A COMMUNITY GARDEN MANIFESTO

by

Newcastle Community Garden Project, 2010

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to A Community Garden Manifesto!

This Manifesto is the result of a collaborative research project with community gardeners in Newcastle (Australia).

Over two Fridays in May 2010, 22 community gardeners from eight operating community gardens (and three community gardens-to-be), piled onto a bus and visited each other's gardens.

At each garden there was lots of discussion (and laughing and reflecting) which was audio-recorded and later transcribed. This Manifesto is a compilation of the discussion organised into the themes that emerged over the two days.

Rather than focusing on how the gardens got started (as there's lots of good advice on the internet about starting community gardens), the discussion focused on how each garden operates and the sorts of things that can happen to community gardens once they're up and running. So think of this Manifesto as a guide to running a community garden.

The themes are organised in no particular order (we've assumed that readers will dip in and out of the Manifesto according to their own needs and interests).

The Manifesto is also a written version of some stories that are on the Newcastle Community Gardens PlaceStories website, see http://ps3beta.com/project/7733. On this website you'll also find stories of each participating community garden (or there's a written version, A Community Garden Manifesto: The Contributing Gardens). Even though we're all in the same town, the community gardens are different from each other. Each has its own personality. And the project has only involved eight of the twenty-three (at last count) community gardens in the Newcastle area!

You can find out more about the project on pages 31-32 ("The Newcastle Community Garden Project" story). If you're really interested, one publication based on the project is:

Jenny Cameron, Craig Manhood & Jamie Pomfrett, 2010, 'Growing the Community of Community Gardens: Research Contributions', In B. Turner, J. Henryks & D. Pearson (Eds), *Community Garden Conference: Promoting sustainability, health and inclusion in the city, 7-8.October 2010, proceedings, pages 116-129*. Available at http://www.canberra.edu.au/communitygardens/conference-proceedings.

And there's more; just contact Jenny.Cameron@newcastle.edu.au

THE POLITICS OF COMMUNITY GARDENING

"We're changing the world!"

What is community gardening all about? Is it just a bunch of local people getting together and doing a bit of gardening? Or is there something more to community gardening?

Bill Robertson
I think that in community gardens we are all trying to chip away at changing the way we live. We can turn things around and we can educate our kids and get them connected through community gardens and then there'll be twenty or thirty or forty times the number of people involved in ten, or fifteen or twenty years time.

"Planting a seed is a political act"

Every action we take like planting a seed is a political act. We're changing the world! Community gardening is a movement. Because in a way we are promoting community gardening, we are trying to spread the word, if you like, of community gardening. I think of us as like a Church of Ordinary People which makes a nice little acronym—coop or co-op.

This is such a material culture that we live in. It's interesting how your value system changes when you get into something like community gardening. You get so excited over a load of dirt. "Dirt! Yes! Scraps! Oh my god, that's fantastic!"

When you buy food in the supermarket, you can buy it cheaply but you don't know how old it is, you don't know what pesticides have been used on it. So community gardens are also like primary health care.

Jodie Kell
I agree that the food aspect of community gardens is really important. Community gardens are teaching us a different way to eat.

Over the summer I didn't buy vegetables. We've got a little patch in our yard, and then with this supplement at the community garden where you can grow big lots of basil, or the zucchini at the community garden were outrageous. That's the thing about cooking to what you grow. We ate a lot of tabouleh and zucchini pie! And, oh the eggplants! My neighbour is Italian and she's not involved in the community garden but I've taken the eggplants to her and she's taught me all different ways to cook them.

Primary health care through community gardens

It's also teaching us about grazing, you know, you walk around the community garden and have a bit of basil, a few snow peas, a few herbs, a passionfruit. It's great to just pick and eat. So I think community gardens are about different ways of relating to food.

Chris Everingham
That's right. There is a tremendous amount of waste with food so what our community gardens are creating a different attitude to food and as Bill says in our material culture, that's a political act.

Community Gardeners:
Bill Robertson
Fig Tree Community Garden
Jodie Kell,
Silsoe Street Community Garden
Chris Everingham,
Sandhills Community Garden

Story compiled by Jenny Cameron

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Different ways of relating to food

"YOU THINK YOU'RE BUILDING A GARDEN …

… you're really building a community"

One of the sayings you hear about community gardening is that "You think you're building a garden, but you're really building a community."

Meryl Dunton-Rose
For me, the biggest thing about Tighes Hill Community Garden has been the community development. It's been great to see who is in the neighbourhood, and the new people that come and join in. We had no idea who lived in this area. But we have met so many people since we have started this.

And we have a book club that's come out it, kids playgroups that have come out of it, people who are on their own now have a place to come and be with other people. The community development has just been huge. There is no hub for people in Tighes hill, but we envision the community garden being the social hub for people in the area.

