

## Street law – integrating community engagement into teaching and learning: A UKZN School of Law case study

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### 1 Introduction: The Street Law approach and experience

Street Law is a sixteen credit, two-semester elective module offered to final year LLB students at the UKZN School of Law.<sup>1</sup> The innovation in teaching and learning adopted in this module sees students selecting community spaces to undertake their module requirement of 25 hours of legal and human rights awareness outreach, or alternatively, to be placed at local partner non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to deliver on this requirement and learn about those NGOs' interventions to address social justice issues and challenge instances of inequality and discrimination. Opportunities arise to become involved in strategic litigation and advocacy campaigns, where students work in teams to contribute to these initiatives.

In each of these spaces, the impact on clients and beneficiaries of these organisations is profound. The individual impact lies in empowering people to comprehend their rights, identify unlawful and unconstitutional behaviour, and take appropriate action to access remedial measures. A broader impact on the affected sector derives from emerging strategic advocacy interventions undertaken to challenge systemic patterns of abuse and discrimination of marginalized communities. For instance, outreach partnerships with stakeholders such as homeless people, informal traders and residents of informal

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<sup>1</sup> UKZN College of Law and Management Studies Handbook, <https://saa.ukzn.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2025-CLMS-Handbook.pdf> (accessed 31 May 2025).

settlements reveal institutionalized discrimination resulting from unconstitutional bylaws, and systemic rights violations of these stakeholders by eThekweni Municipality officials and Metro Police. The strategic advocacy response developed by the School of Law together with its partners, sees a direct challenge to the Municipality to revise its bylaws to remove unconstitutional, discriminatory provisions, and hold its officials accountable for their unlawful behaviour violating the rights and dignity of these groups of people. For law students, many of whom have expressed frustration at the emphasis on private and commercial law in our LLB degree, and limited exposure to human rights and social justice issues and alternative career pathways in these sectors, the opportunity to undertake legal research to support constitutional challenges, and form part of such a transformative intervention is often a life-changing experience.

Street Law students are equipped with an understanding of the theoretical framework underpinning the adoption of participatory methodology in teaching and learning, and with practical skills in designing lesson plans and participatory methodology to communicate legal and human rights information to diverse communities. Street Law lends itself to innovative assessment methods of active student learning. Students are required to research legal topics, develop participatory methodology to convey this to stakeholders such as homeless people, prison inmates and street traders, undertake outreach work in this regard, and put together a portfolio of evidence demonstrating this. Reflective learning among students is actively encouraged, and students are required to include in their portfolio reflective essays that speak to their experience of undertaking legal and human rights education, the challenges they encounter and how they navigate these, and the insights and learning gained from their experience. This approach is testimony to the value of participatory learning methodology in knowledge acquisition and retention, but equally, the value of integrating community engagement in legal education.

There is a growing body of literature speaking to the gap between legal education and practice, with the argument being that this chasm can be bridged by integrating community outreach work into legal education.<sup>2</sup>

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2 M Welgemoed & H Lerm 'Justifying the integration of clinical legal education with procedural-law modules to develop practical skills in law students' (2024)

In this vein, Vygotsky examines the value of incorporating social interaction in the learning process, arguing that meaningful knowledge outcomes occur when knowledge is co-constructed through dialogue and collaboration.<sup>3</sup> In the legal education context, the pedagogical approach to clinical legal education provides the platform for such collaboration and interaction between students and communities, and develops meaningful learning outcomes for students.<sup>4</sup> While their primary goal is to engage in lawyer-client consultation under supervision of law clinic staff as part of their module academic requirements, through this interaction, students hone critical thinking and problem-solving skills and are exposed to the application of theoretical knowledge to real-world problems, in seeking to address community members' legal problems.<sup>5</sup> Empirical backing of this notion can be found in a study conducted across South Africa, Chile and Australia, that evidenced an average increase of 41 per cent in the students' skillsets due to engagement in community outreach work.<sup>6</sup> Amongst others, the skills gained and developed included communication, teamwork, confidence and empathy; soft skills necessary for the creation of well-prepared and rounded practitioners.<sup>7</sup>

Beyond preparing law graduates to be better equipped for practice, the integration of community outreach work into teaching and learning is valuable for its mutually reinforcing outcomes. On one end of the spectrum, community engagement aids in realising the attainment of constitutional guarantees by providing access to justice to community groups that might otherwise have been excluded due to their marginalization, and the prohibitive cost of formal legal services. On the

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*Obiter* 569-594; L Bengtsson 'The law in the community model of clinical legal education: Assessing the impact on key stakeholders' (2023) 30 *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 54; RJ Wilson *The global evolution of clinical legal education: More than a method* (2017) 1-18.

3 LS Vygotsky *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (1978) 24-25.

4 G Quinot & L Greenbaum 'The contours of a pedagogy of law in South Africa' (2015) *Stellenbosch Law Review* 49-52.

5 K Kruse 'Fortress in the sand: The plural values of client-centered representation' (2005) *Clinical L. Rev.* 370-371.

6 F Cantatore and others 'A comparative study into legal education and graduate employability skills in law students through pro bono law clinics' 55 *The Law Teacher* 341-336; J Church 'Reflections on legal education' 51 *Journal for Contemporary Roman-Dutch Law* 163.

