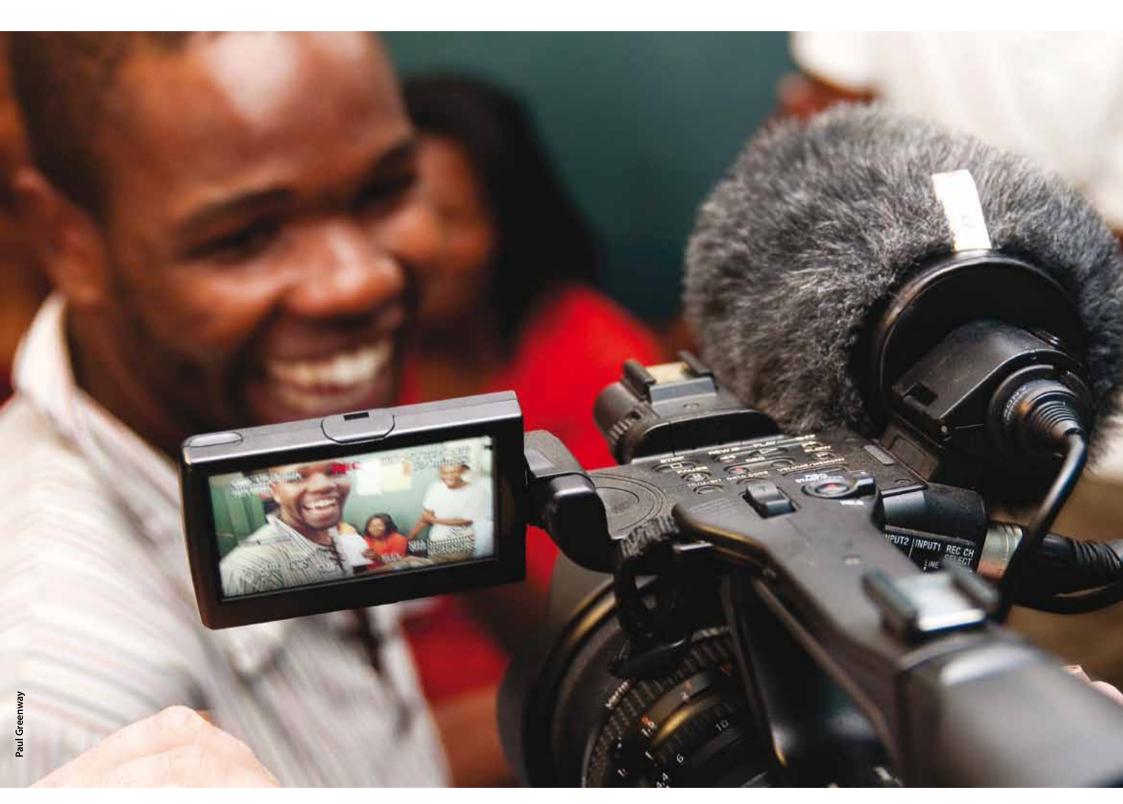# MOBILE PHONES

YOUTH RADIO

CITIZEN JOURNALISTS

HOW THE NEWS IS COMING TO GRAHAMSTOWN

MOBILE PHONES
CITIZEN JOURNALISTS
YOUTH RADIO
HOW THE NEWS IS COMING TO GRAHAMSTOWN

Harry Dugmore

Newspapers everywhere are being forced to rethink their role as simply providers of general news of the day.

As people can access much more immediate information and news online, from a wide variety of sources, and get to "hear about things" from their friends and contacts through Facebook, Twitter and other "social media", local papers are having to find better ways to provide immediate and more useful information and news.

Hyper local information, the kind of detailed "granular" news, about a particular suburb, or about a few city blocks, are one way to be relevant to an audience whose alternative media options are growing by the day.

Take crime for example: a newspaper might learn of a dozen small incidents taking place in their town, but only publish news about a few that are deemed newsworthy according a set of gatekeeping decisions that differs paper by paper.

Sometimes only bigger crimes get reported or, in South Africa, only crimes where there is violence make the grade at bigger news outlets. Pickpocketing or clothes being pilfered off someone's clothesline are not likely to earn any column inches in even the smallest papers.

And yet it might well not be the size of the crime, or its nature, or the levels of violence that are interesting and newsworthy. Rather, it might have everything to do with proximity.

You may of course already know if your immediate neighbour's laundry was recently pinched, but you may not know about it if such deeds were also happening two or three houses, or two or three blocks away. A veritable small-scale clothesline crime wave could be happening (and could be coming your way) without you knowing.