Anne Rooke-Frizell
We found the same thing at Villiers Street when we were there. We were a local level garden, and it was fantastic for the street. You know people would come down the street with a wheelbarrow full of stuff for working in the garden, and they would have a chat with each other, and look out for each other. A few people in the street live on their own and they've told me they feel much safer as a result of the garden being here. The safety aspect is a real bonus.

Nellie Hobley
That's exactly the same at Silsoe Street. Jenny is in the community garden and she lives across the road, when she goes away, we go over and water her garden; and we have chooks and so when we go away we get Jenny or Jodie to come over and look after the chooks, or when Jodie went away we looked after her dog for a week, and another neighbour across the road (who is also in the garden) we've looked after their cat and they've also looked after our chooks. So it's really good to have that community where you can say—even if you just go away for a day or two—you can say "Look, I'm going away, can you keep an eye on the place."

Transforming neighbour-hoods

Jodie Kell

I had just moved here, and I didn't know anyone in the neighbourhood before coming over to Silsoe Street Community Garden. And in the street there's probably 8 or 9 households who come and use the garden. And sure I might have said "Hi, how are you to a neighbour walking past", but now some close friendships have started because of the garden. It's really transformed my neighbourhood.

Chris Everingham

Like Jodie, I was relatively new to the area when I started at Sandhills Community Garden, so the garden has been a great place to meet new people and feel part of the community and so much more connected. It's been a great experience, I've just loved it.

Community Gardeners:

Meryl Dunton-Rose
Tighes Hill Community Garden
Anne Rooke-Frizell
Church Street Community Garden &
Villiers Street Community Garden
Nellie Hobley & Jodie Kell,
Silsoe Street Community Garden
Chris Everingham,
Sandhills Community Garden

Story compiled by Jenny Cameron.

KIDS IN THE GARDENS

Working, playing, eating, relating

Community gardens would have to be made for kids (big and small).

Jodie Kell
The kids at Silsoe Street Community Garden have a great time. When the kids come to the working bees they plant, they get into finding worms, they pick things, they eat things, and then they start racing around and playing together. At one working bee we dug out an area of the garden and it became an archaeological exploration. My son is nine and he still has the treasures he found, little glass bottles and so on from 1942.

We have a cute story of a little boy who came along—it was his first time—and because we didn't know what we were doing we had grown all these paddy melons; and this little boy is called Paddy, and he collected all the paddy melons, there must have been 50 of them, and now he feels like this is his community garden because this is where his paddy melons are grown.

The nice thing is that at the working bees the kids don't just stick with their parents, the kids end up going and working with different adults, so you got relationships being built between children and other adults who aren't their parents

Bill Robertson
Kids have been a really big part of Fig Tree Community Garden. Kids have been involved from the very start over at Morrow Park right through to every second Friday in the month when we have a community kitchen event where we make homemade pizzas and the kids are involved in the making of the pizza.

And I know with my son, he's just gained so much. He's eleven and he knows so much about gardening. And I think there are so many families like that where the children have grown up here and know about gardening.

And as Jodie says, it's funny with the kids, as they develop relationships with people along the way. When my son asks me a question about the garden I just say "Go and see Craig." And they have built up this really good relationship.

Kristy Lee Grainger
That's the experience I have with kids at Fig Tree as well. And there was this one boy and he would come here with one school group and now he has gone off to another school so now we don't see him as much but he still calls by a bit, and the other day he called in and he was telling me about what he is doing now and he says "Life's going real great for me now." And he's thirteen or something. That sort of connection with the kids has been really good. They feel like they've got a safe and comfortable space to come to whether they are gardening or just connecting and being mentored by the people who are here.

Community Gardeners:
Jodie Kell
Silsoe Street Community Garden
Bill Robertson, Craig Manhood, Kristy Lee Grainger
Fig Tree Community Garden

Story compiled by Jenny Cameron.

"WHO'S IN CHARGE?"

People? Plants?

An interesting question is to ask a community garden, "Who's in charge?"

Chris Everingham
Well, for the moment, I'm the person who's at the centre of all the activity that goes on at Sandhills, and I'm pulling it all together. But then it might change. Someone else might come along and they will have different ways of running things.

"It's all very organic"

Bill Robertson
That's similar to how things are at Fig Tree Community Garden. I don't think there is anyone who feels like they own Fig Tree, we always try to keep an open door so people can make of it what they will. None of us are so attached that we think things have to be done a certain way.

The paradoxes of community gardening

We really encourage people to make mistakes. So with the pizza oven for example, we learnt to use it by making mistakes.

At times we've had all these grand plans about what we could do, but in the end we worked out that this wasn't the answer. We really need to let the garden direct us in which way to go. It's all very organic; "whatever will be, will be." When we do those big plans, it doesn't really work out the way we would want it to.

Craig Manhood
I agree that you have to work with the garden. One of my favourite stories is about our compost system. At one point it went a bit pear-shaped because the rats started to have a party with it. We could have gone two ways: we could have tried to make it rat proof, or we could have made it very open. We cleared everything away so there was no space around it and we took the lids off it so that any rats that came in were exposed to predators. Kristy has a photo of a kookaburra with a rat in its mouth and I've seen owls around. I love the paradox—if you don't cover the worm farm, you get less rats. It's the same as the fence—if you don't fence the garden, you get less vandalism.

