



# ANNUAL REPORT

# 2019

**Open Gardens Victoria Incorporated**  
**A0090703V**  
**2019 Annual Report**

This is the fourth annual report of Open Gardens Victoria Incorporated ('OGV') and covers the period from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019.

### Officers

The following persons were the officers of OGV as at 30 June 2019 or resigned during the year 1 July 2018 – 30 June 2019:

	Position	Date of Appointment
Elizabeth Fazio	Chair	Incorporation. Reappointed 16/8/17. Member of Executive and Governance Committee and Member of Marketing and Communications sub-committee
Annette Warner	Deputy Chair	Incorporation. Reappointed 16/8/17. Resigned 15/3/19 Member of Executive and Governance Committee
Cheryl Gurney	Secretary	Incorporation. Reappointed 17/8/16. Member of Executive and Governance Committee and Chair of Marketing and Communications sub-committee
Peter Milsom	Treasurer	Casual vacancy 21/10/2015. Re-appointed 17 August 2017. Appointed Treasurer 15/8/18. Member of Executive and Governance Committee.

### Committee members

The following persons were Committee members as at 30 June 2019 or resigned during the year 1 July 2018 – 30 June 2019.

	Date of Appointment
Helen Diprose	Incorporation. Reappointed 15/8/18 Member of Events sub-committee
Helena Buxton	Incorporation. Reappointed 17 /8/16 Member of Events sub-committee
Russell Barrett	Casual vacancy 21/10/2015. Reappointed 17/8/16 and 15/8/18. Resigned 15/5/19. Chair of Events sub-committee.
Stephen Read	Appointed 16/8/17. Member of Events sub-committee
Jason Chongue	Appointed 15/8/18. Member of Events sub-committee

## Overview

Open Gardens Victoria (OGV) is a volunteer run, not-for-profit organisation that opens private gardens to the public and organises gardening and horticultural themed events for the benefit of the Victorian public. Our activities are funded by levying a small charge to attendees and participants and by 'Friends of OGV' members who pay a \$30 pa subscription fee.

2019 has seen a continued focus on actioning the Strategic Plan adopted by the Committee in September 2017, using the Plan to refine the annual program of garden openings and events.

## Strategic Plan



In addition to our now established, traditional program of open gardens across the state, OGV rolled out the Green City initiative during the year. Designed to broaden the reach of OGV, Green City encourages young people and new gardeners to get into gardening, even if they live in small urban spaces. The program aims to highlight the community benefits of gardens and gardening so that we can 'green' our cities, build communities and create a better quality of life.

Our message is that although urban life means many people are occupying smaller spaces, that doesn't mean they can't garden. Indoor spaces, balconies, courtyards, nature strips, roofs and community plots are all areas with potential for growing plants and food.

### New partners

Guided by this focus, we have formed some exciting new partnerships.

- *3000acres*

In September 2018 *3000acres* was successful in obtaining a grant from the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation to open a series of productive gardens in the inner city in partnership with OGV. Together we opened 24 gardens and ran 28 workshops spanning a wide variety of topics showing people how to grow fresh food from urban backyards. Permaculture systems, keeping quails, growing fruit trees, vegetables and herbs, attracting bees, arranging food swaps and urban farming were all part of the mix. Many of the spaces we opened challenged the traditional concept of what a back garden looks like. Not a blade of grass to be seen in some and a glorious mix of fruit, vegetables and flowers in others! The reach of the program was leveraged by posting a virtual tour series of a number of the gardens and workshops online via our website and social media, overcoming the logistical difficulties of managing a lot of people in a small space.

The 3000acres series was a resounding success with a total of 1556 attendees, and over 20,000 visitors so far to the virtual tour series. We know it has had a practical outcome, with 90% of visitors saying they would implement something they learned in their own garden - a very happy result considering 5% of visitors said they did not currently have a garden! An additional benefit of working with 3000acres has been to make contact with a new group of volunteers who came to help out at the openings through contact with 3000acres.

- In another of our Green City initiatives we are working with indoor plant expert Jason Chongue. Jason has been very successful not only in encouraging young people to add greenery to their homes, but in promoting the benefits of greening the work environment to many businesses.

