**5SENSESGARDEN.COM** 

### Living Well with Dementia Workshops

Exploring the benefits of hosting dementia therapy workshops within community greenspaces

PREPARED BY: DR KATE NEALE 2021







Southern Cross University



The 5 Senses Garden is on the land of the Wangal people of the Eora nation.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture.

We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

We embrace and value diversity and inclusion by recognising the unique choices of all individuals.

## FOREWORD

We recognise that the past 18 months has not been an easy time for many people both personally and professionally. It was a fitting time to deliver and report on how therapies taking place in the 5 Senses Garden at Rhodes Park might provide people living with dementia and their carers the opportunity to enhance their sense of wellness and connection within the community.

The Living Well with Dementia Workshops were funded by the NSW Government through the My Community Project and delivered by Inner West Neighbour Aid. The initial funding application was developed by then staff members Roman Deguchi and Natalie Ciccio. We thank Anne Tunks from Sydney Local Health District who was instrumental in supporting our funding application and the project.

Credit to Maja Sorensen for her seamless transition and taking over the project from former staff members. Maja's hard work and dedication to the purpose of the workshops and relationship building with participants and facilitators played a large part in the success of the workshops. Thank you to Stuart Blundell for his support throughout the project.

We commend Kate Neale and acknowledge the relevant and informative literature searches as well as the development of the final report.

Feedback from carers who attended the workshops speak volumes about the impact of tailored programs, in particular one carer commented "the days that we were able to join you for a morning of activities at the 5 Senses Garden hold special memories for me and I just wanted to take this opportunity of thanking you for inspiring workshops."

Inner West Neighbour Aid is extremely proud to be involved with this project. We know the importance of listening, being connected to the community, delivering innovative and stimulating programs and respecting our elders for their lived experiences.

Allison Yee-Brogan General Manager, Inner West Neighbour Aid October 2021

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 03 Executive Summary
- 06 Project Details
- 08 Background

Staying well when living with dementia Benefits of nature for people living with dementia Appropriate greenspaces for people living with dementia Dementia-therapies involving gardening and greenspaces Caring for a person with dementia

- 17 Research Aim
- 18 Research Questions
- 20 Bushfires and then COVID-19
- 21 COVID-19 Protocols
- 23 Revised Schedule
- 25 Workshop Attendance
- 28 Research Methods

#### 35 Findings

The location of the workshops within the garden How the garden made people feel Sensory experiences The benefits of being in a non-clinical setting like the garden The garden encouraged social connections

- 56 Ideas for furthering the use of the garden
- 60 Conclusions
- 64 References
- 67 Survey Questions



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

People living with dementia face many challenges including safe access to, and inclusion in, public outdoor spaces. And whilst many dementia therapy programs are often conducted indoors for a number of reasons including minimising risk and providing a more controlled environment of stimulus, an increasing body of literature is exploring the benefits of nature and greenspaces for people living with dementia (Marsh, 2020).

Gardens are not just beautiful spaces in which to sit and watch the world go by. They can offer so much more including opportunities for exercising, socialising, cooking, reminiscing, maintaining intergenerational connections, and sensory stimulation (Therapeutic Horticulture Australia, 2021). Many people enjoy gardens for their therapeutic benefits, including people living with dementia and their carers.

This project explores the benefits and barriers of hosting dementia-therapies in public greenspaces to understand the impact it has on the wellbeing and belonging of people living with dementia and their carers in attendance.

The dementia therapy workshops were held at 5 Senses Garden at Rhodes Park in Concord West in early 2020, and resumed again after COVID-19 restrictions eased between February and May 2021.

Participants were invited to attend through Inner West Neighbour Aid's networks and with the support of Anne Tunks from Sydney Local Health District.

The focus of the ten workshops (2 held in 2020 and 8 held in 2021) differed on rotation and included: art therapy; therapeutic horticulture; music therapy; and mindfulness and meditation.

Research was conducted to explore the experiences of those participating in the workshops, as facilitated by a specialised therapist with expertise in each area at 5 Senses Garden. Data was collected in a number of ways. A survey was developed and distributed in paper form, via email and through a QR code to all participants after attending each of the workshops. Fieldwork observation notes were taken during and immediately after each workshop, either by the researcher or project co-ordinator. Informal conversations with participants also illuminated their experiences of participating in the workshops. Photos were taken with permission of all participants.

The study used mixed methods analysis. Statistical analysis including descriptive and frequency statistics was used to examine survey responses. Responses to open items of the survey were content analysed. Fieldwork notes were thematically coded and analysed.

The findings demonstrate that hosting dementia therapies within public greenspaces brings about a number of benefits for people living with dementia and the support person who attended the session with them. The benefits could be described as both individual benefits for either the carer or person living with dementia and benefits for their relationship together. The chance to attend the garden enabled opportunities to socialise, congregate and converse with others in the workshop. It was re-assuring for carers in particular to be able to share experiences with others going through similar experiences. Many also spoke about the increased visibility and connection to the community that came from hosting workshops within the public 5 Senses Garden.

The research findings also illuminate ways in which dementia therapies can be better enhanced by situating them in greenspaces. These included incorporating nature and utilising the amenities on offer. It was however important that the garden did offer safety and security by way of fencing, level and safe walking paths, nearby bathrooms and ample convenient parking and reliable nearby public transport.

It is hoped that by having a more thorough understanding of the impact of gardening and greenspaces, within the context of dementia therapies that are illuminated in this study, will inspire others to implement similar initiatives.



## **PROJECT DETAILS**

#### Workshop + research funding

Living Well with Dementia Workshops were funded through a competitive funding opportunity as part of the NSW Government's 2019 'My Community Project' competitive grant round.

My Community Project was an initiative by the NSW Government to improve the wellbeing of people and communities in NSW.

Inner West Neighbour Aid was awarded funding for the workshops through the scheme. The project submission was supported by Anne Tunks, Dementia Advisor at Sydney Local Health District.

The funding was to conduct ten dementia therapy workshops at 5 Senses Garden, Rhodes Park, Concord West and explore the benefit of doing so for participants. It was originally hoped that the workshops would be conducted monthly in 2020. As explained in more detail below, the workshops were relaunched and held between February and May 2021.

A portion of the funding awarded enabled the research component to be completed.

#### Project team

Dr Kate Neale – Researcher (Southern Cross University + Digability) Maja Sorensen - Project Co-ordinator + Garden Aid and Community Development Team Leader (Inner West Neighbour Aid)

The project team wish to formally acknowledge and thank the participants of the workshops who made the workshops such a success and provided such rich insights during the fieldwork and data collection. Your warmth, enthusiasm and continued engagement in the project made coming to the garden every fortnight such fun.

A big thank you to Roman Deguchi and Anne Tunks for helping to conceptualise the project and successfully seek funding for it. Thank you to Natalie Ciccio for working on the project with us during her time at Inner West Neighbour Aid and Stuart Blundell for his continued support of the project through 2021.



