

Food garden affords rehabilitation and empowerment

Residents at The Ark City of Refuge in Cape Town - a temporary home to destitute men, women and children – are being empowered through gardening. What started out in 2013 as a small vegetable garden has, with Shoprite’s assistance, become a beacon of hope for those seeking refuge at the home.

“We have lots of people interested in working in the garden,” explains *The Ark’s* Pastor Jack Mahoney. “There are three separate sections and it has created a bit of competition among the 30 to 40 residents that work in the garden. They really love it out there.”

Theoretical and practical permaculture training sessions, which Shoprite provides over a period of 18 months, covers a range of topics and have been well attended by interested residents. Pastor Jack says the workshops have been hugely beneficial: “These sessions have helped empower our residents. When they move out one day, they will be equipped with the knowledge on how to have their own food gardens and be self-sustainable.”

“Shoprite has been donating surplus food to *The Ark* for over 5 years. Our relationship with Pastor Jack and his team continues to evolve, most recently to include support of their food garden,” explains Sanjeev Raghubir, Group Sustainability Manager.

The surplus food, as well as the garden’s fresh produce - which now includes cabbage, butternut, carrots, spinach, broccoli and potatoes - is used to supplement *The Ark’s* feeding programme, which provides over 3 000 meals a day to residents.

“The harvest turnaround time hasn’t been ideal because we feed so many people, but we’re getting there now with Shoprite’s help. They have provided seedlings and equipment. They’ve also helped to repair our agricultural tunnel, supplied some irrigation piping and a mobile pump which is now pumping water from the river nearby. Shoprite even tested the water and it has been found to be fit for farming.”

The Shoprite Group has a robust programme in place to address the food security challenges faced by so many people across the continent on a daily basis. Since the start of lockdown, the Group has donated more than R120 million worth of surplus food to more than 400 organisations, including *The Ark*. It also supports more than 146 community food gardens, and 2 313 home-based gardens, across the country’s 9 provinces.

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