7 As above.

other end, it fosters a sense of social responsibility amongst LLB students, which in-part, develops future practitioners who are committed to addressing systemic inequalities through transformative interventions.<sup>8</sup>

There is substantive support for the notion that integrating community engagement into legal education is particularly valuable for fostering social responsibility amongst law students. De Klerk highlights that community engagement instils a heightened awareness of the social dimensions of law.<sup>9</sup> This makes vivid for students the significance and potential contribution of their legal knowledge, which provides them with a pathway to align their professional development with the needs of their communities. Holness reinforces this notion, arguing that community-centered legal initiatives, such as Street Law and university law clinics create opportunities for students to confront systemic injustices and cultivate a commitment to addressing them in their future practice.<sup>10</sup>

The teaching of Human Rights and Street Law provides the opportunity to integrate challenges and inequality in accessing socio-economic rights, remedial measures available for addressing rights violations, and the work of research, outreach and policy advocacy on these issues by local NGOs. Through exposure to the social injustices experienced by vulnerable community groups, students develop a sense of social responsibility, are able to connect with an empathetic response to communities' violation of rights and dignity, and embrace their role as agents of transformative justice. This alignment with the constitutional imperative to promote social justice underscores the indispensable role of community engagement in cultivating socially responsible legal practitioners who are prepared to tackle entrenched inequalities and advocate for meaningful change in society.<sup>11</sup> This article speaks to these components, to illustrate how community engagement and awareness of social justice issues can be woven into the design and evaluation of modules, into legal research, and in building community partnerships

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8 E Singo & A Raymond 'Clinical legal education and social justice—a perspective from the Wits Law Clinic' (2018) *Stellenbosch Law Review* 295-313.

9 W de Klerk 'University law clinics in South Africa' (2005) *South African Law Journal* 944.

10 D Holness 'Improving access to justice through compulsory student work at university law clinics' (2013) *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal* 341-342.

11 D Singo & A Raymond 2018. Clinical legal education and social justice – a perspective from the Wits Law Clinic (2018) *Stellenbosch Law Review* 295-313.

to address systemic inequality and injustice, to better connect Schools of Law and Law students with communities and their lived realities.

## **2 Integrating human rights and social justice issues into teaching, learning and research**

### **2.1 Teaching and learning content and pedagogy**

Some modules, such as Human Rights, and Street Law, naturally lend themselves to providing the opportunity to integrate into teaching content, community social justice issues pertaining to systemic injustices, inequality and discrimination. These illustrate for students the implementation of and access to rights, and state obligations in this regard. Equally important, is the inclusion of advocacy responses and remedial measures available. These include local mobilizing, awareness and protest action, and policy advocacy measures, drawing on tools such as the Promotion of Access to Information Act<sup>12</sup> and the Promotion of Administrative Justice Act,<sup>13</sup> Equally, the value of engaging with institutions such as the South African Human Rights Commission, the Public Protector South Africa, and the Commission for Gender Equality, undertaking strategic litigation utilizing Equality Courts, Magistrates and High Courts, and utilizing international human rights instruments and institutions in such struggles.

The intention behind adopting such an approach is to enable students to connect legal tools and frameworks with real-world community struggles – many of which they may be experiencing directly themselves – such as confronting poverty, hunger, homelessness and discrimination. Drawing in guest lecturers from the activist space who can connect these dots and demonstrate their activism using these tools, deepens this exposure and makes the engagement on these issues more vivid. The objective behind such an approach is to demonstrate to Law students how the legal system and their legal knowledge can be used as tools to transform injustice, and to excite them about the Law's potential, and possible careers in this space.

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12 Promotion of Access to Information Act 2 of 2000.

13 Promotion of Administrative Justice Act 3 of 2000.

The methodology utilized to convey this content to students is equally important. Despite 30 years of democracy, South African society is rife with systematic inequalities that affect the disadvantaged communities the most. The Gini Coefficient of South Africa is currently at 63.0 per cent, reflecting a society with the highest levels of income and wealth disparities in the world, which is ingrained in the fabric of our society.<sup>14</sup> It is from this society that we draw our student body, and students with diverse experience in access to quality education, and basic socio-economic rights, such as adequate food and housing, populate our classrooms. This requires lecturers to be mindful of the resulting diversity in confidence, critical thinking, English language abilities and family and social stresses, impacting on the students in our classrooms. Kennedy warns that the traditional model of legal education is hierarchical and conservative arguing that it perpetuates existing power structures and inequalities, rather than equipping students to challenge them.<sup>15</sup> Such an approach is woefully inadequate in enabling legal education to promote transformation.

There is accordingly great value in delivering lecture content in a manner in which students can engage critically with the content, to comprehend the legal principles involved and their application, in day-to-day situations that they can recognize and relate to. The methodology inherent in such an approach is to make use of smaller group discussions, pair brainstorming activities, and the use of case studies, games and even role-play. These activities create a safe space for students to develop and co-create knowledge, and share this with the classroom confidently. It provides a break-away from the traditional model of individual students raising their hands to answer lecturers' questions – a practice often dominated by those with superior knowledge and confidence, which can discourage participation from less competent and less confident peers.

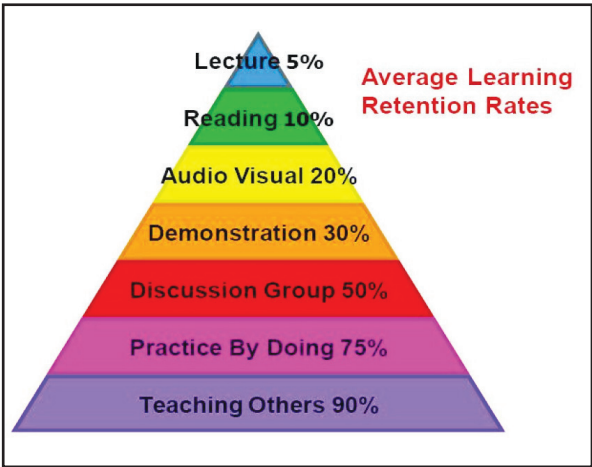
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14 <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/gini-coefficient-by-country> (accessed 25 December 2024); FA Abumere 'Colonial and apartheid Legacy: Social, economic, and political inequality in South Africa' in JS Sanni & MZ Phiri (eds) *Monuments and memory in Africa* (2024) 127; M van der Westhuizen & I Swart 'The struggle against poverty, unemployment and social injustice in present-day South Africa: Exploring the involvement of the Dutch Reformed Church at congregational level' (2015) *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 731-759.

15 D Kennedy 'Legal education and the reproduction of hierarchy' (2007) *Journal of Legal Education* 591-615; J Griffiths 'Law in context: Enlarging a discipline' (1997) *European Journal of Crime, Criminal Law and Criminal Justice* 462.

