

Shoprite helps bring Port Elizabeth school's vision to life

Learners at the Khanyisa School for the Blind in Port Elizabeth are planning to launch a range of aroma sachets and other scented products using fragrant herbs they grow in their food garden.

The driving force behind this plan is the school's Deputy Head, Alec Stoffels, who originally established the food garden in 2016.

"I've always been passionate about gardening, even as a child. It flows through my bloodstream," he comments. "Initially my aim was to grow enough food in this garden to supplement the produce our kitchen uses for school meals. Now my dream is to leave the school a legacy by immersing our learners in the garden and equipping them with the skills to produce their own crops such as beetroot, spinach, pumpkins, carrots, lettuce, parsley and maize."

But, as Stoffels explains, his plans got off to a slow start when it became clear that the garden's design made it too difficult for the school's blind and partially-sighted learners to play their full part in making the initiative a success.

That's when he found a partner in Shoprite, which agreed to help transform the under-used land into a productive, fragrant vegetable and herb garden. The retailer's support included new tools, plants and educational materials as well as training.

The youngsters are in the process of learning permaculture techniques for cultivating vegetables alongside fragrant herbs and plants such as lavender, geranium and rosemary. "But the thing that really fires their enthusiasm is harvesting the produce they cultivate through their own hard work," explains Stoffels.

"Long-term, the kids will always be our first priority," he emphasises. "The vegetables we grow in the garden will be used to give them a balanced, nutritious diet. Any income we earn from our planned range of aroma sachets and scented products will be used to do more for them in the future."

Meanwhile, Khanyisa School for the Blind is looking forward to showing off its flourishing garden to the public as part of its forthcoming 30th anniversary celebrations. "I can't wait for the VIPs and other guests to see what we have achieved with our learners. There is nothing like seeing their joy at harvesting produce they cultivated themselves."

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