

## TITLE

Botanic Gardens and Senior Australians: Benefits and Growing Communities

## BRIEF SUMMARY

This study involves active research into seniors' engagement in valued community-based activities within the scope of productive ageing through voluntary work. It is funded through a 2008 Research Grant from National Seniors Australia (specifically the National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre).

More Australians visit botanic gardens than any other cultural events or institutions apart from cinemas; visits to botanic gardens by customers aged 55+ increased by 384,700 from 1999 to reach 1,578,400 in 2005-06 (ABS, 2007).

This study aims to collect qualitative and quantitative data on levels of benefits Australian seniors gain from engagement with botanic gardens. Methods include on-site interviews and focus groups with senior volunteers, staff of gardens/garden owners (usually local councils/state government departments) and 'Friends of Gardens' organisations. This will provide input for development of a self-completion questionnaire, to be trialled at four Botanic Gardens of Australia and New Zealand (BGANZ) gardens. Further data will then be collected on a larger scale at 12 BGANZ network gardens.

If the levels of engagement seniors have with botanic gardens is better defined, then initiatives can be considered to maximise personal, organisational, and community benefits. When recorded systematically, it will enable this to be replicated within a range of gardens and communities. Furthermore, it is more likely to be useful for ongoing monitoring of the benefits seniors and botanic gardens provide for each other, and their wider communities.

## PROJECT AIMS & KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### AIMS

1. Identify and quantify the benefits seniors seek, and attain from visits to botanic gardens.
2. Identify and quantify the benefits attributed to botanic garden organisations from seniors' engagement within the maintenance of, and service provision at botanic gardens particularly in a voluntary capacity.
3. Identify local community and organisational initiatives that will build the capacity to generate multiple social benefits by effectively engaging seniors with botanic gardens.

### KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the current range of volunteer engagement roles seniors have with Australian botanic gardens?
2. What are the key personal and social benefits seniors seek and attain from visits to botanic gardens?
3. What are the key personal and social benefits seniors seek and attain from engagement with botanic gardens as a volunteer?
4. What are the benefits for gardens as organisations from seniors volunteering at botanic gardens?
5. What are the social benefits for the local community from seniors volunteering at botanic gardens, and the positive images that are delivered regarding seniors' involvement in the community?

## RELEVANCE TO NATIONAL SENIORS PRODUCTIVE AGEING CENTRE

This study is multi layered. Firstly, it involves understanding seniors as volunteers with, and visitors to, Australian botanic gardens.

Second, it will identify the benefits senior volunteers provide to the gardens as organisations amongst the most visited cultural and recreational sites for Australians (ABS, 2007).

Third, the study will also identify the benefits that individual seniors gain from their involvement in the gardens as volunteers, and as visitors. These outcomes will improve our understanding of healthy ageing for seniors in their volunteering roles, and as participants in active recreational activities such as walking, photography and incidental learning in botanic gardens. It will also enable related positive images of seniors contributing to the local community to be promoted.

With this refined knowledge on the range of benefits being sought and attained by seniors engaged with gardens, we can encourage both consolidation of good practice programs and service delivery by the BGANZ network. Additionally, through the development of further initiatives associated with the gardens and local communities, expand these benefits to be sought and delivered by numerous communities.

## PROJECT OUTCOME/S

Firstly, good practice examples of engagement and retention of volunteers and visitors will be shared between botanic gardens and related agencies involving seniors in a similar capacity. This shared learning will increase the likelihood of an uptake of good practices in marketing, recruitment, selection, and retention of visitors and volunteers to botanic gardens. This will be documented in a form suitable for seniors, volunteers, and personnel of botanic gardens, and will help address the research gap identified by Dolnicar and Randle (2004) to integrate core strategic marketing research.

Second, individual gardens will be able to reassess and strengthen the relationships they have with their local seniors both as visitors and volunteers, ensuring continued participation by seniors and engagement of valued activities which contribute to productive ageing.

Third, seniors not currently involved in 'intense' engagement with botanic gardens may be more suitably targeted for refined, mutual capacity building potential, with a focus on targeting seniors through promoting possible benefits (as per Dann & Warburton, 2006). While some existing research on volunteering has investigated attitudinal factors (e.g. Reed & Selbee, 2000), the majority concentrate on demographic groupings, and benefit segmentation is limited to the categories of donating and fundraising (Harvey, 1990).

## RESEARCH TEAM

This study is being conducted by researchers with the Centre for Tourism and Leisure Management at the University of South Australia. For further information on the project or the research team please contact:

Dr Gary Crilley  
Director  
Centre for Tourism & Leisure Management  
School of Management  
Division of Business  
University of South Australia  
Ph: (08) 8302 5163  
Email: [gary.crilley@unisa.edu.au](mailto:gary.crilley@unisa.edu.au)

Dr Emily Moskwa  
Senior Researcher  
Centre for Tourism & Leisure Management  
School of Management  
Division of Business  
University of South Australia  
Ph: (08) 8302 3319  
Email: [emily.moskwa@unisa.edu.au](mailto:emily.moskwa@unisa.edu.au)