The use of such methodology has been proven to deepen students’ knowledge acquisition and retention.

Figure 1: *‘The Learning Pyramid’, National Training Laboratories, Bethel, Maine*



Source: National Training Laboratoris, Bethel, Maine.

The Learning Pyramid, sometimes referred to as the ‘cone of learning’, developed by the National Training Laboratories, Bethel, Maine, in the 1960s, suggests that most students only remember about 10 per cent of what they read from textbooks, but retain nearly 90 per cent of what they learn through teaching others.<sup>16</sup> The original research underpinning these findings has been lost, and the methodology adopted unknown, leading some to question the veracity and application of findings.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, the approach of adopting participatory, experiential and learner-centred methodology has a firm basis in approaches to adult basic

16 Education Corner ‘Understanding the learning pyramid’ <https://www.educationcorner.com/the-learning-pyramid/> accessed 1 June 2025; K Letrud ‘A rebuttal of NTL Institute’s Learning pyramid’ (2012) *Education* (133) 117-214.

17 J Ozanne & B Saatcioglu ‘Participatory action research’ (2008) *Journal of Consumer Research*; J Myers, N Vernon & R Chambers ‘Rigour, timeliness, and trade-offs in research: Experience from India’s Swachh Bharat Mission, Development in Practice’ (2023) *Development in Practice* 324; UNISA Institute for Adult Education ‘Principles and theories of adult education’ 2015 <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245104> (accessed 31 December 2024).



education and action research, and its effectiveness in engaging learners and participants of diverse educational backgrounds on what might be regarded as technical and complex issues has been firmly established.

The participatory teaching and learning methodologies utilised in Street Law leverage students' diverse lived experiences, integrating these into their learning process to create meaningful and relevant knowledge outcomes. Such an approach emphasises that learner engagement and empowerment are fostered through dialogue and collaboration.<sup>18</sup> These methodologies find foundation in the ideas of Freire, who posits that participatory learning encourages active participation and critical engagement and challenges conventional top-down educational models, which perceive learners as mere recipients of knowledge.<sup>19</sup> Freire's work strongly emphasises dialogue and problem-posing education as a cornerstone to participatory methodology, in that learners bring diverse lived experiences and perspectives, which are validated and engaged on in the context of the subject matter, fostering a sense of ownership and agency in the learning process.<sup>20</sup>

Accordingly, underpinning the participatory methodology utilised in the Street Law module is the use of techniques such as group discussion, problem-solving case studies and simple games, that encourage students to actively engage with real-world issues. The impact of this is not only to consolidate learning of legal concepts and their application, but it has the additional advantage of making legal education relevant and impactful.<sup>21</sup> Research has shown that such approaches not only enhance students' cognitive skills, such as literacy and knowledge retention,<sup>22</sup> but also strengthen social skills; helping students discover their

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18 VL Dara & C Kesavan 'Analyzing the concept of participatory learning: strategies, trends and future directions in education' (2024) *Kybernetes*; LS Vygotsky *in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (1978) 24-25; E Lucio-Villegas *Adult education in communities: Approaches from a participatory perspective* (2015) viii & 7.

19 MB Bello 'An understanding of Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the oppressed"' (2023) *Canadian Journal of Family and Youth/Le Journal Canadien de Famille et de la Jeunesse* 227-228.

20 S Brookfield *Understanding and facilitating adult learning: A comprehensive analysis of principles and effective practices* (1986) 10-11.

21 Brookfield (n 20) 11-12.

22 RJ Wlodkowski 'Enhancing adult motivation to learn' (1993) *San Francisco: Jossey-Bass* 18-21.



agency and develop the ability to address systemic inequalities in their communities.<sup>23b</sup> Legal research

The School of Law has established a slate of Research Interest Groups (RIG) into its ambit of scholarly activity for lecturers.<sup>24</sup> All lecturers are encouraged to join a RIG that speaks to their research interests (such as in Labour Law, Family Law, Child Law, Access to Justice and International Law), where we use these RIGs as a platform to share research findings and emerging academic papers with a cohort of colleagues with expertise on this topic, to deepen our research practice and encourage us to publish. The School of Law has a budget for a cash motivational payment for every article published, as captured and validated on our UKZN Research Information Gateway system, with the requirement of having participated in four RIG meetings over the year preceding, on which RIG coordinators report to the Academic Leader: research and higher degrees.

In the social justice space, we have integrated critical issues pertaining to race, inequality and injustice into a specific RIG, the Navi Pillay Research Group (NPRG).<sup>25</sup> The NPRG was established in Dr Pillay's name to honour her formidable legacy and tireless agency, and to serve as a platform for critical research and policy advocacy in the social justice sector. The purpose behind the NPRG is to establish an interdisciplinary, collaborative entity to support research, education, policy and advocacy interventions that respond to contemporary social issues. The NPRG seeks to address emergent issues of race, class, gender and disability in post-apartheid South Africa and globally.

Critical issues demanding research and engagement include those relating to land reform and economic justice, decolonisation

23 P Boyadjieva & P Ilieva-Trichkova 'Adult education as a pathway to empowerment: Challenges and possibilities' in J Holford and others (eds) *Lifelong Learning, Young Adults and the Challenges of Disadvantage in Europe* (2023) 188-186; E Concina 'Participative teaching methods for sustainable development' (2019) *Encyclopedia of Sustainability in Higher Education* 1250-1258; M Shifferaw & J Burton 'Action Research in Adult Education: Academic-Practitioner Partnership in Washington, DC' (2008) 2 *Adult Basic Education and Literacy Journal* 111, this coincides with the definition 'a systematic inquiry of one's practice, the identification of issues and problems that one wants to change, and the actions that need to be taken in order to bring about changes'.