Of course, it's very hard to cover all crime comprehensively using the print medium.

But doing it online, using various forms of visualisation, such as creating "incident maps" where you can visually see where crime has occurred and what crime has been committed, in the last day, or in the week or month, are proving their usefulness elsewhere in the world.

Such approaches can hold a great deal of promise for small newspapers eager to reinvent their role in local communities.

These are the kind of avenues we are investigating with the help of the John S and James L Knight Foundation-funded Iindaba Ziyafika ("The news is coming") project.

Working with *Grocott's Mail*, a Grahamstown community newspaper owned by the David Rabkin Project for Experiential Journalism, a Rhodes University-linked company, we're looking at ways of combining citizen reporting and local sources of "hard data", such as daily police reports, property valuations and sales, information about government services (such as opening times of government health clinics and when specialists are on duty), as well as a range of information about entertainment, sporting events, and upcoming community events.

We believe community newspapers should inspire people to take action, to find community solutions, and pressure authorities to do their jobs well.

Combining good data sources with trained citizen journalists (and with professional editing) we think we will be able to help, for example, communities and the police see patterns of crime more clearly.

Grahamstown, to give just one example, has a high rate of laptop theft, with more than one pinched every week day. How can we understand how and why this happening, and how can the community and the police stop this laptop-stealing epidemic?

From our work so far, there appear to be three key challenges in providing these kinds of data-driven, information-heavy services.

The first is getting a regular supply of good, hard data so the information is up-to-date, useful, and has a "news" quality to it.

The second is selecting ways of displaying the information so that it is most useful to readers. Will maps do the trick, and how scalable and searchable do such maps need to be? What kind of content filters can we provide?

The third challenge is allowing for comments, feedback and formation of reader and community comment, ie allowing people to help make sense of, and add to, what we know.

With the example of crime information, much of the required information appears to be available from local police stations and from private armed response groups. Depending on the country and the police station, it is often freely available. In the US, the information is available in digital form, which is the whole rationale behind the automated parts of the EveryBlock project, http://www.everyblock.com/, which was also initially sponsored by the Knight Foundation.

This type of approach does take time and effort. In South Africa, it can be difficult to get access to crime reports at the local police stations, and when access is granted, the reports are often available in hand-written form. This reduces the possibility of automatically updating crime maps on a news website.

Even thinking about these kinds of approaches means starting to think about a very different kind of journalism. The focus of the news becomes one that strives to provide the often missing link between information that can inspire action, and the presentation and analysis of that information that can suggest the type of action that might work.

Through Iindaba Ziyafika, three key projects are combining to help turn hyperlocal news into something increasingly tangible and useful in Grahamstown – the *Grocott's Mail* Citizen Journalism Newsroom, with offerings of intensive citizen journalism training courses; a platform to use the immediacy and reach of mobile phones through the new mobile website "Grahamstown now"; and working more with Radio Grahamstown to create shows that rely on audience input via sms and instant messaging through the MXit channel.

Jayne Morgan

Jayne Morgan

Paul Greenway

TAKING
CITIZEN JOURNALISM
SERIOUSLY

What we are learning from the three citizen journalisms courses offered so far – with about 100 people graduating all together – is that you really think through and experiment with style, format, duration, content, and modify your approach as you go along.

We've had to make and remake decisions about how to attract people to do citizen journalism, how to select candidates and enrol them in the course, what to teach in what order, and how to support participants and follow up on their training.

Here are some of the insights we've gathered over the last year of training:

Enrolling

Once you've decided to provide training, getting the word out to interested parties is not as easy as you might first think. For example, in Grahamstown, we accommodate both computer-literate and computer-illiterate people by going beyond simply advertising in *Grocott's Mail* by putting up posters around town.

People are invited to file their applications online or deliver paper versions to the *Grocott's* offices. So far, we've actually found that mouth-to-mouth advertising works best, with previously successful applicants telling others about their achievements.

