



Pathway to Dignified Living:
Service Connections to Backyard
Dwellings on Private Land



table of CONTENTS

02	Introduction	08	Household income
02	Purpose of the Case Study	09	Before installation
03	Documentation approach	10	After installation
04	The Lost City neighbourhood	12	Conclusions and recommendations
05	Experience of technicians installing services	14	References
07	Tenure arrangements		
	08 Backyard structure layout		



BACKYARD MATTERS
ENABLING PEOPLE, PLACE & POLICY

This document is produced as part of the project Backyard Matters: Enabling People, Place and Policy. Backyard Matters is a partnership project initiative between Development Action Group (DAG) and Isandla Institute. The project is aimed at strengthening the backyard rental market and contributing towards well-managed, quality rental stock that provides affordable, dignified and safe housing solutions. Backyard Matters is funded by Comic Relief.

Introduction

It is widely recognised that the informal backyard rental accommodation is one of the key provisions of affordable rental housing in South Africa and has been growing for decades with little to no support from the state. In 2019, the Development Action Group (DAG) and the Isandla Institute partnered in a project called Backyard Matters.

The overall aim of the Backyard Matters project is to strengthen the backyard rental market and contribute towards well managed rental stock providing affordable, dignified, and safe housing solutions.



Pictured above: Area map.

In 2020, the Backyard Matters project undertook the enumerations in 8 neighbourhoods across Cape Town, including the Lost City neighbourhood, in Tafelsig, Mitchells Plain¹.

Purpose of the Case Study

This case study provides an in-depth account of the socio-economic context and experience of the installation of electrical and water and sanitation services in the backyard structures of a land-owning household in the Lost City neighbourhood. It reports on conditions for

potential viability of on-site extension of the infrastructure to backyard structures on privately owned property¹. Its purpose is to communicate lessons learnt for policy and programme design from an instance of provision to backyard tenant households on one site.

¹ It is noteworthy that the City of Cape Town municipality is implementing a programme to provide municipal services to dwellers of backyard structures on municipal properties.

Documentation approach

This case study makes use of a **semi-structured interview approach** with the **members of the receiving backyard families in the yard, the technicians** who installed the electrical and water and sanitation services, and lastly the **Development Action Group project staff**.

The families all live on one property owned by the elderly parents who are in their late fifties and early 60s. As heads of the extended household the parents dwell in the main house with a physically disabled relative. Their adult children and their families, including three daughters and the mother-in-law of one of the daughters, are effectively tenants in five backyard structures on the property.

The services installed include an additional toilet, outside the main house and a tap. It also includes an additional pre-paid electricity sub-meter in each backyard structure.

The case study provides a summary description of the social and economic circumstances of the Lost City neighbourhood². It then reports on the experience of installation of the services by the electrical and plumbing technicians and builder. The case study then reports on the situation and experience of the landlord (property owner) and tenants in the yard, before and after the installation of the on-site backyard services and an account of its social and economic impacts.

Finally, the case study concludes and motivates for city-wide implementation of on-site service infrastructure provision and the policy and programme designed pre-conditions for such service extensions.

Lost City, situated within the Tafelsig area of Cape Town, occupies the southern terminus of Mitchells Plain, between Spine Road and Baden Powell Drive, while sharing its eastern boarder with Khayelitsha.



As per now outdated official's census data obtained during the 2011 Census:

1,129 The **total population** distributed across **228 households**.

Demographics:

97% Coloured population

more than 60% of the enumerated households **communicate in Afrikaans**, whilst the remainder speak English and isiXhosa.



50/50 gender split

more than 2/3

are **under the age of 30**, displaying youthfulness in the sector.

A closer examination reveals that a quarter of Lost City's inhabitants are younger, while an additional quarter falls within the age bracket of 20 - 30 years old.

² The detailed profile is provided in the Neighbourhood Profile. Lost City, Mitchells Plain. Backyarding Matters. Enabling People, Place and Policy.