I'd also say that there is nothing static about a community garden, they're always changing. I think a garden belongs to whoever is in it at the time. A garden is a moment. That's all.

Community Gardeners:
Chris Everingham,
Sandhills Community Garden
Bill Robertson & Craig Manhood
Fig Tree Community Garden

Story compiled by Jenny Cameron

MANAGING COMMUNITY GARDENS

Finding the right approach

One challenge for community gardens can be finding the right management approach.

Bill Robertson

We really try to keep things low key at Fig Tree Community Garden, and we deliberatively try to un-bureaucratise the garden as much as we possibly can. For our annual meeting we just take the "m" off so it's our annual general eating, and people come together to share food and talk. We are an incorporated association so we do have that "election for position thing" but we try to share it around as much as possible. We've got a couple of presidents, rather than having one person. We have a couple of roles like that.

Keeping it low key

An Annual General Eating!

The committee meetings are held usually once a month just before our pizza oven, community kitchen dinners, usually with a drink and a conversation and we end up with something written on the blackboard but very rarely are any detailed minutes taken.

There's also a whole load of people who wander in and contribute and everyone's on as equal terms as they can possibly be.

Some people don't like our approach. We have had people who want to get involved in the garden but when they see the lack of structure it doesn't suit them and they move on.

Anne Rooke-Frizell

At Church Street Community Garden we really try to communicate with everyone involved. I think it's important to be accountable to the group that you're working with. I don't put out minutes, but I always put out notes to try to keep people informed, and the notes are short. Half an A4 page is more than enough for people to read. You've always got to remember who you're community is and how you can best communicate with them and how to leave the channels as open as possible.

Getting the tone right

Nellie Hobley
Well, we try to keep things ticking over without us having to do too much. We've had one committee meeting this year, and we'll probably have another one soon—mainly because there's a new coffee shop around the corner and we want to go there for lunch! As Annie says it's important to keep people informed about what's going on, and we've really learned from Fig Tree Community Garden because Craig and Jo put out this great little email that's very quirky, and we think that's just the right sort of tone for community gardens

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Anne Rooke-Frizell
Church Street Community Garden &
Villiers Street Community Garden
Nellie Hobley
Silsoe Street Community Garden

Story compiled by Jenny Cameron.

KEEPING THINGS TICKING OVER

(Especially when you want to keep it "low key")

One characteristic of many community gardens is that they're pretty low key. But one challenge of being low key is to keep things ticking over.

Chris Everingham

We're trying to organise Sandhills Community Garden so people can come down whenever they want to—so they can use the garden like their own garden. I'm down here most afternoons, or someone's down here. And there's a working bee every month. We've found that nobody wants rosters, nobody wants that obligation. We don't want all this formal stuff, so the more informal the better. But then that makes the responsibility mine, in the end.

Regular working bees

So to shift that a bit we are trying things out. For example, with the composting, I've got a sign up now on how people can help with the compost by doing things like cutting things up small, putting in grass clippings, and now I've put a container of sugar cane mulch so people can add that and layer it. As a result people are learning about composting.

To roster or not to roster?

Nellie Hobley

At Silsoe Street, we're a small community garden and we decided to keep it this way. For us, with the group that we've got and the size of the garden we manage fine with a two hour working been every month. This means that weeds and other things don't get out of control and it doesn't feel like "Oh the garden's a mess and we've got to come down and do something about it." It's all really manageable just doing the two hours a month. And we could fit in more garden beds, but then it might not feel so manageable. And because we're unfenced people do wander in at other times and do a bit of weeding or planting or whatever they like.

And we have rosters. Over the summer we have a weekly watering roster and a fortnightly mowing roster. And we just get people to sign up to the roster at the monthly working bee and everyone seems to share work around that way.

Hints!

Working with people's energy levels

Meryl Dunton-Rose
At Tighes Hill Community Garden people have really taken to being on the chook roster, it a fun thing that people enjoy doing.

Bill Robertson
At Fig Tree Community Garden we've also got a chicken roster. The idea is to feed the chickens, clean the coop, and while you're down at the garden plant a few seeds, and do a bit of harvesting, or a bit of weeding or watering. And Kristy has worked on putting up signs like "Water Me". Just a few little hints left around the place so that if you are wandering in once a week or once a month you've got some idea about where you might start.

Kristy Lee Grainger
Fig Tree is such a large site we found that when people came in they weren't entirely sure what to do. So the watering signs really help, especially if there are seedlings. If people are just looking at a bare patch of ground they don't put together that there might be seeds in there that need watering. And the "Pick Me" ones are relatively recent.

Anne Rooke-Frizell
Yeah. I really like what Nellie said about Silsoe Street and not putting pressure on the community to have to put a lot of time into the garden. At Church Street Community Garden we are really trying to develop according to the energy levels that people have. It is really important to nurture the community that we have—and the plants that we have.

