The Healing Circle – A Sensory garden for All Abilities.

Caz Philips, Pauline Butler and Murray Howard-Brooks would like to acknowledge the assistance of our Mentors within this project.

Rob Small.
CEO
Colac Otway Shire

Annette Zealley
Director
Geelong Botanical Gardens

And we also acknowledge our Brethren – the Barwon Community Leadership Programme Participants of 2011 – for their support, guidance and friendship.

From little things, big things grow
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Why a Sensory Garden?

A Sensory Garden seeks to enliven sensory nerves through specific selection and careful arrangement of various garden elements. Sensory perceptions that range from sight and hearing, smell and touch, to even taste can be evoked by a sensory garden. A sensory garden can serve therapeutic and educational purposes for children and adults alike and many that experience a sensory garden find it helpful for individuals with disabilities that affect their sensory responses.

The common focus of all sensory gardens is the creation an immersive experience that appeals to one or more of the five senses that is beyond the scope and design of an average garden. To some degree, the experience for observers and participants is often described to be invigorating, relaxing and stimulating. Many sensory gardens are often created with the needs of disabled groups, such as the visually-impaired, low mobility groups, aged or infirm in mind. As a result, individuals with compromised or non-functioning sensory nerves can receive a sensory experience grounded in physical or mental stimulation that would otherwise be lost to them.

A sensory garden is a way of communicating with nature and stimulate community members to the value of their five senses, promoting social inclusion for any individual with or without disabilities and can be used as an aid in healing and meditation.

Garden elements that comprise the main features of a sensory garden include hardscape and plant display. Hardscape elements are the physical details of the garden that exclude plants. They are just as vital in the design of the garden as the plants and become integral parts of the sensory experience, as the arrangement of walls, footpaths, seating and signage can allow ease of access and interactivity, all of which are important aspects to consider when designing a sensory garden for use by disabled individuals.

A Sensory Garden is a place to relax and reflect
Who Will benefit from a Sensory Garden?

A sensory garden that stimulates the five senses - Touch, Smell, Hear, Taste and Sight - is of benefit to the whole community from young children to senior citizens as well as those members of the community who are wheelchair bound, or have mental and physical challenges. Time spent in natural environments can provide a range of health benefits, including reduced stress and lowered blood pressure and can also make a great contribution to emotional and physical wellbeing. Most gardens offer visual appeal, but a sensory garden is designed to stimulate all five senses.

Mr John Davis, Ph.D of Naropa University USA states in his research “Psychological benefits of nature experiences: research and theory with special reference to transpersonal psychology and spirituality” that there is a strong connection between nature and health. Direct contact with nature leads to increased mental health and psychological development. Davis’s research covered all areas of natural environments from open spaces, courtyards, urban garden plots, parklands, playgrounds and potted plants and noted that there were four major groups that subjects collected in.

Relaxation and stress reduction. This focus is on physical, cognitive, and affective relaxation and studies have shown that a faster recovery response is gained by nature stimuli rather than focusing on built settings such as continual therapy indoors.

Decreased mental fatigue, restored mental clarity, and increased sense of well-being. Studies within this area have shown that nature experiences relieve mental fatigue. As a balance of too much directed attention, nature offers intrinsic interest and a sense of fascination. The restorative effects of a natural environment, whether time in a natural bush setting or a walk in a local park or garden, leads to renewed attention and positive affect.

Recovery from surgery, physical health and healing, improved performance, and improved sense of well-being. Research shows that a view of nature rather than a built environment from a hospital room window aids in quicker recovery from surgery, improves work performance in job settings, and increases job satisfaction (hands up if your office has a calendar, print or poster of a nature scene or landscape!) Davis also adds that the evidence that bringing plants and pets into hospital rooms and residential care facilities such as nursing homes improves physical and mental health.

Benefits for children’s attention. Studies have shown that even contact with very small green spaces in cities leads to improvement in children’s abilities to pay attention, delay gratification, and manage impulses. Other research also has shown that contact with nature may reduce symptoms associated with Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder, Autism Spectrum Disorders and other neurological and focus driven disorders.

A Sensory Garden is a space for healing for many members of the community, not only for those with physical, mental and social challenges but those amongst us who need five minutes of down time to stop and reflect on our day and life’s journey.
Strengths and Weaknesses of the Project

While no dimensions are given for this Sensory Garden, it is a site that can be manipulated varying on the site chosen and the locality of it, for example a coastal or rural setting or in a hospital or school ground or botanical area. The plan can be enlarged or scaled down depending on the appropriateness of the site. Caz, Pauline and Murray feel that it is important for the full benefit of the garden to be reached, the stakeholders utilise what features of the garden will accompany the chosen site adequately.

The community will ultimately be rewarded for the Sensory Garden as it assists in so many ways with mental and physical health and well being. It is an asset of any shire or city council to engage in garden spaces to interact and empower its residents.

Studies have shown how beneficial garden spaces are to people; even those that live in a rural setting can benefit from quiet spaces and relaxing atmospheres.

