Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004

Gilles Plains Community Garden

A Case Study

June 2004
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Brad Astbury
1 Summary

The Australian Government’s Stronger Families and Communities Strategy is funding over 600 projects to help build family and community capacity to deal with challenges and take advantages of opportunities.

Capacity, at a community level, refers to the potential for action arising out of the interplay between human capital (levels of skills, knowledge and health status), social and institutional capital (leadership, motivation, networks) and economic capital (local services, infrastructure and resources).

The Gilles Plains Community Garden, a project that received funding under the Strategy, provides insights into how this capacity can be developed, and then used for a series of activities. These insights are relevant to a broad range of capacity building projects, not just to community gardens. In this project, some of the capacity was very tangible – the physical infrastructure of the garden- but some was less tangible but equally important – the human capital of skills and knowledge; and the developing social capital of networks and trust.

The case study describes how the project was developed and implemented, its short-term outcomes, and the potential for further outcomes through further use of the capacity developed in the program. It analyzes the factors that are seen to have been important in its success, including significant time and attention to planning and consultation, appropriate physical location, the development of effective partnerships, and building on previous developments.

The case study also analyses the contribution of the Strategy to the observed outcome. In projects such as these involving multiple activities and funders, support from the Strategy (through funding and assistance during project development and implementation) has been a necessary component, and effective in combination with others’ efforts.

A garden provides a useful metaphor for other capacity-building projects. Successful gardens and projects require thorough preparation and durable infrastructure. Once the initial construction has been completed, it creates opportunities for a range of new activities and involvements.
2 Introduction

2.1 Structure of the Report

This introductory chapter provides an overview of the evaluation framework for this case study, including: a brief review of the background to the case study and its relationship to the national evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy; a discussion of the evaluation objectives, questions and methodologies; and finally, an overview of the structure and content of this report.

Chapter Three discusses previous conceptual and empirical work on community gardens, while Chapter Four describes the Gilles Plains community garden in northeastern Adelaide. Chapter Five brings these together to analyse how the garden works to achieve the intended outcomes.

Chapter Six brings together the themes identified in previous chapters of the report to highlight key implications for the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, and for the following stages in the evaluation.

2.2 Background to the Case Study

Through the $225 million Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, the Australian Government is providing funding and support for projects to strengthen families and communities, with particular focus on those at risk of social, economic and geographic isolation. A national evaluation of the Strategy is being conducted by a consortium of organisations led by RMIT University Collaborative Institute for Research, Consulting and Learning in Evaluation (CIRCLE), including BearingPoint, Performance Improvement, and Curtin University Consulting Services (which is responsible for the Indigenous component of the evaluation).

The Strategy, which was launched in 2000, represents a new and groundbreaking policy direction that focuses on prevention, early intervention and capacity building initiatives to help support and strengthen Australian families and communities. The Strategy includes funding over 600 projects across Australia. The Strategy represents an innovation in government policy that focuses on assisting local communities to work together in addressing factors that impact on the healthy development of Australian families and communities.

The Strategy is underpinned by a set of eight key principles

- working together in partnerships
- encouraging a preventative and early intervention approach
- supporting people through life transitions
- developing better integrated and coordinated services
- developing local solutions to local problems
- building capacity
- using the evidence and looking to the future, and
- making the investment count.
2.3 Objectives of the Case Study

As part of a larger evaluation of the Strategy a number of case studies of specific projects or communities are being conducted. This report presents the results from a case study of the Gilles Plains Community Garden in South Australia (‘the Community Garden’). Field work including interviews and site visits were undertaken over two days between 31st July and 1st August 2003.

The objectives of this case study of the Gilles Plains Community Garden were:

- To document the processes and outcomes of a project seen to have been particularly successful, and analyse the factors influencing outcomes, particularly the sustainability of these outcomes;
- To explore particularly the issues of combined funding from multiple sources and causal attribution in such circumstances; and
- To work with evaluation audiences to develop a form of case study report that will be most useful for informing future policy and practice.

Within this framework of objectives for the evaluation, emphasis was placed on the question of ‘what works for whom and why in relation to strategic interventions designed to strengthen families and communities’—focussing on the mechanisms acting in context that generate particular outcomes for families and communities.

2.4 Key Research Questions

The following key research questions for the Community Garden project were derived from information available in program documentation, a review of the literature on community gardens and documents concerning the national evaluation of the Stronger Families and Community Strategy. The evaluation questions, with further elaboration in brackets, are as follows:

- What are the major features of the Community Garden project and how does it ‘work’? (The activities and processes)
- In what way is the Community Garden benefiting individuals, families, organisations and communities in the short term, and how likely are these to be sustained in the medium and long term? (The outcomes)
- How has the Community Garden produced these outcomes? (Causal mechanisms)
- In what ways does the context in which the Community Garden operates encourage or undermine its impact on families and communities? (The relationship between the mechanism, outcome and context)
- What role has the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy played in the development, implementation and impact of the Community Garden? (The attribution of outcomes to the Strategy)
- In particular, how has the Strategy contributed to a project with multiple funding sources and partnerships?
How, where and for whom could the effects of the Community Garden be replicated? (The transferability and other implications for the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy).

### 2.5 Research Methodology

A qualitative approach to data collection was undertaken to address the evaluation objectives outlined previously. Three data sources were relied upon in this case study: document review; site visit; and interviews.

#### Document Review

The case study was informed by: the literature on community gardens; Australian Bureau of Statistics census data on the Gilles Plains region; FaCS project files, policy and strategic documents held in the Adelaide office and on the FaCS project database including informal reports to FaCS; and data from the project questionnaire. Documentary sources were used to:

- Identify relevant groups and individuals to interview;
- Provide background information about the region;
- Provide specific data about the Community Garden and other Strategy projects, as originally planned and as actually implemented;
- Provide relevant information about Strategy policy at a local and national level;
- Triangulate (confirm) data collected from other sources; and
- Identify particular issues and concerns for individual and group discussion (see below).

