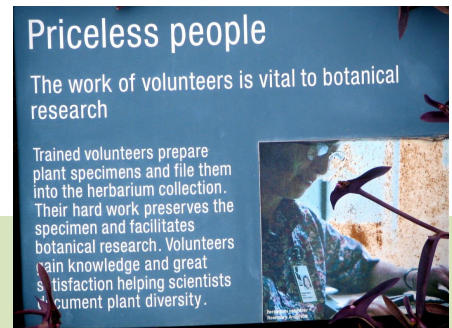


Volunteering with Botanic Gardens: Helping older Australians live more active and healthy lives

Emily Moskwa

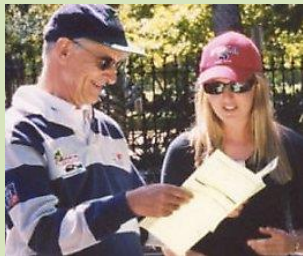
Centre for Tourism & Leisure Management

University of South Australia



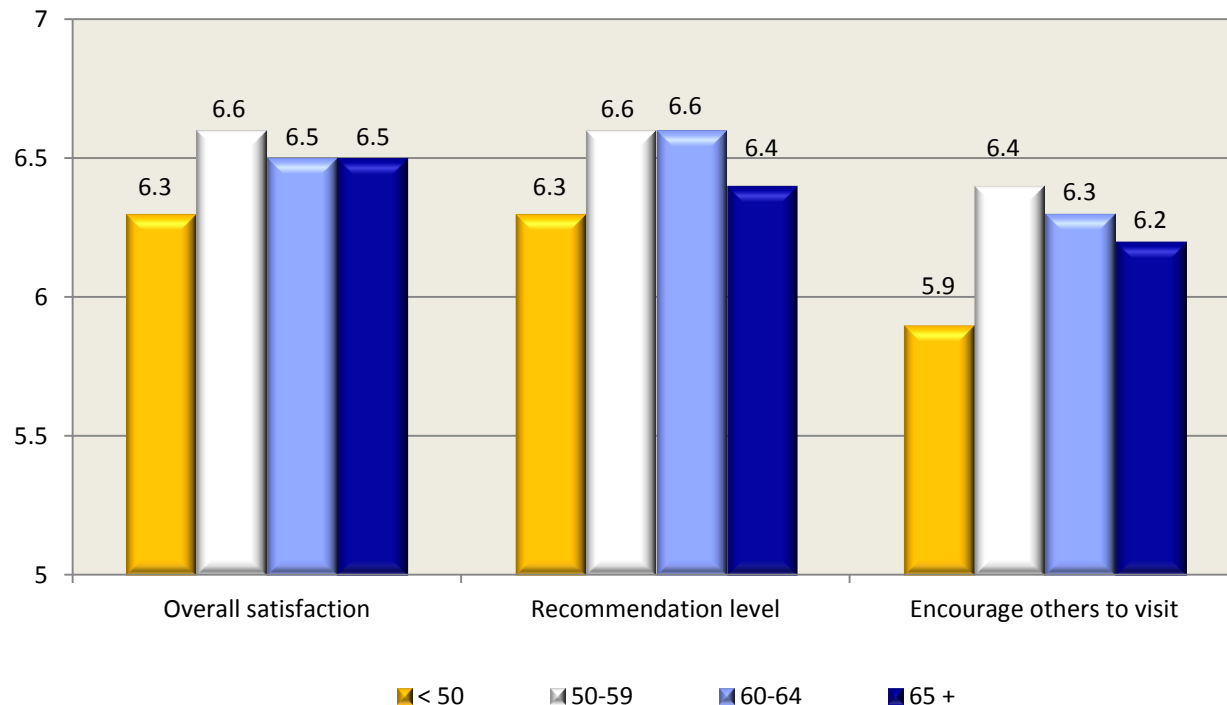
Study Overview

- Research into older Australian's engagement with botanic gardens through volunteering (within the scope of productive and healthy ageing)
- To consider initiatives to maximise personal, organisational, and community benefits
- To replicate within a range of volunteering contexts
- Over 360 participants (focus groups & questionnaires, from 15 gardens)



Why Older Australians?

- Funded by National Seniors Australia (Productive Ageing Centre)
- High proportion of volunteers at gardens appear to be 50+
- Higher satisfaction and advocacy levels by older visitors
- Research into 'leisure and ageing' by University of South Aust.



Why Gardens?

A number of recent studies have described the positive effect of contact with plants (and nature) on well-being.

5 key benefits include:

- psychological well-being
- environmental stimulation
- self-expression and personalisation
- motivators for physical exercise
- social interaction and networking

(e.g. Kaplan 1995, Maller et al. 2005)



Volunteering Patterns

- Over 60% of volunteers recorded an average investment of more than 1 ½ hours per week.
- Most common role was as a guide (42%), with a further 25% involved in hands-on gardening, and 14% were committee members.
- Main motivations were:
 - a love of gardens/gardening
 - the desire to contribute to society
 - to develop social networks/friendships
 - also environmental advocacy and to learn about plants and the environment

Wide Range of Benefits for Volunteers

- *It's a way to do two things at once – meet up with friends while helping the gardens*

	Max. = 5
Enjoying the aesthetics of plants and gardens	4.4
Making a contribution to a good cause	4.4
Learning about plants and the natural environment	4.3
Connecting with plants and the natural environment	4.3
Meeting people and socialising	4.2
Challenging myself to do new or different things	4.1
Improving my general health and well-being	3.9
Escaping the pressures of daily life and relaxing	3.7
Enhancing my professional abilities	3.4

*Measured on a scale where 1=very low and 5=very high.

