



# RHODES EXCHANGE

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## WE LEARN FROM EACH OTHER

In this month's issue we focus on student community engagement and celebrate the 2015 Student Community Engagement Award winners. Over the past four years all our winners have been foreign students, which is most significant and also humbling to note the important work they are doing at a human connection level as foreign students in South Africa. Perhaps we could take a leaf out of their books. Read our frank discussion with Dr Nosipho Mngomezulu about challenging our assumptions about the communities in which we volunteer.



**DR NOSIPHO MNGOMEZULU**

## TAP INTO COMMUNITY WISDOM

This month Rhodes Exchange had the pleasure of interviewing Dr Nosipho Mngomezulu, who has been the Student Volunteer Coordinator at Community Engagement for the past four years. While we all understand and heed the desperate need faced by the communities in Grahamstown East, have you ever turned that mirror to reflect what the giver receives from engagement with community members? Mngomezulu expertly mentors us on this path to community knowledge.

"There is just so much complexity in our communities, which makes it such an interesting human space in which to work, said Mngomezulu, who studied Anthropology to PhD level at Rhodes. "You are engaging students from such diverse backgrounds that there is a rich space for mentoring, coordinating and guiding within the student body; you are working with very capable and very enthusiastic community partner organisations who host our

students; and you are working with some of the larger structural issues of the city – issues of inequality which are not unique only to Grahamstown."

Mngomezulu is no stranger to challenging assumptions, having started off as a student volunteer and activist who, in her own words, "thought I knew things about activism and Grahamstown - and then working in this space I started to realise that there was quite a significant shift that I needed to make in my own thinking about how to facilitate students' learning." Supporting community based organisations that carry out important roles in their community lead to unique and varied opportunities to build real human relationships with people who are from diverse backgrounds.

At the beginning of the volunteer programme, Mngomezulu runs a diversity workshop to get students to understand issues around power and positionality. "One of the students came to me

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afterwards and said that she felt that it was one of the most unnecessary workshops she had ever experienced because I did not have working class students in mind when I designed the workshop. And she was completely right, I had spent so much time thinking about how privileged students are going to engage in community development work it never crossed my mind how I was framing it for working class students who come from Joza themselves and how I could support their growth and understanding, and use their knowledge as an asset."

These workshops now essentially include students' narratives and experiences and validate and humanise the student who graduated at a township school where he or she is now going to volunteer. "Rather than simply being reduced to a statistic it is essential that this person's experience can inform what we do and how we mentor these students," she explained. "There are so many more interesting dynamics at play and if you pay attention to those instead of assume that everyone here is from a space of privilege, you can help the students."

There is also quite a big shift to make to get people to recognise that everyone is a complex, full person and to negate the privileged conversations that occur on campus. The power dynamics as they are in South Africa – the history of apartheid and the gross inequality between the rich and the poor – mean that people also start to buy that as the story of who they are and this makes it is so much harder to build a human relationship with another person: "Teaching Xhosa or cultural heritage is not the only thing a

person from the township is capable of. Someone might be a financial whizz or have great mediation skills – just because they come from an economically marginalised background does not mean they have no other skills," Mngomezulu emphasised.

Cycle of Knowledge, which is coordinated between the English Department and the Writers' Movement, is an example of a project that is breaking down these barriers. People come into a space together as poets who come from very different backgrounds but under no pretence as to their differing viewpoints. "They come into the space together as poets who are confident in the skills each person brings to the table. This works much better than the mindset that you're going to an organisation because you are a giver with no recognition that the organisation existed independently before you were there," she said.

Key to breaking down these assumptions is the willingness to understand each other's humanity and value. "One of the challenges is getting our students to realise that Community Engagement is not a vacuum and it is not separate from the rest of who you are as a human. Having an altruistic mentality is a great start but it can be a dangerous stumbling block in understanding that you are gaining a lot more from the experience of engaging than you are actually giving or able to contribute. Our communities are quite generous about opening up their spaces, whether it is their shelter or their school to you learning. If you take down your wall just a little bit you can be really humbled by people's openness to connecting with you as a human."

While it is hard to erase the decades of separatism and being indoctrinated with different identities that have informed people's sense of security about who they are, the exercise of building meaningful relationships and levels of trusts make it possible to do things differently. "One of the things I try to do with the students when we train is to talk about issues of class and race and help them understand that we need to acknowledge who we are in mature and humanitarian ways," said Mngomezulu. "If you are wearing a pair of Levis in Joza you need to acknowledge that you are wearing a R500 pair of jeans and someone else is wearing a pair of jeans from Pep, but that they know that those are Levis. Don't dress down – these kids look up to you and when you come into their community as a role model and you are slumming it they start to wonder why you do have the same respect for them."