#### Site Visit

With the consent of the auspicing organisations, a site visit to the South Australian State Office in Adelaide and the Community Garden in Gilles Plains (a northern suburb of Adelaide) was undertaken between 31st July and 1st of August, 2003.

The primary purpose of the site visits was to conduct group and individual interviews with stakeholders (see below) and take photographs of project activities for inclusion in the case study report.

The site visit to the Community Garden was also important for understanding how the geography and architecture of the site has potentially influenced project developments and it provided an opportunity to observe the use of the garden by various groups.

A research journal was kept to record important observations and experiences whilst undertaking the field work for the evaluation. These notes facilitated data triangulation and formed an important part of the overall body of data collected and analysed for inclusion in this report.
Interviews

In-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face individual and group interviews were conducted with a range of key stakeholders involved in the planning, support and operation of the various activities around the Community Garden. The interviews and consultations were largely undertaken during the site visits, although there was some initial planning and consulting work with key informants prior to the fieldwork in South Australia.

Overall, approximately 25 to 30 people, all adults, participated in this case study. Participants were drawn from the following agencies, services and groups who have played a role in the planning and implementation of the Community Garden:

- The Adelaide Central Community Health Service;
- South Australian FaCS Office;
- The Gilles Plains Community Campus incorporating the Health Service, Anglican Church (Anglican Nunga Ministry), Child Care Centre, Community House and Primary School.
- Representatives from the Gilles Plains Community Garden Group including the Community Campus (above), Aboriginal Reference Group, North Eastern Community Assistance Program and the Domestic Violence Support Group.

The interviews were conducted with the informed consent of participants and when practicable tape-recorded to facilitate analysis. The interviews typically last one to two hours and were structured to explore in detail issues associated with: the history, development and implementation of the Community Garden; perceptions of the short, medium and long term impact of the Community Garden on individual, family, organisational and community strength and well-being; relationship to the overall Strategy; and finally, recommendations for program replication and ongoing sustainability of outcomes.

Participation in the interviews was entirely voluntary and participants were required to sign a consent form prior to the interview. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, participant comments are not attributed to particular individuals.

Data Analysis and Reporting

Analysis of qualitative data was ongoing before, during and after the data collection phase. This approach allows data and theory to interact in an iterative way so that theory can emerge through induction rather than traditional deductive processes such as a priori hypothesis testing.

The reporting of participant data has given priority to the voices and experiences of those who took part in this study. Quotations (without attribution to specific individuals) are used to add depth, richness and authenticity to the analysis contained in this report.

Recorded observations from the field journal, photographs and other documentary sources are used either as supporting evidence, or where necessary to contest the views expressed by participants during individual and group discussions.
3 Community Gardens in Australia

3.1 Summary

This chapter discusses the specific features of community gardens, and their different intended outcomes. It begins by defining what is meant by the term ‘community garden’ then discusses the history, development and current status of community gardens in Australia and closes with a discussion of the reported benefits of community gardening.

In the past community gardens were seen as an important way to alleviate food shortages in times of depression and war. Interest in community gardening declined during the post-war boom period where economic prosperity reduced the necessity for gardens, although environmental concerns helped to ensure their survival.

In the past 15 years there has been renewed attention directed towards community gardening projects with support from governments (particularly local government) who have begun to recognise the potential value and benefits of using gardens as a cost-effective tool for individual, family and community building (Grayson & Campbell, 2000).

This shift in focus from food supply and environmental benefits to a range of medium and longer term health, psycho-social and economic benefits has helped to boost the number of community gardens currently operating in Australia from one in 1977 to over forty today (Phillips, 1996).

However, because these changes have occurred only recently there has been little work undertaken to better understand how community gardens work to achieve positive outcomes for individuals, families and communities. The case study of a community garden located at the Gilles Plains Community Campus in Adelaide focuses to some extent on these particular issues to do with community gardens, and to some extent serves as a more general examples of a capacity-building project.

3.2 What is Community Gardening?

The Australian Community Gardens Network (2003) provides a useful starting point for exploring the concept of community gardening. They define community gardens as ‘places where people come together to grow fresh food, to learn, relax and make new friends.’

Community gardens can be further classified on the basis of how the gardening is conducted – either on a shared basis (communal garden) or on an individual basis (allotment garden).
However, this broad description does not account for the range of different ways in which community gardens manifest in local neighbourhoods. Projects vary considerably in range and size from large-scale urban farms that occupy significant areas of land and offer a plethora of activities to small-scale community allotments on restricted areas of vacant or unused public or private land (Eliott, 1983).

Crabtree (1999) examined eight community gardens in and around Sydney and found significant variations in ‘complexity, diversity and overlap in their members, structures, philosophies and interactions’ (p. 66). For example, the Women’s Community Garden in Marrickville is a 0.25 hectare communal site with a small group of around ten members who manage the garden on an ad hoc basis. In contrast, the Angel Street Permaculture Garden is a 1 hectare site with a well established management structure. New members must undertake an initial process involving a tour by a core gardener and the provision of the five-year plan for the garden. Gardeners meet on Saturday mornings and harvests are shared communally.

It is clear though, that community gardening is simply one form of urban agriculture. The common feature of urban agriculture is the production of living vegetation (food, flowers, herbs and so on) within an urban (usually city) setting. This process is experienced through local networks which encompass not only the practical aspects of cultivation, harvest and distribution but more importantly, the social dimension of collective interaction. (Brisbin, 2002).

