



Wrapping Up 2019

As we complete our Preschool's sixth year in service it strikes me that, with every child helped, we also help that child's family. And, strong families make for a strong community.

Education was a priority in President Ramaphosa's 2019 State of the Nation address. It is a privilege to be part of the solution. Through Mindstretch we address the inequality in learning opportunities for those with learning challenges.

At Mindstretch we embrace our slogan, moving From Labelling to Enabling

Thank you to our children and their parents, our teachers and all our collaborators and supporters for helping us do our bit for the community. Every kindness counts.

I also thank Kasongo for her beautiful testimonial on Ryan, her son. And I hope you find useful our article on how to support your child's microbiome.

We practice serious, evidence-based education at Mindstretch, but we do not forget the fun factor – or the value of trying new things. Ponies will visit our school as an end of year treat, and every willing child will be able to ride.

Wishing you all a fun-filled end to 2019.

Warm regards,
Jennifer

Mindstretch Founder and Preschool Principal



E: jen@mindstretch.co.za
P: 021 531 5899
M: 083 444 4554
W: www.mindstretch.co.za

New in 2020: Mindstretch Bridging Class

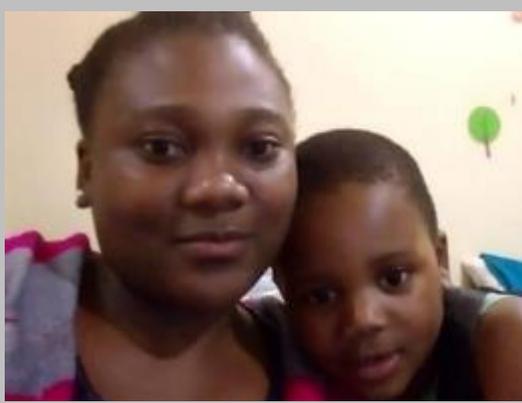
Our Preschool caters for children up to age 8, but our graduates often request an extra year. And so we begin a Bridging Class in 2020.

✓ For older learners with special needs

✓ Caters to a child's individual needs

✓ Accelerates learners in specific areas of development and life skills

✓ To learn more, email jen@mindstretch.co.za



Kasongo and Ryan



Ryan at school

Reflection: Our Son Ryan

We have come far with our boy. While writing this testimonial, I found I was no longer filled with anger towards the previous school that let Ryan down. I also find that I am no longer filled with fear because now I know Ryan is getting a solid foundation at Mindstretch.

Ryan was diagnosed on the Autism spectrum in November 2016, just after he turned three. He was attending a Montessori day care. We immediately informed the school of the diagnosis and they told us they could not keep him on. They implied it was due to his 'challenges'. I felt like I had been stabbed. Fortunately, Ryan's doctor at Red Cross helped us with a list of potential schools and that is how we found Mindstretch. Ryan had a heart-warming first encounter with the Principal, Jennifer. Though we could not enroll Ryan then due to financial constraints, Jennifer kept us updated and invited us to Mindstretch events.

We enrolled Ryan at an educare linked to UCT, where my husband and I were studying. We told them of Ryan's diagnosis. They assured us that the facility was inclusive. We were greeted with a different, unhappy reality: we received negative reports every day about Ryan being disruptive, and that he was a slow learner. We noticed changes at home, such as our son being easily angered. He did not want to go to school and mornings became a struggle. After just six months at the educare, our little boy, just four years of age, was suspended. It was devastating.

You can imagine our joy when, in December 2018, we secured funding and got Ryan enrolled at Mindstretch.

Mindstretch offered Ryan more than we had dreamed possible – in less than a year! His speech has improved, he enjoys school, we can take him to other children's parties, he participates in different activities and loves crafts and baking.

One highlight is how the HANDLE programme that Jennifer and her teachers apply has helped us deal with Ryan's sensitive skin.

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In Support of our Microbiomes

So, what is the microbiome and how can we improve it for our children?

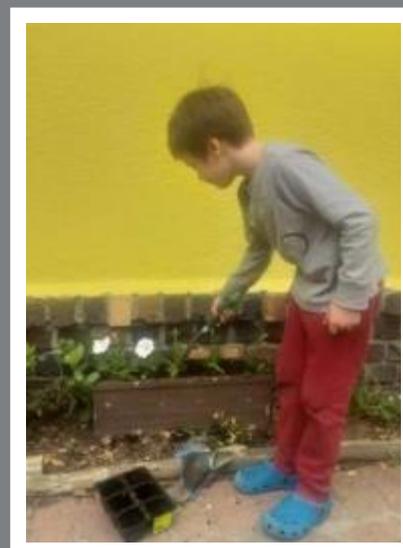
Our microbiomes are as unique as our personalities. We all carry trillions of bacteria and, without them, our health collapses. They are essential for digestion and keeping the gut healthy. They support our immune systems and affect our mental health.

