



# **ANNUAL REPORT**

## **2021**

15 August 2021

# Contents

<b>OVERVIEW</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>1. BUILDING A RESILIENT ORGANISATION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Committee Expertise	1
<b>2. PROGRAMS</b>	<b>2</b>
2.1 Traditional Openings	2
2.2 Green City Activity	2
2.3 Online Programs	2
2.4 Policy	3
2.5 Communication	3
2.5.1 OGV website	3
2.5.2 Instagram and Facebook	4
2.5.3 Newsletter	5
2.5.4 Other Media	5
2.6 Volunteers - Building Community	5
2.7 Our Giving Program	6
2.8 Finances	6
<b>3. LOOKING AHEAD</b>	<b>7</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

No table of figures entries found.

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Moving average page visits 2015 to 2019	4
---	---

# Overview

## Open Gardens Victoria Incorporated

### A0090703V | 2021 Annual Report

This is the Sixth Annual Report of Open Gardens Victoria Incorporated ('OGV') and covers the period from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021.

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 per annum subscription fee.

Each year a portion of our surplus is gifted to horticultural projects which complement the goals of our organisation.

### Our year in at a glance

 Garden openings	18	 Giving committed	\$62,892
 Insta Live Tours	13	 Giving recipients	Wonderground /Plant hunter South Melbourne BEE Gardens Cultivating Community Growing Farmers Victoria University labyrinth Kingsville Seed Library
 Income	\$45,909	 OGV website hits	3,777,466 hits July 2020-June 2021
 Operating costs	\$133, 477 (including \$62,892 of giving)	 Social followers	35,000

## Officers

The following persons were the officers of OGV as at 30 June 2021 or resigned during the year 1 July 2020 – 30 June 2021:

		<b>Position</b>	<b>Date of Appointment</b>
	Elizabeth Fazio	Chair	Incorporation. Reappointed 16/8/17. Reappointed 19/8/20.  Member of Governance Committee and Member of Marketing and Communications sub-committee.
	Jason Chongue	Deputy Chair	Appointed 15/8/18. Appointed Deputy Chair 21/8/19. Member of Events sub-committee and the Giving sub-committee.
	Vivienne White	Secretary	Appointed 21/8/19. Member of Governance Committee.
	Peter Milsom	Treasurer	Casual vacancy 21/10/2015. Re-appointed 17 August 2017. Appointed Treasurer 15/8/18. Member of Governance Committee.

## Committee members

The following persons were Committee members as at 30 June 2020 or resigned during the year 1 July 2020 – 30 June 2021

### Date of Appointment



Helen Diprose

Incorporation. Reappointed 15/8/18  
Member of Events sub-committee.



Helena Buxton

Incorporation. Reappointed 17/8/16. Reappointed 21/8/19. Resigned 20/6/21. Member of Events sub-committee.



Lucy Gubbins

Appointed 21/8/19. Member of Giving sub-committee



Graham Read

Casual vacancy appointed 20/11/19. Head of Volunteers. Appointed 19/8/20



Robert McMillan

Casual vacancy appointed 16/10/19. Appointed 19/8/20. Member of Governance Committee.

### Date of Appointment



Megan Pascoe

Casual vacancy appointed 16/10/19. Appointed 19/8/20.  
Head of Giving. Chair of Giving sub-committee



Sophie Milcev

Casual vacancy appointed 16/12/20 Chair of Marketing  
and Communications sub-committee



Louise Brown

Casual vacancy appointed 16/6/21. Chair of Selection sub-  
committee.



Annabel Reid

Casual vacancy appointed 16/6/21 Head of Events sub-  
committee

# 1. Building a resilient organisation

It has been an incredibly challenging 12 months for OGV. Once again, our plans and programs have been severely impacted by Covid-19. Although we have been able to hold public openings and events on and off since January, the continued uncertainty with permitted numbers of visitors and snap lockdowns has led to difficulties in scheduling and understandable reticence on the part of garden owners to participate. While we have maintained, and even built, our following through successfully delivering free content online, our major revenue streams remain severely impacted by the ongoing effects of Covid.

Our focus is now firmly on developing alternate revenue streams and internal processes to create a resilient organisation.

## 1.1 COMMITTEE EXPERTISE

During the year we were fortunate to recruit three outstanding new members to key roles on the Committee of Management. Sophie Milcev has taken over as Head of Marketing and Communications, Louise Brown as Head of Selection and Annabel Reid as Head of Events.

Sophie is a change and communications professional who has worked in the private and public sectors as well as not for profits - fostering and coaching teams throughout their workplace changes. She has already strengthened the OGV MarComs team at a time when communications with our various stakeholders is absolutely critical.

