities of South Africa, such as economic exclusion and a segregated education system, schools in impoverished areas such as Langa are not well resourced and therefore cannot provide at-risk learners with additional academic support (Hartnack, 2017; Romero et al., 2018; Spaul, 2015). Research has also shown a strong correlation between poverty and low-quality education, as learners from poor communities are likely to attend poor-quality schools with poor educational infrastructure (Branson et al., 2014; Lamb & Markussen, 2011; Van der Berg et al., 2011). An emphasis on a supportive academic programme would add considerable value to the LEP. The What Works Clearing House dropout prevention guide suggests that dropout prevention programmes should implement academic interventions that improve students classroom behaviour, provide personalised learning environments, provide individualised instruction and provide rigorous and relevant instruction (Dynarski et al., 2008). Similarly, GW-CEEE (2021), Spaul (2015), De Witte et al., (2013) and Hammond et al., (2007) all suggest that improving teaching, addressing learner backlogs through catch up programmes, providing small group tutoring, homework support, and experiential learning are altogether useful strategies to provide academic support.

While there is an evident need for the programme to provide academic support to its participants, the reality is that the programme faces restraints. It is unrealistic to expect the LEP to take on added dimensions without the school's full support. However, we strongly recommend that this be taken on

board as academic support is critical. Because the programme operates outside of the Western Cape Department of Education, it can only provide activities realistically within its control and are covered by the existing resources. The programme's financial, human resources, and organisational capacity need to be taken into consideration when recommending new facets of intervention. The LEP would only be able to incorporate academic support strategies that are feasible for them. These could include the provision of small group tutoring activities, homework support, and experiential learning such as field trips to different industries and places of employment. Taking on board a host of additional activities would likely mean that the organisation would need to partner with external organisations to provide suggested opportunities – such as experiential learning - to their learners. This study also suggests that the programme consider partnering with universities to develop a tutoring programme by engaging with university students who might volunteer to tutor the learners or/and to provide homework support.

### **Behavioural outcome measures**

This evaluation recommends that the LEP create a behavioural monitoring system that enables community workers to monitor the behavioural progress of each learner on the programme and those who have exited the programme. As the literature highlights, effective programmes utilise behavioural outcome measures to assess programme effects on learners' behaviours (Flannery et al., 2013). Drawing on the work of Moss et al. (2013), it becomes clear that a wide range of behaviour patterns can be monitored within the class. These include academic behaviour (such as achievement in a given grade and/or homework completion), social behaviours (interaction with peers, language, following instruction) and behaviour that reflects attendance at school (tardiness, absence, class contributions). By monitoring these behaviour patterns, the programme would gather the necessary data to assess whether its interventions are working and - if so, in what way and inform the programme staff of additional interventions that need to be made. The implementation of strategies that assist schools in monitoring learners behaviours play an essential role in dropout prevention and school disengagement (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). This is because monitoring and managing a learners behaviour is part of a crucial aspect of detecting the early warning signs of a learner who might be at risk of dropping out.

Currently, the programme does not measure nor monitor learners' behavioural progress within the schools. As programme staff highlighted during the focus group, most of their feedback on learners is only received when they bump into the teachers when they happen to be at the school. There is no formal space where teachers and programme staff meet. The LEP would benefit from formalising the teacher/LEP meeting space not to be accidental but deliberate. In developing the behavioural monitoring system, the programme will need to select the behaviours it would like to monitor, identify appropriate

indicators for the behaviours, and then develop a suitable monitoring tool and a system that works in conjunction with the school teachers. The programme will need to work together with the teachers to build the system. This is an essential step because the teachers would be much more likely to buy into it and use it consistently. This recommendation should be carefully adapted to correspond to the needs – and realities – that the teachers face. In other words, it should not be an intervention that requires too much input from the teachers as they may already have busy schedules and be overextended. It should also not duplicate other efforts with the early warning system.

