

Hospice food garden feeds greater community

While some doctors aren't eager to work in lower-income areas, one general practitioner had a dream to provide not just healthcare for poor HIV/AIDS patients, but nutrition for the community too.

Dr Russel Marivate (86) started the Ekukhuseleni Tshireletso Hospice in Winterveldt, Soshanguve in 2004 to provide palliative care, among other medical services, to people affected by HIV/AIDS.

Today the hospice provides 24/7 care for up to 20 people as well as home-based care to families affected by HIV/AIDS, and the building also serves as an aftercare facility and a feeding station for 25 children.

Co-founder Tulani Radebe (67) understood Marivate's vision of providing for the community and when the doctor's wife passed away last year and he retired, Radebe was able to continue his work.

"We started the project together after seeing many people dying from HIV/AIDS during the 1990s. There were no antiretroviral drugs available then and we just wanted to provide a little comfort for people in their last days," says Radebe.

Most of the people in Winterveldt are from Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique, and they struggle to find jobs. As a result, there are many who can't afford to buy food. Marivate and Radebe responded to this need by establishing a food garden, but they lacked the resources and knowledge to expand the garden.

Shoprite, through its implementation partner Food and Trees for Africa (FTFA), stepped in to turn the backyard garden into a sustainable agricultural enterprise that could feed patients and the community.

With seedlings, farming equipment and training, Ekukhuseleni can now sell fresh vegetables to the community at affordable prices while also providing food packages for 75 poor families per week.

"The people here are grateful for our garden and we're also supporting entrepreneurs as women from the community buy vegetables from us and sell it to make an income," says Radebe.

Radebe says that everyone at the hospice works in the garden whenever it's needed, but they could use more volunteers, especially during harvest time.

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