

CHAMPION GARDENERS AT UITSIG COMMUNITY SHOW HOW URBAN AGRICULTURE CAN BE DONE



The gardening team at Uitsig Community. Peter Sampson and Shaun van Rensburg (far right) with produce from the garden.

A GROUP of 24 gardeners at Uitsig Community in Uitsig on the Cape Flats have created a thriving food garden that is a shining example to others in the community of what can be achieved. It took a year for this fearless and committed community of differently-abled people to clear the area at Uitsig Primary School, to make space for their urban agricultural activities. Yet within 12 months, in January 2017, they had established a vegetable garden that delivered a first, healthy crop of gleaming red tomatoes that supplied the gardeners' own needs as well as providing surplus for the school kitchen.

When Vanessa Baadjies first saw the densely wooded and overgrown area at Uitsig Primary School she did not think a group of people in wheelchairs and on crutches could clear it. "It looked so impossible," explains Baadjies, as the space resembled "a jungle" when permission was secured for the work group at Uitsig community to develop a garden. It was "quite a challenge" for a group of people with various disabilities to clear the area for food cultivation.

"It always seems impossible until it's done"

Yet under the leadership of Baadjies, whose motto is "anything is possible with commitment and strength", even more has been achieved. The vegetable garden cultivated there continues to produce an abundance of vegetables for harvest — onions, spinach, potatoes, carrots, salad vegetables and herbs and more — despite the drought. Moreover, the gardeners at Uitsig Community also tend a food garden twice a week at the Uitsig Community Centre, where they have been hard at work recently cleaning up the premises and even painting the interior in readiness for seasonal functions.

CHANGING LIVES IN UITSIG COMMUNITY

Continued from front page. The large vegetable garden “showed us any things can be done if you are committed and strong” maintains Baadjies. Enough vegetables are produced for the group's own consumption as well as for sale and to give to the community. “At the beginning of the year we had red tomatoes people could give to the school.” Surplus produce is sold at markets like the Market Day at Pick n Pay Office Park in Kenilworth and vegetables have been supplied to the Department of Agriculture.

That is not all. The Uitsig Community work group make crafts — ranging from basketry, such as fruit baskets, to pottery — that are also sold at Pick n Pay Market Days. Baadjies is so impressed with the craft chandeliers and light fittings made by three individuals, Anthony Wagner, Adriaan van der Merwe and Peter Sampson, that she is now empowering them to create a business out of their craft making.

In addition to this, the group study and in February 2018 will complete a learnership in a National Qualifications Framework Level 4 qualification on how to run a construction business. They were honoured when the recent graduation ceremony after six months of training on how to handle their finances was attended by the former Minister of Higher Education, Dr. Blade Nzimande.

Star sportsman

Now the talented Sampson has taken up bricklaying in order to create pathways in the garden that are “wheelchair friendly”. This individual who “can do anything with his hands” is the group's star sportsman, who won a gold medal over 10 km at the Outeniqua Wheelchair Challenge OCC Race in George last year.

The Uitsig Community work group are members of Mandla Sport 4 Change that was set up by the Netherlands-based organisation, Respo International: The Joy of Movement, who trained Baadjies 10 years ago. Baadjies began working with the Uitsig Community group five years ago. The changes that she has witnessed in the lives of people who had little opportunity in life then have exceeded her expectations.



FLAGSHIP PROGRAMME

“A game-changer”

Members of the work group who were forced to drop out of school have now obtained the required Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) unit standards to equal a matric qualification, while others have opened bank accounts or learned to use a cell phone for the first time. Some families in the poor area of Uitsig who previously had no breadwinners, now have food and income because a family member works in the food garden. Each gardener earns a stipend obtained through the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) of the National Department of Public Works and the Department of Social Development in the Western Cape Province.

“It’s a game-changer,” says Baadjies of the achievements and hard work of the group at Uitsig Community — and the opportunities that cultivating the garden has given them.

A “light” for others to see

The Uitsig gardeners believe in being examples so that other people with physical challenges can “see the light” and realise that they need not stay at home and not achieve. “There is a life ... and people see you make a difference,” Baadjies says. “It’s a life-changer because they realise they needn’t sit at home.”

There are challenges. As there is no place of safety for individuals with disabilities in the Uitsig area, they are often vulnerable to a variety of problems and to abuse in the community where they live. Therefore a “buddy system” has been instituted to support each other and to keep an eye on members of the group.

Now the Mandla Sport 4 Change champions are looking forward to a holiday together. After saving all year, there is money in the bank for them to travel to George in February 2018 to participate in the Outeniqua Wheelchair Challenge OCC Race. Some of them have never been outside of their suburb, let alone travelled further afield than Cape Town — or taken a holiday.



Tending the garden.



Pathways for wheelchairs.



The recent certificate ceremony.