24 UKZN School of Law Research Groups <https://law.ukzn.ac.za/research-groups/> accessed 1 June 2025.

25 Navi Pillay Research Group <https://law.ukzn.ac.za/research-groups/navi-pillay-research-group/> (accessed 1 June 2025).

and persistent forms of discrimination, and human rights violations (particularly those impacting on vulnerable categories of people) in their various manifestations. Engagement takes the form of convening conferences (recently on the War on Palestine and the work of the UN Human Rights Council Independent Commission of Inquiry), webinars (recently on court procedure involving children with mental disability; and on the Ingonyama Trust), submissions to Parliament, engaging with public institutions and leaders to raise issues of concern, and supporting strategic litigation interventions. These include providing current support to the South African legal team in the *South Africa v Israel*<sup>26</sup> matter before the International Court of Justice, and the National Prosecution Authority on the prosecution of apartheid-era atrocities, such as on the COSAS Four matter; the amicus intervention in the *Van Wyk and Others v Minister of Employment and Labour and Others* challenge to maternity benefits;<sup>27</sup> and working with ProBono.Org on issues related to informal settlements and homeless people.

The NPRG creates an opportunity for final year and postgraduate Law students to apply for positions as volunteer Research Assistant and supporting Interns, to lend research support to RIG members, with the potential to co-author journal articles, undertake research support for our advocacy interventions, interview and profile the work of RIG members in our social media spaces, as well as provide administrative and logistical support to our conference and webinar initiatives. This space generates a wealth of opportunities for our Law students to undertake legal research on contemporary and critical social justice issues, to develop and apply their skills and knowledge, and connect them with community outreach and engagement initiatives.

Generally, however, there are of course multiple opportunities to encourage and develop legal research skills and experience in community social justice issues. The School of Law provides lecturers with the opportunity to generate potential LLM dissertation and mini-dissertation topics, as well as LLB research project topics, which they can then supervise. It is critical to deliberately deepen the pool of legal

26 Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (*South Africa v Israel*).

27 *Van Wyk and Others v Minister of Employment and Labour and Others* (2022/017842) 2023 ZALCJHB 2.

research topics beyond purely technical, commercial and private law legal topics, to include topics pertaining to the access to justice, administrative justice and the attainment of socio-economic rights. These are mentoring opportunities to grow student interest and skills in legal research and advocacy on such issues.

### **3 Community outreach and engagement opportunities for LLB students**

Street Law built into the Street Law module deliverables is a requirement that students undertake 25 hours of community outreach, conducting outreach workshops and education in a chosen community, and assisting with legal challenges and complaints of discrimination. As part of their Street Law module, students are equipped with skills in participatory methodology, to communicate legal and human rights information to diverse communities, which forms the basis for the teaching and learning content of the module. Students are then required to complete practical assignments for their assessment for the module, in the form of the following components:

- (a) Developing a lesson plan and appropriate participatory methodology (20 per cent of the module assessment)
- (b) Developing a mock trial package, comprising a criminal/civil law scenario and accompanying six lesson plans to teach learners the requisite legal and procedural knowledge to run a criminal/civil trial (30 per cent of the module assessment)
- (c) Developing a final portfolio of evidence, comprising their lesson plans and support materials for the 25 hours of outreach work undertaken, session report forms from the relevant institution, a planning and evaluation form, and a reflective essay on their experience (50 per cent of the module assessment).

Building on the work of Street Law pioneer Professor David McQuoid-Mason, the authoras UKZN School of Law Street Law coordinator has established a list of in excess of 100 local high schools, and partnership agreements with a slate of NGOs and other organisations, such as the Westville Prison, the Luthuli Museum, and a local traditional authority, to host students who opt to participate in these specific partner outreach initiatives. A case referral mechanism is established where individual instances of rights violations require case intake and response, which

matters are referred to the UKZN Law Clinic. Where matters require policy advocacy, these have the potential to be taken up through the School of Law's Navi Pillay Research Group, referred to above. Those issues requiring strategic litigation are referred to our partner NGO, ProBono.Org, to source attorneys and advocates from their *pro bono* panel, described in more detail, below.

The following case-studies demonstrate the particular nature of the impact or difference made within a particular sector of society, detailing how this benefits their stakeholders:<sup>28</sup>

**Denis Hurley Centre:**<sup>29</sup> The DHC works with people of all faith traditions to serve some of the poorest people in central Durban. In particular, the DHC assists homeless people, drug users, the urban unemployed and refugees through its clinic, feeding scheme, political and economic empowerment programmes, community support and pastoral outreach.

Since 2018, two teams of Street Law students per semester have conducted their outreach with the DHC. These students apply their 25 hours of outreach work, in the form of participatory, interactive workshops and lessons on a range of human rights and legal topics, of interest to homeless people who come into the DHC, as well as assist with practical needs such as applying for ID cards. In addition, however, students have conducted sessions on taking detailed, quality statements in evidence of systemic patterns of discrimination and abuse at the hands of Metro officials.

**Dr Raymond Perrier, Director of the DHC, states (testimonial letter, 30 May 2024):**<sup>30</sup>

*Street Law provides an opportunity for 4th year LLB students at UKZN to work with a local community to learn how to apply law 'on the ground'. Each year between 30 and 40 of the students opt for the Denis Hurley as their placement location and, in small teams, they spend a certain number*

28 'USAf Impact Case Studies Submission Street Law – Challenging inequality and leveraging social justice for vulnerable communities UKZN, School of Law', <https://usaf.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/USAf-Impact-Case-Studies-Submission.pdf>, (accessed 31 May 2025). Testimonials were sought from social partners, to showcase the value of the Street Law partnership, and permission sought of partners for these case studies to be showcased on the USAf website, see <https://usaf.ac.za/street-law-challenging-inequality-and-leveraging-social-justice-for-vulnerable-communities/> (accessed 31 May 2025).

29 <http://www.denishurleycentre.org/> (accessed 1 June 2025).

30 Denis Hurley Centre, testimonial letter, <https://law.ukzn.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/DHC.pdf> (accessed 31 May 2025).

of hours spread over a semester working at the DHC. In particular, they provide a 'drop in' table for some of the 250 homeless people who visit our centre every day.