The Lost City neighbourhood

The City of Cape Town registered **242** residential properties in the area in 2020ⁱⁱ with an estimated value of **less than R220 000** each. The Backyard Matters research project enumerated **232** of the **242** residential properties in the neighbourhood and found that **101** of these households were landlord/homeowner households, while **131** of these households were tenant households. A majority of the **101** landlord householdsⁱⁱⁱ enumerated owned the main house and sometimes let their main house to others who sublet rooms or dwellings in the yard. Of the **131** tenant households enumerated, **11** were tenants within the main house, while the remaining **120** were backyard tenants. In around **80%** of instances, the backyard structures that these **120** tenants live in are built of wood and some corrugated iron. In other cases, they are built of bricks and mortar.

The Lost City neighbourhood profile conducted in 2020^{iv} finds that slightly more than **70%** of the surveyed households moved to Lost City in the 1990s and nearly **75%** of landlords are 50 years of age and older. **This indicates a stable community with a limited resale of properties.** One striking feature of the community is the relatively low education attained, with a significant majority of landlords having completed below grade 10 and not completing higher levels of their formal education.

On average, a landlord's main household typically consists of about **4** people while the overall number of people, including those in tenant households within the yard, averages around **9**. This highlights the significant presence of additional occupants in backyard structures, all sharing the same water, sanitation, and electricity services.

Landlord Population:

20%

Unemployed

45%

Unemployed/job seeking

42%

Social grants
(main income source)

Backyard Tenants:

36,75%

Employed

45%

Unemployed/job seeking

36%

Social grants
(main income source)

Landlord households primarily derive their income from government social grants, wages and rental income from backyard structures. In both cases, the majority of households rely on the **child support grant** as their primary source of government assistance. Rent payment constitute slightly over **12%** of the total household income for landlord households, while the majority of income for tenants is sourced from wages.

**Landlord
Population:**

60%

Earn less than
R3,500/month

30%

Income Range:
R350-R7,500/month

R4,460

Monthly household
expenditure
3-5 members

(60% allocated to
food and groceries,
followed by electricity
and transport costs,
then housing related
expenses - bond/rent)

**Backyard Tenant
Households:**

66,6%

Earn less than
R3,500/month

26%

Income Range:
R3,501-R7,500/month

4,922

Monthly household
expenditure
3-5 members

(60% allocated to
food and groceries,
followed by rental
expenses, then
transport and
clothing costs)

Experience of technicians installing services

Loyiso and Mzu both live in Khayelitsha. Mzu is a certified electrician and has many years of work experience, both within the municipal electricity department and with several private sector electricity companies. In 2018/19 he made the choice to venture out on his own and become self-employed. Loyiso, similarly, has multiple years of experience as an assistant to a plumber in the private sector and then as a self-employed plumber in the low-income housing sector. They were contracted by DAG as a team, Mzu took on the primary contractor role, while Loyiso was sub-contracted by him.

DAG contracted these technicians to install pre-paid sub-meters in each of the structures and to provide an outside toilet and tap for the households living in the yard. The cost of materials and labour for the outside brick toilet with a durable ceramic toilet and an outside water tap was R12,000, including remedial work to the sewer pipe connection from the main house. The installation of the pre-paid electricity sub-meters, including materials like cables and plugs, cost R5,700 per backyard structure.

Prior to installation of the outside toilet and tap all families in the yard used the facilities inside the house. These facilities included a toilet, a bath, and a tap. The inside toilet is flushed with buckets of water. At the time, the flushing mechanism in the toilet cistern was no longer working. Furthermore, the sewerage pipe leading to outside from the house to the sewer pipes in the street had corroded and needed replacement.



Pictured above: Certified electricians installing services.



Pictured above: Tenant using water from the new installed communal tap.



Pictured above: The new toilet installed outside.



Pictured above: Certified electrician installing the electric box.

Altogether the plumbing work required was not only to provide access to water and a toilet to the backyard dwelling, but also repair to the facilities inside the main house. Fourteen adults and six children had been using these facilities. Construction of an additional toilet and water supply doubled the water and sanitation facilities thus increasing the health, safety and convenience for the family in the yard, including the main house. Electricity in the backyard structures used to be connected in an illegal and unsafe way. According to Mzu *“...connection was sagging, even the children can pull and get electrocuted.”* This meant that only one family in the yard could use electricity for cooking at a time, or else the power would trip (shut off).

