

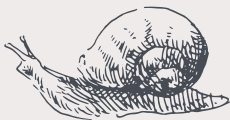


my
smart
garden

Program Evaluation

Summary Report

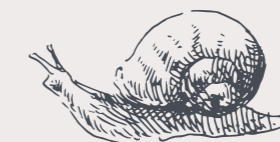
Prepared for My Smart Garden by
First Person Consulting November 2022





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1 INTRODUCTION

My Smart Garden is a council-run sustainable gardening program, supporting community members to create sustainable gardens in their outdoor spaces. The program was established in 2011 as a partnership between Moonee Valley and Hobsons Bay City Councils, growing to eight councils by 2021 with the additions of Maribyrnong City Council, Brimbank City Council, Wyndham City Council, City of Stonnington, Moreland City Council and City of Yarra.

The program is free for participants, offering several components and activities: gardening workshops and events (in-person before COVID-19, but now also offered online), online resources, incentives and prize draws, community events in council public spaces. The program is run as a collaboration between the eight councils, with the activities distributed between the councils.

My Smart Garden has the following key objectives:

- Increase community awareness and behaviour change in response to the climate emergency and other sustainability issues.
- Gain tangible environmental outcomes such as reduced waste, energy, water and carbon emissions, and improved microclimates and biodiversity.
- Gain tangible social outcomes such as improved physical and mental health, as well as increased social capital and resilience by building community connections.
- Offer a broader and more holistic program by working collaboratively and leveraging off each other's skills, knowledge and experiences.

Due to the growth of the program, as well as the transition of events online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this evaluation is well-timed to provide valuable insights. This evaluation explores the impacts and outcomes achieved by the program, as well as the process of growth and collaboration

between partnering councils. This summary report is supplemented by a detailed report that comprehensively outlines the evidence base for the evaluation findings and recommendations presented here.

1.1 Evaluation objectives and scope

First Person Consulting (FPC) was engaged to undertake an evaluation of the program. The objectives identified by the implementing partner councils for this evaluation were:

- To understand and document the impacts of the My Smart Garden program
- To identify lessons and improve on its delivery for the future

1.2 Approach

FPC used a series of key evaluation questions to guide our approach to this evaluation and ensure that it meets the objectives outlined above. These questions are included in Table 1, aligned to the relevant sections of this summary report. Our recommendations are included in section 7 below.

The evaluation methodology involved analysing routine monitoring data from the eight participating councils, an online survey of participants, interviews with seven My Smart Garden participants, and interviews with project officers of the eight participating councils. A summary of our approach is included in Table 2 on the following pages.



Great program, looking forward to more virtual events and attending something in person after lockdowns!

It is a very positive program giving skills to residents and improving their ability to grow their own food. It has grown and is now available from many councils. It is a great grassroots program that I tell everyone about.

Amazing program please keep it going.

I think this is such a great resource. I love how the presenters are so open, enthusiastic, expert and willing to spend the time with people.

Thank you for the most down-to-earth (!), enjoyable and free local services you provide. Couldn't find better anywhere.

Love it all!!!

This is a great initiative that needs more support and awareness!

It's a great program and I hope it continues to expand.

Thank you. An important local resource.

I love the My Smart Garden program, you are always keen to listen to the community and try new things. You share your knowledge about permaculture, animals, plants, trees, composting and many more topics.

Table 1: Evaluation questions and summary report structure.

FOCUS AREA	KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS	SUB-QUESTIONS	SUMMARY REPORT SECTION
Process	1. What has been the implementation experience of My Smart Garden?	a) How many participants have there been in My Smart Garden? Where do these participants come from (from within or outside the participating LGAs)? b) What are the barriers, enablers and motivations to participation? c) Has delivery varied between councils? What factors have affected this? d) How well does workshop delivery and planning work and what are the opportunities for improvement? e) How has the shift to online delivery altered the experiences and outcomes of participants?	Program delivery and process
Environmental outcomes	2. What environmental outcomes have been seen as a result of the Program?	a) How has the Program resulted in a reduction in waste? b) How has the Program impacted use of water? c) How has the Program impacted the availability and consumption of home-grown foods? d) How has the Program impacted the planting of native plants? How has the Program contributed to the creation of habitats for wildlife? e) How has the Program contributed to home energy use and low carbon living? f) Have there been any other unexpected environmental outcomes as a result of the program?	Environmental outcomes
Health and wellbeing outcomes	3. What physical and mental wellbeing outcomes have been experienced as a result of the Program?	a) In what ways has the Program impacted community connectedness? b) In what ways has the Program impacted the physical health of participants? c) In what ways has the Program impacted the mental health of participants? d) Have there been any other unexpected physical and mental health outcomes as a result of the Program?	Health and wellbeing outcomes
Other outcomes	4. Other outcomes, including participant satisfaction, sustainability of outcomes and financial benefits	a) In what ways have participants indicated they will sustain their efforts following their participation in My Smart Garden? Are there barriers to sustaining their efforts? b) Has the program had financial benefits?	Health and wellbeing outcomes
Collaboration	5. How has the collaboration between councils informed the reach and direction of the Program?	c) What are the benefits and challenges of collaboration between and within councils? d) What learnings would be useful for other local councils to know from the My Smart Garden program? e) What lessons are there for the strategic direction of the My Smart Garden program moving forward?	Collaboration

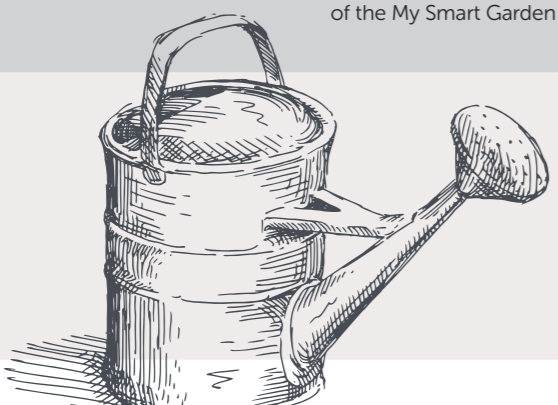


Table 2: Summary of evaluation components.