### 3.3 History of Community Gardening

The idea of community gardening originated in Britain during the 18th, and in particular 19th centuries, where plots of land referred to as allotments were made available under the *Allotments Act* (1887) to the labouring poor for the production of vegetables and flowers (Gelsi, 1999; Hunt, 2002; Eliott, 1983).

The practice of community garden among urban working class spread throughout industrial countries including much of Europe and the United States in the 1800s (Coe, 1978). In comparison, the history of community gardens in Australia has no legislative foundation, but can be traced back to the Second World War when food shortages and economic depression prompted the government to encourage families to work together in ‘Victory Gardens’ to produce fruits and vegetables for the table (Hunt, 2002).

Despite an initial post-war decline, growing public awareness of environmental issues coupled with an escalation of high-density housing in Western cities re-fuelled the demand for community gardens. Over the last three decades, many neglected vacant lots in the modern urban environment have been transformed into thriving gardens. For example, a 1996 survey reported that over 6,000 community gardens are operating in the United States (Hunt, 2002; Schukoske, 2000).

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1 Community gardens have been defined in a variety of different ways. For a review see Schukoske (2000, p. 355).
The first Australian community garden was established in 1977 in Nunawading, Melbourne. The development of the garden was driven by Dr Gavan Oakley, then a local councillor who felt that the garden would benefit both older and younger members of the community by reducing social isolation and providing unemployed young people with something to do. Management of the garden is the responsibility of a voluntary users' committee and both communal and individual plots are provided at a small cost to members (Eliott, 1983; Hering, 1995).

The Nunawading garden is seen to be an extremely successful and innovative community development project that has provided a working model on which many subsequent gardens in Australia have based their ventures.

### 3.4 The Australian Community Gardens Network

The Australian Community Gardens Network (ACGN) was established in 1994 by Darren Phillips as a result of a study he conducted on community gardens in Australia which identified a lack of communication among various gardens, who were acting independently of each other rather than sharing information and providing support (Crabtree, 1999).

The role of the ACGN has evolved over time to encompass a range of activities other than simply making connections. According to information on the website, the ACGN is an informal, community-based organisation linking people interested in community gardening across Australia that aims to promote the benefits of community gardening and facilitate the development and maintenance of gardens through information dissemination and advice.

State coordinators help to facilitate interaction and communication among various community gardens as well as advocate and mediate in negotiations on behalf of gardens (e.g. to local regulatory bodies) and provide advice to those interested in developing a community garden in their area.

The ACGN maintains a website that includes information about the network, the history of community gardens in Australia, tips on how to plan and start a community garden, a list of contacts and stories about the community garden experience as well as useful links to research, policy and practice in the area of community gardening.

Increased involvement by State governments in facilitating community garden development in and around housing estates and development of state community garden organisations has implications for the future of the ACGN as a central co-ordinator.

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2 Although there is some confusion here, as another source identifies the Collingwood Community Garden (est. 1979) as being the first (Hunt, 2002, p. 153).
3 Formerly the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network
3.5 Benefits of Community Gardening

The community garden literature is replete with examples of the environmental, health, psychological, social and economic benefits that community garden can provide across a range of individual, family and community domains.

Environmental

Research has found that a significant proportion of land in the average city lies vacant and unused because of population and residential shifts due to de-industrialisation, irregular, undeveloped or small land size and changing perceptions of desirable housing (Schukoske, 2000).

Community gardens can directly contribute to improving the urban environment because they ‘bring derelict land into productive use, regreen streetscapes and increase wildlife habitat’ (Grayson & Campbell, 2000, p. 2). They also help to promote awareness of organic gardening and permaculture principles that aim to encourage sustainable use of the environment (Crabtree, 1999).

Health

Community gardening is an active pursuit that brings a range of physical health benefits. There is evidence, for example, to suggest that by growing some of their own fresh fruit and vegetables individuals and families increase their consumption of nutritious food and decrease their consumption of sweet foods and drinks (Blair, Giesecke & Sherman, 1991).

In Australia, gardening remains one of the most popular leisure pursuits and is a recommended form of physical activity. The exercise associated with gardening has been found to provide significant benefits to individual health such as reduced cholesterol and blood pressure (Hunt, 2002; Armstrong, 2000).

One study found that characteristics of community gardens such as social support, an emphasis on informal networks and community organising through empowerment offer an important mechanism for public health promotion in social and economically disadvantaged communities (Armstrong, 2000).

Psychological

There is an extensive history of the use of community gardens to improve psychological well-being, often through horticulture therapy which has been used in prison and mental health settings as a form of rehabilitation. A number of studies have explored the psychological benefits of gardening and found that it has the potential to relieve anxiety, depression and promote relaxation through nature-based activity (see for example, Coe, 1978; Kaplan, 1973; McBey, 1985).
Gilles Plains Community Garden

Other important psychological aspects of community gardens are the ability to encourage learning and growth among individuals as well as facilitate community education. It has been suggested that learning to grow plants stimulates the mind and adds to an individual's knowledge and skill base. Community gardening can also assist in community education about waste management, composting, recycling water reduction and organic gardening. A number of community gardens have been used as learning venues by local schools, TAFE and universities.

Social

Research on community gardening suggests that it acts as an important trigger for releasing mechanisms such as social interaction and cooperation that produce a variety of positive outcomes for individuals and communities.

