

'I can't watch people suffering daily and do nothing to help'

Marie Pienaar started the Home Sweet Home facility for the aged in Colesberg in the Northern Cape in 2012 because she could no longer look on as elderly people in the community struggled to get by on just their social grants.

With Shoprite's support, Marie (54) is resuscitating the food garden she started two years ago to provide fresh vegetables for community members.

"You can't watch people suffering every day and do nothing to help them," she says. "Our facility was established to assist the elderly and we planted the food garden because we feed 22 people every day and didn't have enough money to buy all the food we needed."

The vegetables planted at Home Sweet Home didn't grow well because of extremely dry conditions and a lack of water infrastructure. Shoprite donated a water tank, shade netting, compost, organic fertiliser, mulch, seeds, trees and educational material.

The retailer is on a mission to support community food gardens across South Africa and has since 2015 partnered with more than 100 community food gardens as well as 347 home gardens, benefitting more than 23 000 people.

"Fresh vegetables are so important, especially if people are poor and don't have access to good nutrition. The water tank and everything else Shoprite supplied is really helping us," explains Marie.

Shoprite's support also includes training in permaculture methods for Marie and her garden assistants. For example, there are sheep and goat kraals nearby, and they have been encouraged to use the manure to fertilise the soil.

"They are showing us how to make the crops grow well and how putting grass over the plants help them grow," says Marie, who hopes that the spinach, carrot and beetroot plants will keep on providing sufficient food for the beneficiaries as well as other poor community members.

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CAPTION: Marie Pienaar with two of the volunteers, who work the vegetable garden which supplies fresh produce to the Home Sweet Home facility for the elderly in Colesberg.