### **External partnerships**

The evaluation recommends that the LEP make further efforts to engage and partner with external entities. The programme would benefit by being embedded in a broader network of community-based organisations, NGOs, civil organisations, and government agencies trained to provide specialised support and assistance to their beneficiaries and confront the serious issues that are evident and lie outside the scope of the programme. During the focus group, this need was expressed by the programme staff who felt that it was necessary to engage more actively with external partners who could assist with serious issues such as suicide, teenage pregnancies, substance abuse, sexual abuse, unemployment and access to night school for those who would like to complete their matric but are above the school-going age. These are all concerns that negatively impact impoverished households and are often factors that determine whether or not a learner is likely to drop out of school. The evaluation thus suggests that the LEP actively pursue partners within Langa and adjacent communities where the learners live to make the required referrals and access the support they require. The programme will also need to continuously connect and build relationships with government departments and civil society to get the extra help it needs. This may mean that the programme will have to hire additional administration staff who can forge the necessary community relationships and whose responsibility would be to nurture these partnerships.

### **Limitations**

One of the main limitations of this evaluation was that the literature sourced to inform the evaluation was mainly from developed nations such as the United States and Europe. There is limited published literature on the implementation and effectiveness of dropout prevention programmes in developing countries. Therefore the LEP was assessed against best practices derived from and for programmes implemented in cultural and socio-economic contexts different to that of the LEP. Therefore, it may seem that the program is less effective despite the fact that its methods and design are suitable to its context.

Second, the process evaluation was not informed by primary data collected from programme participants (learners and parents) and other stakeholders (principals, teachers, community members). The evaluation relied extensively on programme records captured and shared by programme staff, as well as the perspectives of programme implementers. The unexpected limits imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic inevitably compromised the scope of the process evaluation. Despite this limitation, the evaluator was able to gain valuable insights into the operational infrastructure of the programme and identify areas of improvement, thus fulfilling the main purpose of the evaluation: programme improvement.

Third, the process evaluation relied extensively on a small sample of programme documents (learner referral forms and home assessment). While the data sources and data analysis methods were appropriate for evaluation questions 1, and 2, in retrospect the evaluator should have negotiated access to a larger sample of programme documents and explored the feasibility of implementing a probability sampling strategy to strengthen the process evaluation. The evaluator cannot, for example, conclusively determine whether the initial home visit are being delivered according to planned procedures. Despite this limitation, preliminary conclusions point to processes that align with best practice literature.

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## **Appendix A: Programme Theory Development Questions**

1. What is your understanding of the LEP?
2. What are the objectives of the programme?
3. How do you achieve these objectives?
4. Who are the target participants?
5. What are the main activities you see as being essential to the programme?
6. What resources do you need to operationalise the programme?
7. Which of the activities that you have listed do you think are the most needed?
8. Are there any external factors that you think could pose as a threat to the functioning of the programme?
9. Who are the LEP partners?

## **Appendix B: Focus Group Questions**

- 1) Think back over the past year what challenges and successes has the programme experienced? How have these been addressed?
- 2) What is your professional background in and do you have prior experience working with at-risk learners?
- 3) Do you think you are adequately equipped to perform in your role?
- 4) What type of training did you receive when you joined Just Grace?
- 5) What kind of training/development do you think you need to conduct your job better?
- 6) What do you think the programme needs to do to become more effective in delivering its activities?
- 7) How are the relationships the LEP has with the schools?
- 8) Are there any obstacles you face when dealing with learners parents/caregivers?
- 9) Are there any other issues you would like to raise or highlight?
- 10) What do you feel you require from Just Grace to do your work better?

## Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet



Dear Participant

My name is Geraldine Kwenda a postgraduate student at the University of Cape Town and I am conducting a theory and process evaluation of the Just Grace Learner Engagement Programme as part fulfilment of my master's degree in Programme Evaluation.

I would like to invite you to participate in the research study. However, before you agree to participate I would like you to know more about why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and please feel free to ask questions should you feel anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information.

### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The evaluation of the Learner Engagement Programme seeks to assess the extent to which a) the programme has been designed suitably and effectively to bring about the desired changes in the learners b) assess the quality of service delivery to the learners with a focus on the home visits, counselling and the Youth Opportunity Programme (taking COVID-19 into consideration) and c) assess the extent of organisational support for the programme. The study will also provide Just Grace with recommendations on how to improve the programme.

### **Why have I been invited?**

You have been invited to participate because you have been with the programme since its inception and are responsible for implementing one or more of its activities. Therefore your views and insights on the programme are key.

### **Do I have to take part?**

You are under no obligation to participate in the study and are free to decide. I will describe every process that will be undertaken in the study and you will be provided with a consent form to sign indicating you have agreed to take part. You are also free to withdraw at any stage of the process and do not have to give a reason for this. You are also free to choose not to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable in any way.