Both Grayson & Campbell (2000) and Brisbin (2002) have found that community workers in Australia are increasingly using community gardens as a community development tool rather than for simply improving access to food or nutritional health.\(^5\)

In a review of the social benefits of community gardening, Schukoske (2000) notes that community gardens have the potential to transform vacant lots which pose a hazard to the community and attract antisocial behaviour into places which foster a spirit of community co-operation and improve ‘social capital’.\(^6\)

Schukoske (2000) identifies a range of social objectives that community gardens might help to achieve. These can be grouped into the following four categories:

- An increase in community cohesiveness and capacity;
- Foster collaboration and interaction among local residents from a diverse range of backgrounds, thereby reducing discrimination;
- The promotion of self-respect in residents of low-income neighbourhoods; and
- A reduction in the levels of criminal activity by reducing opportunity and creating defensible space.\(^7\)

Kuo & Sullivan (2001), who investigated public housing development in Chicago found that apartment buildings surrounded by vegetation reported significantly lower personal and property crime, and concluded:

Greenery helps people to relax and renew, reducing aggression. Green spaces bring people together outdoors. Their presence increases surveillance and discourages criminals. The green and groomed appearance of an apartment building is a cue that owners and residents care about a property, and watch over it and each other (p. 343).

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\(^5\) This reflects trends in the use of community gardens in the United States (see for example The American Community Gardening Association, 2003).

\(^6\) The term ‘social capital’ refers to aspects of social organisation such as networks, norms, an social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit (Putman, 1993).
Community gardens are social venues where people can gather and meet new people, establish new partnerships and work together toward a common goal. Clearly then, community gardening needs to be conceived as an inherently social activity that involves processes of negotiation, shared decision-making, interaction and problem-solving. These processes can help to build and strengthen family and community relations (Phillips, 1996).

**Economic**

Community gardens have been traditionally used as a means for low-income, urban families (often newly arrived migrants) to increase access to food supplies, particularly during periods of economic depression and war. One study estimated that savings of between $50 and $250 dollars (US) per season in food costs could be made for people who participated in community gardens (Hlubik, Hamm, Winokur & Baron, 1994 as cited in Anderson, 2000).

Another economic benefit of community gardens is their potential to provide a base for job creation and job skill training opportunities. For example, many TAFE institutes utilise gardens for conducting classes on horticulture that may lead to future employment in the area for students (Elliott, 1983).

Through promoting local, sustainable food systems and improving job skills through training, community gardens may have a positive impact on local and national economies.
4 The Gilles Plains Community Garden

4.1 Summary

This chapter provides a background and context to the Gilles Plains Community Garden initiative. The project is examined along several key dimensions that can be grouped into the following categories: social and geographic context, project origin, scope and scale, project objectives and a chronology of the project.

The Community Garden is located in Gilles Plains, which is a culturally diverse suburb of Adelaide that has traditionally been disadvantaged in economic terms. The garden has been built on a small area of land (40 square metres) that was previously an asphalt car park. It is centrally placed within a collection of services known as the Gilles Plains Community Campus.

The project emerged from the community, which saw the potential for doing something productive with the car park to strengthen links between local residents, the services around the campus and local government. Broad objectives focus on promoting cultural awareness, building community capacity and improving social interaction and connectedness.

The project is typical of many small-scale, communal gardens that operate in Australia. It is reported that a diverse and growing range of groups use the garden including some regular groups such as the primary school, child care centre and health outreach service. There is continual use by local residents, both families and individuals.
4.2 Social and Geographic Context

The community garden is a 40 square metre area located in the middle of a community campus, which incorporates a health outreach service, a church, a community house, a childcare centre and a primary school. The land is owned by the South Australian Department of Education, Training and Employment, but leased by the health service.

The garden is situated in Gilles Plains a north eastern suburb of Adelaide that occupies an area of 1.8 square kilometres. Gilles Plains is a low SES area with a significant amount of high-density housing and despite recent redevelopments remains highly disadvantaged in economic terms. The project falls within the Strategy Targeting Framework for South Australia for areas considered to be in most need of assistance.

According to 2001 census data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2002) there are 3,108 persons living in Gilles Plains with a sizeable proportion (3%) identifying that they are of Aboriginal descent. Around 23% of residents were born overseas from countries such as United Kingdom, Vietnam, Germany, Philippines and the Republic of South Korea.

A little over 14% of residents are aged 65 years and over and most residents earn less than $400 a week, with around 4% indicating negative or nil income. Approximately 13% of households were single-parent families with children under 15 years of age and over 23% of residents live in State Housing Authority dwellings.

4.3 Project Origin, Scope and Scale

The project evolved as a result of discussions over the years by various individuals and local groups who saw the potential for doing something productive with the car park to strengthen links between the services around the campus and promote reconciliation. It was seen to be a practical way of involving service groups, the Aboriginal community and local residents in a non-threatening environment – ‘all the groups were there but no-one was really talking’ because there was not common ground to interact.

The Adelaide Central Community Health Service played a key role in mobilising and engendering feedback from the community through various workshops, letterbox drops to local residents and attendance and community events. In particular, the health service had experience in applying for funding. The Garden was 18 months in the planning from conception to commencing Garden construction.

In addition to Stronger Families and Communities Strategy funding through the Strategy’s ‘Local Solutions to Local Problems’ Initiative, the garden was also funded through numerous other sources including the Port Adelaide-Enfield Council and the South Australian Housing Trust. In-kind support was also provided from local businesses and research was undertaken by the Urban Forest Biodiversity Group.
Total initial funding of the Garden was $37,260 with the SFCS portion being $20,470. The bulk of the SFCS funding was used for establishing the garden infrastructure which involved bitumen removal and dumping, garden loam, irrigation, paving, equipment community education and training.

The target group for the project includes disadvantaged families and community members in the Gilles Plains area including older people, school children and Indigenous persons, although the garden is open to all members of the community.

The potential number of recipients to be assisted through the Garden project is estimated to be at least 100 to 200 people, chiefly comprising the groups who utilise the services of the campus as well as local residents.

