



# UPEARN

## IMPACT REPORT 2020

by Yoni Pakleppa and Mishka Reddy, UpLearn Programme Managers



# OVERVIEW

In 2020 UpLearn had to adapt very quickly to the circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic. All core programme elements were moved online. Students were provided with monthly data and supported to develop the digital literacy skills necessary to continue engaging in the programme remotely. The team smoothly switched over to online coaching and tutoring to support this necessary shift. Our monthly teaching weeks were also moved online and as a result were still able to offer ten half-day workshops per month across all degrees and specialisations throughout the year. We developed a data and connectivity conscious teaching methodology that utilized three online platforms: Google Classroom, Zoom and WhatsApp. Despite the obvious challenges involved in making this shift we have seen an incredible jump in digital literacy skills and general resourcefulness and independence of our students as a result of moving all of our teaching online. The experience has revealed the strength of and opportunity in a hybrid-teaching model that utilises both online and in-person learning spaces.

This powerful learning also influenced the development of new programming in 2020. The panel review process, which requires graduates to prepare a presentation for a panel of experts on key degree learnings and how they can be applied to real world vocational settings is now fully online. This allows for expert panelists to join from around the world via Zoom to give invaluable feedback and expose graduates to global professional networks. Similarly, as a result of the pandemic, both the Advanced Professional Development Course and the Digital Literacy Course are now fully online.

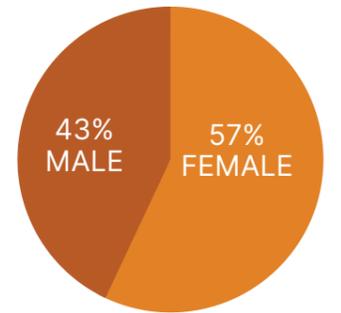
In 2020, more than ever before, UpLearn had to depend on the strength of its student support networks. Thanks to incredible leadership from a handful of student volunteers in the programme online spaces were created and revitalised from within the student community to support academic success as well as emotional wellbeing. This incredible work was a vital piece in the successful and speedy adaptation of the numerous UpLearn programme elements to function remotely. Through the combined efforts of the team and our students UpLearn not only survived 2020 but developed into a robust, responsive and antifragile programme.

# HIGHLIGHTS

- Developed and launched the Advanced Professional Development course through a rigorous peer review process. This asynchronous and online course, housed in Google Classroom, was designed to facilitate the development of necessary professional skills. Enrolled students received weekly feedback on assignments from a dedicated teaching assistant and were invited to bi-monthly virtual networking sessions. The final assessment was in the form of a mock interview wherein students were tested on all professional skills covered in the course and graded according to a rubric.
- Adapted the internal internship. Originally this involved groups of student interns learning project management skills in order to modify, coordinate and conduct an in-person body mapping workshop in a community space for a particular target audience. As this was not possible in lockdown we adapted the content to speak directly to the global health crisis. Under supervision from a health systems professional and a communications specialist each group had to create a resource on COVID-19 with specific information related to the needs of their client.
- Pivoted the Digital Literacy Course from an in-person offering to an online course also housed in Google Classroom. Students were given self-study materials that followed a set curriculum and sent weekly practice tasks and feedback. The course culminated in a Google Form digital literacy assessment to test learnings across 8 key modules.
- Provided students with access to various wellness services such as referrals to support groups run by Adonis Musati Project and online yoga and meditation workshops. Student support leaders also provided emotional support to fellow students during the pandemic.
- Launched the UpLearn Engagement Policy in partnership with the Global Education Movement. The objective of launching this policy was to ensure the highest academic and professional standards are attained. Additionally, the coaching team ran BA expectation workshops to supplement the release of this policy.
- Became a Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium (CLCC) member.
- Ran a rigorous admission process at the end of 2020 and as a result 66 new students joined UpLearn to begin the pre-degree programme in February 2021.
- Partnered with the NGO Ikhaya Le Langa to provide internships to students. The internship placed several UpLearn students alongside South African students from Langa. The 3 month developmental internship included a course component around project management alongside application through work experience in selected Ikhaya Le Langa projects that related to tourism and travel with the aim to solve African problems.