As a result, we now give each graduate three

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO DO CITIZEN JOURNALISM WELL? DO CITIZEN JOURNALISTS NEED TO BE TRAINED? DO THEY NEED TO BE PAID? DO THEY NEED A SPECIAL KIND OF EDITORIAL "HAND-HOLDING"? DO THEY NEED TO BE "IN" ON DIARY MEETINGS AND DECISION MAKING IN TERMS OF STORY SELECTION? OR ARE THEY JUST "LETTERS TO THE EDITOR"-TYPE CONTRIBUTORS WHO ARE GIVEN A BIT MORE SPACE AND LATITUDE? GRAHAMSTOWN-BASED TRAINER ELVIRA VAN NOORT IS WORKING WITH THE NEXT GENERATION OF CITIZEN JOURNALISTS VIA THE IINDABA ZIYAFIKA PROJECT. IN 2010, ABOUT 200 PEOPLE WILL GET AN OPPORTUNITY TO SEE IF CITIZEN JOURNALISM IS FOR THEM.

application forms to hand to people they think will also benefit from taking part in the training course.

We've worked to ensure that whether the applicant is employed is not, or where they live, is insignificant, so that every citizen in this town gets a fair chance.

The most important consideration for selection is the applicant's motivation letter. This reveals the applicant's proficiency in English as well as allowing us to work out what their motivations are for applying.

Because the *Grocott's Mail* Citizen Journalism Newsroom mission is to "encourage and empower all citizens to more actively engage in debates about important and interesting issues in their lives through producing and publishing their own content to foster a keener sense of community awareness, involvement and, ultimately, pride" (see www.grocotts.co.za), we look for people who have a real hunger for this kind of community building.

How, where and when?

After selecting the applications with strong motivations, we have to figure out should the courses be in the morning or afternoon depending on the profile of those selected? Do we stream groups, so that those with lower levels of computer skill can get more computer time?

To accommodate everyone we have now decided to run four separate classes each week: three times in the

Khaya Thonjeni

Paul Greenway

Khaya Thonjeni

morning and once in the afternoon. There is one class with people who have both computer and Internet skills, another class for people with computer skills only and two classes for people without any computer skills.

Each class lasts about two hours once a week over six weeks. Plus various homework assignments, the total training takes about 20 hours of people's time.

What topics to cover and in what order

The course it set out to cover a number of basics: what is citizen journalism? What is news? Story structures; facts and opinions; computer and Internet training and multimedia. We also try to inculcate that being a citizen journalist means playing an "active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information" (as Willis and Bowman say in *We Media)*, and not hanging around waiting for the news to happen to you.

There are many discussions about the differences between CJs and professional journalists and one of the key discussions is around aspiring to objectivity.

We look at how one of key differences between the CJs and *Grocott's Mail* journalists, besides not being part of the formal journalistic workflow in the newsroom, is their choice in sources and stories.

CJs tend to ask other citizens for their opinions (because they operate on a grassroots level) while journalists choose to go to prominent sources (the mayor, ward councillors etc).

A story from a citizen journalist is also more likely to be based on news that affects citizens directly and comes from citizens themselves.

While this creates a refreshing perspective and creates more diversity in the news, citizen journalists also have to be careful about being fair. We discuss how this can be done while still telling them that critical stories often originate in the community.

Building confidence

In class three, which focuses on interviewing, the trainer invites a well-known local to be interviewed by the class for half an hour in a press conference setting.
The CJs get ten minutes to prepare questions. This is an amazing session with many lessons learned including the banal, such as sitting upright and showing interest, developing listening and note-taking skills (using

quotations properly is a big part of what we cover in this class), asking questions clearly and concisely, not letting the interviewee take over etc.

So much of journalism is based on the ability to interview, in person or over the phone, and people are so nervous about approaching people in power that building confidence and skill in doing this is proving to be much more important than we initially thought.

Cell phones first

A big part of the training is learning how to use cell phones as a reporting aid and tool. We focus on using phones to take notes and, if web-enabled, to do research using tools like Google.

We also spend a lot of time learning about how to take better photos and video recordings. Downloading, editing and uploading the photos took longer in some of the classes but people were always patient and most stayed after the class was over to practise some more.

More recently, graduated CJs with a video cellphone also get extra video shooting and editing skills.

We've discovered that most people are unaware of cell phones' capabilities as a reporting tool and the whole idea of multi-media reporting.

After the class some of the participants enthusiastically took off doing vox-pop type interviews with lots of photos, others recorded interviews and used audio snippets in a text article.

Sustaining viable journalism

Doing journalism is a habit. To get people into the habit, we're created the first full time citizen journalism editor post. From May 2010, the editor has worked with each batch of trainees to get their stories published, and get them into the rhythm of reporting. We also have small payments for stories or photos that get published, which we are hoping will further boost trainees' motivation and confidence.

Gradually, more and better stories are emerging. We're also allowing the top four students in each class to participate in the *Grocott's Mail* newspaper daily diary meetings.