Jason has offered workshops with OGV at his Plant Society shop in Collingwood. In informal, social sessions designed to help people overcome any fear of indoor gardening, Jason taught a range of basic indoor gardening skills, including watering regimes, the best light access, repotting and maintaining plants, with additional information about plant selection and care.

We are also continuing to work with other partners:

- Once again, landscape designer Andrew Laidlaw has had a presence at open gardens, generously answering questions and giving talks on design. These openings have raised funds for Global Gardens of Peace.
- We have continued to work with the [Urban Agriculture Forum](#) and the [Sustainable Living Festival](#) organising activities which give an insight into 'urban agriculture' in Melbourne. An open day at the William Angliss Institute in Melbourne CBD provided an inspiring program of speakers on topics such as:
  - Karen Sutherland - designing a productive, urban rain garden
  - Jon Belling – Indigenous food and plants
  - Dr Nick Rose – Sustainable Communities Summit
- Productive garden guru and author Karen Sutherland offered a series of events focussed on growing tomatoes, ranging from a talk at Fitzroy Nursery, to a workshop at Rose Creek urban farm and culminating in a Tomato Fair at the lovely Chesterfield garden in Geelong.
- Finally, our relationship with the Fareshare organisation has developed further. Fareshare is a voluntary organisation which grows and collects fresh food for supply to those in need. Following the interest shown by OGV visitors to one of Fareshare's sites on a railway siding in Abbotsford, this year we held an Open Day at the Abbotsford site, offering a program of speakers throughout the day.

While these activities are of universal appeal, there is no doubt they are connecting a new, younger audience with OGV.

## Building the Annual Program

The level of openings increased substantially in our fourth year with 54 gardens opening. As many of these were small spaces with limited accessibility, the number of visitors was relatively stable at around 18,000. As reported above, the impact of the smaller openings was increased by the large numbers accessing virtual tours online. Effectively an additional 20,000 people 'visited' gardens this way. Given the extensive demands of the existing program on our volunteers we feel that this is currently the maximum number of gardens we should aim for annually.

Other OGV activities in 2018/19 included:

- a sold out coach tour of Macedon Ranges gardens,
- the book launch of Karen Sutherland's book on growing tomatoes,
- a tour and talk at RBG Cranbourne
- the very special opening of the arts and crafts Cranlana garden in Toorak with a speech by noted journalist Michael Shmith on the history of the garden.
- a fascinating talk by Warwick Forge on gardens in India
- workshops on composting
- the annual Friends Christmas get together.

Having a presence at various Plant Fairs and at the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show again helped to raise our profile, provide publicity for our activities and grow the number of people requesting to be included on our data base.

Each year the OGV calendar includes gardens ranging from designer to owner-grown and maintained, small inner city to country estates and suburban to rural fringe. Styles have varied from naturalistic Australian, to succulent gardens to European plantings with autumn colour and all points in between! Feedback from visitors and garden owners alike has been universally positive, with many garden owners expressing delight at the genuine interest shown by

visitors in identifying plants, appreciating design and respecting the challenges which owners have overcome to create the spaces they are so proud of.

Maintaining a spread of active Selectors across the state has been a particular challenge this year. Following the resignation of the Head of Selectors, the Head of Regional selectors, Sam Crawford, has been acting in the role. While Sam has been managing both roles with incredible dedication, we are currently seeking a person to take over this important portfolio long term. Meanwhile, there are some key regions currently without Selectors. This inevitably has an impact on the gardens which are available for opening and it is one of OGV's major challenges to achieve a spread of active Selectors across the State.

## **Developing Policy and Processes**

Open Gardens Victoria is overwhelmingly a volunteer organisation, reliant on the goodwill of its community to achieve its aims. A Planning Day in April highlighted the need for action in several areas. A subsequent audit of Committee skills led to the decision to create new positions of Head of Giving and Head of Volunteers. We are currently recruiting for those positions.

To make sure we gain maximum value from every volunteer's activities, it is important to ensure that operational practices are clearly established, recorded, understood and handed down as members move on.