# IMPACT

**66** NEW STUDENTS  
OUT OF 445 NEW APPLICATIONS



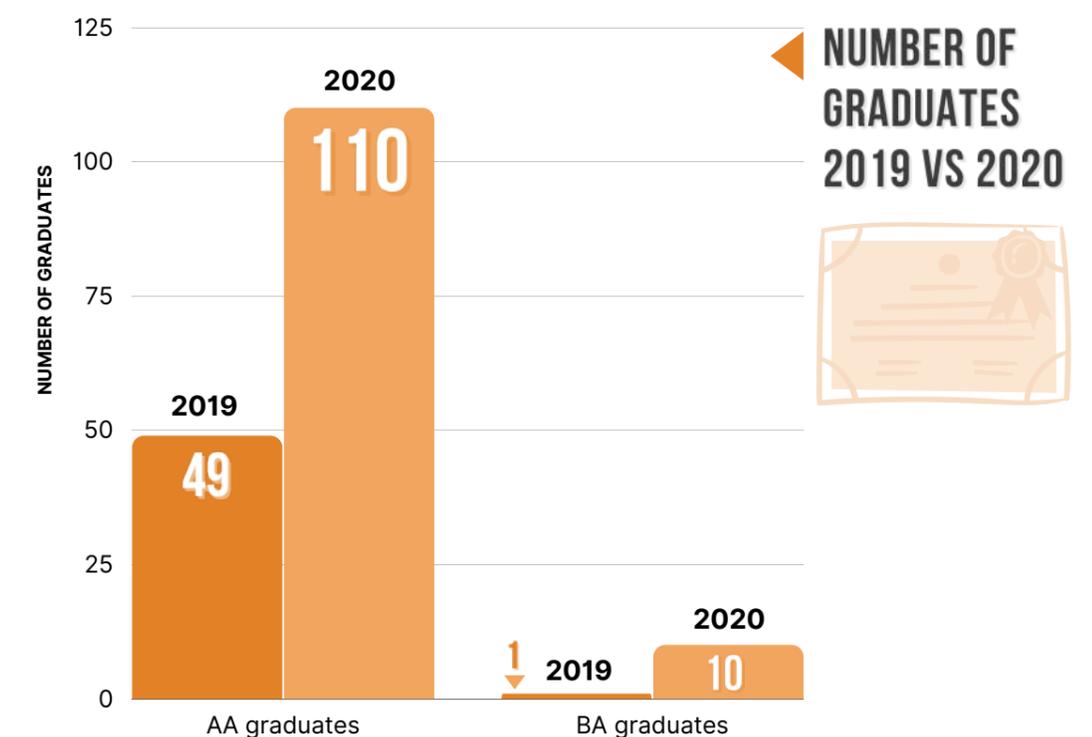
**113**



**70%**

**INTERNSHIPS COMPLETED (89%)**

**GRADUATES EMPLOYED**



# EDUCATION AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES WITH UPLEARN

**Before coming to South Africa, Charlotte never imagined that she would be able to further her education past high school. A chance encounter with a stranger in a taxi led Charlotte to Scalabrini – she now holds a BA degree in Management specializing in Logistics and Operations.**

## STUDYING WITH UPLEARN

Charlotte's journey with UpLearn began in 2018. When she completed her Associate of Arts (AA) she experienced her first graduation. "It was amazing! There were 28 student's graduating and everyone was very excited. After receiving our certificates there were many tears ... but they were more like tears of joy."

After graduating, Charlotte began her BA in Management. Students are given four years to complete their studies, but it took Charlotte just over a year. "The journey was really a difficult one. Whenever you accomplish something in a short period of time, it's going to be tough." Being a mother of two young children and having duties to do at home whilst finding the time to study is not always easy. This was where Charlotte saw huge benefits with UpLearn. "[With UpLearn], you can choose your own schedule and working online is flexible, you can do it at night when your children are sleeping or on weekends when their father is there."