All of these steps are creating a more regular, higher quality citizen journalism, enriching *Grocott's Mail's* role in this community.

Khaya Thonjeni

STEAMING ALONG

EMBRACING THE CHALLENGES OF THE NEW IN SOUTH AFRICA'S OLDEST INDEPENDENT NEWSROOM

Michael Salzwedel

The transition from old to new media has been marked by a few uncanny moments at *Grocott's Mail*. When I arrived for my first day of work as the new media editor in June 2009, I walked into a staff meeting where it was announced that the historic printing presses were to be switched off forever, the staff retrenched, and the paper printed off-premises in Port Elizabeth.

In with the new, out with the old.

A few months later, we carried in computers for our Citizen Journalism Newsroom (www.grocotts.co.za/cjnr) through the front door just as workmen were removing the printing presses out the back.

In with the new, out with the old.

While saying goodbye to the printing presses may well have been tough for some, their departure has symbolically made room for the newspaper to experiment with new technologies, richer stories, bigger audiences and a wider range of dissemination methods.

During the South African War from 1899 to 1902, as many as five editions of *Grocott's Mail* were published a night to ensure that the latest war news was available. A steam whistle was installed on the roof of the premises, which let out a shrill blast alerting readers to the latest issue.

Today, the Internet and mobile phones are our steam whistles. When we publish a hot story online, we Tweet it and let our more than 700 Facebook fans know about it too.

We also send out SMS headlines twice a week when the paper is published, and when we have any major breaking news.

Grocott's Online was launched in 2006, operated on-and-off by Rhodes Journalism students and staff in the New Media Lab (http://nml.ru.ac.za). The site in its current incarnation was launched in July 2009 and, as of April 2010, was attracting an average of 300 unique visitors and 1 000 page views a day, growing at around 10 to 15% month-on-month.

The website, and all related new media projects at *Grocott's*, are part of Iindaba Ziyafika (isiXhosa for "The news is coming"), a four-year Knight Foundation-funded project which began in 2008 and is headed up by Harry Dugmore, MTN Chair of Media and Mobile Communication in the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes.

"The core proposition of Iindaba Ziyafika is that information and communication technology can enlarge the public sphere by providing the tools that encourage participation and facilitate that participation," Dugmore wrote in last year's edition of *Rhodes Journalism Review*.

Grocott's Online endeavours to encourage and facilitate this participation by providing and promoting a comprehensive platform for citizen journalism.

Our "MyStory" section is well populated with stories written and photographed by citizen journalists; many of these making it into the print edition as well.

We run six-week training courses in the *Grocott's Mail* Citizen Journalism Newsroom to equip local citizens with knowledge and skills that help to make them more effective citizen journalists.

We have also appointed a Citizen Journalism Editor, who works closely with *Grocott's Mail* editors and our citizen journalists to ensure that contributions are well managed and that citizen journalism remains a sensible and strategic part of what we do, within both the Iindaba Ziyafika project and the broader visionary framework of *Grocott's Mail.*

Grocott's Online is not the only way we are delving into new media and trying to contribute to improving life in Grahamstown. Mobile phone technology has moved from being the "next big thing" to being very much the current big thing.

We receive SMSs from readers directly into Nika, our open-source content management system, which are then published in print and online.

We also have a free SMS headline alert service (www.grocotts.co.za/sms). Included in this is the capability to communicate with particular groups of people to alert them to news – and opportunities for civic engagement – in their areas, whether geographic or topical.

Our most significant mobile project is Grahamstown NOW (ghtnow.co.za), a mobi-site that brings together a wide variety of real-time (or as close to real-time as possible) information about what is happening right now – or what is about to happen or stop happening – in Grahamstown. The site's core philosophy is that "nowness trumps newness" and "of-use trumps of-interest".

It provides real-time information about events and specials, live views from various webcams around town, as well as the latest news and SMSs published on Grocott's Online.

Grahamstown NOW meets the Iindaba Ziyafika mandate of using mobile phones to encourage civic engagement (in this case by informing people of events such as council meetings) and also provides extra sources of revenue for *Grocott's* (local businesses can list time-based specials on Grahamstown NOW).

At a local level, there is a strong case that the job of newspapers and their websites should be to alert people in advance about choices to be made, to help frame issues and explain what is at stake. With our focus on mobile phone access, increased data mining and presentation of both raw data and analysis of that data, and citizen journalism, we hope to make a real difference to the power people can access and exercise in Grahamstown.