### **What will I be required to do if I take part?**

You will be required to take part in a workshop and focus group with fellow programme staff. These will be conducted face to face. The purpose of the workshop is for me to gain your understanding of the Learner Engagement Programme its activities and desired outcomes. The focus group will be conducted to get your insights

into the daily operations of the programme, staff development and organisational support. The workshops are anticipated to last no longer than 3hours each and the focus group 2hours. You will also be required to sign a confidentiality agreement before taking part in the focus group.

**Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

Yes, your participation in the study will be kept confidential and any information you provide during the study will remain anonymous. This means the study will not identify your contributions by name, job title or gender in any documentation that will use information obtained during this process. I will be audio recording the focus group discussion to generate transcripts. The audio recordings and transcripts will be available only to myself. The recordings and transcripts from the focus group will be held in a secure location where they will be stored on a data management system before being destroyed.

**What will happen to the programme data used in the study?**

All physical programme data obtained and used during the study will be stored in a secure location and only I will have access to it. Where programme data is received via email this data will be stored online in a password protected cloud which only I will have access to. No personal or sensitive information from programme data will be disclosed in any documentation that will use information obtained in this study.

**What will happen if I do not carry on with the study?**

If you decide that you no longer want to participate in the study and that you do not want your responses to be used then all your contributions will not be included in the final report. Please contact me Geraldine Kwenda via email ([mmbger001@uct.ac.za](mailto:mmbger001@uct.ac.za)) if you wish this to be done. Should you have any concerns about any aspect of this study please feel free to speak to me or email me and I will do my best to address all your concerns. Otherwise, you can contact Barbara Schmid [barbara.schmid@uct.ac.za](mailto:barbara.schmid@uct.ac.za) from the UCT Knowledge Co-op as the study is facilitated through them.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results of the study will be used to generate a scholarly report for Just Grace with recommendations and feedback about the effectiveness of the Learner Engagement Programme design, operations processes.

Yours Faithfully

Geraldine Kwenda

[Mmbger001@uct.ac.za](mailto:Mmbger001@uct.ac.za)

(071 391 4069)

**Appendix D: Participant consent form**



I..... agree to participate in this research project (A theory and process evaluation of the Learner Engagement Programme) that is being conducted by Geraldine Kwenda from the University of Cape Town on this date.....2021.

I understand that the purpose of this study is to assess the programme design and operational process of the Learner Engagement Programme. I understand the aim of the study and that I will be part of a workshop and focus group and will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement if I participate in the focus group. By signing the consent form I ..... (participant initials) acknowledge that:

1. I understand that my participation in this research study is entirely voluntary and have read the information sheet related to the research and understand the aim of the project
2. I understand that if I wish to withdraw from this study or to leave, I may do so at any time and I do not need to give any reasons or explanations for doing so
3. I understand that I will remain anonymous and the researcher will not identify me by name in any documents using information obtained from this interview and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure
4. I agree that the evaluator may publish documents that contain quotations by me as long as my identity remains anonymous
5. I understand the study involves workshops that will last 3 hours or less and a focus group interview that will last 2 hours or less which will be audio-recorded and transcribed
6. I understand that I will not receive any payment for participating in the research
7. I understand that once the study is complete only the researcher and their supervisor will have access to the information obtained and these records (audio and transcripts) will be kept secure in a data management system and online password-secured cloud
8. I am aware that the researcher has offered to answer any questions I may have about the study and what I am expected to do and if I have any concerns I can contact her on ([mmbger001@uct.ac.za](mailto:mmbger001@uct.ac.za))

I have read and understood this information and I agree to voluntary participate in the research and to the terms indicated above.

.....

Participant Signature

Geraldine Kwenda

## **Appendix E: Focus Group Informed Consent Form**



Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study on the Learner Engagement Programme (LEP), The objective of the focus group is to discuss the service delivery, operations, staff development and organisational support aspects of the Learner Engagement Programme. The discussion will be recorded and transcribed.

### **What will you be asked to do in this discussion?**

As a participant of the focus group you will be asked to discuss and give your insights on a) your professional experience with at-risk learners, b) your experiences on the organisational support the LEP receives as well as programme staff and c) your thoughts and insights into staff development. This discussion will be led by myself Geraldine Kwenda and it will not exceed 2 hours.