OGV sub-committees have continued to develop their own sets of guidelines, standard form correspondence and processes for communicating externally and with other sub-committees. There has been an increased focus on ensuring wherever possible material is placed online for access by the appropriate cohort. In addition, we are currently developing a set of organisational documents such as a Welcome pack, a detailed description of the roles and responsibilities of each sub-Committee and a comprehensive set of policies and procedures to guide our operations.

The ideas and work of the sub-committee continues to be the backbone of the organisation and the importance of the contribution of these members cannot be overstated.

**The OPEN GARDENS VICTORIA INC ORGANISATIONAL CHART is attached to this Report as Appendix A.**

Income from our activities has again proven sufficient to fund the services of an administrative assistant for approximately 10 hours per week, ensuring timely loading of garden opening details onto the website and keeping online information up to date. Funding from the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation grant covered the costs of the administrative assistance needed to service all of the 24 garden openings and 28 workshops in the 3000acres series of productive garden openings.

We have continued to engage the services of a communications expert to assist with preparation of media releases and make contact with various publications who promote OGV openings and events. We have increased the amount of paid assistance to update databases and format and distribute newsletters. This assistance ensures that the workload of volunteers does not become unmanageable.

## **Communication**

- **Website** [www.opengardensvictoria.org.au](http://www.opengardensvictoria.org.au)

The website continues to be the primary means by which OGV communicates with its public. The public is

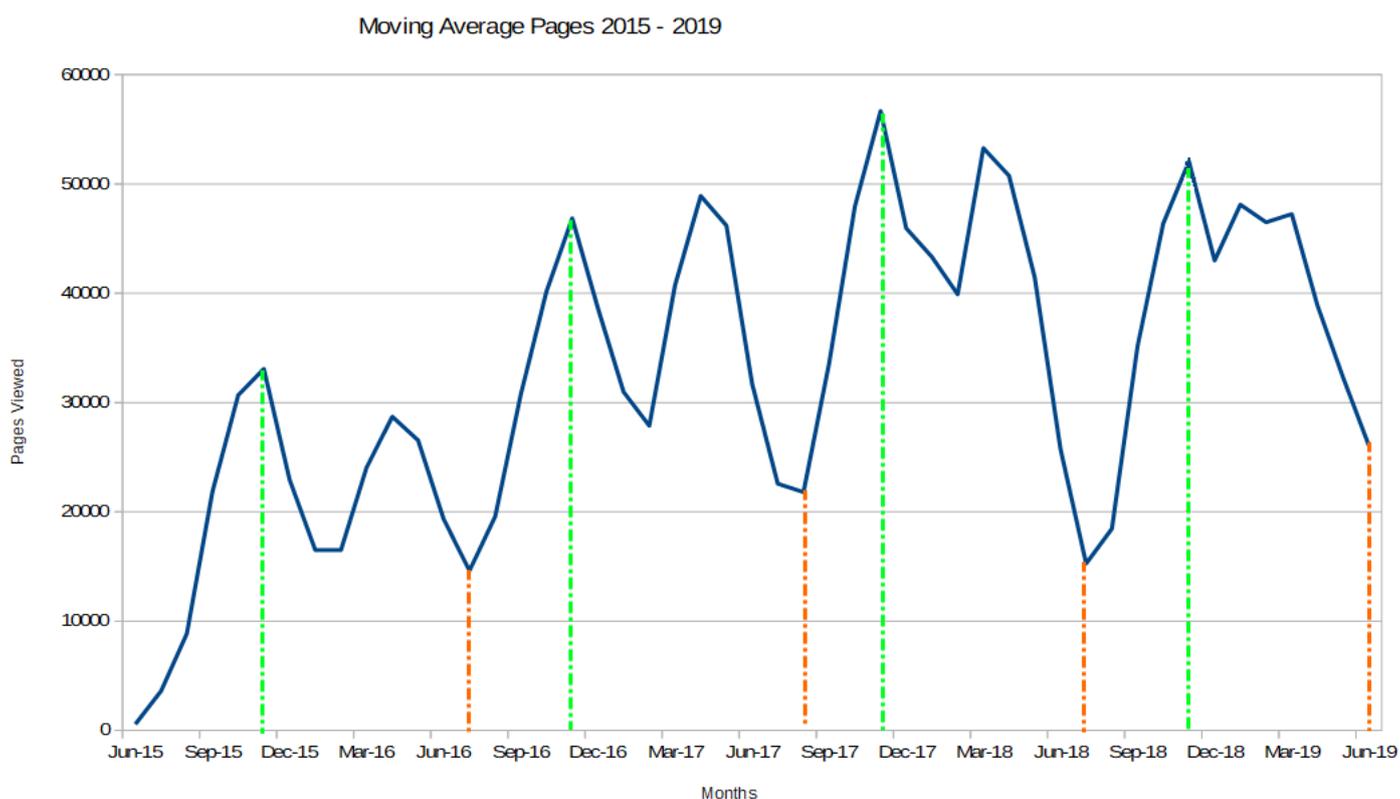
encouraged to visit the website often for information and updates.