## BACKGROUND

In 2020, it was estimated that 472,00 people in Australia live with dementia and are supported by over 1.6 million carers (Dementia Australia, 2021).

Dementia is described as a "collection of symptoms that are caused by disorders affecting the brain" (Dementia Australia, 2021) that affects one's behaviour, thinking and ability to perform a range of tasks. It is not one specific disease.

Dementia affects not just the individual diagnosed, but also their family, and especially their partner, spouse or loved one (Alzheimer's Research UK, 2021). Caring for someone with dementia can be detrimental to a carer's physical and mental health. In the role of caring for someone else, the carer can run the risk of not caring for themselves.

#### Staying well when living with dementia

It is therefore imperative that people living with dementia and their carers stay well, in order to foster and maintain their wellbeing and social connections. There are many therapies and programs available to people with dementia^ to help maintain their mental and physical wellbeing, and ensure they stay socially connected to their communities.

^ Acknowledging that not everyone receives the support needed to live their best life with dementia.

The consensus within the literature, and in practice is to provide opportunities for people living with dementia to stay as engaged in life as much as possible through the provision of activities that prioritise comfort, attachment, inclusion, occupation, and identity (Kitwood, 1997). This has led to the proliferation of non-pharmacological programs and activities designed specifically to help people living with dementia stay actively involved in life. Dementia programs and activities may have any number of objectives including: social connection, continued brain function, and encouraging physical activity.

Dementia Australia, (2021) recommend activities for people living with dementia that:

- align with a person's interests
- maintain existing skills
- are safe
- allow for an emotional outlet
- are relaxing and do not overstimulate or induce stress
- feel unhurried
- compensate for activities that can no longer be done
- promote self-esteem
- dignify
- empower
- stimulate and encourage new learning
- are enjoyable
- foster and encourage social contact
- acknowledge and celebrate cultural backgrounds.



Creative arts-based dementia friendly therapies have been particularly popular in meeting such objectives for people living with dementia. Creative therapies positively impact people living with dementia as a strategy to support wellbeing and social connections (Kenning and Visser, 2021) as well as providing a sense of mindfulness and other benefits that arise from combining nature within arts-based therapies (Olson, 2021).

#### Benefits of nature for people living with dementia

Experiences of nature are said to have various physical, mental and social benefits for older people (Orr, Wagstaffe, Briscoe, and Garside, R., 2016) and incorporating nature into dementia therapies have said to increase sensory stimulation which is believed to benefit people living with dementia (Jakob and Collier, 2017)..

Kasap, Ağzıtemiz and Ünal (2021, p16), argue contact with nature "replenishes attention, memory, executive functioning, and learning capacities", whilst "bolstering creative potential". They describe the ways nature has an uplifting effect on positive mood, well-being and relaxation by mitigating stress and anxiety levels.

Access to nature however doesn't just have a positive impact on one's individual state of mind, but also socially, by fostering contact with others within natural spaces, it facilitates a cohesive appreciation and value for nature and improves social connectedness (Kasap et al, 2021). Barton and Rogerson (2017) describe how, "engaging with greenspaces can positively influence eating and sleeping patterns, fitness and mobility, sense of wellbeing, self-esteem and control associated with improved social interaction and a sense of belonging". They also argue for the impact access to greenspaces has for reducing stress, agitation, anger, apathy and depression for people living with dementia.

#### Appropriate greenspaces for people living with dementia

Palmer (2020), argues that appropriate greenspaces for people living with dementia should enable a carer to support a person properly, spatially be orientating and understandable, provide the opportunity for personal expression and identity, be welcoming and inclusive and provide a sensory experience but also control of unwanted stimuli.

Safe access to natural areas such as parks and walkways encourage people living with dementia to access nature and enjoy fresh air, sunshine, flora and fauna and sounds associated with the environment such as birdsongs and leaves rustling (Sturge, Nordin, Patil, Jones, Légaré, Elf, and Meijering, 2021). Amenities, accessibility via public transport, access to services, clear signage, safe paths, opportunities for positive social interactions and opportunities to witness "normal" community life improve participation for a person living with dementia within their community (Courtney-Pratt, Mathison, and Doherty, 2018).

#### Dementia-therapies involving gardening and greenspaces

Research shows that engagement in greenspaces positively impacts an individual's wellbeing. A growing body of evidence suggests that access to and time spent within public greenspaces does positively impact on a person with dementia's quality of life and provide opportunities to stay connected socially to others and the community more broadly (Kasap et al., 2021). MMako, Courtney-Pratt and Marsh (2020) discusses this very



specifically in terms of "Engaging in meaningful activities; Empowerment; Positive risk taking; and Reinforcing Identity". They conclude that for people living with dementia, access and participation within community green settings enables an active and meaningful community-life, despite cognitive decline and time spent within public greenspaces does positively impact on a person with dementia's quality of life and provide opportunities to stay connected socially to others and the community more broadly (Kasap et al., 2021). MMako, Courtney-Pratt and Marsh (2020) discusses this very specifically in terms of "Engaging in meaningful activities; Empowerment; Positive risk taking; and Reinforcing Identity".

#### Caring for a person with dementia

As we conclude this section we must remember that in order to provide for a person living with dementia, it is critical to also cater for their carers too. It is critical to find effective ways of providing support to carers of people living with dementia. It is understood that carers face an increased risk of stress, depression and other illnesses and so programs, therapies and activities should also be provided that focus on providing support for carers in a number of ways (Dementia Australia, 2021).

Dementia Australia (2021) acknowledges that provision of care to a person living with dementia is enhanced when carers:

- are educated about the disease and involved in the person's care,
- understand the disease and learn how to communicate and interact with the person in appropriate ways

 are provided psychosocial support, including counselling, training in techniques for behavioural management and participation in support groups.

Research demonstrates that therapies offered in a nature-based setting that invite both people living with dementia and their carers "support contact with nature and animals, activity engagement, physical activity, structure, social interactions, healthy eating, a sense of meaning in life and a focus on normal daily life" (de Bruin, Buist, Hassink, and Vaandrager, 2021, p1). For carers specifically it offers respite and reassurance, whilst maintaining carer's own interests, involvement in activities and social connection.



### **RESEARCH AIM**

The aim of the research was to explore what impact hosting dementia therapies in public greenspaces had on the wellbeing and belonging of people living with dementia and their carers in attendance.

In January 2020, Inner West Neighbour Aid staff, workshop facilitators and the researcher met at 5 Senses Garden to see the space and get more information around the aims of the Living Well with Dementia Workshops, planned data collection and the scope of the research component of the project. Ideas were also shared about how the natural setting of the garden can complement, enhance and support each of the therapies on offer, that being art, music, horticulture, meditation and exercise.