Now, there are prepaid sub-meters in each structure, which are much safer. These meters allow tenants to buy electricity independently. This way, each family in the yard can control how much electricity they use based on what they can afford. It also helps prevent arguments and stress, both for individuals and the whole group, because everyone pays for their own electricity. It is taken that sharing between family members may be less stressful

than between rent paying tenants in the yard. The main house has a main electricity meter that needs to have enough credit for the power used in the main house and to charge the sub-meters in the backyard structures. It also supplies electricity to the backyard tenants. If the main house doesn't have enough electricity credits, the power to all the backyard structures in the yard is cut off. On the other hand, if one or more backyard structures in yard, utilising sub-meters neglects to charge their meter and run out of electricity, supply to that dwelling alone is interrupted, the others including the main house is not affected. Seven percent (7%) of the amount of electricity purchased by tenants through the sub-meter is added for use by the main house and 4% is charged for administration by the electricity supply authority.

Regarding the municipal service charges for water supply in Cape Town, registration as an indigent by the main household landlord exempts the landlord from paying for water consumption. In this instance, the municipal account of the main (landlord) household indicates that it is not charged for water supply and therefore receives free basic water of 6,000 litres per month.

Tenure arrangements

Mrs Daniels and her husband took ownership of their home more than 25 years ago, and they have been living there ever since. The main house has one bedroom, a bathroom and toilet, and a kitchen area and entrance room at the front of the house. Her husband's brother was first to build a timber and corrugated iron dwelling at the back of the yard behind the main house. He passed away and his widow remarried and continued to live in their dwelling. She has three sons. The eldest son married one of Mrs Daniel's three daughters who now all live on the property with their families in their own informal dwellings.

Fathima, Mrs Daniel's second born, lives with her husband and three daughters, 19, 15 and 7, in a typical wood and corrugated iron structure, second from the street. It has two bedrooms and a kitchen area and was built by them 16 years ago. As with all the other structures in the backyard, their dwelling is vulnerable to leaks in the roof and water at the doorstep often threatens to flood the house, during heavy winter rains. The son of the eldest daughter, who is 27 years of age and married with a child

and twins, has built his own smaller structure next to his mother's towards the back of the yard. She lives elsewhere some of the time. The youngest daughter, 27 and her husband live with their 9-year-old son in the green 25 m² 'Wendy house' at the front of the property. It has two small bedrooms, a kitchen and a living area that can fit a couch, a coffee table, and a wall unit. In total the yard accommodates 14 adults and 6 children. Two other adult members of the extended family come and go.

The parents, who are notionally the landlords, do not receive rent from their tenant daughters in the backyard. 'We are family' is their standard response to this question. Neither do they receive rent from the family at the back who are too poor to pay rent and have been tenants for almost as long as the property-owning landlord. They are distant relatives. In this case, at least, it appears that before the installation of sub-meters the non-payment of rent may have been used as leverage, from time to time, for contributions towards electricity purchases.

