

dlalanathi is a Zulu word that means "play with us." It perfectly captures the approach of the South African organization by the same name, which works to "provide emotional support to children and families affected by trauma in a context of poverty and HIV and AIDS."

"Our name expresses how we use play to achieve wellness for children. Play is . . . a key indicator of their mental health. Play is children's natural means of communication, bringing fun, connection, development and healing where there has been traumas and loss". *dlalanathi*

dlalanathi's Family Support Group provides a safe space for grandmothers to process the grief and trauma that can create emotional distance between them and the children in their care. Parenting workshops provide grandmothers with vital skills and strategies for building strong relationships of trust and communication with their grandchildren through play. This lays the foundation for them to provide emotional support to these children throughout their lives.

Contributions to the SLF have allowed us to provide consistent, flexible support to **dlalanathi** at a time when the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic made play, communication, and family connection especially important.

The Power of the Doll: In partnership with an Australian volunteer based organisation of doll makers, **dlalanathi** has integrated dolls into the heart of their work with grandmothers. Their relationship building in communities always begins with Play for Communication, a 3 day doll-making and story-telling process that awakens in grandmothers the memory of how core play was in their own childhood, the games they played, who they played with and the many things they learned through their playing. This sensitisation process opens up for grandmothers a new way of seeing their grandchildren, inviting them to enter a new way of listening and communicating with the children using the doll that they have made. Stitch by stitch, the creative reflective process of making a doll softens grandmothers, brings joy and the possibility of a more responsive life-giving relationship for both grandmother and child.



At a **dlalanathi** Play for Communication training, a caregiver makes a doll to use for storytelling.

Check out their website if you are at all interested in their approach to therapy using play. It is quite fascinating and inspiring: <https://dlalanathi.org.za/>.

Information taken from the [Stephen Lewis Foundation 2021 Impact Report](#) and the [dlalanathi website](#).