### **What about confidentiality?**

To help protect your confidentiality all information obtained as a result of the focus group will be kept completely confidential and your name or any of your personally identifiable data will not be included in written notes and reports about the meeting. All data obtained during the discussion will be securely stored on a password protected laptop and online cloud. Participants will also be asked (including you) not to share what people talked about. If I use names they will not be your name and no one will be able to identify who the respondent or participants in the focus group are.

### **What are the risks of being part of the focus group?**

There are no known risks of participating in the focus group. However as a result of having to respond to questions about the organisational support, its operations and your personal experiences working with at-risk learners you may feel uncomfortable to comment in front of your colleagues. You may choose not to answer a particular question you are not comfortable with.

### **What are the benefits of the focus group discussion?**

The information obtained from this discussion may assist the LEP in learning more about how well it is operating as well as what improvements may be required.

### **To Note:**

1. The focus group will be audio-recorded and transcribed. If you participate in the study, you may request that the recording be paused at any time. You may choose how much or how little you want to speak during the group. You may also choose to leave the focus group at any time.
2. Participants are also required to respect the privacy of fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others.

**Participant confidentiality Agreement:**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ hereby agree to maintain the confidentiality of information disclosed during the focus group and observed live.

1. I also agree to hold in confidence all information disclosed by group members during this discussion
2. I shall at all times hold in trust, keep confidential and not disclose to anyone else or make use of any confidential information beyond the activities that are part of the Focus Group

By signing this consent form, I acknowledge that:

1. I agree to participate in the focus group carried out by Geraldine Kwenda of the University of Cape Town to aid with the research of the process evaluation of the LEP.
2. The focus group will be recorded and I agree to participate in this study.
3. I have read the information sheet related to the Evaluation of the LEP and understand the aims of the project.
4. I am aware of the topics to be discussed in the focus group.
5. I am fully aware that I will remain anonymous throughout data reported and that I have the right to leave the focus group at any point.
6. I am fully aware that data collected will be stored securely.
7. I am fully aware that I am not obliged to answer any question, but that I do so at my own free will.
8. I agree to have the focus group recorded (video or dictaphone), so it can be transcribed after the focus group is held. I am aware that I have the right to edit the transcript of the Focus Group once it has been completed.
9. I am aware that I can make any reasonable changes to this consent form.

.....

Participant Signature

Geraldine Kwenda

.....

Date Signed

Date Signed

## Appendix F: UCT Ethics approval



### Faculty of Commerce

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch, 7701  
2.26 Leslie Commerce Building, Upper Campus  
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 4375/ 5748 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 4369  
E-mail: [jacques.rousseau@uct.ac.za](mailto:jacques.rousseau@uct.ac.za)  
Internet: [www.uct.ac.za](http://www.uct.ac.za)



@Commerce UCT



UCT Commerce Faculty Office

28 12 2020

Geraldine Kwenda

School of Management Studies

University of Cape Town

REF: REC 2020/12/013

**A theory and process evaluation of the Learner Engagement Programme (LEP)  
implemented by Just Grace NPC.**

We are pleased to inform you that your ethics application has been approved. Unless otherwise specified this ethical clearance is valid until 31-Dec-2021 .

Your clearance may be renewed upon application.

Please be aware that you need to notify the Ethics Committee immediately should any aspect of your study regarding the engagement with participants as approved in this application, change. This may include aspects such as changes to the research design, questionnaires, or choice of participants.

The ongoing ethical conduct throughout the duration of the study remains the responsibility of the principal investigator.

We wish you well for your research.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jacques Rousseau'.

2020.12.28  
14:23:54 +02'00'

**Jacques Rousseau**  
Commerce Research Ethics Chair  
University of Cape Town  
Commerce Faculty Office  
Room 2.26 | Leslie Commerce Building

Office Telephone: +27 (0)21 650 2695 / 4375

Office Fax: +27 (0)21 650 4369

E-mail: [jacques.rousseau@uct.ac.za](mailto:jacques.rousseau@uct.ac.za)

Website: <https://www.commerce.uct.ac.za/Pages/Ethics-in-Research>

"Our Mission is to be an outstanding teaching and research university, educating for life and addressing the challenges facing our society."