It was agreed that the purpose of the research was not to:

- Conduct a client satisfaction survey of the workshops
- Explore the benefits of each therapy type offered (art, music, horticulture or mindfulness and meditation) for people living with dementia and/or their carers, although some are reported in the findings of this report.
- Evaluate the facilitation of the workshops either in terms of how they delivered each individual focus (art, music, horticulture or mindfulness and meditation) or how well they did or didn't utilise the garden. The report however does make general recommendations for ways the garden and its location could be further enjoyed in the context of the workshops.

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The project was guided by the following research questions:

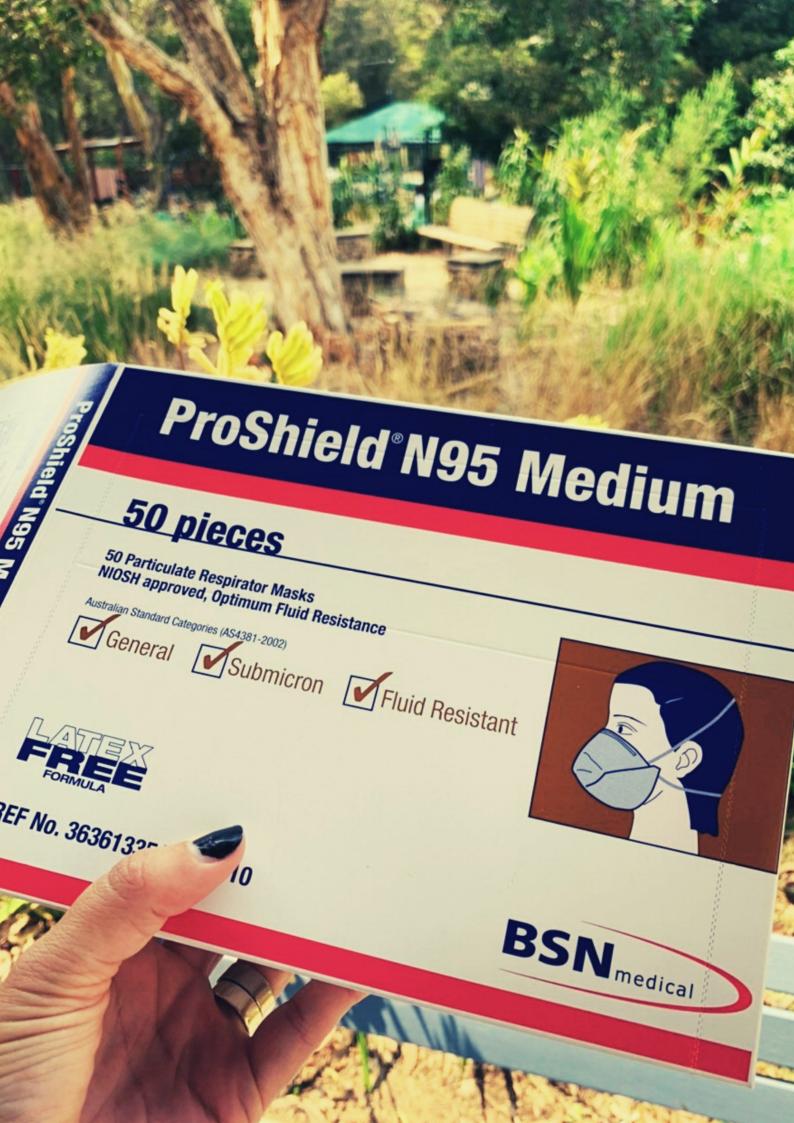
1. What impact did garden-based dementia therapy workshops have on participants' own sense of wellbeing?

2. What impact did garden-based dementia therapy workshops have on the relationship between people living with dementia and their carers?

2. What impact did garden-based dementia therapy workshops have on fostering social connections between participants?

3. Does hosting garden-based dementia therapy workshops in public greenspaces encourage broader community inclusion?

4. In what ways can dementia therapies be adapted to maximise the wellbeing benefits associated with greenspace contexts?



### BUSHFIRES AND THEN COVID-19

The program began in Summer 2020 as Australia was being ravaged by bushfires. Much of Sydney was being engulfed by smoke to a worrying level on a daily basis. Face masks were being distributed to participants out of concern for the poor air quality. Continued concerns for the air quality and its impacts on participants of the program threatened the continuation of the program. Despite this, two workshops were able to proceed. In early February 2020, participants gathered for a meditation and mindfulness workshop and many returned in early March 2020 for an art therapy workshop.

Then in late March 2020, attention turned to a new threat as COVID-19 hit Australia's shores and all of Australia went into a snap lockdown. The program was put on hold immediately and indefinitely in the uncertainty of how Australia would be affected by the virus and the worrying reality that many participants who has signed up for the program were also the most vulnerable against the disease. The program stayed suspended for the remainder of 2020.

In late 2020, as Australia began opening up, the team reconvened and planned for a 2021 relaunch accepting the reality that snap lockdowns could continue to threaten the delivery of the workshops and importantly, the facilitation of the workshops would need to consider public health COVID-19 safety guidelines.

20

### **COVID-19 PROTOCOLS**

A COVID-19 project protocol was put in place at the beginning of the fieldwork in response to the ever-changing landscape and possible impacts this could bring to the fieldwork. The researcher ensured a careful and cautious response to ensuring policies, government advice and health guidelines were always followed in completing the research. This included complying with site protocols, travel restrictions, testing recommendations and self-isolation or quarantine measures if unwell or awaiting COVID-19 test results.

Inner West Neighbour Aid established and followed similar protocols and visiting therapists were asked to provide their own COVID-19 Safety Plans.

Workshops started with 10 participants in accordance with NSW Health guidelines but extended to 20 participants as COVID-19 restrictions eased. Safe social distancing was maintained by strategic seating arrangements.

At the time the workshops were held, there were no mask wearing or social distancing mandates in place. Physical contact such as hand-shaking or embraces between participants (not including between a person living with dementia and their carer) was not encouraged.

In 2020, people were able to serve themselves during the lunch service. In 2021, the researcher and project co-ordinator assumed the role as servers to limit the sharing of utensils between participants.

Neighbour Aid

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Living Well Dementia Workshops Free for people living with dementia & their carers

Learn techniques for well-being & enjoy a day in the garden The first and third Wednesday of the month from February-May 2021

Horticulture: 3 February, 5 May Music: 17 February, 21 April Meditation: 3 March, 7 April Art: 17 March, 19 May

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## **REVISED SCHEDULE**

With concerns that new outbreaks could close the program at any time, the decision was made to move the workshops from a monthly schedule to fortnightly incorporating 2 sessions each of four types of therapies.

