



Anna Mabe

Organisational support, resident support and friendship buffer vulnerability

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Text: Tanya Zack, Kirsten Harrison, Melanie Samson

Photographs: Mark Lewis

Design: Willemijn Schellekens

Reclaimers and residents

This section of Putney Road in Johannesburg's Brixton suburb is a short, well-appointed suburban road that starts by taking a bend around the park and ends more gloriously at the foot of the Brixton tower, one of the Johannesburg skyline's most famous landmarks. But for most of its length the tree-lined street alongside the park is an almost unassuming host for a ground-breaking pilot project in which residents work directly with reclaimers to ensure that their recyclables are collected. With its view of the large trees, the defunct tennis court, the charmless clubhouse building and the tarmac 5-a-side soccer field, it's a quiet neighbourhood scene.

It's Tuesday – waste collection day - and reclaimers have been working this road and the surrounding streets for hours. More specifically, individual reclaimers have been collecting canvas and plastic bags that residents have filled with recyclables, after receiving the bags from the reclaimers, as part of the African Reclaimers Organisation's resident-reclaimer recycling project.

Separation outside source: Sorting on the side of the road
Anna Mabe empties the material from the bags she's collected onto a sheet she's placed on the side of Putney Road in Brixton. She sorts what

she collects and places the materials she'll take into her blue plastic quilted bag.

It looks like a jumble of waste, but she's working methodically, extracting plastics and cans. She points out that she must work close to this pile that she is sorting so that no one steals her materials. She says she has to collect a lot of materials to make a small income. 'I don't want to collect cardboard or anything that doesn't have high value' she says

A young resident crosses the road to chat with Anna and to empty his bag onto her pile. He retrieves the bag to refill it again for next week's collection. She collects light, high value materials. She pauses to take a clean bag to another resident. 'I know all their names, and they know me. They'll keep these bags for me even if I miss a day because I have to go to hospital' she says of the residents in this street block.

Still, she says, not everyone cleans the materials before putting them in the bag. And some even put waste in it.

Low income

It's a struggle for Anna to raise enough money for rent and food. She works twice a week. 'Some days I earn R170, some days R70, some days R20. But this is better than begging. I can buy mieliemeal'. Anna wishes she could get an RDP house that the government is meant to provide to all poor people.



Losing her job

Anna worked at a soup kitchen for several years. But her boss died and there was no work. She was hiring a room but when the lady who owned that house died, the family locked the gate and Anna was stranded. 'I suffered when my madam died,' Anna says. She came to Fietas, where stayed on the street. 'I slept on the front stoep of a house. I would leave early in the morning. I would go around asking people for work.' Eventually she was given a small room in exchange for domestic work and R550 monthly rent. Since losing her formal jobs and her health started fading, Anna has turned to reclaiming. She doesn't have relatives and she fends for herself. She has been collecting recyclable materials for 7 years.

Friendship and working together

Anastacia Chauke is Anna Mabe's best friend. The women are both in their late 60s. They met in Fietas and now they are inseparable. Although they work independently, the two friends work this road at the same time. They pause their collecting to talk with each other regularly. They help each other load their bags on and off the trolley. And later in the morning they will pull their trolleys together to the buy-back centre in Newtown.