

## **Flourishing garden a metaphor for the upliftment of Wesbank youth**

“Our beautiful garden is a positive attraction and is redirecting our youth’s focus. We use its beauty as a metaphor for their lives.”

These are the words with which Hilton Davids, founder of the Vlottenburg Community Organisation (VCO) in Wesbank, described a food garden established in partnership with Shoprite at Rainbow Primary, the school across the road from the organisation.

According to Hilton none of the VCO’s achievements would have been possible without the retailer’s support: “Shoprite saw our need and potential and have walked this journey with us for two years. Our partnership grew from small food donations, sponsoring a retrofitted container - which houses our classroom and kitchen - to the establishment of this garden.”

Spinach, beetroot, leeks, lettuce, cabbage and carrots are among the crops being grown in the garden, which also contain herbs like rosemary, marjoram, wild wormwood and wild garlic. In drought-stricken Cape Town, the garden, where seedlings were planted at the beginning of the year, is being watered from a borehole.

Its beauty is as a result of its novel design in which Shoprite’s partner, Urban Harvest, deliberately moved away from the grid-style garden design. Instead a three-dimensional mandala design of concentric circles was decided on, adding to the garden’s overall aesthetic appeal. The word mandala is Sanskrit for “circle” and this design was chosen for its eye-catching beauty and the fact that it acts like a traffic circle directing the flow of people so that it does not feel crowded. Visitors to the garden also get maximum enjoyment from it.

The vegetables in the garden are used to feed the children benefiting from VCO initiatives. It also provides fresh produce for the feeding scheme at Rainbow Primary. “We’re now feeding 250 children daily. That’s a huge improvement in just three years,” Hilton adds.

“Our hard work has ensured where once there was nothing there is now a green garden that feeds and empowers people. The same can be said for the lives of our youth: they might feel as if they have nothing to offer but if they work hard they can create something beautiful from nothing.”

The children from the school and organisation are encouraged to work in the garden with the hope that they will take the gardening skills they have acquired back to their homes to continue gardening there.

One faithful volunteer from the community, Gerald Bezuidenhout, arrives early each morning to lovingly tend to the garden. Work in the garden is a labour of love for this retired farm worker, who worked on wine farms around Stellenbosch. “Gardening gives me immense pleasure, but the greatest pleasure comes from the praise I get for our beautiful garden from community members,” Gerald says.

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**CAPTION**

Gerald Bezuidenhout (left) with Hilton Davids (right) and learners from Rainbow Primary School in Wesbank are proud of their achievements in the school's food garden.