When Charlotte first came to Scalabrini she accessed Employment Access and through being at the office she met some of the UpLearn students – and she immediately let Employment Access know that she wanted to study too. Charlotte's dreams were almost dashed when she was told that UpLearn was full. "I was so disappointed, because I really wanted to educate myself. After a month I received a call from EAP saying one student dropped out from the programme, but there was a long waiting list. I didn't know if I stood a chance. I decided to apply and sent my application. They then called me in for an interview. After two weeks they contacted me and said congratulations I made it through! That was the happiest day of my life."

## LIFE BEFORE UPLEARN

While still living in Zimbabwe, Charlotte worked as a secretary and furthering her education was just a dream. "In Zimbabwe if you do not have mathematics your chances of going to university are very slim. I never knew that I would end up at a university and leave with a degree."

"I was not an A student, but if you look at me now, you can say I have a degree. With dedication and perseverance, you can achieve this. [Before UpLearn] I was very shy. Through being equipped with different skills and being part of workshops where you have to facilitate sometimes, I have learnt to become bolder and more confident. I have become more confident because I have gained skills."

Charlotte felt supported by UpLearn during her studies and always knew that there was someone to assist with problems relating to studies or personal problems. "There is constant support available to students. Even during Covid they gave us 10 gigs of data so we can complete our assignments and last year every student got given a laptop. They (UpLearn) always provide resources."

## A DREAM REALISED

At the time of speaking to Charlotte, she was busy with an internship with the Global Education Movement (GEM), where she is responsible for graduate support and helping with CV's and cover letters - similar work to the services she first accessed at Scalabrini with the Employment Access Team.

