

RUO EMOH

FROM HOUSING STRUGGLES TO HOPE IN NEW HOMES

OUR HOME

OUR STORY





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RESEARCH PROCESS

The research project was designed and coordinated by Noah Schermbrucker of PEP, Mariel Zimmermann and Yolande Hendler of CORC, SA SDI Alliance and Sophie Oldfield from African Centre for Cities at the University of Cape Town and Urban Studies at the University of Basel. The project drew together leaders and residents in Ruo Emoh with students studying at the University of Cape Town (Masters of Southern Urbanism) and at the University of Basel (Masters in Critical Urbanisms).

The project work involved interviews with 19 Ruo Emoh families documenting their stories prior to moving into formal housing in Ruo Emoh in December 2017. The interviews focused on three themes: household and housing histories, perspectives on the process of accessing houses in Ruo Emoh, and expectations and hopes for living in Ruo Emoh. The research was undertaken in two sessions in Ruo Emoh on March 7 and March 17 with a final braai in Ruo Emoh on April 14 where the stories developed from the narratives were checked by families interviewed.

SOCIAL FACILITATION Melanie Johnson

OLD RUO EMOH PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE

Fazline Abrahams, Naeem Adrianse, Moerieda Bernard, Fagwa Jacobs, Archie Olkers

NEW RUO EMOH PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE

Asheka Ely, Adnaan Hendricks, Adeep Johannes, Terence Johnson, Fazlin Samsodien

RESEARCH TEAM

Ruo Emoh: Adnaan Hendricks, Melanie Johnson, Adeeb Johannes and all the residents who were interviewed and assisted
Ruo Emoh Catering: Tasneem Hendricks
Peoples Environmental Planning: Noah Schermbrucker and Shawn Cuff
South African SDI Alliance: Melanie Johnson (FEDUP/ISN), Na-eema Schwartz (ISN), Mariel Zimmermann (CORC), Yolande Hendler (CORC)
University of Cape Town, African Centre for Cities: Sophie Oldfield, Ademola Omoegun

STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

University of Cape Town: Geetika Anand, Majaha Dlamini, Kaylin Harrison, Abdullahi Ali Hassan, Goabamang Lethugile, Oliver Manjengwa, Joseph Ngben, Israel Ogundare, Sayak Roy, Rosca Warries;
University of Basel: Adesola Adelowo, James Clacherty, Janine Eberle, Evan Escamilla, Lea Nienhoff, Florence Siegenthaler, Sebastian Steiner, Basil Studer.

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INTRODUCTION

Living in a backyard, an overcrowded home, or making do in an informal settlement is a reality for many families in South Africa. Unstable and insufficient housing leaves everyday life a challenge. Access to essential basic services such as water and sanitation and electricity is difficult. Alternative, secure forms of housing are costly and insecure. Families often face the threat of evictions, finding themselves on the street or looking for another place to stay. Government efforts at improving living standards and attempts to provide basic services have fallen short. Living in such vulnerable situations marks the struggle of many families for a life of dignity. In these hard contexts, families and communities across South Africa have to organise to access and build housing, mobilising to improve living conditions.

This booklet shares the story of Ruoh Emoh (Our Home, spelt backwards) a housing project through which 49 families have moved into homes on a well-located piece of infill land in Colorado Park in Mitchells Plain, Cape Town. Community organising and planning for Ruoh Emoh started in 1997 and continued over twenty years. Administrative and political regulations and obstacles, as well as neighbouring rate-payers' interventions repeatedly delayed the project. Nevertheless, the commu-

nity's persistence paid off. The housing project was completed and Ruoh Emoh's 49 families moved into their new homes on December 22nd, 2017.

This booklet documents the project's long history. It shares the housing histories and experiences of nineteen of the forty-nine families who self organised to change their living conditions and to become homeowners in Ruoh Emoh. It narrates their stories and experiences, the hardships of their housing struggles, the challenges of organising to access secure housing, and the emotions and experiences of moving into new homes in this development. These stories are the heart of this booklet, narrating the hardships of living without decent and secure housing and the hopes that accompany the move to home ownership in Ruoh Emoh.

On the one hand, this booklet is a reminder of the challenges and achievements of a struggle spanning more than 20-years. On the other hand, in this project and in the residents' stories are lessons that highlight persistence and dedication, the commitment developed in the collaboration required to bring the Ruoh Emoh housing project to fruition.

In particular, PEP and uTshani Fund (part of the South African SDI Alliance¹) as well as the Federation of the Urban and Rural Poor (formerly known as

the South African Homeless People's Federation) have walked alongside Ruoh Emoh community since they first started organising in 1997.

This research project on Ruoh Emoh has brought together residents with masters-level urban studies students in the Masters of Southern Urbanism based at the African Centre for Cities at the University of Cape Town and the Masters of Critical Urbanisms based at the University of Cape Town and at the University of Basel.

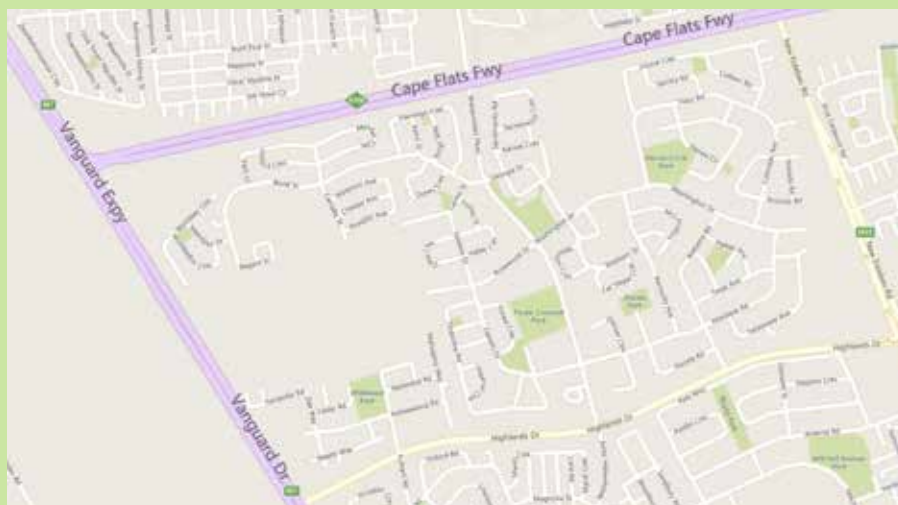
A product of the research project this booklet records Ruoh Emoh's history. The Ruoh Emoh story sheds light on broader struggles in South African cities for shelter and homemaking. In producing this booklet we hope that the (hi)stories and lessons recorded here can be an inspiration and a tool for other communities, who find themselves in similarly harsh living conditions and housing struggles. Through sharing the challenges and strategic breakthroughs, the everyday experiences of struggle and hope, Ruoh Emoh's stories might encourage and assist other communities to seek alternatives to or identify upgrading opportunities in backyards, informal settlements, and overcrowded housing.

At the heart of the booklet are stories of what is possible when a group of

people are willing and able to organise, to build strategic alliances and to negotiate pragmatically over the long term. At the heart of the booklet are family hopes and visions for the future as they continue to build their lives as homeowners in Ruoh Emoh.

This booklet celebrates Ruoh Emoh families who know best the realities of housing struggle and the hopes of homeownership.

¹ The South African SDI Alliance supports urban poor communities to find solutions to homelessness, landlessness and poverty. Through building organised communities and collaborative partnerships urban poor communities seek to make cities more inclusive and pro-poor. The Alliance consists of two community-based partners - the Federation of the Urban and Rural Poor (FEDUP) and the Informal Settlement Network (ISN) - and two support NGOs - the Community Organisation Resource Centre (CORA) and uTshani Fund. Through FEDUP the Alliance is affiliated to Shack Dwellers International (SDI). See sasdialliance.org.za for more.



LIST OF ACRONYMS

CORC

CRA

FEDUP

ISN

NGO

PEP

PHP

RDP

SANCO

SA SDI Alliance

SPELUM

Community Organisation Resource Centre

Colorado Ratepayers Association

Federation of the Urban Poor

Informal Settlement Network

Non-governmental Organisation

People's Environmental Planning

People's Housing Programme

Reconstruction and Development Programme

South African National Civics Organisation

South African Shack Dwellers International Alliance

Spatial Planning, Environment and Land Use Management

THE PROJECT

Work to bring the Ruo Emoh housing project to completion spanned over two decades. Its success was celebrated on December 22nd, 2017, when 49 families moved into new homes, built on a well-located piece of infill land on the corner of Weltevreden Parkway & Caesars Drive in Colorado Park, Mitchells Plain. The houses are located adjacent to public transport and nearby schools, a community hall, shops and a hospital. The process to bring the project to completion was, however, complex and contested, marked by the community's persistent battle with government's administrative and political hurdles, and contestation from the neighbouring ratepayer groups.

First steps towards Ruo Emoh

To trace the struggle and success of Ruo Emoh we need to look back to 1997, when Janap Oosthuizen and Lee-Ann Fredericks were part of creating a savings scheme. Over time, backyarders and tenants strained by poor living conditions in Manenberg and Mitchells Plain joined the savings scheme. Dissatisfied by waiting for government subsidised housing, the collective initiated the Ruo Emoh Housing Savings Scheme. The savings scheme was established under the South African Homeless People's Federation, which later became known

as the Federation of the Urban and Rural Poor (FEDUP). The Federation is a women's-led, member-based social movement that organises through savings collectives and practices associated with Shack Dwellers International (SDI).

In order to initiate a savings scheme under the Federation, a group needs to identify collectors and treasurers. Collectors mobilise savers through collecting and recording savings, ideally on a daily basis. This enables savers to build trust, share personal challenges with each other and identify collective priorities. Treasurers are responsible for managing deposits and withdrawals in a joint bank account and overseeing the general finances of the group. To become a member of the Federation a saver is asked to contribute a once off sum of R750 to the Federation's National Urban Poor Fund (UPF). Over the years the Federation has used these regional and nation-wide contributions (whether to the UPF or other collective Federation funds) to negotiate with the state and other actors around leveraging additional resources for development priorities.

Within a group, saving is primarily about building trust, solidarity and strong organising capacity. Through coming together in the Ruo Emoh savings group, individuals faced with

similar hardships began building solidarity. In addition to daily savings, Ruo Emoh group members saved towards land, infrastructure and housing deposits. Saving together and building solidarity was not a smooth or uncontested process as, over the many years that followed, there was a high flux of members in the Ruo Emoh group. Nevertheless, the Ruo Emoh savings group, as part of the broader Federation, identified strategies to access land and later housing through the People's Housing Process (PHP), a programme initiated by the then national Department of Housing.

The Ruo Emoh group was convinced that they could build more appropriate houses than the contractor and government led Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) approach and in June 1999 demonstrated what a people's housing approach could entail. In only 3 days, they built an illegal, formal "show house" on vacant land in Mitchells Plain. Neighbouring residents (who were skeptical of the Ruo Emoh group) approached the Federation about the show house and saw that it offered a real, and perhaps more beneficial, alternative to contractor supplied housing. The next day, however, a bulldozer demolished the show house in 3 hours. What remained, was a foot in the door:

the show house resulted in negotiations for open land in the immediate vicinity.

“We built the house as a practical statement. Of course we knew that it was illegal. We knew that we would have to suffer the consequences.... We did not try to interrupt negotiations – at every time we were ready to talk. All we wanted... was to ask them to come and look at the house... to see that the people’s process is better.”

Janap Oosthuizen²

In 1999 the Ruo Emoh group, supported by the South African Homeless People’s Federation and uTshani Fund purchased a piece of undeveloped land in Colorado Park. At approximately 10,000m² in size, the purchase of the plot enabled the community to begin designing, planning, coordinating and managing their own housing development. This people-led approach resulted in a nuanced and locally appropriate plan. Once the land was bought, applications for rezoning and subdivision were submitted to the city council and to the provincial government of the Western Cape. This initiated a slow engagement with statutes

and regulations necessary to obtain subdivision clearance so that the land could be used for residential purposes.

Neighbourhood planning, and organising obstacles

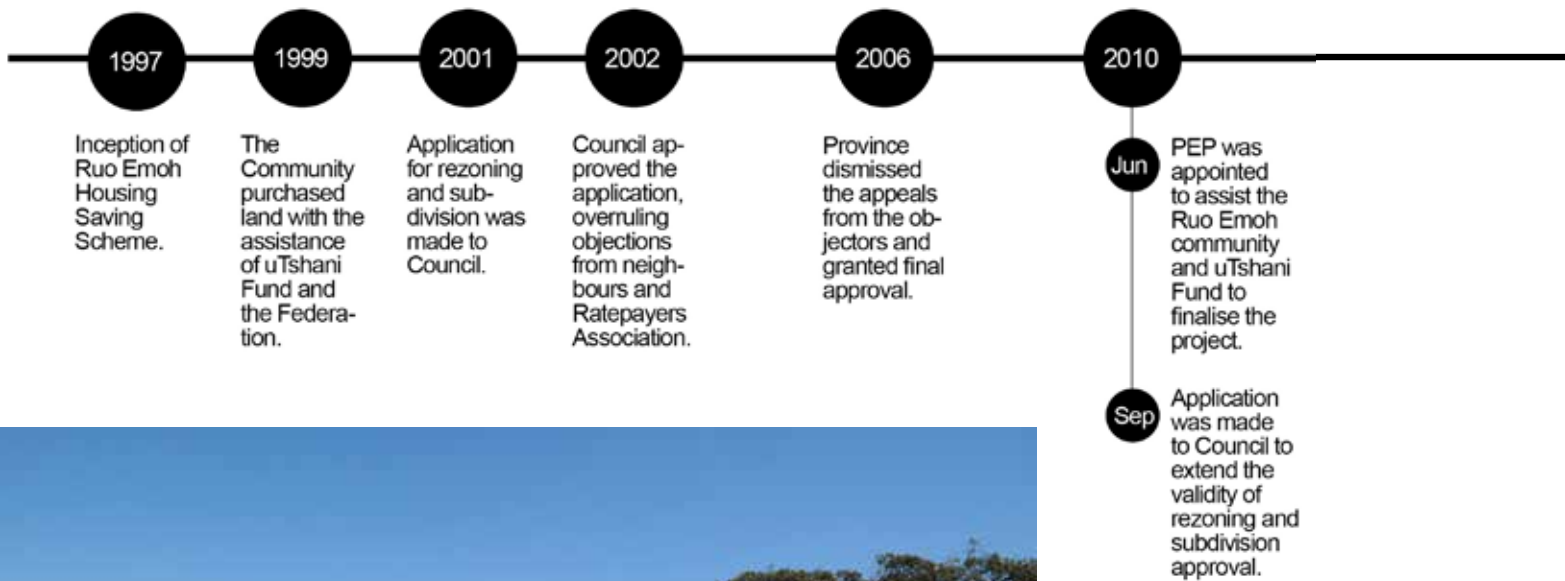
Once the Ruo Emoh savings group had applied for subdivision clearance, approval from the surrounding middle-class neighbourhood, Colorado Park, was required. At this stage, however, the Colorado Ratepayers Association (CRA) and other neighbours raised numerous objections. The objections were based on the assumption that the Ruo Emoh development would lower property values and strain basic service infrastructure for water, electricity and sewage. There was also a perception that linked backyard dwellers with criminal activity and the introduction of drugs and other vices into the area. Ironically, many who objected had erected informal structures in their own back yards to accommodate children and relatives. Finally, after five years of back and forth, the subdivision was approved on 26 June 2006. From this date, the rezoning and sub-division clearance was valid for five years. Within this time frame, the Ruo Emoh group needed to meet certain legal requirements.

From 2006 to 2010 the project was put on hold due to ongoing objections

by neighbours and ratepayers. This delay had serious ramifications. Towards the end of 2010 the community and support organisations panicked with the realisation that the rezoning and subdivision clearance would lapse in mid 2011.

Through negotiations the city committed to an in-principle agreement that assured the continuation of the project even after the official lapse of the rezoning and sub-division clearance.

After 12 years of multiple setbacks, groundwork infrastructure was installed on the Ruo Emoh site on 8 June 2011. The community’s fresh hope and drive for the project was however, short lived. Shortly after the contractor initiated the groundwork infrastructure installation, ratepayers supported by the local councilor attempted to disrupt construction. In some cases, physical conflict was narrowly avoided as ratepayers stood in front of bulldozers to stop the groundwork. Under political pressure the city reneged on the in-principle agreement and in July 2011 uTshani Fund (as the developer) received a “cease works order” from the city. The project was stopped at significant cost (and penalties) to the developer with half the infrastructure left incomplete in the ground. Needless to say, the patience, fortitude and planning of an organised community, who wanted to build their families a safe home, was



TOP: The Ruo Emoh plot with infrastructure such as road, sidewalks and power boxes already installed. RIGHT: Community members discuss plans for the houses.



2011

Jan

Subsidy application (N6) submitted to CoCT.

Feb

CoCT approved the application. Subsidy application was submitted to the Province.

Mar

Objections were again received.