In the process of developing and implementing the community garden project, considerable effort was made to form and involve multiple partners. Significant links were established with local Indigenous groups, various community agencies and businesses to facilitate the planning of the garden. Allowing sufficient time for planning, the formation of partnerships and community mobilisation was identified as a critical ingredient in the achievement of intended outcomes.

### 4.4 Objectives of the Community Garden

The community garden aims to improve the local community through greater understanding of each other and the environment, and to provide an important opportunity to explore the relationship between personal well-being and the environment.
More specifically, the stated objectives of the garden include:

- To create a practical reconciliation project where local Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can work together
- To create a beautiful and productive community garden which acts as a focus for cultural and educational activities – a place for people to meet, rest, reflect and play
- To encourage local people to work together on community projects and thereby strengthening community connections
- To provide community members with opportunities to train in garden development and maintenance
- To enhance local knowledge of native plants and how they are traditionally used by Indigenous people
- To give local school children the opportunity to learn about plants and gardening, particularly in relation to their Indigenous and Italian cultural studies programs, and
- To provide a focus for the school’s Gardening Club and Environmental Club.

During interviews with program staff and community garden participants these formal objectives were elaborated to include the following:

- breaking down barriers and sharing Aboriginal culture with the community;
- getting rid of an eyesore and creating a lovely, peaceful place to be in;
- learning about gardening, the plants and good food;
- encouraging others to garden as well – especially the school children;
- to create space and remove an eyesore that was hot in the summer and cold in the winter; and,
- people coming together regardless of race.

[Laying paving July 2002]
## 4.5 Chronology

The following chronology shows clearly how Strategy funding built on previous work, and helped to create a basis for further activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Key Project Events</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
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| **2000 Before funding under the Strategy** | Local community garden in the community garden at the North Eastern Community House (later demolished during building redevelopment) provided a precedent example  
Community mobilisation and planning  
Support and some funding secured from local agencies  
Formation of Community Garden Working Group | Considerable time and resources were invested into planning the garden prior to funding being sought and received from FaCS. This has been identified as a critical factor in the achievement of outcomes.  
There is an element of continuity between the previous and the new community gardens with the North Eastern Community House forming part of the Gilles Plains Community Campus within which the new Gilles Plains Community Garden has been located. In addition, the Tool Bank from the previous community garden was transferred to the Gilles Plains Community Garden. |
| **2001 August Project approved**             | Earthworks completed  
Blessing Ceremony  
Garden planted                                           | This project experienced delays in receiving its first payment due to difficulties at the contract stage.  
They were able to maintain momentum due to support from local partners, who underwrote costs while the project waited for payment. Without this practical support, this could have significantly delayed and jeopardised the project. |
| **October Contract created**                |                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| **December First Payment**                  |                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| **2002 March Receipt of final report**      | Continued development of various sections of the garden  
Weekly gathering and formal monthly meetings to plan activities and events  
Funding sought for future developments | Effective management of community support is needed for project maintenance to ensure that initial enthusiasm does not diminish.  
It may be necessary to monitor project developments following the injection of FaCS funding. |
| **April Final payment**                     |                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| **2003 Beyond Strategy funding**            | Consolidation of program successes through implementation of community arts project & meeting/performance space | The ongoing commitment to further development of the garden demonstrates that sustainable capacity has been developed.                                                                                      |
5 How does your Garden Grow?

5.1 Summary

This chapter provides an outline of the major inputs, activities and components of the Community Garden to illustrate how the project works to achieve intended outcomes. This process is represented diagrammatically in a program logic model.

Overall, it can be seen from the evidence presented that the project has and should continue to enjoy considerable success. To a large extent this can be attributed to the dedication, forward thinking and enthusiasm of both the community and a number of key professionals who were able to draw on their skills in community development to bring people together, harness community energy and secure funding from various sources to implement a community garden that benefits individuals, families, organisations and the local community.

The chapter is divided into four sections, including: a description of how the project works; project outcomes and impact; an articulated program theory; and finally, issues relating to replication and the future sustainability of the Garden. The results presented below seek to address the objectives and questions of the case study and are based on interview data, documentary sources and the site visit.

5.2 How the Community Garden Works

Components of the Garden

The community garden has been named ‘Kurruru Pingyarendi’ which translates to Turning Circle. The name symbolises ‘themes of reflection, looking at things from different angles, coming together and harmony’ (Community Garden Evaluation Report, 2002, p.1).

There are six main aspects of the community garden: an Indigenous section; a herb garden; a vegetable patch and fruit trees; a sensory garden, community artworks and a meeting area/performance space. These areas provide a focal point for the various activities conducted at the garden and are connected by a paved brick pathway which winds throughout.
The Indigenous section has been constructed to reflect both the strong cultural heritage of the local Kaurna people and original biodiversity of the area prior to European settlement. This area of the garden includes a frog pond, provides a habitat for native fauna and helps to conserve water. It also serves to promote awareness of and respect for the traditional culture of the Indigenous people who live in the area. For example, reeds planted in the section were harvested and used to conduct a basket weaving class.

The herb garden is laid out into the shape of a wheel and includes herbs used by a wide range of cultures. As an example of how this section has been used, children at the local primary school have experimented with growing, cultivating and preparing various Italian herbs for use in home economics.