The program re-launched in February 2021 with the following schedule:

3rd February: Therapeutic horticulture
17th February: Music therapy
3rd March: Meditation and Mindfulness
17th March: Art therapy
7th April: Meditation and Mindfulness
21st April: Music therapy
5th May: Therapeutic horticulture
19th May: Art therapy

Fortunately the workshops were able to run in 2021 without further interruptions to the schedule.



## WORKSHOP Attendance

Workshops were promoted to people living with dementia and their carers through Inner West Neighbour Aid's stakeholder networks, clients, local dementia support organisations and referrals systems at the neighbouring Concord Repatriation General Hospital. Interested participants could call or email to register their interest in attending each, any or all upcoming workshops.

DATE	THERAPY	FACILITATOR	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
5 Feb 2020	Meditation	Leanne McLean	12
4 Mar 2020	Art	Kerryn Coombs-Valeontis	16
3 Feb 2021	Horticulture	Kerryn Coombs-Valeontis	10
17 Feb 2021	Music	Jeannette Harvey	17
3 Mar 2021	Meditation	Leanne McLean	15
17 Mar 2021	Art	Kerryn Coombs-Valeontis	18
7 Apr 2021	Meditation	Leanne McLean	11
21 Apr 2021	Music	Jeannette Harvey	15
5 May 2021	Horticulture	Kerryn Coombs-Valeontis	17
19 May 2021	Art	Kerryn Coombs-Valeontis	12

Final workshop attendance breakdown included:

Many participants attended multiple workshops. People living with dementia attended the workshops with either a family member, typically a spouse (17 pairs across all the workshops), child (5 pairs across all the workshops) or paid carer (2 pairs across all the workshops). Eight carers attended workshops on their own (across the entire program). One participant (neither a person living with dementia or a carer) came on her own. Her motivation for coming to the workshops was to have the chance to connect with people living with dementia and their carers. Her parents (who were both living with dementia) resided overseas and it was her opportunity to see and understand dementia first hand so she could relate better to the care roles of her siblings in caring for their parents.

Participants lived within the follo	owing local government areas (LGAs):
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LGAS	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Hunters Hill	3
Inner West	12
City of Canada Bay	12
City of Sydney	7
Burwood	3
City of Ryde	4
City of Canterbury-Bankstown	5
Georges River	2
Bayside	2
Parramatta	1
Northern Beaches	1
Unknown	1

Participants typically began to arrive to the garden on the morning of a workshop around 9:45am. Workshops got underway at 10am. Late arrivals were welcome to join at any time. All workshops went for 2 hours and participants and therapists were invited to stay for a catered lunch in the garden afterwards. All participants typically left by 1pm.



## **RESEARCH METHODS**

Surveys, observations and informal conversations during the workshops were used to collect data in order to better understand the experiences of people living with dementia and their carers within the workshops.

Participants for the research were recruited during the promotion of, and during the workshops. Upon signing up for the workshops, people living with dementia and their carers were given details of the research and told that a researcher will be present at some workshops to solicit survey responses and observe the activities to gain a better understanding of the impact of the therapies being held in greenspaces. Participants were reminded that attendance at the workshop wasn't contingent on participating in the research.

At the beginning of each workshop, the researcher or project co-ordinator again explained the research component within the program. Participants were reminded that observation notes were being taken to gain a better understanding of workshops being situated in a garden, but that no identifying information was being recorded and should they wish not to be observed, to let the researcher know. As previously mentioned, permissions to have photographs were also sought with an explanation that photographs would be used in the final report but care would be taken not to capture participants' faces.

Participants were invited to discuss any aspects of the data collection with the researcher at any time and reminded that participation in the research was completely voluntary and not a requisite of their participation in the workshops. All attendees indicated they were okay with the research observations taking place.

A survey was also developed and distributed in paper form, via email and through a QR code to all participants after attending each of the workshops.

Paper versions of the survey were made available at the workshops for anyone to complete or take home to complete at a more convenient time. Survey respondents were encouraged to return the surveys to the researcher or project co-ordinator at subsequent workshops or return by mail to the address provided in the information sheet that accompanied the survey. QR codes were made available onsite for participants who preferred to answer the survey online at a later stage. Participants also received an electronic version of the form via email to fill out if preferred over using the online survey form provided to them via a website link.

Some workshop participants indicated they would prefer to talk to the researcher about their experiences over the phone instead of completing the online survey. Where this occurred, the project co-ordinator forwarded contact details to the researcher with the permission of the respondents. Phone interviews were then conducted following the questioning of the survey. The researcher filled out the online survey on behalf of the respondents as the phone interview took place at a mutually convenient time. No identifying information was collected during the phone conversation or written on the survey responses. Once the phone survey was complete, the respondents contact details were deleted ensuring anonymity within the data set.

29



Fourteen participants (representing 27 workshop participants) participated as survey respondents, either completing the survey online, in paper form or over the telephone. All survey respondents identified themselves as a carer (either spouse, family or in a paid support role) to a person living with dementia. All but one answered the questions on behalf of themselves and the person living with dementia. One person responded from their perspective as an adult child of someone living with dementia only.

The researcher also attended seven workshops to take photographs, observational notes and converse informally with the participants to learn more of their experiences within the garden.

It became apparent that some participants preferred to discuss their experiences with the researcher instead of completing the survey. In these instances, participants were invited to provide insights on their experiences to the researcher, which the researcher wrote as fieldnotes for inclusion in the data set.

During conversations within the workshops between the researcher or project co-ordinator and participants, participants were expressly asked if their recollections of experiences in the garden could be used as data within the research of the programs. Where consent was given, information was included. Both people living with dementia and their carers participated in the conversations together. In many ways the carer supported the participation of the person living with dementia within the conversations in order to help the researcher hear their perspectives. The researcher didn't engage in conversations with a person living with dementia alone.

32

Participants were not identifiable in any fieldwork notes, which were later transferred from the researcher's phone and safely secured on University hardware. Likewise, emails were electronically copied and saved as project data files and deleted from online email systems.

For workshops where the researcher was absent, the project co-ordinator sent summary notes of how the workshop went, who was in attendance and anything of importance that occurred. Mentions of participants by name were de-identified and then safely secured on University hardware. Emails were electronically copied and saved as project data files and deleted from online email systems.

Photos and videos were also taken throughout the time spent in the garden by the researcher and project co-ordinator. The photos were used primarily to assist the researcher recall the activities with the garden or particular moments of significance. Photos were also sent to further illustrate the workshops, which likewise were saved securely and then deleted off researcher emails and computer servers. The photos throughout this report are those taken within the fieldwork phase of the project. Participants were made aware of the photos being taken and their permission sought for the photos to be taken and used in the report.

The resulting data from each visit, survey results and any correspondence following provided valuable insight into whether and how situating dementia therapies within public greenspaces provided additional benefits to people living with dementia and their carers; any identified barriers or limitations and the ways in which dementia therapies can be enhanced through a greenspace context.