One of the big surprises for students is that they approach Community Engagement as a simple 24-week volunteering programme but, for many of them, it changes what they do, how they think, and how they interact in the classroom. "Becoming fully aware of how people live and the challenges they face just five kilometres from the University campus, these students start ploughing back into their academic work and engaging in their volunteering in a really different way. It is based on these experiences and interpretations that they begin to make decisions on how they feel they can make a difference, whether it is to continue to volunteer or to become involved in social justice work where they feel they can make a bigger impact."





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And what about the students coming into Rhodes? Do they differ in their preparedness to engage from students say a decade ago? Social media allows children from protected private school environments to read so broadly that they some of them do not to engage, says Mngomezulu. Conversely you might get a black student who you assume will have no problem engaging who, because of the pressure of assimilation in a Model C school, admits to not being able to speak isiXhosa properly.

"The pressure of assimilation is still there, Rhodes is an old institution, but the shifting demographics of the student body mean we have such a dynamic mix of students engaging that the opportunities are limitless. I don't even think the architects of our democracy anticipated this. We can think more critically and more interestingly with the kind of young person who is coming into higher education. Information is changing our world so rapidly that we begin to question the kind of

education that is needed. A University still provides your interpersonal, research, reading and analytical skills, and we understand that these are way more important than rote learning. These skills expand the possibilities for learning outside of the classroom."

Student volunteers number just 360 out of a student body of about 7000, but these are the individual students who sign up for the programme and therefore this figure excludes the students who join volunteer clubs at residences and in sporting clubs. An exciting development that CE is seeing in students is a bigger openness to the complexity in volunteering. "CE is a very tiny component of a community development process and our students are beginning to recognise the magnitude of what they are participating in," she said. "For example, when planning a soccer match, for the first time some of them have to consider transport accessibility and understand that you can't put pressure on a child to find R8 to come to Rhodes when it would be easier

to send 18 students out to a venue in the township. They begin to grapple with linguistic diversity and must use their problem solving skills practically and truly get to grips with human diversity. Some students are quite open to it and easily engage and for others it takes a bit of time."

An important part of the volunteer programme is to reflect and write down what has been learned and Mngomezulu says some students probably thing she is "a bit pedantic about always reflecting but those who take it seriously go on to do projects that completely blow my mind." This is evident in the calibre of students and projects who were finalists for the 2015 student awards. Selected according to a set of criteria that point out best practice and the ability to be sustainable, the 23 finalists across five categories provided hot competition. "That does not take away from the value of the other projects," affirms Mngomezulu. "By virtue of existing in the way they do, all the projects are a significant thing."

## STUDENT RESEARCHER OF THE YEAR

Adopting a participatory research approach, Nomsa Chemura and Shingirai Katsinde are two Pharmacy MA students who have developed health promotion materials to be used as part of health programmes by St Mary's Development and Care Centre and Ubunye Foundation, two NGOs working in Glenmore, Ndwayana and Grahamstown. Working with community members from Glenmore and Ndwayana area, Nomsa and Shingirai were assisted in identifying adolescent pregnancy and exclusive breastfeeding as key research areas the community cared about. Employing a qualitative action research design based on CBPR principles and PEN-3 model, which emphasizes understanding of human behaviour as part of a wider cultural context, they worked closely with community health care workers, mothers and local NGOs. Apart from their MA research, Nomsa and Shingirai have volunteered to work on the Phelophepa Health Care Train and are active mentors in the Rhodes University Pharmacy Students' Association (RUPSA). Nomsa and Shingirai also volunteered in the Environmental Health promotion exhibit during the National Science Festival in 2015.

The provisional titles for their theses:

- Development and implementation of Health Promotion activities for the prevention of teenage pregnancy.
- Development and implementation of health Promotion activities to encourage exclusive breast feeding.