May

Province approved the project under developer driven subsidy scheme for 50 beneficiaries.

Jun

Work for the installation of infrastructure started on site.

26th Jun: Lapse of the rezoning and subdivision approval.

July

'Cease works' letter from Council leading to suspension of all works

2012

After numerous meetings, final approvals given from SPELLUM – the project could go ahead.

2015

Negotiations with key stakeholder to restart project. Application to Province for increased subsidy quantum. Project approval on 31st Dec by Province.

2016

Feb

Civils 2000 appointed to complete civil infrastructure.

Jun

Civil work completed.

Oct

Both civil and electrical work completed.

Dec

First transfer process and subdivision enacted.

2017

May

Final transfers to residents concluded.

Oct

Housing construction started.

22nd Dec 2017

Construction concluded, title deeds transferred and residents take occupation.



TOP: Work underway for the installation of infrastructure at Ruohome.
BOTTOM: Houses under construction.

left shattered. Despite repeated attempts to engage amicably and to explain the details of the development, the ratepayers and the local councilor would not agree to the project's continuation.

As a result of these objections, and to continue the project, the developer and Ruo Emoh community reluctantly ceded to a lower density for the project. Whereas the land was originally slated for 100 two-storey houses, the project was reduced to 49 single-storey houses. This compromise meant that fewer housing beneficiaries would receive a house as part of the project, and those who did would need to pay more. It also meant that at a time when there was a cry for medium to high-density housing across South Africa (which would incorporate cross-subsidisation and innovate building methods when using state subsidies) an opportunity was lost to create a people-centred project and process.

Restarting and regaining momentum

FEDUP and uTshani Fund, assisted by Peoples Environmental Planning (PEP), worked tirelessly to find funding, re-unite the community and overcome the institutional and administrative hurdles needed to restart Ruo Emoh.

Despite the financial and emotional setback, the community decided to continue with an application to extend subdivision for a further 5 years. After 18 months and numerous meetings with the sub-council, the city's Spatial Planning,

Environment and Land Use Management Committee approved the extension of subdivision in November 2012.

Subsequent to the extension of subdivision (which was valid for a period of 5 years) the project was once again stalled. Put simply the finances no longer made sense – given the amount of available state subsidies and the amount already lost due to the incomplete infrastructure installation and associated penalties. A series of drawn-out internal negotiations between the Ruo Emoh residents and support NGOs followed which resulted in a financial agreement to submit a new application to the Provincial government for an increased subsidy quantum. This amount was approved at the end of 2015. This left just one year to meet the conditions of subdivision that lapsed in early 2017. The most vital of these conditions were:

- An approved beneficiary list submitted and accepted by Province
- The installation of all infrastructure (civil and electrical)
- The construction of a boundary wall at the cost of the developer
- The submission of a homeowner's constitution with the local land use management department

PEP was appointed to oversee and manage this process with the support of Ruo Emoh residents and Melanie Johnson, who acted as social facilitator on behalf of FEDUP and the SA SDI

Alliance. Critically, the cost of many of the requirements was born by the community (e.g. constructing the boundary wall and ensuring site security). Therefore Ruo Emoh experienced numerous hurdles such as friction and division between community members, which lead to conflict around approved beneficiaries and plot allocations. These complexities were ably negotiated by the SA SDI Alliance social facilitator. Despite a number of setbacks and many sleepless nights, subdivision clearance was granted in December 2016. This was a significant breakthrough for all involved and testament to the hard work and dedication of Ruo Emoh community and its support NGOs. At the end of 2016 all that remained was to construct the houses.

Due to delays in releasing the subsidy and a number of onerous administrative tasks, housing construction only began in August 2017. Given the nature of the project, short time-frames and restriction on state finance, a "sweat equity" or PHP self-build option was not feasible. Community input in the design and layout was extensive however. Mellon Housing was appointed as contractor and all houses were completed by December 22nd, 2017. On the same day, families received their title deeds and moved into their new homes. The Ruo Emoh residents paid the R6 500 per title deed, through a loan provided by the People's led fund, which will be paid back in full within a year.



ANTI-CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
The Ruo Emoh site; Residents discuss layout
of the houses on the plot; The layout of
each house was individually designed;
Houses near completion;
A big day: Title deeds are signed by
homeowners; One of the many consultation
meetings underway



² Cited in People's Dialogue on Land and Shelter (1999).
Negotiating for land: The construction and demolishing of
Ruo Emoh's showhouse in Cape Town, August 1999.

THE JOURNEY TO RUO EMOH

Prior to the move to Ruo Emoh, families lived in many different locations from various regions in the Western Cape with some migrating from other provinces. Most residents were backyarders or lived in some form of overcrowded home in the greater Mitchells Plain area (39 families) or in Manenberg (10 families) before moving to Colorado Park.

In the struggle to secure housing, most families moved numerous times across the city or within a neighbourhood. Moving to Ruo Emoh marks the end of these housing struggles and the start of a process of home and community building.

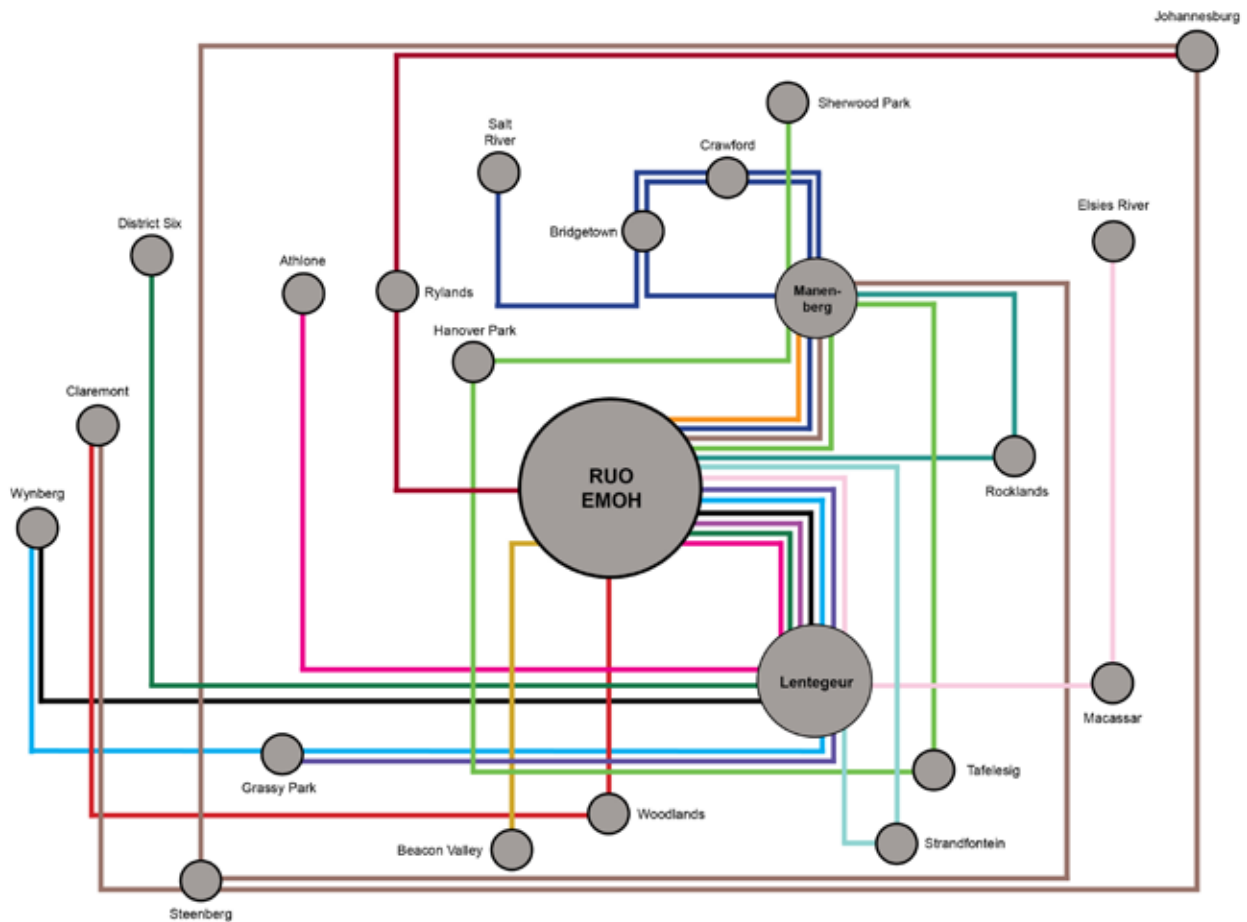
The illustration on the right provides a sense of these housing geographies.



TOP LEFT: Noah Schermbrucker briefs students during the research project.

TOP RIGHT: Ruo Emoh residents join students for a braai during the research.
BOTTOM: Archie Olkers shares some of his experience of the process with students.

BELOW: Before the move to Ruo Emoh, residents lived across the greater Cape Town metropole and beyond. The illustration shows the locations of families' past residences. ILLUSTRATION BY Marial Zimmermann



ADNAAN HENRICKS AND HIS WIFE TASNEEM
IN THEIR KITCHEN.



CHALLENGING AS A CHAIRMAN, JOYFUL AS A HOMEOWNER!

Interviewee: Adnaan Hendricks

Interviewers: Geetika Anand & Basil Studer

“You won’t believe it when my first child was born, we used to live in my father’s house at that time, and I used to tell him, don’t worry son, we are going to have a house soon. Because that was the idea at that time, that we would get house in the next couple of years. Now I look back, he is now 21 years old.”

Adnaan Hendricks’ extended family thought they were never going to move into their house, but the dream finally came true. It was indeed a long, emotional and challenging journey for Adnaan and his family, but now they are just very happy having moved into their own house. It’s a much better area for children to grow up and commute to other parts of the city.

Adnaan is the current chairman of the Ruo Emoh executive, he is 43 years old and lives with his wife Tasneem and their four children in their new house. They got the house plan a little changed, so that one room is slightly bigger than the other. Adnaan and Tasneem have taken the smaller room, so that children can fit more comfortably in the bigger one.

Adnaan is a certified rigger, but he struggles finding a long lasting job, mostly because uncertified workers can be hired on lower rates. He started working at a young age when his uncle, a qualified mechanic, took him under his wing. In

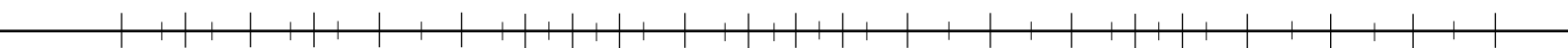
the process, however, Adnaan could not do his matric. Tasneem is the same age as Adnaan, went to college and is trained in secretarial works, but she also lost her job last year. They met when they were in 9th or 10th grade and have been married for 24 years now.

The eldest son is 21, studies math and science at University of Western Cape, and he wants to go for a graduate programme after finishing his undergrad. Their daughter is 16 and the two younger sons are 11 and 7. All of them go to school. The eleven year old is soon going to go for Islamic studies for two to three years. Adnaan sends all his children to do these studies, even though they fall back in school through this, because for him it is important to keep the heritage in the family, to keep the religion close. He says that they can make up for this loss by doing double grades in one year in college.

Adnaan was born in Manenberg, his parents were relocated there from District Six when the Group Areas Act came in. There they lived until Adnaan was in grade one or two and then they moved to Rocklands in Mitchells Plain. The reason to move was the high crime rate in Manenberg due to acute impoverishment. Calling Manenberg a slum, Adnaan tells, “we do have our

gangsterism, drugs and all those normal social problems that goes with it [here], but in Manenberg, it’s like hundred times worse.” He spent most of his life in his father’s house in Rocklands. When he got married, his wife also moved in with him in his room. Even though they had a separate entrance to their room, the space was very cramped with other siblings and their spouses also living in the same house. “I would advise everyone who gets married to move in to your own place, even if it’s a one room, so that you start off on your own feet.” This is what Adnaan had to say looking back.

After that, they rented their own place, close to his father’s house in Rocklands. He does not know why, but he says, that people in his community always want to buy or rent a house close to mommy and daddy. It was slightly bigger than this new house, but Adnaan says that you still live more comfortably when it really is your house. That way there is no landlord coming over once a month to check if you’re breaking something or not. They lived twelve years in that house, a former RDP house, owners of which had moved out into a bigger bond house using the rent to cover the costs of the loan. Adnaan thinks that this is a smart idea, but nowadays RDP houses do not have the same quality



because the plot size has reduced so much. Over 12 years, rent increased from R1 500 to R3 700. Adnaan preferred this house over his father's; one, because it was his own house (even though rented) and he was paying for it; and two, because it was located in a circle (like his current house), where kids were safe to play, unlike his father's house where one had to check on them all the time.

When asked, which of the places he lived was the best located one, he clearly says that it is the new one. He states: "There's a smart thing about this house. Although it's RDP house, when you drive past, you won't say it. Anybody would just think it's an enclosed secure complex."

Adnaan joined Ruoh Emoh 20 years ago in 1998 on his mother's suggestion, who is also a member. The project was about 2 years old when he joined. Adnaan described the project as RDP housing with bottom-up approach, but he said that people who started the project also lacked knowledge on how to approach this whole process. Even though he had his doubts, Adnaan says it was out of desperation that he joined and stuck to the project for so long. He did not see the possibility to get a house in any other way, because the banks would never give him a loan, since he did not have a secure, well-paid job. His sister

was also part of the group, but her husband managed to get a bond to buy his own house, and that's when she left the group. Adnaan and his mother, however, stayed on and would always go to the community meetings and save money when they could. From that time, Adnaan says there are about ten people who stuck to the process and have managed to secure a house now. For his mother it was also important, as she still lived with Adnaan's father even though they were divorced, but she could not move out, not having a job. There was a lot of pressure to leave the group, as many thought it will always stay a dream and one could not see much progress happening on the ground.

"Imagine, you keep on telling your children, daddy is busy with this project and you are going to get house soon. And you bring them here, to the area, and remember, at that time it was only bush and trees and sand. And they look at this place, like seriously! And then nothing is done. You don't see bulldozers coming."

Adnaan is sure that if everybody was more empowered with what to do and how to do it, the project could have gone much faster, but he says that there is also a positive side to this with all the new and very nice people joining in the project later. When he became chairman two and a half years back now, a lot happened, with Melanie coming on the board integrating the project from the Manenberg side, and also coming together with the technical team. They also wanted to have a new approach, so that they would be part of everything, every design choice they wanted to partake.

"The laziness we had to cut out of ourselves. In other words, if Noah then says, certain things happening today, somewhere, we gotta be part of that. So you gotta stay out of work. That's why I am saying, being a chairman took a lot out of me."

There were many fights to overcome: "Even in our committee meetings, we would fight. And that is how you get things done, you fight with each other. When you see people not fighting, then you must know something is not right. [...] When you see people fighting, you know there's passion, they are doing things."

Adnaan learned in the process to be more thorough, following up on people when he needed them to do something,

but also to be stricter with himself. Also they found that it was important that you would bring everybody at the same table, so that nobody can blame the other without having to engage directly with them. The most difficult part of the project was that it was held back through the ratepayers association for almost eight years. Adnaan wishes that people in South Africa would start caring for each other, that way a lot of time could have been saved. During this time there were still costs for the group, and people would ask what happens to their money when they could not see any progress in the project because of the different setbacks. Adnaan however does not want to hold grudges, but he will always mention the struggles he had with them, telling the story. Now the tone has completely changed and the residents of Ruo Emoh are seen as a part of the neighbourhood.

Another difficult phase of the project was when the infrastructure was in place, but the houses weren't. This meant that everyone either had to pay for the security or come and guard the place themselves so that there is no vandalism. This just added to the long list of expenses that people had to incur before they even saw the sign of their houses being built.

In the new neighbourhood, they feel safe, as the gangsterism is out completely. However the schools are far and it's

not that safe to send your children there alone. So Adnaan drives them every day, and because they are all in a different grade he needs to drive a lot. At the moment they live off the child support they get, which is enough for food and the gas for the car. Adnaan also does odd jobs whenever he gets a chance. Adnaan has full faith in God:

"My religion tells me His plans are better than your plans. When you have R10, He will put what we call (Arabic term for a gift). That R10, God will put His blessing and make it worth R1000. I told you we keep our religion close to us. So we ask for God's help. Looks like it's working, I am surviving. You must have faith."

Adnaan's plan is to eventually expand the house with a second storey. He does not want to build outwards as now he has a nice space in front of his house to eat with the family and visitors. Elaborating on future plans for the house, Tasneem said that they would build five bedrooms on top (one for themselves and four for the four children), move the kitchen to current kids' room, convert their current bedroom into a dining room and make the current living room into a big lounge.

He also has a cactus garden, which he wants to further develop. But all of these plans require money and when he has some he first wants to fix a car for his

son that he can take to college. He hopes that he won't be too late for that. He is thinking about starting his own business, but he has to think about what he is good in and one that does not need capital to start.

