

**VICE CHANCELLOR'S DISTINGUISHED AWARD
FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

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Since university spaces are still among the most privileged spaces in our society, the Education White Paper 3 of 1997 urges higher education institutions to fulfil both the moral and political imperative to contribute to social and epistemic justice and equality by forming partnerships with communities outside of the university. One of the core functions of higher education institutions plays a critical role in promoting this change. In fulfilling this imperative to promote and practice community engagement, universities move away from what has been their traditional role as disengaged ‘ivory tower’ institutions and become more socially responsive institutions, championing the struggle against race, gender and class oppression.

The winners of the 2022 Vice Chancellor’s Distinguished Award for Community Engagement have engaged with community leadership to establish a much-needed facility, the Joza ADC Counselling Hub in Makhanda East.

The work of the Hub was made possible through partnership building and collaboration between the Assumption Development Centre, Rhodes Psychology Clinic and the Rhodes Student Counselling Centre (SCC). The history of the Hub is also manifold and involves strong partnership building. Several years ago, Prof. Jacqui Akhurst founded a smaller counselling service for pupils at Nombulelo Secondary and Joza Youth Hub. During the COVID pandemic, Ms. Nqobile Msomi offered school leaders, teachers and pupils online counselling support sessions. Out of these various efforts and partnerships, the ADC Counselling Hub was built. Therefore, it is not surprising that an outstanding feature of this organic project was the team members’ in-depth understanding of partnership building, as a key component in the application of community engagement in higher education.

The application highlighted that “an intervention focused on addressing the needs as identified by the community partner, within their context. It challenges the psychologist to work in collaboration with their community partner to bring about interventions that meet these needs

and in so doing the psychologist respects and promotes the community partner's agency for change. One of the most practical, concretely visible ways in which this approach is applied, is by taking psychology to the community partner, in their physical setting. While most South African professional training programmes offer a community psychology component, few currently integrate this with a service-learning component. However, Service Learning is a very effective vehicle for teaching the principles and practice of community psychology to our student psychologists. It is also a revolutionary way of understanding how psychology could and should be practiced in South Africa”.

The Hub has transformed the Rhodes University space by building on the principles of community psychology and community-based service learning within the Masters in Counselling and Clinical Psychology programmes, as well as in the internship year completed by Counselling Psychologist Interns at the Rhodes Student Counselling Centre. In this way, it has responded timeously, effectively and collaboratively to fulfil a moral and political imperative by addressing social and epistemic injustices. The Hub provides counselling and psychological support beyond the university space, whilst developing key skills of university students and academics.

Over the past eighteen months, the Hub has implemented and succeeded in its aims of:

- 1) Providing mental health resources in the form of individual counselling and psychoeducational groups/workshops for people living in Joza and accessing services at the ADC, particularly Makhanda youth.
- 2) Facilitating a community-based service-learning training opportunity in community psychology for the Masters in Counselling and Clinical Psychology students at the Rhodes Psychology Clinic, and the Counselling Psychology Interns at the Rhodes Student Counselling Centre.

The project is commended for its specific understanding and implementation of community engagement and service learning to facilitate the teaching and learning of community psychology at Rhodes University through a collaborative partnership. Modules of community psychology in the Masters in Counselling and Clinical Psychology programmes provide students with a theoretical lens, framework and orientation towards psychological intervention that challenges many of the typical western hegemonic biomedical conceptions of how to bring

about health and wellbeing. With a specific focus on partnerships, this theoretical approach promotes understanding of mental health needs and priorities within a cultural context of social action/social liberation model that recognizes and emphasizes the impact of social and structural inequalities. More importantly, the university team members are immensely applauded for their imagination and courage as they work towards transforming curriculum to be contextually relevant in Community Psychology and building a sense of place with their community partner, the ADC.

The selection committee strongly believes that the inclusive, participatory partnership development process of the Hub, the trust and commitment that exists between the diverse partners and the existing impact of the Hub on the youth of Makhanda are significant indicators of a sustainable, purposeful community engagement programme.

The Hub team is comprised of a wide range of individuals not mentioned above and who were critical to its success. These include the ADC Centre Manager, Masonwabe Nduna and Madoda Mkalipi and Prof. Jacqui Akhurst who won the award in 2018.

Congratulations to the entire team!