**NOMSA CHEMURA AND SHINGIRAI KATSIKDE FOCUSED THEIR MASTERS' RESEARCH ON HEALTH PROMOTION MATERIALS TO BE USED AS PART OF HEALTH PROGRAMMES.**



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## SOCIETY OF THE YEAR

In 2015 the Namibian Society has implemented a number of successful community engagement projects emphasizing sustainability and relationship building. Collaborating with Children of the Soil and Galela Amanzi, NamSoc has established an environmental partnership focusing on awareness raising at Good Shepard and Fikizolo primary schools. Namsoc has focused on food and water wastage, gardening as well as working with Grade 4 learners at Fikizolo on physical education and health promotion. The partnerships Namsoc formed this year have been so successful, that they have been included in the society's constitution, ensuring continuity and sustainability of the physical education programme. The society has participated in a clean-up of Sugar-Loaf Hill with Children of the Soil as well as participating in Trading Live for Mandela Week. In August, Namsoc organised the first "Togetherness Week" which brought together community members, schools and Rhodes students to raise awareness about physical health in the community. The successful events that took place over the week allowed the society to raise funds as well as showcase the power of relationships in reshaping a new society. As an international student society, Namsoc has showed immense dedication to building relationships in Grahamstown, exemplifying in their commitment to community engagement the spirit of pan-Africanism and Ubuntu.



## NAMSOC GOES BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY

## COMMUNITY PARTNER OF THE YEAR

In 2015, Access Music Project's programmes have grown, expanding the contributions they make to arts development and mentoring of young talent in Grahamstown. Early this year, AMP was involved in a multi-sectoral partnership with the Rhodes Music Department, the Field Band Foundation and Sakhuluntu Cultural Group to host Bloco Malagasy: a drum ensemble from Madagascar. At the opening of the National Arts Festival this year, AMP's performance and work was praised by the MEC of Eastern Cape Arts and Culture, Pemmy Mojadina. AMP learners also participated in the Standard Bank Youth Festival, playing alongside other accomplished young performers from around the country. With six student volunteers in 2015, AMP has been able to expand its teaching repertoire to include singing, bass guitar, piano, violin and marimba. AMP learners have worked tirelessly to not only maintain high discipline and motivation, but excelled in all their goals for the year. Three AMP learners have auditioned for the UCT School of Music, aiming to follow in the footsteps of AMP graduate, Athenkosi Nelani, who obtained a full scholarship to pursue his BMus degree at Rhodes. AMP's partnership with AMI helped win the BASA small business award in Johannesburg this year.





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## RESIDENCE OF THE YEAR

The gentlemen from Guy Butler returned to the CE Awards to reprise their 2014 title as Residence of the Year. In 2014, Guy Butler Residence worked consistently with two community programmes: Amasango Career School soccer training and the Chemistry Department's Khanya Maths and Science Club. Since 2013, the residence has committed itself to building sustainable relationships with community organisations and encouraging a culture

of volunteerism amongst the men in the residence. In 2015, the residence has partnered with GADRA education's mentoring programme as well as Sophia Youngstar's Football Club. The residence has shown a clear understanding of the values and principles of community engagement, always working to build deep relationships with the organisations they partner with. The residence takes the road less travelled, thinking critically about how the various

activities inform their values as a residence, offering more rewarding engagements for the residence and its partners. From Give 5, to mentoring at GADRA, to Trading Live for Mandela Week and their weekly tutoring at Sophia Youngstars, the residence maintains a commitment to social justice and sustainable development. Their commitment has been exemplary as a residence and as members of Nelson Mandela Hall's CE activities.

## GOLD AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Reginald Victor Runyoro has been a dedicated member of the student volunteer programme in 2015, serving as the student leader for Children of the Soil, a contributor to the CE media team, and the CE rep for the Namibian Society, tasks he has fulfilled with enthusiasm and excellence. From recruitment of volunteers, to assisting with training, Victor has been a volunteer one can always depend on. His exemplary leadership has seen Children of the Soil building one of the largest volunteer bases, Namsoc building a sustainable community engagement programme and, judging from the numerous nominations he received from fellow volunteers, he has clearly earned the respect of his peers. Victor's dedication is surpassed only by his humility, allowing his service to speak itself. His quiet thoughtfulness has brought innovative interventions in Siyakhan@Makana, where Victor has helped establish partnerships between Ellen Khuzwayo, Namsoc and Children of the Soil. He has lead Namsoc in participating in Trading Live for Mandela Week, and coordinated the successful physical health and community building Togetherness Week. Victor has gone above and beyond the call of duty to integrate his various engagements, ensuring continuity and sustainability in all he does. Victor has shown how our differences shouldn't be an obstacle for building relationships.

REGINALD VICTOR RUNYORO DEMONSTRATES A DEDICATION SURPASSED ONLY BY HIS HUMILITY





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DR NOSIPHIWE "NOSI" NGQWALA AT HER INAUGURATION INTO THE SOUTH AFRICAN YOUNG ACADEMY OF SCIENCE.