As a chairman, he wants to leave a legacy, for the next chairman to have big shoes to fill. There is an election every two years, the next one is in one year. Until then the committee is busy managing the place, taking care of the 'snags' coming out, the construction faults due to poor workmanship or bad quality equipment. Also they need to get parks and forestry into the neighbourhood, as they want to transform the place in front of the gate that is allocated as a park area into an open gym.

Adnaan would describe his experience as a chairman as challenging, because he would always be the one that would have to carry the blame for anything the committee does. Asked to remove the chairman hat, he describes it very different:

"It was the most awesome feeling, the most awesome feeling. I mean, when we were told that you must come and collect your key, I came with my... I had a trailer. I took the last pennies I had... I couldn't afford a truck. I just had a trailer. It was a smart thing, because I just paid 200 bucks for whole 24 hours. So, I came

up and down with it. All I needed was fuel in my car. And I came with everything I had. [...] You must ask the people here, this space was full of all my stuff outside, because I want to move into my house. And a lot of people did the same thing. It was epic. That was really epic. I mean a dream finally coming true. [...] It's a very unique place. Even our visitors who come here, when they visit, they don't wanna leave [when] kids come here, they don't want to leave”.

Echoing the feelings, Tasneem said that they were the first ones to move in. When they got the keys, they did not want to wait even one more day. The day they moved in, they (and another family) stayed up the whole night. They lit the fire. It was like a camp. Everybody was up talking about their journey to get the house. Nobody wanted to sleep, for them it was still a dream, and they were afraid the house might not be there when they woke up the next day. Tasneem is just happy that they don't have to pay rent anymore, and they don't have to make sacrifices to save money for rent and other expenses that they incurred to access this house- including lawyer's fees, security, mobile toilets, and so on.



EBRAHIM AND FATIMA ABRAHMS
IN THEIR LOUNGE.



ASCEND TO DIGNITY

Interviewee: Ebrahim and Fatima Abrahms

Interviewers: Abdullahi Ali Hassan & Adesola Adelowo

Zaakiah, the energetic five-year old girl comes running into the house and yells at the top of her lungs, "Mama, mama, mama. I'm going to Layla's house to play." Her mother responds calmly, "Ok. Ok. Please, close the door," as Zaakiah – who is barely tall enough to reach the door knob – slams the door shut. Her parents watched her exit with a serene calmness knowing their daughter is safe wherever she makes a friend in the neighbourhood.

This exchange describes Ebrahim and Fatima Abrahms new normal when they became newly-minted homeowners at Ruo Emoh. Instead of gunshots, teenagers fighting, or drivers beeping their car horn, life in their new neighbourhood is peaceful and quiet – it's so quiet it feels eerie. But before January 2018, the Abrahms were living at a backyard in Manenberg. Like many backyarders, they had been on the journey to create a life that would be safe and secure enough to have a family and raise children.

Fatima was born in Woodstock, Cape Town in 1970 and she grew up in Belgravia in Athlone, in the Cape Flats. She became a backyarder in around 1999 when she moved to her mother's backyard for seven years. For another eleven years, she would move from different backyards in Manenberg until

she arrived in Ruo Emoh. Ebrahim was born in Bo-Kaap, Cape Town in 1968 and he grew up in Hanover Park and Belhar. From Belhar he moved to Manenberg where he and Fatima lived until they moved to Ruo Emoh. In addition to their daughter, Zaakiah, and the Abrahms household also includes Fatima's uncle, Adil.

Now you might be wondering, how Fatima and Ebrahim met? Both of them were committed to keeping their neighbourhoods safe. They had formal jobs as constables in the South African Provincial Police through which they first met.

Ebrahim explains: "I always care about our communities because of the gangsterism, the drugs and the violence in our community. So, I first started off with a neighbourhood watch. I had my own neighbourhood watch for twenty years. And then afterwards, I told myself, let's go a step further in life by asking the police to join them. I had to make sure I knew how things really worked within the South African police. When you're on the inside, then you understand how the system works. Since then, I'm still trying to work within the community as a community worker."

As with many government organisations, the bureaucracy became too

much and they started to feel powerless like they couldn't help bring about positive change for their community so the Abrahms resigned some years back from the police service. But the desire to bring that sense of safety and security to where they live is what has driven Fatima and Ebrahim to be patient and persevere while they were waiting for Ruo Emoh to become a reality.

But was saving money and moving to Ruo Emoh worth the wait? The simple answer is YES!

They explain: "It's worth it to feel settled so you can have aspirations and set goals for the future. I have my own house, I own a roof over my head and I'm going to be more free to do things in life, by setting goals from here onwards."

"It's worth it to fondly look forward to going home after a long day of work. Every day I go to work. Sometimes when you're backyarder, you don't feel like going home. You can feel [the stress] coming down the road. Yeah, more money, more money and every time. When I started living there seven years ago I paid R400 per month. When we left it, it was up to R900 per month and that's without electricity and water. Now, when I'm done with work at twelve, I can go home. And it's so very good to open your door, just to say, "Hi, I'm back. I'm done

working, make me some tea, some coffee, a sandwich.” But before, sometimes, we didn’t even feel like going home.

It’s worth it to belong to a community. The people here, we greet one another, we talk to one another. Sometimes the doors are open like weekends to twelve o’clock. The kids are playing [outside] here. I don’t think they would have played in other areas like that. Our neighbour brought us food to eat. We didn’t expect it. And we baked some cake, we shared with our neighbour.

It’s worth it to have the dignity of living under your own roof. There’s nobody to shout at you and tell you what to do, you know. You don’t have to look outside and say, oh yeah, the landlord is coming, she’s coming again. To live like that, it’s like living in hell. Because you have to eat up everything that people do to you, say to you because you just wanted a place under a roof. And my staying here now, it’s a bigger relief and it’s an honour to have your own roof over your head. I can go to my own tap to get a little water. I feel free to go to my own toilet [and] not worry about what [the landlord] is going to say when I ask them, if it’s possible to use their toilet. Everything was upstairs for us. Even water was away, we have to go fetch water upstairs.

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Mama, mama, mama. I’m going to Layla’s house to play.” Her mother responds calmly, “Ok. Ok. Please, close the door,” as Zaakiah – who is barely tall enough to reach the door knob – slams the door shut. Her parents watched her exit with a serene calm knowing their daughter is safe wherever she makes a friend in the neighbourhood.

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SUMAYA HENRICKS AND HER SON
AMEER IN HER RUO EMOH HOME.



OH TO MY FAMILY...FREEDOM

Interviewee: Sumaya Hendricks

Interviewers: Lea Nienhoff, Kaylin Harrison, Israel Ogundare

Mother of three, Sumaya Hendricks resides in Ruo Emoh with her husband Ismail Hendricks and their two sons, Imtiyaaz and Ameer. For the Hendricks's getting a house in Ruo Emoh has changed the family's life: A blessing as Sumaya describes it. Living in Ruo Emoh is a much different experience to having lived in her mother's home for 14 years. For Sumaya, this place that she has now made her Home is her "Heaven". It's Freedom.

"Freedom, yeah. For my kids, for myself – oh freedom to whatever," she says and smiles.

Sumaya lived in her mother's home with her husband and two kids in a single room. They've never known what it is to have a space of their own. She says about her children: "They never had a place before. It means more than a lot, it means the world. Honestly."

Her family struggled and could not afford a house. Sumaya has also been on a waiting list for a house for many years –since 1990. Reflecting on her experience, she said: "Financially you are not able to buy a house even if you are above a bracket of R10 000 a month, you can't, it's just impossible...it's impossible to get a bond even if you have a little salary".

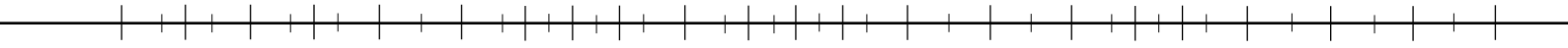
Sumaya was born in District Six and lived there until she was 12. "It was different there", she says, "we were three families in one house and everyone had lots of kids in District Six." Looking back she thinks "District Six was like a big camping site," the kids were running around barefoot, and when they didn't have something to eat at home, they would go to the neighbours and get some potatoes. Sumaya has a lively memory of this time and she says "I can still remember the riot of 1976, I was in grade 1 at the time and I can still remember how we ran amok." When people were forcibly removed Sumaya and her family moved to Mitchells Plain, where her mother lives to this day. Moving to Mitchells Plain, she says, "was actually a blessing, because we had our own house, we could turn off the lights at night, we had hot and cold water."

When Sumaya got married, her family moved around Mitchells Plain until they had to move back into her mother's house. Previously, they rented to have their own space, but when her husband Ismail lost his job the couple, by then having two sons, had to move into the house of Sumaya's mother. Moving into Ruo Emoh was an emotional experience for not only Sumaya, but her mother as well.

Sumaya and her husband joined the Ruo Emoh committee 12 years ago and were very involved in the meetings and workshops held. Previously, her husband Ismail served on the committee as a treasurer, but had to leave in order to pursue job opportunities. Thereafter, Sumaya replaced him to remain involved in the project. She did however find it challenging as there was much to learn. When she looks back to the process now sometimes she would have liked to have more voice in the discussions. "Each one of us, each individual has a different...a own agenda," Sumaya finds. She gives an example:

"Like for instance, in the case of the geysers. The committee had to decide if the houses will get the high or the low pressure ones. We expected to get it for free but then the government said they don't subsidize the geysers anymore. The committee decided to take the high pressure ones. But those are much more expensive and that was impossible for us to cope with. If you don't have a fixed amount that comes in, you can't budget around that."

It is these things that the members of the community had to navigate around and find solutions for. Everyone wanted to become a homeowner and people in the community were very driven and



motivated with this goal in mind. This kept everyone together despite the challenges. Sumaya described the experience as a risk, which was worth taking and said that they had to persevere and have patience throughout the process in order to finally become homeowners. Sumaya said:

“The meetings were quite nice, you know, we inspired each other, because everybody wanted a house, so that really kept us going.”

Sumaya describes what it was like for the community and her family to move into Ruo Emoh:

“We moved in just before Christmas. It was so exciting. Around Christmas time it was really calm. I am Muslim, so I don’t celebrate Christmas. But for my Christian neighbours it was special. For New Years we organized a street party to celebrate all together. Unfortunately, it was raining.”

Sumaya is happy with her new house. It gives her peace of mind knowing that she has this space and that her children are safe in the community. Having this home means that the Hendricks have less worry or fear. Fear about where the next meal will come from or where the

electricity, food or water will come from. The financial burden on her family is now much less.

“I am pretty comfortable with my own space... Since we moved here I could open the door, my kids are playing outside... Everything is just perfect for me.”

The place is what the Hendricks have constructed and made home for themselves. Sumaya has owned her space, speaking of how she has made changes to make this house her home, she says:

“I couldn’t see myself living with yellow walls. When I changed the walls, I thought this is mine.”

ARCHIE OLKERS IN FRONT OF HIS
HOUSE BUSY WITH LANDSCAPING.



EVERYONE DESERVES A HOME

Interviewee: Archie Olkers

Interviewers: Rosca Warries & Florence Siegenthaler

“Everyone deserves a home. The Ruo Emoh community finally moved into theirs. Now it is our mission to put other homeless people in housing”.

It's a hot day in Mitchells Plain. Archie Olkers, Uncle Archie we call him, sits on a red plastic chair in one of the newly built houses on a piece of land that had been ready for them already twenty years ago. And as we sit with him today, on a worn-out flower-patterned sofa that he covered with white cloth for us, he looks back on over two decades of fighting for these 49 neatly aligned houses that are just about to be turned into homes. Uncle Archie is no less than one of the founder members of the Ruo Emoh community and part of its committee for 22 years.

Flashback. 1996. A group of people, amongst them Uncle Archie, comes together over a common goal: Solving their housing problems.

“You see, all these people get stuck on the housing project, waiting 30 or 40 years for a house and you know you end up never ever getting a house. That is how we progressed. So, what we did was we built an illegal house in Woodlands that was on council ground (...)

We built it on a Wednesday, it was about four days to be built, and on Monday it was opened, and Tuesday, the army, the police, everyone, was out there to tell us to demolish that house”.

Yet, the group was not ready to give up that easily. They went to town and asked the council for ground to build their houses. Being told that there was no ground available, they then went around themselves and, indeed, would soon find the very piece of land we are standing on right now, on that sunny Wednesday in March.

Back then it was commercial business ground, bought for R230 000, pre-financed by the uTshani Fund, which the group was working with.

As fast as the ground was provided, as hard and long was the struggle that followed. Uncle Archie saw it all: From re-zoning to building fences and adhering to the government's requirements and regulatory processes.

“After the first five years, no housing was built. When the approval of the re-zoning was there, there was no money. No money was there because the funders got out, five years is long. So, I took that paper to the director of PEP and I asked “Do you help me?”. I got approval, everything. But now I need help. And he said okay, he will help me, he will help me the

two of us are going forward, and not one will turn on the other one's back. And up till today, I'm still working with him. It's now 20 years, and he helped get the project going”.

And keeping the project going, that meant challenging each and every one's perseverance. One of the founding members died only little time after having started the project. And then there were all the struggles that life kept ready for Archie beyond the project. Yet even those, he managed to turn into fuel, rather than inhibitions for his goal.

“I can remember when my wife, that was on a Sunday, said I must see that I put our children into a house. The Monday morning after I had to leave early and by the time I was back she'd passed away. So, I made sure I get the project finished”.

His kids, in the meantime, grew up. His son, 30 years old, lives in Beacon Valley, where Uncle Archie stays as well. His daughter, who works as a part-time nurse, is about to move into one of the Ruo Emoh houses with her son.

“You know, the boy stays at the neighbours next door when she is not here, when she is at work on Mondays”. Their housing struggle isn't fully resolved. Neither Archie nor his daughter has received the keys for the house

yet. It's a last piece of waiting and it is nerve-straining. Uncle Archie explains he does not feel any malevolence for the people, who might have had an easier or shorter way to their houses, at least within Ruo Emoh, says Uncle Archie. Some people have waited longer than others, since many dropped out on the way.

"You see some of us have been back struggling 20 years... It just took too long to build these houses."

Talking to him, we need to acknowledge the challenging community dynamics that have arisen despite, or maybe even because, they were standing up for one common goal.

Archie's friend Naeemah, joined our conversation with her little daughter. She listened to Uncle Archie's story. For her it raises the issue of community.

"Amidst all this beautiful stuff happening, there's also something to be sorted in order for us to say this is a close knit community. From the outside everything might seem hunky-dory, but when you talk to someone like Uncle Archie you see the other difficulties that we were facing all the time."

The story of Ruo Emoh, then, is not only about speaking with one strong voice to the government and fighting for housing. It is fighting for the community itself as well. What we need to acknowledge is not only the perfectly plastered

walls in off-white that are finally put where they belong. What we need to acknowledge is the effort and trust put into the community over all these years to keep it together, to ensure that to the outside, they could stand up as one and speak with one strong voice.

And that voice, after all, is what created the village-like atmosphere we encounter here today. Parents letting their kids play outside. Neighbours watching out for others. People coming together for braais late at night. And amidst all of them, Uncle Archie, buzzing around, paving backyards and moving furniture.

"Here is still plenty of work for me to do...not only to do...but also to see that things go on. We as Ruo Emoh must not stop. Because we got our houses and that is a responsibility to put other people into housing as well. And we are not rich people, but we can be clean people. And that is the main part. You can see where there is love from a family to the house. You need to appreciate it. What was built up over the years, that must not be destroyed. Whatever you can do, help the next person"

This is Uncle Archie's message: Lets go forward and build this community. Lets make this the place we want and need it to be.

“

Lets go forward and build this community. Lets make this the place we want and need it to be.

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MARILDIA BENJAMIN AT HER FRONT
DOOR



A PLACE TO REST AFTER A LONG JOURNEY: THE BENJAMIN FAMILY

Interviewee: Marildia Benjamin

Interviewers: Joseph Ngben & James Clacherty

Marildia Benjamin (75) was born in Uitenhage, thirty minutes outside of Port Elisabeth. She grew up in Uitenhage and attended her first few years of primary school there before leaving school. “In those days we didn’t stay in school long. You learned the basics and then you went to find work or stayed at home.” Mrs. Benjamin met her husband Galiem Benjamin (85) in Uitenhage where he was working as a painter for an interior decorating firm. All three of the Benjamin’s children were born in Uitenhage. Nasreen, Gadija and their son Aabied. Because of Mr. Benjamin’s work with the interior decorating company the family moved a number of times within South Africa. “We’re like hippies,” says Nasreen, “we grew up in Uitenhage and then we stayed in Paarl for about three years, the whole family, and then we went back to Uitenhage and then we stayed in Jo’burg for about another two years. So we’ve been all over.” While living in Johannesburg Nasreen was introduced to the pharmacy industry, working at a pharmacy in Crown Mines for the two years that the family lived in there.