## Appendix G: MOA Just Grace & UCT Knowledge Co-op

### MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT (#548.1)

#### **THE UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN THROUGH THE UCT KNOWLEDGE CO-OP**

A university incorporated in terms of the Higher Education Act, 1997, and the statute of the University of Cape Town, promulgated under Government Notice No. 1199 of 20 September 2002, herein represented by Lucinda Rooza, in her capacity as Contracts Manager of the University of Cape Town and she being duly authorized thereto, having its principal place of business at Bremner Building, Lower Campus, Lovers' Walk, Rondebosch, 7700

(herein after referred to as "UCT")

And

#### **Just Grace**

A non-profit company in Langa; NPO: 206-583

Herein represented by Grant Edmond, in his capacity as Executive Director, and he being duly authorized thereto

(hereinafter referred to as "J/Grace")

(Hereinafter collectively referred to as the "Parties" and individually as the "Party")

#### **Preamble**

**Whereas** UCT Knowledge Co-op is a unit within UCT which works in partnership with communities to address development challenges. The unit aims to make it easier for community partners to access UCT's skills, resources and professional expertise and works by matching community groups with academic partners in a collaboration that meets the needs for research or practical support identified by the community group.

**And Whereas** J/Grace is a non-profit company with the overarching objective of poverty alleviation in Langa and has identified the need for a formative evaluation of their learner engagement programme, targeted at at-risk youths in the Langa community.

**And Whereas** the Parties wish to establish an arrangement to govern the relationship between them on the basis of the terms and conditions contained hereinbelow.

#### **1. Definitions**

In this Agreement, unless clearly inconsistent with or otherwise indicated by the context, the definitions set out hereinbelow shall apply:

- 1.1. "Agreement" means this memorandum of agreement between the Parties captured in this document, together with any annexures, which are incorporated herein by reference.



## Appendix H: Learner Referral Form

Just  
45  
7455  
Tel:



Grace NPC  
Washington St  
Langa  
  
074 721 7019  
Email: [contact@justgrace.co.za](mailto:contact@justgrace.co.za)  
Web: [www.justgrace.co.za](http://www.justgrace.co.za)

### SCHOOL LEARNER REFERRAL FORM

I would like to refer the following learner to Just Grace NPC for further intervention by the psychosocial support team.

#### NAME OF LEARNER

Grade:  
Home address:  
Parent contact number:  
Learner contact number:  
School:

#### REFERRED BY

Name:  
Contact number:  
Date of referral:

The reason for referral (please tick at the appropriate box)

CATEGORIES	TICK
1. Absenteeism	
2. Punctuality	
3. Violent behaviour	
4. Substance abuse	
5. Poor academic performance	
6. Signs of abuse and/or neglect	
7. Signs of poverty	
8. Absent parents/caregivers	
9. Other	

Further Comments:

.....  
.....

#### Office use only

Reviewed by:  
Date:  
Comments

## Appendix I: Home visit assessment form



Just Grace  
 45 Washington St  
 Langa  
 7455  
 Tel: 081 700 3741

Email: [contact@justgrace.co.za](mailto:contact@justgrace.co.za)

Web: [www.justgrace.co.za](http://www.justgrace.co.za)

### Home Assessment Tool

Name of the participant..... Date.....

School .....Grade.....Age turning this year.....

Programme.....

GREEN	Home Situation	Check box
	Single parent household (parent coping well with responsibilities)	
	Good or satisfactory hygiene	
	Good or satisfactory interaction between parent and child	
	Healthy relationship with sibling/s	
	Little to no complaints from school (regarding behaviour or academics)	
	At least one responsible adult attending to needs at all times	
	At least one employed adult	
Adequate shelter and utilities		

YELLOW	Single parent household (parent struggling to cope with responsibilities)	
	Minor concern regarding hygiene	
	Lacking interaction between parent and child	
	Strained relationship with sibling	
	Several complaints from school regarding behaviour or academics	
	Parents home late (without suitable arrangements for care of child/ren)	
	All adults unemployed	
	Inappropriate privacy/ overcrowding (compromising safety of child/ren)	
	Father or Mother intentionally not involved	
	Moderate Conflict within family	

RED	Single parent household (parent not coping at all with responsibilities)	
	Major concern regarding hygiene	
	No interaction between parent and child	
	No relationship with sibling	
	Suspended, Expelled or Not attending school	
	Child-headed household	

Child/ren left unattended irresponsibly	
Adult/s frequent shebeens	
No basic shelter/ utilities	
House is a shebeen	
Severe Conflict within family	
Domestic violence	
Alcohol abuse	
Suspicion of or noted drug abuse	
Gang involvement	

Child living with:      Biological parent            Relative            Foster care