The Mandla Sport 4 Change group.



FOOD KITCHEN BRINGS HOPE TO THE ELDERLY

The vegetable garden cultivated by 24 differently-abled people in Uitsig community — an area in Uitsig in the Cape metropole which ranks among the highest in the world for tuberculosis (TB) infection and suffers from gang violence and other social problems — is providing nutritious food to a school, the community and the elderly in the area.

The vegetable garden which is cultivated and maintained by the group of 24 people at Uitsig Primary School and one at Uitsig Community Centre have benefitted from efforts of the Flagship Programme of Mhani Gingi Social Entrepreneurial Network towards food security.

The environmental Flagship Programme donates vegetable and herbs seedlings from the Mhani Gingi Organic Vegetable and Herb Seedling Nursery in Athlone, and a daily stipend is provided from the Department of Social Development in the Western Cape Province to enable the gardeners to maintain themselves and their families.

Nourishing the community

“This group looks after and maintains the vegetable garden which is located at the community centre and at Uitsig Primary School. The produce from the garden is shared among the school, community and old aged homes. The food garden helps old age people to have something to eat before taking their medication; some of the old people they do not have a source of income or decent income to buy healthy food to eat before taking their medication,” said Tabisa Mahlathi, Co-Ordinator of Mhani Gingi's Flagship Programme.



FLAGSHIP PROGRAMME

A source of hope

“Some of them are the victims of their own children who come and take their pension fund money to buy drugs. The community garden has now become their source of hope to bring food to their table,” Mahlathi said.

“This group at Uitsig Community is involved in many activities such as athletics (wheelchair racing), pottery and a sewing project. As an organisation we have also donated a sewing machine to the project.

“We have also started a community kitchen at Uitsig civic centre for everyone around the community to have access to nutritional food.” Mahlathi explains that there is a growing realisation that even when food is available in supermarkets, it may not be accessible to every household.

Access to healthy food

“A large portion of people in disadvantaged communities do not have access to acquire sufficient food quality to have all of its family members meet their nutritional requirements and lead productive lives. As the Mhani Gingi Flagship Programme we are working together with the communities, churches, early learning centres, old age homes, prisoners, and disabled homes (in) different communities in the Western Cape Province, creating food gardening to help them bridge the gap between the rich and the poor.

“The food gardening in the communities helps households to have access to organically propagated vegetables.” In this manner the Flagship Programme helps boost access to healthy nutrition through urban agriculture while also providing income generation and skills.

The Flagship Programme activities during 2017 have been supported by Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation, General Mills through United Way Worldwide, the Department of Social Development, the National Department of Public Works through the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), City of Cape Town, and others.



A VISION TO ALLEVIATE EXTREME POVERTY IN DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

A highlight of the year for Mhani Gingi Social Entrepreneurial Network was the move of the Mhani Gingi Herb and Vegetable Seedling Nursery from its original space at Old Mutual Head Office in Pinelands to Athlone, in a partnership with the Saartjie Baartman Centre for Women and Children. “We are very thrilled to be starting this wonderful journey with the Saartjie Baartman Centre,” said Tabisa Mahlathi, Co-Ordinator of Mhani Gingi's Flagship Programme, which houses the organisation's environmental and gardening activities.

From the beginning of May 2017, the organisation has been moving parts of the nursery to the new premises where the food garden will be started. The partnership with Saartjie Baartman Centre will also provide vegetables for the centre's kitchen as well as train women who reside in the centre about gardening and provide education for children.

“We are now busy preparing the soil so that we can start with our ground garden,” said Mahlathi. Other areas are still being cleared for gardening tunnels to be placed.

Involving the community of Athlone

She added that Mhani Gingi has been networking and investigating surrounding schools, places of worship and facilities to find out “how can we work from the inside out with the people of Athlone community”. “The vision is to involve the community in what we are doing in our Flagship Programme, trying to alleviate extreme poverty in our disadvantaged communities.

“By doing this we are hoping that people will have access to healthy and nutritious food, (and to) create job opportunities for the youth around the community by means of doing their own food gardens at their back yards so that they will be able to sell their produce and have something which will keep them busy instead of them focusing on drugs,” Mahlathi said.

Plants and produce from the Mhani Gingi Nursery and 25 community gardens are sold at Earth Fair Market in Tokai; Old Mutual Staff Markets at Old Mutual Business Park in Pinelands; Market Days at Pick n Pay Office Park in Kenilworth and Rondebosch Village Market.



Clearing grounds at the new premises in Athlone in preparation for tunnels and the food garden.

COLLABORATION WITH ZIMASA PRIMARY SCHOOL PROMOTES A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

In a new collaboration formed in 2017, Mhani Gingi Social Entrepreneurial Network and Zimasa Primary School in Cape Town worked together to revamp the vegetable garden at the school premises in Langa township.