COMPONENT	SUMMARY
Review of existing data —to develop our understanding of the program, prepare early insights in response to the evaluation questions and inform data collection planning.	Key information sources analysed and presented in this report include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Previous evaluation reports, draft program logic models (which were revised as part of this evaluation) • Terms of References for participating councils • Monitoring data, such as routine data collected during workshops (including Eventbrite data, Excel workbooks created by each council)
Online survey of participants	In total, 761 surveys were recorded. The survey was distributed through the My Smart Garden September and October eNewsletter and shared through several council social media channels. <p>Questions were asked about the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type and size of garden • Number and types of workshops engaged with (e.g., online or in-person) • Barriers to engaging • Behaviours changed since joining My Smart Garden, including sustainable gardening practices • Utilisation of available resources • Feedback and suggestions • Demographics
Interviews with a total of 15 internal and external program staff and program participants	Stakeholders involved in evaluation data collection activities included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eight (8) interviews with program staff from each of the eight participating local councils, • Seven (7) interviews with program participants, representing a range of councils and experiences. Some of the interviewees joined the program during the pandemic, and others have been involved for numerous years.
Qualitative and quantitative data analysis	Following the data collection, we analysed the interview data. Analysis was structured around the KEQs and sub-questions. Quantitative data from the survey and routine monitoring data has been summarised using descriptive statistics with additional details provided in the relevant sections.
Reporting and presentation of findings	Stages of reporting and presentation of findings included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • preparation of a draft report for comprehensive written feedback from the program team • presentation of key findings to available My Smart Garden program team on 11 November 2021 • providing a re-drafted report and final review process before finalising the report.



2 KEY FINDINGS

My Smart Garden program is a holistic initiative that is leading to significant positive change for individuals, communities and the environment. My Smart Garden provides free and engaging workshops for enhancing gardening practices, but also works to build connections and encourage community participation.

Participants have experienced numerous health and wellbeing outcomes, as well as improving their gardening practices to produce more fresh produce, save water, reduce waste and enhance biodiversity. Ultimately, My Smart Garden is more than the sum of its parts – it is a way for councils to support community members in becoming healthier and more resilient, while leveraging that action to contribute to the environmental priorities of participating councils.

The impact of, and interest in My Smart Garden continues to increase. The number of participating councils has grown from two to eight, with further requests from neighbouring councils hoping to join the program. The number of participants is also growing, with over 6,300 attendees of workshops since 2017.

Participants are valuing, using and sharing knowledge gained through the program, which contributes further to the impacts achieved. There are some clearly demonstrated environmental, social and economic impacts that have been achieved by the program.

Importantly, the program is contributing to key council environmental priorities and objectives including the climate emergency, biodiversity, waste, mental health, food security and urban resilience. There is an undeniable urgency to address these challenges, further justifying the ongoing need for this program.

Based on the demonstrated impact and community demand, and the multi-faceted contribution across council priority areas, there is strong potential for program expansion (both within existing municipalities and beyond).



A vital source for me to figure out the science of gardening and have success.

Thank you for this wonderful offering to local gardeners. The zoom sessions during lock downs have been really helpful in many many ways. Thanks again.

It is a brilliant program ... It is amazing that sessions are free and you have inspired me to look at becoming more self sufficient at home which I think will be great especially when I eventually retire. I have since the session ordered a compost bin and bokashi bucket and other food growing goods. I have learnt so much and it is so good that you have the recordings on your website and all the other resources. I couldn't fault the program. It is perfect!!!!

I think it[']s great and look forward to doing more of the workshops and events that connect the community.

Has been great encouragement during lockdown to increase plants for home and balcony. Definitely has helped with mental health and stress!