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Sandhills Community Garden
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Bill Robertson
Fig Tree Community Garden
Kristy Lee Grainger
Fig Tree Community Garden
Anne Rooke-Frizell
Church Street Community Garden &
Villiers Street Community Garden

Story compiled by Jenny Cameron.

"PUTTING IT OUT THERE"

Making Things Happen

When community gardeners talk about how things happen—how ideas get turned into action—phrases like "putting it out there" reoccur.

"We put the idea out there"

Chris Everingham

What happens at Sandhills Community Garden is that somebody comes up with an idea. They might talk to me about it or they might talk to one of the people they know on the committee about it. And then we put the idea out there, and when we are gardening together we talk about it. And it just develops from there.

Here's an example. One of the ideas that has been out there for a few years is the idea of a platform around the tree and to get a space under the platform where kids can make cubbyhouses and that sort of thing. Now that idea's been out there for as long as I have been involved. And we haven't found anywhere for it to go because there are council regulations. So the idea's still out there. It never really goes away. And one day things will fall into place and we'll act on the idea. It's like this idea for a water tank idea. We've put the idea out there and now we are all talking about it. So we do all the talking about it before we approach anyone.

Craig Manhood

At Fig Tree Community Garden we also put ideas out there. The bees are a good example. We put it out there, "Wouldn't it be good to have bee hives." And then one day this man walked in here. His name was Ted Flowers, and he's the president of Newcastle Bee Club, and he said he had these hives which are used to monitor for pests and diseases that could come into the country and could destroy Australia's honey bees. So he put the hives here, and they take samples from the hives every three months and send them to CSIRO for testing. And these hives are stationed at every large port around Australia, and these are the 2 hives for Newcastle—the biggest coal port in the world—and they're here at Fig Tree.

"It's just magic ... put it out there, and it happens"

It's just magic. We put it out there, and it happens!

We were short on a book keeper and Jo just walked in one day. It was her first time at the garden and I wanted to make her feel welcome." And we talked and talked and talked, and then finally I said "So what do you do?" and she said "Well I was a book keeper." And that happens quite often. You just put it out there and it happens, people just turn up.

Nola Christie

That's what happens at Tighes Hill Community Garden. For example, when we started there was only concrete. There was no soil for a garden. So I put out that we needed soil and then that huge dust storm came and the dust was just everywhere. Someone said to me "Next time, just say 'I want the soil in this spot'."

Community Gardeners:

Chris Everingham,
Sandhills Community Garden
Craig Manhood
Fig Tree Community Garden
Nola Christie
Tighes Hill Community Garden

Story compiled by Jenny Cameron.

GETTING AROUND WHAT YOU CAN'T SHIFT

"Ask for forgiveness not permission"

Sometimes all sorts of barriers are put up that can stop community gardens from doing various gardening activities—it might be unsafe, people in the area might not like it, it might smell. Sometimes, however, community gardeners just go ahead and "do it."

Craig Manhood

Sometimes it's better to ask for forgiveness rather than permission. And because it's a garden, if it really is a big issue you can always change things or move things

"You can always change things or move things"

Jodie Kell

We have lots of little kids at Silsoe Street Community Garden, and we don't want them running onto the road, but we didn't really want a fence either, not even a low one, because it can seem like a barrier. We want the garden to be as open to the street as possible. So we have put in lots of low planting under the trees at the front and we're extending that with some lovely Brazilian cherries that are in a nice, curved semicircle. Now some people might call what we've done a hedge, but because that can trigger concerns (you know, people might be lurking behind the hedge) we call it our fairy ring. So we always joke that we don't have a hedge, we have a fairy ring.

We did go ahead and put in compost bays as well, and we put these right against the back fence. But we later moved them because Council was concerned that the neighbours at the back might not like it.

Chris Everyingham

At Sandhills Community Garden we just went ahead with a compost system. We put one bin in to start with, and we used a tumbleweed, because of issues with rats and so on, and nobody said anything. And then people started using it. People we didn't even know started using it. And then we put another one in. And that one started filling up really quickly. And nobody said anything. And then we put a third one in. And then at that stage, Council put a lock on the gate so we couldn't get in, because there were worried about people falling down the embank-ment—you know, occupational health and safety concerns. And I said "Look we can't have a community garden without compost." And they said, "You'll have to find somewhere else". And I said "There isn't

somewhere else. It's been going for two years and no-one's complained and no-one has fallen down. And more and more people are using it all the time." And they didn't say anything but two days later the lock was gone!

So I'd go along with Craig, and say "ask for forgiveness not permission".

Community Gardeners:
Craig Manhood
Fig Tree Community Garden
Jodie Kell
Silsoe Street Community Garden
Chris Everingham
Sandhills Community Garden

Story compiled by Jenny Cameron.

