To whom it may concern,

Reference letter: Citizen Surveys   **1 July 2023**

Dear Madam/Sir,

My name is Dr Caryn Abrahams, I am an academic at the University of the Witwatersrand, Wits School of Governance. Between 2018 and 2022 I served as Principla Co-Investigator of a project funded by a UK Research Innovation grant for a Global Challneges Research Fund – the Susutainable Healthy Learning Cities global project (www.centreforsustainablecities.ac.uk). We sought out, closely looked at the research track record, and eventually chose an expert research company to run our focus groups. This was quite a feat since we had two South African cities to cover – Johannesburg and Cape Town and 10 neighbourhood sites in each city covering varying levels of depravation and wealth. We wanted a research firm who demonstrated deep knowledge about the South African context, and who would be able to design a research frame for both cities. It was an even more complex endeavor since there were still Covid regulations in place at the end of 2021, and the company had to also assure us of their ability to work with tricky situations and difficult circumstances.

Citizen Surveys, under the leadership of Ms Washeelah Kapery, more than exceded our expectations on all fronts. Firstly their proposed research design, had to meet all our demographic, and geographical requirments, and their team consistently worked with our research team on meeting our expectations, refining the research instrument and even advising us on where we were less experienced. An example of this was where our recruitment instrument was vague and we had not given it much thought. Our project was essentially focused on how different neighbourhoods experienced life and services in their neighbourhoods, and Citizen Surveys proposed a detailed recruitment framework for us, which seemed like a small innovation, but was frankly genius in that their proposal of a mix of parents of small children and others, broadened our thinking about the potentially very different experiences of residents in neighbourhoods. This intervention also set me as a researcher on a course of thinking about how children experience their neighbourhoods.

Then, the actual 20 focus groups were scheduled and run over a couple, well planned weeks, with contingency plans where there were drop outs in responses, safe transport and conference hosting, observation areas, and video recording with live patch in for our reserachers to observe. The research and facilitation team was increadibly responsive and creative in their approach, and also included a mapping exercise which was not part of the initial request, but emerged as a later innovation. Although the focus groups for this project of ours was to be run mainly in English, I know that they have the ability to work across languages in South Africa. The transcripts and letters of consent were all delivered in good time, and the team met all the reporting requirements this project included.

This was not an outsourced, perfunctory job to Citizen Surveys, they were incredibly invested in the work, and there were many wonderful and rich conversations afterward about the nature of the research, the emergent findings and how the instrument could be revised and improved through the project.

Not only were we incredibly impressed by their quality of work, and research design and methdodogy knowledge of the Citizen Surveys team, we were very much appreciative for their advice, guidance and debrief sessions during the research process. In that respect we received immeasurably more from Citizen Surveys than the focus groups and transcripts we contract them for.

Thus this letter of reference is really a letter of commendation for the expert research services of Citizen Surveys, and their incredible work ethic. They will make a valuable contribution to your research endeavors and strengthed any focus group research project they take on. Please feel free to contact me should you need further information.

Kind Regards,

Dr Caryn Abrahams
Senior Lecturer, Wits School of Governance

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