 **Landcare Broken Hill Inc**

***Greening the Hill Mk.2***

ABC Radio interview No.8 – 18 June 2019

**Community Gardens for Broken Hill**

One of the project ideas being floated as part of ***Greening the Hill Mk.2*** is to establish one or more community gardens in Broken Hill. It is one of the projects that appears to be gaining much interest.

So this last weekend I’ve been in Melbourne investigating community gardens. To see how they work first hand – looking at designs, the scope of activities, management structure, benefits and pit falls.

I’d like to raise some ideas in this radio interview and ask listeners for some feedback, particularly their suggestions.

**Veg Out Community Gardens, St Kilda.** (beside Luna Park) **City of Port Philip**

The St Kilda community garden has 145 garden plots, of which 10 plots are reserved for community groups and the other 135 are rented out to private people.

The St Kilda garden is restricted to local people who pay $4 every six months for a square metre of garden plot. A concession rate is available at $2.50 every 6 months per sq m.

There’s a big waiting list of people wanting a plot. Once a plot is allocated, the plot becomes the responsibility of the plot holder. Each new plot holder is initially on a 3 month probation period. Being a community garden, it really important that people get on and so are considerate of others

**Uses of the plots**

Most people grow just vegetables. Some grow just flowers. Many grow a mix of the two.

A few plots people create **art installations**. Art was very much a feature of many garden plots – sculptures, wind chimes and many really quirky objects – often made out of old gardening tools fashioned into art works.

Experience has shown that some rules are needed, so that the plots are properly maintained. Most plots I saw were well maintained, with little rubbish around. The Veg Out Committee does have a Plot Monitor, whose job is to ensure plot holders maintain their plots properly

The community group plots, or communal plots, were allocated to larger garden endeavours. There was a reasonable vineyard on one. Another communal plot was a small orchard of about 3 dozen fruit trees.

The structure adopted provided for people to be supporters of the garden. These people do not need to be anything other than a supporter of the concept, so they join as ‘Friends of Veg Out’.

**Place of Recreation**

Amongst the garden plots there are many paths meandering around. It was clear that the garden has become a local attraction where some people just visit to relax. There are many park-type benches around where visitors can sit and watch.

In the midst there are some communal areas where the public or the garden community can have picnics. It was clear these facilities were popular.

**Tourist attraction**

The Veg Out Garden has become quite an attraction in St Kilda, with it now being promoted on websites such a Trip Adviser. Evidently a good number of people get much enjoyment out of visiting the garden.

**Recycling food and garden waste**

One of the features of this St Kilda garden was that the local community was encouraged to drop off their kitchen waste and garden waste to be reused. The garden had a number of communal composting areas, mulching areas, worm farms etc.

The benefits were obvious: for the Veg Out Garden, the plot holders were able to produce compost and worm fertiliser for their plots. The local community were able to participate, feeling useful in ensuring their waste was productively re-used. And from the Council perspective, it had less waste to collect and so less material was going to landfill. A win-win for everyone.

**Community spirit & a place of learning**

A community garden such as I inspected in St Kilda brings the local community together, providing a real sense of belonging and friendship to those involved. Experienced gardeners pass on their knowledge to people new to gardening. This community benefit is very apparent with other community garden projects.

**Land Ownership**

With all the community gardens I investigated I found the land allocated to community gardens was either Crown land or Council land. The Councils all believed that allocating land for community gardens was consistent with their Sustainability Policy and had multiple benefits for their local community. Engendering community spirit, reducing waste, using Council land in an environmentally responsible way, promoting better community health and even creating a local attraction which was good for the local economy.

**Pitfalls**

Security has been identified as an issue. Secure perimeter fences have been found to be necessary. Also the gardens can only be accessible during daylight hours, with gates locked for security.

**So for Broken Hill. What would people like?**

**What sort of garden**? Vegetables, flowers, community recreational spaces?

**Interest in creating an attraction**, with a partnership with the Arts Community?

**Location?** Usually easy access - within walking distance from plot holders’ homes. So do we need in Broken Hill: North, South, Central & Railway Town?

**Next public meeting to discuss *GREENING THE HILL MK.2* projects**

**Centre for Community, 200 Beryl Street, 7.00pm Thursday 27 June**

Want to express interest? Want to become a Landcare Broken Hill member? **LandcareBrokenHill@gmail.com**