In 2003 Nasreen got an internship at a pharmacy in Claremont, Cape Town. She

moved to Cape Town alone and started a four-year apprenticeship programme at the pharmacy to become a pharmacy assistant. “The owner there was a very nice man. He helped me to study and I enjoyed the work.” While working in Cape Town she met her husband and the two of them moved into a house in Lentegeur together. At this stage both Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin were retired and Nasreen was the primary earner in the family. To help Nasreen to support them more easily and to keep her company in the new city, where she was living alone with her new husband, the family decided to move to Cape Town. Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin, along with Gadija moved to Cape Town in 2004 to join Nasreen and her husband in the house they were renting in Lentegeur. During this time Gadija met her Capetonian husband and they moved to Strandfontein together.

It was after a few years in Lentegeur that Mr and Mrs. Jacobs first heard about the Ruoh Emoh project. Nasreen’s sister in law Fagwa Jacobs has been part of the project from the very beginning in 1998 and is on the Ruoh Emoh committee. She told the family about the project and about the savings scheme. “We were impressed by what she told us, about

the idea of owning our own home, and so we decided to join.” In 2012, Mrs. Jacobs attended their first Ruoh Emoh savings scheme meeting. Every month each household had to contribute R1000 to the savings scheme. If a household couldn’t afford to pay the whole R1000 at every meeting then they could pay the amount in installments between one meeting and the next. These meetings were held about once every two months, usually in Lentegeur near to the site of Ruoh Emoh.

After the first year of waiting for their home in Ruoh Emoh, Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin moved from Lentegeur to a house down the road from Gadija in Strandfontein for a short while before moving to Colorado Park to rent a house with Nasreen and her husband. Colorado Park is right next to the Ruoh Emoh site and the house they lived in was just down the road from their new house in Ruoh Emoh. “The house in Colorado had a big yard for the children to play in and there was a nice garden and it was a little bit bigger [than the Ruoh Emoh house] but not that much bigger. It was a freestanding house, two bedrooms with a big lounge and a small kitchen and a bathroom, with the toilet

and the bathroom separate. The space was enough for us. It was much better than living in Lentegeur. The environment there is not that nice, especially for children. There are a lot of drugs and that kind of thing. In Colorado there is much less of that.”

During the time they were waiting for something to happen with the Ruo Emoh site they were participating in the savings scheme and attending the community meetings. There were times during this process, however, when they were worried that the project wouldn’t get off the ground. Mrs. Benjamin felt a bit removed from the whole process at times saying, “the committee members were the ones doing all the work and so I wasn’t much involved. I paid into the scheme and went to some of the meetings but that was about all I did at that time.” Gadija had also attended some of the meetings on her mother’s behalf while Mrs. Benjamin looked after her husband who had developed very bad arthritis. “At some stage we thought that maybe it was some sort of scheme, you know,” Gadija says, “we were quite worried.”

At one point about two years ago the family even considered leaving the project and getting the money they had invested in the savings scheme paid back to them. This was a critical stage in the project and when the family asked

for their money back the committee told them that they wouldn’t be able to pay them out yet and instead encouraged them to wait just a little bit longer. They had waited for a long time and so they ended up staying in spite of their concerns. “It was because of Fagwa that we ended up staying. She was part of the committee and she would always say ‘no things are happening’. And she had been waiting for twenty years already! So she helped us to trust the project. And then when we saw that they had started to build, we realised that this was really going to happen” says Mrs. Jacobs. “We definitely learned patience and trust from all of this” adds Gadija.

Once the first work on the infrastructure was started it became necessary to guard the site so that people couldn’t come and steal any of the infrastructure already installed or the materials stored on site. Every night for almost a year one member of the community would stand guard at the site. Because Mrs. Jacobs and her husband were too old to do the guard duty themselves they paid R360 for someone else to take their place when it was their turn. Eventually when the infrastructure was completed and the top structures built the deed for the house was transferred to Mrs. Jacobs who is the sole owner of the house. When the family came to see the house they were

very impressed by how well it had been finished. They had not expected it to have already been plastered and for the bathroom to have already been fitted and the plumbing installed. They had also expected the house to have a tin roof rather than the tiles that had been used. The only thing they did to the house before moving in was to lay the tiles.

“You know the timing was actually unbelievable” says Nasreen. Only a month after the family got the deed for their house Nasreen and her husband got a divorce and she had to leave the house they had shared in Colorado Park. “The same time the house became available I went through the most terrible time of my life and there was a house available for my parents and myself to move in here. So the timing was like, really, it helped a lot, really a lot. And the environment here also. I was under psychiatrists and everything you know for all the things that I’ve been through. It’s just, you know all the different people staying here, they are very nice people and it keeps my mind busy because you will always see someone coming past and saying ‘hello, how are you?’ or the children go play so it’s really a big help for me to move on now again.” Mrs. Jacobs says that more than anything else she is relieved to know that she now owns her house.

"It is much more comfortable knowing that I own the house. I can relax now."

There are still things that the family would like to change about their house though. Mrs. Jacobs feels that there is not that much space between their house and their neighbour's and so the family wants to build a vibacrete boundary wall: "You go out your door and everyone else is just there". "Everyone is very kind and helpful and so we don't mind being so close" says Mrs. Jacobs "but it would be nice to have a bit of space". "And the sand! There is always sand everywhere!" Gadija adds. The yards of all the houses are still just bare sand as no one has had time to cover them. The Jacobs family wants to lay concrete down in their yard to keep it cleaner. "I would also like it if they put something there in front, by the gate. People are all friendly here, they are well-mannered people. So I feel very safe. I can go and sleep a little bit and the child can go play outside and I don't need to worry about anything going on. But it would be nice to have something so it's not so easy for the children to walk out or for someone to come in."

In spite of the fact that the neighbours to Ruo Emoh in Colorado Park fought the Ruo Emoh project, there is no

animosity between the Colorado Park residents and the new Ruo Emoh residents. The family said that the Colorado Park residents thought that the people moving into Ruo Emoh would bring problems with drugs and crime with them. There was an impression that all the Ruo Emoh residents were poor backyarders from Lenteguur which is seen as being a bit of a rough neighbourhood. But when the Colorado Park residents saw the kind of people that they were, they realised that they are people just like anybody else and that there was no real need for concern.

The Jacobs family has only been living in the house for three months and they have already started to plan the extensions to their house. Apart from the wall and laying concrete in the yard, the first plan is to build an extra wing onto the house to make Nasreen's room bigger and extend the kitchen. They also want to replace the bath with a shower to make Mr. Jacobs' life easier. Many other people in Ruo Emoh are considering building an extra storey onto their houses but for now Mrs. Jacobs says that just making the rooms bigger will be enough. They want to do this before the end of the year and have already got the original plans for their house from Adnaan, the chairperson of the committee.

"The favourite house I have lived in is in Port Elizabeth" says Nasreen "Just because of the family and friends. But I wouldn't like to move away from Cape Town though because Cape Town is nice and it's different from PE. People are friendlier here in Cape Town. They always say that PE is a friendly city but Cape Town is, people get more involved. And now we have this house. My children like it because there are so many children here. And they go to a good Islamic school here and I wouldn't want to mess with that."



SHIRLEY FORTUIN (MIDDLE) ALONG WITH
INTERVIEWERS SAYAK ROY (RIGHT) &
ADEMOLA OMOEGUN (LEFT)

THE “IRON” LADY

Interviewee: Shirley Fortuin

Interviewers: Sayak Roy & Ademola Omoegun

Shirley Fortuin lives alone in Ruoh Emoh, and works in a metal badge making company in Salt River where she has worked for about 15 years. She has been through some challenging times in life but like fine iron processed through fire she has come out strong. She had hoped to move into her new house with her family but unfortunately she lost her two sons in the last 3 years whilst waiting to get the house, but her grandchildren visit from time to time so she has plans to decorate one of the two rooms in the house for them so they can sleep there when they are around. She is 57 years old but does not look it and it is obvious she gets questioned about this often as she is quick to say she has her ID card with her to prove her age.

Shirley was educated up to grade 11 but she insists that life has taught her a lot, which a formal education cannot provide. She is very committed to her work and everything she is involved in, and is proud to talk about her work and display some of the products from her company, showing some pictures of their products on her phone as well as a key ring which she made completely by herself describing how the raw iron was transformed into finished products through hard work.

“... Our company has made many

metal badges. My portion of work is in processing. I really like my job. Many schools have come to our company to make badges, even from your school, the UCT student society has also come to us to make badges.”

Shirley also has a strong sense of community and hope. Born in Kensington she moved to Manenberg with her family when she was 13. They lived in a brick house, which belongs to her mother and she still visits often as it is not far away. Growing up for her in Manenberg was very challenging as it was not safe, there were often gang fights, with gun shots and many deaths. Over there, it is not very safe to walk around freely unlike in Ruoh Emoh she says. However she insists that Manenberg also had its good sides, for example in some areas people also play street soccer, street net ball or do street parties at night. So, it depends on who you are and where you are and on what people choose. So she insists that it is important not to stereotype.

She got involved in Ruoh Emoh about 12 years ago through a friend who hosted one of the meetings, which Melanie (the social facilitator) organised. Her friend subsequently asked her to join and after joining she never relented. She recalls a funny episode early on when she joined and provides a description that demon-

strates her commitment to the cause:

“Hahaha Something funny happened once ... a meeting got cancelled. Because everybody wants government housing and more than 100 people signed up for this meeting. As a result, we changed the venue to a local school ... I still remembered then we used to have consecutive meetings on Saturday afternoon and Sunday afternoon ... I mean if you don't have a house of your own and you can get the opportunity to own a house, won't you take it? ... if you have a wedding to attend this afternoon (Saturday) and there's a meeting about the houses, what is more important, attending the wedding or going to the meeting about the houses because you want to know what's going on ... there will always be other weddings ...”

She describes her relationship with other residents of Ruoh Emoh as being very cordial because they had met during meetings in their struggle for a common objective, and they knew each other well and were basically like family. Furthermore they were all fully involved in the course of the project and she was also quite active herself.

“See in this process we people were also part of the project. If there is management, management is made of us. For example, at a point all 49 housing units

were divided into five small groups and I was the treasurer of one group ... we did daily savings, sometimes 2 rand or 3 rand per day to manage all the emergency issues The entire process was good. From the facilitator to the NGO, everyone is very positive and frankly without them, this project will be a distant dream. Like if Melanie says that she will do something by Wednesday, by Wednesday that thing is done ... she's sharp.."

Nevertheless, Shirley highlights that there were challenges along the way, both amongst themselves and also externally with the opposition to the project from the neighbourhood ratepayers. But they tackled the challenges collectively as they are very democratic and everyone is given the opportunity to express their views and all opinions are considered. She further explains that this unity has also contributed to the gradual changing of perceptions by the ratepayers who earlier opposed their presence in the neighbourhood due to fears over safety and potential depreciation of property values in the area because of their presence.

"Let me share a story with you. There is a market outside on the left. One day a lady shop owner was chatting with me and asked me where I came from, I told her I am from Ruo Emoh. Then she came with me and saw everything. After that she said that she is very satisfied and

likes our housing. So, the perceptions are changing slowly, slowly ..."

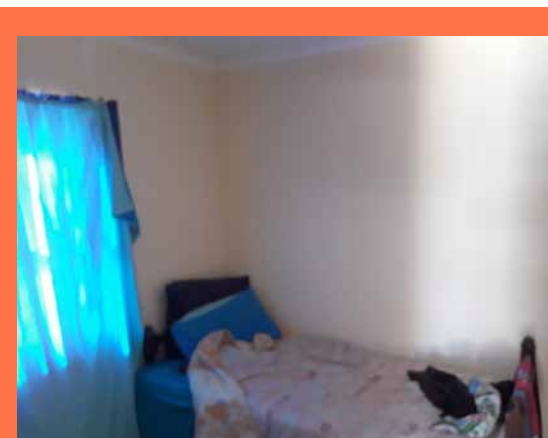
On what the main lessons learned and what it means to move into Ruo Emoh, Shirley explains:

"... first things first, never underestimate yourself, never lose hope, something good will happen. You have to believe this; otherwise you become impatient and lose everything. Please hold on to what you want ... persevere [Moving into Ruo Emoh] was very emotional because I mean you get a house of your own, I think everybody wants that eventually ... Ruo Emoh stands for; Our Home! ... It's not my home. The term "my" is individual but "our" carries the notion of community ... in the end you got that blessing so your door must be open for everyone to come ..."

She also described that the Ruo Emoh housing complex is very different from other subsidized housing areas. The main difference she observed is in terms of

housing conditions, such as the toilets, and the best part is the flexibility in the interior structure.

"You know Ruo Emoh is very different from other housing societies, because: They are very flexible regarding the interior housing structure. You can find that most of the household utilize the fixed space according to their own needs. That's the most beautiful part of this project. You know in African housing, people make the foundations higher than ground level. That creates a problem for disabled and old people. So, they are free to choose what people want. So, you can find some have a good foundation height (inaccessible for people who uses wheelchair) and most of the people kept it normal".



Not waiting for others
to help you out, but
working together for a
common goal, that is
the key to Ruo Emoh's
success.

Farida Gester

'TOGETHER WE CAN ACHIEVE MORE': SOLIDARITY AS A KEY TO COMMUNITY BUILDING

Interviewee: Farida Gester

Interviewers: Majaha Dlamini & Janine Eberle

Farida Gester grew up in Wynberg where her parents rented a place. She was living with her happy big family. Farida chuckles when thinking back to that time staying with her parents, four brothers and three sisters.

In about 1980 - Farida was around 21 years old - her family was pushed to live further outside the city. "The owners of the house in Wynberg claimed it for themselves. My parents only rented it and that time it was still apartheid," Farida explains. The whole family moved to Lentegeur in Mitchells Plain, where they lived together for 30 years. When Farida talks about that time, she speaks of her father as a very sociable person, who welcomed all people into their home, regardless of their skin colour. There would always be visitors around the house, especially when her brothers scouted teammates to play football with them. When Farida's two sons were old enough, they would also play football in her father's team, with people from different townships. Her mother used to cook for all the people and everybody would have a good time.

Her parents also supported her after she had a bad accident on her way to work. That is now 20 years ago, her chil-

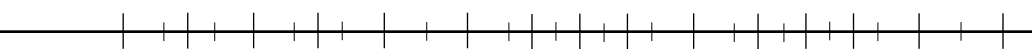
dren were still little. Farida was working as a machinist in a factory at that time, but after the accident she was forced to live off a disability grant from the state. It was very difficult for her to get by without her regular income, but her parents always supported her, like they did with all their children.

With the years, her parents got ill and after her mother's death, Farida did the cooking for everyone who visited their house or came by to play football. When also her father died, Farida decided to move out. The house in Lentegeur had only 3 rooms and was very crowded. With her siblings, nieces, nephews and in-laws living there all together, she had wanted to find a more spacious place for a long time already, but she stayed for the sake of her parents, which she cared for and looked after. It was important to them that the family stayed together. So after they passed away, Farida's oldest son who was living in a two-room house in Portland, asked her to move in with his family. That is now 8 years ago. In Portland Farida shared a room with the 3 grandchildren, two girls and one boy. Meanwhile, her younger son and his family were staying in the backyard of other people in Lentegeur.

A community that might become a family

In December 2017, when Farida could finally move into her house in Ruoh Emoh, she decided to take her younger son and his family with her. Farida is very happy to finally have her own house and her family is excited to live here. It will still take a while for her to see how that changed her life in the long run, she says. For her, the move from Portland to Ruoh Emoh was not such a big change, since she was already living in a house before, also there she was sharing a room with her other grandchildren. The living situation did not significantly change her everyday life. For her younger son's family it is different, since their former place was not as spacious and they had to pay a high rent to be able to stay in Lentegeur. Their move from the backyard to Ruoh Emoh marked a significant shift in their lives. Certainly, everyone is more comfortable here than where we lived before, Farida says.

It was 6 or 7 years ago when Farida joined the Ruoh Emoh community. She heard about the project from the beginning when her neighbours in Lentegeur were talking about it. But as she was still living in her parent's house



with her whole family, she rather stayed there. She looked after her parents when they weren't as fit anymore and needed someone to look after them. It was only when she moved to Portland with her oldest son, she decided to join the community. It wasn't easy but her family supported her so that she could contribute to the saving scheme. When there were functions, and meetings, she would always be there and help to push forward the project. She appreciates all the hard work everyone in the community has put into its success. The biggest obstacle in the process in her view was the city not cooperating with them. It is hard to see why they just didn't let them build their own houses, why they had to make it such a long and hard struggle. The neighbourhood ratepayers also added to the problem, they did not want Ruo Emoh to be built. Farida says that they thought the new houses would be low-class houses and this would be bad for the area. Their resentment was nothing personal and Farida is positive that the relationship will improve over time, now that they can get to know each other. "It has to," she chuckles.

Farida has visions for her house, but it will take time to really decide on what to build. For now, she is very happy with how everything looks. At some point she would like to extend a veranda, build

another wall outside the house and add another room. It is even possible that they will add a second floor at some point. Time will show, for now they like it as it is.

She hopes that this project will spread so that more places like Ruo Emoh will exist in the future.