GIVE AND TAKE

Cultivating an ethic of generosity

What happens to the produce in community gardens? How much gets taken by people who aren't the growers? And what about when gardens aren't fenced? Isn't that a problem?

Jodie Kell
We've had a lot of respect from people. Silsoe Street Community Garden is unfenced and we haven't had any vandalism. I think that's common to all the community gardens in Newcastle. People seem to just understand that these are places to be respected.

Encouraging people to do more taking

In fact, we have almost the opposite, where people don't take enough produce. We try to write on the blackboard at the front so people know what can be taken.

Meryl Dunton-Rose
At Tighes Hill Community Garden we also have the problem that people don't take stuff. I think there is a feeling that "Oh, we better might not take this because someone else might want it." But then we have stuff that is left-over and sometimes we have ended up throwing things into the compost

I think as people get more involved in the garden, it is something that they will learn about. And that's where the signs at Fig Tree Community Garden are so good—"Pick me" ; "Keep for seed" and so on.

Bill Robertson
You're right. The signs really help people know what's ready for taking and what needs more time to grow or ripen.

At times at Fig Tree Community Garden we have had people taking more than they might need. We had one instance where we found one person taking lots of pumpkins and selling them. But you know, "So what. They probably really needed to do that."

It balances out

Alan Wallington
At Ernie Hughes Memorial Community Gardens we say that you should allow for about 10% of your produce to go missing. And if you consider that most of us grow more than we can eat anyway then it evens out. And if people take things that introduces them to vegetables, doesn't it?

Chris Everingham
At Sandhills Community Garden, we lose a plant or two. But for every plant that we lose, people give us things. You do feel pretty bad when something gets taken, but you just have to say "It doesn't' matter. It's not that important." And as I've said before community gardens are all about cultivating this attitude of generosity. It's an ethic of generosity.

C**ommunity Gardeners:**
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Tighes Hill Community Garden
Bill Robertson
Fig Tree Community Garden
Alan Wallington
Ernie Hughes Memorial Community Gardens
Chris Everingham,
Sandhills Community Garden

Story compiled by Jenny Cameron.

ENCOURAGING DIFFERENT GROUPS

Community gardens generally try really hard to connect with different groups of people.

Chris Everingham
At Sandhills Community Garden we try to have that ethic of including as many different groups of people as we can. So the garden is wheelchair friendly. We have a little picnic table down one end—it took us eight months to get the table, but now people can come down here and have little picnics. And a group of visually impaired people come down here and they bring their guide dogs. We have a sensory garden because we want to include visually impaired people so there's different mints and herbs and hopefully the lemon myrtle will grow.

Companion planting—making people into companions

Bill Robertson
One of our mottos at Fig Tree Community Garden is "Grow with Others." So it's deliberatively got that double meaning. It's about the fact that you garden with others and you also become more whole people together. There are so many different people that are drawn here and that connect with the place. For example, the chess board was built by a men's group from a Newcastle family support service, and a TAFE outreach group ran some workshops on how to build a pizza oven so they built the pizza oven. Some of the people were corrective services drug offenders and so it's a good story because you have all these young men who had spent a bit of time in jail for things like selling drugs, and then you have all these older gardeners that they're working with in the garden. One of these older gardeners was an ex-cop as it turned out, but throughout the process you had these really good bounds that were formed.

It's like companion planting. There's companion stuff that goes on here between people. On a Friday night there might be the pizza oven going, and you could have the Croatian guys playing Bocce right next to the oven, and a group of community people at the pizza oven and the bowlers playing bowls and then a punk band on inside the Croatian Sports Club next door, and so on and so on. So there are all different groups that connect with each other.

Community Gardeners:
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Sandhills Community Garden
Bill Robertson
Fig Tree Community Garden

Story compiled by Jenny Cameron.

CONFLICT IN COMMUNITY GARDENS

"In community gardens you do a lot of smiling"

It's inevitable that there will be tension and even conflict in community gardens because you're working with other people.

So how do community gardens manage conflict?

Alan Wallington

At Ernie Hughes Memorial Community Gardens, we have just three rules:

Three simple rules

Respect your fellow gardeners

Respect the neighbourhood

Respect the environment.

I think that any dispute will come under one of those three rules. So you don't have too many rules as that will frighten people off, but you do need some rules so there's a way of dealing with problems.

Chris Everingham

When we started at Sandhills Community Garden we didn't have any rules or a constitution or anything like that, mainly because we didn't know how things were going to turn out and how the garden would develop. Then we had one person involved who basically wanted to run this like a guerrilla garden and to ignore council—even though we're on council land. And they really wanted to ignore the other gardeners. We came down one morning and a whole garden bed had been dug out without talking to anyone about it. And we just thought "Aaagh! We are just going to have to find a way of sorting this out." So we called a public meeting, but before the public meeting we figured out how it should work and what we are on about. So we wrote that down and distributed that to everybody and then when we had a public meeting and accepted this as our constitution. And the constitution basically says:

- this is a community garden that we share;
- it's on public land;
- we have to work under the supervision of the council;
- we share the park and we have to consider all users of the park in whatever we do;
- anyone has an opportunity to put a project forward; and that if there is any conflict about it, it has got to come back to the committee and it has to be a majority decision.