The vegetable garden and fruit tree section is chiefly used by the primary school and the community garden group. The area also comprises a small nursery and three compost bins. Some of the trees are still developing and not yielding much fruit as yet. The small amount of vegetables and fruit produced from the garden are shared communally among those affiliated with the garden. For example, watermelon was distributed among the school children in summer and excess vegetables are provided to low-income families and other individuals in need.
The sensory garden contains a variety of fragrant and scented plants such as lemon balsam. Many different groups utilise this section, wandering through and taking in the variety of smells that emanate. For example, the domestic violence support group use the fragrant plants to make scented things for their homes.
Gilles Plains Community Garden

The final two sections of the garden— the community artworks and meeting/performance space – are currently being developed. Funding has been successfully secured from ARTS SA and the Port Adelaide/Enfield Council ($10,000) to involve the local community in creating mosaic, sculpture and art. Nunga women from the new Aboriginal Community Centre (under development) have also expressed a strong interest in becoming involved in the art project. When completed, the meeting space will provide a focus for social events.

Management Structures

The garden is managed on an inclusive philosophy by a 15 to 20 member Gilles Plains Community Garden Group comprising representatives from the Adelaide Central Community Health Service, the local Primary School, Child Care Centre, Aboriginal Reference Group, Anglican Church, Community House, Domestic Violence Support Group and local residents. The group has been meeting regularly since early 2000 to plan the creation of the garden.

The garden group currently meets every Friday at the Gilles Plains Community Campus health outreach building to plan activities, communicate news, work in the garden and evaluate the project. A more formal meeting is held on the first Friday of each month. These meetings are open to all interested individuals and groups.

A set of guidelines for bottom-up decision-making has been developed by the group as well as a set of principles for the garden concept that focus on local ownership, inclusiveness, tolerance, cultural awareness, equality and respect. The direction of the garden is driven by local needs and interests.

Extensive consultation with the community is a significant part of the management process. Strong links to the community and relevant agencies has been ongoing. For example, the Gilles Plains Primary School has been involved in the development of a worm farm, a food growing area at the old toilet blocks, a quilt based on the Turning Circle concept of the garden, a display about the garden in the school, and the linking of class curricula to the garden (e.g. science, maths and history). Parents from the school community also take part in garden activities on a regular basis.

Research and evaluation to support the garden has included a survey of participants, a resource library at the Community Health Outreach Centre, a large journal which comprises photos and sketches of the process of developing the garden, visits to local and interstate community gardens to learn about effective gardening techniques and the involvement of various individuals who have provided advice and training.

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8 The community arts project has been widely promoted in the local press and among groups associated with the garden. The first session was held on Saturday the 2nd August – the day after the site visit was conducted by the author (see attached flier).
Communication and Promotion

A range of strategies to raise awareness of the garden have been employed. A brochure describing the garden and the principles underpinning the garden has been developed by the working group members and disseminated in the local community. Several articles have also been published in the local newspaper and community newsletters.

Members of the working group actively promote the garden at community events and meetings of various service agencies. These occasions are also used to engender feedback from stakeholders and local residents. The forums and consultations help to inform current and future activities at the garden and ensure the sustainability of the project by maintaining the number and extent of participant involvement.

Specific events are also held to promote awareness of the garden and its objectives. For example, in August 2001 a Blessing Ceremony was attended by around 200 local residents. The ceremony was used to formally open the garden and acknowledge traditional ownership of the land.

Due to the gardens’ central proximity to a local residents and service groups, a substantial amount of information also travels via word-of-mouth.

Training and Education Strategies

A diverse group of individuals and agencies have been involved in the design and delivery of various training and education programs to promote sustainability of the garden. The training programs are advertised through local networks and print media and open to all interested parties.

Examples of training and educational programs that have been delivered include:

- A workshop on the history and significance of local Indigenous plants;
- A four week garden course aimed at equipping gardeners with practical skills in garden development and maintenance;
- A workshop on back care in the garden run by a local physiotherapist;
- A four week course on irrigation design and practice; and
- A workshop on Occupation Health and Safety.

Additionally, the primary school has been able to successfully incorporate the garden into curriculum. For example, teaching children about various plants and vegetables, their history, uses and how they grow. Links have also been established with the local high school and in the past training institutions have used the garden as an educational venue for students to learn about horticulture.

On a more informal level, experienced gardeners have been able to impart their knowledge about successful cultivation of plants, composting, irrigation and so on to less experienced garden group members.
5.3 Achievements of the Community Garden

This section draws on the perceptions and experiences of key stakeholders and garden group members to understand the major outputs and outcomes that have emerged as a result of community garden processes.

Intended Outputs

The SFCS Funding Agreement states that the SFCS funds would be used to achieve the following outputs:

- To transform the identified area into a community garden which will become a focus for local cultural, Indigenous, educational, artistic, environmental and recreational activities.
- Training and support will be provided to community members in garden development and maintenance, OH&S, landscaping, environmental and conservation management.
- Community connections will be strengthened through local people working together on the development of the garden, by exchanging knowledge, building respect, awareness and understanding, creating tolerance, harmony and social cohesion.
- The garden will be a practical reconciliation project where local Indigenous and non-Indigenous can work together.
- The garden will be a site for Indigenous cultural education, including the provision of information on local native plants, their healing properties and how they have been utilised by Indigenous people.
- School children will have the opportunity to learn about plants and gardening, particularly in relation to their Indigenous and Italian cultural studies programs. Individual classes will tend to their own allotments creating a sense of ownership and improving the children’s abilities to learn, interact and play. The garden will enhance the school’s Gardening Club and Environmental Club.
- Local people with disabilities and children attending the Childcare Centre will be involved with the interactive aspect of the gardening by taking part in planning, design, planting and maintenance activities. (SFCS Funding Agreement, 2002).

It is clear from an examination of program documentation and discussions with individuals involved in the garden that these basic ‘outputs’ have clearly been achieved.