Social cohesion and the feeling of solidarity are very important for Farida. This is how she grew up living with her family and also how she explains the success of Ruo Emoh. Everyone is like family here, looks after one another and this is how Ruo Emoh has been able to achieve so much.

Not waiting for others to help you out, but working together for a common goal, that is the key to Ruo Emoh's success, Farida says.



HOMEOWNER OF NUMBER 67 AUNTIE
ABEDA JOSEPH

THE LONG ANTICIPATED HOME AND COMMUNITY

Interviewee: Auntie Abeda Joseph

Interviewers: Goabamang Lethugile & Evan Escamilla

The Joseph family has finally found a place that they can now call home in Ruo Emoh, after many years of moving from one neighbourhood to the next the family is now able to live a peaceful relaxed lifestyle. In her own words describing the period of waiting and the struggle the family has faced, Auntie Abeda Joseph said: "It's just so a relief with everything. I've been through a lot with the kids all the years, man. Even though they're big now and out of the house, they're not really enjoying what was supposed to be for them also."

Auntie Adebale's story's for getting her house has been a trial of moving from one place to the other filled with frustrations of backyarding and renting houses. She was born in Sherwood Park as middle child to a family of 7 siblings. They stayed with their uncle, her mother's brother. Her childhood life was spent in Sherwood Park up until she was 10 years. Her mother got a house in Manenberg and the family moved to Manenberg Avenue. Upon the passing of her mother, her brother was given the family's house because he was married. Auntie Abeda's story of moving from one neighbourhood to the next began, when her mother passed away. By then she was a single mother and she had to take care and provide shelter for her children.

She stayed at the backyards of family members and friends' houses. At some point she had to rent houses, and squat before she could have a house she could call her own.

When asked how she thinks her children are feeling about living in Ruo Emoh and this house she said, "They would feel what I feel now. But even one of the eldest in the community said here, he said to us, if we had been given houses 15 years ago we wouldn't have appreciated like we do today. The struggle, what we've been through to get here wouldn't be so much in appreciation. So that's what I think, I'm so blessed."

Auntie Abeda Joseph is happily married to Mr. Rafiek Joseph and they have two children Firdoros and Farouk. Auntie Abeda's children are now grown up and are no longer under her wing, with a sad face she said her children will not enjoy the house as they have now moved out. Farouk is staying in Pretoria studying and Firdoros is living in Manenberg with her husband.

Like the other families in the Ruo Emoh, Auntie Abeda, has seen more than 15 years passing by waiting to acquire a house. There was a point in her life when she lost hope and patience and she left the savings group for a period of 5 years. Eventually, the determination

of owning a house one day, brought her back to the savings group and with the support from her husband they continued to save towards their house through the savings group from Manenberg.

There is a delight in her face when she starts to speak about the plans she has for her house and her life. She points out that her struggle has taught her to appreciate the little things in life – to have faith. You can see that she is a woman of faith as you enter her house there are pictures hanging on her wall. The first thing they did when they moved into the house, with her husband they tiled the house and hung up these pictures. She is happy with the inside of the house, but like any family security is important. The family has started putting up burglar bars on the windows and doors. The next move is to construct a property fence and a carport.

"First this year I just wanna enjoy the house and do what must be done in the house. I was talking to my sister the other day about the kitchen is not big enough to my flavour."

Finally, the Joseph family has found a place that they can now call home in Ruo Emoh, after many years of moving from one neighbourhood to the other, the family is now able to live a peaceful relaxed lifestyle. In her own words

describing her adjustment to the new community she said,

“We are good, everyday we greet each other and we know each others names and faces. So if you are going out and you have left your washing out you tell us. It’s perfect here. Like my brother was saying the other time, it is a retirement place. It is peaceful here better than the area I was coming from.”

THE CHURCH CHOIR PERFORMING
PHOTO BY TERI ROBERTS





ADEEB JOHANNES PROUDLY AT HIS
FRONT DOOR AT NUMBER 45.

IMPROVEMENTS, SECURITY, COMMUNITY

Interviewee: Adeeb Johannes

Interviewers: Oliver Manjengwa & Sebastian Steiner

As you enter Adeeb's house you cannot help but notice how he has already begun to make it a home for himself and his three children, Taaybah, Abdul-Alim and Muazz. He is brimming with ideas, designing a lounge suit, epoxy flooring, a remodelled ceiling with down lighters, 3D wallpaper, a gas fireplace for those cold Cape winters and a kitchen island, where his family can eat their meals. Adeeb is not all talk though, he is now working for an upholstery and craft company, a field in which he has excelled after attending school until standard 9 and later completing a course in frame building and upholstery.

What is striking about the whole Ruo Emoh community is how each house is a hive of activity, Adeeb is the epitome of a father determined to succeed, he has already got to work on the ceiling project and it is quiet arguably turning out better than a contractors work. Many of the residents are constructing or plan to construct individual walls between properties, with inspectors ensuring these walls are constructed to the correct standard. There is a true sense of pride in conversations with the residents, particularly Adeeb, as they narrate their histories, challenges and hopes for the future.

Adeeb is originally from Athlone, where he lived as a child and later moved

to Mitchells Plain to Lentegeur at the age of twelve where his mother had bought a house. It is there where he stayed in a backyard wendy house, which had its own entrance, when he was older. He then moved out of his mother's yard when he got married and stayed in several other backyard dwellings in Mitchells Plain, some of the suburbs he moved to were, Crawford in a friends yard and later a flat, Surrey estate in another backyard, Eastridge where he later separated from his wife and moved back to his mother's Lentegeur home before moving into his Ruo Emoh house.

He had spent 15 years on the waiting list for a RDP house until in 2016 he got in touch with Ruo Emoh for the first time and later joined the steering committee. There are 39 families from Mitchells Plain and 10 families from Manenberg in Ruo Emoh.

“Ruo Emoh is enclosed providing security for children as they play. Everyone knows each other, so you can even leave your door open during the day”

Adeeb tells us this as he punctuates each thought with his acknowledgement of

the ‘Almighty peace be upon his name’ he says as he continues to share Ruo Emoh hopes and vision. As a committee member he describes how money is collected weekly from each family to maintain and improve the community area. It includes the funding of projects like the park or higher boundary walls, installing burglar bars and the maintenance of a night watch. This even though the lights in the street are bright enough to see anyone in the dark, which was a good investment he reflects.

The community is happy about the recently installed grey water-system, despite the water having low pressure. Adeeb, like Tariq uses grey water to suppress the sand on the front porch, so the wind does not blow it into the house. He is not planning any structural changes on the outside of the house for now, he is happy as it is. If he needs more space he can expand to the front or the backyard. In the backyard he has an additional 3 metre wide space, as a result of being on a corner house, until it is limited by a boundary wall. Additionally every house has an attic for storage, which he plans to translate into even more space to store materials for his upholstery work.

When asked for his thoughts on selling his house in the future, he says “just look at the type of roof tiles that were

used. It uplifts the place and the houses look like expensive houses, on a par with the neighbouring Watergate houses in an up market part of Mitchells Plain. I wouldn't sell."

In his opinion a steering committee is essential. They are leading the way: "Ok we have to do that and that next". There need to be rules and regulations in the community, otherwise it would not work this well", he says.

Hopefully, in 5 years the boundary wall will be sorted out (increasing the height), there will be letter boxes in the front of the area of Ruo Emoh, numbers on the houses, an elegant Ruo Emoh sign at the entrance and a play area with a jungle gym and sand pit. These are the main aims for the steering committee. It is his view that for any project to be successful it needs a strong steering committee where members can go to, if they have any problems. With such a sense of community, commitment and determination all these years it has truly become Ruo Emoh.





NASIR FOUCHE IN HIS HOME
AT RUO EMOH

A JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND MILES FINALLY COMING TO AN END

Interviewee: Nasir Fouche

Interviewers: Majaha Dlamini & Janine Eberle

Nasir Fouche was born in 1966 in Elsies River, Cape Town. He grew up with both his parents and 6 other siblings. He had 2 brothers and 4 sisters. His parents owned a house in Elsies River. In 1976, Nasir and his family were forcefully removed from Elsies River to Macassar because of the Apartheid's Group Areas Act. He was only about 10 years when this happened and did not really understand what was happening and just that he had to move with his parents and siblings.

In Macassar, the family was renting a dwelling in a backyard and Nasir attended school there with his siblings. They stayed for 3 years in Macassar. When Nasir was 13, in 1979, his father bought a house for the family in Lentegeur, Mitchells Plain, and the house physical address was 84 Dahlia Street. This is where Nasir spent most of his young adulthood and attended school. The father and his older brother were the only bread winners for the family. His mother was unemployed. When Nasir passed grade 11 to progress for matric, his older brother got sick with a tuberculosis diagnosis, which meant he could no longer work. From this point on, it was the father's responsibility to generate an income for the whole family. At the time his father worked

for a printing company, then called De Nationale Pers Beperkt, which is part of today's group called Media24. Instead of continuing with his schooling, Nasir told his dad that he wanted to quit school so he could help him in supporting the family as his sisters were still young. His first job was at Groote Schuur Hospital, where he earned R200 per month. Nasir felt that this was too little for him and his family. In 1984, he changed his job to work at the same company as his dad, where he earned R75 per week. This made a positive difference by then, he reckons. Talking about challenges of moving to Lentegeur, he said his father was working night shifts and that meant transport was limited late at night. This forced him to walk long distances to the Nyanga train station to catch a train to town. Another challenge was that it was far from town and far from convenient shopping centres, he narrates that his mom had to travel long distances to do groceries as compared to when they were in Elsies River. This was a burden, as she was not in good health.

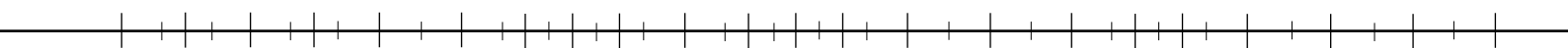
In 1990, Nasir bought a house of his own in Lentegeur. Two years later, Nasir got married with his wife (now ex-wife) Nadeema, who moved in. The same year,

Nasir was retrenched from his work at De Nationale Pers Beperkt. This forced him to sell his house before it was repossessed. Nasir took the transaction proceeds into his savings account where he kept the money for maintaining his wife and himself. Instead of buying another house, Nasir's wife Nadeema suggested that they can move into her parents' place in Lentegeur while they are saving up to buy another house. At this time, Nadeema's father had passed away.

Nasir and Nadeema have two children, a son (22) and a daughter (20). The son has a diploma in business management and is currently working as a dispatch supervisor. The daughter is doing her 2nd year at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, where she is training to be a teacher.

Since 2000, Nasir is working as a marine painter at the Waterfront in Cape Town. This year is his 18th anniversary.

Nadeema and Nasir got divorced in 2010 but they are still on good terms and have been co-parenting well in raising their children. The house in Ruoh Emoh is registered on Nadeema's name and Nasir is keeping it for her until she moves in with her son and daughter. Nadeema is still at her parents' place in Lentegeur,



No. 5 Duinebessie Street. As she is currently unemployed, Nasir supports her and the children wherever he can. Like Nasir, Nadeema's family was also forcefully evicted through the Group Areas Act. Her family was moved from District Six to where they stay today.

Their involvement in the Ruo Emoh project

Nasir tells us that Ruo Emoh started around 1995 with a few members, many which are no longer part of the project. The name Ruo Emoh has always been there since day one. The project started out as a practical demonstration to the government, that given a piece of land, they can build their own houses. To do that the group of backyard dwellers invaded the council land and built a house structure within a day. Shortly after, this house was demolished by the council. The project continued with the group meeting on a regular basis, Nasir admits that he was not fully committed to the meetings of Ruo Emoh, but Nadeema was the one who attended. At the beginning, he said they would make 50 cents contribution for administration purposes for the organisation. There was some point where Nadeema was also not attending the meetings when the project was taking forever to get concluded and it felt like they were not moving forward.

However, over the years she would just keep an ear to what is happening around the project. At this time, Nasir says he would just help financially whenever money or anything was needed. Nadeema continued to be part of the project nonetheless up to getting her house under her name. Nasir said that a lot of the people that started with them at the beginning pulled out of the project. He can only think of Nadeema who was in the project from the beginning.

When finally receiving the house, Nasir said it was a good and proud moment for the family. Everyone was happy. Nasir mentions that his daughter and son are already using the Ruo Emoh address before they even move in.

Nasir said he loves Ruo Emoh, because it is a safe neighbourhood, there is no gang violence. Moreover, he likes the fact that neighbours get along and check-up on each other. As much as Nasir was not involved in the early stages of the project, he believes he stepped in at a crucial stage of the project. Nasir was part of the first residents to move into his house in Ruo Emoh. He was guarding his family house and the other houses and

preventing break-ins before the residents moved in.

In terms of improving the house, Nasir said he has a few ideas to beautify the house, but has to get the permission from Nadeema.

On the lessons learned from this project, Nasir said he learnt that perseverance and working together could take communities forward. He also wishes that many other communities could take a leaf out of Ruo Emoh's journey.



FAZLIN SAMSODIEN (MIDDLE)
ALONG WITH INTERVIEWER
SAYAK ROY (RIGHT) & ADEMOLA
OMOEGUN (LEFT)

THE LOVE OF FAMILY

Interviewee: Fazlin Samsodien

Interviewers: Sayak Roy & Ademola Omoegun

Fazlin Samsodien is a family oriented 42 year old single mother, who lives in Ruo Emoh with her four children, 3 girls and a boy. Three of her children are in school, the girls are aged 16, 13, and 2 months, with the older two in grade 10 and 8 respectively, whilst the boy is 4 years old and is in pre-primary school. The children's father who does not live with them, provides some support for the children and the two older girls also get child support from the government. But Fazlin, who was educated up to grade 11 and runs a cake and pastry business from home, is mainly responsible for her children.

Fazlin was born in Mitchells Plain, Cape Town, where she and her children lived with her parents and extended family before they moved to Ruo Emoh. She describes Mitchells Plain as being very big and with a number of dangerous areas unlike Ruo Emoh, which is completely safe. She and her three immediate neighbours have actually been thinking of making their block even safer for their children when they go out to play by putting up a fence around their buildings so that their young children can play safely in the courtyard. However, they are not in any hurry, as they have to save up and get approval from the committee. Moreover, Ruo Emoh is safe anyway so there

is really no rush. It is just something they are contemplating, as the safety of their children is a priority for them.

Her cousin, who was involved in Ruo Emoh from the start (20 years ago), introduced her to the project around 2012, as she knew Fazlin was looking for a safe place for her children and herself. After this, she applied for a subsidy through the committee and after a while she was contacted and informed that the subsidy had been approved. Thereafter, she was invited to the regular meetings. She has had a very pleasant relationship with other residents and the committee. And in December 2017 she became the secretary of the committee as they were looking for a secretary and she volunteered to help. The chairman, the technical team and the whole committee have been very helpful. "If you need anything they always assist and they also work hard to keep the area orderly and safe." Fazlin states. She says there have had difference of opinions along the way, but they always came together to negotiate and at the end they always found a conclusion together.

Fazlin has made considerable effort to make the house comfortable for her children and explains that the project has had a major impact on her family. She also got support from her own family to

improve on the house.

"... my children were extremely happy and excited about the house because when we used live with my parents they didn't feel like bringing friends home because the house was always full ... but now they can bring their friends ... they were very, very excited ... My lounge area used to be bigger, but I had the wall between it and my children's room knocked down to make their room bigger ... I prefer to make their room bigger so the children can have more space in their room ... We are allowed to make some modifications to the building in order to make it more comfortable for our personal situations ... so I decided I didn't need a big lounge area but the children need space in their room ... In the future I would consider building an upper floor to create even more space ... When we moved my family, my sisters ... all bought me something to decorate the house, tiles etc. ... I had the support of my family ... they were very excited ..."

From her experience on the project, Fazlin has learnt the importance of perseverance, patience and faith in achieving a vision as after their wait the outcome surpassed their expectation. She explains that compared to other low cost housing estates, which she had visited previously, some of which they

visited with their facilitator in the process of waiting and planning, Ruo Emoh was much better, as some projects have very small bathrooms. She attributes the success of Ruo Emoh to the support of uTshani Fund, the Federation, SDI and other affiliate organisations that helped to make their project better than other low cost housing areas. Ruo Emoh means a lot to Fazlin, even more than words can convey, as she puts it:

“... Ruo Emoh is our home written backwards, it means our home ... our lovely homes ...

I can't tell you what it means to me because sometimes I still can't believe it, it's overwhelming ... is it really true ... Is it really my home?? I think I must still get used to the fact that it is my house ... Everything took time, they said they were going to pull the plug on the project at a point but here we are ... t's hard to believe ... that's what the neighbours also say, are we really in our own homes? ... It's going to take time to realise that it's our house, our home ... You can't really explain to the next person how you feel ...”





NAAZEEN SALIE WITH HER
DAUGHTER SUMAYA

MY DREAMS FOR MY CHILDREN ARE FALLING IN PLACE

Interviewee: Naazeen Salie

Interviewers: Adesola Adelowo & Abdullahi Ali Hassan

“It was like we never ever thought that our house would look like this. Mommy, is this really our house? They still couldn't believe it. Mommy, is it really? It's too beautiful.”