# FINDINGS

#### The location of the workshops within the garden

Workshops predominantly took place under the manmade gazebo where ground is even, there is adequate seating and protection was offered from the elements. The lack of walls on all sides of the gazebo offered unobstructed views of the garden regardless of where participants sat and the abundant nearby planting made tactile engagement with foliage easy.

Hard-wearing man-made surfaces, namely the concrete floor and stainlesssteel benches were the only distraction to feeling fully immersed in nature. Depending on where a person sat under the gazebo, they could bask in the warm autumnal sunshine or be shaded on the warmer summer days.

Nearby seating under the shade of the mature trees of the garden also offered alternative spaces for workshops. This was discussed with some of the facilitators who commented on the need to consider adding more temporary seating to accommodate group sizes and potential difficulties in projecting voices in such a large open spaces within the garden.

The garden remained open to the general public during the workshop sessions and as such the space was often shared between workshop participants and others. The general public were often observed watching the workshops and enjoying the sight of the participants singing or dancing (in the music workshops).

The garden is fully enclosed by a fence, with two gates at either end of the garden, connected by an accessible meandering path lined with overflowing



plants of differing varieties. Participants were often observed enjoying the walk from the entrance gate to the gazebo as they inspected the garden as they walked.

#### How the garden made people feel

Workshop participants often described arriving to the garden feeling a sense of unease and leaving with a sense of calm. Participants were asked to complete the sentence, "My heart is full of:", to describe how they felt after one workshop, and in doing so, used terms such as "love", "music", "dancing" and "nature".

Participants in the survey spoke of their general enjoyment of time spent in public greenspaces. When asked how getting out to a public greenspace like 5 Senses Garden made them feel, all respondents described feeling "calmer" and "happier" and "more rested" after having spent time outdoors in nature. After a horticulture therapy-based workshop where participants made wreaths from foliage foraged on site, verbal responses included: feeling "connected; joyful; satisfied; serene; grateful for access to the garden; and childlike."

Survey respondents reflected upon how being in the 5 Senses Garden impacted the wellbeing of the person with dementia they supported, reporting: reduced agitation; connecting well with others; improved mood; feeling refreshed afterwards; and better quality of sleep that evening for the person. As no one living with dementia reported to fill out the survey, we cannot report their own self-reported efficacy.

Carers also reported on the impact the workshops being held outside had on their own wellbeing too. They reported having: reduced agitation; improved connection to others; improved mood; and a better quality of sleep that evening.

Most respondents to the survey also reported feeling more connected to the environment after visiting a public greenspace and having been reminded of the beauty of nature. Comments were made in the workshops such as, "I like hearing the birds to de-stress after our busy morning getting here," to which someone replied, "The birds are closer than the cars," which was met with happy agreement from the group and a third participant noting, "There is always birdsong here."

Other comments about how people were feeling during and after the workshops in the garden included:

"It brings a smile to her face (referring to a person living with dementia). She keeps asking when they can go back to the garden."

"I feel at peace when I come to the garden."

"I was nervous about coming, but I feel better now."

"I feel guilty resting when we could always be doing something. I know that's not good for me. It's nice being here as it feels like a rest, even though we are still doing something for him."

"Moving around the garden makes me feel present here."

"Being outside is less overwhelming for her so we like to get out as much as we can. The garden is really safe. I don't have to worry about strangers or traffic or loud noises like we do in the streets."

"We have created a sense of community which is bigger than us within the workshops."



#### Sensory experiences within the garden.

According to survey results, hosting the workshops in the garden encouraged people living with dementia and their carers to engage in outdoor activities and they felt benefits from doing so. Respondents enjoyed sensory engagement with nature in the space.

In terms of the sense of sight, participants reported observing nature in the forms of enjoying the wide variety of plants within the 5 Senses Garden and the presence of birds and insects. Many enjoyed being in an outdoor space and the chance to see a wider span of the sky, bigger horizons with all the surrounding greenspace beyond the garden and the chance to sit and cloud gaze.

Participants were often observed commenting on being in the garden and how much things have grown, especially in the kitchen garden near the gazebo. "It is always a very sensory experience for them, sniffing leaves and picking things" wrote the project co-ordinator in her observation notes. Participants were also allowed to pick produce from the garden to take home. One participant wrote to the project co-ordinator, "Another wonderful morning yesterday. Thank you for all your work. Later that night we enjoyed a lettuce from the garden."

Participants also enjoyed people watching and particularly enjoyed the sound of children playing in the adjacent preschool or in the playground within the garden. For one participant it brought back memories of her own childhood, The sounds from the musical garden also brought enjoyment, either as the participants used the instruments themselves or enjoyed the sounds made by others using them. The sound of birds in the surrounding

trees and rustling of leaves were also enjoyable sounds for participants within the garden and brought to their attention during the workshop mindfulness activities.

Given the workshops were mostly held in late summer and autumn, the climatic conditions were generally favourable to being outside. The participants often talked about how lovely the warmth of the sunshine was on their backs. Fresh air was also seen as a benefit to being outside which they attributed to their sense of wellbeing.

It rained during some of the workshops but it didn't deter or inhibit participation as the participants were well protected by the undercover shelter. In one workshop "rain" was mentioned as something someone was grateful for. The horticulture workshop in May began in the nearby education centre due to bad weather, but moved to the garden to plant seedlings and propagate cuttings from the garden. The project co-ordinator noticed participants' mood lifted and they appeared more free in the garden. Participants were observed touching leaves and smelling different foliage whilst commenting on the different smells around them. The project co-ordinator noted a genuine curiosity.

Participants often remarked on the pleasant smell of foliage and flowers on their visits, which often invited them to touch plants and further explore the garden more. Participants were often observed collecting items from the garden (such as flowers, leaves or rocks) and inspecting them in detail.

There were many examples of utilising the garden surroundings and natural resources that could be found on site within the dementia-therapy workshops within the data.



An awareness of the natural surroundings were incorporated into mindfulness activities such as being aware of the breeze on participants' skin, or the nearby sound of birds and wind through the trees. Participants were often reminded to attentively notice nature around them and were led on nature walks through the gardens to inspect the many things growing around them.

In one meditation workshop, participants were asked to focus on a piece of pelargonium for five minutes. In doing so, people said they noticed new growth, considered ways to paint it, observed it in detail from multiple perspectives, noted its textural differences and pondered its meaning for ecology.

In a horticultural workshop, a wreath made from foliage and flowers foraged from the garden was hung on a nail that had been hammered into one of the gazebo posts. Everyone was delighted to see it still hanging as they arrived to the following workshop, and again and again months later. It became a wonderful artefact of the group's presence in the space and symbol of their belonging. Another art piece (leaf and flower prints) created during another workshop still hangs in the noticeboard at the garden.