Louise has a background in horticulture, having completed a horticultural apprenticeship and worked for Parks Victoria as well as gardening for private clients over many years. She has also established and managed several successful businesses, has a track record of leadership and is used to working with many different people, including as a volunteer. Already a Selector, Louise comes to her new role with a knowledge of the OGV organisation and a feel for current Selection issues.

Current Events sub-committee member Annabel Reid has taken over the leadership of that Committee. Annabel has been part of OGV since its very earliest days and has a deep understanding of the organisation. Her energy and digital expertise will be particularly valuable at a time when we need to build capacity for online events.

### **OGV's organisational chart is provided as the final page of the Report**

We are very fortunate to have a skilled band of committed volunteers who put much time and effort to increasing the organisation's public profile and delivering a program which reaches a diverse gardening audience. 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.

Although succession planning is a challenge, it is encouraging that voluntary positions advertised during the past year through Instagram, Seek Volunteer and LinkedIn have all received a healthy number of good quality applications. It is apparent that the applicants have a high awareness of OGV and our programs. They are keen to both provide support and work with like-minded volunteers.

A further indicator of community support for OGV has been successful recruitment of 8 new Selectors at a time when openings have been constrained by Covid limitations.

Despite our reduced income for the year as a consequence of Covid restrictions, OGV's retained surplus accumulated since incorporation has allowed us to continue to retain the services of administrative assistants and a graphic designer. Paid assistance ensures that the workload of volunteers does not become unmanageable.

The importance of staying in touch with our followers when our face-to-face programs have been limited cannot be overstated. Thus we have increased the amount of paid assistance for crucial social media activities, newsletters and the like. We have also 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.

## 2. Programs

### 2.1 TRADITIONAL OPENINGS

After the disappointment of cancelling a full program of spring openings as a result of Melbourne's second lockdown it was encouraging to once again open gardens in the autumn season. It has been a case of planning for the best, having our processes in place and being ready to communicate changes quickly.

Key to these processes has been development of the OGV Covid Safe Plan and use of QR codes. Responding to whatever government regulations were in place at the time, Committee members established protocols for physical openings and meetings under the Plan.

Although only 8 gardens were opened in autumn, they presented a pleasing variety, ranging from an expansive dry garden near Portland, to the gracious grounds of Bishops court in inner Melbourne and a traditional mountain climate garden in the Dandenongs.

### 2.2 GREEN CITY ACTIVITY

In 2019 OGV partnered with *3000acres* to open a series of productive gardens in the inner city under a grant from the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation. After the cancellation of a 2020 OGV program, it was wonderful to offer a program of autumn openings with *3000acres*, when productive gardens are at their peak. Due to the small spaces, numbers were constrained to ensure compliance with Covid density requirements. Sessions were hugely popular, with most sold out and even extra sessions scheduled selling out too. Importantly, these openings have been particularly well received by younger, inner city residents.

### 2.3 ONLINE PROGRAMS

During the first lockdown in 2020 OGV developed a new suite of social media and website content to keep us in touch with our followers and bring plants and gardens to them. Like many organisations which pivoted to develop new ways of working during lockdown, OGV has embraced these changes as a permanent part of our offerings.

Other online initiatives include:

#### **Instagram Live Garden Tours**

The highlight has been the continuation of virtual garden tours called “A Walk in the Garden’. These videos feature landscape designer and former OGV Committee member Stephen Read, as he chats with garden owners for 30 minutes while they walk through their gardens. Viewers can pose questions via the Q&A feed. Each of the videos is posted to IGTV and has been watched by close to 3000 viewers. This program has been one of the outstanding positives for OGV from Covid-19 times and is now a permanent part of the OGV program.

- Virtual tours of gardens;
- Tutorials on gardening techniques and what to do in the garden;
- The plant of the month providing information and photos of a plant at its peak;
- The monthly theme, which encourages people to send in photos for posting on social media and the web;
- A regular competition, judged by a different, well respected expert in the particular horticultural topic. These have attracted media attention and many entries. Photos for the entries have been providing great content for social media and have spawned an article on the topic for the News tab on our website.

## **2.4 POLICY**

During the year a Governance Committee comprising OGV’s executive and governance expert Rob McMillan was established to oversee OGV’s policies and procedures. Its initial task has been to produce a comprehensive consolidated procedures document. Covering areas as diverse as job descriptions for committee members and contractors, to risk assessment procedures for openings, to recording all policies in full, the document provides an operating manual for the entire organisation. It ensures knowledge will be retained regardless of changes in Committee membership. The next key task for the Governance Committee is to develop principles and processes for managing succession.

As reported last year, a new Giving Policy provides a framework for allocating grants under OGV’s annual giving program. A new Giving sub-committee has been established to administer the grant application provisions of the Policy and make recommendations to the Committee. This process was run for the first time in 2020/21 with outstanding success. Grants totalling \$29,800 have been approved.