The results have been extraordinary in a number of ways: In some cases, homeless people have been enabled to apply for grants to which they are entitled, to obtain IDs, or to fill in application forms for training programmes.

In a few cases, homeless people have been given an informed opinion about some legal matter which is worrying them, for example in relation to employment or a will or a road accident.

In other cases, homeless people have been given a chance to relate an experience of being a victim of crime and learn what is needed in order to file a formal complaint.

Over time we have been able, thanks to the statements collected by the law students, to build up a picture of a pattern of human rights violations (often at the hands of the police) suffered by homeless people, that we have then publicised through traditional and social media. In all cases, simply by the law students being there and listening to their stories, homeless people have benefited from being taken seriously and treated as valid citizens by people with whom they would not otherwise engage. In turn, we know that the stories that the law students hear are then spread more widely (with confidentiality duly observed) which shifts perceptions of homeless people from being perpetrators to being victims of crime and helps build empathy more widely in society. We have heard specifically from law students involved how this experience has radically affected them and made them aware of the gap between the theory and practice of the law for poor people in South Africa; in some cases it has inspired them to look at ways of directing their own careers more towards the common good.

We are pleased to have had this opportunity to positively impact both homeless people and a new generation of lawyers.

**Abahlali baseMjondolo (Shack dwellers' Movement):**<sup>31</sup> ABM is a socialist shack dwellers' movement in South Africa, working with informal settlement organisations across the country, campaigning for land, housing and dignity.

Since 2023 we have had a team of students each year conduct awareness workshops on rights and remedies for residents of informal settlements, in relation to access to housing, water and sanitation, and additional practical legal challenges experienced by these communities.

**ABM President, S'bu Zikode, states (testimonial letter, 3 June 2024):**<sup>32</sup>

Universities and university-trained intellectuals, so as lawyers have been to a very large extent far removed from day to day lived experiences of the people in communities.

It is for this reason why the shack dwellers's movement of South Africa Abahlali baseMjondolo has partnered with the School of Law programme. Apart from exposing young lawyers to real world in communities, Abahlali communities have through our Youth League developed a good working relationships and hope. The workshops on housing rights, evictions and gender-based violence have created conversations of mutual respect and benefit to both students and communities. For example, students have helped Abahlali communities facing evictions to take statements of personal circumstances of each family required by courts.

It is through this kind of collaboration of universities and community organizations that our society can be empowered.

**South African Society for Labour Law (SASLAW):**<sup>33</sup> Since 2021, we have had a team of students per semester, conducting awareness workshops on labour law, rights and remedies at SASLAW's pro bono office at the Labour Court, taking statements and advising clients approaching this office for assistance with labour law matters. Students have worked with SASLAW attorneys to develop and translate plain language materials and brochures which SASLAW uses to inform clients of their rights and assist them prepare for trial. We have expanded our strategic partnership with SASLAW, linking this unit with our Clinical Law final year students, and our LLM Labour Law cohort, to facilitate integrating our students into the work of SASLAW. Clinical Law students volunteer to work under the supervision of the attorney at their pro bono office at the Labour

31 <https://abahlali.org/> (accessed 1 June 2025).

32 Abahlali baseMjondolo, testimonial letter, <https://law.ukzn.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Abahlali-baseMjondolo.pdf> (accessed 31 May 2025).

33 <https://saslaw.org.za/welcome/> (accessed 1 June 2025).

Court, to conduct client intake and interviews, and shadow attorneys in the Labour Court. SASLAW also creates the opportunity for Labour Law students to participate in their webinars on labour law topics.

**Diane Cochrane, SASLAW Probono NPC KZN Manager states (testimonial letter, 31 May 2024):<sup>34</sup>**

The SASLAW PROBONO NPC / UKZN partnership was formed in early 2021. The Street law module was recognised as one that would benefit from involvement in our Probono project which runs at the Labour Courts throughout South Africa.

Students participated at the SASLAW Probono offices engaging with litigants who had no other access to justice to see to their Labour Court and other Employment law matters.

The structure of SASLAW's pro bono office encouraged students to develop their listening skills, note-taking skills, and research skills. Students were encouraged to sharpen their research skills by conducting independent research on a particular topic, beyond the information taught to them during placement. It was important for students to do this in order to empower themselves to respond to questions posed to them in their consultations with community members.

Students had the challenging task of breaking down complex legal concepts and presenting them to lay people in simple terms that may be easily understood. This meant that they needed to thoroughly understand the concepts as well. The ability to communicate legal concepts clearly and simply is a skill which will certainly serve students well when they engage in community service when they are in practice. A number of pamphlets and brochures were created for the various processes these litigants face at the CCMA or Labour courts and this contributed positively to the community who were able to better understand the timelines and process they were involved in. These brochures were also translated into Zulu, further assisting communities.

In addition to consultations the students also had the opportunity of witnessing court proceedings which was always very well received. The SASLAW Probono project in Durban alone has seen and assisted over 5000 clients over the past 8 years and countless hours of Probono work has been

34 SASLAW, testimonial letter, <https://law.ukzn.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/SASLAW.pdf> accessed (31 May 2025).



conducted by attorneys, students and other volunteers alike. We were extremely grateful for the assistance and participation from the students who we met and were able to work with during their semesters with us.

**Asiye eTafuleni (Let's go to the table):**<sup>35</sup> AeT is a public interest organisation based in the Warwick Market working to achieve spatial justice and equitable access to sustainable livelihoods for informal workers in urban public spaces.

Since 2021, we have had a team of students per semester conduct awareness workshops and develop plain language public information materials on issues pertaining to the informal trade regulatory framework, the rights of traders and remedies available on unlawful seizure or destruction of goods by Metro officials. Students' outreach takes the form of street legal kiosks within informal markets around Durban, where traders are able to gain information on their rights and talk through their legal challenges with students, with the option to refer any cases to the UKZN Law Clinic, should there be a need.