Improvements are continually being made to the website, with activation of the News tab the most recent development. At least one new article is published each month to encourage people to visit the website regularly, particularly in the seasons when fewer gardens are opened. This site keeps visitors in touch with things that are happening in the garden world, particularly where these are related to our strategic themes. It also highlights openings of particular interest and allows us to give an insight into the impact of our giving program. We have articles coming up on Burnley students' travelling scholarship trips and on the new therapeutic garden we are funding at the Royal Talbot hospital. The aim of these articles is not only to increase visitation to the OGV website but to increase OGV's profile as a respected voice in the horticultural community. In future the website will be used to highlight events run by other organisations with aims consistent with OGV's objectives and theme.

Since commencing in May 2015 with a brand-new Website, page visits have built from 0 to approximately 40,000 per month on average. The visits are in seasonal waves. We enjoy two high seasons per year (Spring and Autumn) and two low seasons High Summer/Xmas and Winter.

Currently the two high seasons account for 70% of the page traffic for the year. Our plan is bolster the lower garden season with Events that support our themes.

Average pages since OGV commenced operations showed steady growth, reaching a peak of over 55,000 pages in December 2017. Since then visits have decreased slightly but follow a strongly similar seasonal pattern, with December recording the most visits. These are now complemented by the over 20,000 visits to the videos online via OGV's You Tube site and via Instagram and Facebook.



- **Instagram**

OGV's remarkable social media presence continues to grow. The number of Instagram followers jumped last year from 10,000 in June 2018 to more than 17,800 followers in June 2019. Every garden opening and event is promoted on Instagram and these are often picked up by our followers and reposted to others.

- **Newsletter**

The monthly newsletter is also achieving an increased presence each year. It is now sent to more than 4000 garden lovers each month. Feedback indicates this is helping to build an OGV community.

- **Other Media**

While we continue to enjoy strong support from the media, a number of valuable links have weakened this year with changes in staff and production aims at both ABC Radio Melbourne and 3AW. We are no longer guaranteed publicity via these two radio stations. As these have proven to be a wonderful means of letting garden lovers about openings in the past, we will work to re-establish lines of communication with both stations.

Meanwhile, Megan Backhouse includes our gardens and events in her Plotlines column in the Age and our gardens are sometimes featured in The Australian's weekend supplement and the Planthunter online magazine. Material is also submitted to a variety of print and online magazines.

## **Building Community**

This operates at many levels.

The community is involved in many garden openings. Volunteers help out on the day by manning the gates and helping direct visitors. The CFA, local primary schools and the like often become involved, using the opening as an opportunity to earn money for their organisation by offering refreshments or running a plant stall. Where the charity is to receive the gate takings its members often volunteer at the opening. Thus a garden opening may contribute to the social capital of the area as well as supporting a charity and offering the wider community a chance to meet with fellow enthusiasts.

The Friends Group also helps to bring people together. OGV encourages garden lovers to support OGV and link into a network of fellow garden lovers by becoming a Friend. The continued practical assistance and support of the Friends of OGV has been much appreciated and valued. In 2018-2019, over 100 people took up membership.

