



# **Evaluation Report Seven Oaks Community Garden**

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## Executive summary

**Purpose.** The purpose of this report is to present findings from an evaluation of Seven Oaks Community Garden, which Project Lyttelton managed from 2007 to 2010. The evaluation was undertaken by Project Lyttelton in partnership with Social Foci (Limited), an independent research company that specialises in evaluation. This report is part of a larger *Project Lyttelton Community Research and Evaluation* project funded by the Lottery Community Sector Research Fund.

**Background.** In 2007, Project Lyttelton established Seven Oaks Community Garden, a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) scheme to produce quality produce for the Lyttelton and the Opawa community, and to provide education on sustainable matters. From 2008, the Holistic Trust School shared the site with Project Lyttelton. Besides the gardeners and the school community, the garden was used by volunteers, neighbours, flax weavers and a bee keeper. The Southern Seed Exchange also used the site as its base, evening education classes in horticulture and flax weaving were held, and the Salvation Army ran its horticultural unit for teenagers on site. In addition, boxes with fresh vegetables were produced weekly over the growing season and distributed to paying customers. In 2010, Project Lyttelton decided to discontinue its oversight of the garden due to lack of sustainable funding.

**Evaluation objectives.** Project Lyttelton completed this evaluation to identify key lessons from managing and running the garden, and thus inform decision making about future CSA projects. The objectives of the evaluation were to (1.) focus on past experience at the garden to inform future decision making (e.g. to identify key successes, challenges, and lessons learned); and (2.) to identify what people valued most about the garden and what went well.

**Evaluation methodology.** Evaluation activities included: (1.) a debrief group discussion session with four people who had been actively involved in the management and running of activities at the garden; and (2.) interviews with two volunteer gardeners, two teachers, and two neighbours, who were involved in activities at the garden for up to three years. These research activities were conducted several months after Project Lyttelton had finished its involvement with the garden.

**Research limitations.** The evaluation consisted of a small qualitative assessment with people who were involved with the gardens (10 in total). Therefore, although findings from the evaluation provide useful information to inform future projects in relation to what worked well regarding the management of, and activities in, the gardens, it did not include an in-depth examination of different groups (e.g. neighbours or volunteers) accessing the gardens, and their perception of the quality of aspects of the garden and/or benefits resulting for participants.

**Key findings - successes of the garden.** Key successes of the garden identified through the evaluation were: (1.) the *sense of community* and the positive atmosphere evident at the garden; (2.) the strong relationships that were formed between Project Lyttelton, neighbours, teachers and children at the Holistic Trust school, and other people involved in activities at the garden; (3.) the space and facilities which lent themselves to a wide variety of activities for people of all ages. For example, school-education for children, evening classes and workshops for adults on subjects such as permaculture and organics, social events, food production, and a seed-exchange; (4.) the production of healthy local and organic produce and its distribution in the community through the CSA vegetable-box system; and (5.) the beauty of the natural setting, which provided a peaceful retreat for visitors to the garden.

**Key findings - key challenges.** While communication with gardeners onsite was effective, more communication between Project Lyttelton and the Holistic School Trust would have been helpful, so that the two organisations had a shared understanding of the values underpinning the project, the vision for the garden, and how activities at the garden support that vision.

More volunteers and a stronger connection with the neighbourhood were needed. Volunteers and neighbours needed more information about the garden, the activities that occurred there, and how and when they could get involved. There appeared to be a lack of physical connection with the garden by neighbours, and the fact that the garden is hard to see from the road side could have contributed to this.

Lack of resources was another key challenge for several reasons including: (1.) employed personnel were spread too thin (i.e. were provided with too many tasks in relation to the time allocated to complete them); (2.) there was a lack of available gardeners (paid and voluntary) which led to areas of neglect at the garden (e.g., maintenance in glass houses and orchards); and (3.) working bees were only happening once a month. Some neighbours would have liked more options around working bee times and days.

**Recommended changes for future Community Supported Agricultural (CSA) projects.** If Project Lyttelton was to set up another similar project, a number of aspects should be included in the design of the project to ensure its success and sustainability. Firstly, a strong shared vision and clearer strategic planning for the project should be developed, as this is vital for a project's success. The vision should be created together by key stakeholders, so that everyone involved understands the values underpinning the project, the vision for the project, and how the activities at the garden support that vision.

