

Garden spreads hope like the rays of the sun

“The biggest change has been the difference it’s made in the children’s lives. They not only benefit from nutritious meals, but also get closer to the soil by helping in the food garden.”

These are just some of the benefits Elisa Monaone, programme manager of the Ntsoanatsatsi Educare Trust, sees in the Monontsha Village community since they took hands with Shoprite to create a more sustainable food garden.

The garden was established by the trust in 2017, but ran into difficulty because it could not access a reliable water source due to an ongoing drought in the QwaQwa region. Early last year Shoprite included the garden in its national initiative to support community food gardens as part of the retailer’s ongoing efforts to alleviate hunger.

“We have a more consistent crop now and the vegetables harvested are used in the feeding scheme for the children in the community. The parents that help in the garden (and with the feeding scheme) have a sense of purpose. This garden has really changed lives,” explains Monaone.

The Ntsoanatsatsi Educare Trust was established in 1994 to provide training for the teachers at early childhood development centres. Since then it’s activities have expanded to include services such as aftercare and literacy programmes as well as caring for orphaned and vulnerable children in the Maluti-a-Phofung local municipal area.

Vegetables grown in the one-hectare garden include cabbage, beans, maize, spinach and beetroot. Apart from an additional water tank and grey water system, they have also benefited from garden training, fencing around the garden as well as a shade net covering to protect small plants while they grow.

“We started the garden with two aims in mind namely for it to supplement our feeding scheme, but also as a skills development programme for some of the unemployed parents in the community. Eight mothers currently tend to the garden and we encourage them to use their skills to start gardens at their homes. We even provide seedlings for them to start with,” says Monaone.

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CAPTION: Volunteers working in the Ntsoanatsatsi Educare Trust’s food garden in Monontsha Village in the Eastern Free State are learning skills they use to establish their own gardens at home.