

Masiphumelele Library: a holistic service to youth and children in the community

Susan Alexander

Library and Information Services, Masiphumelele Library, City of Cape Town, South Africa.
E-mail address: susan.alexander@capetown.gov.za



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Abstract:

The joint vision of the Masiphumelele Library and local government, the City of Cape Town, includes supporting education, early childhood learning, gender and HIV/AIDS initiatives, informational and recreational needs. The library provides excellent conventional support for formal and informal education for young people through its reference, study and internet services, considered critical in educational support in both developing and established communities.

In addition, their mission is to initiate and develop a range of outreach programmes for young people, drawing them into the library. Each is designed to aid the social development of the individual young person and thereby the social cohesion of the community as a whole, in particular through Computer classes, Homework club and Girls group. The extensive outreach initiative also has strong specialist partnerships which seek to support the development of children and youth.

The partnerships include:

*The NGO **IkamvaYouth**: www.ikamvayouth.org who extend a service to the youth in the community through mentoring, tutoring, career guidance, workshops and outings. The library identifies with IkamvaYouth's vision of moving beyond poverty through education thereby countering inequality.*

*The NGO **Lalela**project: www.lalelaproject.org who provide educational arts to youth affected by extreme poverty, to spark creative thinking and awaken the entrepreneurial spirit*

*The NGO **Wordworks**: www.wordworks.org.za who have a mission to strengthen early literacy and language development and enable children to fulfil their learning potential.*

In line with the library's view, Dr Genevieve Hart, Professor from University of the Western Cape in her paper "Moving beyond outreach", "in 2011 ... examines the contribution, real and potential, of South African public or community libraries to sustainable development and to social inclusion." She writes, "The World Bank points to the increasing evidence that social capital is crucial for societies

to prosper economically and for development to be sustainable In a society like South Africa, only if the institutional culture of public libraries changes to embrace the role of libraries in social inclusion by means of outreach activities will they have a future.”

In this paper we present an overview of how the Masiphumelele Library uses outreach to respond and adapt to the needs of children and youth in the community.

Keywords: Outreach, Partnerships, Youth and Children’s Services, Innovation

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“The Masi Library is a source of information for the Community – it is a knowledge partner.”

B. Mumba

Masiphumelele which means “we shall succeed” is a largely Xhosa-speaking high-density settlement in the South Peninsula of Cape Town. Here close to 40,000 people have made their homes - many of them migrants from rural areas - with employment at a premium and social and recreational resources scarce. A large proportion of this population is made up of children and youth. Housing is a combination of brick structures and wood and tin shacks. During the winter months, the living conditions become extremely hard with the winds, rain and cold and the rising waters of the wetlands which border Masiphumelele.

Challenges include HIV/Aids, TB, insufficient services, housing and amenities and the high risk of fire and flooding. The community boasts a quality primary school, a clinic, a high school and a library. The community is well supported by a range of NGOs catering for the multiple needs of the population. Over the years bridges have been built between the neighbouring communities of the South Peninsula which still display the economic divisions of apartheid: the library bridge has strong foundations.

Instrumental in establishing this foundation has been the joint vision of the Masiphumelele Library and local government, the City of Cape Town, which spans a range of educational initiatives from early childhood learning, to gender and HIV/AIDS initiatives, as well as the informational and recreational activities for youth and adults. These strategies, many of which target the youth of Masiphumelele, offer support for formal and informal education through reference, study and internet services, all considered critical in educational support in both developing and established communities.

In addition, their mission is to initiate and develop a range of outreach programmes, which are taken here to mean educational and recreational activities that draw children and youth into the library. Each outreach activity is designed to aid the social development of the individual young person, thereby feeding into the social cohesion of the community as a whole. The programmes are also designed to provide integrated progressive skills so that the individuals build on past skills as they progress.

A good proportion of the outreach programmes are aimed at preschool and primary levels and include weekly reading enrichment classes (*Wordworks*), where volunteers link up with children from Grade 1-3 and work through an organized *reading enrichment programme*; children from the local crèches at the start of their school careers (Grade R) can participate in a *school readiness programme* where trained volunteers prepare them with skills for their first year at school; Wordworks also run an evening *Parent programme* where parents learn to prepare their children for school; mothers and toddlers are welcome to enjoy a morning of activities and social interaction (*Stay and Play*). The library hosts a *nursery school outreach* four days a week: here the library works with *Nal'ibali* to encourage storytelling at local nursery schools and at the library. (*Nal'ibali* is isiXhosa for "here's the story"- a national reading campaign to spark children's potential through storytelling) Weekly computer classes are given in a fun interactive way while the Lalela art project enables children to develop their creative potential. Volunteers drive a weekly *Homework club* helping children with homework and facilitating exercises and games to improve reading, mathematics and writing skills. On a more recreational note afternoon activities take place four times a week and include storytimes, puzzles, games, craft and films.