Communication between key stakeholders is also important, through for example, effective dissemination of information via leaflets, fliers, newsletters, and posters. In some cases regular and ongoing meetings with stakeholders might be appropriate also. Communication could be established through *ritual*. For example, by using creative, non-verbal ways of connecting people to the land, such as art projects in a garden. Ways to engage more people in a CSA project need to be developed, so that all areas of the project can get adequate attention.

In addition, more effective volunteer management and communication to strengthen the connection between volunteers and Project Lyttelton, and clear job descriptions for employees or contractors to clarify expectations for employees, would lead to better results. More funding would be helpful to employ more people. However, finding ideas and ways to work better with existing resources is also important.

Making sure a CSA project, such as a garden is easily seen from the road could make it more inviting and accessible to neighbours, and having working bees more often would provide more people with an opportunity to attend. For future projects, opening a garden up to different community groups and making it available for a variety of purposes, such as allotments, market gardens and schools without gardens, would engage more volunteers and strengthen the connection with the neighbourhood.

# 1 Introduction

The purpose of this report is to present findings from an evaluation of Seven Oaks Community Garden, which Project Lyttelton managed from 2007 to 2010. The evaluation was undertaken by Project Lyttelton in partnership with Social Foci (Limited), an independent research company that specialises in evaluation. This report is part of a larger *Project Lyttelton Community Research and Evaluation* project funded by the Lottery Community Sector Research Fund.

In 2007, Project Lyttelton established Seven Oaks Community Garden, a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) scheme to produce quality produce for the Lyttelton and the Opawa community, and to provide education on sustainable matters. From 2008, the Holistic Trust School shared the site with Project Lyttelton. Besides the gardeners and the school community, the garden was used by volunteers, neighbours, flax weavers and a bee keeper. The Southern Seed Exchange also used the site as its base, evening education classes in horticulture and flax weaving were held, and the Salvation Army ran its horticultural unit for teenagers on site. In addition, boxes with fresh vegetables were produced weekly over the growing season and distributed to paying. In 2010, Project Lyttelton decided to discontinue its oversight of the garden due to lack of sustainable funding.

This report describes the evaluation of this project and its intended use, the key evaluation objectives and questions, the evaluation methods used and limitations, and evaluation findings, followed by a discussion and conclusion section.

## 2 Evaluation type and use

The Seven Oaks Community Garden evaluation is a summative evaluation, which looks at the processes and outcomes from the garden. It provides a qualitative assessment only, as it is based on the views of key people associated with the garden.

Project Lyttelton used the evaluation to identify:

- What aspects of the garden project worked well and those that did not work so well (as a model for Community Supported Agriculture).
- What people who used the garden (e.g. for flax weaving, educational purposes, or growing produce) valued most about the garden (including perceived benefits for them, and what worked well).

Project Lyttelton will use the evaluation findings to share lessons learned with wider audiences, and draw from aspects of the garden that worked well, to inform planning for other projects that they oversee.

## 3 What we wanted to find out

### 3.1 Key evaluation objectives and questions

The key objectives of the evaluation and related evaluation questions are as follows.

- **Objective 1: To focus on past experience at the Seven Oaks Community Garden to inform future decision making**
  - What were some of the key successes of the Seven Oaks Community Garden, as a model for Community Supported Agriculture?
  - What were the key challenges that Project Lyttelton experienced?
  - What are some of the key lessons learned?
  - What aspects of the Seven Oaks Community Garden, as a model for Community Supported Agriculture should Project Lyttelton continue?
- **Objective 2: To identify what people valued most about the Seven Oaks Community Garden and what went well**
  - What did people value most about the garden (i.e. benefits for them and others as a result of participating in activities at the gardens)?
  - What aspects of the garden did people think worked well (e.g. activities at the garden and functions of the garden)?

## 4 Description - Seven Oaks Community Garden

When Christchurch Polytechnic (CPIT) closed their organic garden site at Seven Oaks in Opawa in 2007, the site was offered to Project Lyttelton. Project Lyttelton established a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) scheme to produce quality produce for the Lyttelton and the Opawa community, and to provide education on sustainable matters. The management of the garden consisted of an advisory group, which included Project Lyttelton Board Members, neighbours and volunteers, and two gardeners employed by Project Lyttelton. This group liaised with stakeholders, such as funders, CPIT, and the Seven Oaks Education Center (the Holistic Trust School); a newly established primary school which shared the site with Project Lyttelton from 2008.

