



HELPING

YOUR COMMUNITY

HELP OTHERS

Megan Jackson looks at how you can help your community

Every 3.6 seconds someone, somewhere, dies of hunger. One third of all children under the age of five in sub-Saharan Africa are malnourished. At the same time, the world's 358 billionaires have assets exceeding the combined annual incomes of countries making up 45% of the world's people. To satisfy the world's sanitation and food requirements would cost only US\$13 billion- what the people of the United States and the European Union spend on perfume each year. In the Eastern Cape, 72% of the population lives in poverty. In Grahamstown, 60% of the city's residents are unemployed. Yet as shocking as these statistics may be, and even though one comes face to face with this poverty on a daily basis, those who have the means to help are doing little to do so.

Ex-deputy president Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka said, in 2007, that the number of South African's living in poverty is one of the biggest problems contributing to crime. If we, as a country, are to have any hope of alleviating crime we need to work

together, from the grassroots upwards, to uplift those communities which are less fortunate than our own. In Grahamstown, there are two such organisations which aim to empower individuals by enabling sustainable health and income by training community members in cultivation, nutrition and livelihood skills, so that they feed their families as well as sell their extra produce as a means of generating a living.

Food and Trees for Africa is a national programme which was founded in 1990 as a solution to urbanisation. The aim of the organisation is to provide food security through the establishment of permaculture gardens. These gardens are completely organic, enabled through the symbiotic relationship between various plant and insect species. Once training has been completed, these gardens are self-sustainable – requiring only planting and harvesting by those members of the community who take over. This means that the garden will provide a permanent source of food and income, providing it is well tended.

Robyn Hills, a Food and Trees representative for the Grahamstown area, places emphasis on instilling a sense of ownership in her trainees, which she feels is crucial to the subsequent upkeep of the food garden. "If the people do not feel a sense of ownership towards the garden, they are less likely to tend to it once it is left to them".

The Umthathi Training Project is another organisation which provides





training programmes for communities and schools. The community programme consists of two aspects – developing home and community food and medicinal plant gardens, as well as teaching the trainees to use the gardens for cooking and nutrition, home health care, income generation, and building sustainable relationships. Marlene Mitchener, director of the organisation, says that “[t]rainees are expected to take the skills that they learn in the food garden, and use them to make their own food gardens in their own backyards”.

It is also hoped that the trainees will pass on their skills to their neighbors, eventually creating a community which is completely self-reliant when it comes to feeding themselves and their families. The schools project aims at cultivating food gardens in the various schools in the township areas. Teachers and students get involved in the training process – the end result being a garden on the school’s property which can be used to feed the children who go there.

These organisations are not only providing people living in poverty with a means with which to feed themselves, but they are also creating a sustainable means of income for those with gardens. Left over produce can be sold to friends and other community members, the income of which can be used to pay for clothes and education. The members of these organisations believe strongly in community upliftment as a way to tackle the issue of crime, and by providing people with a means to provide food and income for themselves and others, you can greatly reduce the occurrence of petty crimes in your own community. It is an opportunity for you to help your own community through the upliftment of others.

Some ways in which you, as a community, can get involved in Food and Trees for Africa and/or Umthathi:

- Monetary donations: These organisations rely heavily on outside funding. Increased funding would enable them to create more food gardens, and to train more members of those communities in need.
- Donations in the form of equipment: Spades, rakes, watering cans, gardening forks, hose-pipes and any other gardening equipment would be greatly appreciated. This would enable the organisations to increase their number of trainees per course.
- Donations in the form of raw materials: Seedlings, compost.
- Corporate sponsorship: Get your business to sponsor the establishment of an entire food garden. At a cost of R6000, you can start a food garden in your own home or a suitable piece of land in your area, and use it to train domestic workers in your neighborhood.

For more information regarding donations and other forms of involvement contact Robyn Hills (Food and Trees for Africa) on 082 786 7564; or Marlene Mitchener (Umthathi Training Project) on 046 622 4450/ 082 820 7858

