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## **Global parenting App for wellbeing of children launched in South Africa**

The COVID-19 Pandemic highlighted the difficulty in reaching caregivers through in-person programmes due to financial and human resource constraints. To address these challenges, a digital chatbot adaptation of the in-person Parenting for Lifelong Health (PLH) programme was developed, with the aim to provide universal access to evidence-based parenting support.

PLH is a suite of open-access, non-commercialised parenting programmes designed to prevent child abuse and other forms of violence in low-resource settings around the world. Endorsed by the WHO, PLH's in-person programmes have demonstrated remarkable success in improving parent-child relationships, increasing child safety and boosting children's cognitive and socio-emotional development.

Representatives from South Africa's Department of Social Development, UNICEF South Africa, Clowns Without Borders South Africa, Parenting for Lifelong Health, Innovations in Development, Education and the Mathematical Sciences International, and the Universities of Cape Town (UCT) and Oxford recently launched the brand-new parenting chatbot called 'ParentText'.

Of UCT's involvement in the project, Vice-Chancellor Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng said she is proud that South Africa continues to play a leading role in the ongoing effort to develop PLH programmes, and that UCT is lending a hand in the process.

"UCT's mission is to develop African creativity and innovation to benefit the whole continent and the world. We are delighted by this next step in this vigorous research programme and we look forward to continue developing strong ties with the University of Oxford," Professor Phakeng said.

ParentText sends daily messages via WhatsApp to support caregivers with positive relationship building, online and offline child safety, intimate partner relationships, and stress management. Developed with and for families in South Africa, the programme is available in English, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sesotho, Afrikaans, and Setswana, with additional language versions planned for the future.

ParentText was developed during COVID-19 as an interactive chatbot based on evidence-based in-person parenting programmes. These include the Sinovuyo Caring Families Programmes, which have been previously implemented in South Africa and have had positive effects on increasing positive parenting practices and reducing violence against children.

UNICEF South Africa Child Protection Officer Sinah Moruane noted that, "ParentText comes at the right time and is an innovative solution that will really ensure that our parents are being supported in doing their parenting responsibilities".

Jamie Lachman, the Chief Executive Officer of PLH and Honorary Associate Professor at UCT commented that ParentText is "a continuation of work that we have been doing in South Africa over the past 15 years. I'm looking forward to seeing how now as we're moving into the digital space, we can continue to work together to achieve universal access to evidence-based parenting support."

Mr Percy Ntsoane, the Acting Director: Families at the National Department of Social Development, stated that ParentText has been coming in handy for parents to get some tips on issues that are really of concern to them.

For more information about ParentText, please contact [info@cwbsa.org](mailto:info@cwbsa.org).

### **ParentText on WhatsApp**

If you would like to try out ParentText, it is available now!

Simply open WhatsApp and message "Hi" to +27 69 335 3250 to access ParentText.

***Ends***

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