In 2007, Project Lyttelton spent the majority of time at the garden clearing the very overgrown site and re-establishing a workable garden setting. From 2008, available land was reduced as the Holistic Trust School was established, but this provided opportunities for engagement between Project Lyttelton and the school. Besides the gardeners and the school community, the garden was used by volunteers, neighbours, flax weavers and a bee keeper. The Southern Seed Exchange also used the site as its base, evening education classes in horticulture and flax weaving were held, and the Salvation Army ran its horticultural unit for teenagers on site for half a year.

For two years, twenty vegetable boxes with fresh vegetables were produced weekly over the growing season and distributed to a group of paying customers, both in Lyttelton and in Opawa. Customers committed themselves at the beginning of the season to buy the weekly box at a fixed price. They also became involved with the garden through working bees, helping to distribute the boxes, attending social events like barbecues and had the possibility of attending an 'Introduction to organic gardening' evening class. In addition, throughout the year, produce and seedlings were sold to London Street Restaurant , Lyttel Piko health food shop, Opawaho Organics and the Lyttelton Farmers Market.

The Christchurch City Council and WINZ were the two major funding bodies. Funds were also raised through sale of produce, plants, herbal cosmetics produced on site, and education courses. However, the garden's size and lay-out were inadequate to grow sufficient produce to return a profit. Project Lyttelton also inherited maintenance problems caused by neglect (e.g. overgrown shelterbelts and orchards causing root-invasion and shading out, as well as old and broken greenhouses). These issues hindered production and were time-consuming and expensive to remediate. In 2010, Project Lyttelton decided to discontinue its oversight of the garden because funding it had become too difficult.

The objectives for Seven Oaks Community Garden, groups that the garden intended to reach, and resources (people and financial) that supported the management and running of the garden are presented below. For a logic model showing the activities that were part of the garden and outcomes expected from those activities see Appendix A.

#### **4.1 Objectives for the garden**

Through Seven Oaks Community Garden, Project Lyttelton aimed to:

- *Produce a variety of healthy, local, and affordable organic food for the community.*
- *Promote and increase knowledge about the production and consumption of a variety of healthy local foods.*
- *Promote and increase knowledge about the benefits of growing seasonal organic food close to where it is eaten or used.*
- *Promote and increase knowledge about permaculture principles.*
- *Promote and increase knowledge about self-sustaining food production, whereby income generated by the sale of local food is more than, or equal to, money spent on production.*
- *Build awareness of nature to enhance the interconnectedness of people with nature.*
- *Help the community to learn how to become more community-reliant for their food.*

## 4.2 Groups reached by Seven Oaks Community Gardens

Key groups that the Seven Oaks Community Garden is intended to reach.

- Local people within walking distance of Seven Oaks Community Garden.
- People from Lyttelton and around Orton Bradley Park/Church Bay.
- Children from the Holistic Education Trust.
- Health food shops (e.g. Lyttel Piko, Opawaho Organics), restaurants, and the Lyttelton Farmers Market.

## 4.3 Resources

People involved in managing and running activities at the garden included:

- Two part-time paid workers who are qualified organic gardeners (20 hours per week in total).
- A regular gardener (two to three hours per week).
- A Bee Keeper.
- Flax weavers.
- Volunteers (weekly vegetable box scheme/monthly working bees).
- Teachers, educators, and tutors (i.e. from the Holistic Trust School).
- Grow Local Committee.
- Four community MAX workers (WINZ funded 'Youth work for community' scheme) worked 30 hours a week for six months in 2009/2010.

Financial resources included:

- Sales from produce through health food shops (e.g. Lyttel Piko), the Lyttelton Farmers Market, and Lyttelton restaurants.
- Sales from vegetable distribution from a weekly vegetable box scheme.
- Sales from homemade creams sold through the Lyttelton Information Centre.
- Sales from pinecones sold through London Street Dairy in Lyttelton (as part of a joint fundraising venture with Orton Bradley Park).
- Sales from firewood from trees that are cut down at Seven Oaks Community Garden.

Community sponsors contributing to Seven Oaks Community Garden have included:

- PGG Wrightson.



