Social Workers as Community Gardeners

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ANZSWWER Symposium:
‘Riding through a time of welfare cutbacks’
25-26 September 2014, University of Western Sydney
Acknowledging the First Nations Peoples

• We would like to acknowledge the first nations peoples on whose land we meet today, the Darug, Tharawal, Gandangarra, Wiradjuri peoples. Acknowledging (among others):
  – Strengths
  – Generosity
  – Courage, and
  – for offering so warmly and humbly the significance and value of many things, including connection to land and people, and the centrality of these connections to our health and wellbeing.

And

• Recognise the past injustices, brutal treatment and harsh policies past and present that have destroyed the lives of many individuals, families and communities.

And

• A Hope, for a future that witnesses greater social justice, human rights, and compassion here in Australia as well as around the world.
Presentation outline

• 3 academics, 3 gardens
• Why gardens – a kinder space for our work
• Poverty – community gardens can offer a response within a macro context
• Narratives: Duncraig, Glen Forrest, and Edith Cowan University Bunbury community gardens
• Summarising – why community gardens?
• Key learnings
3 academics...

- Members of a cross-university writing group (Moore, 2003) which has been in place for over 20 years

- Separately began involvement in community gardens and used writing retreats to cultivate ideas and theorise around social work and community gardens

- 2013 – we presented at the ANZSWWHER symposium on eco-social work and since formed Eco-Social Work Practice Group WA

- At a writing retreat in early 2014, we discovered we were all involved in community gardens in some way and identified how our involvement fitted with our practice as academics and activists.
Why gardens?

• Community gardens represent a kinder space where connection, compassion and justice can occur by allowing for:
  – Emphasis on gifts and strengths
  – Physical and spiritual connection to nature

• Site for the integration of the personal and political

• Not the answer to poverty but what they represent may be part of the solutions
Poverty

Elements of poverty

• Social exclusion
• Hunger
• Obesity/cardiovascular
• Mental illness
• Lack of opportunities to exercise
• Sense of hopelessness/disconnection
• Systemic unemployment

Community gardens promote

• Social inclusion & conviviality
• Reciprocity
• Access to healthier food
• Improved mental health
• Physical activity improved health
• Connection to nature/hope
• Green Collar jobs & ‘word of mouth’ employment
The story of 3 gardens

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Duncraig Edible Garden (Site of Resistance)</th>
<th>Glen Forrest Community Garden (Egalitarian Classroom)</th>
<th>ECU Bunbury Community Garden (Site of Professional Practice)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sue Bailey</td>
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<td>• PhD topic “Responses to Terrorism” was pivotal</td>
<td>• Personal &amp; Professional</td>
<td>• The garden is a site for ‘collective interventions’ practice for SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS</td>
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<td>• Understanding climate change denial etc.</td>
<td>• What’s working well in community and taking to classroom space</td>
<td>• Working with academic and professional staff on campus, interested students &amp; external partners is MY site for professional practice &amp; reflection about my macro social work practice.</td>
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<td>• Loss and grief theories particularly Dual Process Models</td>
<td>• Being impassioned &amp; forming coalitions</td>
<td>• Building on strengths &amp; identifying weaknesses</td>
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<td>• Community Garden as restoration orientation</td>
<td>• Worldviews &amp; Frameworks for practice</td>
<td>• Challenging worries &amp; fear of the ‘other’</td>
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Why the Duncraig Edible Garden for Sue

Sustainability as a social, economic, political, cultural organising system

Restorative
COMMUNITY
GARDENS AS A
THIRD SPACE –
RESISTING
DOMINANT
IDEOLOGY AND
ACTING OUT
SUSTAINABILITY
PRINCIPLES

Business - as-usual system of social, economic, political and cultural values and structures
Margaret Stroebe, Henk Schut (1999)
THE DUAL PROCESS MODEL OF COPING WITH BEREAVEMENT:
RATIONALE AND DESCRIPTION, Death Studies, 23:3, 197-224, DOI:
10.1080/0748118992010466  page 213
The Duncraig Edible Garden
The Glen Forrest Community Garden

In 2008 a small group of residents had a vision of ‘establishing a community garden in Glen Forrest where everyone could come and grow all kinds of flowers, fruit and vegetables, in a fun, permaculture-inspired kind of way’ (http://gfccg.org.au)

Why the Glen Forest Community Garden for Antonia

Linking what observed, felt and participated in:

– Head: Inspired by what observed
  • Different ways of working and knowing (frameworks/worldviews)
  • Governance – sociocracy (consent-based decision-making)

– Heart: and felt
  • Conflicted by work/travel/value of community
  • People acting with passion together