All the sacrifices and hard work were worth it for this very moment when Naazeen Salie watched her children walk into their new home. “I needed to do this for [my children]. They say, ‘Mommy we need to do a project.’ But they don’t bring their friend’s home because they knew our condition.” Naazeen was determined to keep going to get her house in Ruo Emoh because of her desires for the well-being of her children and securing stable housing for her family.

But, what experiences shape a mother’s determination and drive? How does a family arrive at such a moment? And, what decisions and sacrifices did they make to triumph over moving from backyard to backyard or house to house?

Naazeen and Ahmed Salie have been married for sixteen years. They have two children, including fourteen years old, Mohamed, and eleven years old, Sumaya. They also have a third child Nuuh, a three old now who is the daughter of Naazeen’s brother. Although she was

born in Walmer Estate in Cape Town, Naazeen has lived in different neighbourhoods in Cape Town, including Mitchells Plain, Vanguard Drive, Grassy Park, Manenberg, and Ottery – where she met her husband at a local school. But because of unstable housing, Naazeen attended thirteen schools through grade eleven. Her parents divorced when she was seven years old, which also contributed to the lack of permanent housing.

“I’ve been to hell and I’ve been back. You know what I’m giving my family now is what I’ve never had. I am so protective over my kids. God should really forgive me if somebody should hurt my children. I come out of a broken home from a very young age. It was just me and my brother. We lived for years with my father and he was a good father; he’s still a good father. He did what he could do but there are just things that a father can’t do that a mother does.”

The challenging relationship with her mother, loving relationship with her father, and being moved around with her brother as her constant support nurtured her commitment to someday have her own family, and to love them with all her heart – which meant giving them safety and making sacrifices to have a better life.

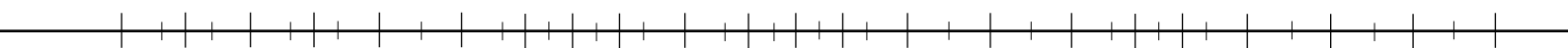
Getting a house in Ruo Emoh wasn’t

easy. Naazeen and Ahmed included their children in the hard work and sacrifices to get their home.

“You know we used to come here on this ground when it was nothing – nothing but bush. They had to clean the bush, we used our bare hands to clean the bush. You know we use saws and stuff like that. Then we had to secure it. We stood together and we said we need to take care of our ground. Then we made up security [schedule]. Our [family] shift was every Saturday night from seven o’clock in the evening until seven o’clock Sunday morning.

That was every Saturday for about eight to nine months – if not longer. Now, the land was clean right. The roads started to be laid. The electricity people came and it was dark, and it was winter. It was cold there was nothing here, it was dark. You had to stand here and take care of your place, not just the section I’m living in, the complete section we had to take care of (and secure).

I used to bring my children with me every Saturday evening. I would bring them even if it rain. It wasn’t raining all the time but...it was winter as well. They would ride the bike around the circle and I would tell them this is where our home is gonna be. That brought so much joy to the children to think well here is a land



so surely somehow or the other we're all gonna be here someday.

We had to sleep in a vehicle or if there was no vehicle we used to make us a bonfire. You couldn't sleep because you need to take care of the place. Because anybody could come and invade [the land]. We wouldn't want anybody to come on this ground and just put their things on the place down. But now somebody else come and they take it away from you. So, we had to fight hard for that not to happen. Because there were many people who were ready that came and there were rumours going around that the electricity cables were in the ground. If somebody steals it, who's going to do it again? The government is not going to do it again so we had to take care of what was ours."

Even though the Salie's were going to get a house in Ruo Emoh, the entire family participated in cleaning and securing land. Like many families, they also gave-up favourite foods and activities to make financial contributions towards expenses like the community fence.

Now that they have a house, what does the move to Ruo Emoh mean to the Salie family?

"I'm looking forward for my children. I know they're gonna grow out to be very good young men and young women because that is what I implant on them every day. Life is what you're gonna make out of it. My expectations are very high for them and always pray and ask God to help me. My dream is in five years I want to [build] up for the sake of my children. In five years' time my son can come to me and tell me mommy I want to get married, what am I gonna do then? Where will they live? Those are all things playing in my mind.

"We...sit in our family time and we... speak and we...laugh and we...gag about stuff. It was like we never ever thought that our house would look like this. [They still ask] mommy, 'Is this really our house?' They still can't believe it... God willing my expectations for them are very high".

THE SASMAN FAMILY



IT'S A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Interviewee: Nabeal Sasman

Interviewers: Florence Seigenthaler & Rosca Warries

"Sorry for the mess, we have just had breakfast", says Nabeal as we enter a perfectly tidy, newly arranged living room.

We have a seat on the couch as Nabeal's kids curiously poke their heads through the door. It's a calm and sunny Saturday morning, perfect for them to play outside. Nabeal speaks with a silent, humble voice while, in the background the TV shows a Nigerian series. His wife and her mother have been part of the Ruo Emoh community for over ten years, and that is how he got to know it as well.

"We waited very long, but this project gave us some form of hope, that we can move out of a particular area, especially for the kids. Underprivileged areas increase the amount of violence. That is where we're from. It's like two different worlds, even though we haven't moved that far. You can see, kids come out after lunch, start playing, it's a safe environment."

Nabeal's two-year-old daughter comes in with a bunch of flowers. He chuckles as she leaves again with her older sister, to pursue her self-ascribed task at the small patch of yellow flowers in the sandy front-yard of the house.

Nabeal's wife is not feeling very well on the day of our interview. Their newborn had kept her up all night. Nabeal, originally from Grassy Park, has been

with his wife "ever since", he says. Ever since, that is since they were teenagers. He then moved to Lentegueur, Mitchells Plain, where she stayed. But Lentegueur was a constant distress, especially since the couple got kids.

"People got shot in front of our home, at best, things were quiet for a month or two and then it literally rained gang wars. The kids get traumatised. Every time something goes off, like the car backfires, my son will ask was that a gun shot?"

Moving into Ruo Emoh, then, also meant gaining peace of mind. A reward for the stony path they have crossed to get here. But also, it required commitment and perseverance. Attending regular meetings, becoming part of the neighbourhood watch, while working full-time at a call-centre.

"We had to juggle a lot of things and give up a lot of hobbies in between. Everybody put in a lot of energy and effort".

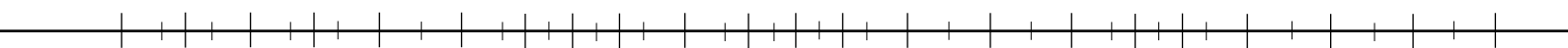
Many sacrifices were to be made in the process of waiting and saving money for the prospect of a better future in getting a home. However, what they got in return was not just their own little house, but also, a place in a close-knit, supportive community. Both of them, the community and Nabeal's family, still, are in constant development. Being a community requires an effort and active

engagement from everyone involved. This meant learning to communicate and deal with disagreements as well as with structures and administrative processes. However, through all the meetings and disagreements, Nabeal recalls, in the first few weeks after moving in, the whole community would stay outside until late at night and just sit, eat and chat with each other.

"There were challenges all the time. But, as a whole, people got along. I know there was a lot of exchange of words like disagreements based on certain promises that transpired that didn't happen for people. But, nothing can be completed on negativity so then something was done right to make this possible. There can't be disagreements all the time."

Before, the whole family had to stay in one small room, the Ruo Emoh house allows for a little more privacy and space. Two rooms add onto the living room and Nabeal plans to expand the house little by little in the coming years.

"It's not that our living condition before was only bad, it kept the family together. But it's just better now, everything. We've been assisted with the grey-water system, there's infrastructure installed. That are things we didn't have where we come from. I want to add another room to the property, but we are



restricted. So possibly, we going to try and extend hopefully in the near future so that we can add another room because with so many kids you need extra space. I have to be realistic and see what I can achieve.”

Not only is Nabeal planning to renovate and add another room for his children to sleep in but he also is considering creating a bigger kitchen for his wife to feel comfortable cooking for the family. His decision making process of renovating reflects an inspirational aspect of his heart in providing and creating a safe and comfortable life for his family. Nabeal, jokingly, told us that through the whole process of minor renovations of painting the walls and tiling the floors he allowed his children to help him, so that family memories could be made. His children experienced so many traumatic moments of gang violence that to be able to create a space of harmony through tiling floors or painting walls, together they can create a better and safer home environment.

“That first week that we moved in. We had to do many things like tile the floors because there wasn’t tiles on the floor. So they would come along and help me paint the walls. For fun they would paint. So everything that still needs to be done we try and do it together. So it’s all a fun experience for them. And the good thing

is that they can play outside. They are not worried about anything. My children are traumatised because of the gang violence, they also don’t want to see fighting because they know it will lead to gang wars. One night we were all up, I will never forget that evening. I called the cops once, because we could see something happening. Right in front of our home and the man got shot and they were still awake. You know, when we grew up I never experienced anything like that so they grow up within that, what if they become accustomed to that? Does that mess with their life? And, those were the kind of things they went through every single day of their lives. Lots of questions go through my mind. But since we have been here, you can see they have changed and they are more at ease. Those things affected the kids. But, living here, now, we make them play outside.”

For Nabeal his future looks safe and comfortable. He knows it takes a lot to get somewhere in life. He knows he has to make sacrifices and save constantly to provide for his family. But, living in the Ruoh Emoh community he can do these things in a secure and close-knit community where his children have the freedom to pick flowers and play in the streets. Where he has the freedom to speak with other men in the community and become part of the neighbourhood

watch. It is difficult to get to the destination of receiving a home but to make it a safe and comfortable one takes time as well and Nabeal has the heart and passion to see that through in Ruoh Emoh.

His hope for the future is that as the community grows in strength that they will always come together to make it beautiful and safe for his family and other families in Ruoh Emoh.

ESA EDEERIEA AND HER
DAUGHTER NORA



FREEDOM FROM SHARING – A HOUSE WITH PRIVATE ROOMS AT LAST!

Interviewee: Esa Edeeriea

Interviewers: Basil Studer & Geetika Anand

Esa Edeeriea, her husband, and their two daughters moved into their house in Ruo Emoh on 27 January 2018. This was a really important day for this family. The two-bedroom house gave the family the much-needed privacy as they have a separate bedroom for children now.

Esa still spends almost 4-5 hours daily in commuting. She works as a cleaning lady in a pharmacy at Sea Point. Her husband is a painter, but has been unemployed for more than four years now. Both the daughters are in school, the younger one in grade 4 and older one in grade 10. The older daughter, Nora, wants to be a lawyer. Esa herself has gone to school until seventh grade. The family relies on Esa's salary and child support grants received from the government.

Esa had lived in three neighbourhoods and five houses in Cape Town before she moved into her own house in Ruo Emoh in Colorado Park. Born in Wynberg, Esa grew up with her six siblings and parents. The family moved to Grassy Park from Wynberg. They then shifted to Mitchells Plain when Esa was 18, and she lived in that house until she got married, at the age of 35 (in 1998). For the first two years of her marriage, she and her husband lived in her mother-

in-law's house (also in Mitchells Plain) where they had a private room, and a shared kitchen and bathroom. Their first daughter was also born in that house. Since the house was small and they were sharing it with parents and the family of her husband's brother, they decided to move out.

They rented a wendy (backyard house) from a friend, very close to the mother-in-law's house. The rent was R500 and accessing water was another R350. Spread over an area of 18 sq m, there were two rooms – one was converted into a kitchen and the other was used for sleeping by the couple and two children. There were no water and sanitation services inside that house. For almost 18 years, the family lived in that wendy house, before they moved into this new house in Ruo Emoh.

Five year ago, one of Esa's friends asked her if she wanted her name on the list of the Ruo Emoh project. Since she wanted her own house, she said yes, and that marked her beginning in the project and a process at the end of which she owns a house. Esa had her initial doubts about whether the houses would really see light of the day but on her friend's assurance, she started saving and partic-

ipating in the meetings. She would save R100 a month, but sometimes she would have no savings. In the end, she had a shortfall of about R4 000 that she paid last year.

Having lived in shared and small houses all her life, Esa really appreciates her current house here in Ruo Emoh. She is most happy about the fact that there are two bedrooms – one for her (and her husband) and one for children. She also has her own kitchen and bathroom now. Esa has partially carpeted the raw flooring that came with the house, and her first priority is to finish that as soon as possible. Using tiles, the family has also paved the passage to the entry of the house. The plan is now to tile the floors inside, get cupboards for the bedrooms, and put a shower in the bathroom. Esa loves gardening and wants to develop the frontyard into a garden. Since the backyard is not too big, she would rather use that for washing purposes.

Esa's association with the Ruo Emoh community has been a good one. She knows everyone in the community and does not miss anyone from her last neighbourhood. Since the meetings have been going on for so many years, everyone has developed a good relationship

with each other.

Esa likes the quietness of the neighbourhood; her older daughter, Nora, on the other hand, feels it's too quiet here. She also misses her friends from Mitchells Plain. She needs to take a taxi to school now, while she could walk from the earlier house. However, she likes the fact that they have their own space now, and the sisters don't have to share the bedroom with their parents anymore.





ISMAAEEL & MYMOENA JACOBS

EVERYTHING FELL IN PLACE

Interviewee: Ismaaeel & Mymoena Jacobs

Interviewers: Kaylin Harrison, Lea Nienhoff, Israel Ogundare

Recently married Mymoena and Ismaaeel Jacobs are expecting their first child together this year – a baby girl. Having the home in Ruo Emoh therefore came at the time it meant a lot to the Jacobs Family. For Mymoena it is simply a case of “Everything fell in place”. For Ismaaeel, as the first son to get married he felt he needed this space; a place of his own and it so happened that through all the uncertainty and ups and downs of the Ruo Emoh project, the place became available to the growing Jacobs family tree.

Ismaaeel: “Never mind how small the place is, we got our own space, it’s a home, we can make a home out of this, so, that for me is more important than living in a mansion, or like not appreciating what we have here.”

The Jacobs know the burden and expense which renting someone else’s property entails having previously rented in Rylands. They also know what it means to share a house with many family members. In Ruo Emoh they have a space of their own and Mymoena says: “It’s a nice stepping stone for any new

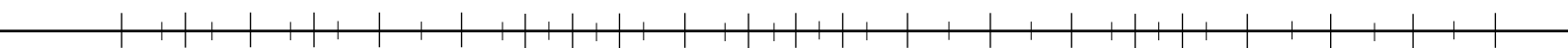
couple”.

Mymoena was born in Johannesburg and lived there for most of her life. Ismaaeel is from Cape Town and grew up in Lentegeur, where his family still resides. The place is what the Jacobs has constructed and made home for themselves. With Ismaaeel’s expertise lying in that of renovating, tiling and so forth. He took the structure and renovated it into a beautiful home. The beneficiary of the house in Ruo Emoh is Ismaaeel’s mother, Jasmine Jacobs. This home plays a significant role in not only the Jacobs currently residing there, but also for any other Jacobs family member. In the future, the house may be a home to the children and the children’s children for generations to come. This is the story of the struggle and the steps taken to finally get the house, in the words of Ismaaeel Jacobs.

It was almost like a movie

“It is 20 years ago, when the project started, and my mother was there right from the beginning. She was on the board for housing. I was a little boy, when all of this started. Every rand they had together made a difference at the time. They were raising money with little food fairs. My mother was preparing cakes and boerewors rolls to sell. Later, I became

the running guy for her; whenever they were meeting and other things, I would go. Sometimes, I was working, but then you hear at 3 o’ clock is a meeting and you have to be there, we had no choice, we just had to move. When I came back home from the meetings I told my mother what was happening, what the next steps are, and I also picked up who is trying to run the show. We had so many challenges and everyone of us had their ticks. But nothing major. I remember when I went to the first meeting for my mother. Some of the other members were from around the area and I had known them by face, but not on a personal level. But after going to the meetings more and more, I was befriending people. Obviously, we were going to live together soon. At the time we were hoping to be neighbours soon, but eventually it just went on for a little while. In the recent years there were no fundraisers or these things any more, but when we met we were discussing how things progressed and how we could secure our property, since it was already our land. The challenge was to handle the delays. Sometimes we needed to put in large sums of money and the committee would promise certain things on certain days, but it just wouldn’t be possible. The issues would linger for a few days, but



the committee would sort them out in the end. I respect them a lot for that."

We stood security ourselves

"We had to put up a fence around the land. But it didn't take long until parts of the fence were stolen. We had to take it off again. I played a part in that as well. We came in on a Saturday and we just took it off. At some point it was just the two of us, myself and Archie. Then the infrastructure came in and we knew we have to start to stand security ourselves. We came after work, on the weekends, to stand security at our grounds – day and night. I think this was when people got a more positive mind-set towards the project again. In the beginning this was an issue, but over time we had the feeling of 'this is our ground', we claimed it. If we want to stand security we will stand security because we own this now. Once people heard, once they got the go-ahead that things are happening now, things are going to happen, people had enough of the empty promises. Once things started...I can tell you people were really positive towards everything."