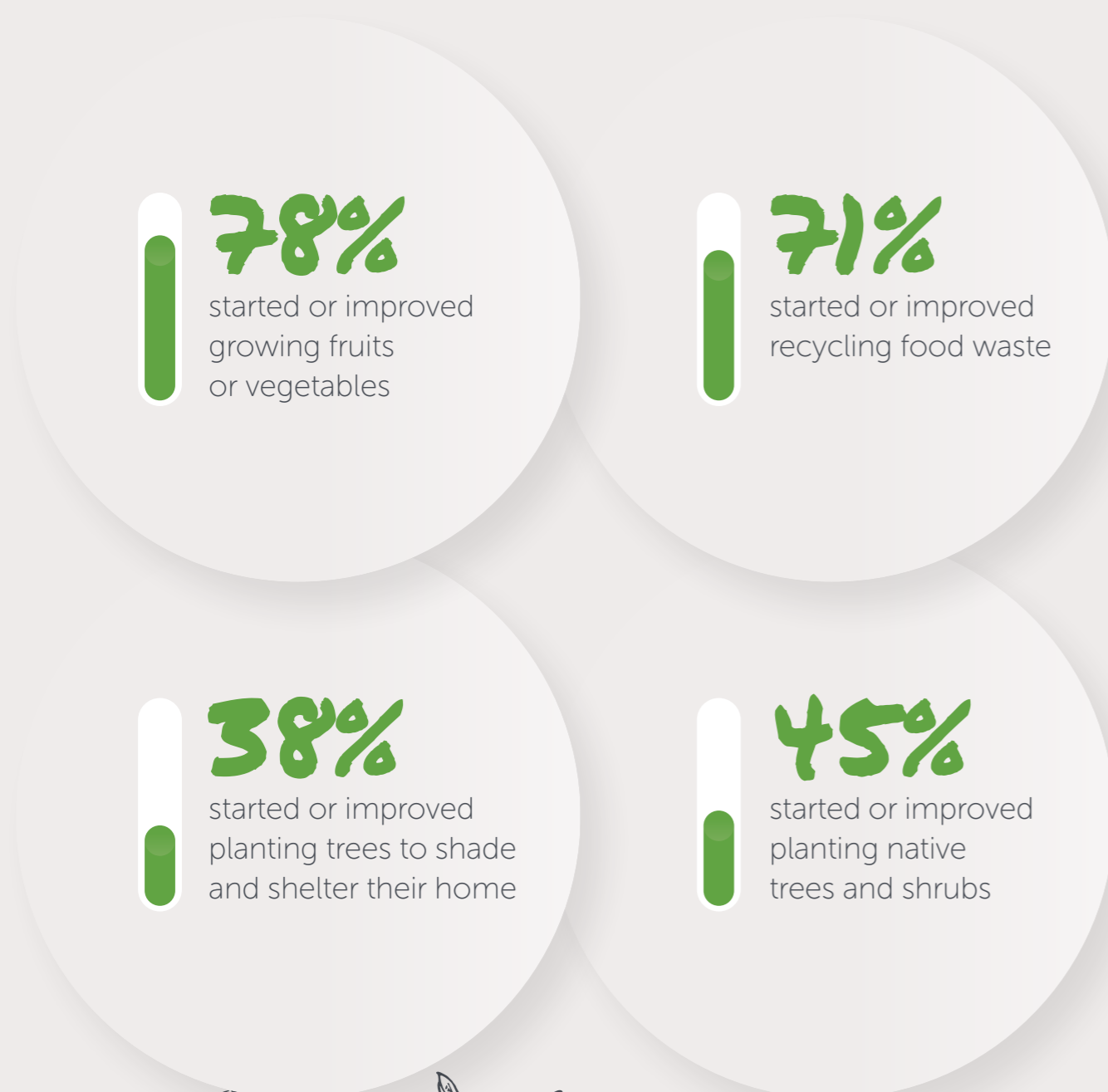
Brilliant program. A great effort towards helping people prepare for the impact of ongoing climate change - especially in the area of food security.

It is a great program. [I] have got so much out of it and really hope it continues



MY SMART GARDEN PROGRAM IMPACT

Since joining the program:



Environmental benefits:

3697 m3
green & food waste



3697 m3 green and food waste converted into mulch and compost per year (that's equivalent to 15400 large wheelie bins!)

1.2 million
litres mains water saved



1.2 million litres mains water saved per year by using greywater from the shower, bath or laundry (that's equivalent to 6600 bathtubs!)

525 tonnes
CO2-e emissions avoided



525 tonnes CO2-e emissions avoided per year by avoiding organic waste in landfill (that's equivalent to driving 2.1 million km!)

Health and economic benefits:





Photos provided by City of Yarra



3 PROGRAM DELIVERY AND PROCESS



I enjoy the newsletter each month and it helps me to plan what to do.

It is a very interesting newsletter. I usually find something useful for me in each one.

I would love to attend face to face events when they resume but they usually clash with work. I use your website as a first port of call as a resource. This is a great initiative and I hope it keeps going.

My knowledge about gardening and sustainable practices is deeper because of the My Smart Garden program. I enjoy reading the newsletter sent to my email address as it provides me with wealth of information. My next project in the garden is to get some chooks. Fingers crossed!

Think it is a very useful site, especially for beginners. Would like to see expansion to other areas.

Thanks for putting this together for free. It has been the best program and I have learnt so much. So much variety. I love how people freely share their wonderful practical skills and knowledge. It's great having notes and the recording if I could not make it to a session, and that we can go back to it.

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE keep funding the My Smart Garden program. Webinars and newsletters are outstanding.

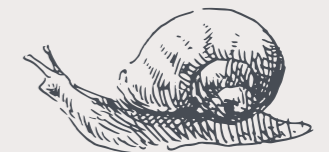
The program has been highly successful in delivering a large number and variety of workshops to participants, both in-person and online (since the COVID-19 pandemic).

Approximately 150 workshops have been delivered across the eight participating councils since 2017, with food gardening topics accounting for over one-third of all events. The remaining two-thirds include topics such as compost, pest control, seed raising, gardening for small spaces, open days for families, and other unique gardening topics.

- Variation in resourcing, length of time in the program, and individual council processes and priorities means that councils differ in the amount and format of workshops delivered, as well as how the program is promoted and marketed.


Over 6,300 attendees have taken part in My Smart Garden workshops since 2017 (4,096 since 2020). Approximately 5,400 individuals have signed up to the My Smart Garden eNewsletter.

- Survey respondents have attended an average of 3.1 workshops.
- Key reasons and motivations for attending workshops range from the desire to meet new people, improve the aesthetics of their garden, to grow vegetables and to help the environment.
- Enabling factors that help participants attend include: the program offering free workshops for participants and the availability of online workshops.
- Key barriers to attendance include: work commitments, family responsibilities and forgetting to attend.