- Christchurch City Council.
- Work and Income New Zealand (providing four trainees and wages).
- Private grants of money made by individuals.

## 5 What we did - methodology

This evaluation aimed to give at least two Project Lyttelton team members 'hands on' applied learning opportunities with a key objective being to enhance their evaluation capability as part of a wider monitoring and evaluation project. As such, they were supported by Social Foci to undertake evaluation design activities, collect qualitative information from fieldwork, and undertake analysis of data, and reporting.

This section sets out the methodology for the evaluation of Seven Oaks Community Garden. Qualitative methods were selected for this evaluation because Project Lyttelton wanted in-depth information about what occurred in the past to inform future CSA projects. Collecting quantitative information (e.g. through a survey of people who worked at the garden) would have been difficult, because the garden had not had oversight by Project Lyttelton for about six months at the time of the evaluation, and contact details would have been hard to obtain due to the Christchurch earthquake.

### 5.1 Focus group

In December 2010, a debrief meeting (with a focus group structure) was held by Project Lyttelton with four people who were involved in the management and running of the Seven Oaks Gardens and, therefore, had a good knowledge of how the garden functioned as a model for CSA.

- **A topic guide was developed** which set out a structure for the facilitation of the focus group. A copy of the topic guide is included in Appendix B.
- **Potential participants were contacted.** The venue, date, and time for the meeting was booked, and potential participants were sent an email inviting them to the meeting with information about the purpose of the research and the intended use of the evaluation findings.
- **The topic guide was distributed to debrief meeting participants.** Once participants confirmed that they were happy to attend, they were emailed the topic guide indicating (1) general discussion topics that will be covered during the debrief meeting (2) the purpose of the meeting and use of the information gathered (3) their informed consent and confidential reporting (4) that the focus group component of the meeting would be audio recorded.
- **The focus group took place.** At the debrief meeting, one Project Lyttelton team member (who had had no involvement with the garden) facilitated the discussion.
- **Focus group data was analysed.** The focus group facilitator typed up the audio recording of the focus group. Then the facilitator undertook a thematic content analysis of information in the focus group transcript and documented key findings from the focus group.

- **Key findings were emailed to focus group participants** for the opportunity to provide further comments about discussion topics, and to ensure that the key findings accurately reflected their thoughts. The key findings were then changed as necessary, and finalised by the facilitator.

## 5.2 Key informant interviews

Project Lyttelton conducted face-to-face and telephone interviews with six people who had spent extensive time at Seven Oaks Community Gardens. These included two volunteers, two teachers from the Holistic Trust School, and two neighbours who lived in Opawa.

- **Interview documents were developed.** These included an interview topic guide to inform potential participants of the general topics that are likely to be covered in the interview, a participant consent form, and an interview guide (the interviewers question list). A copy of the topic guide is included in Appendix C.
- **The interview guide was pilot tested** with someone who had been involved with the garden for up to three years, and changes were made to the interview guide, as necessary.
- **Key informants were contacted.** Those that wished to participate were sent a confirmation of the time and date for the interview, a consent form, and an interview topic guide.
- **Key informant interviews were conducted.** Each key informant was interviewed for 20 - 30 minutes. Notes were taken during the interviews, as agreed in the participant consent form. After the interviews were completed, notes were typed up and sent to participants (via email or post) to give them an opportunity to correct notes, or make additional comments.
- **Interview data was analysed.** Once interview notes were finalised, a thematic content analysis of information from the interviews was undertaken.

## 5.3 Research limitations

The evaluation consisted of a small qualitative assessment with people who were involved with the gardens (10 in total). Therefore, although findings from the evaluation provide useful information to inform future projects in relation to what worked well regarding the management of, and activities in, the gardens, it did not include an in-depth examination of different groups (e.g. neighbours or volunteers) accessing the gardens, and their perception of the quality of aspects of the garden and/or benefits resulting for participants.

## 6 What we found - evaluation findings

This section presents evaluation findings from the debrief meeting (focus group structure) and interviews with key informants who were involved in the garden.

### 6.1 Debrief Meeting

In December 2010, a debrief meeting (with a focus group structure) was held by Project Lyttelton with four people who spent a lot of time at the Seven Oaks Community Garden and, therefore had a good knowledge of how the garden functioned as a model for CSA. Participants included staff and managers from Project Lyttelton and a paid worker. This section describes what participants saw as key successes, challenges, lessons learned from their involvement in the garden, and aspects of CSA that work well.

