

Benefits all round from volunteering at botanic gardens

A national study nearing completion has found strong satisfaction ratings from volunteers at botanic gardens, and even stronger levels of recommendation for others to volunteer at gardens. With a wide range of benefits from feeling connected to plants and the natural environment, escaping the pressures of daily life and relaxing, and meeting people and socialising, volunteers are contributing to a good cause and enhancing their own quality of life.

The study by UniSA researchers in collaboration with Botanic Gardens of Australia and New Zealand (BGANZ) members shows volunteers feel very attached to the gardens they volunteer with, and identify strongly with them. Funding from the National Seniors Australia Productive Ageing Centre and the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing has enabled the researchers to explore the benefits associated with volunteering at gardens from three key perspectives: for individuals aged over 50 years, for botanic gardens, and for the wider community.

As one manager from a participating garden said, benefits from volunteering not only include benefits to the individual such as the 'feeling of worth and contributing to a place they love', but positive outcomes for the garden such as 'provid[ing] knowledge of the gardens that is not available elsewhere' and a 'connection to the community'. Whilst enjoying the aesthetics of plants and gardens was rated the most important benefit for volunteers, it was also the benefit volunteers reported to be gaining most from their involvement.

Interim results from the study show the majority of volunteers at participating gardens were in the 60 to 69 years or 70 plus age groups (49% and 35% respectively), with three-quarters of volunteers being female. Whilst 11% were engaged in part-time work, 71% had retired. Their main roles as volunteers were associated largely with guiding (44%) and gardening (22%). The study relates volunteers' roles, motivations and benefits gained with a self-assessment of personal lifestyle and wellbeing measures.

The full report will be available in October 2009. For further information contact Dr Emily Moskwa on (08) 8302 3319.