The partnership goal is to provide organic food for the learners and to supplement lessons with hands-on experiential learning. The collaboration also intends to beautify the school grounds and educate the learners on the importance of nutrition and self-sustainability, while promoting a healthy lifestyle through food security and nutrition.

Tabisa Mahlathi, Co-Ordinator of Mhani Gingi's Flagship Programme, said that further aims of the collaboration were to empower the school through training to give teachers the knowledge, skills and resources to confidently teach the learners with hands-on experiential learning activities. Another goal was to develop a sustainable garden.

Safeguarding young minds

Funding from Pick n Pay Foundation, General Mills through United Way Worldwide, the Department of Social Development in the Western Cape Province and the National Department of Public Works support the Flagship Programme. This includes funding from General Mills for projects towards healthy eating for women and youth as well as for educating and safeguarding young minds.

The images here show progress underway as a team from Mhani Gingi worked with learners from Zimasa Primary School during the year.



Revamping the vegetable garden at Zimasa Primary School.



Learning hands-on how to propagate healthy food.

FATHERS CAN MAKE A CHANGE

FATHERS' SUPPORT GROUP TRAINING AIMS TO EMPOWER WOMEN AND CHILDREN

As part of the Family Unit Participative Conference held during Women's Month in August 2017, Mhani Gingi hosted a 5-day Fatherhood Training Workshop in Cape Town from 20 to 24 November 2017 for organisations who participated in the event. While Mhani Gingi's focus is on the family unit, the initiative of Fathers' Support Group training was for male delegates who are interested in forming support groups and becoming support group facilitators — with a specific focus on new or soon-to-be fathers in their communities.

Mhani Gingi Social Entrepreneurial Network hosted the training in partnership with the Swedish organisations 1.6 Million Club Sweden and Yennenga Progress, who also funded and collaborated in the Family Unit Participative Conference held from 18 to 20 August 2017 in Cape Town.

The 5-day Fatherhood Training Workshop was presented by Nils Pettersson who has worked with the Swedish organisation, Men for Gender Equality, and has conducted similar initiatives in Latvia, Poland, Burkina Faso, Zambia and other countries.

The objective of the training was to begin fathers' groups in different organisations, said Pettersson. Participants were trained how to conduct groups and how to create content for meetings in fathers' groups. The 14 participants who attended, from all over South Africa, were all interested in a project to involve, engage and inspire fathers, in order to empower women and children, said Pettersson.



Liez van der Westhuizen (left), Project Manager for Mhani Gingi, and presenter Nils Pettersson.

FAMILY UNIT PARTICIPATIVE CONFERENCE

FATHERS CAN MAKE A CHANGE

Gender issues in family life

The five-day workshop content created awareness about gender issues in family life and also explored the local context to create content for use in fathers' group meetings. "We also looked at the future and how to make a project with fathers' groups sustainable and how they could train other facilitators," Pettersson said.

"I was taken by how the participants received everything with open hearts, interesting discussions and readiness to learn more. But as usual, I still think I was the one who (learned) the most," he said.

Equitable partners

"The main objective with this work is to empower women and children and (to encourage) a non-violent approach. Men have to take on more of the unpaid work in the home and care-giving of children. By engaging men in a positive way as equitable partners and good fathers, we can achieve a change not only for women and children but also for men themselves," Pettersson said.

"That's why we have to (approach) this in a gender transformative way, being careful about how to do it and have the right approach." Participants in the workshop received a resource, *Fathers Can Make A Change: Tool Kit for Facilitators of Fathers Groups*. The training was delivered at the premises of the organisation, Mosaic, which participated in the Family Unit Participative Conference.

A GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH:

- Sharing unpaid work in the home
- Equitable partners
- Sharing care-giving
- Non-violence



Lillian Masebenza (right), Founding Director of Mhani Gingi, addresses the group.

BUILDING TOMORROW'S SOCIETY WITH LIGHT AND HEALING

Principals who are among seven Early Childhood Development (ECD) principals and 15 ECD centres in the Khayelitsha, Langa and Philippi East townships of Cape Town that are supported by Mhani Gingi Social Entrepreneurial Network, were treated to a day of relaxation and a massage by therapists at the Light and Healing Centre in Tokai on 7 December. The purpose was to recharge the energies of the principals and thank them for their hard work and dedication during 2017.

Building the society of tomorrow

Mhani Gingi's passion to build the society of tomorrow drives its support of about 600 children in ECD facilities in the Cape Town area and development of the school principals, under the leadership of Mhani Gingi Trustee, Joan Wright. This works falls under Mhani Gingi's Social Responsibility Programme which supports vulnerable groups in society including children, the elderly and people with disabilities (PWD).