#### 6.1.1 Key successes

Participants at the meeting identified a number of key successes of the Seven Oaks Community Garden. These successes relate to the quality of food produced, the sense of community amongst people working at, or visiting the garden, the educational opportunities at the garden, and relationship building between Project Lyttelton and individuals and groups accessing the gardens. They were described as follows.

##### **Sense of community**

- The sense of community among people at the garden was identified as a key success of the project. It was not just about growing vegetables, but about building relationships and community - *One of the things that I particularly enjoyed were the different sorts of people that worked on the land and all had different backgrounds or ages or ideas or reasons why they came here.*
- The positive atmosphere at the garden was of vital importance to enhancing a sense of community- *People seemed to feel free to come here...it was the atmosphere that was created here on the whole; welcoming and warm and inviting.*

##### **Quality of food**

- The food that was produced at the garden was considered to be excellent due to the hard work and experience of the paid gardeners.

##### **Education**

- The educational aspect of the project was identified as successful, as it fitted within Project Lyttelton's vision of long-term educational goals.

## Relationship building

- Building effective relationships with the project's community (i.e., Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology (CPIT), neighbours, and volunteers) and with interested groups (e.g. PGG Wrightson) contributed greatly to the success of the project through in-kind donation, business advice, voluntary work and loan of equipment.

### 6.1.2 Key challenges

Participants at the meeting identified a number of key challenges experienced at the Seven Oaks Community Garden as follows.

#### Land productivity

- There were challenges with land productivity - *The trees were so overgrown and so there was a whole area we couldn't use [which] meant a lot of work to put in to make the land productive.*
- There were also challenges for the key Project Lyttelton person with having three different garden sites to manage. There was Seven Oaks garden and two other sites - *Just the amount of time needed to be spent to go there plus particular things like you are doing watering when it is an hours drive away each way. So that was a real challenge to manage that efficiently - we also lost a few plants.*

#### Financial barriers

- Lack of finances contributed to challenges in managing the different jobs at the garden. Often the head gardener was spread thin, attempting to complete too many tasks because of the lack of resources to employ others - *A challenge for us all the time was the financial situation... continuously having to look for new things or always looking at cutting corners to make the money go...one of the biggest challenges was to keep the financial situation afloat in a sort of sustainable way.*

#### Management of staff and volunteers

- The different types of relationships involved in the project (i.e. between paid workers, and volunteers, visitors, and the Holistic Trust School staff and children) added vibrancy, but put strain on the paid workers, because of a lack of strategy around management of volunteers and others at the garden - *Volunteers need a lot of management...to have the right amount of volunteers to the job, that is a challenge...because volunteers are what they are they are volunteers. They come when they come and they go when they go.*

### 6.1.3 Key lessons learned

Participants at the de-brief meeting identified a number of key lessons learned at the Seven Oaks Community Garden. These learnings relate to selection of future site locations, and the need for clarity of vision for future projects.

### **Selection of location for future projects**

- Fostering people's connection to the land and food production were identified as priorities for future projects, but due to the challenges with distance from Lyttelton (and between sites), and the subsequent management issues that arose, finding land locally should be a priority.

### **Clarity of vision for future projects**

- Having a strong vision of the role that the [garden] project potentially has on entering into Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology (CPIT) negotiations, effects the ultimate success of Project Lyttelton's and other stakeholders' relationship. Often the challenges were due to a lack of clarity around the vision at the beginning of the project.
- Communicating a stronger vision of the project during the CPIT negotiations may have brought ultimately better results – *At the beginning I found it trying to get a relationship with CPIT that was sort of honouring and respectful of where we were coming from.... I guess it was a clash of cultures really.*

## **6.1.4 Aspects of Community Supported Agriculture to continue**

Participants at the de-brief meeting identified aspects of Community Supported Agriculture that Project Lyttelton should continue. These relate to the key lessons learned above, and are as follows:

- Fostering peoples connection to the land and food production were identified as priorities for future projects, but respondents felt that due to the challenges with distance from Lyttelton (and between sites), and the subsequent management issues that arose, finding land close to Lyttelton should be a priority -*The land needs to be within our area, as we've already talked about. Having a strong relationship with the land and food production is worth taking forward.*
- A strong vision of the project, and of Project Lyttelton, is at the heart of the success of such a scheme,- *[We must] go with boldness and courage...we are going in the direction we are choosing. We are consciously choosing how we do it.*
- Strong community, food production, and ethical relationships were seen as essential parts of an effective vision.