The youth of Masiphumelele are a primary concern of the library in recognition of their vulnerability, carrying as they do the burden of growing up in an economically depressed environment. A range of youth programmes provide guidance, direction and support for young people and include *IkamvaYouth* who target over 100 Grade 9-12 learners, focussing on tutoring, mentoring, career guidance, computer skills and media skills; *Girlz Group* meet weekly - girls of all ages are involved in discussion, workshops and outings with the aim of empowerment, wider exposure and sharing life skills; *Nal'ibali* also plays a role with youth through a weekly reading club which meets to talk about books. Computer classes for youth are offered in the newly upgraded computer room and the City of Cape Town is installing Wifi so that young people with smartphones can access the internet via their library membership cards.

In developing outreach programmes at Masiphumelele library, a totally 'inclusive' approach is taken: the few brightest and most focused individuals are not favoured; education, encouragement and support is provided to people of all ages, abilities and strengths. The seed is planted for change and each individual is allowed to nurture that seed in their own

way, for change to grow in whichever form or direction they wish.

The growth and success of the extensive outreach initiative has been based on carefully developed long term partnerships, which have become strong through sustained interaction. Masiphumelele's partnerships in this context are taken to mean a joint interest in promoting the same goals, a union combining the same vision to support the development of children and youth. The library itself was built on a partnership from its inception, and they have continued in formal and informal guise since that time.

It started with an informal partnership between two neighbouring libraries, Fish Hoek and Ocean View, in the South Peninsula in 1995. Jean Williams from Ocean View, a neighbouring suburb historically designated for "coloured" South Africans initiated a library service in Masiphumelele from the boot of her car in the 1990's; Fish Hoek Library came on board in 1995 with a commitment to start a more formal service. Space was allocated for a small library in a farmhouse where the local Housing Department also had an office. After a housing dispute, the premises were burnt down in 1999 and it took some time before new partnership plans were discussed.

The discussions gathered momentum in 2001, when John and Carol Thompson, founders of *Masiphumelele Corporation (MasiCorp)* offered to help, issuing the challenge with the first partnership agreement – "I will build you a library if you make it work". The library building was completed in 2003 and opened its doors in September of that year. It was a difficult time for libraries and so the newly built satellite library had to rely on donations – books from America, old furniture, and staff from Fish Hoek library, one of our longest standing partners. The library received Community Library status in 2012 (the Library was given individual status and an operational budget) but the strong relationship forged between the Fish Hoek and Masiphumelele libraries is ongoing.

MasiCorp continued the partnership with the library, building a further double storey extension and a park in 2006. They also committed funding for operational costs which is largely used to pay volunteers a subsistence stipend and maintain the computer room. The headstart from *MasiCorp* enabled the library to take root in the community and their commitment to the library continues.

Another beneficial partnership is with the *Rotary Club of Newlands*, which initially supported one of the library reading programmes and went on to project manage the building of a beautiful Outreach centre. They sourced funding from *Peninsula Beverages*, along with committed funds from *Exclusive Books Reading Trust* plus donations from *Wendy Ackerman* and *MasiCorp*.

The infrastructure for the Masiphumelele Library having been established, the City of Cape Town now owns the library buildings and park, provides maintenance and cleaning services, staff salaries, insurance, security and book stock while the Provincial library supports the library by providing books and periodicals.

Also instrumental in this process has been *the Friends of Fish Hoek Library* which is a supportive partner, sharing proceeds from the yearly “Library Alive” fund raising initiative and providing a conduit for individual donations to Masiphumelele Library.

Other partnerships include those with *local schools, the crèches* and *Michaelis School of Fine Art* which is part of University of Cape Town. The latter provides a yearly community art project where 3rd year students create a community art exhibition in the library which exposes all ages to artistic expression.

Partnerships also exist with groups such as *World Teach* who support the annual winter school, *African Impact* who help with afternoon activities for young children and also the regular *volunteers* who help us with our outreach programmes.

In this process, some valuable lessons have been learnt. Partnerships build on the foundation set by the library with the first partner - *MasiCorp*. Partners have been carefully selected to ensure a common shared vision and goals. A good knowledge of your prospective partner is critical. All roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined and observed, with the library retaining overall management, responsibility and accountability. Frequent and direct communication is key to pre-empting misunderstanding amongst diverse parties and personalities.

Masiphumelele library continues to value partnerships as a means to enhance library resources and outreach programmes, which in turn encourage the community, in particular children and youth, to make use of libraries and develop beyond the mandate of the conventional library. The library has extended the range of outreach programmes by focussing on NGO partners that complement the values and goals of the library.

The principal NGO partners all focus on youth and children, and include:

- *Wordworks* (www.wordworks.org.za)
- *Lalela Art Project* (www.lalelaproject.org)
- *Nal’ibali* (<http://nalibali.org/>)

- *IkamvaYouth* (www.ikamvayouth.org)
- *EIFL-PLIP* (<http://www.eifl.net/programmes/public-library-innovation-programme>)
- *MasiCorp*, <http://www.masicorp.org/>

Some of the key achievements of these partnerships have been:

IkamvaYouth started at the library in 2009. The library identifies with *IkamvaYouth's* vision of moving beyond poverty through education thereby countering inequality that is still so prevalent in South Africa. The relationship is one of respect and commitment – and their wonderful work complements the goals of the library. Of this organisation, a Grade 12 pupil said, “Ikamva is one of the places I can call home.”