Thank you

Mhani Gingi would like to thank all supporters of the Social Responsibility Programme who during 2017 provided a range of wonderful assistance. They included Old Mutual's Greens'cool Early Learning Centre, for a welcome recent donation that helped Siyakhanyisa Educare in Langa that experienced a break-in; Merry Pop Ins in Bree Street, Cape Town; Once More online store; Sue Walker of SW Events and Project Management and Christy Haefele of Beating Heart SA.



Avril Hoepner (second from left) and therapists of the Light and Healing Centre with the principals.



Siyakhanyisa Educare receiving donations from Old Mutual's Greens'cool Early Learning Centre.



Principals standing tall at Enkuthazweni Educare's graduation ceremony in November with Mhani Gingi Trustee, Joan Wright (second from right).

SUMMER OF FUN FESTIVAL SUPPORTS EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

A Summer of Fun Festival in support of Mhani Gingi Social Entrepreneurial Network's activities in early childhood development was again organised by Sue Walker of SW Events and Project Management. Proceeds raised at the event at Pinelands Club on 2 December 2017 will go towards Mhani Gingi's Social Responsibility Programme which supports vulnerable groups in society, including children, the elderly and differently abled people.

The Summer of Fun Festival had several aims. One was to bring the diverse Pinelands community together to celebrate summer, family and holidays over the festive season. Another aim was to provide a platform for local talent, creativity and home-based entrepreneurship.

Glyn Lewis provided live music and the Summer of Fun Festival also featured food and beverages, a craft market, a kiddies' play area, and a Teen Zone. In addition, the Mhani Gingi Organic Herb and Seedling Nursery sold their produce and plants.

The women of Mhani Gingi's Dutch Soap-Making Project funded by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands at Saartjie Baartman Centre for Women and Children sold their liquid soap product.



Glyn Lewis.

Partners and supporters of Mhani Gingi who traded at the craft market included the entities featured below.

IVAN
082 752 5193

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CHOPPING BOARDS
RITZCHEA BLDGES
PLASTER BOWLS
LAZY SUSANS

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072 914 4837

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jilly@webafrica.org.za
076 77 464 65

PARTNERSHIP PUTS HEALTHY FOOD ON THE TABLE AND PROVIDES SKILLS AT BLOUVLEI SCHOOL

Blouvlei School for children with special needs in Retreat invited their donors and partners to a high tea in November 2017 to thank them for their support during the year. The food that was served at the tables included fresh produce from the vegetable garden that is cultivated at the school in partnership with the Flagship Programme of Mhani Gingi Social Entrepreneurial Network. The garden employs four learners and past pupils of the school and an abled supervisor. The learners produce nutritious food for the school kitchen and for their families, as well as obtaining a stipend and acquiring skills with which to derive an income once leaving school.



Celebrating at Blouvlei School were intern student from Marquette University, Stephan Muccular; Mhani Gingi Office Administrator, Lulu Mfazwe; Flagship Programme Co-ordinator, Tabisa Mahlathi; and Principal of Blouvlei School, Cordelia Romes.



The vegetable garden which provides food for the school kitchen.



NETWORKING

FAREWELL TO INTERN FROM MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY



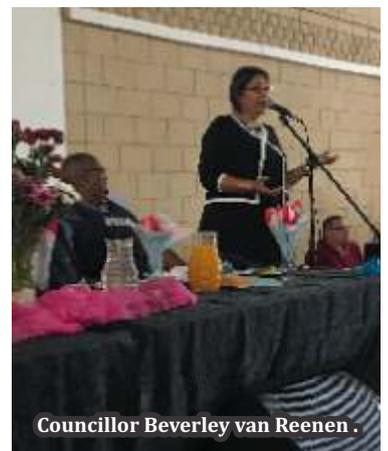
At a farewell for intern student, Stephan Muccular from Marquette University, who spent six months with Mhani Gingi Social Entrepreneurial Network during 2017, were (clockwise from the left) Project Manager, Liezl van der Westhuizen; Mike Galeski, from Creighton University; Stephan Muccular; Assistant to the Project Manager, Heidi Africa; Flagship Programme Co-Ordinator, Tabisa Mahlathi; Dr Sally Mullins with Sebastian; Mhani Gingi Founding Director, Lillian Masebenza; and Office Administrator, Lulu Mfazwe.

Ward function honours members of Uitsig Community

On 22 November the Uitsig Community gardeners attended the Year-End Christmas Function in the Uitsig Community Centre, Uitsig, hosted by Ward Councillor, Beverley van Reenen, and Proportional Councillor, Marlene Abrahams, on behalf of the City of Cape Town. "This treat for our community including the physically challenged and the aged is simply a drop in the bucket and it cannot be compared to the sacrifices that they make and have made in the past for our freedom," Van Reenen said.



The function in Uitsig Community Centre.



Councillor Beverley van Reenen .

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