

Veggie tunnels provide brain food for preschoolers

Vegetables produced in the Justicia area of Mpumalanga are not only providing vital nutrition to preschoolers, but are also enriching the diets of nearby community members.

Henna Preschool supports 150 children and is the biggest of a cluster of three rural early development centres owned by the More Community Trust. New Beginnings Daycare enables teenage mothers of seven babies to continue attending school, while Jabez Preschool, started in January 2018, has one classroom for 15 youngsters.

Shoprite was approached to help develop vegetable gardens at the crèches after Food & Trees for Africa, the supermarket's implementation partner, flagged the potential of this project.

"After starting our vegetable garden project at Henna Preschool, we could supply fewer than 200 community members with fresh vegetables as we could not get seedlings to plant throughout the year," says Jade Mkansi, spokesperson for the project.

Shoprite became involved and provided training, a water tank and planting materials as well as tools. The vegetable gardens now have enough seedlings for every growing season. There are also two very productive vegetable tunnels at Henna, and one at New Beginnings. A tunnel for Jabez is on the cards.

A huge variety of vegetables is grown in the tunnels, ranging from maize to spinach, lettuce, onions, carrots and more. The crops are used to feed the children and are distributed to parents and teachers when there is any excess.

We can now prepare lunch for the children using the freshest vegetables from the garden every day to help develop their minds.

- Jade Mkansi, spokesperson, Henna Preschool

In addition, garden-fresh greens are also supplied to more than 400 community members. Jade reports that this helps minimise travelling for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, who now have to travel less than 5km to get vegetables from the school.

Monthly training sessions provide an additional benefit to community members: equipped with the necessary knowledge, it has also enabled them to also start small gardens at their homes, despite limited water supplies in the village.

Shoprite's initiative has helped us get more vegetables into our families' diets. We now eat a greater variety of vegetables and different types of meals.

- Jade Mkansi, spokesperson, Henna Preschool

END

Follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#): @WeActForChange