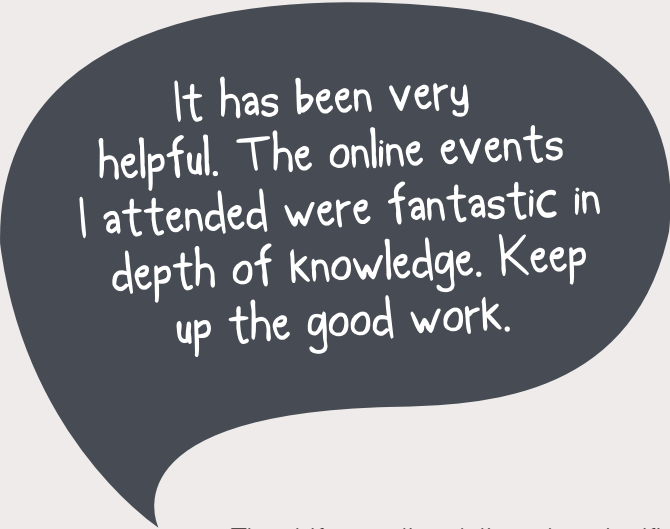




Thanks for providing this service. It is really helpful to have local knowledge about gardening when you are just starting out.



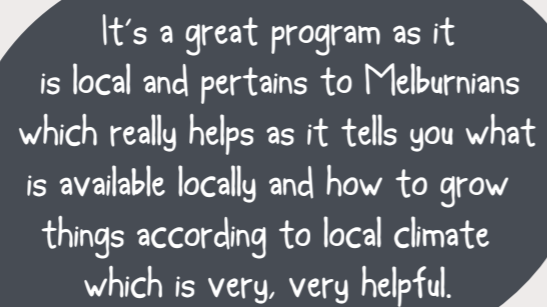
Thank you for a great opportunity to deepen our knowledge and to hear about very interesting, useful topics.



It has been very helpful. The online events I attended were fantastic in depth of knowledge. Keep up the good work.

The program broadly aims to attract Melbourne gardeners in participating local government areas.

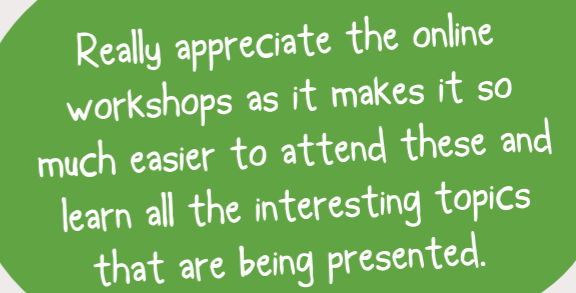
- Around 10% of participants are trying gardening techniques for the first time and around half of participants are working to improve on certain gardening skills and behaviours.
- Of the total survey respondents, 74% are from My Smart Garden councils.
- Most participants (82%) identify as women, and most (82%) speak only English at home. Of the 18% that speak another language, Cantonese, Spanish, Hindi and Arabic are the most common languages.
- The program is targeting people with an interest or skills in gardening. However, it is likely that there are many people with an interest in gardening who are not being reached by the program, due to lack of targeted marketing.



It's a great program as it is local and pertains to Melburnians which really helps as it tells you what is available locally and how to grow things according to local climate which is very, very helpful.

The shift to online delivery has significantly widened the reach of the program, with participants from across Victoria, Australia and outside of Australia

- Over 4,400 Eventbrite registrations were recorded for 2021. Of these, 2,165 were from My Smart Garden councils, 1,486 were from other Victorian postcodes and 754 were outside Victoria.
- Two thirds of survey respondents (66%) generally found online events to be as informative and engaging as in-person events, and 76% said online events made attending easier. However, over half (55%) felt that it was harder to connect with other participants.
- There have been over 8,000 views of recorded online workshops to date with this number continuing to increase.



Really appreciate the online workshops as it makes it so much easier to attend these and learn all the interesting topics that are being presented.





STORY OF CHANGE

Joanne from Wyndham

A sense of purpose and a place to connect, in Wyndham

Joanne has been living on her large quarter acre block in Wyndham, for the last 30 years. About seven years ago Joanne first got into gardening, after attending Wyndham's Green Living Series program. Since then, with the help of My Smart Garden, Joanne's yard has undergone a transformation from a mess of weeds to a plentiful, productive, edible garden.

Joanne started off planting a small tree on the nature strip which was provided by the council. She then moved on to a veggie garden. Her horizons were then broadened by a My Smart Garden facilitator who explained the concept of edible gardens rather than just vegetable gardens.

Now Joanne has over 18 fruit trees growing on her property, with veggies and herbs throughout, and chickens and worms. With her extensive gardening system Joanne is feeding five families, including her friends and family.

80% of my food comes from my garden. People come to my house with a big cane basket and empty egg carton... I've got about 15 raised edible garden beds... I've learned all this from the program.

Living with a disability during the pandemic has meant that Joanne has had to reprioritise her life.

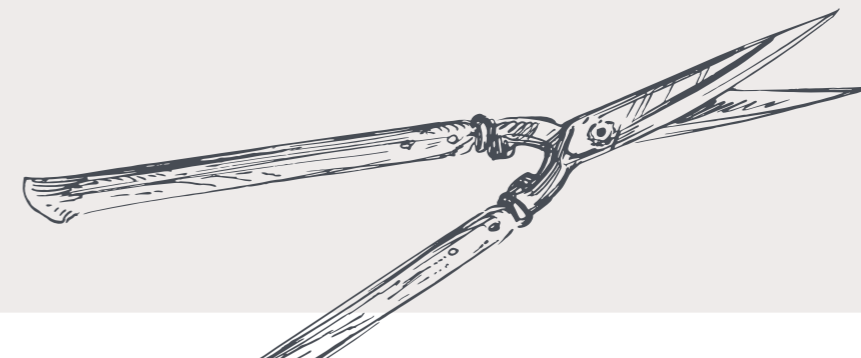
I'm not allowed to get vaccinated or leave home, so I book into all the [My Smart Garden workshops] I can. These workshops are things to look forward to.

