

Uplifting and nourishing a new generation of young South Africans

The challenge of feeding around 60 disabled children with three nutritious meals seven days a week is not for the fainthearted. But thanks to dedication, vision and creative solutions, the food garden at the Star Uplifting Centre in Dimbaza, near King William's Town, is making it happen.

This success story started in 2010, when Zoleka Khakana, the Centre's Project Manager, first joined Star Uplifting. "I've always loved growing crops. As a child, my mother made sure I had a plot to plough and cultivate. It's in my blood," she explains. "So, shortly after I arrived here, I established a food garden with my colleagues. We were motivated by a single goal: to grow enough to feed our young residents and produce a small surplus to sell on to the community. Any revenue we raised would be reinvested into our children's care."

Not only did Zoleka's team achieve their goal, but they have also empowered some of their more physically-able children by teaching them valuable gardening skills they can use in later life.

With their hard work, the garden was soon producing healthy crops of cabbage, spinach, carrot, beetroot and lettuce along with seedlings. But despite this early success, Zoleka realised the garden was too small to meet the growing demand. Instead, her team had to find creative ways to increase capacity and output within the same area.

With support from Shoprite, and guidance from the retailer's implementation partner Food & Trees for Africa, Zoleka and her team implemented a series of smart solutions, such as vertical growing spaces and tyre stacks to grow potatoes, late last year. The team also identified new areas around the Centre to expand their planting area and received training in permaculture practices to ensure the garden could keep producing fruit and vegetable crops for longer each year.

The result is that Zoleka and her team at the Star Uplifting Centre are now able to help their community achieve the food and economic security it so badly needs.

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