



Healthy Active by Design Case Study Mandurah Community Gardens

Introduction

Mandurah Community Gardens (the “Gardens”) is a place where people come together to grow and share produce, seeds, gardening knowledge and experience. This outdoor environment offers the Mandurah community an opportunity to socially connect with people from a range of backgrounds, ages and cultures to simply communicate and share a common bond around gardening. Like other community gardens the Gardens aim to improve physical and nutritional health, mental health and wellbeing, environmental sustainability, food security, social inclusion, education and training, economic development, cultural vitality and community resilience.

In 2009, the City of Mandurah responded to interest and inquiry from community by supporting the development of a community garden.

Description of project

The Gardens is located east of Mandurah in the south west of Western Australia in a suburb called Coodanup. The Gardens were developed by a small but committed community group, supported by the City of Mandurah. Funding was also provided by Royalties for Regions through Peel Development Commission that allowed the development of key infrastructure including a shed. The City of Mandurah allocated a significant amount of time and resources to the development of the project, including project coordination by a Community Development Officer. In 2013 the City handed the project over to the newly incorporated Mandurah Community Gardens Inc.

Once the need for community gardens was identified and funding was allocated by the City of Mandurah, it took several years to gain traction, as challenges emerged including availability of suitable land on which the gardens would be located. The City of Mandurah had a number of potential sites however came to an agreement and memorandum of understanding with Coodanup College (Department of Education) as the site of the Gardens.

In 2012 the Gardens became incorporated and thereby autonomous from the local government and establishing a self-directed committee under the Association Act 2015 (WA). Transition to an incorporated body was essential in order to seek and secure further grant funding. Since the Gardens became incorporated, they have received a number of funding grants. These include:

- LotteryWest funding \$15,000 – toilet and plumbing costs.
- Department of Local Governments and Communities of \$9,900 for guest speakers, events and workshops.

- City of Mandurah Partnership funding for three years and \$12,000 for workshops, signage, equipment and events.

More recently, the Gardens has received additional funding to purchase equipment, limestone pathway upgrade, shelter and seating and educational workshops and events.

Additionally South Metropolitan Health Services engaged with the community group targeting the Gardens as a setting for healthy food provision and nutrition literacy initiatives. The health service became involved in strategic planning, partnership building (with organisations such as Foodbank WA), grant applications and evaluation as part of building the capacity of the Gardens.

The Gardens encourages everyone to work together for the purpose of maintaining a functional and cooperative space. The Garden can only survive and thrive through participation and involvement from members and the community.

The Gardens work on an annual membership fee and plot allotment scheme. Paying members enjoy the benefits and responsibilities of membership. All members will have access to the Constitution that governs the Association. Members have the opportunity to assist with the community plots and attend working bees. Members receive free produce or seedlings, garden emails/newsletters and attendance at educational workshops, social events, networking and gardening skill sharing.

Plot holders have exclusive access to allocated garden beds within the Garden. Plot holders have the opportunity to:

- Plant, enjoy the produce of, and care for, their allocated plots.
- Assist with the community plots and attend working bees.
- Receive produce or seedlings if available, garden emails/newsletters.
- Attend educational workshops, social events, networking and gardening skill sharing.

Project team

The Garden aims to be an enjoyable place for people to actively learn about gardening and share ideas. The challenges associated with the Gardens include sourcing volunteers possessing the appropriate mix of expertise and sufficient time to contribute. The Gardens require volunteers who have a broad range of social and gardening skills, experience and knowledge.

As noted above, The Gardens is an incorporated body, governed by its Rules of Association, a Committee and office bearers including a President, Vice President, Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer. Committee members play a significant role in the decision making, planning and development and operation of the Gardens.

The Gardens is divided into plots with each assigned to a group, individuals or families. The plots vary in size and aim to provide opportunities to participate in sustainable organic food production. Each holder is required to undertake weeding, pest control and general maintenance and is responsible for supplying and maintaining communal tools stored in shed.

Project cost

The initial costing for development of the Gardens were in excess of \$50,000 and covered the installation of a shed, fencing, land clearing, lime stone pathways, water tank and pump, garden equipment, timber and soil for plots, wicking beds, signage, shirts and hats, tubs, hoses, reticulation installation and retic spares, kitchen area and fridge.

Further costings

Since the opening of the gardens a universally accessible toilet and ramp was installed on site costing more than \$25,000.

The Gardens has attracted and received significant funding from government agencies including Royalties for Regions, City of Mandurah, Lotterywest, Department of Local Governments and Communities, as well as number of sponsor such as local banks, businesses and agencies. All the project partners have a vested interest in developing the Gardens as they appreciate the potential benefits to the community of owning such a community asset.

Values

Health value

The Gardens provide an avenue to be physically active as well as providing recreational opportunities, nutritional health with opportunities for people to learn about growing their own food, psychosocial benefits with interactions with the outdoors and growing plants and links with community kitchens.

Mandurah Community Gardens has extended the health value it provides to the community by offering a number of educational and health workshops these include

- *Foodbank WA's Garden to Plate* Program – funded by the City of Mandurah and hosted by the gardens this program costs around \$3,000 a year to deliver with facilitator fees, light catering and workshop materials. The workshops can be less expensive with donated materials and free facilitation.
- Calendar of events – monthly activities that involve physical activity and learning about gardening (composting, worm farming) and/or cooking demonstrations. The Gardens also open every Friday and Saturday for visitors to come and explore the Gardens and seek further information.

Economic value

The Gardens are the largest in the Peel region and has the potential to provide local economic development, and social enterprises (nursery, markets, café, and training programs). The Gardens actively promote to active aging seniors, in turn making Mandurah a desirable place to retire.

Environmental value

The Gardens provides an excellent example of a community organisation that operates and promotes living and consuming in a sustainable manner. The Gardens also offers local solutions to climate change, provides organic waste management solutions, showcases sustainable technologies, and contributes to food security through local, community food systems and greening of urban environments.

The Gardens showcases a compost system. Educational signage is installed at the compost area to educate visitors as to the best means to compost green waste materials.

The Gardens showcase the use organic gardening techniques and avoid the use of synthetic chemical fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides. Where possible, permaculture principles are integrated and organic and permaculture principles include such practices as: building healthy soil to reduce pest and diseases, use of organic practices such as crop rotation, companion planting, mulching, watering and integrated pest management.

Social Value

The Gardens is inclusive of all people and encourages interaction regardless of age, education, language or ability. The social benefits include the developing of friendships and the reduction in social isolation. The Gardens has over 1300 occasions of visit per year and there are five agencies who attend accompanying clients who are disabled.

Furthermore the Gardens are a supportive environment that promotes social inclusion of a range of people from multicultural backgrounds. Local Mandurah people are encouraged to meet and develop friendships, exchange ideas, and develop links between individuals and groups. The Gardens provide opportunities for community events and social occasions.

Use Value

The Gardens provide 'outdoor classrooms' for informal learning. The Gardens partner with Foodbank WA to run the Garden to Plate program, which is a monthly healthy eating and gardening workshop. In 2015, participants of the workshops reported that they had changed the way they manage their garden and majority of the 2016 participants reported that they consumed more fruit and vegetables since attending the workshops.

References

Claire Nettle (2010). *Growing Community: Starting and nurturing community gardens*. Health SA, Government of South Australia and Community and Neighbourhood Houses and Centres Association Inc.

Growing Communities WA project (2008 – 2010) - support from Lotterywest, City of Swan and Town of Cambridge.

<http://communitygardenswa.org.au/media/articles/Resources---Resources-To-Download/Benefits-of-CGs.pdf>