

How a food garden is giving mental health patients purpose

(10 December 2020) After many years in the advertising industry, Meryl Smith, 66, wanted to get involved in community development to give back to those less fortunate and with Shoprite's assistance, she's been running a successful food garden at the Lentegeur Psychiatric Hospital in Mitchells Plain.

As the director of the Spring Foundation - a non-profit organisation started in 2015 and focussed on functional skills training, vocational training and the recovery of mental health patients - Meryl says the Lentegeur Market Garden serves three important purposes. "The garden provides food, it provides training and it provides therapy as well as recovery for the patients," she explains.

Together with the Spring Foundation, the garden has aided in the recovery of 50-100 patients, some of whom gained skills for employment. "A few patients who were trained in the garden had learnt enough about how to plant and care for crops that they now have jobs in the farming sector," says Meryl.

Shoprite provided the Lentegeur Market Garden with water infrastructure in the form of a 5,000-litre water tank, piping and gutters together with gardening tools, compost, mulch, seedlings, herbs and fruits trees.

The retailer is also providing ongoing training for the full-time employees working in the garden as well as those who are working in other community gardens, and small-scale farms in the area.

"We're an organic garden and we're aware of the impact a garden has on the environment, so we're really happy to learn all these new methods to take care of the soil and to plant in an eco-friendly manner," says Meryl.

"We're really grateful to Shoprite. Our garden serves so many purposes and we want to produce more crops so that it becomes more sustainable, and Shoprite is helping us to achieve our goals."

The Shoprite Group has been supporting food gardens across South Africa since 2015 and has partnered with more than 119 community food gardens and 475 home gardens. More than 28 000 people have benefitted from the Group's ongoing initiatives to enhance food security in South Africa.

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