

Grace Matlhape

SmartStart

South Africa



Grace Matlhape is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of SmartStart, driving an inspiring social franchise that is revolutionizing access to high-quality early learning opportunities. Prior to her role at SmartStart, she served as the CEO of loveLife, a nationally acclaimed organization dedicated to HIV prevention and fostering social and behavioural change among young people. With an extensive background in social justice and development in South Africa.

Grace possesses a deep-seated passion for implementing innovative strategies that amplify the impact of evidence-based programmes. Her work focuses on reaching and positively influencing large segments of the population, ultimately striving for lasting change.

She serves on various boards, leveraging her expertise to guide strategic decisions that benefit society at large. Grace is not just a leader; she is a catalyst for positive change, and her impact continues to ripple throughout society.



SmartStart

Grace Mathape

Johannesburg



Mission:

To ensure all children have the right foundations in place to succeed, while creating employment and social enterprise opportunities, and stimulating economic activity in our most under-resourced communities.

Vision:

Every child in South Africa has access to quality early learning programs

Top Challenges:

- The harmful gender norms that undervalue the work of child care around the world. How can we advocate for a “mindset shift” about this approach?
- The misinformed belief that Home Based Child Care (HBCC) is not as valuable as traditional center-based care. Changing this idea has been the focus of our policy work with governments, though formal policy has shifted, but the mindset has not.
- Continued funding for our work is always a concern.

Successes

- We are celebrating 10 years of expanding access to quality early learning programs by setting up a small-business franchise model, equipping women to lead over 13,000 franchises across South Africa.

Our focus on the quality of interactions, not just government regulations, helps us focus on systems development and what supports children’s access across the broader ecosystem.

There are not many organizations that are operating at the level of scale that we are. We could teach others how we have worked to create an environment where our children are performing better than the national average.



WHAT SMARTSTART WANTS TO GET OUT OF THE GLOBAL CONVENING

Insights into what works in other parts of the world; what others in this arena are doing and thinking, ways that people are dealing with challenges. We are keen to review and share emerging evidence. We have social connections and relationships to share.