The hope and aspiration that comes with owning a house, especially after a long period of waiting is unquantifiable. This house has a great significance for Ismaaeel's whole family. Ismaaeel expresses, how he and his brother looked

forward to having the house. To both of them it was an aspiration and now it has become another home, and at the same time a financial security.

Looking towards the future, Ismaaeel hopes to build up the security for the community and can imagine a complex typology. Mymoena has a plan in mind that when the baby arrives and things have settled, she will try to petition for better measures to reduce speed, for example getting a speed limit.

When asked about lessons learned in the process the Jacobs respond:

"I think to stand more together as a community. Don't, because you are disappointed by one person, not help the community. That whatever challenges you get, let's face it together. Don't leave it to one."



TARIQ SILJEUR WITH
WIFE ZAIDA AND
DAUGHTER LESLEY

HISTORY OF ACTIVISM

Interviewee: Tariq Siljeur

Interviewers: Oliver Manjengwa & Sebastian Steiner

Like all the stories in this booklet Tariq's story is captivating, extraordinary and inspiring. It is full of challenges and suspense, it makes you want to love, cry or both, it makes you want to meet this person and discover more about him and his family. Many would be surprised by what Tariq says when asked what it was like to wait 20 years to get a house. His response was: "It could have been worse, It was not that long." He knows a lot of people who are on waiting lists a great deal longer than that. He and his wife, Zaida, are just happy that they have a house now. This house is all they have ever dreamed off. Zaida, his 5 year old adopted daughter and himself are living in this new house. Their other children have over the years moved away in their pursuit for decent housing. Ruo Emoh and the whole organisation behind it gives him hope that it could become a model for other housing projects. That it will be better in the future and that his children may not have that struggle anymore. Tariq told us some of these struggles, most poignantly his family story. This is a story of activism and crucial housing problems, embodied by his personal story, his father's and his uncle, Trevor's. It is important that Tariq's uncle, Trevor's, housing story and struggle is shared as it has moulded his passion for a decent and respectable society. Here is his uncle's, which starts

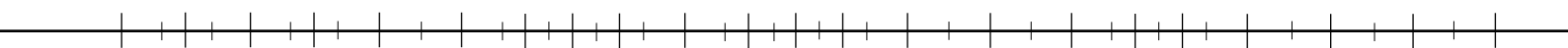
in Vrygrond.

Vrygrond was a shanty town in the early 90's, the original landowner was very wealthy. When he died he left his land in his will go to the people who were are living on the land, but the apartheid government stole the land. To contest this, his uncle moved out of the brick home (with electricity and running water) to set up a shack amongst these people. Trevor was a community leader there. For 10 years he fought to get back the stolen land from the apartheid government. But when he got the land back he was not content with just having the land, but he also wanted people to live in decent housing. He started the Vrygrond Trust. The trust got 27 million rand from the government for a project with 1600 houses planned. In Vrygrond the dissident group was controlled by three officials of the SA National Civics Organisation (SANCO). They were also founders of the Trust but that was not enough for them. They wanted to have total control over the project. Trevor said no to that and said that they are welcome to come on board but that he is not giving them the project. They didn't want to come on board. A first attempt on his life was made. His shack was set on fire with him and his 5 year old daughter Tracy inside. Whilst, his uncle managed to get out unharmed, one side of Tracy's body

got burnt. Tracy had plastic surgery until the age of 16.

After the fire all of the family members warned Trevor not to go back. But he wouldn't listen. He set up a shack a second time. His work continued and they burned the shack down again. Tracy and he both got out this time. Again, he set up a shack for the third time. The buildingproject continued and in the night on the date when he handed over the first set of keys to the people to move out of shacks into the new houses, that night he got shot and killed in front of Tracy. Tracy is the mother of Tariq's adopted daughter. It is an immensely intense story. (If you have the time to read the story it can be found on the Internet. There are tremendous struggles and challenges in securing housing.

Tariq's surname is a very political ANC surname. Not only because of Trevor, but also because of Tariq's father who used to be part of the ANC. What saddens Tariq is how his family was moved from Claremont to Steenberg during apartheid and how the white people who moved into those houses in Claremont would say what the apartheid government was doing was wrong but they still accepted the dispossession of people from their houses. Tariq narrates, quite bluntly, that if you did not want to move willingly you were forced, thrown



out of your homes. The apartheid system made people become political: “they forced people to stand up against them”. With that history of activism, Tariq found himself also in housing struggles. He grew up in Cape Town and moved to Johannesburg for economic reasons and to work there as a chef. When the hotels were outsourcing staff, he came back to Cape Town to Steenberg originally. His wife was still living in Manenberg with her parents until they could put up a wendy house in the yard. This is the cheapest and most affordable way to get a ‘house’ for many families.

Tariq told us how unsustainable small houses are. Overcrowding becomes a real issue, families don’t remain static, things happen, a family which moves into a house may initially think it is just them, relatives move in, parents pass away and their children also move in so the structure of the household is always changing. The backyard structure got sold when they moved to Ruo Emoh. Some backyards get loans that they have to pay off on a weekly basis after having provided a wage slip or three month bank statement to show they can pay off the wendy house. It cost him and his wife a fortune for their wendy house where they stayed before. Sometimes living in a backyard was really embarrassing. For example if you had to go to the toilet, one would

disturb people living in the house.

Tariq emphasised how you have to give people their space, and he is quite happy that in Ruo Emoh people have their space, though it is not much, it is secure.

The building contractor has ‘stolen’ some of the land. He was uncomfortable with the word stolen but used it for lack of a better word. The issue was that when the wall was constructed. The contractor did not use the designated pegs and went a meter into the property on both ends of the wall, and this is noticeable as his is a corner house. The peg that was meant to be used is still visible as one looks over the wall and he hopes that this will be corrected. As an eternal optimist, he cheerfully said that there is still space and that Zaida, his wife, can still have her ‘little garden’ despite the issue with the boundary wall. Gardening is really important to her as she was raised on a wine farm. They plan to come up with innovative ways to maximise the space they have in their yard, by hanging 2-litre plastic bottles with basil, thyme and rosemary along the wall. Tariq says he strongly believes that people should have their little piece of land that they can do

something with. In Tariq’s and Zaida’s opinion Ruo Emoh will look more developed in 5 years or 10 years. They have projects in mind like a paved front porch, a carport and a stunning garden. It is just a matter of money and commitment that determines how many changes can be made. They are going to make changes whenever they have spare money. The people in Ruo Emoh are allowed to sell the houses after 8 years, but Tariq and his wife do not have any intention of selling. Tariq sees that the future will be brighter. And that it will be an even better place over the years. In his words:

“I think in the future this place will be amazing as long as the community is working together.”

Commitment is very important for the project to work as he said. Not just in the past but also in the future of Ruo Emoh. In his own point of view, Ruo Emoh could become a model for on-going projects or projects in the future as one compare this housing to the others they don’t come close. This has to be the best.



AUNTIE ZAINAP WHISGARY IN
HER KITCHEN.

MY HOUSE, MY COMMUNITY, MY LIFE

Interviewee: Auntie Zainap Whisgary

Interviewers: Evan Escamilla & Goabamang Lethugile

Upon entering Ruoh Emoh, one house is bound to catch a stranger's eye as being unlike the rest. There is constant movement around Auntie Zainap's property and it seems that every time you glance away and look back a window has shifted position or a door has disappeared and reappeared somewhere else – not to mention the mass alterations happening on the inside of the house. Auntie Zainap has waited twenty years for this day and has wasted no time in testing her architectural capabilities. (It turns out she has quite an eye for it!)

For twenty years the original applicants and buyers of the private plot of land, now known as Ruoh Emoh, fought and waited and fought again to realize their plans of building and moving into their own homes in Weltevreden Valley. Auntie Zainap, one of the original applicants, was drawn into the project by one of her daughters, who later pulled out and took a house with a small mortgage in Mitchells Plain. Although the story of Ruoh Emoh began circa twenty years ago, this story actually commenced more than sixty years ago, when Zainap Whisgary was first taken into her father's house in Salt River. Interestingly, 'life' can sometimes be thought to start with marriage and children because this is often when independent life begins for women like Auntie Zainap. But the following

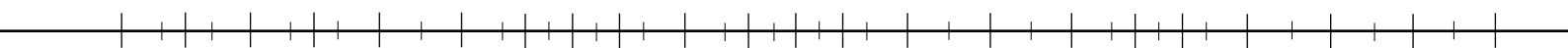
paragraphs will be a sketch of her life's movements from birth until the present.

After Salt River, the first housing memory young Zainap has is of 62 Cornflower St, Bridgetown. The developmental years of her life were spent here taking care of her working father and younger siblings. She has very little contact with her mother, who is still alive but chose to remove herself from the family and pursue other interests, so, at the age of 13, it was necessary for her to stop attending classes to tend to the domestic affairs of her father's household. This independent 13 year old girl was responsible for taking a 10 rand note to the shops to buy the week's groceries and 2 rand to the offices to pay the Bridgetown rent. In her own words, "This is why I say my childhood was stolen from me, because I had to be a mom at 13. I was like a big girl, man". She remained at home caring for children not much younger than herself, to ensure that the household ran smoothly and that her siblings and father always had a warm meal and a lighted kitchen to come home to.

Although young Zainap's responsibilities cropped up distinctly earlier than marriage age, many of her starkest housing memories stem from the time after she was married, when she was focused on giving the best possible life to her babies. At the age of 16 Auntie

Zainap, newly wed, left her grandparent's house in Crawford and relocated to her husband's family home in Manenberg. Manenberg was where she gave birth to the first of her 6 beautiful children, and the other 5 followed shortly thereafter in quick succession. She gave birth to the children in the span of a decade and ended up moving around with them more times than she cares to count. From Manenberg, her growing family moved to Bridgetown, the home of her brother-in-law. This stop lasted about 5 years before Auntie and her children went back to her grandparent's home in Crawford. Finally, she once again left her grandparent's house and moved into a slightly larger place in Mitchells Plain, a new home owned by her father. The next 36 years of Auntie's life would be spent in and around Rocklands, Mitchells Plain.

Despite choosing, and sometimes having, to relocate her family various times in their childhood and young adult life, her children were provided for and have gone on to fight their own housing struggles, often being victorious in their endeavours to secure long-term tenure. Her eldest, Abdul-Majiet has since passed but her second child, Adenaan, is the chairman of the Ruoh Emoh Committee and has his new house just down the street from his mother. Shawaal, Rezaah, Fatgeiah and Sumaya are her younger



children who are spread through the area but not so far out of reach that they cannot call on their mother to watch their little ones, and in doing so indoctrinate a bit of her fighters spirit into each of them. In fact, the daughters currently living in Rocklands, expressed some disappointment that Ruo Emoh has finally been realized and their mum will be moving out. (Luckily, she has not yet moved out because of the extensive renovations taking place on her house, we will come back to this.) Auntie Zainap said,

“For me, 20 years I didn’t have the luxury of living with my daughters, we were living there and that one there. So to wait for this house was very important to me at the time. So, after my daughters got married and all the children got married I lived with them but it was still important to have my OWN house.”

Auntie was not prepared to be forever reliant on her family or on her family’s spouses. She had been patiently waiting and simultaneously fighting tooth and nail to get this project moving again so

that she could finally emancipate herself. She is now receiving a pension and with her savings she is making her dream house.

Each Ruo Emoh house started as an open kitchen and living room with a toilet and two back bedrooms. There was a front door facing the street and a side door off of the kitchen. Auntie Zainap has already expanded her kitchen, causing her to also push back her toilet and turn the two small back rooms into one back room with a sliding glass door. When the Ruo Emoh project first began it was not only grandbabies that she was watching, some of her children were still with her. Between the Ruo Emoh project initiation and its completion her dependents have grown and been replaced by newer and fewer dependents, allowing her to freely turn her two bedroom into a one bedroom with no worries for the future. She assured us that in time a second level can be built onto the house, although there is no rush to do this at the moment. She now has one dependent grandson in Varsity who stays with her occasionally but it is likely that he will not yet start his own family so for now she is free to pursue her dreams – designing the perfect kitchen for baking and fully enjoying her newfound life as a pensioner/homeowner.

Speaking of the kitchen, Auntie’s

kitchen will soon have real counter space and plenty of room for her to do all of her mixing and baking. Currently, she has tiled over the side door, added a window and actually had the original doors and windows replaced with different models. She is an industrious entrepreneur who bakes all manner of sweets to satisfy any possible craving. Her baking is her art and her kitchen will soon be her very own sanctuary.

Auntie Zainap was able to begin all of these renovations now because she has been diligent with her saving and has also managed to search out the best deals, haggle down prices and generally push on with all of her creative designs. One huge project that is not yet underway is that of her ‘outdoor entertainment area’ where she will be able to shade herself from the beating sun and Cape wind to entertain friends for braais and tea. The woman is a visionary who is determined to have her house in pristine condition in record time so that she can finally take up permanent residence in her last ever home, Ruo Emoh. Our Home.



WASIELA BRANDT

THIS IS A PLACE WHERE MY CHILDREN CAN GROW: THE BRANDT FAMILY

Interviewee: Wasiela Brandt

Interviewers: Joseph Ngben & James Clacherty

Wasiela Brandt was born in Claremont in 1974. She is the youngest of eight siblings all born in Claremont. In 1978 her family was forced to relocate because of the Group Areas Act and at the age of three Wasiela moved to Woodlands in Mitchells Plain. Wasiela started school at Woodville Primary, which was opened the same year she arrived in Woodlands and was only the second primary school to be opened in Mitchells Plain. Her four youngest children still go to school at Woodville Primary. Wasiela would go on to do her matric at Woodlands high, the same high school that her husband Randal Brandt went to. In Woodlands, Wasiela's whole family lived together in a three bedroom council house in a block of flats surrounding a courtyard. Soon after they moved her older siblings started getting married and moving out of the family home to start households of their own. Randal was born in Steenberg and also moved to Mitchells Plain when he was very young. His family moved into a house on the same court as Wasiela where he stayed for forty years. This is where the two met.

Wasiela's mother managed to buy the house that her family was living in from the government and so when she passed away a few years ago the title for the house was transferred to a trust held by all of the children. At this stage Wasiela

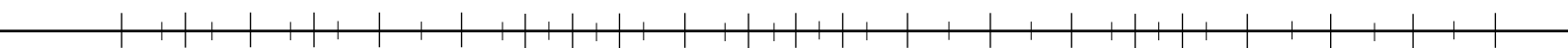
and two of her older brothers were living in the house with their families. Wasiela's nephew moved in with his family shortly after their mother passed away bringing the number of people living in the house up to 18. "Yoh! it was difficult living with all those people. If you want to go to the toilet, everyone is in the toilet. And the electricity, you must buy electricity and ooh, we skell about who must buy electricity now and stuff like that."

While still living in Woodlands Wasiela was working at a handbag manufacturing company in Woodstock called Cape Cobra. It was here that she found out about Ruoh Emoh. One of her colleagues, Moerida Bernard, had been part of the housing scheme from the beginning in 1997 and she convinced Wasiela to join her. "You know the other people that is working with us are saying 'Ja, but Moerida is waiting so long already, who says its going to happen and you want to go join them?'" Wasiela wasn't sure at first but after some convincing she went to her first meeting in 2003. "The things that people said at the meetings actually motivated you" she says "So I paid the R750 membership fee and I joined." At the beginning the meetings were not always that regular. "There would be some meetings but then it's quiet a bit and there's no more meetings, you don't hear nothing. And then you think 'Ag

man! Is this thing really going to happen or what?' Are these people taking us for a fool or something like that?" Randal also had his doubts: "My wife mostly went to the meetings. I didn't go because if it feels like I'm wasting my time then I get frustrated. Over the years a lot of people got frustrated and thought they were wasting their time." Randal had considered buying the two bedroom flat in Woodlands that he had grown up in but he and Wasiela decided to move to Ruoh Emoh instead when they realised that the project was actually going to happen.

"Even though we had to wait a long time for the house it was worth the wait" says Wasiela.

"Really it was worth waiting for. When we had the meeting last year and they said that you people are moving into your houses in December. And then they called us in again and said you people are mos getting your keys. And we were like 'Oh my god!' That is like heaven, it is really like heaven when we could come and fetch our keys and when we could move in. We moved in as soon as we could." It wasn't an easy process to get this point. Even when building on the houses had started many people thought it would still take some time before they



could move in: “Actually when they started building in October, Yoh! we thought are these people really going to finish by December? That's quick! We thought no man it will maybe be later this year.” In addition to the uncertainty about how long the process would take the community also struggled to understand and meet all the requirements of the city. “We were only a small group on our own, that is why. We never had help you know. We tried to create things for ourselves” Wasiela explains.

