

## **Community centre with food garden at its centre helps girl realise her dreams**

When Phyllis Malope (65) started the Philani Community Development Centre in Zuurbekom on the West Rand of Johannesburg in 2001, all she wanted to do was to play a part in helping a desperately poor community. Little did she know that 18 years later, her efforts would help a young girl reach a long-held dream to travel overseas.

Busisiwe Khaoue grew up in the impoverished community in Zuurbekom and spends many weekends participating in the extra maths and science lessons offered at the Philani Community Development Centre. She also benefits from the centre's food garden, which is thriving because of its partnership with Shoprite.

"She's a good student and works very hard," says Refiloe Qabang (36) the orphan care support programme manager. "An opportunity came up through her high school, Protea Glen Secondary, and she applied for it because she always wanted to travel overseas, and then she was chosen. Busisiwe participated in a Young Women in Public Speaking programme in Canada last year. We are very proud of her achievements and we are looking forward to her matriculating this year."

The unemployment and matric dropout rate in Zuurbekom is very high, and for this reason, the centre's founder, Phyllis Malope, started offering extra school lessons on Saturdays to assist high school learners. "Education is important and we have a teacher from the high school, Moses Bie, who volunteers on Saturdays. The learners like Busisiwe know him and benefit from the extra lessons," explains Phyllis.

The Philani Community Development Centre has grown over the years and today consists of 101 community members, who help in the skills development centre, community health centre, nursery school and food garden. At first the small food garden just sold produce to hawkers and shops in Bekkersdal, but with support from Shoprite it now provides nutritious meals for some 450 beneficiaries.

Spinach, beetroot and onions are among the vegetables grown in the garden. This produce is either used in the centre's feeding scheme or forms part of food parcels that are regularly distributed in the Zuurbekom community.

Anibal Mondlane has been working in the community food garden since 2001 when he donated cabbage seeds to help get the crops going. Initially the garden struggled as the area is dry and the soil is loamy. Luckily Shoprite stepped in to help revive the garden.

"Our soil is good, but it needs water and fertiliser. Shoprite assisted us with a good fertiliser that's really helping the crops," says Anibal. "They're also teaching us about permaculture and companion planting." The retailer also installed water infrastructure and erected a fence around the four hectare garden.

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CAPTION: Children are among the main beneficiaries of the food garden at Philani Community Development Centre in Zuurbekom, on the West Rand.