The partnership and collaboration on this project will see many community groups and residents engage in social activities and foster a sense of ownership over a community project that may in turn assist them with their own health and social challenges.

For Caz, Pauline and Murray, working on this project has been a rewarding experience and has allowed a project to become a legacy for the three project partners.

While the benefits of this project far out way the negative aspects of it, consideration must be taken into account for plant damage, vandalism, inappropriate plant selection and wrong site location. Concern must also be turned to sustainability of the garden and continual maintenance of the site.

While maintenance has been sought from community groups, there is the possibility that members may fall short of their commitment to uphold the maintenance on the garden due to volunteer overload or commitments to other community projects.

Council regulations and legislation may impact some of the plant selection or the features of the garden, thus enabling the some of the features on the site plan to be altered.
Location

A site is currently being sourced within the Colac Otway Shire or City of Greater Geelong for this project. Environmental concerns as to location and accessibility ensure the delivery of the project stay true to the project partner’s brief of an ALL ABILITIES garden. Sloping hills and uneven terrain make manoeuvrability in a wheelchair or scooter difficult. If the location sourced is a school or hospital, community access may be compromised and depending on the surrounding environmental factors, plant selection may need to be adjusted.

Caz, Pauline and Murray firmly believe that this project can deliver to the community the type of space and empowerment that the community need and deserve. With funding being acquired and an appropriate site being sourced, the Sensory Garden will be an asset to the community and will empower, engage and educate generations to come.

I think that I shall never see, a poem lovely as a tree.

A tree whose hungry mouth is pressed, against the sweet earths flowing breast,

A tree that looks at God all day, and lifts her leafy arms to pray,

A tree that may in summer wear, a nest of robins in her hair,

Upon whose bosom snow has lain, who intimately lives with rain.

Poems are made by fools like me, But only God can make a tree.

We have worked hard at deciphering the best site to utilise the senses journey within the Garden. The Circle seemed the best option as you can visually see each section of the garden from every advantage point.
**Plant Selection**

*Taste.* A selection of hardy herbs that can be cultivated and gifted to the community kitchen for cooking:

- Basil
- Coriander
- Rosemary
- Lemon Grass
- Lemon Balm
- Oregano
- Marjoram
- Sage

*Hear.* Gentle breezes through the bamboo and native grasses make beautiful music, you just need to sit long enough to hear it. Bamboo is also cultivated to make wind chimes which can be sold to assist in maintenance.

- Bamboo
- Dietes Miscanthus

*Smell.* No roses but glorious scents just the same.

- Daphine Eternal Fragrance
- Heliotrope Plum Pie
- Salvias
- Philadel Phus Grandiflora
- Choisya Temara
- Gardenia
**Touch.** Soft, course, furry ... it’s one of the most important senses we have.

![Lambs Ears](Image1) ![Southern Plains Banksia](Image2) ![Agasatache-Summer Love](Image3)

**See.** The Glorious Prunus Kanzam – Cherry Tree – is a magnificent sight, and with tightly packed flowering heads, stripy barked trunk and sweetly scented limbs, it is the perfect choice for the visual component of the Sensory Garden.

![Prunus Kanzam Tree](Image4) ![Prunus Kanzam Flower](Image5) ![Prunus Kanzam Bark](Image6)
Garden Features

Raised Garden Beds assist those in scooters or wheel chairs to enjoy and interact with the plants and flora that have been specifically chosen to engage the senses. Four raised beds are within the circle and one ground level in the middle which has sand in which boulders and a majestic Buddha statue sits under a Cherry tree.

Four Garden bench sears are placed within the circle so the community can sit and reflect, enjoy and interact with the space. Ample room between the raised beds and garden seats allow for chair or scooter access.

Large Salt and Pepper Granite Pillars are placed within the sand garden to enable further interaction with the Sensory Garden. These pillars are large enough to sit on and close enough to the sand garden to be used as stepping stones and another addition to the ‘touch’ sense.

While the centre of the ‘see’ garden bed is the magnificent Prunus Kanzam (Cherry Tree) and the lush soft sand surrounding the boulders, a Buddha Statue will adorn the garden bed as well. The Statue will be placed in the appropriate position to ‘greet the sun’ as it rises each day.

Wind Chimes will add to the noise reduction of the space, by blocking out traffic noise and urban clatter. It also gives users a soothing sound to focus on while searching for peace and relaxation. In future, wind chimes will be made from the Bamboo in the ‘Hear’ garden bed and sold to assist with sustainability of the Sensory Garden.
Garden Features. Continued.

Within the centre circle pathway, different textures line the circle.

The feel of smooth pebbles and pavers give the participants a massage effect when walking on the stones. Both surfaces are safe for scooters and wheel chairs as the pebbles are not raised above the level of the pavers used.

Flagstone pavers surround the path edge as well as used within the massage path section of the circular walk way. These mixed with the large river pebbles give a wonderful pathway

Small river pebbles cover a section of the circular path. This gives participants and visitors to the garden the opportunity to enjoy the pressure point massage on feet as they move across the stones. This surface is safe for scooters and wheel chairs and not too small for the safety of children.