These workshops enable Joanne, not only to learn new knowledge and skills, but to connect with others. Having been involved in the program for several years, Joanne has taken the opportunity to attend many workshops both in person and online. Most of Joanne's friends are now gardening friends and people she has met through the My Smart Garden program.

I've had so many interesting discussions, even on the Zoom [workshops]. I sent people personal messages during [workshops]. Sometimes people add me on social media or call me and we start chatting. I've got 3 new friends from the Zoom workshops over the last 18 months. Even if you don't make a new friend, you have company online and hear other ways of thinking and hear new opinions - you aren't isolated.

Joanne reflects:

My garden has physiologically, emotionally and physically changed my life. It's improved my life. Growing my own food has made me feel productive... My garden is never done, it's always a work in progress. It keeps me going.





4 ENVIRONMENTAL OUTCOMES

For almost all of the measured behaviour change outcomes, participants indicated that My Smart Garden was helping them expand or improve on their gardening practices. My Smart Garden has also had a demonstrable impact on a broad range of environmental outcomes, contributing to the urgent response needed to combat climate issues.

4.1 Environmental outcomes for participants

My Smart Garden works by building the knowledge, skills and motivation of participants in sustainable gardening practices. Some of the key practices targeted in the program are outlined below and show:

- 71% of respondents noted that they started recycling food waste or improved their existing recycling since joining My Smart Garden.
- Almost 80% of participants noted that they now grow fruits or vegetables or grow them better, since engaging with the program.
- 38% of participants have started planting or improved how they plant trees, shrubs or vines for shade and shelter, with most planting multiple

trees for this purpose. Interestingly, planting for shade was a behaviour that respondents most-frequently noted to be unsuited to their 'gardens, lifestyle or interests' – potentially because of the difficulty of creating shade for buildings such as apartments.

- 13% of respondents noted they had started planting native trees and shrubs, and a further third (32%) indicated they had expanded or improved their work in this area.
- Collecting and recycling grey water is the behaviour that has the least uptake, with only 6% collecting grey water for the first time and 26% collecting it better.

I'm very proud. I used to throw orange and banana in the same waste bin, but now I separate my food waste, including stuff for worms and citrus for normal general composting... I have my own tiny worm farm, but they don't eat very much so I bring the rest to the community garden which has many bins and worms.



"I definitely make enough to eat... We used to have a food swap in Newport – during covid it has dwindled down to a wire basket on my fence – but we share excess with neighbours and produce like jams, chutneys etc. When you have it in your backyard your fridge is your garden."



With the way the world is at the moment it is sometimes difficult to leave your house safely with Covid around. Being able to eat from your garden is desirable. Also as people become more conscious of their carbon footprint these kinds of resources are becoming even more invaluable. My Smart Garden is in the right place, at the right time and I hope it continues to grow and flourish.



4.2 Broader environmental outcomes

My Smart Garden has had a demonstrable impact on a broad range of environmental outcomes, contributing to the urgent response needed to combat climate issues. Many of the impacts cannot be easily measured, though some estimates of the scale of the impacts are provided below.

- My Smart Garden has helped the 761 survey respondents reduce an additional 388 m³ of green waste and 130 m³ of food waste per year. This is equivalent to 123 tonnes of organic matter that has been kept out of kerbside collection schemes and, at worst, out of landfill.
- Building from this baseline, FPC has modelled a potential benefit for the broader My Smart Garden Community of (i.e. the 5,437 people who have attended a workshop and are on the mailing list) have had broadly similar benefits, this equates to a diversion of 2,771 m³ of green waste and 926 m³ of food waste per year (in total, 879 tonnes of waste diverted).
- The 761 My Smart Garden participants who responded to the survey are saving a total of 166,440 L per year in greywater alone through shower, laundry and other tap water (assuming they only save water during the peak four months of autumn/summer), or 219 L per participant.
- If we assume that other My Smart Garden participants have had similar outcomes, the full complement of 5,437 people on the My Smart

Garden mailing list are saving in the order of 1.2 million litres of water per year. Note, importantly, this does not account for water savings from:

- » reduced watering because of mulching
- » water capture in rainwater tanks or from direct diversion
- » changed watering practices and water saving behaviours.

- While the overall CO₂-e emissions from this organic material would be significant if it were to be disposed of in landfill (as much as 1,418 tonnes), most of the participating councils have food and garden organics collection services. The material being diverted thus reduces the volume of material going through these services (and the associated costs to councils), but the emission savings are limited to those councils without food or garden collection services. As such, they account for an estimated:

- » 75 tonnes CO₂-e per year among the survey respondents
- » 525 tonnes CO₂-e per year if the results are extrapolated to all people who have engaged in My Smart Garden and are on the newsletter.¹ This is comparable to 2.1 million km of driving or the carbon absorbed over ten years from planting and raising over 8,500 seedlings.

¹ Based on emission factors of 1.85 and 1.35 for food and garden waste that is sent to landfill as opposed to being composted, as per the National Greenhouse Accounts Factors 2021, Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources. We assume that all participants who had access to the scheme through their council would have otherwise made use of that scheme.

