

# Empowering communities through lifelong learning

The South African learning situation is fraught with gross disproportionalities between the learning context of the poor and the well-off. The higher and basic education systems are still reeling from years of instability and disequilibrium inherited from the apartheid era. Too few people enter into the higher education system and even fewer are retained and eventually pass. Too many South African communities which find themselves in the death grip of poverty, illness, unemployment and a general sense of hopelessness.

“Formal learning can therefore no longer be the only means of learning,” says creator of Unisa’s Chance 2 Advance programme, Dr Genevieve James.

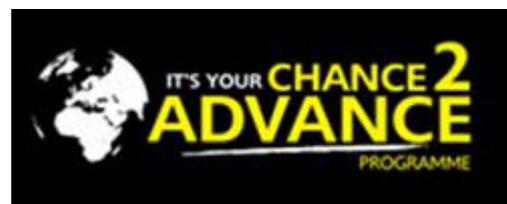
She says according to the white paper on post school education; there are millions of adults and youth who are unemployed, poorly educated and not studying. Many do not qualify to enter a university or TVET college, and for those who participated in adult literacy programmes and attended public adult learning centres, there are no additional learning opportunities.

“In addition, educational opportunities for adults and post school youth have been insufficient, and the quality has generally been poor. Public adult learning centres efforts are also inadequate and existing education institutions cannot meet the need. We are also aware that the expansion of the university and college systems will not be sufficient to meet all the needs.”

## How C2A works

It is against this backdrop that the C2A programme uses informal learning since it is fast becoming the most appropriate means to educate, uplift and enable communities to pursue life-long learning without the barriers of university entry requirements and costly fees. “Once communities re-discover the joys of learning, contribute to their learning development, and, co-determine their learning outcomes, then, there is a greater likelihood of completing basic education, securing entrance into the post-school education system, and greater civic participation,” says James.

Having designed its programme offerings in line with the millennium development goals (MDGs) and the national development plan (NDP), the C2A community outreach programme therefore resonates with the agenda of the white paper. And while contributing to the national development agenda, it also provides an opportunity for participating Unisa academics to amplify their community orientation through their contribution to the social justice mandate of the university.



## C2A provides training in:

- The world of work and careers
- Education
- Social Justice and Community Development
- Money and Debt
- Business and Entrepreneurship incl. Social Entrepreneurship
- Maths, Science and Technology
- Environment, Recycling and Permaculture
- Health and Wellness, community health care and emergency treatment
- Skills Training
- Creative Art
- Parenting And Childcare, Early Childhood Development
- Citizenship Education
- Community Organisation
- Making Effective Use Of ICTs for various purposes such as seeking employment, information or marketing local products
- Skills for self-employment in a range of areas

In light of the country's education challenges, the C2A programme has developed a replicable model of community education that seeks to:

- Bridge the knowledge gap experienced by disadvantaged and marginalised communities through greater access to informal and life-long learning.
- Address skills development by providing and encouraging relevant learning that can empower, enrich and reinvigorate people, business, environment and communities.
- Positively contribute towards student readiness to enter into higher education and pursue life-long learning with greater community consciousness.
- Nurture and train students who have the potential of providing transformative leadership within society.
- Encourage academic reflexive activism and knowledge dissemination.
- Create networks towards education and social revitalisation.
- Enable unemployed people to develop resilience and self-confidence to respond to challenging situations through capacity development and skills training.



Some of the participants at the Chance 2 Advance workshops in Phoenix, Durban



CPR procedures being explained in a practical demonstration during group work.

## Demonstrating societal impact

Since its inception, C2A has moved from a summer school concept to a mega community-learning programme. It has implemented 65 learning initiatives, containing over 500 workshops, impacting over 60 000 participants from about 100 communities across five provinces. In addition, the programme has been recognised as a best practise in knowledge mobilisation by the Global University Network for Innovation, and three of the C2A staff won Unisa Women of the Year awards.

The C2A programme has created, rich networks of community stakeholders, NGOs, activists, experts and practitioners, and a national community learning facilitator database. Further to this C2A has trained community learning ambassadors in KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng and the Western Cape as well as Unisa student learning ambassadors to support the national programme roll-out. James says the C2A operations model has also been successfully

replicated across the country in both rural and urban contexts and has the potential for replication across the continent.

Based on post-programme feedback, James says it is evident that the C2A programme has contributed to an increase in learning consciousness and the understanding of the role of learning in creating healthy and thriving communities.

“The programme has promoted knowledge and skills growth, contributed to social capital, encouraged community agency and created awareness of major social justice challenges. After attending workshops community members develop the courage to pursue employment or start their own businesses while others who gain a better understanding of social justice issues become social activists.

“C2A is fervently serving communities by creating opportunities for people to complete school, continue their education after school, learn skills to enter the labour market, re-skill after redundancy, and find alternative ways to earn sustainable livelihoods. It supports the country through nation building, the promotion of social cohesion and by supporting communities to participate in a sustained manner in the life of the economy.”



CPR procedures being explained in a practical demonstration during group work.



Pictured are some of the Chance 2 Advance community learning ambassadors.