The percussion installations in the music garden was incorporated into the music workshop, whilst the art workshops focused both on drawing things in nature as well as using natural resources as a medium for painting or creating and using as stamps.

Many activities also encouraged participants to use their hands, either working with natural resources found in the garden or creating tactile experiences with it, such as finger painting clay pots or inspecting the surfaces of leaves and foliage to make stamps or for weaving.



# The garden strengthened relationships between the person living with dementia and their loved one.

Features within the garden brought participants closer together. One carer stopped to take a picture of her partner painting in the garden. She said that the lighting and nature looked really good. In another workshop, one person living with dementia started mimicking playing the violin. His partner watched him and began crying with joy as she recalled how he used to play violin in an orchestra and the music in the garden was bringing back fond memories for both of them.

At other times the activities in the garden brought people closer together physically. During the music workshop, a mother and daughter held each other and danced together whilst another married couple were observed sitting, holding hands and swaying to the music.

All of these examples demonstrate the ways the workshops provided opportunities to "attentively notice" a person in a different or fondly remembered light. This had a positive impact on their relationship by providing opportunities to enjoy each other outside of their care relationship.

A few participants also mentioned that they enjoyed wandering through the kitchen garden with their loved ones to see what was growing and reminiscing about past food gardens they'd previously owned at home. In one of the art workshops, one carer recalled how he and his wife (who is living with dementia) used to spend a lot of time in their backyard garden while he painted out there. He said he hadn't felt able to paint for many years due to his wife's deteriorating health so having the opportunity to



engage in an arts-based workshop within a garden setting brought back so many fond memories. They then talked about trying to re-establish the hobby again at home to enjoy together.

Carers often noticed the workshops made people living with dementia feel comfortable and at ease. One carer said that her mother never paints at home. They leave paint and pencils out for her, but she always chooses to play cards. At the workshop she finished the painting exercise early and continued to draw her own design.

In another example, the facilitator asked everybody to describe their morning and how they were feeling. One person living with dementia began speaking about his life and what he used to do for work. He had previously been quite reserved in workshops. His partner said " That is the most that I've heard him speak all week". He was observed as becoming more comfortable and confident in the group and space with each workshop they attended.

In general, survey respondents felt that participating in the workshops and enjoying the natural surrounds of the garden before, after and during the session greatly improved their relationship with the person they cared for. One person remarked, "We don't often sit together anymore unless I'm doing something for her. But not like sit and just do something together. This is nice."

Most reported the workshops in the garden brought them closer together and gave them the opportunity to enjoy each other's company. They were happy to see each other smiling and participating in the activities, as well as



having conversations about how lovely the garden was and things growing in it.

For many respondents, being outside broadened their horizons, reminding them of other things not in their day to day life and gave an "escape from the usual activities they did together". One carer remarked that she hadn't heard her husband (who is living with dementia) speak so much in the past. She said their social outings usually only involve seeing family so it has been good for them to get out and talk to new people (for both of them).

For carers in particular, enjoyment within their time in the garden was in part brought about by talking to others who shared similar experiences related to caring for someone living with dementia and the security of an enclosed (fenced) but non-clinical garden setting.

#### The benefits of a being in a non-clinical setting like the garden.

Many workshop participants spoke of enjoying being in a "neutral" or "peaceful" setting such as the garden. They talked specifically about their interest in the focus of the workshop and perceived benefits for both them and the person living with dementia of participating, but often added statements like, "and we get to do it here, in such a beautiful location" or "and it's an added bonus to be outside and enjoying the change of season today too". One survey respondent described the atmosphere as more "relaxed and non-threatening than an institution like a hospital or medicalrelated location".

A visiting clinician came to observe a workshop as an interested bystander said, "Having the session in the garden provided a lovely atmosphere and so appropriate to the workshop. I also think that it helped the people who attended and probably didn't know each other previously to interact and possibly had a calming effect on the people with dementia."

For many carers this was true. In survey responses and informal conversations, they described a sense of contentment in the moment which was in part brought about by talking to others who shared similar experiences related to caring for someone living with dementia and feeling a sense of security within the enclosed but non-clinical garden setting. One carer described it as being, "so good to be in a beautiful setting with other generous and caring people, " whilst another remarked, "We have created a sense of community which is bigger than us within the workshops."

Some participants remarked that although they were attending dementia therapy workshops, they appreciated that dementia was rarely brought up. Carers were often seen helping each other, engaging in conversation amongst themselves and helping the people each were supporting.

The workshops became a social event that many enjoyed attending. Participants clearly built a rapport with others in attendance. This was apparent through their warm greetings of each other at the beginning of each workshop and shared conversations over lunch between pairs. Carers were observed helping each other and the people others care for freely during the workshops. Phone numbers were exchanged to maintain contact outside the workshops times and share information.

There was a sense of real comfort and at times, willingness to be vulnerable between the participants. After one music workshop, participants described



the session as: togetherness, memories, calm, uplifting, openness, curious, heart-warming. During the workshop, one lady, reminisced on her youthful days dancing as she freely and enthusiastically danced within a circle formed by other participants under the gazebo. At one stage, she was joined by another participant living with dementia and they danced together. Other participants danced together too, despite not knowing each other particularly well other than having met them at the workshops. The project co-ordinator observed how much the group were smiling and making eye contact with each other.

After each workshop there was a sense of togetherness amongst the group. Generally, everyone would stay for lunch after the workshop and often would stay and chat casually without rushing off by any particular time. Being situated in the garden meant there was never a need to usher participants out or ask them to leave (as you might in a rented hall or indoor space),

#### The garden encouraged social connections

In addition to the social connections made within the group, either between a person living with dementia and their carer, or between the group more generally, social connections were also made between participants and the broader community who visited the garden or nearby amenities during the workshop times. The sounds and sight of children playing in the adjoining preschool was particularly enjoyed by the workshop participants.

One participant described the location of workshop as allowing them to "feel a part of the community still." Another said that being in a public space like a garden, where the general public could still congregate made them "feel visible".



Many felt the workshops also came at a good time to overcome the impact of social isolation and mental fatigue that came with extended lockdowns and social distancing accompanying COVID-19. One participant described life under lockdown as one-dimensional and involved just himself and his wife (who is living with dementia). For them and others, the garden provided a safe passage back out into the community as outdoor spaces were promoted by health officials as safer than indoors to congregate. This alleviated some of the concerns about re-engaging in group activities and therapies.

Most survey respondents felt more likely to revisit the garden if there was an organised workshop to attend, as opposed to utilising the space on their own. Having an organised workshop provided a reason to be in the community, and the garden enabled this to be done in a safe and encouraging manner.

As the workshops encouraged people to visit the 5 Senses Garden and enjoy the outdoor activities planned within them, the survey results also show that coming to the garden for the workshops encouraged participants to explore other nearby amenities within the proximity of the garden, including the Kokoda Trail and nearby cafe. Most carers would gauge the energy levels of the people they care for before embarking on a walk, but said the extended time together outdoors and exercising often extended the benefits they were experiencing within the garden.