**Sithulisile Moyo, Law Programme Officer at AeT, states (testimonial letter, 13 May 2024):**<sup>36</sup>

Since the inception of this project, we have worked with 30 LLB final year students who have been central to the success of this project. They have facilitated street legal kiosks within 10 informal markets in Durban with an outreach of 5000 informal workers. These street-based legal kiosks allowed informal workers to ask questions about their legal challenges and the regulatory framework on informality.

In that accord, we highly recommend the street law department, UKZN as a competent partner on any social justice initiatives. We are hopeful our partnership will grow and yield more stories of success.

**Mpungose Traditional Authority:** The MTA is a local traditional authority based in the rural communities adjacent to Eshowe, falling under the leadership of a traditional leader, Inkosi Thandisizwe Mpungose.

35 <https://aet.org.za/> (accessed 1 June 2025).

36 Asiye eTafuleni, testimonial letter <https://law.ukzn.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/AeT.pdf> accessed 31 May 2025.

Since 2023, we have had a team of Street Law students conduct training and awareness workshops with MTA court officials on how to address community legal issues such as *ukuthwala* (abduction for marriage) using traditional court structures and processes. Our students train court officials and *izinduna* on substantive content of law pertaining to the chosen topic, and on court procedures, and prepare these stakeholders to run a mock trial on the topic.<sup>37</sup> These interventions serve to demonstrate to officials and train them on the practical application of law, and to pilot the newly-developed software package designed to digitise traditional court proceedings, as these are brought into the formal legal system under the newly adopted Traditional Courts Act.

***Inkosi Thandisizwe Mpungose states (testimonial letter, 3 June):***<sup>38</sup>

*Over the years, we have established a strong relationship with the University, which has led to a significant collaboration aimed at enhancing access to justice in rural communities. This partnership supports our Traditional Council and, by extension, the broader community in delivering justice.*

*Our collaboration has also facilitated further research and reciprocal education in the areas of customary law and the traditional legal framework. With the invaluable support of the University and, in particular, the Street Law students, the Council has received training in legal principles.*

*This training has empowered them in their roles as officers of the traditional court, enabling them to view justice through the lens of the Constitution and affirming the importance of the Traditional Court as the community's first point of contact with justice.*

*We hope to continue strengthening this partnership and to highlight the positive impact of such institutional collaboration on our shared goals.*

37 'School of Law partners with traditional communities to promote rural access to justice', *UKZNdaba* Vol. 12 Issue 39, 28 November 2024, <https://ndabaonline.ukzn.ac.za/UkzndabaStory/Vol12-Issue39/School%20of%20Law%20Partners%20with%20Traditional%20Communities%20to%20Promote%20Rural%20Access%20to%20Justice/> accessed 1 June 2025.

38 Mpungose Traditional Authority, testimonial letter <https://law.ukzn.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Mpungose-Traditional-Authority.pdf> (accessed 31 May 2025).

**Albert Luthuli Museum at Groutville, Stanger:**<sup>39</sup> In seeking to contribute towards a transformed society inspired by the values and ideals of Chief, Albert Luthuli, the Museum works to promote and sustain the legacy of Chief Albert Luthuli, through a range of educational and outreach offerings. Since 2018, a team of Street Law students has worked each year with partner high schools of the Luthuli Museum, in the Groutville/Stanger area, to train and prepare teams of school learners to participate in the Department of Basic Education (DoBE) Annual Schools Moot competition. Our students run workshops with the learners on constitutional and statutory provisions relevant to the Moot topic, on court etiquette, and how to argue a matter.<sup>40</sup> The School of Law hosts a semi- competition for the top learners, arranging for staff to serve as judges, and arranges for the finalists to argue their case in a local Magistrate's Court, awarding the winning student a R15,000 bursary towards his or her studies, should he or she opt to study Law at UKZN.<sup>41</sup> In 2019, the Luthuli Museum team from Mathubeszwe High School in KwaDukuza, Stanger, was selected through the DoBE national competition to participate in the South African team contesting the international schools moot competition - and won!<sup>42</sup> Two of our top-performing students from the Groutville area have gone on to take up the School bursary, and are currently studying for their LLB degree at UKZN.

39 <https://luthulimuseum.org.za/> (accessed 1 June 2025).

40 'Judges impressed by high school moot court competition participants' *UKZNdaba* 3 November 2022, <https://law.ukzn.ac.za/judges-impressed-by-high-school-moot-court-part/> accessed 1 June 2025.

41 'Aspiring legal practitioners impress judges at moot court competition' *UKZNdaba* Vol. 7 Issue 34, 20 June 2019, <https://ndabaonline.ukzn.ac.za/UkzndabaStory/Vol7-Issue34/Aspiring%20Legal%20Practitioners%20Impress%20Judges%20at%20Moot%20Court%20Competition/> accessed 1 June 2025.

42 'Basic Education announces South African winners of 5th International Schools Moot Competition', 31 January 2020 <https://www.gov.za/news/media-statements/basic-education-announces-south-african-winners-5th-international-school-moot> accessed 1 June 2025.

**Zinhle Nyembe, Public Relations Officer at the Luthuli Museum states (testimonial letter, June 2024):**<sup>43</sup>

1. It is with much enthusiasm that I on behalf of the Luthuli Museum, I convey sincere gratitude and appreciation for the prestigious opportunity that the University of KwaZulu Natal, School of Law - Street Law affords the Luthuli Museum by partnering with in the Moot Court Competition for high schools in preparing learners to enter the Department of Basic Education's National Schools Moot Court Competition.
2. The University's support of this competition does not only assist the Luthuli Museum meet the objectives and the outcome set out to uphold the legacy of Chief Albert Luthuli; teachings about South African Law and make the museum a platform for robust dialogue; it also moulds the participants to becoming young South African Law enforcers that they would not have been without this opportunity.
3. Each year, as it unfolds, the museum engages in collaborative programmes and partnerships to ensure that the commemoration of the life of Chief Albert Luthuli and Mrs. Nokukhanya Luthuli is experienced and remembered by South Africans at large and all those who hold dear his contribution to the building of a better world for all.
4. This special partnership started almost a decade ago with a team of UKZN Law School academics and Street Law students running workshops training the participating high school learners, on the Constitution and human rights, and how to prepare legal arguments.
5. The program is part of the Luthuli Museum's school capacity building programme and the UKZN School of Law Street Law programme which aims to create greater awareness in schools and communities (mostly disadvantaged communities) about the justice system, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, and to encourage young learners to consider pursuing a career in law.