– Hand: Peoples’ strengths, capacities, skills, gifts
  (Kelly & Sewell, 1988)
– Feet: Flexibility of CG group, moving forward, sometimes backwards
  (Ife, 2013)

Challenging worries - What gets in way (gated community, worry about what gardens might attract, fear of change)

With what we know of CD:

• Bell hooks’ ‘teaching to transgress’
  – Self-actualisation (hooks, 1994)
  – Conscientisation (Freire)
  – Private troubles, public issues (C Wright Mills)
  – Empowerment of selves and others
  – Educator as facilitator of learning – sitting with the uncomfortableness of uncertainty

“The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom with all its limitations remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labour for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom.” (hooks 1994: 207).
Why the Glen Forest Community Garden for Antonia

TRANSFORMATIVE TEACHING - Student centred learning, collaborative, partnerships, flexibility, responsiveness, devolution of control

COMMUNITY GARDENS AS A THIRD SPACE - RESISTING DOMINANT IDEOLOGY OF UNIVERSITIES AND ACTING OUT SUSTAINABILITY PRINCIPLES
Challenging: Teacher-directed learning, hierarchical leadership, performance indicators, curriculum audits, quality assurance
The ECU Campus Community Garden
The ECU Campus Community Garden

- The garden is a site on campus for:
  - experiential learning
  - building community
  - practising ecological sustainability

- In Sem 1, 2014, the garden was a site for social work practice (in a unit on collective interventions). In small groups, students:
  - invited clients from Life Without Barriers to be partners in the garden
  - held a planting day to plant out the garden for the winter season
  - developed recipe cards for students using fresh fruit & vegetables
  - created a Facebook page (ECU Bunbury Community Garden)
  - negotiated with administrative staff about risk management, requirements for volunteers, reticulation, rubbish removal, etc

- It was a challenging teaching & learning experience where students acted, reflected & theorised around their group work (eg. use of task & maintenance skills) and community work in the garden.
Why the ECU Campus Community Garden for Marilyn

TRANSFORMATIVE TEACHING - A space for students to learn by doing - using Rothman’s locality development to grow the class as community and grow the garden

COMMUNITY GARDENS AS A THIRD SPACE - RESISTING student expectations of being taught and creating a space for transformative education

TRADITIONAL TEACHING - teacher as expert, students following instructions
Frameworks for practice

There are frameworks which we have been able to apply to our work across the domains of social work practice (Chenoweth & McAuliffe, 2012)

Broadly: community development, work with groups, social policy, work with individuals, education & training, organisational management & leadership.

Specifically:

– Rothman’s Locality Development
– Community Development Continuum...
For example: the Community Development Continuum

Jackson, Mitchell & Wright (1989)

- Developmental casework
- Mutual support
- Issue identification & campaigns
- Participation & control of services
- Social movements
To summarise: why gardens?

- They provide opportunities for counter-oppressive practice
- They can be sites of resistance to business-as-usual ways of responding to a hypercapitalism – a global hegemony about industrialisation, unfettered growth, materialism and the commodification of food (Baudrillard in Ashley 1991).
- They have become a space for us to practice ideas about transformative learning in relation to eco-social work (sustainability) community development, group work, interpersonal skills.
- They have become another site of our professional practice (beyond the classroom) where we can learn, reflect, practice and challenge what it is to be a social worker.
- They are a site for responding to poverty, one of the key areas of structural disadvantage of concern to social work
- They provide field education opportunities
- They enable the bringing together of the personal, professional and political
Key learnings for us

• Social workers can find spaces where the personal can be the political, ie. where personal troubles can be seen and worked with as public issues (Mills, 1959).

• Community gardens (and classrooms) are sites for transformative change – third spaces where we can work towards social change from within the dominant culture, resisting and undermining it as we actively participate through socially responsible & ecologically careful activities.

• Gardens assert our right to use public space for public good and are generally unsurveilled.
Service users as agents of change

When people with whom we work become passionately involved with others to change social structures they begin to believe in having some measure of power over their own lives. In other words, they are involved in taking control over those things which affect their lives. This ultimately improves their own health and well-being as well as that of others with whom they associate. (Jackson et al., 1989: 72)
Where to from here?

• Our next goal is to build the research element into what we are doing
• Writing retreat – publish ideas:
  – Building on current research
  – Listening to what people share with us
• Student involvement
• Our continued participation in these spaces
• Feed into OLT – eco-social work practice group
References


ECU Community Garden Facebook https://www.facebook.com/pages/ECU-Bunbury-Community-Garden/595413723882366?sk=photos_stream&ref=page_internal


Glen Forrest Community Garden http://gfcg.org.au