## **2.5 COMMUNICATION**

### **2.5.1 OGV website**

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

The website continues to be an important means by which OGV communicates with its public and has become absolutely crucial since the advent of Covid-19. The raft of new online content provides new ways for gardeners to engage with OGV. In addition to our monthly content, the

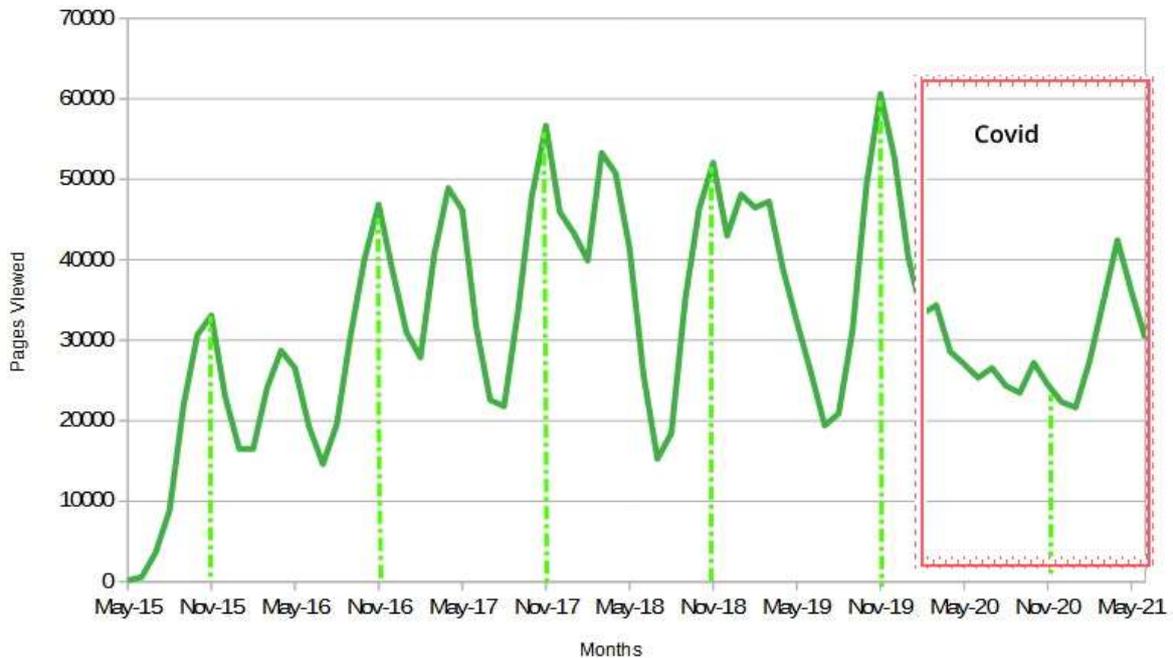
[News tab](#) has provided extra reasons for visiting, to read the articles published each month. This site keeps visitors in touch with things that are happening in the garden world, particularly where related to our strategic themes. It features articles by the judges of our monthly competitions and allows us to give an insight into the impact of our giving program. Just some of the pictorial articles published are:

- The ALKIRA sensory garden created with funding from OGV;
- Recipes for seasonal produce;
- Passion for Perennials by Merryle Johnson and Creative with Natives by Kate Herd.

These articles not only serve to increase visitation to the OGV website but increase OGV’s profile as a respected voice in the horticultural community.

Engagement with our followers during Covid is strikingly different. Previously there was a definite pattern to the access of our web site by our garden followers. High seasons in December and Low seasons in July – August. With all open gardens postponed in 2020 after March and far fewer openings in autumn, we could expect the web audience to postpone as well. That has proven not to be the case. Though the peak viewing is lower than in non -Covid years, there has been sustained interest throughout the year. We believe this likely to be due to the increased social media activity leading visitors to the website, especially from garden visits on Instagram.

Figure 2.1: Moving average page visits 2015 to 2021



### 2.5.2 Instagram and Facebook

OGV’s remarkable social media presence continues to grow. The number of Instagram followers is now a substantial 35,000. Over the past year we have seen a significant shift in social media content and engagement. We have showcased garden openings and all garden related content (via our Discover More initiatives). Despite the limitations of opening gardens due to the Covid-19 pandemic, our social media activity continues to be very popular and engaging for our followers on both Facebook and Instagram.

Social media content is updated weekly to encourage cross platform visitation and allow users not active on social media access to the content. We have adopted a structured pre-determined posting schedule maximising the knowledge of our audience and high engagement timeframes for each platform.