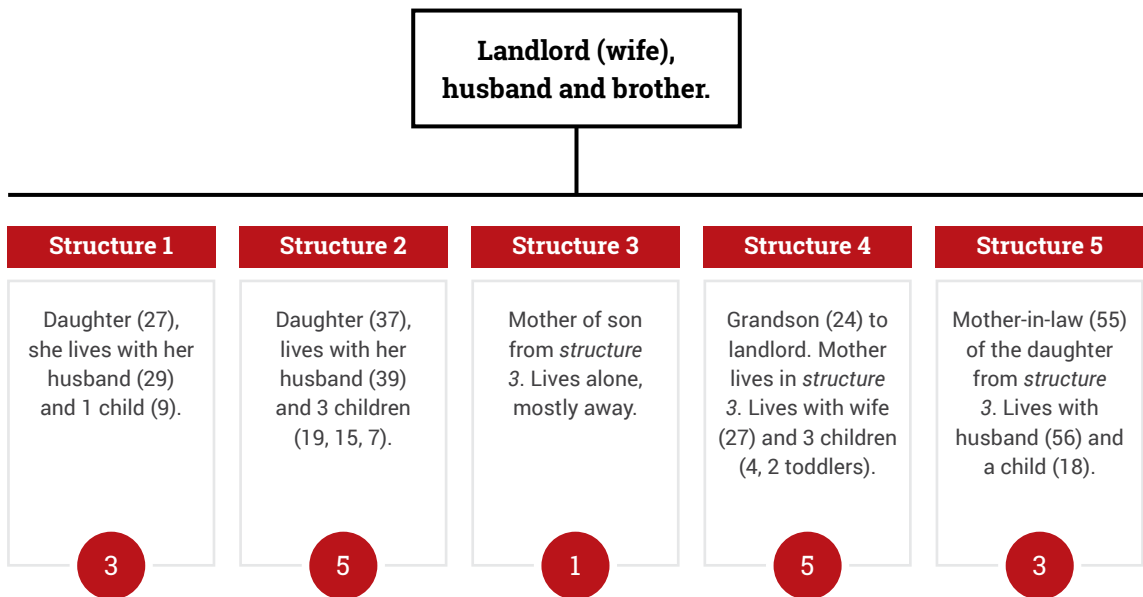


Pictured above:
Backyard structure with a main house in the front of the yard.



Pictured above:
One of the five backyard structures in the yard.

Backyard structure layout



Household income

The household income in the main parental household is calculated at a steady **R6,180 per month** comprising two social grants and a disability grant. The household income of other families in the backyard is lower comprising more reliable child support grants and the **R350 Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant** and less reliable occasional and contract employment. In this instance, two men are employed doing piece work as general workers for an events company earning **R400 per day**; one has been contracted recently to work as a cleaner, and one does occasional panel beating and spray painting of vehicles in the neighbourhood. Per capita household incomes are variable and insecure ranging from **R801 - R1,500 per month**

and sometimes dropping to below the official food poverty line of **R663 per person per month**^{vi}.

Asked about food, Mr Gideon^{vii} comments from the other room in the shack that they 'eat two-minute noodles, except on Sundays'. Sometimes they are given food by other family members and sometimes not. 'They all have families of their own to feed', says Mrs Gideon. Regarding other expenses, 'I have stopped paying for insurance since my disability insurance was terminated. It was only for six months'. She plans to go back to the authorities to claim it again. Fathima reports that she sometimes must borrow from local neighbourhood money lenders to make ends meet at **50% interest per month**. Her top priority is regular employment.

Before installation

Before the pre-paid sub-meters were installed in each of the shack dwellings outside, electricity was purchased jointly, through the meter in the main house. This arrangement caused regular quarrels and discontent between households regarding electricity use and the fairness of contributions towards its purchase.

Three households in the yard have a fridge and a TV or laptop to watch movies on. One has a microwave oven. All have a kettle and a two-plate electric stove, and some have a gas cooker and phone chargers (see *Table 1*). Installation of the sub-meters is unlikely to change the overall levels of consumption of electricity in the yard, but may result in greater levels of individual household responsibility for consumption.

They previously had a rough 'schedule' for when it was allowed to use the main house toilet. The entire family in the yard has been using the broken toilet in the main house. To flush the toilet, they had to manually pour water from the tap because the cistern mechanism was broken. It was even more challenging if no one was available in the main house with access to the key, the backyard tenants would be left without using the bathroom and kitchen until someone returned. For washing themselves and their clothes they had to boil water in a kettle. With the installation of these additional services, they can now use the toilet and access water more conveniently.



Pictured above:
The before condition of the main house electric box.



Pictured above:
Corroded and worn sanitation pipes before installation.

After installation

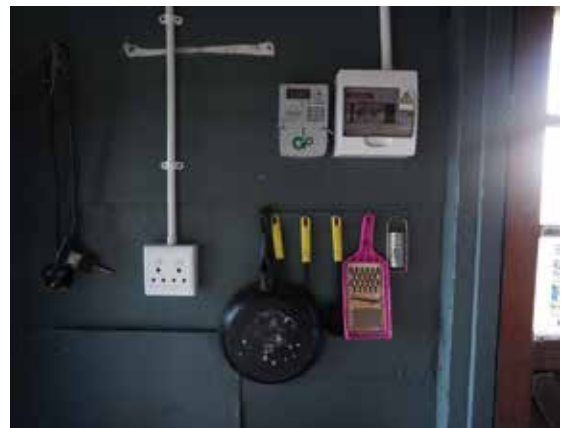
The most notable effect of the installation of sub-meters has been to reduce arguments in the yard, although there is still some misunderstanding regarding charging of the meter in the main house. This meter must remain charged for those in the outside dwellings to be able to charge their meters and this is not always the case. Fathima grumbles that she must now pay more for electricity as she has to charge both her meter and her mother's. While this is a teething problem regarding understanding of the charging of meters, it does hold potential to undermine the core benefit of individual sub-meters to some extent.

