

# THE FARM IN THE CORNER

By **Sr Goretti & Melodi Ng**



Tucked in the far corner of Marymount Convent School where Good Shepherd Student Care (GSSC) stands is a small flourishing edible farm. In 2021, several people got together in a bid to sustain a regular supply of fresh vegetables for the more than 200 children who flock to GSSC after school for their cooked lunch before their routine of homework, games, and other activities.



Donor Cheryl Tan is a keen urban farmer. She pointed out Singapore's push for 30x30 goal, i.e. 30% of local produce by

2030, and volunteered to help GSSC set up a farm-to-table programme where the children may be meaningfully involved. By mid-January, Cheryl's farming friend, Prem was hauling materials like bricks, concrete slabs, cement, sand, and soil to GSSC from a farm that was closing. Over the Chinese New Year, Cheryl, Prem, George and Mogan were busy preparing planting beds, each neatly framed by recycled bricks. This was followed by more backbreaking work with big and small changkuls, spreading soil and covering with plastics to render the 4 beds ready for planting.



On 02 March 2021, Sr Goretti, a teacher of GSSC led a group of excited girls to transplant 120 chye sim seedlings into the ground. Three weeks later the first harvest of 900 grams of chye sim were cooked for lunch. Word about the farm spread, well-meaning parents and others brought in all kinds of plants, some of which looked





strange even to Cheryl. Nevertheless, the children were excited and worked hard to make everything grow. Every day they completed their homework quickly so that they could have a chance to water, weed, fertilize, plant and harvest.

The Inner Wheel Club of Singapore adopted the farm for about 6 months. The members kindly supplied farming tools and equipment such as gloves, secateurs, nettings, stakes, seeds, organic fertilizers and compost, soil, and insecticide. While the children became good at caring for greens such as chye sim, bok choy and xiao baicai, the little farmers watched helplessly as the bottle gourds wilted and rats devoured their juicy long beans. Like seasoned farmers, the children took these setbacks in their stride and carried on diligently.

GSSC is blessed to have other partners, like Assumption Pathway School (APS). As part of their service learning, some of the students of APS participated in growing vegetables with ASEAN theme. GSSC kids got to enjoy a few rounds of moringa leaves cooked in soup. APS teacher, Edward Yeong and other colleagues rode their bicycles, sometimes in heavy downpour to deliver their harvests. Such dedication.

Angelica, another teacher of GSSC helped Sr Goretti to build a shed from some posts and discarded bamboos so that climbers like tomatoes, cucumbers, long beans, bottle gourds and winter melons thrived. Providentially harvesting is all year round. For Sr Goretti and the children, the greatest pleasure is enjoying the fruits of their labour. Sometimes, there is more than enough for the little farmers to bring home to their families. Some parents cook the vegetables and send them back with their children with notes of appreciation for the staff. The community spirit continues to spread.



The highlight of the farm in 2021 was the winter melon. At a whim, Ivy the cook decided to keep some of the seeds from the winter melon she was preparing for lunch. In December, we harvested 2 giant winter melons, one that weighed more than 10 kg!

Currently the farm only supplements the weekly requirements of vegetables for lunch. Maybe in the future, with technology and new methods of farming, the farm in the corner may be producing in such abundance that the young farmers may have their own market day.