Further, this partnership helps the museum meet one of its objectives to uphold the legacy of Chief Albert Luthuli and the teachings about South African history and its manifestation into South African Law. The Street Law students' articulate presentation of the law applicable to the competition is always informative. Without their support of this programme, all the initiative would have been in vain as they play an important role in ensuring its success. The knowledge that they share is a great stride in planning future competitions.

This program has yielded great positive impact and has made strong of the relationship the museum has with the schools in general, because of its uniqueness and popularity. It is very important for people to get informed on imperative issues of justice system and human rights and its application.

The University of KwaZulu Natal and Street Law's engagement in portraying Law as a profession and the way they are dedicated to the project is appreciated by the participants, the Luthuli Museum, Department of Basic Education, and the parents.

We are especially grateful by the way the university sees the importance of the existence of the Luthuli Museum and holds it in high regard. As much for appreciation for the university's contribution to this program, I would like to say that this collaboration has such great value in building our society in as far as creating awareness of the law is concerned.

Without the university's support of this programme, all the initiative would have been in vain as they play an important role in ensuring its success. This is a great milestone for the Museum in as far as enhancing education in high schools is concerned, gratitude is sent to you, for ensuring that law teachings are available at the grass root level.

<sup>43</sup> Luthuli Museum, testimonial letter <https://law.ukzn.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Luthuli-Museum.pdf> accessed 31 May 2025.

**Department of Correctional Services (DCS) – Westville Correctional Facility.**

We have brokered a Memorandum of Understanding with the DCS, in terms of which four teams of Street Law students each year provide legal and human rights awareness workshops at the Westville Prison, with remand and life offenders, as well as in the Youth and Women's facility. The DCS provides transport for UKZN students between campus and the facility, and all participating inmates receive UKZN School of Law certificates of participation, at a graduation ceremony within the correctional services facility.<sup>44</sup>

Students' reflective essays included in their portfolios of evidence, bear testimony to the powerful impact this outreach work has on their appreciation of their legal education, their confidence in their knowledge and abilities as emerging legal practitioners, and their excitement at the impact of their outreach on critical social justice issues affecting a diverse range of communities and marginalized stakeholders.

**(a) Legal activism, social justice advocacy and research**

The broader impact of the School of Law's undertaking community outreach and engagement is derived from the strategic advocacy interventions developed, as well as the opportunities created for Law students to support these initiatives. These take the form of interventions to challenge systemic patterns of abuse and discrimination of marginalized communities, as revealed through the outreach interaction with NGOs working in this space. These are referred to in the case studies captured above, and include the rights violations experienced by groups such as homeless people, informal traders and residents of informal settlements, at the hands of officials of the eThekweni Municipality and Metro Police, for instance.

The statements being taken by Street Law students undertaking outreach at the Denis Hurley Centre, for instance, are being used to buttress a challenge to the eThekweni Municipality and its discriminatory, apartheid-era and colonial origins bylaws on 'nuisance' and 'vagrancy', to have these declared unconstitutional. We have brokered a relationship

<sup>44</sup> 'Street Law students inspire positive change at Durban Correctional Centre' *UKZNdaba* Vol. 12 Issue 38, 14 November 2024, <https://ndabaonline.ukzn.ac.za/UkzndabaStory/Vol12-Issue38/Street%20Law%20Students%20Inspire%20Positive%20Change%20at%20Durban%20Correctional%20Centre/> accessed 1 June 2025.

with ProBono.Org and a local chamber of Advocates to assign *pro bono* attorneys to take up this challenge, and our Street Law coordinator together with a team of final year law students contribute to the legal research and strategy process underway. The statements taken by our Street Law students form the basis of our legal challenge. This will see a direct challenge to the Municipality to address unconstitutional behaviour by its officials, and revise its bylaws to remove unconstitutional, discriminatory provisions.

Students undertaking their outreach with *Abahlali baseMjondolo* have been provided the opportunity to be drawn into our collaboration with ProBono.Org to contribute legal research and strategy to a possible Equality Court challenge against the eThekweni Municipality for its discriminatory and unconstitutional treatment of informal settlement residents, by failing to deliver on their right to access water and sanitation services. In both these matters, students are invited to indicate their interest in supporting legal research, statement-taking and working in a team with the lead attorney and advocate on the litigation project, to draft applications and heads of arguments.

In addition to the strategic litigation and legal advocacy initiatives emerging from student outreach with our stakeholder partners, we have developed the following additional opportunities for Law students to be engaged in social justice initiatives:

**United Nations Human Rights Council's (UNHRC) Independent Commission of Inquiry (COI):** Through the Navi Pillay Research Group, we have brokered a partnership with the independent Commission of Inquiry established by the UNHRC to investigate violations in international law and international human rights law occasioned by Israel's occupation of the Palestinian Territories. Our RIG lends research support to the legal research team behind the COI, in the form of a research fellowship, for which we have selected a promising final year LLB student to undertake legal research.

**United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR):** Through the Navi Pillay Research Group, we have developed a relationship with the UNHCR to assist with building a partnership with Schools of Law across South Africa, to provide assistance to refugees seeking asylum, integrate refugee law into teaching and learning at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and potentially build a team of Clinical Law students from Schools of Law to assist the Department of Home Affairs with its backlog in processing

asylum applications.<sup>45</sup>

These initiatives present phenomenal opportunities for law students to participate in social justice advocacy, gain legal research and drafting experiences, directly experience the transformative potential of the law in addressing systemic discrimination and violations of human rights, and be exposed to potential alternative careers in Law.