A basic assessment of the community garden against the literature on successful program implementation (e.g. Gunn, 1978; Hill, 1997; Sabatier & Mazmanium, 1979) further suggests that the project effectively applied a bottom-up approach whereby professional community development workers from the local health service engaged the community who then played an active role in both developing and planning the garden as well as putting the policy into practice (i.e. constructing the garden).
This helped to engender a sense of ownership in the project, ensure a clear understanding and agreement upon aims and objectives and build a consensus among relevant stakeholders. The context in which the garden was implemented was also conducive, being well located among a group of committed service providers and gaining the support of local government and business groups.

As a result of the energy and community enthusiasm devoted to the development and implementation of the garden, individuals and key stakeholders were able to report a range of positive outcomes. Many of the perceived benefits espoused by participants in this study are reflected in the principles underpinning the SFCS (see Chapter One) as well as the literature on community gardens (see Chapter Two).

Perceptions of Impact: What the Garden Means to Participants

Participants in the study were asked to comment on who the garden has benefited and in what ways it has impacted on family and community capacity. The reported benefits and impact can be discussed in relation to two broad outcome categories:

- Individual and family;
- Community and organisational.

Participants described a variety of benefits to individuals and families as a result of the community garden in the areas of employment, education and training, personal and social well being and health and nutrition.

The garden has provided an important educational and teaching resource for individuals to improve their knowledge and skills in gardening and other related areas. For example, the school principal explained that students are actively involved in the garden and teachers use it as an effective tool to learn about the history and culture of the area, biology and science of plant growth and practical aspects of food production and preparation.

There are also possible individual benefits of using the garden as a base for job skills training. A worker from the community health service recounted that in the past there has been some involvement from the local TAFE and high school with further work planned for the future. It is possible that for some individuals and volunteers who work at the garden the skills they acquire may increase their likelihood of obtaining employment in occupations such as horticulture or landscaping.

A few participants spoke about the garden in a therapeutic sense. They mentioned how the garden has helped in their personal development and given them a sense of well-being and satisfaction by getting back to nature and working together to accomplish something. The school counsellor finds that the garden is a non-threatening location to bring children when they are in need of assistance as it can have a calming effect.
Another young female respondent was effusive in her comments about the garden and how it has given her a sense of belonging. She recalled that since being involved in the garden group she has been able to overcome personal difficulties in her life including depression – ‘the garden is now helping me to raise my own family’.

Many local families use the garden as an alternative form of recreation on the weekends. For example, one respondent mentioned that she regularly takes her family to the garden when they come to visit as it is a pleasant environment for them to relax and share in each others company.

Health benefits were also reported by some participants, mainly in relation to the exercise they obtain through working at the community garden rather than the fresh food supply and nutrition benefits (unlike some allotment gardens, the Gilles Plains garden does not produce high quantities of vegetables and fruit). There is potential though, for the garden to change individual and family knowledge and attitudes that could modify eating patterns toward more nutritious meals.

The second cluster of possible benefits raised by participants can be grouped into outcomes for the community and organisations, including: enhancement of partnerships, building capacity and social capital, improving the urban environment and reducing antisocial behaviour.

In accordance with the principles underpinning the SFCS the garden has reportedly facilitated both the establishment of new links to agencies and individuals as well as strengthened existing partnerships. Much like the plants that have been cultivated in the garden these partnerships have taken considerable time and nourishment to develop. In most cases they have been built around principles of reciprocity and good will. The project has forged a strong social coalition and ‘brought all the agencies at the campus together when previously they were acting rather separately’.
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The advantage of working together to address complex social problems is illustrated well in the following quote by a garden group member:

“When I look back at the bare nothing out there and to see today that there is something very special for all of us here it really makes me think that we can do things if we work together”.

The above quote is also indicative of how the garden has helped to achieve another related function - building community and organisational capacity and social capital. The project has purportedly helped to engage the community and foster interaction, collaboration and understanding among local residents regardless of race, age, ethnicity or socio-demographic background. As one participant made clear during an interview:

“it has certainly helped to break down barriers between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals…they are just people like everyone else and it doesn’t matter what colour your skin is”.

One person who had been involved with the project during its development said ‘there is community interaction that might not have happened if the garden wasn’t there’ and for this reason the project ‘was a good example of what I thought building community capacity meant’.

[May 2003 –Reconciliation Day]

Organisations also appear to have been aided as a result of participation in the project. One key informant described that for some agencies it has helped to demystify government processes such as applying and securing funding and another mentioned that it has helped attract people to their organisation due to the beauty and uniqueness of the garden.
Participants said that there had been a surprisingly low number of incidents of vandalism and theft reported at the garden site. Vacant lots can be a hazard to the community and although not directly indicated by participants as an outcome attributable to the garden, a reduction in antisocial behaviour and activity (as indicated in the literature) could have occurred due to the creation of ‘defensible space’\(^9\) and increases in community ownership.

Another positive outcome for the community has been the environmental aspect of ‘greening the area’ and encouraging flora and fauna back to the neighbourhood by reclaiming unused urban space and turning it into a thriving community garden. There has also been a greater consciousness among local residents of principles of organic gardening, composting, waste management and water conservation that might not have occurred without the garden project. One member of the garden group summed things up well: ‘…it was nothing before, just bitumen, nothing just horrible. It used to be very ugly, awful and dangerous [now] people come to admire the natural beauty of the place’.

\(^9\) As defined by Newman (1972) defensible space is ‘a model for residential environments which inhibits crime by creating the physical expression of a social fabric that defends itself’ (p. 3).
5.4 Articulating a Project Logic for the Community Garden

A project logic offsets out the intended causal chain of a project or program – how its activities are understood to contribute to a chain of outcomes leading to the final intended results. (sometimes other labels are used, including ‘program theory’ and ‘intervention logic’ or ‘theory-of-action’. The Gilles Plains Community Garden provides a useful example of the very different project logic underpinning capacity building projects compared to direct service delivery projects.