## SA YOUNG ACADEMY OF SCIENCE AFFILIATE

Dr Nosiphiwe "Nosi" Ngqwala lectures in Pharmaceutical Biochemistry in the Faculty of Pharmacy. Her research interests are focussed on the areas of water supply and sanitation and she works closely with the Environmental Health and Biotechnology Research Group (EHBRG) where she also supervises Masters and Honours students. Raised in Mount Frere, Eastern Cape, she has a deep-rooted love for South Africa and her passion for her country has motivated her to direct her research and teaching career towards solutions to the economic, environmental and social problems affecting South Africa and to make a real difference. She is recognised for her role as vice chairperson of Young Water Professionals (YWP) in the Eastern Cape, which is a "programme focused on bringing people working in or interested in the water sector together in a meaningful way" and is an active member of the Activate Innovation Leadership Program, a national network of young leaders equipped to drive change for the public good across South Africa. Nosiphiwe is committed to making a difference within and outside her department, this has been witnessed by her working with Enactus-Rhodes, the Namibian society, Scifest-Africa and three of her students made it for invested awards. Her nomination to become a member of The South African Young Academy of Science (SAYAS) didn't not come by surprise as, through her work, she already contributes towards solutions to national and global challenges facing society. Other professional affiliations include the Water Institute of South Africa and the International Water Association. She was the youngest member inaugurated this year and says she draws her inspiration from Dr Roman Tandlich, her colleague and PhD supervisor.





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## CHANGING LIVES THROUGH MATHS EDUCATION



The Nedbank Eyethu Community Trust has recently awarded R215000 to the Rhodes University Maths Education Project (RUMEP) which will assist the Project continue its intervention work through its cluster projects.

Working with more than 120 Mathematics teachers (years 1-3) this year, RUMEP is the hub of professional development for Maths teachers in the Eastern Cape. Currently its programmes include the BEd (in-service) in Mathematics, the Collegial Cluster and MathsNet Project, and the Focused Intervention Mathematics Workshops for organisations such as the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and World Vision. There are two, first year groups of teachers this year; one from the Northern Cape and one from the Eastern Cape. The Northern Cape group have been fully sponsored by the Sishen Iron Ore Community Trust (SIOC) and attend contact sessions in Kuruman and in Grahamstown.

According to Tom Penlington, in two decades, RUMEP has seen a number of post level 1 teachers being promoted to higher positions of authority in the Department of Education such as deputy principals, principals and Senior/ Chief Education Specialists. One teacher from the Northern Cape was promoted to chief co-ordinator of the Dinaledi Project in the Northern Cape and one Eastern Cape teacher, now a Senior Education Specialist in the DBE in Sterkspruit (another RUMEP cluster) was chosen to go to the USA and teach there for a year. Besides these promotions, a number of our ex-students have graduated with Phds in Mathematics Education and are now employed at universities throughout South Africa.

The Collegial Cluster and MathsNet Project aim to sustain mathematics education in the rural Eastern Cape with a clear focus on building self-sustaining communities of teachers, many of whom are ex-RUMEP students whose aim is to take responsibility for their own learning and growth and so improve their professional practice in the classroom.

Each cluster is self directed by its own constitution and decides on what intervention they wish to work on for the year. The project encourages active involvement of committed teacher communities whose schools are functional and who then act as agents of change and development in their own communities.

Computer and information literacy are, without a doubt, an important element of any individual's education. Teachers are increasingly called upon to use computer and information resources in their schools but without necessary computer training, which we provide to each cluster, many of the rural teachers would never have the chance to experience such professional development. RUMEP currently has six functioning clusters from Sterkspruit in the north to Dutywa in the east and Grahamstown in the south.

Intensive classroom support and monitoring is provided by RUMEP staff members. The impact is assessed through a number of mechanisms and workshops are held with teachers to discuss these tests as well as learners' errors and misconceptions which are then dealt with by the RUMEP facilitator.

The donation from Nedbank will go towards classroom support and computer training visits, purchasing mathematical teaching material for cluster schools, conducting workshops for teachers, organising Mathematics open days and designing benchmark tests for learners in the exit grades.

Contextualised within the nationwide need to improve the quality of schooling and teaching, RUMEP has a crucial role to play on all fronts – teacher collaboration, classroom support, accredited programmes and focussed intervention projects. A couple of examples stand out about why these interventions are so important. There is a pool of untapped talent in our rural and disadvantaged schools that simply needs the right support from the earliest stages as seen from some of the project's shining stars.



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ASITHANDILE CALATA, A MATHS PRODIGY FROM DUTYWA, IS WORKING TOWARDS HER BCOMM AND LOOKS FORWARD TO SUPPORTING HER MOTHER ONE DAY.