Others continued to extend and enjoy their time in the garden by organising to meet family members after the workshop. Often family members would congregate in another section of the garden and wait for the participants to join them. The many areas and activities within the garden enabled people to enjoy the space and keep entertained while they waited.



### IDEAS FOR FURTHERING THE USE OF THE GARDEN

All facilitators utilised the natural surroundings of 5 Senses Garden within their workshops. Most focused on the ways natural elements could be incorporated in activities or how the garden could facilitate benefit to the participants and focused on activities that gave the participants an artefact or intangible experience from the event,

The following are ideas of alternative activities that could be pursued in future workshops. The ideas aim to provide the opportunity for participants to contribute to the garden itself in the hope this contributes to a greater feeling of belonging and esteem.

Future horticulture and art therapy workshops could be tailored to steer efforts further into the kitchen garden onsite. Many of the beds could have been replenished and planted out by workshop participants, not only providing them with the wonderful benefits of working with plants that the workshop was aiming to do, but also contributing something meaningful to the garden and in doing so, making a significant statement to the broader community of the value people living with dementia (and their carers) can still make within the community.

Another potential outcome of an initiative like this could be that participants are further motivated to return to the garden to see how their planting has grown. They may also wish to get involved in additional non-dementia specific programming at the garden with other members of the public that centre around the kitchen garden or cooking with its produce. Programs like these are already run at the 5 Senses Garden.

Arts-based dementia therapy workshops can incorporate one activity whereby the participants helped to create simple and easily read signage for the kitchen garden outlining what is growing in a way that still demonstrated artistic flair. Given the cultural diversity within the workshop groups, these signs could have been multi-lingual also.

We know from the literature that these continued connections with broader society have a positive impact on both people living with dementia and their carers. A sense of achievement and purpose that comes about from working as a group to achieve something that is greater than the effort of an individual has a positive effect on a person's self-esteem. Additionally, it can help raise awareness amongst the general community of the meaningful contribution people living with dementia can still make to all our lives.

Although not directly related to nature, the proximity of the garden to the preschool next door appears to offer opportunities for intergenerational connection during the dementia-therapy workshops. For example, with the permission of the preschool (and children's parents or carers) children could meet the workshop participants at the boundary fence to play instruments or sing together. Many nursery rhymes or songs transcend generations and could be equally enjoyed by the children and the older workshop participants. For people living with dementia, childhood memories are often easier to recall and nursery rhymes provide an opportunity to do this.

There is also an opportunity to organise simultaneous art-based activities for the children and workshop participants to enjoy together and even have displayed in children's journals, preschool noticeboards, within the garden (such as a string of friendship flags painted by both the children and the participants), or swapped and taken home by everyone.

From a horticultural perspective, joint activities could include shared gardening experiences between the children and workshop participants under the supervision of educators and the workshop therapist in the kitchen garden. In addition to offering benefits to the workshop participants, the children's inclusion in the kitchen garden would garner a broader intergenerational community interest in the space. If the logistics of this are too difficult to manage, then other ideas include having workshop participants raise seeds for the children's school vegetable patch, or the inclusion of a shared garden bed along the adjoining fence line where sunflowers could be grown on either side to signify friendship and intergenerational connection.



# CONCLUSIONS

The benefits of hosting dementia-based therapy workshops in a garden setting include the physical benefits that come from being outdoors and sensory experiences that promote health and wellbeing.

Emotional and psychological benefits were also reported in terms of feeling calmer, happier and more rested after attending a workshop within the garden. The workshops themselves provided an opportunity to connect with previous skills, hobbies and interests and many felt their attendance improved the relationships between the carer and person living with dementia.

Participants also appreciated the opportunity to congregate and socialise with others living similar lives, as well as the opportunity feel connected to the broader community through spontaneous interactions or the workshops proximity to other public spaces. The opportunity could exist to invite more dementia specialists to host workshops within the garden to allow people living with dementia and those who care for them to access services that could assist them in other aspects of their lives.

Not only did the location of the workshops enable a greater connection to nature for the participants, but they also noted that the naturalistic setting of the garden dissipated the feeling that the workshop was clinical in nature and enabled people to simply enjoy their time with others, doing interesting activities outdoors together. A simple pleasure not lost on the participants and demonstrated by the strong repetitive participation of core group of participants. Ideas for how the workshops could further exploit these clear benefits and appreciated features pivot in the idea of expanding the physical set up of the workshops further into the garden setting and finessing the program to consider more meaningful contributions the participants can make in the space or more deliberate social interactions with others.

With this new insight and understanding into the impact of gardening and greenspaces within the context of dementia therapies, it is hoped the findings within this report will inspire and allow others to consider the ways they can enhance the incorporation of nature or situate dementia therapies in public greenspaces for a greater sense of social connection, wellbeing and belonging.

This isn't suggested without acknowledging that adequate funding and staffing are required to maintain dementia therapy programs of this nature.

Funding is necessary to cover the expenses associated with workshops including staff time, paying workshop facilitators and the cost of refreshments and other resources or equipment.

Ideally workshops of this nature would be funded on a continuing basis to ensure they occur frequently and consistently. Doing so would provide participants with regular support and access to dementia expert advice, a connection to local support services and increased opportunities to meet and build sustained social connections with others living with dementia and their carers. Funding for additional infrastructure such as safe and accessible garden spaces across more LGAs would allow workshops to occur in more locations, reaching a greater number of participants. Doing so would enable those who attend to participate in a meaningful activity within their own local public greenspaces/ communities where social connections and access to support services can be made more easily both within, and outside of organised workshops.

The findings within this report make a strong case that funding of dementia based therapies within public greenspaces, such as the one within this project would result in real and lasting benefits for people living with dementia and their carers.



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# SURVEY QUESTIONS

#### 1. Who is completing this survey?

- The carer of a person living with dementia
- A person with dementia
- We are completing this survey together

#### 2. What activities do you generally enjoy together in public greenspaces (such as a park or public garden)? Tick all that apply.

- Walking
- Active participation in recreational activities (chess, dancing, exercise, gardening etc.)
- Bird or nature watching
- Sitting on a park bench or picnic bench set in a public greenspace
- Enjoying something to eat or a picnic (takeaway food, at a café set in a public greenspace, a coffee)
- Meeting friends or family on planned catch ups
- Meditation or mindfulness
- Observing and listening to others in the space (children playing, laughter, listening to live music, people watching etc.)
- Other. Please state...

