



# THE REVOLUTIONARY POTENTIAL OF THE CLUSTER 'IN CONVERSATION' DINNERS

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It all started on a late November afternoon in 2020 when Hlonelwa Lutuli (my former co-Executive) and I met with Yeki Mosomothane (the Multicultural Educator and Coordinator at the Centre for Student Communities) to discuss ways in which Clusters could collaborate with the Multiculturalism portfolio.

It was from this meeting that the idea of the Cluster 'In Conversation' Dinners was born. The dinners would provide students with an opportunity to 'visit with' the surrounding – and at times forgotten – communities around Stellenbosch Central. Through these visits, we hoped to showcase the possibilities present for change within our Stellenbosch (University) community.

Admittedly, the initiative itself went through many names before we settled on the present title, viz., the "Cluster Dinners", "Cluster Multiculturalism Dinners", "Cluster Conversation Dinners" among many others. At the time, I found this constant shifting of the title as frustrating, because I felt that it made the initiative look like it was not well thought through and made it difficult to sell to our fellow leaders. In hindsight however, I came to realise that the multiple name changes spoke to the dynamism and resilience of the initiative, which on further reflection, were qualities which could be attributed to the rest of the involved parties.

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Barbara Coloroso once said that sharing a meal is “one of the oldest and most fundamentally unifying of human experiences.” My past experiences with the different ‘In Conversation’ Dinners have indeed been intimate, satisfying and at times very powerful. In Kayamandi, I was exposed to the entrepreneurial and socially conscious work being done by Samkela Mhlakaza. Joyene Isaacs – former Head of Western Cape Agriculture – from Jamestown spoke to us about transformation in a way that was relatable, funny yet impactful.

I found that the conversations provided a platform/space where we as students could engage with the different guests about their communities, stories and histories in a way that allowed us to be bold and honest about the distance still to travelled by Stellenbosch, for it to become the ‘inclusive’ and ‘transformative’ community that it has the potential to become.

Aunty Siena Charles of Kylemore was a luminous example of someone who embodies agency, inclusion and resilience in the work she does at her tea garden and the soup kitchen – amongst other such initiatives – she organises for the poor in her community

Earlier I spoke about students ‘visiting’ with the different communities – Kayamandi, Jamestown, Kylemore, Pniel, Vlottenburg, Lynedoch – through these dinners. Like any visit where food and conversations are involved, we shared many stories, experiences, an embarrassing moment (or two) but most importantly, togetherness, which was much needed with the past year or so we have had as a Stellenbosch community.

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This togetherness was shared by a diverse group of people, students – positional and non-positional leaders – from the different clusters, cluster coordinators, cluster convenors as well as some cluster academic principals. My experience being that we were brought together by not just the food but an eagerness for different perspectives with which we could reconsider the same challenges that continue to face us.

Through visiting the different Stellenbosch communities that we did, we attempted to bring what is currently at the periphery to the core. I envision these dinners becoming a legacy project for clusters, because of their revolutionary potential for student communities.

