

## **Project creates beautiful space for mothers at Mother Lodger Unit**

The Mother and Child Academic Hospital (MACAH) Foundation embarked on a community-based project to do some much-needed renovation and upgrades at the Mother Lodger Unit at Universitas Academic Hospital. Mothers often stay at the unit while their babies are required to remain in hospital for an extended period of time.

The first phase of the project, which took place earlier in October 2021, was a major success with several volunteers made up of MBChB, Occupational Therapists, Physios and Psychology Honours students, spending their Saturday morning painting, cleaning and gardening at the Mother Lodger Unit.

According to project leader Lüther van Zyl, they painted several walls with paint provided by Dulux, and planted vegetables with soil and seedlings provided by Greenside Nursery. “The mothers staying at the unit will soon harvest fresh vegetables and now have the chore of looking after their fresh garden. The next phase will involve further painting of the unit as well as the implementation of informative paintings/graphics which will emphasise the importance of the first 1 000 days of life,” says Van Zyl.

### **Providing an uplifting environment for mothers**

Project coordinator for the MACAH Foundation, Tertia de Bruin, says this was the first Mother Lodger Unit Project undertaken by the MACAH Foundation. It is not an annual project but there will still be several more upgrades and maintenance of the unit until the Mother and Child Academic Hospital is built.

“The Mother Lodger Unit houses mothers whose babies are in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. Because of the importance of the mother-baby dyad, the MACAH Foundation set out to support the mothers by creating a beautiful and positive space for them to live in so they can focus on being a mother and establishing the mother-baby dyad,” says De Bruin.

The aim of the project is to renovate the unit to provide an uplifting environment for these mothers where they can thrive and focus on the recovery of their babies while developing skills and forming supportive relationships with other mothers.

This environment will create an opportunity for these mothers to experience autonomy in maintaining a vegetable garden whilst ensuring food resources. Their environment and stay at the unit should be uplifting and positive and set the tone for the rest of their journey as mothers, further promoting the healthy development of their child long after they have left the unit.

### **The bond between mother and baby**

According to Prof André Venter, Founder Director of MACAH Foundation and Emeritus Professor in Paediatric and Child Health at the University of the Free State (UFS), the bond between a mother and baby can never be replicated by any other person. The baby is totally dependent on the mother and the mother is also dependent on the baby to make her the best mother she can be.

“This bond will enable the baby to have relationships with other people that are meaningful and have depth. The baby feels comfortable and safe in the womb and then after birth they are suddenly in the outside world where there is noise and many dangers. In the time after birth, the mother is there to look after the baby and make the baby feel safe and soothed. The bond is about the baby experiencing that his/her nutritional and emotional needs are met. If this bond is not established, the baby gets anxious and secretes toxic stress hormones which can impair healthy development and growth.”

### **Photo captions**

These students volunteered to help renovate the Mother Lodger Unit at Universitas Academic Hospital.

Volunteers work hard painting and cleaning at the Mother Lodger Unit at Universitas Academic Hospital.