

THE BEAT GOES ON 10 February 2011 # 956 R11,50 (R1,41 VAT incl) Other countries R10,09 (tax excl)

DRUM



EXCLUSIVE

**FUNNYMAN KENNY NKOSI & WIFE TUMI:
A WEDDING & WE'RE PREGNANT, ALL IN ONE YEAR**

AND BABY MAKES THREE



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& THE DOWNRIGHT
OUTRAGEOUS!**

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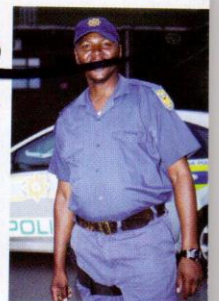
- * WHAT WAS WRONG
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TREND

**KASI GYM FOR
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Time for gym, baby

The workout routines at this Soweto gym help babies develop both physically and mentally, says instructor Caroline Maseko



THINK of a gym and images of muscled men showing off their honed six-packs and women strutting their stuff in sexy Lycra outfits are likely to come to mind, along with swimming pools, treadmills, saunas and toned gym bunnies smiling from behind the reception desk.

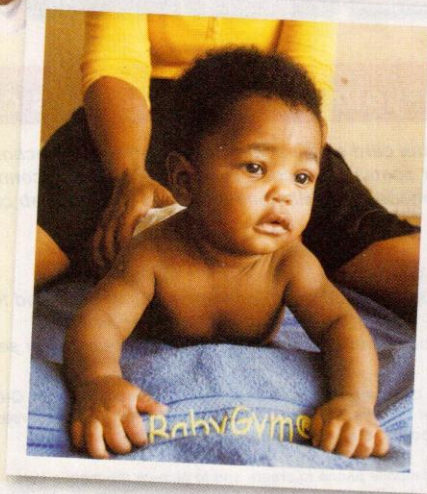
But this gym in Soweto is different. There is no pool and no equipment, there are no hunks and the women arrive with babies in their arms. That's because this is no ordinary gym: it's a place where tots between the ages of 12 and 24 months gather with their mothers and caregivers for daily workouts.

It's the first BabyGym in a South African township and is the passion of Caroline Maseko (38), who is also the centre's main instructor.

"I've seen the need for baby gyms and you just can't argue with the benefits," she says.

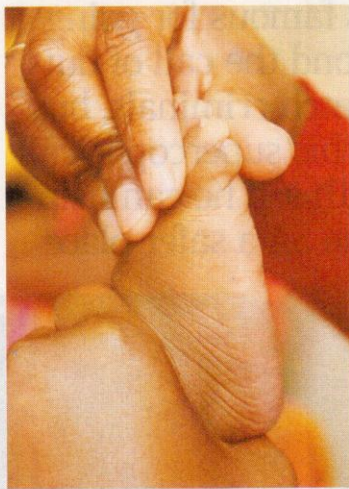
She explains that baby gym does more than strengthen a child's muscles and help children with disabilities - it also helps develop their brains. Massage is used to build up muscles which are not properly formed and could hamper the baby's ability to walk and develop normally.

"And just look at them," she says, pointing

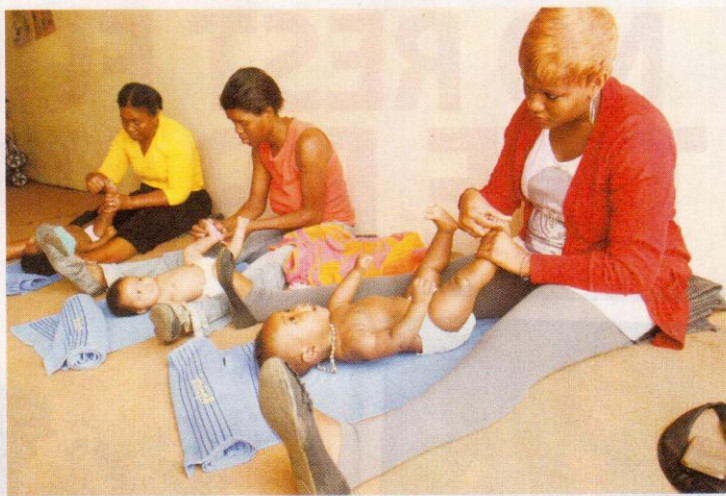


MAIN PICTURE: Caroline Maseko is on a mission to give the babies of Soweto the best possible start in life.