EIFL-PLIP provided a grant for the upgrading of the computer room in 2012. This facility now provides internet access and computer classes to children, youth and adults and has provided many advocacy opportunities for the library.

An additional opportunity came through becoming a member of *Beyond Access: making information work for everyone*. (<http://beyondaccess.net/>) Through them a link was created globally with other libraries and the opportunity to share the experiences of Kathryn Torres, from the Shine Centre. (<http://www.theshinecentre.org.za/>) She represented South Africa in Bangkok to workshop a generic reading programme that can be customized to specific library needs. She collected information from Masiphumelele Library, Wordworks, Nali'ibali and Shine to give a voice to all contributors in Bangkok – this has resulted in a module entitled “*Libraries, Literacy & Technology*” which is freely available to anyone who wishes to use it in their specific library.

Funding partnerships have been developed by the library itself. Our partner, MasiCorp, gives financial support to the computer room, the Homework club and the Stay and Play toddler group. They are always willing to assist with the extras that come up. Private trusts, commercial enterprises, local businesses and individuals give support that has enabled the expansion of the Masiphumelele Library's reach, some giving in monetary form, while others have given in kind.

In order to maintain an open transparent approach and to further communication and visibility, the “In Touch with the Community” newsletter was started in 2012 and regular meetings are held with each partner, to ensure that there is a spirit of open communication.

In conclusion, Genevieve Hart, Professor of Librarianship at University of the Western Cape in a paper “Moving beyond outreach”, “... examines the contribution, real and potential, of South African public or community libraries to sustainable development and to social inclusion.”

She writes, “The World Bank points to the increasing evidence that social capital is crucial for societies to prosper economically and for development to be sustainable In a society like South Africa, only if the institutional culture of public libraries changes to embrace the role of libraries in social inclusion by means of outreach activities, will they have a future.”

In order to make that happen, partnerships or, as she writes, “Networks of relationships among persons, companies, institutions and civic organizations enable a society to function effectively and to move beyond poverty, ... it is only by outreach that libraries can join and build these networks.”*

*LIASA conference in East London 2011 **Moving Beyond “Outreach” Reflections on two case studies of community library services in South Africa** presented by Professor Genevieve Hart

Conclusions

Reflecting on Masiphumelele Library’s journey, it has become apparent that libraries need to expand their horizons and to do so, librarians need the courage to explore and adapt their practices in the best ways possible to engage especially with youth and children in their communities. The outreach programmes help build capacity for optimum use of the new services available, thereby facilitating access to all levels of knowledge. Libraries therefore need to remain relevant and appealing to the community, reinventing themselves as matchmakers between young people and information.

It is also a reality that technology has transformed the world, bringing opportunities to poorer communities which were previously isolated; so libraries need to recognise their role in making computer skills, and technology resources accessible as a strategy to closing what has seemed to be an unbridgeable gap in South Africa.

Recommendations

Based on this experience, the following recommendations are offered:

1. The library should provide opportunities for all and should provide a safe neutral environment focused on education, with no restrictions of race, religion or political affiliation.
2. Although the library is the gateway of knowledge for all, restriction of internet access should be based on the security of children and youth, and not denial or censorship of information.
3. A primary aim of any library should be to draw children and youth into the library to discover the magic of knowledge; outreach programmes provide a highly successful strategy to make this happen.

4. Membership of the library should continue to be encouraged to access the conventional support of recreational and educational resources provided by the library.
 5. Libraries should strive to provide ease of access by assuring convenient open hours and innovative ways of operating.
 6. Libraries should encourage responsibility and commitment by the recipients to the outreach programmes.
 7. Libraries should market outreach programmes extensively and network in order to maintain the profile of the library both within the community and further afield.
 8. Provision of outreach programmes can be facilitated by library staff as well as through partnerships with groups with the same vision as the library and volunteers from the community and neighbourhood communities. By sharing the vision and goals of the library, they should respect that they are responsible and accountable to the library.
 9. The library should provide a platform for communication and dialogue so that a harmonious working relationship is maintained with partners and volunteers.
 10. The library's reputation for integrity and reliability needs to be built and maintained.
 11. Librarians should dream big and never give up.
 12. The library is a living entity and has to be worked on constantly to keep it alive.
- “You cannot underestimate the role of the library as a community adhesive. In the library, you get to feel that you are part of something bigger than yourself. It's life.”
- Maureen Petry, Director of the Warner Public Library in Tarrytown, N.Y

Acknowledgments

Professor Dr G.Hart, UWC South Africa
 B.Mumba
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