

Capacity Building of a Community-Based Organisation in Maitland Garden Village



An Interactive Qualifying Project to be submitted to the faculty of Worcester Polytechnic Institute in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor Science.

Abstract

Maitland Garden Village (MGV) is home to a small community which faces social challenges including idle youth and unemployment, factors contributing to major problems such as substance abuse and teenage pregnancy. The purpose of this project was to work with the MGV community-based organisation, the Green Light Project (GLP), to create a vision and plan for a community Help Centre that would address these problems. We sought to accomplish this by establishing a good working relationship with members of the Green Light Project, utilising the current assets of the organisation and the MGV community, and making new relationships with various stakeholders within and outside the community. With these internal and external partners we were able to analyse possible venues for the prospective Help Centre facility, construct an extensive resource book on community-based organisation (CBO) sustainability, secure a temporary venue for existing GLP programmes, develop a youth music programme connecting the GLP with a city after-school initiative, and set up a system that gives GLP members the opportunity to develop proposals for future projects.

For our full project report visit our webpage: <http://wp.wpi.edu/capetown/homepage/projects/p2012/mgv/>

For more information about the Cape Town Project Centre visit: <http://wp.wpi.edu/capetown/>

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Figure 1: Maitland Garden Village

Problem Statement

Although poor living conditions and limited opportunities are especially prevalent in South African informal settlements, these challenges are also encountered in formal settlements. One such formal settlement is Maitland Garden Village, a small urban coloured community located on the outskirts of Pinelands, a suburb of Cape Town. Founded in 1922, Maitland Garden Village is home to about 1,600 residents, including backyard tenants, those who illegally reside in shacks in the backyards of residents (Galant).

MGV is in several ways a close-knit community. Many of its residents were born and have grown up in the village, and this familiarity provides a strong basis for community action. Despite these strengths, MGV, similar to disadvantaged communities elsewhere, struggles with a high unemployment rate, geographic and social isolation, drug and alcohol abuse, and teenage pregnancy.

Last year in 2011, a WPI project team worked in MGV for the first time to address these problems and to strengthen the community by using the approach of

asset-based community development. By utilising the strengths of the MGV community, the group teamed up with community members and created the Green Light Project, a grassroots community-based organisation, whose mission is to give greater purpose to the lives of all residents through the introduction and development of programmes to improve skill levels (especially among the unemployed youth), to address idleness and the resulting social problems, and to create greater self-respect, social cohesion and community responsibility. The GLP

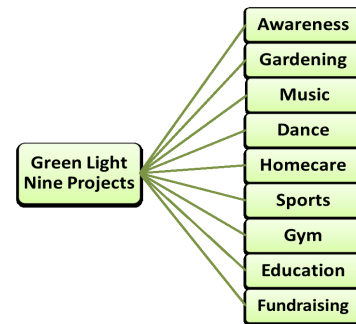


Figure 2: Green Light nine Projects

looks to advance this mission through its nine projects (figure 2).

To build upon the success of its first year, the Green Light Project is at a stage

where it needs to make choices about programme direction, management, fundraising, motivating volunteers, and working with other organisations in Maitland Garden Village. Having regularly run programmes throughout the week, including a walking club, gardening club, awareness workshops, and fitness programmes, the GLP feels the greatest asset they are lacking at present is a permanent venue of their own. With this in mind, the GLP is looking to expand upon its programmes and to begin the search for a venue with the vision of turning it into a community Help Centre.

Project Goal

The goal of our project was to strengthen the skills and competencies of the MGV Green Light Project and help the organisation develop a more extensive network of external relationships with city agencies, potential funders, and other community organisations. To achieve this goal, we sought to help the Green Light Project consider the feasibility of establishing a Help Centre to serve as a place where people could go to participate in enriching programs and to obtain information and support for dealing with personal problems.

Project Partners

Our WPI student team consists of Andrea DiGioia, Edmund Eduah, Juliana Fekete, and Andrew Lamb and was advised by Professors Scott Justo and Bob Hersh. On site, we were guided in our work by our MGV sponsors Ronell Trout and Sheila Galant while working in conjunction with Green Light Project leaders and par-

ticipants. We were aided in our work by the WPI Cape Town Project Centre liaison Basil Tommy and City of Cape Town Department of Social Development assistant professional officer Jennifer Stacey. We also gained valuable insight from MGV community members and organisations.