For direct service delivery projects, it is possible and useful to specify particular outputs and outcomes, and the links between project activities and outcomes.

For capacity building projects, while there are some short-term outcomes for participants, the most important result is building some capacity for future activity, which can then be used to achieve broader outcomes for a wider range of participants.

For example, there is evidence that the Gilles Plains community garden has already contributed to social, economic, environmental, psychological and health outcomes for participants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of outcomes for participants in community gardens</th>
<th>Examples from the Gilles Plains Community Garden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Sense of working together to accomplish something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sense of belonging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shared recreation with family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Development of skills and knowledge related to gardening and plants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>Improved attractiveness of physical environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased awareness of water conservation, waste management, organic gardening, composting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>Sense of well-being and satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Calming atmosphere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Improved mental health</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
More importantly, the garden has built capacity for further projects and development. It has contributed to the development of:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of capital</th>
<th>Examples from the Gilles Plains Community Garden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human capital</td>
<td>Secondary and TAFE students’ knowledge of history and culture of the area, biology and science of plant growth, food production and preparation. Horticulture skills development of volunteers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic (including environmental) capital</td>
<td>Physical infrastructure of the garden which allows further developments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social capital</td>
<td>Co-operation between individuals. Encouraging participation in organisations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional capital</td>
<td>Development of working group membership, processes and principles. Co-operation between organisations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The project logic diagram which follows shows the project and its outcomes in a cyclic form – both directly contributing to outcomes for the community, and building capacity of various types for further activities. This diagram shows a number of features of the garden that may have relevance for other capacity building projects:

- Capacity consists of several different types of capital – human, economic, social and institutional
- Application of capacity depends on both having capacity developed and an opportunity to deploy it
- Some projects focus on identifying and using existing capital and opportunities, some begin by developing capital, and some work on both of these strategies at the same time
- Some activities directly lead to enhanced well-being; others are focussed on building capacity or on increasing opportunities to deploy capacity
- There is a cycle of deploying capacity and then undertaking further activities

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10 This diagram has been further developed from the issue paper on ‘Community Capacity Building’ which has been completed as part of the national evaluation.
Figure 1: Project logic for the Gilles Plains community garden (as an exemplar of a community capacity building project)
5.5 Looking Ahead: Sustainability, Replication & Other Lessons

Sustainability is a concept that means different things to different people in different situations. The lack of agreement upon what is meant by sustainability can lead to confusion about what constitutes program sustainability. As a consequence there is the danger that unrealistic expectations can be placed on some projects to perform beyond the initial injection of funding.¹¹

Sustainability was understood by participants in this study as the capacity of the community garden to become self-maintaining in some sense so that long-term achievement of desired benefits can be achieved into the future.

A traditional concern with community gardens is the potential for them to become neglected due to loss of interest and an inability to attract new gardeners to replace those who leave:

Low levels of participation threaten the continued existence of community gardens because it sets up a positive feedback loop – too few participants leads to poor maintenance which discourages potential gardeners, exacerbating low participation and an unkempt garden (Russ & Grayson, 2000, p. 9).

The participants in this study cited a number of factors that would help ensure that the community garden is sustainable into the future, including:

Social capital
- A wide range of partnerships that have helped to increase the number of individuals and agencies who have a stake in the project;

Economic and physical infrastructure
- The location of the garden in the middle of a collection of services means that ‘it is very noticeable and not something that is easily forgotten’;
- The garden has been designed to be low-cost and low maintenance. For example the planting of Indigenous plants that require little attention and watering;

Organisational and economic capital
- The involvement of agencies (such as the health service) who are skilled in the management of community projects and with expertise in attracting future funding to build on the successes achieved so far (e.g. for the community arts project).
- Building in to the operation of the garden some non-gardening activities such as community social events, arts and craft, cooking and training workshops.

¹¹ An issue paper on sustainability which examines these issues is being developed as part of the national evaluation of the Strategy.
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On the basis of the factors presented above it appears unlikely, at least into the foreseeable future that the community garden will become neglected. It has been a community initiated and driven project that will continue to provide a focus for social interaction and enhance family and community capacity over many years to come.

Drawing on the experiences of this project and guidelines on the development of community gardens from the literature (see for example Grayson and Campbell, 2003) the following observations can be made in relation to planning and developing a garden in other locations:

- The most common way to approach the development of a community garden is from the bottom-up where local residents work together with the support of a few community professionals who play a constructive role in assisting and guiding the project.

- Some of the key challenges that can be overcome by allowing sufficient time for planning (at least one year) and community consultation include: finding land; building credibility and applying for funding; public liability insurance; managing the site; training gardeners and maintaining interest.

- The planning phase should be well coordinated and encompass activities such as: raising community support through letterbox drops and promotion in local press and at community events; research into how other successful gardens operate; agreeing upon the philosophy, purpose and objectives of the project; articulating timelines; applying for funding; designing the garden (e.g. location, soil testing and layout); and developing a management plan.

The results from this case study evaluation indicate that communities can take charge, work together to mobilise existing resources and act strategically to access other resources to help maintain and enhance individual and collective well-being.

There is also some data to suggest that other groups and organisations in and around the Gilles Plains area have as a result of the successes and attention given to the garden project become enthused to try out the community development approach used by the garden and espoused in the SFCS framework themselves.
6 References


Gilles Plains Community Garden


Photographs

The photographs on pages iii, iv, 11, 12, 14, 15 and 26 the captions of which detail some of the history of the garden were provided by Ms Julie Coulls, Community Development Worker, Adelaide Central Community Health Service.

All other photographs were taken by the author, Mr Brad Astbury.
Gilles Plains Community Garden