



Second-year Public Relations student at Unisa and 'yellow brained', Mbali Lekker, walked away from the workshop understanding herself and others better.

Dr James, project manager of the C2A programme, with three Unisa contract workers Billy Ntlhane, Phineas Kadiaka and Samuel Kadiaka, who attended the course on *Explore the Universe – an introduction to astronomy* after hours and found it to be fascinating.

# PROMOTING A CULTURE OF LEARNING

Learning is something that everyone should be able to enjoy and it need not be restricted to formal programmes offered to formal students. This was the thinking behind the Chance 2 Advance (C2A) programme, an initiative that takes informal learning opportunities beyond the university boundaries and engages people from all walks of life, from different backgrounds and with diverse interests in learning.

The C2A programme was launched in January this year and ran for two weeks at various locations in Pretoria. Project leader of C2A, Dr Genevieve James, says the aim was to promote and encourage a culture of learning in the broader community, especially in marginalised and poor communities, by inviting them to become part of the learning environment. Community leaders, school leavers, the unemployed, NGOs, business people, the general public and Unisa staff and students all made use of the chance to follow courses they thought were relevant to them or that merely sparked their interest.

The hugely successful programme comprised a wide selection of customised and relevant learning initiatives grouped under the following themes: social justice, development and transformation, world of work, education and careers, science, maths and technology, personal growth and development, lifestyle and creative arts.

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Each theme offered a range of workshop choices and in total the programme offered 53 workshop titles. The presenters were highly skilled and widely experienced experts in their fields.

Affordability and accessibility are the hallmarks of C2A, as those who attended were not excluded on the grounds of high costs or strict entry requirements. Moreover, a significant number of bursaries ensured that people who could not afford the drastically reduced costs could still take advantage of quality programmes.

The courses and workshops not only included a wide selection of topics but were also presented in interesting and engaging ways. The city became the classroom for those who went on the *Justice trail* course, which included a ten-stop reflective journey through Pretoria, highlighting sites of justice and contemplating alternative just futures. Students had the opportunity to engage with change makers and re-imagine a better city. For gardening enthusiasts there was a workshop on *Creating an organic food garden*.

School leavers and the unemployed gained from workshops that prepared them for the world of work and assisted them in career planning, while many court interpreters and those fluent in more than one language joined the *Become a language interpreter* classes. Those with business aspirations found the training on business proposal writing useful. *Bringing the museum to school* was a special workshop which took museum artefacts (tied to aspects of the school curriculum) to schools that could not

otherwise afford museum visits. And, with the need for more mathematicians and scientists in the country, Unisa’s College of Science, Engineering and Technology conducted an innovative workshop titled *Maths gives you the edge!* where students considered the role of maths in everyday life. With courses in social networking and e-communication, special workshops in personal growth and development, health and wellness training, an introductory course in cinematography and one in astronomy, the choice was endless – there literally was something for everyone.

Students emerged from the workshops in high spirits and the positive feedback from students was overwhelming. “The programme’s true value came in the form of raising public awareness on the inherent capacity to learn, serve and transform, regardless of age or socioeconomic status,” says Dr James.

A noteworthy aspect of C2A was that people who have never been part of a learning environment before had the opportunity to learn, as in the case of three maintenance staff members contracted to Unisa who attended a course entitled *Explore the Universe – an introduction to astronomy*. Aware of their set working hours, Billy Ntlhane, Samuel Kadiaka and Phineas Kadiaka enquired about classes offered after 16:00 that they could be part of. Every day, after work, they hurried to join the week-long workshop of six one-hour sessions on astronomy. Beaming with satisfaction the men remarked how interesting it was to learn about the universe. Another group of young people participating in the Diepsloot Youth Projects also made good use of the programme in order to better

equip themselves for their challenging circumstances and attended workshops on *Community profiling and development project management*.

Pleased with the positive public response to the programme, Dr James shares her thoughts on empowering quality of learning: “Learning has a liberating potential, those who make the connection between learning and a better life can break free from chronic poverty and debilitating hopelessness in one generation.” She says the work has only just begun as there is a great need for South Africans to gain an understanding of themselves, their society and the world, improve their health and wellbeing, acquire skills to increase their probability of employment and become aware about social justice issues facing their community. “At Unisa we are suitably positioned to make a significant contribution to social change by walking with communities in their efforts to increase their agency.”

Acknowledging the major role played by Unisa’s Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Mandla Makhanya and Pro Vice-Chancellor, Professor Narend Bajinath, in the inception and guidance of the programme, Dr James believes that without the visionary leadership at Unisa this project would not have been possible. According to Professor Bajinath the C2A programme assisted in making the university accessible, as expertise was taken to the people and the university opened the academic world to society.

Dr James concluded by saying, “One of our deepest hopes for the programme was that we encourage a culture of learning and that we break down the walls between marginalised communities and learning initiatives. By breaking down these walls we can create greater access and destroy the myth that learning and education is for the elite. South Africa and all who migrate here must have the opportunity to learn, live and flourish, so let it be said that we are a learning nation”.