

GARDENING HELPS TO REDUCE CRIME

By TROELS SOMMERVILLE

Maybe the hippies were right: Flower-power is helping make the world a better place.

Petunias are being planted by Sutton Park School on Vine St in Mangere to help improve the situation of the crime-riddled street. Students at the school are hoeing, digging and sowing in an effort to bring a sense of pride to the inhabitants of the area, project co-ordinator Dale Harvey says.

The kids learn respect and caring, among other things, from dealing with another life-form that is dependent on them to survive, he says. "You're growing kids in these projects, not just plants. "The kids have ownership of this project, they tell us what to do, I just help guide them." Not only that but gardening can apparently help reduce the crime rate in the area, police say.

Sergeant Andrew Graham from the Mangere East Neighbour Policing Team says engaging communities through schools encourages people to come out and take ownership of their properties and neighbourhood.

"There's a reduction in crime because the more people that come out and are actually on the street looking after their neighbourhood the less crime there is," he says. He's hoping the interaction will also help foster a relationship between the community and police.

The project is the revival of an idea Mr Harvey had in the mid1990s after his prize-winning garden was vandalised by a group of students from the school. They stole some prized fish from his

pond, cut them up and stuck the severed heads on doors around the neighbourhood, he says.

The next day he marched into the principal's office and gave the ultimatum to "either start a gardening programme at the school or be on the national news tomorrow". Needless to say the gardening programme was started right away and flourished from the beginning.

Within weeks the students had embraced the project and even began to take ownership of the garden. Eventually the kids dolled up the school so much they got to take home plants to add a little pizzazz to their own homes.

"The only stipulation I had was that the kids had to plant them in a place where everyone could see them," Mr Harvey says. The students would wander through each other's gardens comparing them and their overall cultivating prowess.

But the programme fell away after a few years when Mr Harvey's mother took ill and his time was spent caring for her. In 2011 and with sponsorship from Pacific Steel the kids of Sutton Park School are once again picking up their trowels, spades and pitchforks to make their neighbourhood a better place.

(Photo Text)

Green streets: Marthaida Karanga and Robert Kiripati chat to programme leader Dale Harvey.

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