5 HEALTH AND WELLBEING OUTCOMES



Overall, one of the greatest achievements of the program is the significant health and wellbeing outcomes for participants. Participants reported positive social connections, increased physical activity and improved mental health

My Smart Garden is much more than just a gardening program. While the overarching aim is to improve sustainable gardening practices, there are several secondary benefits from spending more time outside and meeting new people.

- Participants benefiting from incidental physical activity that occurs through walking, digging, bending over and harvesting, particularly for those that would not otherwise be motivated to exercise. 63% of survey participants spent more time outdoors as a result of My Smart Garden. Elderly participants or others with restricted movement also reported learning about ways they can adapt their gardens and practice to suit their physical capacities, for example through raised beds so that they are not constantly bending over.
- 78% are growing vegetables and herbs, which has close links with physical health benefits. Those who grow their own vegetables are more likely to eat diverse diets and more seasonal produce, as well as explore new ways of cooking.

Participants have experienced significant mental health benefits, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns, where many found solace in their gardens and were able to connect with likeminded people through online events.

- 63% of survey respondents are spending more time in their garden, with many (59%) feeling more positive since participating in My Smart Garden.
- 33% of survey respondents reported pursuing additional ways of connecting with their community through gardening, 18% have joined a group (online or in-person) involved in sustainable gardening and 18% have made new connections with people in their community.

My Smart Garden is my sunshine and rainbow in the midst of the lockdown!

Gardening is a tremendous stress relief at this time and the benefits should be promoted.

It is wonderful and [] never thought I would find so much joy in gardening.

To be observant and mindful of the natural world takes one out of oneself. Gardening in all its forms brings us into balance with the natural world of which we are a tiny part. If you can increase awareness of the beauty and diversity to be found within even a small garden, I would be satisfied... My garden connects me with nature and feeds my soul. Thinking about my vegetable crops and sowing next season's seeds is part of the process of being connected with the earth. During lockdown it has kept me sane.

Great way to connect people/ transfer of skills between people that don't know each other.

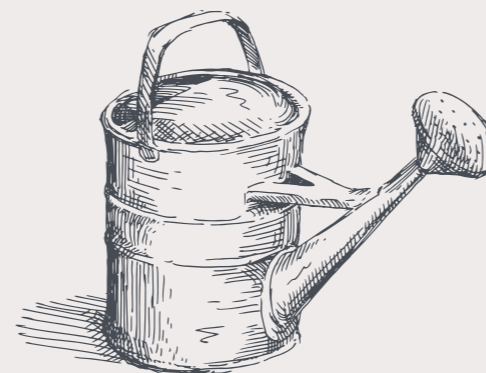
I really love the presenters and the audiences plus all that information that is shared so so generously and someone to answer whatever queries we have.

It's a joy to be amongst people who care about their gardens, their chickens, sustainability and protecting the planet.

Thank you !!
And thank you for being free!! Your courses are so welcoming and inclusive. I am a garden lover for life!!!

Great information, really enjoy participating. Helped me through lockdown being connected and motivated.

A great resource - feels like grass roots - connecting with like minded people - local investment/ global returns.





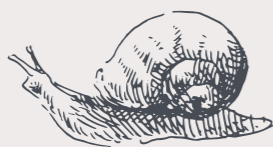
Below are some quotes from My Smart Garden participants about how the program has helped their mental health:

Many My Smart Garden participants felt that as their gardens mature, they will save money from their gardening practices. 89% of participants felt they will benefit financially by either saving money on food, composting/mulching, implementing more sustainable gardening practices or saving electricity on heating/cooling. In the 2015 evaluation, this was around 43%.

It feels like I am contributing to my community. I don't feel as useless as my health could make me feel. It might seem negative and sad to people, but it's beautiful - it's changed everything about my life. I have a list of things I want to do each day.

If I didn't have my garden, chickens and dogs - I would have committed suicide a while ago, that's not a joke - I felt hopeless. But now I have a purpose. Something to keep me occupied.

I was diagnosed with depression in my 40's and I do take medication for it. Working with the elderly gives me joy but I am getting burnt out now, everyone is a number. I'm at the point where I would leave but gardening and My Smart Garden does calm me down and the therapy aspect is immense.



It's brilliant [and has] helped me begin gardening for the first time - something I had wanted to do since I was a child. Help[ed] me find ways to garden when I live on the poverty line and rent.

It becomes more important to environmentally produce food as marketing, transport and prices become more unstable.

6 COLLABORATION

The program has been greatly enhanced by cross-council collaboration. The ability to draw from a collective pool of resources and expertise has improved efficiencies and increased workshop variety and offerings for participants.

6.1 Benefit and challenges of collaboration

There were some significant benefits as a result of cross-council collaboration. One of the major benefits is the ability to combine human and financial resources to achieve more than what would be possible otherwise. With the recent growth in participating councils, tasks that may have lapsed in the past due to lack of resources and/or capacity have been actioned, such as website upgrades and this evaluation.

Almost all councils identified improved efficiency and reduced duplication as a result of councils working together. As a program that runs off minimal resources, this has been significant in being able to share and reduce workloads while reaching a greater number of participants.

Being part of the collaboration – it means that we are all working together instead of duplicating.

This has also meant that more offerings and a greater variety of workshops are available for participants, including residents of other areas.

Since we have had other councils join, the number of workshops has exploded, offering more workshops (now) than we have ever had, which is quite phenomenal.

Having access to a network of peers outside of respective councils is a unique and valued benefit of the program for some. Each council also brings diverse skills and expertise that enables the program to expand into different areas while also providing opportunities for capacity and capability building across councils.