**(b) Human rights volunteering/interning generally**

As noted, the author as Human Rights module coordinator is able to integrate socio-economic rights and remedial measures for addressing rights violations into the module content and teaching of Human Rights, including the work of research, outreach and policy advocacy on these issues by local NGOs. Drawing on her background in human rights NGOs, the author has compiled a list of local NGOs websites, programmes and directors, and encourages and facilitates the placement of aspirant human rights activist students as interns and volunteers at these NGOs, as requested by students and as possible. Such internship opportunities embed law students in social justice activism, providing them with invaluable first-hand experience in undertaking legal research to inform policy advocacy, human rights outreach and awareness programmes and training materials, and becoming involved in grassroots activism.

#### **4 Creating a model for community service for LLB graduates**

The collaboration with the Mpungose Traditional Authority (MTA) has created the opportunity for the School of Law to work with the MTA to develop a model for legal internships for LLB graduates, with traditional authorities. This has the potential as a model for community service for LLB graduates, as well as developing pathways for alternative careers in law for LLB graduates, in undertaking court administrative and prosecutorial roles, legal research and paralegal services in traditional court precincts. The intervention is envisaged to contribute towards rural access to justice and the decolonization of the legal system, and lend support to traditional courts as they come into the legal system, in

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<sup>45</sup> UNHCR 'Draft concept note: UNHCR SAMCO with Universities in South Africa 2025 – 2030', 10 March 2025.



the wake of the adoption of the Traditional Courts Act.<sup>46</sup> The model being developed will be piloted with the MTA, with a view to then being rolled out across all traditional authorities in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). The component parts include the following:

- (a) UKZN and University of Zululand Schools of Law would provide a database of and access to LLB graduates, to whom the programme would be advertised.
- (b) The MTA, in this instance, would host legal interns, who would provide legal research support to the presiding officer of the traditional court, the traditional leader, as well as staff a paralegal office at the traditional court.
- (c) A local firm of attorneys would provide attorney supervision to the legal interns – the vision is to link every traditional court in KZN with a firm of attorneys in nearby towns, through the database of ProBono.Org and others. This support would include legal research support in cases being adjudicated by the traditional court, and for work undertaken in the paralegal office.
- (d) The Centre for Justice and Community Development would provide certified paralegal training and support to the legal interns, in their work staffing the paralegal office.
- (e) Traditional Leadership Casefiling (TLC), the entity behind the digitisation of traditional authority proceedings, would provide back-of-office support to the legal interns, and potential articles placement for candidate attorneys.
- (f) The issue of payment of stipends to legal interns is a critical issue, and who would foot this bill. Project partners are of the view that the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, or alternatively the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) should pay these stipends, just as the state pays for medical graduates to take on the role of interns and requires them to service rural health clinics. Project partners will engage with the Department of Justice and COGTA in this regard.

Project partners envisage approaching the Legal Practice Council to contemplate including a rotational approach to its practical legal training programme for candidate attorneys. It is our view that part of the compulsory system for candidate attorneys should be that they spend a certain period at a traditional court, to build their knowledge and understanding of the application of law in this field. Partners would seek to interrogate with the LPC whether the placement of LLB graduates

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46 Traditional Courts Act 9 of 2022.

as interns at traditional courts, and service of a period of six months or one year in this position, could serve as a pathway into practical legal training. What will require interrogation is the degree of supervision received by legal interns by their designated supporting firm of attorneys. Issues of rights of representation, and right of appearance in traditional courts by traditional court interns would also require interrogation and recommendations developed in this regard. These issues all form part of the research currently being undertaken to buttress this initiative.

## **5 Conclusion**

There are several recommendations that flow from the UKZN School of Law experience in fostering community outreach and engagement through its research, teaching and learning initiatives. This case study has demonstrated the value of Schools of Law undertaking initiatives such as the following:

- (a) Integrating social justice and legal advocacy into teaching, learning and research interventions.
- (b) Creating opportunities for community outreach by Law students, working these into module requirements, where possible, equipping students with knowledge and skills to undertake this work, and assessing their outreach work.
- (c) Fostering Law student engagement in social justice advocacy campaigns and strategic litigation by social justice partners.
- (d) Exploring opportunities for community service for LLB graduates, as legal interns and paralegals in community spaces.

To embed community outreach and engagement within the operations of the School of Law, however, moving these measures beyond initiatives developed and nurtured by individual lecturers, and ensuring their visibility and sustainability, the following additional measures are recommended:

- (a) Formalize community outreach and engagement – embed this within the School's teaching and learning paradigm, its strategic plan, with targets, timeframes, responsibilities and budget clearly assigned, and in its monitoring and evaluation framework and mechanism.
- (b) Make community outreach and engagement count – include this component in the percentage allocation of lecturer key performance indicators and performance appraisal mechanisms.

- (c) Assign responsibility for community outreach and engagement – create the position of Academic Leader: Community Engagement to coordinate, champion and support academic staff in outreach engagements, and form part of the School's Management Team. This is necessary to make community outreach and engagement visible, institutionalise it, and ensure ethical and safety compliance in the outreach measures adopted, as well as the sustainability of such measures.

These interventions are offered as a means to enable Schools of Law to bridge the divide between universities and their surrounding communities – from which many of their law students come – creating platforms for law students to utilise their knowledge and learn new skills regarding the application of the law in addressing social justice struggles. This serves not only as a means to strengthen collaboration between Schools of Law and communities, but, as importantly, to ensure the relevance and responsiveness of our curriculum and teaching approach to contemporary development and human rights challenges persistent in our society. Finally, such measures assist in enabling our law students to understand how the law can be used as a tool for transformation of institutionalised and persistent injustices and inequality. This deepens their learning experience as law students, contributing towards their personal growth and development as young adults and emerging practitioners, and hopefully encourages some to take up a career as activist or advocate in this space.