Electricity is the second biggest expense after food for the families in the yard. This is followed by transport cost and also children's expenses for the younger generation. The households report spending between **R150 and R400 per month** on electricity totalling between **R1,000 to R1,200 monthly**.

The potential power consumption of the appliances in the yard is in the range of **16 kW**. Power consumption is estimated at around **450 kWh per month**^{viii} if only one of the three fridges in the yard are on all the time. If more than one fridge is left on the combined electricity consumption of the households would go above the **600 kWh** threshold set by the municipality. The household would pay the domestic tariff of **350,80c per kWh** (incl. VAT) if on average through the year it consumes more than **450 kWh per month**. If average consumption is above the 600-kWh threshold the Home Users tariff of **426,56c per kWh**^x applies. The lifeline tariff is **211,55 per kWh** of consumption per month up to the **450-kWh** threshold, with free basic electricity of **60 kWh and 25 kWh** if consumption is below **250 kWh and 450 kWh** respectively.



Pictured above:
After the new installed box inside the main house.



Pictured above:
Electricity submeter installed in one of the backyard structures.



Pictured above:
Installed communal tap and sanitation pipes.

Appliance	Wattage (kw)	Main House	Shack 1	Shack 2	Shack 3	Shack 4	Shack 5	Units	Kwh pd	Average appliance usage
Kettle	1,200	1	1	1		1	1	5	3.00	Kettles each used 3 x p/day for 10min each
2 Plate stove	2,000	1	1			1	1	4	4.80	Hot plates used 3 x p/day for 12 min each
Lights	75	2	1	2		1	1	7	1.05	Lights switched on for 2 hours p/day
Chargers	10		1	1		1		3	0.06	Chargers all on for 2 hours p/day
Laptop	65		1	1				2	0.13	Laptops on for 1 hour p/day
Fridge	700	1	1	1				3	5.60	Fridges typically draw power a third of the time. In this case, it is assumed that on average only 1 fridge is left on all day so as to approximate the number of units of power drawn with repeated spending.
TV	100	1						1	0.10	
Microwave	1000		1					1	1.00	
Total Kva	19,485	4,216	5,052	2,127	0	4,05	4,04	26	15.74	
Percentage use		27%	32%	14%	0%	26%	26%			
Number of occupants	20	3	3	5	1	5	3		0.79	Kwh p/month
Reported electricity purchases	R 1,260	R 400	R 200	R 350		R 160	R 150		447.2	Kwh p/month

Electricity tariff for level of consumption:

Lifeline tariff	2.1155									R 946.05
Domestic Tariff >450 kwh/month	3.5080									
Domestic Tariff >600 kwh/month	4.2656									

Table 1

Conclusions and recommendations

The recommendations outlined below are based on conclusions from this case study and findings from the Backyard Matters project, which forms the wider project context of this work. The recommendations have also drawn from a report on the City of Cape Town experience of implementation of its pilot backyarder programme providing basic service in three municipality owned properties – Langa, Facreton and Hanover Park*.

The overall conclusion drawn is that there is a need for national policy guidelines giving direction and recommending provision of municipal services to all backyard structures in low-income areas.

While public funds are subject to a multitude of demands on social spending, including the basic income grant, ultimately a solution will need to be found that recognises this reality of poverty, private unaffordability and an absence of adequate water and sanitation and electricity services in backyard settings.