However, despite the benefits, there are some challenges faced by councils when trying to run a program collaboratively. The variation in resourcing between councils was identified as a challenge to meaningful collaboration at times, including the efficiency at which actions occur.

This can also be impacted by individual council priorities, perception of the program, and different requirements and processes. For example, one council might undertake 6-monthly or yearly calendar planning cycles whereas others do so monthly, making it difficult to cater to all needs.

Another key challenge to collaboration has been staff turnover within councils and the lack of structured handover processes. This has implications on knowledge retention and data consistency which may impact sustainability of the program moving forward.



6.2 Lessons for the strategic direction of My Smart Garden

Program growth was widely discussed by participating councils. All agreed that ensuring the current model is strong prior to expansion and/or replication in other areas should be prioritised.

Councils suggested that the program would benefit from improved program administration and governance. While the current size of the program is manageable between councils, it lacks a central point of coordination that would be essential if the program were to continue to grow.

Similarly, investing in marketing and communications of the program as a whole would be beneficial to reach new and different audiences, while alleviating some of this responsibility from individual councils and allowing more time for workshop planning and delivery.

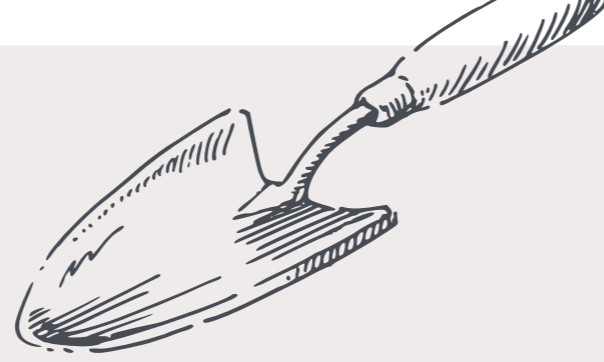
We asked ourselves how big do we want to get? What are the impacts if it gets too big? Growth is our biggest issue – we've had some requests for growth, and we have only recently formalised the new participating councils, but if it grows too quick, what does it mean for the program and the responsibilities of the team? Do we all have enough time and what would be the requirements and financial responsibilities?

We could really use a proper marketing resource for the program rather than just ad-hoc from our comms teams which is what we get at the moment.

Renewing the MoU with input from existing and new councils was considered an important next step, to ensure all members are clear on expectations and parameters of the program moving forward.

Embedding monitoring and evaluation standards across the program should be another priority, so that impact can be clearly articulated for ongoing and sustained support. That data is also stored centrally will help address issues with staff turnover and loss of information from individual councils.





7 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on evaluation findings above, we recommend:

1. My Smart Garden is a highly valuable program, appropriate for the council level and many benefits would be seen by expanding the program within and beyond existing councils. The program is creating meaningful environmental, health and wellbeing outcomes for participants and the broader community, and expansion would result in benefits for a wider range of people.

For this to occur, the program would require further funding for each participating council to cover specialised marketing and communications support, as well as a funded dedicated program coordinator.

2. Revisiting the target population set out in the program objectives to ensure it considers council priorities broadly and is maximising its impact. Councils should consider targeted promotion to ensure the program is available and accessible for different interested population groups who may not be currently participating.

- My Smart Garden participants come from all over Metropolitan Melbourne and the program is broadly attracting who it currently sets out to – gardeners in Melbourne. However, ‘gardeners in Melbourne’ is a broad target group, and the lack of diversity among participants suggests that there are whole population groups not being reached – that might be interested and benefit from participating in the program. Younger participants (particularly men) and CALD communities are

not currently participating as much as what might be expected based on overall community composition.

- Given the mental and physical health impacts of participating in My Smart Garden, consideration should be given to other population groups that might benefit. Furthermore, there is potential to achieve broader environmental impacts by encouraging participation by a wider range of community members i.e. those with less experience but still a strong interest in gardening – this may require a re-focusing of the course content to ensure the needs of both newer and more experienced gardeners are met (see Recommendation 4 below).
- To help broaden the diversity of participants, there may be benefit in each participating council mapping the relevant community organisations and services in their areas, such as:
 - » Neighbourhood houses
 - » Youth organisations
 - » Community based organisations focusing on migrant and CALD groups (e.g., the Asylum Seeker Resources Centre or the Australian Vietnamese Women’s Association)

These organisations could be useful in helping to extend the reach of the Program, particularly among parts of the community that are currently underrepresented.

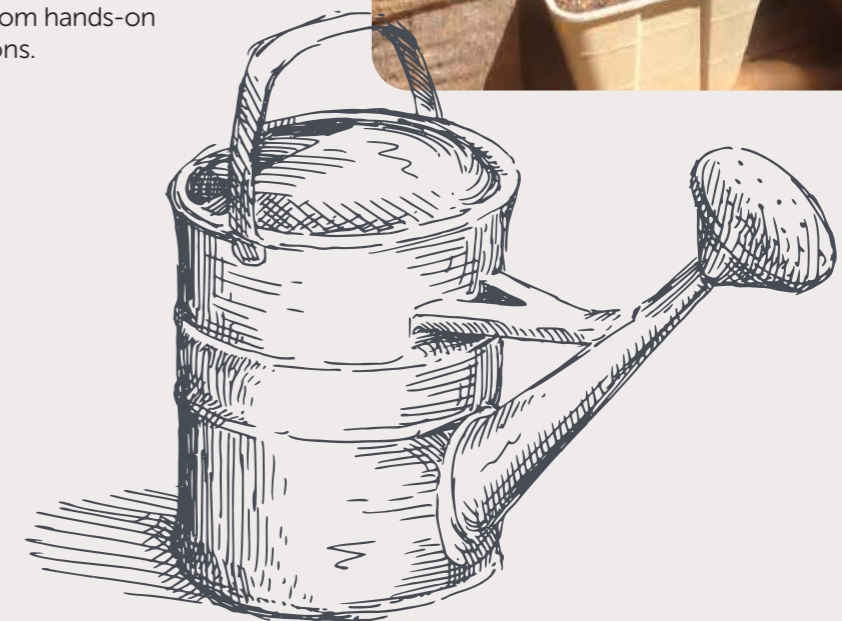
- Targeted marketing and community consultation should be carefully planned, for example – targeting migrant groups with workshops relevant to needs and circumstances (such as small space food gardening, herbs, or the financial benefits of gardening at home).

