

This garden club makes it fun to help those in need

The Avian Park Community Garden Club in Worcester coordinates 34 home-based food gardens to support seven soup kitchens, five crèches, a school and many elderly people who cannot afford to buy food.

Avian Park, which is comprised of low-income housing and informal settlements, suffers from food scarcity as unemployment in the area is high. Gerhard Karolus (69), club chairperson, has been involved with the club since it was started four years ago at the Avian Park Service Learning Centre. Community members realised they could help each other by exchanging gardening knowledge and skills.

The 46 club members achieve this by organising guest speakers and running an annual garden competition to ensure that members and the community benefit from the club's efforts.

"Our members come from across Worcester because it's a poor town and people here need to have productive gardens," says Gerhard.

Shoprite has donated a 5000-litre water tank, facilitated the installation of a well point and diesel pump as the food garden at the service learning centre is in need of reliable water infrastructure. The retailer is also providing a fence, gardening tools, planting and educational material as well as ongoing training for the garden club members.

"We are learning a lot from the training about companion planting and what crops to plant during the different seasons. We're also learning about composting and the workshops have a huge impact on our members," says Gerhard.

The crops range from herbs such as mint to vegetables such as cabbage, beetroot, beans, spinach, onions and much more. The Avian Park Community Garden Club is hoping that the upgrades to the garden at the service learning centre will entice more community members to learn about gardening so that they too can grow fresh vegetables for their own tables.

The garden club is known to help its community during difficult times. Two years ago, when gang violence erupted in Avian Park, many people took shelter in their homes and were subsequently prevented from moving around. The Avian Park Community Garden Club came to the rescue by providing food for school children stuck in their homes.

"I've been working in Avian Park for many years and the gang members know who I am, so they leave me alone because they know we're just helping people," says Gerhard.