1. Establishment by the City of Cape Town of a basic services funding programme for provision of electricity, including sub-meters, and water and sanitation, including a toilet and water taps, to backyard dwellers on private land. Provision of basic municipal services to backyard dwellers on private land should be obligatory for municipalities and must attend to the expressed needs of backyard dwellers as tenants. The fund can be drawn from national budgets, such as the CoGTA Integrated Urban Development Grant (IUDP) or the Urban Settlements Development Grant (USDG) from the Human Settlements Department and also from municipal government budgets including adjustments to the electricity tariff structure. The programme can be designed as a joint CSO Community partnership with the municipal.
2. The backyard basic services programme must of necessity commence with a **thorough neighbourhood level consultation and communication with residents and community leaders** regarding the rules, procedures and expectation of residents and providers regarding the funding. Most important, the residents must be informed that the provision of supplementary backyard services will not impact on their position on the governments housing waiting lists or supplant their right to housing.
3. Develop methodologies including use of **qualitative methods and quantitative enumeration of the situation of backyard dwellers for research in partnership with backyard communities**. The aim of this research is to achieve a better understanding of the experience of backyard dwellers and the extent of the problem in what is, seemingly, an ‘invisible sector’ of housing provision.
4. **The appointment of local contractors** is an important local economic development objective. Procurement should, therefore, be directed preferentially towards local electrical and plumbing service providers and contractors.

- 5. Provision of basic municipal services to backyard dwellers on private land should be obligatory for municipalities.** We suggest the following procedure based on the learnings from the case study.
- a. An inspection to the site to assess the current conditions of services in the landlord house and the backyard structures.
 - b. A detailed specification and estimate of cost should be prepared by a coordinating programme manager with the requisite technical skills. A rapid assessment of the financial situation of the landlord household and tenant to determine levels of affordability and financial impact of provision.
 - c. A detailed explanation of the work process, rights and responsibilities, an explanation of municipal accounts, and of the workings and charges related to the system of sub-meters.
- 6. Finally, the programme must include a Housing Support Centre (HSC) that provides the following services:**
- a. Information on basic backyard services programme rules and procedures and detailed explanation of the work process of the programme.
 - b. Information and support for registration for lifeline electricity tariffs and ways of saving on electricity expenses.
 - c. Information and advice service on rights and responsibilities of landlord and tenant and also the municipality, including use of the Tribunal and rules and procedures for dispute resolution. The HSC should provide a rental tribunal outreach service for tenants, including advice and information on rights to tenants. Advice and information including explanation of municipal accounts, and of the workings and charges related to the system of prepaid meter and sub-meters.

References

- ⁱ The Neighbourhood Profile, Lost City, Mitchells Plain. Backyarding Matters. Enabling People, Place and Policy is a companion document to this case study.
- ⁱⁱ *Table 2*. Neighbourhood Profile. Lost City, Mitchells Plain. Backyarding Matters. Enabling People, Place and Policy.
- ⁱⁱⁱ The Backyarding study refers to homeowner as landlords to distinguish them from tenants in the backyard dwelling. It defines tenure based on whether it is freehold ownership or rental, or as a resident agent of the owner.
- ^{iv} Neighbourhood Profile. Lost City, Mitchells Plain. Backyarding Matters. Enabling People, Place and Policy. See also https://www.isandla.org.za/en/projects/urban-land/item/download/176_37d6e129968e0867a2b6d4cf54b4d662 on the impact of the COVID pandemic on backyard dwellers.
- ^v <https://www.capetown.gov.za/Family%20and%20home/Residential-utility-services/Residential-electricity-services/the-cost-of-electricity>
- ^{vi} <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P03101/P031012022.pdf>
- ^{vii} All names in this document are assumed names in the interest of protecting the privacy of the respondents.
- ^{viii} This estimation of usage time is shown in *Table 1*. Importantly, while residents report the fridges are on all the time consuming 16.8 kWh per month, it is assumed that on average only one fridge is left on all day. In this way estimates of power consumption can approximate reported spending on electricity.
- ^{ix} <https://www.capetown.gov.za/Family%20and%20home/residential-utility-services/residential-electricity-services/the-cost-of-electricity>. Notably, the lifeline tariffs for households using more than 450kWh have been reduced.
- ^x See Presentation to CoCT Sub-council 12, dated 5th May 2017.



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