

Community champions help rural orphans

In 2004, when Charmaine and Andre Krugel were asked by community members of the Huntington Trust in Bushbuckridge, Mpumalanga, to help orphans and vulnerable children in the village, they couldn't say no.

After doing home visits to assess the situation, the Krugels together with the Community Development Forum and the chief, started the Swa Vana Children's Project.

"We're just an ordinary family and we didn't know anything about how to collect donations to help these children, but the need was so huge and so tragic that we had to do something to help. We live in Joburg and so we started off very small by asking for donations from our friends and our church. We were able to start helping six children and then as donations grew from companies and the government, I gave up my job and established a non-profit organisation for the three centres in Lilydale, Justicia and Huntington," explains Charmaine.

The vision was to provide a place of hope for children and others from these broken communities and to facilitate long-term solutions as well as holistic care.

Today the Swa Vana Children's Project is responsible for three drop-in centres in Huntington, Lilydale and Justicia. Here the children are fed cooked meals on a daily basis; clothing is donated and distributed; children are transported to clinics; there are organised sporting activities; arts and crafts lessons; counselling; and a supervised after-school programme.

While donations have been made regularly over the years, the one thing that was proving to be almost impossible to get right was the community food garden. The poor soil and the lack of water meant that growing vegetables was always challenging, so Shoprite, through its implementation partner, Food and Trees for Africa (FTFA) stepped in to help.

"Our centres are open from Monday to Friday, but because some children and families are completely dependent on us, we have to ensure they have food over the weekend and the gardens help to provide for them. When we harvest from the gardens, it reduces the amount of money we spend on groceries," says Charmaine.

Shoprite and FTFA installed a 10,000-litre water tank and irrigation, and provided tools, plant material, educational material, land preparation and training for those working in the food garden.

The training included soil remuneration techniques such as how to prepare the land, promoting soil health and biodiversity, making compost and crop rotation. The vegetables being grown in the community garden include spinach, carrots, beans, beetroot, onions and more.

“The soil in these areas is almost clay-like. It’s very hard to grow crops, but after the training and the soil preparation, the gardens are flourishing.”

END

CAPTION: Gardeners in the food garden that helps to feed some 400 children that benefit from the Swa Vana Children’s Project in rural Mpumalanga.