![UCT Knowledge Co-op logo]

PROJECT PORTRAIT
Community development and working with the UCT Knowledge Co-op:
A community worker's perspective. **# 21b (2013)**

Introduction

This is a summary of an interview with a community worker about her experiences of community development – and of using UCT to help her in some of this work.

Amina Rajap has been working in community development for over twenty years. During this time she has been involved in all sorts of projects, from building community gardens to defending the rights of local residents in the high court.

She has been involved in two UCT Knowledge Co-op projects. The first one was in April 2011, when students collected information to support the need for a footbridge in the community. The second in December 2011 was an art project to involve children in painting a mural. Both projects were in Statice Heights in Athlone, Cape Town.

How did you first become involved with the Knowledge Co-op?

I heard about it through the programme manager at The Women's Circle, who was also in touch with UCT. So then I contacted Barbara (Schmid – project manager of the Co-op) and we just took it from there and they introduced the students to us.

Barbara is very keen on working with local communities and she is pushing the students to see what's happening….. The students did a report on the footbridge that we need and other things to uplift our community. But then we interested them in our beading class and they also made things like earrings, so we actually learned from them also.

Amina Rajap:
Community worker

How do you go about encouraging community involvement?

- Amina advocates living in the community in which you work so that you can get to know people and they can get to know you.
- If you hold a meeting people are more likely to come if they know you.
- Many initiatives Amina sets up on her own gain momentum from the community by talking to them informally. "If I know I want to start with a garden, then I'm going to talk to the people, I'm going to tell them, 'Listen here, we can beautify this place. Are you in?' "
- Sometimes there will be stipends available which gives people an extra incentive to be involved.

Practical hints for engaging with the City of Cape Town & its councillors

It's important to submit anything that you want to bring to the attention of decision makers in writing. In this document you should include:

- A clear explanation of the issue or your needs.

- A thorough explanation of who is going to benefit from your proposed intervention or what you are asking for.

- Attach supporting evidence. For example, attendance registers from meetings that you have had with other people.

- If you attend any meetings where your issues have been raised, make sure the points made are minuted and make sure you receive a copy of the minutes for your records. Attach these minutes to written requests to politicians.

- Include a time frame with an indication of the urgency of your request and when you expect to get a report back.

- Document all written communication and keep copies for yourself as a record. Your first port of call will usually be your local councilor. But if you are not satisfied with the response then you should write to their superior. Sometimes the higher up you go, the more likely it is that things will start happening. If needs be, write to the Mayor.

When raising the issue in local meetings, go through the sub council to ask for your issue to be put on the agenda. If they don't put it on the agenda, you can still raise the issue in the meeting, but make sure it appears in the meeting minutes.

Working with the UCT Knowledge Co-op

"They are actually bringing opportunities and the children love to see the students here...they do show that they are grateful for what whatever's coming. And yes I must say thank you to …. all those people at UCT … making a few things possible for us. At the end of the day there's hope for our children."

Keywords: Collaboration, city council, community development.

To **reference** Project Portraits, please cite the author as UCT Knowledge Co-op.

The Knowledge Co-Op at the University of Cape Town

The UCT Knowledge Co-op aims to make it easier for community partners to access UCT's skills, resources and professional expertise. It helps initiate joint projects that benefit both the community partner and the university. It links community groups with appropriately qualified staff and students at UCT, and it supports both partners throughout the project – from initial planning to final product.

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