

Lillydale's remarkable ladies establish nutritious food garden

“Our work is very stressful and there are so many mouths to feed. But with help from partners such as Shoprite, we are determined to keep growing and selling our own produce so we can look after the children with nutritious food.”

This is the single-minded message from Minah Ndlovu, one of the women who run the Lillydale Home-Based Care Centre near the Sabi Sands Game Reserve in Mpumalanga. Established in 2005, the centre initially focused on caring for families ravaged by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Ndlovu and her co-founders – including Lonny Mathebula, Flora Mashilini and Florence Mnisi – began by paying home visits to community members who were too sick to leave their beds. During these visits, the women discovered hundreds of starving children whose carers were too sick or impoverished to feed them.

Using money from their own pockets, the women responded by baking bread and delivering food parcels to as many of the most vulnerable families they could reach. But without an income of their own, Ndlovu and her co-founders realised they need a sustainable solution to ensure these children have a guaranteed meal every day.

That's when Ndlovu set about creating a food garden from scratch. The vision for the garden was to create a sustainable, food source to ensure the young, elderly and sick community members obtained vital nutrition. An income would be generated by selling surplus food to the community.

Ndlovu and her colleagues started the food garden with seeds, tools and equipment collected from neighbouring gardens. The early results were promising and the garden was soon producing spinach, cabbage, beetroot, sweet potato, tomatoes, chilli, green peppers and maize. But the team at Lillydale Home-Based Care Centre needed to reinforce their business skills, technical know-how and improve the garden's infrastructure.

That's when Shoprite agreed to capacitate the centre and to create a more sustainable garden. The supermarket chain assisted with building and preparing new beds to optimise production, repairing boreholes and providing seeds, fertilizer, equipment and other plant materials. In addition, Ndlovu and her colleagues received mentoring, business coaching and training in gardening techniques.

The results have been very positive and Ndlovu is confident that her team now has the know-how, skills and infrastructure to secure the garden's long-term sustainability. For now,

however, she remains fully focused on keeping the most vulnerable members of her community healthy and well nourished.

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