Ways to work companionably

Nellie Hobley & Jodie Kell
At Silsoe Street Community Garden we work on a collective model where everyone shares everything. As a result, sometimes there are tensions when people have different ideas. People might have different ideas about what should be done next, what plants should be planted together or what to do with the onion weed. But I think people all know that in the scheme of things it's really not that big an issue. And we remember one working bee when someone was keen to work on the weeds in one part of the garden in a particular way, and a few people were happy to get in and lend a hand; but a few other people just quietly wandered away to another part of the garden to do some work over there. Nothing was said, nothing needed to be said. We could work companionably in our own way.

"You do a lot of smiling"

Craig Manhood
That sort of thing happens with us at Fig Tree Community Garden. For example, people across the road, they are connected and they will come in and a few of them will just want to tell you what you are doing wrong, which is fine, and you've just got to smile. I think in community gardening you do a lot of smiling because as Nellie and Jodie say "Nothing is that big an issue".

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Craig Manhood
Fig Tree Community Garden

Story compiled by Jenny Cameron.

RESOURCING COMMUNITY GARDENS

Using different approaches

The community gardens in Newcastle come in all shapes and sizes. This means that there are different strategies for resourcing the community gardens.

Some gardens use community grant funding from agencies such as Newcastle City Council or Hunter Water.

Others have developed small commercial activities.

Others incorporate donations.

And one has developed a novel form of self-funding.

Nellie Hobley & Jodie Kell
At Silsoe Street Community Garden we got a Community Grant from Newcastle City Council for 2009, and we used the money to establish the garden—for things like building the garden beds, buying soil and putting in an irrigation system. But we decided not to put another community grant in 2010, because we really didn't need any money, especially since we've started to get more organised with our compost bays.

Bill Robertson
The grants we get at Fig Tree Community Garden enable us to pay a small wage to people and then in turn we can give services to other groups for free. This means we can put some time into hosting different groups, whether its seniors or adolescents or kindergarten groups. At Fig Tree there is a range of different groups constantly using the garden and they can do this for free. But we do need to think about how we can get some money so that people can make more of a wage, more of a living, from the garden.

Kristy Lee Grainger
One thing we do is to grow herbs that we sell at about 6 restaurants, so we raise a bit of money for the garden through those sales

Linda Sherbon
We've started doing the same thing at March Street Community Garden. We've don't have any grant funding, so for the past 12 months or so we've been growing herbs and we sell them every Saturday morning when council sells all the native plants. And we've also been doing this at school fairs and church fairs.

Nellie Hobley & Jodie Kell
At Silsoe Street we also get donations. A lot of the plants have been donated. One of our gardeners has a friend at a local nursery and they have been great as they donate their stock that is bit old. Most of the fruit trees have been donated. For the small plants, people just come along to the monthly working bees with seeds and seedlings

Kristy Lee Grainger
At Fig Tree Community Garden we have had other sorts of things donated—actually swapped would be the more precise term. There's a beautiful mural on the chook dome. I had a friend visiting from Ireland and I was getting a new car and I had my old car and I wanted to give it to her and she wanted to do something for me in return. So she came up with the idea for the mural.

And then there's things like the sculptures. There was a local artist, Tom Ireland, who donated one of them. It just happens because of the people's good will

The same $140 goes round and round and round

Nola Christie
Because we're a guerrilla garden at Tighes Hill, we just keep within the community limits and develop off people's donations.

For example, when we were starting out and there was only concrete here, we put the word out to the community that we needed soil. A neighbour down the road was putting in a new pool, and I found in the paper someone else who was putting in a new pool and between those two sources we got eight truckloads of soil. It took a couple of months of us wheel barrowing the soil around. Eventually someone said, "Let's just put the hat around and raise money to get a bobcat in." So we did that and collected $157. We found a bob cat driver who charged us $140 for two hours, and then he donated three hours extra. We then used the left-over money to buy watering cans and things like that. That has been the only money we have raised so far.

Nellie Hobley & Jodie Kell
We really agree with that sort of approach. Sometimes you can spend all the time trying to get funding, but really for a small community garden you just need the bare minimum to get along and then you can spend most of the time actually in the garden.

Alan Wallington
At Ernie Hughes Memorial Community Gardens we have a great relationship with the Diggers Club. They pay for our water and some insurance. We have individual allotments and I built the first garden bed for $140, and anytime someone joins they pay $140 for a garden bed (and they get it ready to plant with the timber surrounds and the soil). And every time another $140 comes in I build another garden bed ready. So it's the same $140 going round and round and round and round and round.

Community Gardeners:
Nellie Hobley & Jodie Kell
Silsoe Street Community Garden
Bill Robertson & Kristy Lee Grainger
Fig Tree Community Garden
Linda Sherbon
March Street Community Garden
Nola Christie
Tighes Hill Community Garden
Alan Wallington
Ernie Hughes Memorial Garden

Story compiled by Jenny Cameron.