The posting of content is an average of 9-12 social media posts per week and we are posting more stories that have a 24 hour expiry date - encouraging higher engagement due to the varied gardening related content shared. We've seen our story reach grow on Instagram by 3591 views and 281 views on Facebook.

During the past year, OGV has seen followers increase by approximately 5,000 on Instagram and 2,000 on Facebook.

Our top reaching post at the start of this financial year was 10,751 on Instagram and 5,500 on Facebook. By the end of the financial year this was an impressive 104,000 on Instagram, due in part to the re-sharing of content from other pages to our newsfeed on Instagram. Facebook was much lower on Facebook at 2,200. From monthly tracking of Facebook insights, it appears that content engagement on Facebook is especially driven during times when we have lots of garden openings to promote.

### 2.5.3 Newsletter

The monthly newsletter is also achieving an increased presence each year. A revamped format is now sent to almost 4500 garden lovers each month. Feedback indicates readers appreciate the content and the contact.

### 2.5.4 Other Media

Meanwhile, Megan Backhouse includes our gardens and events in her Plotlines column in the Age. An entire article on composting recently featured an interview with committee member Helena Buxton, ahead of her in person and Zoom workshops. OGV gardens are also featured from time to time in The Australian's weekend supplement and The Planthunter online magazine as well as by a variety of print and online magazines such as Australian House and Garden, Country Style, Mornington Peninsula Magazine, Surf Coast magazine and other regional publications.

## 2.6 VOLUNTEERS - BUILDING COMMUNITY

Building community is at the heart of OGV's programs. Whether it be through local volunteers who help out at the gates or through local organisations who run fundraisers at openings, our openings contribute to the social capital of an area as well as offering the wider community opportunities to meet with fellow enthusiasts.

Becoming involved in the operations of OGV offers further opportunity to link into a network of garden lovers. The volunteers who comprise the OGV Management Committee, sub-committees and Selectors are all a part of this network. For the first time this year OGV participated in Volunteer Week activities, organising a morning tea followed by a private guided tour of the Melbourne Botanic Gardens as a thank you to the many people who contribute their time and effort to support OGV.

Also much appreciated has been the memberships taken out by 91 Friends of OGV. Their subscription is essentially a gesture of support for our organisation at a time when there have been few opportunities to realise any personal benefits from membership.

## 2.7 OUR GIVING PROGRAM

Each year OGV helps raise money for community organisations and applies part of its operating surplus to benefit charities and organisations which have a connection with horticultural activities. OGV Grants approved 2020/21 are shown below. Note that not all funds are yet expended as funding is released as projects meet agreed milestones.

Organisation	Amount	Project
Wonderground / Planthunter publication	\$2,750	Steward Circle support for the publication.
South Melbourne BEE Gardens	\$9,866	A community public garden initiative dedicated to increasing bee habitat and bee populations in urban Melbourne.
Cultivating Community	\$10,000	Working with asylum seekers teaching gardening skills with each participant getting a living box to grow enough food for 3 months.
Growing Farmers	\$9,300	Inner city landowners are matched with aspiring farmers to grow produce over 9 month period, produce farmed is then sold at community markets at a reduced price
Victoria University Labyrinth	\$9,800	Public access labyrinth created from low growing native and exotic species to create year-round flowering meadow enhanced by Australian Native Fruit trees.
Kingsville Seed Library	\$700	Fund purchase of seasonal seeds for a community seed sharing library.

During the course of the 2020/21 financial year more than \$45,000 will have been contributed as a result of OGV activities.

## 2.8 FINANCES

The Financial Statements presented by the Treasurer show that as at 30 June 2021 OGV had an operating deficit of \$(24,676) before making donations of \$62,892, and \$(87,568) after donations. These donations include funding approved in past years but not yet expended for reasons including practical difficulties arising from Covid restrictions.

Full details of the finances are contained in the Financial Statements.

### 3. Looking Ahead

In the year ahead we will:

- Continue to recruit new Selectors where there are gaps in our geographical network to enable us to open gardens across the State. We will look to collaborate with different communities to bring clusters of openings, particularly in the regions.
- Develop, in addition to our standard program of openings, new themes for opening gardens and holding related events, giving a focus to our efforts and our collaborations.
- Look to expand ways for sourcing gardens, forming partnerships with respected designers and using online material and print publications
- Develop the Friends of OGV program
- Continue to seek partners for both our public facing activities and our giving program.
- Develop crucial online content, serving the dual purposes of bringing gardens and gardening knowhow to viewers while generating a new revenue stream.

Thank our volunteers by providing more opportunities for social interaction

Continue to focus on succession planning to ensure there is a plan in place for a smooth transition as committee and sub-committee members retire.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth Fazio".

Elizabeth Fazio

Chair

15 August 2021

OGV org chart