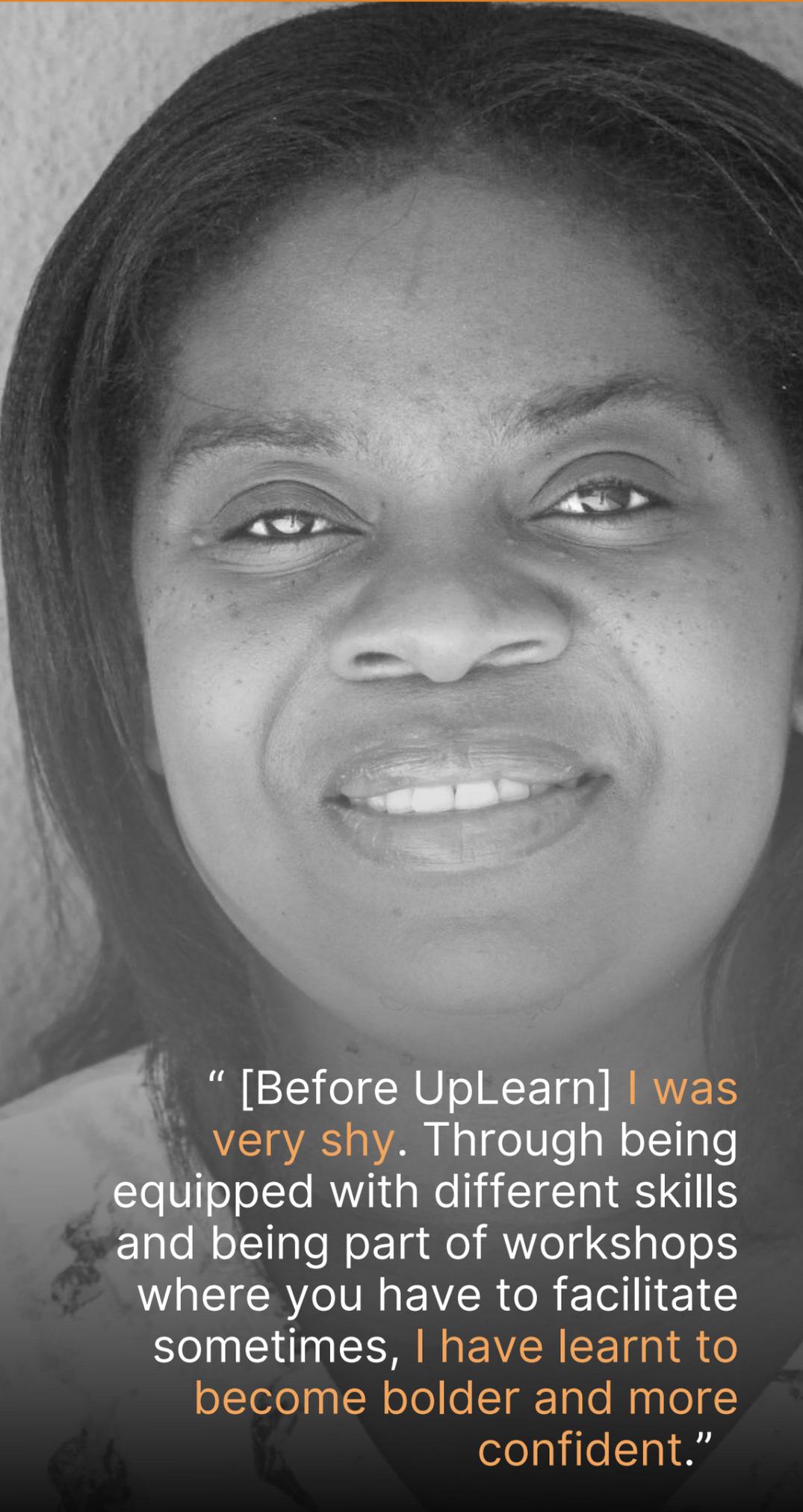
UpLearn is a part of GEM launched by SNHU in five different countries: Rwanda, South Africa, Malawi, Kenya, and Lebanon. Charlotte assists people from each of these countries. GEM's aim is to address the reality that worldwide there are more than 65 million refugees and other displaced peoples and only 1% have access to higher education. The objective of the initiative is to give those who may be prohibited from accessing tertiary education by financial or legal barriers an opportunity to empower themselves through education.

The internship was supposed to be three months, but when the interview took place her internship had already been extended more than once. "I started in June 2020. It was supposed to be 3 months, but they decided to extend it with a month. They extended it again and now I am still there. I am enjoying it and I am so grateful to be granted such a wonderful opportunity."

With a firm interest in logistics – Charlotte hopes to one day work for a transport company in the logistics team – specifically focusing on keeping packages safe. "I read in so many cases whereby some goods are being lost when transporting them. I would like to introduce an idea or a system of different packaging, which makes sure the goods arrive safely at their destination. We don't want to have a case where goods are lost or broken."

## UPDATE

**SINCE THIS ARTICLE WAS WRITTEN, CHARLOTTE'S INTERNSHIP AT GEM HAS TURNED INTO A PART TIME POSITION AS ASSISTANT EDITOR.**



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# LOOKING FORWARD...

The pandemic made consistent academic progress a challenge for many of our students resulting in some falling behind on their project submissions. In 2021 we will rigorously enforce our engagement and progress policies to create accountability for students who need to get back on track. Additionally, we will be revamping our tutoring model to give students quick access to a trained staff member on the full range of degree topics. We will also be investing in developing our professional teaching practice through work with an education consultant. As more students begin to graduate we will also focus on growing employment opportunities through networking and building positive relationships with employers both locally and online.



The centre is registered with the South African Department of Social Development as a non-profit organisation (021-079 NPO), as a youth and child care centre (C7569) and as a Public Benefit Organisation with the South African Revenue Services (930012808) and governed by a Trust (IT2746/2006).  
Auditors: CAP Chartered Accountants.

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