Main Benefit for Volunteers

A sense of place (in the community) – connecting with certain places to create a sense of belonging

- A strong personal community of associations is crucial to successful ageing.
 - Those newest to their local community, particularly when aged 60+, recorded the highest overall satisfaction with volunteering, suggesting the important role volunteering may play with integration into new communities for older people.
 - *‘Connecting with people at the garden is so rewarding’*

	Max. = 5
I am very attached to this botanic garden	4.5
This botanic garden means a lot to me	4.4
I identify strongly with this botanic garden	4.1
I feel happiest when I am at this garden	3.4

Benefits for Volunteers

- Statistical analysis showed that volunteers gain the same wide range of benefits regardless of the time commitment they have with their botanic garden.
- There was no significant difference in the range or extent of benefits gained for the different roles performed, in relation to place identity /sense of belonging/feeling part of a group.
- However, guides gained greater benefits in enjoying, learning about, and connecting with plants and the environment than those in other roles such as hands-on gardening, committee activity, fundraising.

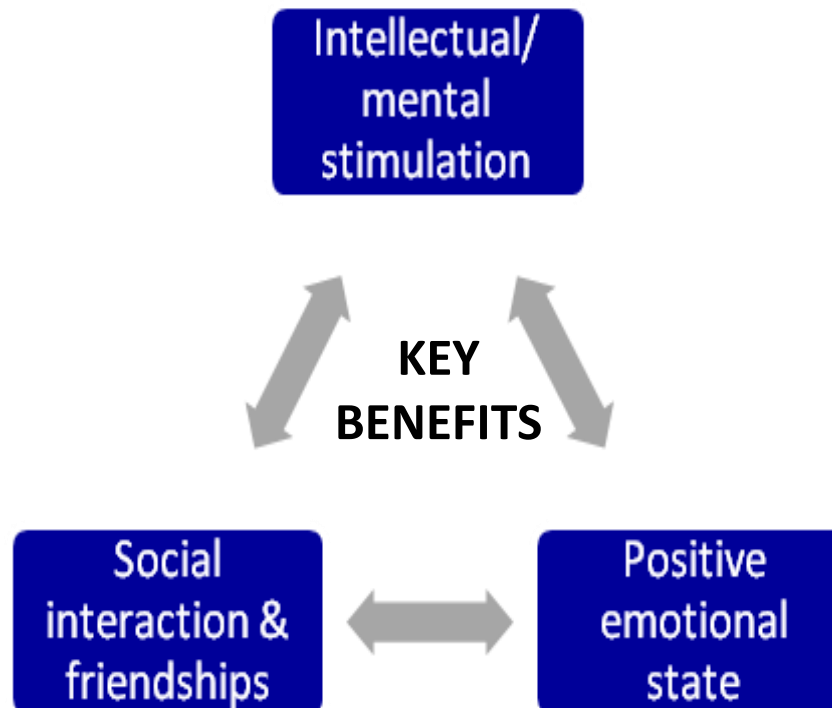
Benefits for Others

- *'Community in general benefits because without volunteers such as me, programs would be non-existent'*
- *'My healthy attitude helps relationships with friends and family'*
- *'My friends – I give them suggestions of places to go to visit each garden, they ask my advice, I take them for walks for pleasure'*
- *'My husband...because we have a day apart and when we meet over dinner we have lots to talk about'*
- Volunteers are a *'group of like-minded people'* who sometimes go out of their way to help each other. They not only help the gardens and gain personal benefits, but they bring benefits to each other too:

'One member of the group has taken on the role of assisting older members with their work and this has meant some of the less physically able members are still able to come.'

Summary

The study proposes the use of volunteering in botanic gardens as one way to 'look outside' for solutions to some of the global health issues of today by demonstrating the wide range of interrelated benefits that can contribute to successful ageing.



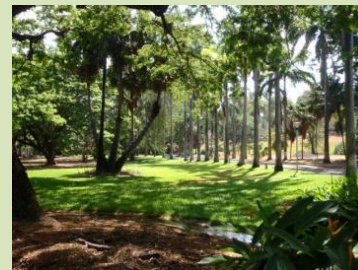
Summary

Contribute to healthy ageing primarily through:

- Social interaction & networking (Integration)
- Psychological well-being (Satisfaction)

Follow-on contributions through:

- Environmental stimulation
- Self-expression & personalisation (Creativity)
- Motivators for physical exercise



Priceless people

The work of volunteers is vital to botanical research

Trained volunteers prepare plant specimens and file them into the herbarium collection. Their hard work preserves the specimen and facilitates botanical research. Volunteers gain knowledge and great satisfaction helping scientists document plant diversity.

