

AMPLIFYING RURAL VOICES THROUGH **FOUR DAYS OF FUN AND REFLECTION**



HEATHER ROBERTSON

Heather Robertson writes about the process that led to the germination of Rural Voice II.

Twenty nine of the thirty stories which form the backbone of this book were created at a four day workshop held at the beautiful nineteenth century Goedgedacht farm, situated on the slopes of the Kasteelberg . Goedgedacht translated from Dutch means a place of 'good thoughts' or 'good ideas', an apt description for our four day storytelling workshop. One of the LDA leaders, Christiaan Oerson from Cederberg Matzikama Aids Network was unable to attend the workshop, but he contributed his story after I provided him with a framework of questions to answer and editing support.

There are a number of storytelling techniques that I used which helped the workshop members develop the confidence to give voice to their own stories. Some of the techniques shine through the final stories, like a deep awareness of location and place. I was amazed by how dedicated the LDA members were to writing their Morning Pages¹, a very challenging exercise devised by author of *The Artist's Way*, Julia Cameron, to unblock and unlock creativity. Every morning each participant would quietly sit and write three pages of longhand stream of consciousness writing, never lifting a finger or getting distracted. This exercise is both therapeutic and cathartic.

A task which had participants both laughing and crying and giving each other group hugs was an exercise which required them to write a letter to their younger selves. This exercise unearths long buried emotions but also helps the writer reflect on the strides they have made in their lives. All of these creativity- unleashing exercises, group work and interviewing techniques were stepping stones to the final stage of the process which was to help participants find their own voice and tell their story about how and why they came to work at their local development agency.

Participants were encouraged to write in their mother tongues, but most opted to write their stories in English.

The results of the four day workshop can be read in the following chapters. You will discover like I did, that these LDA members are the true pioneers of social change and empowerment. Many of them have surmounted personal tragedies, injustice and economic obstacles to play pivotal roles in their often forgotten and ignored rural communities. They are the true unsung heroines and heroes of our country.

1. Cameron, J. (2019). Morning Pages | Julia Cameron Live. Retrieved October 21, 2019, from [juliacameronlive.com website: https://juliacameronlive.com/basic-tools/morning-pages/](https://juliacameronlive.com/basic-tools/morning-pages/)



Nomfiki Mgobo and Zingisa Gombo committee members from Tyinira Rural Development Agency speaking to paralegal officer Thando Hlangu.



ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Access to Justice in South Africa is guaranteed under section 34 of the Constitution, which provides that everyone has the right to have any dispute that can be resolved by the application of law, decided in a fair public hearing before a court or, where appropriate, another independent and impartial tribunal or forum. Everyone is also equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law. However, most South Africans cannot afford legal representation and thus in effect do not have access to justice. Community advice offices have a history of providing legal advice and rights based information, informing people on where and how to access services offered by government departments and making sure people access those services.

SCAT has been supporting paralegals at local development agencies (LDAs) since its inception as a small grantmaker. SCAT is committed to ensuring that community-based paralegals have a sustainable financial future for the valuable service they provide to people who are unable to afford legal assistance, and do not have an understanding of the legislation that protects their rights, nor ways to action these rights. We see our role as continuing to find independent sources of funding for the sector, building the organisations we support as accountable transparent LDAs in their communities and encouraging local philanthropy to sustain these organisations and other community initiatives.