Washed sand is placed within the centre circle for the Zen garden section of the Sensory Garden. This sand is clean and safe for children and adults to handle. It gives a meditative quality when handled and lends itself to the wondrous patterns that visitors can make with their feet, hands and other tools.
Maintenance and Sustainability

Issues with the Maintenance of the Sensory Garden is a major component as to whether the project is a success or not and also if it has a sustainable future in our environment. With service clubs being approached such as ‘Friends of the Colac Botanical Gardens’, Colac Lions Club, Apex clubs, St Laurence and other Community Groups, it is felt that with their assistance and that of the fostering Shire/City, the project will have a full and long life in which to enrich the community for many years.

Seasonal planting and cultivating of the herbs is required and this can be done simply with the herbs sold to the local cafes and eateries in the township. This can also be partnered with the community Garden and Neighbourhood House cooking classes.

Seasonal pruning of plants and shrubs will need to be done and this would be the undertaking of the fostering community group, with clippings and cuttings taken to be mulched for compost – once again returning to the garden for organic matter to enrich the soil and plant life.

Watering of the plants as they establish will need to be closely monitored and can be done so by hose from local water connections. Once established the shrubs are of a hardy nature and will require very little water maintenance, relying on the seasonal rains.

Fertilising of plants can be done when is required according to planting cycles and seasonal changes.

Structurally, the Sensory Garden should not need much maintenance at all, as most of the materials are of a hardy nature. It may be required to top up the gravel and plant soil due to environmental conditions but this should be looked at and done on a ‘as needed’ basis.
Funding Opportunities

Funding is being sourced from various departments both state and local government, community groups and other funding avenues.

Sponsorship and donations of products, time and labour will assist in the project’s completion.

In Kind labour is anticipated to be orchestrated by local volunteers and community gardeners.

- Colac South West Sub Fund.
- Colac Otway Shire
- City of Greater Geelong
- Colac Community Funding
- Victorian Government
- Ourcommunity.com
- Mental Health and Well Being
- Vichealth
- Vision Australia
# Budget

**Plant Selection**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plant</th>
<th>Quantities</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Herbs</td>
<td>10 tubes</td>
<td>$30.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>$39.50 x 3</td>
<td>$118.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dietesor</td>
<td>$12.50 x 2</td>
<td>$25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardenia</td>
<td>$11.50</td>
<td>$11.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daphne</td>
<td>$18.95</td>
<td>$18.95</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heliotrope</td>
<td>$11.50</td>
<td>$11.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvias</td>
<td>$7.50 x 6</td>
<td>$45.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choisya</td>
<td>$9.95</td>
<td>$9.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadel</td>
<td>$14.50</td>
<td>$14.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prunus Kanzam</td>
<td>$38.50</td>
<td>$38.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annuals/Perennials</td>
<td>$5.20 punnet x 6</td>
<td>$31.20</td>
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Total: $354.60

**Bench Seating**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Price</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marquee Rustic Garden Bench</td>
<td>$129 x 4</td>
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</table>

Total: $516.00

**Paving/Gravel**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Quantities</th>
<th>Price</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flagstones in ‘Oatmeal’</td>
<td>15 sq meters in pallet @ $9.12 per paver</td>
<td>$2,188.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gravel; Small and Large River Pebbles</td>
<td>$149.50 cubic metre x 10</td>
<td>$1,495.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paving Concrete</td>
<td>$434.50 cubic metre x 5</td>
<td>$2,172.50</td>
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**Raised Garden Bed**

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrugated Steel oval Garden bed</td>
<td>$297 x 4</td>
<td>$1,188.00</td>
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Barwon Community Leadership Programme 2011. Community Project

## Budget. Continued

### Soil/Sand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost per Unit</th>
<th>Total Cost</th>
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<tr>
<td>Potting Mix/Garden Loam</td>
<td>$100.00 sq metre x 12</td>
<td>$1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sand</td>
<td>$85 sq meter x 6</td>
<td>$510.00</td>
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### Garden Sculptures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large Sitting Buddha</td>
<td>$399.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wind Chimes</td>
<td>$15.95 x 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt and Pepper Granite Pillars</td>
<td>$200 x 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: $1,030.90

### Additional Costs

- Delivery: $2,00.00
- Administration: $500.00
- Contractual Labour: $1,500.00

**Total Project Cost**

$13,350.80
Caz, Pauline and Murray sourced information, advice and guidance from the following reference material and websites.

- Caz Phillips
- Pauline Butler
- Murray Howard-Brooks
- Rob Small, Colac Otway Shire
- Annette Zeally, Geelong Botanical Gardens
- Ian Serein, Colac Otway Shire
- Sue Betts, Shalimar Nursery
- CSI Landscaping supplies
- Mambourin Sensory Gardens, Werribee
- Ballarat Sand and Soil Supplies
- Melton Sand and Soil Supplies
- Flintstones Garden Supplies
- Selkirk Bricks and Pavers
- www.trulywindchimes.com.au
- www.thestonesuperstore.com
- www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
- www.johndavis.com
- www.bunnings.com.au
- www.bartleby.com
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