

PRESS RELEASE

Let children be children: The power of structured play to support children to be school-ready.

Accra, Ghana: An initiative that allows children aged between one and six to simply play independently with simple hand-made manipulatives has been found to develop basic foundations of learning in children to be successful in primary school and beyond. The manipulatives were designed using a customized curriculum to engage a child in independent play and draw on their inclination for playful activities to address a good proportion of the early childhood developmental areas.

Through independent engagement of 257 boys and 251 girls with about 17,500 manipulatives over a 14-week period, the children developed their gross and fine motor skills, visual perception skills, hand-eye coordination, language development and problem solving skills. 75% of these children that demonstrated school-readiness were age four and below. These noticeable improvements in the children's intellectual performance just by playing with these manipulatives has inspired some parents to enroll their children in basic school after previously perceiving them to be too young to be enrolled.

The initiative dubbed "Early Learning Content Box Project" was implemented by the Kaya Childcare Center (KCC) and the Mastercard Foundation over a 17-month period to address the childcare and child learning needs of poor and vulnerable young women, particularly kayayei (head porters) and hawking mothers in the Madina locality in Accra. The project has transformed lives and unveiled crucial lessons for policymakers about child learning and early childhood development. It highlights the importance of small engagements and structured play to provide success for informal, low-income, often low-educated populations. It affirms the need for policy makers to prioritize early childhood development in policy frameworks, and make childcare and learning aids financially accessible, acknowledging the foundational years before kindergarten as crucial. In addition, alternative funding mechanisms, including government subsidies or grants, are crucial for ensuring equitable access to childcare and child learning aids for financially vulnerable mothers. Finally, the pilot project underscores the need to strategically locate affordable childcare and child learning services near workplaces of marginalized women. Proximity and affordability emerged as critical factors, emphasizing the need for alternative funding mechanisms and conveniently located childcare services for financially vulnerable mothers.

Scan the **QR Code** below to download the policy brief on the project.



About Kaya ChildCare

Kaya ChildCare (KCC) is a non-profit organization located in Madina, in Accra committed to providing quality, inclusive, and low-cost childcare and child learning services to enable marginalized children to benefit from early childcare and child learning services. KCC currently serves 100 children of *Kayayoo* mothers and other low-income market workers and hawkers working in Madina, Accra. KCC works to enable marginalized children to benefit from early childcare and child learning services, and contribute to providing quality universal basic education in Ghana for the benefit of the poor.