In June 2010 People's Environmental Planning (PEP), an NGO that offers technical support for communities engaged in housing struggles, started working with the Ruo Emoh community. This, Wasiela explains, really helped to get things going: “And you know when PEP joined, the project actually started. When they joined everything started happening.” Four years later new members were also elected onto the committee and this helped to bring some energy to the process. “The new people that joined pushed where our old committee were lackadaisical. The new people said 'No! We don't want to have this and that and that. We want this! And we want that!' They were pushing.” Wasiela explains that it was the committee that was doing most of the work. The members of the scheme helped where they could.

On one occasion, just after construction on the houses had started, a group of men from Samora — a neighbourhood nearby, came to the site and threatened to attack the builders if the contract for the building wasn't transferred to them. The committee had to mobilise the members of the scheme and get them to come and protect the site and the builders. “It was raining that day and we had to come out, we had to stand ground because this is our project. You can't just come and think you can take over here. So there was a whole skelling outside the gate here. And then this guy who was working with the project had to call the police. There were already builders here so these other people can't just take bread out of other people's mouths. Then we just stood ground and said 'no you are not gonna come here.’”

Because both Wasiela and Randal had grown up in Woodlands they both said that moving away was a bit strange and that it would take time to adjust to the new surroundings. Many of their friends still lived in Woodlands and they had to travel to visit them. “There you could just walk out the door and just greet someone. So often I still go there, I go quite often” says Randal. “Our friends at the old place will make jokes now and say 'ooh you guys are posh now?' since we have moved to Colorado Park”. Randal

also plays for a football club and is very involved with the running of the club. “There are teams all over Mitchells Plain but I still have to go back that side often”. Even though they are still getting used to the new surroundings, Wasiela says that they are very happy in Ruo Emoh and she is particularly pleased that it is much safer for her children here. “You see my son, the ten-year-old, it is much better here. The gangsterism, and drugs and all that is gone. The children, they look at that person with the pair of Jordans, that one has a pair of Adidas. They ask ‘where did you get them?’ 'Nah that gangster, drug lord, he gave it. You must just do something for him and you can also wear a pair of that. And the children they go in for it. Because you can't afford it. I am glad that my children aren't now into that. I want this area, this community, it's quite safe for my children.’”

Another thing they have had to adjust to is living in the quiet area of Colorado Park after the noise of Woodlands:

"Here it's very quiet. It's like we are adapting to this. You know there was gunshots and you hear the police sirens any time and stuff like that. It's too quiet here. It is a bit strange. But we are getting used to it."

The house they are living in now is also smaller than the one they were sharing in Woodlands. “The house we had there had bigger ground and it was a three-bedroom house, it was actually quite big. But now I’m in my own house so I don’t care.” The family are already making plans to expand the house. Wasiela and Randal have been discussing the possibility of adding an extra storey onto their house to make more rooms for the children. Before they do this, however, there are a few smaller things that they need to do. Randal has already made a kitchen counter and kitchen unit but he plans to make a better one out of hardwood when he has the time. He also plans to put oak flooring into his and Wasiela’s bedroom. “It’ll take time but we’ve got plans. It’s nice to have your own house and you can work towards it” says Randal.

WASIELA BRANDT IN FRONT
OF HER HOUSE





MELANIE AND TERENCE JOHNSON
IN THEIR GARDEN.

'HOUSES, DIGNITY, NEW LIFE!'

Interviewee: *Melanie Johnson*

Interviewer: *Sophie Oldfield*

The first sight of Melanie's and Terence's home is the garden. Even though they have only recently moved into their home, the garden is already beautiful. Stone paved steps lead to the front door, with carefully placed pot plants accentuating the path. A splash of colour in a blooming flower, growing chilly and pepper plants, Terence explains that this is their first garden ever and 'the garden gives life, it's all about our new family. It's about building a home.'

The move to Ruo Emoh is a new start for this couple, two years into their married life. This home is a foundation on which they plan to build their family, a place in which they can secure and nurture their children. Two of Melanie's three sons and her two daughters live with them and Terence's five children come to visit in the holidays. Like the new garden, their family is the heart of this home. They hope to live here in peace, leaving past insecurities and hardships behind them.

The success of Ruo Emoh is not only personal for Melanie. It is a collective achievement, a product of her work as the project's social facilitator, part of her job with the South African Shack Dwellers International Alliance. In this role, Melanie expresses best what moving to Ruo Emoh means for everybody. 'Now

the houses have been built, dignity can be restored and people can live.'

Melanie's own background inspired her housing activism. She honed her activism skills in the hard knocks and streets of township life. She grew up in Rylands with her father and grandmother, moving to Manenberg to live with her mother and sister after her granny's passing. In Manenberg, living in her mother's house, she and her ex-husband raised her five children. On the housing list in Manenberg for 21 years, she emphasizes that moving to and then living as an adult in Manenberg shaped her commitment to become a community leader.

"[I became] a community leader because of the two different types of cultures and homes I come from. It helped me see that there is a bigger need. [Activism] really is my passion. I studied for many things, but I chose none of them. I chose to do community work. I still enjoy it. I volunteered for many years without getting paid a cent. I became the black sheep in my family

because I didn't take up a career because I chose to work with poor people. They couldn't understand it but today they have the upmost respect for what I do. They understand today. The choice that I made was to work and make change. I believe in adding value and making change."

Her work demands wisdom, savvy, creativity, and most of all, hard work and commitment. Its demands are unrelenting. She explains that strength is the capacity to change oneself, and the capacity to help others see a better future, to help them work together.

This is a huge achievement. Life has been hard for her and for everybody else in Ruo Emoh. She explains: "I've been there. It's very difficult ... You get evicted any day. Your water gets switched off. You can't even use the toilet if the landlord doesn't want you to use it. Your children sometimes can't even make a noise..."

These experiences shaped her persistence and her commitment to seeing the Ruo Emoh project to its finish. She knows first hand the difference a secure home brings, 'this sigh of relief.

Of saying ok, you know you are in your own space. It's yours. Nobody is going to come tomorrow and kick you out.' In this context, she can build a new foundation for her family, embracing the dignity that is possible in this new home.

We had to make this project work

Making the Ruo Emoh Project work was no easy feat. Melanie stresses that 'We had to literally prove people wrong.' The Ruo Emoh project was stuck when she joined it in 2011. At the first meeting her colleague said 'are you guys bloody mad? Melanie – Seriously!' That is how 'stuck, totally, and utterly STUCK!' the Ruo Emoh project was at that stage.

Drawing on her experience working with backyarders on other housing projects, like in Manenberg, she brought this experience to the Ruo Emoh project, working extensively with the community. She explains that this was very tricky. Everybody had different opinions. Everybody had different stories, different opinions of what's good and bad, what went wrong and why. She explains that 'When it's an old project, people often gate keep. They keep the project very close to them. You can't blame them really because some of them have been working very hard.' She saw her role in this process as protecting the community interest, and voice, and primarily 'building people. We need to build people to build a community. That is exactly what we have done in this process.'

Melanie's work has been extensive.

She has helped manage and build a legitimate list of beneficiaries. This piece of the project was essential. She had to ensure that everybody's documentation was complete. She describes how Province would 'throw out applications.' Befriending a lady in the Province's office, she could ask her 'what do you need now? And this official would say 'do this and that and I would do it and come back.' It took a lot of time, driving up and down, late nights, going back to Province and submitting the forms. Critical to the process, Melanie explains that 'I could breathe once I had all 49 approved beneficiaries. Going to the families, going back to Province, getting the approved documents, it was a challenge. That's why I say when we had the approved project beneficiaries then I said now I can start dealing with the members because we have the biggest part out of the way.'

None of this work was straightforward. It required a back and forth, to town and home, to this office and that office, to friends and colleagues. It was built on networks, negotiating how things work by building bridges and linkages. Melanie drew on all her networks, all the relationships she has developed over the years working in the Western Cape Backyarders Network. 'The first thing you learn as a leader is to maintain your relationships because you never know when you're going to need them.'

A key part of her work has focused on strengthening the new Committee. She

explains how crucial this was: 'You can't fight if you have nobody behind you. My strategic plan was to make sure that I had the buy-in of the members in the process. Once they had a buy-in, I could work confidently with PEP, SDI, the Alliance and uTshani.' For Melanie this work is the most important. It is 'people building'. She emphasizes that 'we need to build people to build a community. That is exactly what we have done in this process.'

The success of the project demanded patience and commitment, attending endless numbers of meetings over the years. It required ensuring a free flow of information and the opening of finances, the writing of a Constitution for the community, the formation of a new Committee and now a Ruo Emoh Executive. Her philosophy is that 'knowledge is power. When you share information with people they get to understand and then they can support. Slowly I had to nurture them to open up the project.' This challenging task required her skill and diplomacy. 'I had to speak that same language every time.'

Now she is confident in the project and in the new Executive. 'They understood it, the good part of it you can see now. I'm not running the show. They are running their own show. And, that, for me, was building the capacity within this project. People could come together. They didn't wait for me.' People taking responsibility is key to the success for the project, it is key to home ownership and

to the neighbourhood's longer-term development. She is especially proud that Ruo Emoh is one of the first projects in which people moved in with title deeds. Each family on the day of handing over their key received a copy of the title deed, with the original securely stored in the lawyer's offices.

Her hope and expectation is that the Ruo Emoh community will continue to take responsibility for driving their own process. "At the end of the day, they will be home owners, they need to drive their process." She sees this happening day by day as Ruo Emoh families settle into their new homes, figuring out new ways to live together and to plan for the future.

We are happy to start a new life here

This is a new beginning most importantly for her own family. She can see the difference in her family. Her children's environment has changed so much through this move. In Manenberg shootings happened every given day. She emphasizes that 'Here [in Ruo Emoh] they are safe, they can play; they can breathe. I also think now their attitudes change because they are in this environment where they are fully safe.' They are all happy to start a new life here.

It is not simple or easy to make these changes. She explains that she is 'also trying to embrace this new place because it's your new life. How do you really make it work for you? How do you really accept it as part of you? It was very difficult for me on a personal level, letting go

of one thing and accepting another.' It is a challenge especially to find a balance between her own new life in Ruo Emoh and her work and its endless demands. 'You have to find a balance because your work can swallow you up very easily.' She recalls all the community meetings and late nights over the decades. How 'you're never at home'. She hopes that now she has a choice: 'I can go or I can stay. I try to prioritise what is important now. I try to balance everything out. Sometimes I am home nice and early. I can still cook and do what I need to do. I can make sure that I plan. You need to plan ahead.'

While these changes are not easy – they require discipline and discussion – Melanie and Terence are clear that 'we actually are moving forward as a family now altogether.' This house and new home in Ruo Emoh offers them a new foundation. While they have already done the tiling and painting, adding on a carport, she and Terence have additional plans for their home.

'We're not finished, we haven't put in built in cupboards... We would love to extend, to go out and to go up to have enough space for the children.' Ruo Emoh offers other families this foundation too. They take pleasure in the ways in which they and their neighbours are making their houses homes, making them comfortable, establishing front yards, building the dignity that comes with owning this home and living here together. For Melanie building, extending and gardening are 'ownership kicking in'. Ruo Emoh families have been given and have taken the responsibility.

'That's great, that's what you want to see: Now that I am here, it's not only seeing the change within my own family...I can see a change in other families too'. In moving to Ruo Emoh this family is building a home, a 'home that will work.'



CONCLUSION

The stories shared in this book inspire. They put into words dreams and hopes, the dream of owning a home that allows for a life of dignity, a home where there is running water, access to electricity, a toilet, a home where children can play outside, a home that provides security and a space to live an independent life. The stories vividly communicate too the hardships, the challenges and the financial, social and emotional costs, which are such a large part of each family's struggle for a secure place to live. The success of Ruo Emoh is embodied in these stories, in residents' long struggles for recognition, dignity and for freedom, and in the hopes families now nurture, settled in their own homes.

Yet, to think of Ruo Emoh as simply a story about the completion of a housing project also overlooks what it has taken to organise and negotiate this project, as well as the struggle and the compromises required to complete the building of homes. This work has been collaborative, involving residents, the Committee and its leaders, as well as PEP and members of the SA SDI Alliance, particularly CORC and FEDUP. This has been hard work, engagement that required patience and commitment, as well as technical expertise, and political and organisational savvy. In the Ruo Emoh story and experience are lessons, wrought from

the many challenges, as well as from the collaborations, which have sustained the project.

Learning in and from Ruo Emoh

The organising and mobilising at the heart of the project have been demanding for residents and for PEP, and the SA SDI Alliance. On an individual level, residents have had to be patient, to have faith, and to hang on to their optimism in order to withstand the setbacks that arose throughout the project's history. For community leaders – those on the project steering committee and the social facilitator – there were constant pressures to balance community expectations and navigate bureaucratic and organisational, as well as political challenges. To maintain unity and a sense of community, transparent and continuous communication has been vital. The ability to compromise on different levels has made solving disagreements and bringing together ideas and beliefs possible. Their commitment, determination and trustworthiness has kept the dream of Ruo Emoh alive. This organising work is on going as Ruo Emoh now establishes itself, negotiating the ways in which families wish to build this community together.

The completion of Ruo Emoh has also demanded intensive collaborative work

for partner organisations and the community over the decades. There is lots of learning in this work. Some is internal to the project. In order for a project to come together all partners ideally need to be consistently involved and included. There is a need to be clear and to have set accountability around roles and responsibilities with guidelines on the processes required by the project. This is especially important when there are various actors and committees involved (such as the project steering committee, consultants (PEP), as well as the project technical committee in this case).

Thorough communication and understanding processes is important so that seemingly minor miscommunications do not cause unnecessary delays. This clarity was not always possible in Ruo Emoh. Sometimes NGO's stepped into the roles of social facilitator and community leadership and vice-versa. Sometimes inconsistency or separate (and often contradictory) interactions led to confusion and conflict, tensions which are perhaps inevitable in a project of such a complex nature.

Some issues have been external. A key tension in this project, for instance, was when to resist and when to compromise, to give in to political or regulatory requirements that seemed 'anti poor'. This is challenging turf in a collaborative

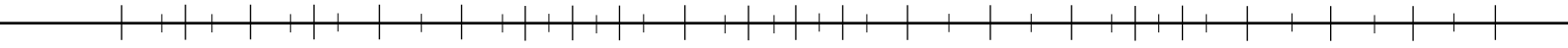
project. Key political decisions need to be made to help decide on the best approach in tackling the myriad regulations (and their financial implications) required by the city. Do NGO's acquiesce and follow the rules? Do they look for ways to work around these rules through negotiations with sympathetic officials? Or do they choose to make a political statement and challenge regulations, which they deem anti-poor? These types of decisions can stall or halt a project. In Ruo Emoh significant compromises were made throughout, some of which in retrospect should have been challenged. However this type of challenge may have completely de-railed the project. In the end the primary motivation of putting people into safe homes was foregrounded. But project decisions do need to consider the wider impact and politics of making a stand against anti-poor regulations. This type of support can reshape the regulations that control low-income developments.

Collaboratively producing this research and booklet

The process of completing this research also has been collaborative, drawing into the project the African Centre for Cities at University of Cape Town and its affiliated masters-level students. Students have learnt so much



MELANIE JOHNSON
DISCUSSES THE RUO EMOH
PROJECT WITH STUDENTS
DURING A RESEARCH
SESSION.



engaging with residents and leaders and Ruo Emoh's partner organisations. The project has opened their eyes to the hardship and struggle, the resilience and patience, the agency that families have constructed in their lives despite challenging circumstances. The project has given students first hand exposure to how NGOs and communities can partner, and what communities can achieve working together.

Students were challenged by and appreciated the project and the opportunity to learn academic research skills and to produce the narratives for this booklet and for Ruo Emoh. As one student reflected: "To go back to the people that you interviewed and to share something of your experience, the lessons you've learned, or the surprises you've had, and, to bring them this work, in writing, was a beautiful experience." This sharing, its rigour, built mutual respect. A Ruo Emoh resident explains:

"When the students came they actually heard what people -were saying. We saw this when the students brought our stories back to us and we read through them. When you can see that someone has listened

and reflects your story in the way you told it to them – you feel respected and appreciated. These narratives are a recognition for the work that we have been doing".

In small ways the research process has also built better communication among Ruo Emoh residents. Many people in Ruo Emoh interacted with the students, which gave them a chance to explain the project in their own way and to share their own story.

The collaborative approach to the research has also made it possible to reflect more varied voices and experiences in the documentation of the Ruo Emoh story. By collaborating we achieved something together that we would not have been able to achieve alone.

Collaborating with the ACC team, made it possible to get an in-depth varied reflection of "community voices", to gather stories of residents who normally didn't speak in community gatherings and to produce this booklet. Through this process, students engaged in a context where their learning how to do research contributed to this project and its documentation and celebration.

In sum, this booklet is a record of Ruo

Emoh's struggle and success, the right to be proud of their new homes and this neighbourhood. It highlights what is most important and meaningful, in the words of a community leader, 'we fought for this project.' We hope this booklet can be used in the future as a tool for advocacy going forward and that its stories can inspire communities under similar circumstances that an alternative is possible.







University
of Basel