While Friends have been generous in offering assistance, they seem to be less concerned with attending Friends-only events. Friends will continue to receive a 2 for 1 entry to one garden opening, priority booking, discounts on talks and an invitation to the annual Christmas party. They will continue to be offered many chances to volunteer.

## **Donations to Charity**

Each year OGV applies part of its operating surplus to benefit charities and organisations which have a connection with horticultural activities. Significant donations this financial year are:

- \$10,000 to the Royal Talbot hospital to develop a new therapeutic garden in a space currently dominated by concrete paths and a clothes hoist! The idea is to provide a green and inspiring outlook from surrounding rooms which house long term patients, treatment rooms and seminar spaces.
- A further \$10,000 to the University of Melbourne for the third year of travelling bursaries to assist the studies of students enrolled in studies in Urban Horticulture at Burnley.

- \$5000 to support the continued publication of The Planthunter, encouraging people to include horticulture and gardens in their lives.
- \$6000 towards a mobile olive press and trailer to be used by 3000acres for community programs.

We have also continued to donate funds throughout the year in conjunction with our openings and events. Thus all profits from the opening of Seafarm were donated to Cabrini hospital as a tribute to the late David Wilkinson, a previous Chair and contributor to open gardens organisations over many years, all of the Cranlana proceeds were donated to the Royal Talbot Hospital and half of our profit from the Buninyong opening was donated to Friends of Buninyong. Where gardens were opened in conjunction with Global Gardens of Peace, OGV also made donations to that organisation.

During the course of the year, many garden owners donated their share of the gate takings to charity.

Some of the charities to benefit via donations from OGV and garden owners this year are:

Bayley House	Grace McKellar Hospital
Beaufort CFA	Global Gardens of Peace
Brunswick Community Centre	Learning for Life Autism Centre
Burwood Heights Primary School	Parkinsons Victoria
Cabrini Hospital	Royal Talbot Hospital
Days Walk Farm	Skipton Hospital
Duneira Garden Trust	Sustain Australia
Fareshare	The School of Lost Arts
Friends of Buninyong Botanical Gardens	Ziebells Farmhouse

During the course of the 2018/19 financial year more than \$70,000 will have been raised for charity as a result of OGV activities.

## Finances

The Financial Statements presented by the Treasurer show that as at 30/6/2019 OGV had an operating surplus of \$45,340 before making donations of \$37,571 and \$7,769 after. Full details of the finances are contained in the Financial Statements.

## Looking Ahead

In the coming year OGV will continue to bring the Green City theme to life, emphasising the two-way contribution of gardens and gardening:

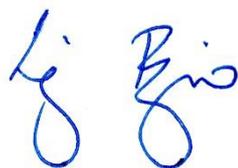
- Helping to reinforce the livability of our urban areas and adding to the quality of life of Victorians through a focus on the environment, sustainable gardening and fewer miles food production
- Bringing the well-documented health and wellness benefits of gardening to a new, younger audience

We will continue to look for new ways to select gardens for the annual program. One new way will be to offer a number of different 'series' of openings. A further series of productive openings with 3000 acres is at the planning stage, as is a series of 'achievable gardens' which will be of particular appeal to those with little available space. A series of 'architects gardens' is also in the offing.

OGV is in the process of appointing a researcher to a new paid position which will look to source gardens brought to attention in print and social media. All of these will supplement the traditional Selector-based gardens. We will nevertheless continue to recruit more selectors, particularly in both regional areas and will look to appoint a new Head of Selectors.

OGV is seeking to recruit more volunteers at Committee, sub-committee and general levels, to ensure that as our program grows, so too does the capacity to deliver high quality openings and events. Succession planning will be crucial as the organisation matures. Recent advertisements have resulted in an encouraging level of applications which look promising for increasing the pool of volunteer expertise and assistance available. We are creating two new Committee positions – Head of Giving and Head of Volunteers.

Development of comprehensive policies and procedures will be a priority in the coming year and we will continue to seek partners who we can include in both our public facing activities and our giving program.



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Elizabeth Fazio  
Chair

25 July 2019