## MATHS OLYMPIAD WINNER

by Ms Fezeka Makiwana

The cluster schools participate in a three-round RUMEP Maths Olympiad for Grade 9 learners in which a learner from Dutywa obtained a first position of 93% in the first round and 70% in the final round. He is from a very poor background, has no parents and is staying with distant relatives. Various stakeholders have been approached and the strong possibility of him being awarded a bursary is being investigated. This is a rural child who can reach beyond the stars.

During my visits to one of the deep rural schools, Vulithuba Junior secondary School in the Dutywa District in the Eastern Cape, I came across Lazola. After a few visits to the school, my attention was drawn by Ms Fipaza, a Mathematics teacher, to Lazola's performance in Mathematics. I developed an interest in his mathematics progress as he was one of the best performing and promising learners in the District. Annually RUMEP runs Maths Olympiads for Grade 9 learners. In the 2013 Grade 9 Mathematics Olympiads, Lazola got the first position in the province, with an average of 93%. My curiosity to know more about Lazola was aroused and it was at this stage that I was informed that Lazola was abandoned by his parents. He was adopted and raised up by an illiterate granny in the village, who was not even related to him. It became clear that when he completed Grade 9 she could not afford to pay for his secondary education because there was no secondary school nearby. Renting out a flat for

him where there was a high school or paying for his daily transport to and from school were both well beyond her reach.

His Maths teacher, the Mathematics Subject Advisor in the Dutywa District and I undertook to make a financial contribution towards Lazola's education and his general welfare. The aim was to take some of the load off the old granny's shoulders. His Mathematics teacher volunteered to stay with him so that she could monitor him closely.

The granny, whose only source of income is the old age grant, was very grateful for such help. We all took it upon ourselves to monitor Lazola's academic progress and assist him when he has challenges. We, as a group, also collect clothes and try and meet his other various needs.

Lazola is presently doing Grade 11 at Skenjana Senior Secondary School in the Dutywa District, where he is doing exceptionally well in all his subjects and particularly in Mathematics. At this high school he is being taught by one of the ex-RUMEP students, Ms Sotomela, who gives us quarterly feedback on Lazola's academic progress. I am told that Lazola is often seen tutoring and giving maths assistance to his peers at school during and after school as well as during weekends.

Lazola would like to become a medical doctor. As the group assisting him with his education, we can only hope and pray that he maintains his excellent performance in Maths and Science so that he qualifies for a bursary to further his education. He has indicated that if he does not make it as a doctor, he would like to become an engineer. We hope that we can hold his hand and walk with





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him to achieve his goal. We hope that our assistance will help this young village boy realise his dreams. We hope that our efforts in alleviating poverty, will help him improve and develop not only his home but his village as well the country at large.

## ACCOUNTING CAREER IN SIGHT

Featured in Rhodos this year, Asithandile Calata, is an 18 year old student from Dutywa who is studying towards a Bachelor of Commerce in Accounting. Calata is doing her first year at Rhodes. Mrs Fezeka Mkhwane, a cluster coordinator at the Rhodes University Mathematics Education Project (RUMEP), helped to bring Calata to Rhodes. The RUMEP specialises in working with communities and academics to identify and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds who have the potential to succeed. Teachers from selected parts of the province are given the opportunity to attend intensive contact sessions that are run over the duration of 2-3 weeks, where improved teaching and training methods are shared across the board. Calata's maths teacher attended one such set of contact sessions, and told of her wishes to help further the education of one of

her brilliant maths pupils. Having performed exceptionally all through her junior or cluster years (grades 1 to 9) at Vulithuba Junior Secondary School, Calata then attended Colosa Senior Secondary School where she continued to surpass her peers in mathematics. Mkhwane later visited Calata at her school to assess her academic progress. Satisfied with her performance and tremendous amount of promise, Calata was able to enrol at Rhodes in 2015 with full financial support for both her tuition and residence fees.

On the importance of granting opportunities to competent students to further their tertiary level education, Mkhwane had this to say: "Everyone deserves the chance to improve their situation, and education is the best way to do that. Calata says she faces quite a few challenges in her first university year. Among them are her first-time encounter of Accounting and having to be taught and to do all her learning in English (as opposed to isiXhosa). She dreams of completing her degree, securing a good job, and building her mother a beautiful home one day. "I accept myself and my background, and I will do all that is necessary to make it".

*"Everyone deserves the chance to improve their situation, and education is the best way to do that."*



MS FEZEKA MAKIWANA BELIEVES IN THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF EDUCATION IN THE RURAL AREAS