#### 3. What sensory experiences do you enjoy in public greenspaces? (Tick all that apply)

- Watching people
- Observing nature
- Getting some fresh air
- Enjoy being in a bigger space and seeing the sky or cloud-gazing or bigger horizons
- The opportunity to bask in sunshine

- The opportunity to bask in sunshine
- Enjoying the elements of the weather
- Enjoy hearing positive sounds around me/us (children playing, laughter, music, bird sounds)
- Opportunity to listen to nature such as bird calls, sounds of the wind in trees, sounds of insects etc.
- Opportunity to touch natural surfaces (such as plants, foliage, flowers, insects, water)
- Enjoying the smells found in nature (foliage, smell of rain etc)
- Enjoying the various temperatures/ climate of being outside
- Other. Please state...

#### 4. Please rate how you FEEL when after visiting a public greenspace

Being outside broadens my horizon and encourages me to see things more positively				
This is true for me	I'm not sure	This isn't true for me at all		
I feel calmer after visiting a public greenspace				
This is true for me	I'm not sure	This isn't true for me at all		
I feel more rested after time spent outdoors				
This is true for me	I'm not sure	This isn't true for me at all		
I feel more connected to the outside world after visiting a public greenspace				
This is true for me	l'm not sure	This isn't true for me at all		
I feel more visible in society after visiting a public greenspace				
This is true for me	I'm not sure	This isn't true for me at all		
I feel more socially connected after visiting a public greenspace				
This is true for me	I'm not sure	This isn't true for me at all		

ly

<sup>–</sup> I feel happier for being outdoors after visiting a public greenspace				
This is true for me	I'm not sure	This isn't true for me at all		
It gives me access to nature I don't have a home				
This is true for me	I'm not sure	This isn't true for me at all		
I'm reminded of other things not in my day-to-day life				
This is true for me	I'm not sure	This isn't true for me at all		
I'm reminded of the beauty in nature				
This is true for me	I'm not sure	This isn't true for me at all		

## 5. What benefits do you think there are from being in a natural setting such as a public greenspace? Tick all that apply.

- Physical benefits that come with navigating greenspaces (different terrain and risks)
   Chance to demonstrate capabilities and independence
- Exhibition of previous skills/ hobbies/ passions/ interests
- Visibility within the community that people with dementia access the spaces
- Opportunity to congregate and socialise

<sup>-</sup>I/we get that "grounded" feeling that comes from spending time in nature other. Please state...

### 6. What is the biggest influence on a person living with dementia's access to community greenspaces? Please rate from most important (1) to least (10).

- Reassurance of personal physical safety
- Having a carer to accompany the person
- Access to support services to facilitate safe participation
- Appropriate access to close transport or proximity of parking.
   Dementia friendly layout, accessible and safe paths and planting.

- - Opportunity to participate in something meaningful
- Reception of others (friendliness/ welcome)
- Opportunity to interact meaningfully with nature (passively or actively)
- Specific activity to be involved in (such as a workshop or program)
- Appropriate amenities such as somewhere to sit, bathroom facilities, provision of refreshments, privacy.
- Other. Please state...

#### 7. What barriers do you think inhibit your enjoyment or access to public greenspaces?

- Concern for physical safety/ risk of being in nature
- We both don't enjoy being outdoors
- Lack of regular structured activities to do in greenspaces (other than the

#### programming

at 5 Senses Garden)

- Lack of access to regular sensory experiences in nature
- Concerns for how interactions with others in a natural setting may go
- Lack of transport or other infrastructure (appropriate seating or shelter)
- Inconsistent weather makes it difficult to plan
- Concerns about moving safely within the community
- Not enough opportunity to access nature independently
- Other reasons. Please state...

8. Do you think hosting dementia therapies in public greenspaces results in a more meaningful engagement in the community? If so, please describe how.

### -9. Do you think the dementia therapies helped you engage in the garden in a more meaningful way (that you wouldn't have got from visiting in your own time)?

If so, please describe how.

## 10. Would you have come to the garden if it wasn't for the dementia-therapy programs on offer? Tick all that apply.

- Yes, we visit the garden in our own time anyway
- Yes, but for other workshops held here
- No, we only came for the dementia-based therapies

### 11. What impact do you think the dementia therapy sessions in the garden had on your relationship together?

- It brought us closer to each other
- It made us appreciate each other more
- It allowed us to enjoy each-other's company,
- It was a nice escape from our usual activities together
- It was good to have a change of scenery
- It allowed us to talk to others who share similar experiences
- Other. Please share...

# 12. Write a number between 1 (no impact) and 5 (significant impact) next to each item indicating the impact the dementia therapy had on the carers. Leave unmarked if not relevant.

- Reduced agitation
  - -Improved sense of wellbeing
- Improved connection with others
- Feeling refreshed
- Better quality of sleep

- Improved mood
- Improved relationship between carer and person living with dementia
- Reduced aggression
  - <sup>-</sup>Other increased opportunities to access community (did you go elsewhere as a result of already being out and about)
- Likelihood to come back to the garden for another visit (outside of program time)
   Increased likelihood to connect with other nature-based therapies
- Increased likelihood to connect with other carers and or person living with dementia

# 13. Write a number between 1 (no impact) and 5 (significant impact) next to each item indicating the impact the dementia therapy had on the person living with dementia. Leave unmarked if not relevant.

- Reduced agitation
- Improved sense of wellbeing
- Improved connection with others
- Feeling refreshed
- Better quality of sleep
- Improved mood
  - <sup>-</sup>Improved relationship between carer and person living with dementia
- Reduced aggression
- Other increased opportunities to access community (did you go elsewhere as a result of already being out and about)
- Likelihood to come back to the garden for another visit (outside of program time)
- Increased likelihood to connect with other nature-based therapies
   Increased likelihood to connect with other carers and or person living with dementia

### 14. Would you say your experiences in the dementia-therapy sessions were enhanced further by being set in a natural outdoor setting like the garden?

- Yes. If so, how.

- No. If you think i	t detracted from the experier	nce, please describe.		
- Unsure	the greenspace and access	s to nature was utilised in the program?		
15. How do you think	The greenspace and access	s to nature was utilised in the program:		
<b>16. Having experienced these nature-based dementia therapies how likely would you</b> : Participate in another nature-based dementia-related activity				
Very likely	I'm not sure	Unlikely		
Visit a garden or greenspace in your own time				
Very likely	I'm not sure	Unlikely		
Organise your own gathering or outing in a public greenspace with people living with				
dementia and their ca	irers.			
Very likely	I'm not sure	Unlikely		
These dementia-based therapy programs were impacted by public health guidelines				

relating to congregating and social distancing. Three last questions about the impacts of COVID on your access to greenspaces in 2020 and beyond.

17. Please tell us in what other ways your access to greenspaces were impacted during the lockdown.

**18**. Please tell us the impact this had on your wellbeing and social connections.

19. How has the new normal of social distancing or health precautions continued to impact your access to greenspaces and its impact on your wellbeing and social connections?

END SURVEY.