LIKELY AND UNLIKELY PARTNERS

Building synergies

The community gardens in Newcastle work with some likely—and unlikely—partners.

Some work with Newcastle City Council in an arrangement that has become increasingly common as more and more local councils are supporting community gardens.

Other community gardens have partnerships with some less likely partner.

Chris Everingham
Working with Council has been terrific. They do all sorts of things for us at Sandhills Community Garden. There's a Council depot right next to our garden and we work in with them. You say hello to the staff. You take them over produce. You encourage them to come and take produce themselves. And then they do all sorts of things to help us out. Mostly I don't have to ask them. They see that something needs to be done, for example, that a pile of tree prunings need to mulched up and they just do it.

The only downside is sometimes when we do want something a bit bigger it can take a long time. There was a picnic table that we wanted to use, and it needed to be concreted in, and that took about eight months. So just sometimes you need to be patient. But we always try to have a respectful relationship.

Craig Manhood
With Fig Tree Community Garden we started out over in Morrow Park on rail authority land, and then we had to move. One of the blokes over at Morrow Park looked around for us and he asked these guys in here at the Croatian Sports Club, the bowling club, and he told us to come over and have a chat because it sounded alright.

And I came over here and had a chat with Parvo behind the bar, and he agreed that we could move over here, and it was all done with a handshake.

Bill Robertson
The first interaction with the Croatian Club, that handshake, that's been a really important part of it. It's been quite an informal relationship around conversations rather than around an exchange of correspondence.

Developing respectful relationships

All sorts of options emerge when you look around

The thing with these bowling clubs, these sports clubs, is that they've got a 99-year lease on the land so there is a whole possibility with the bowling clubs across Australia where we could get ourselves elected and turn them all into veggie gardens. And they are usually so well placed people really thought about where bowling clubs were and they are always central.

Alan Wallington
That's right, Ernie Hughes Memorial Community Gardens is on an old bowling green at the back of the Diggers ex-services club. So there are opportunities to work with ex-services, with the RSL clubs.

Anne Rooke-Frizell
When we had to move from Villiers Street we looked at different possibilities. We looked at working with the boy scouts. We even talked to a real estate agent about using a block of privately owned but vacant land close to where we were. But in the end the local church, in Church Street, was the best option for us.

And I think churches are another option for anyone who is looking for land. The church is just crying out for a contemporary relevance, and social justice is one thing that many churches value, and the bible has loads of references to land and agriculture. And also Churches are often on the best bit of land. So there's another unlikely partner for community gardens.

Community Gardeners
Chris Everingham,
Sandhills Community Garden
Craig Manhood & Bill Roberston
Fig Tree Community Garden
Alan Wallington
Ernie Hughes Memorial Community Gardens
Anne Rooke-Frizell
Church Street Community Garden & Villiers Street Community Garden

Story compiled by Jenny Cameron.

VALUING WHAT WE DO

What's the real value of community gardens?

People are trying to find various ways to value what goes on in community gardens, and to show all the benefits of community gardening.

Chris Everyham

At Sandhills Community Garden we have sheets that record our number of volunteer hours, but I think there's much better ways of valuing what we do. I think that one value is to look at what we've created. We've created this great asset for the city—I like to think of it as an interactive leisure facility. And it's now a tourist stop as we get tourist buses coming here now.

It's the quality of the relationships that get formed

But really the most important things are the relationships that are formed, and how do you put a value on that?

For example, last year we put out a calendar as a fund raiser and these beautiful pencil sketches were done by this gentleman in the housing estate. And as a result of this work people have gotten to know him and now people all say hello to him. That's just an example, but how do you measure something like that? How do you measure the son that brings his mum down in the afternoon in a wheelchair with a little dog because she can't talk, she can't walk, and she can bring her dog down here. How can you measure that? We've got to find ways of assessing these values.

Bill Robertson

I think of Fig Tree Community Garden in the same way. It's a space where people can come in and they can do what they will. There are often families here and all different age groups, and groups such the mental health rehabilitation group. These spaces get used in ways that people don't really value. There's money that goes into formal counselling and counselling rooms so there's that formal social work-medical model and community gardens are a contrast or a complement to that.

It's not just numbers, it's not that 400 people came to the garden and did 1200 volunteer hours; it's how they use the space as well, and the quality of the relationships that get formed and the quality of people's experience while they are here.

Community Gardeners:
Chris Everingham
Sandhills Community Garden
Bill Robertson
Fig Tree Community Garden

Story compiled by Jenny Cameron.

TALES FROM THE GARDENS

There are some tales from community gardens that just touch a nerve and that seem to define what communities and community gardening can be all about.