- Beyond targeted marketing and community consultation, for the program to expand successfully to CALD communities, an investment would need to be made into translation of resources and partnering with interpreters and translators for workshops, events, and translating resources.

3. Workshop delivery should move to a combination of online and in-person activities, as has been suggested by participants and program officers alike.

- Online workshops still have a role to play, as accessibility and flexibility was deemed important to many participants, and it enhances the reach and impact of the program.

- » As part of the below recommendation to map the various workshops, we recommend mapping the feasibility of certain workshops in-person versus online, considering which topics are more theory-based and which topics would benefit from hands-on practical demonstrations.



4. As the program moves to a combination delivery model, there would be value in mapping the learning outcomes of the workshops and, potentially, developing a content framework. Whilst there is less duplication than early in the program, there is currently a lack of clear strategy for planning events.

- It is very clear that My Smart Garden has numerous environmental, physical and mental health benefits. However, there is a lack of strategy about how to best maximise these benefits. This strategic planning could capture what each workshop is expected to contribute to, but also has the potential to show how workshops are connected and might inform a broader 'syllabus' of interrelated modules/sessions. This approach could help ensure each council's priorities and needs are being met. There are several considerations on which this strategy could be framed:

a. Participant wants for future workshops

- » Currently, the most popular workshops (based on number of attendees) are small space gardening, community garden events, family days and composting workshops.
- » Survey respondents ranked pests, discount supplies, gardening in small spaces, food production and community gardening as topics they would like to see My Smart Garden cover at future events.
- » Notably, several topics overlap as the most popular current events, and greatest desires for future events: community gardening, gardening in small spaces, and thrifty gardening/discount supplies.

b. Council priorities

- » Depending on funding and environmental council priorities for 2022 and beyond, there may be content areas which are prioritised by councils (such as composting initiatives, bin rollouts).
- » Environmental outcomes – such as water or reducing the urban heat island effect – are also examples here where councils may want to put more or less attention.

c. New versus experienced participants

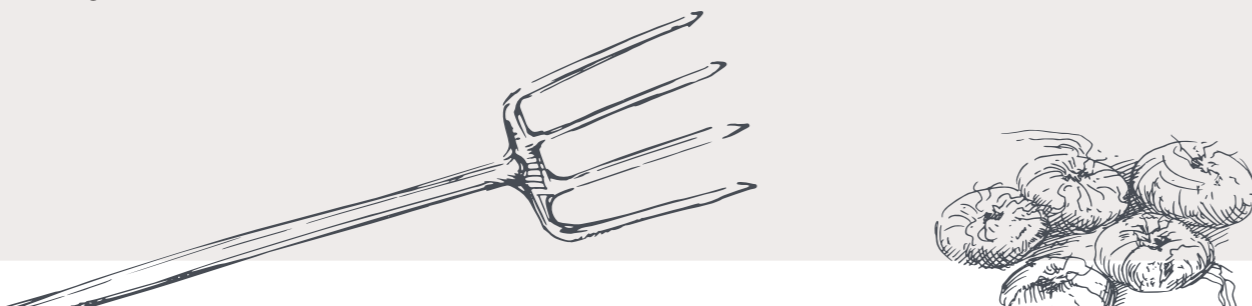
- » Councils could consider varying their strategy for new learners compared to experienced gardeners.

» My Smart Garden has now grown to a point where many participants have been part of the program for years, having attended many of the workshops. New learners could benefit from the core topics or a series of beginner workshops, whereas experienced gardeners could dive deeper into certain content areas. While we recognise that there is already consideration of experience levels, formally thinking about and mapping expectations and content areas would help in clarifying target audiences and in planning across councils.

» This could help to support marketing strategies and how to reach participants with varying levels of experience.

5. Within the existing eight participating councils, My Smart Garden should revisit the collaboration strategy and governance structure.

- We suggest revisiting the Terms of References, to ensure fair division of tasks and identify where people are overburdened with additional tasks.
- Based on the outcome of the Terms of References review, the program should consider the merits of a program coordinator, funded by the eight councils. Some of the benefits include:
 - » Avoiding tasks falling through the cracks
 - » Someone to help delegate and coordinate, making it easier for other councils to participate – maximising benefit that each council gets.
 - » Contrastingly, there is a risk that as things get bigger, coordinating tasks internally becomes more challenging. A program coordinator role would need to be considered in relation to the growing size of the programs, to ensure the internal coordination of tasks does not become unsustainable for key individuals to manage.
- If a funded program coordinator is not viable, we recommend that council appropriately reprioritise My Smart Garden for current project officers. This may mean additional hours, days or reallocation of other work.
- We recommend streamlining data collection practices, e.g., sign up templates/post event surveys. This will make it easier for the program to do internal monitoring and track progress.





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