Shared Action Learning: An Interactive Approach



Figure 3: Green Light Project Leaders

This year at the Cape Town Project Centre, we have newly implemented a strategic approach for social interaction called Shared Action Learning. Shared Action Learning (SAL) is an approach that puts the interests of the community at the center of the project. The approach entails mutual learning, action, and reflection among all individuals and groups involved in the effort. Though helping to guide the project, SAL does not guarantee it will run smoothly or be successful in achieving its initial goals. Working in low income communities, CBO leaders

are often overstretched; and it can be difficult to generate volunteer commitment. As a result it was important that throughout our time in MGV we were patient and flexible as we tried to find direction for our project and opportunities to work closely with community members. This meant at times letting go of what we had hoped to accomplish and instead focusing on what could be accomplished with the resources available.

Project Outcomes



Figure 4: Edmund working with sponsors

We were able to accomplish the following:

1. Made positive connections with Green Light Project members and learned about the current status of the organisation.
2. Analysed the pros and cons of possible venues for an MGV Help Centre.
3. Helped the GLP make contact and explain its plans to other community and faith-based organisations in MGV.

4. Secured a time slot for the GLP at the existing Community Centre to serve as a venue for short-term initiatives through a youth singing and dancing programme.
5. Developed a resource book for GLP future initiatives.
6. Put in place a programme to strengthen the GLP members' proposal writing skills which can lead to more effective programme development

Connecting with Maitland Garden Village Residents

Entering MGV, our group had the understanding that we needed to establish a positive, open, and trusting relationship with our sponsors Ronell and Shelia so that we could successfully support them and their visions for future Green Light Project initiatives. As a result, our first couple of weeks focused on making connections with the women who we found to be friendly, passionate, and dedicated to their organisation. Through guided tours of MGV, our attendance at MGV's 90th annual Village Day, a community-wide celebration of the village, and a meeting with the GLP leaders, we were introduced to several community members who expressed the same welcoming spirit. These three encounters were successful in helping us make connections with the community and understand the

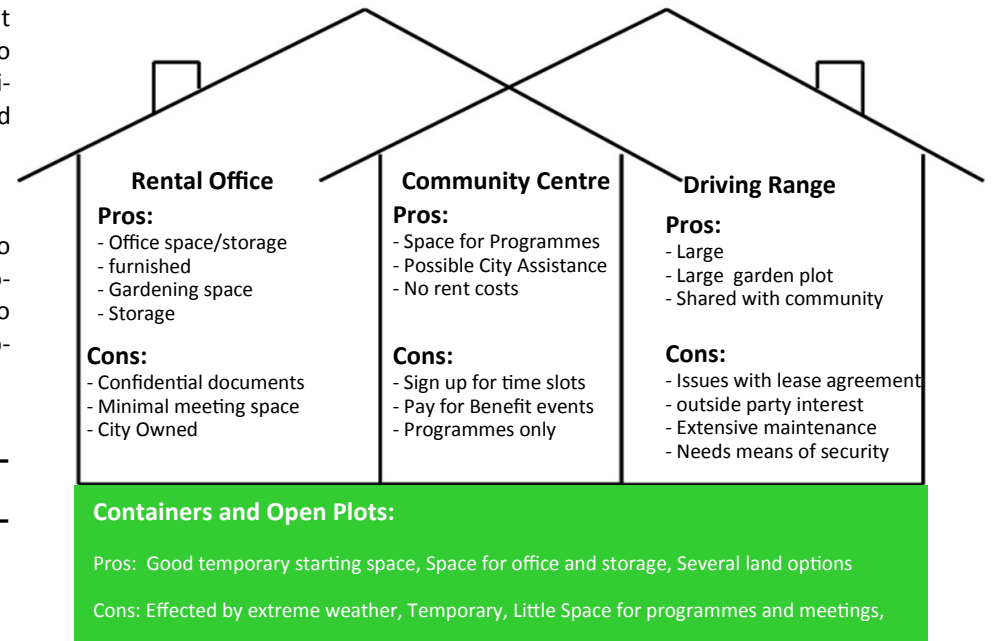


Figure 5: Venue Analysis

current status of the GLP by:

- Helping us to establish open communication lines with our sponsors
- Allowing us to witness the many talents of the local people
- Giving us a sense of the drive and motivation of MGV's community leaders
- Informing us that the Green Light Project was in the process of becoming an NGO

While we gathered the information above, we learned from the GLP leaders that there was a want and need for a Help Centre. We learned that GLP leaders dedicated a considerable part of their time each day to volunteer services for MGV community members such as re-

sponding to calls to intervene in family matters, helping the elderly find their way to the hospital, and sending children on the streets to school.

As a result of our interaction we focused on two project directions:

- Identifying and analysing the availability status of potential venues
- Gaining a deeper understanding of the GLP and considering ways to enhance its current programmes

Analysing Possible Venues for a Maitland Garden Village Help Centre

Through interviews and meetings with Ronell and Sheila, Green Light Project members, and other key MGV community members, we gathered perspectives as to why there should be a Help Centre in MGV and what programmes should be provided by the facility. A general view among community members was that the main purpose of the Help Centre should be to get children off the streets by providing opportunities for fun activities and skills development on a regular basis. Some key long-term goals for the Help Centre that came from these encounters include:

- Implementing a mobile clinic to care for sick and injured community members

- Obtaining sports equipment and creating more opportunities to play a variety of sports
- Obtaining instruments and form a youth band within the community
- Organising education classes for adults, enrichment programmes for youth, and special programmes for those who are mentally disabled
- Recruiting trained counselors to provide training programmes including those for creating a CV, finding a job, and starting up a business
- Growing a community vegetable garden to provide food for a feeding scheme and to sell produce to encourage social entrepreneurship and business creation
- Having the centre serve as a destination for visitors and tourists to come and learn about the unique heritage and community dynamic of MGV

An important focus of our project was to assess the suitability of different venues to accommodate these ideas. The GLP



Figure 7: Stakeholders at community meeting

leaders believed a Help Centre was the key piece in expanding their organisation. We learned that they were currently operating out of a few different venues including members' homes, the Methodist Church hall, and the MGV Community Centre. During our meeting with the GLP leaders we identified three additional venues that they felt could be feasible. A description of each venue and its pros and cons can be seen in (fig). With the identification of these possible venues, we began putting together a proposal with the intentions of sending it to the city. In developing our proposal and through meetings with our sponsors, advisors, and Jennifer Stacey from the City of Cape Town's Department of Social Development, we began to see the Help Centre not simply as a GLP initiative but one that could serve the broader MGV community, including other groups working on social development. To learn more about the views of other MGV community groups on the question of a Help Centre, we helped organise two key meetings between GLP members and other community organisations such as the Residents Association, Soccer Club, Friends of Daniel Kingdom Church, St.

Athanasuis Church, and the Methodist Church.

Connecting with other Community and Faith-Based Organisations in Maitland Garden Village

During the process of searching for a venue and compiling our proposal, we found it necessary to not only work closely with members of the Green Light



Figure 6: Potential Venues (clockwise from top left: Driving Range Building, Container, Rental Office, Community Centre)

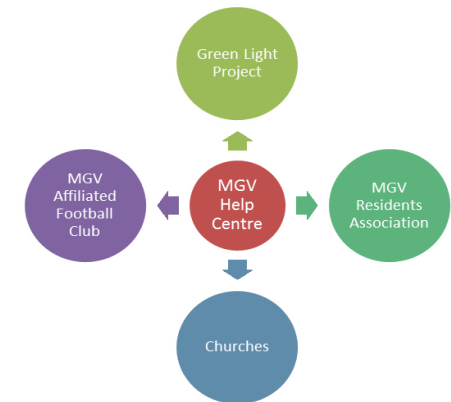


Figure 8: Potential help centre partners

Project but also to identify and collaborate with members of other MGCV community organisations. Two community meetings were held on the evenings of November 8th and November 15th between the Green Light Project and representatives from other MGCV organisations. Entering the meetings, it was our hope that we would leave having:

- Identified that members of the community beyond the GLP felt there was a need for a Help Centre
- Created a detailed schedule of the activities that would be held at the Help Centre and the organisations that would oversee them
- Considered how the Help Centre could be managed

There was unanimity among the various stakeholders of the need for a community Help Centre and an interest in better coordinating activities across groups. There were disagreements, however, about what organisation should spearhead the effort to set up and manage a Help Centre. The disagreements revolved around notions of legitimacy, seniority, and which organisations it was felt best



Figure 9: Children using computers during music program

represented the broad interest of MGCV. It was very interesting to witness these meetings and learn about the deeper, more complex connections among members of the community at large we were unaware existed. Though it has yet to be resolved which group could manage the Help Centre, the meetings at least brought these disagreements into the open and paved the way for more substantive discussions in the coming months.

Creating a Youth Dancing and Singing Programme

With the conclusion of the two community meetings and further investigation into the activities of the GLP, we determined that at this point the Help Centre idea was a long-term initiative for the organisation. In addition to our work on the Help Centre, we wanted to implement something on the ground during the time we were in MGCV. As a result we shifted our focus to what we could do for the Green Light Project at present and how our initiative could serve as an inspiration for future activities and model programmes at the Help Centre. This change of focus was tied to our own learning as a team. Working with community stakeholders, we made the following key observations:

- The Community Centre in MGCV provides enough access time for current GLP programmes
- The GLP needs to increase the quantity of ongoing programmes for the need of a venue to be justified



Figure 10: The extreme dancers during GLP and WPI concert

- The GLP needs to find better ways to reach more community members
- The GLP is lacking in the development of organisational skills

Taking note of each observation, together with the Green Light Project, we shifted our focus to starting up an activity at present that they could continue after we returned to WPI. Building upon the immense musical and dance talent we witnessed among the youth at Village Day, we started a youth music programme that met in the Community Centre for two hours, three days a week. This programme was linked to a city after-school initiative where a city staff member was expected to design and run activities for children. The programme was successful in that it:

- Generated enthusiasm from both the city staff at the Community Cen-

tre and the MGCV youth

- Serves as a model for how the GLP could develop its programmes by leveraging municipal resources (staffing, venue)
- Strengthened the GLP link to the city and its ongoing municipal funded initiatives targeted at after school programming

On the evening of December 13th, we held a concert at the Community Centre where the programme participants performed for a group of community members. Due to the positive reaction of the very big audience, of which the large majority were children, we anticipate that participation and support of the programme will continue to grow after we leave.

Although we were successful in initiating a programme the MGCV youth positively

responded to, we realise that if we had more time in MGV we could have further developed the project in several ways. For instance, we might have been able to create a small group of committed community leaders, or even collaborate with the city workers at the Community Centre to help municipal staff develop the initiative. In addition, we could have spent more time publicising and getting more support for the programme by contacting local schoolteachers and other MGV organisations such as the Residents Association. To advance the programme in the future, we hope that the GLP leaders will take it upon themselves to collaborate with the city staff as well as other community groups and potential programme leaders so that it can gain support, be run efficiently, and remain sustainable.

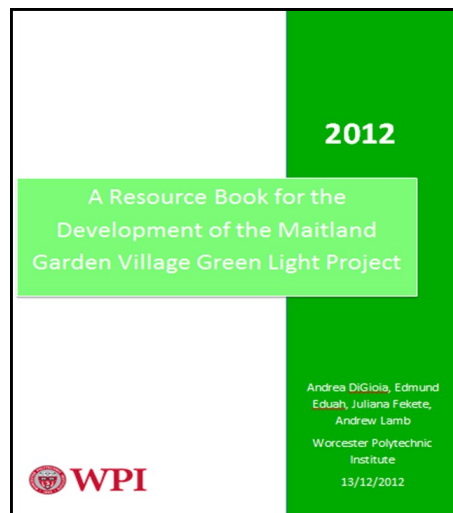


Figure 11: Resource Book cover page

Developing a Resource Book for the Green Light Project

Having spent weeks going through the process of closely analysing each possible venue for the proposal, we decided to make use of the work we had and use it to help the GLP develop their organisational capacity. We did so by taking aspects of our proposal and compiling the information into a resource book incorporating the physical pros and cons, opportunities for use, operational problems, and status regarding each venue. The book also contains instructions on writing a proposal or grant application and resources the GLP can use to do so. The resource book focuses on the following key features:

- Short and long-term goals for programme development
- Help Centre venue analysis and management plan
- Financial management strategies
- Future programme development ideas and strategies

The resource book, we hope, will enable GLP leaders and others to think through organisational priorities, manage current programmes, and seek external funding.

Strengthening Proposal Writing Skills

The Cape Town Project Centre has made a commitment to provide 10,000 rand (approximately 1,150 US dollars) to fund GLP programmes that advance the development of the organisation and MGV

community more broadly. To access the funding, the GLP will submit written proposals to the CTPC to explain how the funding will advance programme activities and strengthen the organisation. The proposals will include a narrative of



Figure 12: Green Light Project Logo

the project, project goals, intended impacts, and budgets. The GLP will be expected to provide project updates to encourage its relationship with WPI. Through this effort, the Green Light Project will gain practice in writing proposals, and more importantly, discuss strategic directions for the future.

Moving Forward

As the Green Light Project waits to hear back from the provincial government regarding approval for a NGO registration number, we are hopeful that the organisation will continue to provide community development programmes. We hope that the members will use our resource book to organise and develop their initiatives and when the time is appropriate, pick out relevant information to compile proposals for WPI funding and eventually a Help Centre venue.

The Green Light Project will have additional opportunities once it becomes a registered NGO. The group will be able to apply for much needed funding from the municipality and from private sources. The organisation could acquire equipment and supplies for further programme development, such as community gardening, youth sports and education, and computer literacy, while committed Green Light Project volunteers could eventually obtain stipends. In the event that a MGV Help Centre is established as a registered NGO, the Green Light Project could act as an umbrella organisation and invite other MGV community members to apply for external funding for projects of mutual interest.

Reflections and Recommendations

While being a fun and exciting experience, working in MGV with the Green Light Project opened up our eyes to the many struggles and obstacles grassroots community-based organisations face in any disadvantaged community on a daily basis. With limited guidance, resources, and funding, mobilising a voluntary initiative and building the capacity of these organisations is a long and complicated process that takes a lot of dedication and patience, which our sponsors have shown. At times, however, we were unclear about the direction of our project and felt frustrated that we seemed to gain little traction with others involved in the GLP and with other groups in MGV.

In witnessing the social dynamics of the community, we wish we had worked harder to branch out and connect with more community members, in particular by forming deeper relationships with members of the Green Light Project, aside from the executive council. This would have allowed us to gain a more holistic perspective of how the GLP was fairing. We found this difficult due to the fact that many members worked during the day when we were present in MGV and did not attend the GLP meetings at night. We tried to make connections with stakeholders of other organisations but ran into similar constraints. Had we observed this earlier, we would have been more persistent in scheduling face to face interviews when we were in MGV and scheduling telephone interviews with those who worked during the day.

Assuming that the close-knit nature of the community would result in smoothly run meetings was another shortcoming of ours. In doing so, we were unable to anticipate the differences in perspectives between the GLP and other community organisations. It would have been very useful to have had individual meetings with the other organisations, where we could have introduced and explained our project to them prior to the first community meeting. This may have helped us to better understand their interests and intentions with the centre.

Working on this project allowed us to realise that sometimes the intangible achievements are the most important. Just as the stability of a house depends on the strength of its foundation, the same holds true for grassroots non-profit

organisations. Building a solid, strong foundation for the long-term growth and sustainability of an organisation is critical, and we believe that the work we have done over the seven weeks in MGV contributed greatly to that foundation.



Acknowledgements

- **Ronell Trout:** Sponsor
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- **Scott Jiusto and Bob Hersh:** Advisors
- **Jennifer Stacey:** City of Cape Town Department of Social Development



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