Nola Christie
Early on at Tighes Hill Community Garden we had just got our first donation of chickens, and on the Friday we had cocktails in the garden and we had a great night. Thirty people were there all having a great time. And then later that night someone jumped the fence and killed the chickens, actually ripped their heads off. It was terrible. We thought "What are doing! Is this what's going to happen to our community garden?" But we thought "No, we will just keep going." We fixed the fence, got some new chooks, pad locked the coop. And it's been fine ever since.

Craig Manhood
There are so many tales from the gardens. There are little personal stories about the things people do.

At Fig Tree Community Garden there were a couple of girls who had a dog that had been hit by a car. They buried the dog in the garden and they planted a Tamarillo on the spot. There is lots of memorabilia like that all around the garden.

Another story involves Peter who lives nearby and who comes over all the time. One day Hunter New England Health turned up with some people with disabilities (head injuries I think). No-one was here and they wanted to cook pizza in the pizza oven, and they wanted to be in a garden. So Parvo from the Croatian Club next door called Peter. Peter came over and they sorted it out. They lit the oven and Peter—he can talk—he made them feel at home. There was a guy in a wheelchair that was, according to the carers, quite disconnected from everything and everyone. He wanted to get in with the chickens and being in a wheelchair it's quite hard as there's rough ground to get over, and you have to get around the compost, and he was a big fella. So the carers and Peter they wheeled him around there and they lifted him over the ledge to get him inside and once he was in there he started crying with joy with being around the chickens. That's what we're here for. That's what community gardening is all about.

Community Gardeners
Nola Christie
Tighes Hill Community Garden
Craig Manhood
Fig Tree Community Garden

Story compiled by Jenny Cameron.

THE NEWCASTLE COMMUNITY GARDEN PROJECT

Research with a difference

What is the Newcastle Community Garden project? How did it get started? What type of research approach does it use?

Jenny Cameron

Supporting new community gardens

It all started through an informal chat that Craig Manhood and I had at a Fig Tree Community Garden working bee one Sunday morning. Fig Tree had funding from Newcastle City Council to run some workshops with the new community gardens that seem to be springing up all over Newcastle. The aim of these workshops would be to help support and strengthen these new community gardens.

Collaboratively investigating how the world works

I said to Craig, that rather than run workshops where you get an expert to come in and give advice and guidance, why not run it so that the new community gardens learn from each other's experiences, and why not do it as a bus trip so that the gardens get to see what each other is up to. And that would also be a way to help build connections between the gardens so that they can support each other.

I had a bit of research funding as a new staff member at the University of Newcastle that could go towards the project and that be used to build a PlaceStories website, so that we could communicate what we find to community gardeners in other places.

So the project started off as a combined Fig Tree Community Garden and University of Newcastle initiative, but now I hope that all the community gardens involved see themselves as part of the project.

I guess the research that we're most familiar with is where researchers—experts—go out and collect data, analyse the data and then write about their findings. And apart from maybe interviewing people or getting people to fill in a survey the research process all seems very removed.

This project is based on the idea that we are all researchers, we are all interested in finding out more about how the world works. Community gardeners are interested in finding out how other community gardens operate, what challenges they face, how they deal with the challenges and so on. And university researchers can work alongside these, if you like, everyday researchers to jointly investigate the world. That's what we did through the bus trip. We visited each others gardens and we collaboratively investigated the world!

24 Hour Party People

Craig Manhood

This might sound funny, but I'm reminded of the movie "24 Hour Party People", when the Manchester sound emerged. The movie starts with a Sex Pistols concert (before they made it big) with a small crowd of about forty people. But in the audience were members of the Happy Monday's, Joy Division and other yet-to-be-formed big name bands. It was a moment of inspiration which formed a generation of music.

This could be the start of a movement

I think the bus trip was such a moment in history for the community garden movement in Newcastle (and maybe beyond). And we don't know where the project will go next, that's going to depend on all the community gardens involved, and other community gardens that might want to join in.

On the bus trip we had a lot of fun coming up with ideas for what we could do next. One idea was that we all put in to run workshops on sustainability, so we run one workshop at every garden on a different topic throughout the year. So we'll share the load across the gardens.

Another idea is for a community garden open day/bus tour that we take people on so they can visit each of the gardens.

Another idea is a cycle map showing how to get between each of the gardens so people could do their own tour.

The other idea is to run an event like a progressive dinner party between the different community gardens—a community garden crawl where you taste and graze on the produce at each garden.

Then Jamie, who's been working on the project with Jenny to put together the PlaceStories website, has been meeting with the gardens and other people who are interested to see about running a stall at the Farmer's Market each Sunday to sell excess produce from the gardens. And now they've started Nourish Newcastle and are looking at an urban agriculture initiative.

So there's all sorts of possibilities for what might happen next, and how everyday researchers and university researchers might keep working together.

Community Gardeners

Craig Manhood
Fig Tree Community Garden
Jenny Cameron
University of Newcastle (& Silsoe Street Community Garden)

Story compiled by Jenny Cameron

See our PlaceStories website at http://ps3beta.com/project/7733

For more information see the bottom of page iii.

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JC