Recent research has suggested a link between the microbiome and autism. Some on the autism spectrum may have a less diverse microbiome – meaning there are fewer kinds of good bacteria in their systems.

Fortunately, we can improve our children's microbiomes with these five things:

- 1. Give plant-based foods.** Feed your child many kinds of plants. If needed, hide vegetables and fruits in things they like, such as smoothies. Or cut up vegetables and then mix or blend them into soups and stews – or bake them into breads. Remember also nuts, seeds and wholegrains.
- 2. Serve beans.** Beans feed the gut microbiome. Try mashing white beans into breakfast porridge or avocado. Hide black beans in berry smoothies. Try a mild hummus chock-full of chickpeas.
- 3. Choose probiotics.** Fermented foods are loaded with healthy bacteria (probiotics), but children can resist the strong flavours. Try at least to have them eat yogurt (if they are not casein intolerant). Check the label for the presence of 'live' or 'active' cultures, and avoid foods with lots of added sugar.
- 4. Avoid antibacterial cleaning products.** Hand washing prevents germs spreading, but over-sanitizing is bad. Avoid antibacterial soaps and gels. They kill good bacteria as well as the bad. Old-fashioned soap and water are best.
- 5. Be outdoors.** Playing outside boosts gut health and the immune system. Let children garden or play in a sandpit. Let them play with pets. Shielding children from dirt may weaken their immune systems. Being in nature also helps reduce stress, and stress itself harms the microbiome.

At Mindstretch, our children play outside every day the weather allows. We tumble on the grass and sit under the trees. Sometimes we roll up our sleeves and garden, and sometimes we play in the sandpit.



Reflection: Our Son Ryan *(continued from page 2)*

When Ryan started attending Mindstretch, he did not want to wear certain fabrics like cotton. The school introduced Ryan to skin brushing therapy. Within a week we saw improvement. The skin brushing helped Ryan feel more comfortable in his own skin. Now he can wear long-sleeved shirts quite comfortably.

Food was another problem: Ryan was picky eater. Jennifer and the teachers gave us tips on how to introduce new foods. They also hold a regular 'cooking class' at school. As a result, Ryan is now open to trying new foods.

Having Ryan at Mindstretch Preschool has brought joy to his young life and it has given us peace of mind. My husband and I are able to concentrate on our studies knowing that Ryan is at a school that understands him and which tailors the programme to his needs. We meet regularly with Jennifer and Roxanne (Ryan's teacher) to discuss his Individualized Education Plan. It helps immensely to be familiar with the goals/concepts/skills and strategies that the school has planned to help Ryan realise his full potential.

Our journey has shown us how deep the need is for programmes like that of Mindstretch. It has also shown how significantly one small child's life can be changed with decent intervention, and how wide the ripple effect is on family.

Kasongo

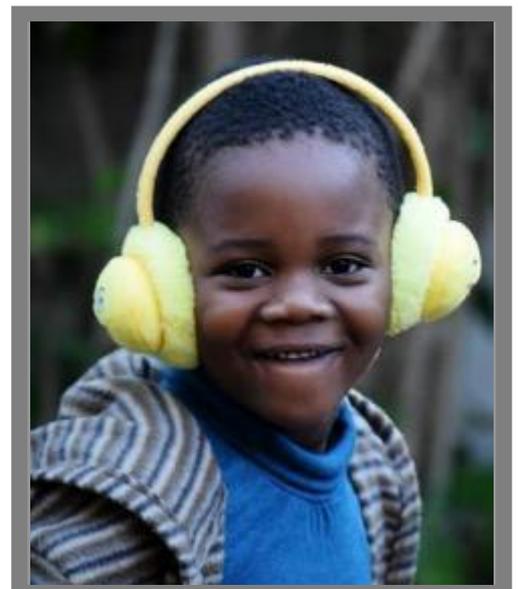
A Note from Ryan's Teacher, Roxanne

Ryan has blossomed at Mindstretch. First his confidence grew and then his learning improved. He settled in within a week. He thrives in our environment with its structure, creative learning and low student to teacher ratio. And we make sure to tailor the situation to his needs.

For example, Ryan is sensitive to sound, and so we got children's earmuffs that reduce noise and help him to focus on his work.

We have shown that Ryan is far more verbal and cognitively able than described by his previous school. Ryan excels in fine motor and perceptual skills, completing quite challenging tasks with ease. When he joined us under a year ago, he could manage a 20-piece puzzle. Now he completes 50 pieces comfortably. Currently, we are working on his vocabulary and word combinations.

Ryan loves a good game of chase, tickles and cuddles. He is rewarding to teach and at this rate will continue to reach new heights quickly.



We Welcome Your Feedback

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