

Food garden provides life skills to special needs learners

Learners at the Thubelihle Special Opportunity School in Ladysmith, KwaZulu-Natal are being taught gardening as a practical life skill, and their food garden has received a welcome boost following support from Shoprite.

The school has a strong focus on helping learners gain practical skills that will assist them with a future trade or self-employment.

School principal, Sibongile Shabalala, says things haven't always been easy, "We were planting veggies on a small scale as we had to buy the seedlings ourselves, our shelter was falling apart and things were not working as well as we would have liked. But we kept it going because we wanted to foster a love for agriculture with our children."

Shabalala says Shoprite's assistance has been an immense help. "We've received lots of seedlings, planting materials, gardening tools and they have also helped us repair our shade netting. They have also ordered two 5 000 litre water tanks. Things are different now, thanks to Shoprite."

The school's 54 learners, aged 6 – 18 years, garden 4 days a week. They grow cabbage, spinach, lettuce, onions, tomatoes and beetroot. Sibongile beams with pride, "You must see our garden. It is so beautiful and so green. I've never seen our garden look like this. The methods that those of us who work in the garden have been taught through the workshops from Shoprite have made such a difference. We've been taught about companion planting and working with the soil for example."

Some of the vegetables grown are given to the gardeners and learners to take home, while other produce is sold so that the school can reinvest in and expand their food garden. Sibongile says they're also looking forward to being able to sell some of their produce to Shoprite directly.

"This is a great opportunity for our learners. They're all so excited to grow this project further. Some of our learners that love gardening have also been given a 'garden in a bucket' so that they can grow vegetables at home. We are so grateful."

Fostering long-term food security and job creation will always be a priority for the Shoprite Group, which is why the retailer supports 145 community food gardens and 1 433 home gardens, benefitting more than 40 000 people in total.

ENDS