LEFT: Seven-month-old Fana Martins gets a massage from a caregiver.



LEFT: A mother massages her baby's foot – helping to stimulate his physical and mental development. RIGHT: Every mother wants the best for her children – and this gym in Soweto is helping them achieve just that.



to the three nappy-clad babies cooing happily on her studio floor. "They love it and it brings them so much closer to their mothers too."

Caroline then sits on the carpet facing the mothers and demonstrates the various exercises on a doll, instructing them to put the babies on their backs on their matching sets of blue towels.

"Lift their legs; massage them under their feet in a clockwise motion. Rub those feet gently, then slowly stretch their toes," she instructs. "By doing this you're helping your baby become conscious of their bodies."

MAKHOTSO Sekudisa is one mother whose youngest child has been given a new lease on life thanks to Caroline. A year ago her bubbly little daughter, Matshidiso, who is now three, was unable to walk and her parents feared something was seriously wrong. Makhotso (35) began to worry because her eldest son, Khotso (11), was walking at nine months and her twin girls, Mpho and Mphonyana, took their first steps at a year.

"When we started with Caroline she promised that Matshidiso would be standing and walking without help in five weeks," Makhotso says from her shack in Orlando West, Soweto.

"In the fourth week I went to fetch Matshidiso from crèche and expected my daughter to just sit and wait for me to pick her up as she always did. But Ausi Caroline told me to wait at the door and when Matshidiso saw me she stood up and walked over . . . I just cried. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Every time I look at Matshidiso I feel I still have not thanked Ausi Caroline enough."

Caroline had first come across Matshidiso some months earlier when visiting the crèche as part of her community outreach programme.

"When I saw Matshidiso I was concerned.

“ It's important to catch developmental problems early before they show up at school ”

Every child grows and develops at their own pace but a child should start showing signs of wanting to walk by about seven months old," she explains.

So she set to work and by massaging and stretching the child's feet and legs as well as her ears and hands; she solved the problem. And she did it all for free.

"If you see a child with a developmental problem you simply have to intervene," she says, adding that it's important to catch problems such as these early before they show up at school.

"A lot of kids who turn their books upside down when they write or have learning disabilities are those who did not crawl when they were toddlers or have not developed properly physically," she explains.

"It's important to get those basic things like crawling right because, for example, when a baby crawls it looks off into the distance and then back at its hands. This helps develop the baby's vision and is crucial for when a child needs to copy something from a blackboard at school. Crawling is also a cross-lateral movement that strengthens both the left and right sides of the brain, which enhances learning."

CAROLINE was inspired to open the gym in 2009 after seeing that there were no such facilities in the townships. She launched the business after completing her three-year theory course at the BabyGym Institute in Linden, Johannesburg, where she still works as an administrator and instructor.

"When I got to understand the important role instructors can play in babies' lives, I knew I could use it to help my community," she says. "Many suburbs in Johannesburg

have this kind of facility but there were none here and there's a real need."

During her training she spent time working in orphanages and children's homes and saw firsthand the power of her techniques while working with kids who had learning disabilities and cerebral palsy.

"It's wonderful to see the results when you work with these little ones – by the end of one session they are already moving their hands and feet more freely," she says. "It can really change lives."

Caroline offers some of her services for free, but encourages parents to pay her normal rates of R550 for five one-hour sessions. She also conducts sessions at her clients' homes if they want personal attention.

These days the only people who seem to find it tricky to get her personal attention are her kids – Gugu Gumede (19), studying for a diploma in logistics at the Vaal University of Technology, and Warren Maseko (14), who's in Grade 10. That's because she's constantly working.

"But they're both happy that I'm doing this type of work," she says.

And with that her next group of mothers arrives with their gurgling babies. They hope Caroline's methods will help their children – and maybe even give them the edge they need to become the leaders of tomorrow.

"A child needs to be stimulated to develop physically and mentally. The gym will benefit every baby in Soweto," says Caroline. □

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