Paul Greenway

YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULD BE SEEN AND HEARD

Jayne Morgan

I t's episode five of Y4Y. As usual, things are slightly chaotic in the Radio Grahamstown studio but we've got learners from Graeme College, Mary Waters and Nathaniel Nyaluza schools all around our mikes and some nice responses coming in on MXit.

It is the week where municipal workers have been rampaging through the town's streets and ANC Youth League leader Julius Malema and the murder of AWB leader Eugene Terre'Blanche have been dominating headlines, so the debate is about leadership and whether South Africa's youngsters have the right kind of role models.

Strong opinions are being expressed for and against the strikers.

In the middle of the discussion, a message comes through from "Twigs". The day's "MXit master" [Zane from Nyaluza] reads it out over the air: "Y4Y is fantastic, it gives us information and it's not just for one race, it's for black and white." In the middle of the studio mayhem, my colleague Khaya Thonjeni (who is also the show's presenter) and I do a little dance and some high fiving. Y4Y aims to appeal to any learner at a high school in Grahamstown. This kind of response means, we hope,

Y4Y IS A YOUTH RADIO SHOW CREATED BY AND FOR GRAHAMSTOWN'S HIGH SCHOOL LEARNERS. THE PROGRAMME IS PART OF THE R5-MILLION IINDABA ZIYAFIKA (THE NEWS IS COMING) PROJECT FUNDED BY THE US-BASED KNIGHT FOUNDATION AND RUN THROUGH THE RHODES SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND MEDIA STUDIES. ONE OF ITS MAIN AIMS IS TO INCREASE THE GRAHAMSTOWN COMMUNITY'S ACCESS TO, AND USE OF, THE MEDIA, PARTICULARLY THROUGH MOBILE MOBILE PHONES. KHAYA THONJENI AND JAYNE MORGAN ARE ITS PRODUCERS.

Paul Greenway

Jayne Morgan

that we are making some progress towards that goal.

While the geographical distances between Grahamstown's 13 high schools are small, the gulf between the upmarket private schools in town and the government schools in the townships is gargantuan.

Y4Y has set out to use this South African microcosm to see if we can create communication across the divide.

We started from the premise that, whoever they are, 16-year-olds have certain things in common. As Khaya puts it: "There are some things all teenagers think about: identity, relationships, dealing with drink and drugs, family life, music and fitting in. We're concentrating on those points of connection and, where there are differences, trying to get people to understand each other better."

For that reason, while the production team helps with the technical side, the show's content is generated by the learners themselves.

Every week, three schools from across the spectrum participate. They each create a news bulletin as well as source and conduct interviews. Teams from each school then come in to the studio to take part in a live debate and meet contemporaries they would never otherwise come into contact with.

The topic may be inspired by national events or a local school issue (we did a memorable matric dance special). Whatever it is, it's the learners who drive the discussion and make it relevant.

Opening up the discussion to listeners was essential to hearing as many voices and views as possible.

One of the other things Grahamstown's youth have in common is owning a mobile phone. "We chose the MXit platform so that people can join in the debates at a fraction of the cost of an SMS or a call," says Khaya. "We want the communication to be two-way. We've had an amazing response. As soon as we went on air, people were signing up and commenting. The interaction is growing every week as young

people realise that they can have their say instantly and be heard by the whole audience."

As well as using MXit, Y4Y has a home on the *Grocott's Mail* website (www. grocotts.co.za/y4y) where the audio from the programme is posted as well as pictures, competition winners and other content. This page will become increasingly interactive and provide another communication space. However, while Internet access remains patchy, phones are the key.

Y4Y is also designed to be a learning experience on more than one level and that includes introducing children to journalism and the media. Anyone who takes part is encouraged to think about what makes a news story and how to produce a good interview. In our regularly participating schools, small groups are emerging who are keen to go further and are being trained to record and edit their own audio.

Several – from all backgrounds – have discovered a new passion. However, whether they are budding journalists or not, every learner who has taken part has got a huge kick out of demonstrating our programme strap line: "Young people should be seen and heard".

The discussion is inspired by something going on that week (such as SciFest or matric dance fever) or an issue relevant to the lives of our listeners – boys and girls trying to understand each other or whether their schools are giving them what they need.

A recent subject was the issue of fighting between well-established and recently returned Xhosa initiates. It was picked up during a studio discussion about gender equality. Strong views came out and it was interesting to hear how polarised the boys and girls were. What was also important was that everyone in the discussion – black or white, moneyed or not – had a personal experience of the issue.

Most importantly, it is something we would never have got to if we were imposing ideas from outside.