## **6.2 Interviews with key informants**

In June 2011, Project Lyttelton conducted six key informant interviews with people that had spent extensive time at Seven Oaks Community Gardens. These included two volunteers, two teachers from the Holistic Trust School, and two neighbours. This section describes what aspects of the garden interviewees valued most, and changes that could have occurred that would benefit future Community Supported Agricultural initiatives.

### **6.2.1 What people valued the most about the garden**

Interviewees were asked what they valued most about the garden. These reported values are as follows.

### **Educators of children at the garden**

- Seeing the seasons and nature at work - *Seeing vegetables and trees and beauty, experiencing nature at its best, rather than tarmac like at other schools. It is an amazing paradise for children.*
- Working in partnership with the land, and respecting the land - *Because the land feeds and nurtures our physical and spiritual side. Nature is good for the soul. We establish a relationship to the Earth, are part of the Earth.*
- The lessons learned by children. It was beneficial for children from the Holistic Trust School to learn how to share and to care for living things. Through being in the garden, the children learned about the growth cycle and their *love* for nature was strengthened.
- The teamwork between everyone involved- children and adults.
- Working with the land is part of the Holistic Trust School philosophy, and so that fitted well with Project Lyttelton's aims. Working with Project Lyttelton was seen as very valuable for the children and the school, and the school would like to be able to continue working with Project Lyttelton in some sort of way in the future.

### **Volunteers**

- The ambience of the garden, especially as it is right in the city.
- The design of the garden - *People put a lot of thought into the design of the garden, and although it is a bit run down, you can still feel it was a thriving hub and that lots of people put many hours into the garden to make it beautiful.*
- The garden involved growing healthy food locally and organically as well as looking after the land.
- It provided a healthy environment for people to go to. - *It was like taking respite going there....I enjoyed getting tired while doing the work, that made it worthwhile.* People with a wide range of backgrounds and interests came together with a common interest. *You felt you came from the rest of your world, and it lifted you. You felt as though everything was in balance somehow.*

### **Neighbours**

- The environment and the company of the others at the gardens, and the fact that it was a chance to collectively contribute to the garden.
- That the garden is still there, even after Project Lyttelton is no longer involved, and that it has been organic for over twenty years.
- That the sense of community experienced at the garden made the garden an enjoyable place to be. People can enjoy working with people while conversing - *So why I liked it was that it was active socialising rather than just drinking and talking.*
- That the Seven Oaks environment was quite informal, and was not such a huge group, so people did not need to be directed. It was a relaxed environment and way of working.

## 6.2.2 Activities people valued the most

Interviewees were asked what activities they personally valued. These activities are as follows.

### Educators of children at the garden

- Unusual activities (i.e., the scarecrow making, creating butterfly gardens and lakes, making elderflower juice, calendula hand creams) - *Those activities carried an element of surprise, you didn't know what to expect, but the children engaged very well with those activities.*
- Harvesting food as it showed children that food comes from the garden, not just from the supermarket.
- Hunting for, digging up and re-potting native seedlings, as it engaged the children.
- Learning about the worm farm because it was very engaging for the children and the teachers, since lots of new things were learned, such as the fact that scraps were valuable.
- The good relationship between the Holistic Trust School and Project Lyttelton.

### Volunteers

- Working with the children from the Holistic Trust School, because they were keen to be in the garden.
- The interaction with people - *We had a purpose together'. Much of what everyone learnt was from working together, and that was what made it special.*

### Neighbours

- The monthly working bees – *It was great to be outside with other people....and after work enjoying being outdoors with other people.*
- The garden Advisory Group meetings because they included people, such as neighbours, who were not just part of the garden management or staff.
- Interacting with people at the garden while working in the garden - *It was the conversations, the catch ups that occurred, the casual informal interactions.*

## 6.2.3 Aspects of the garden that worked well

Interviewees were asked what aspects of the garden they thought worked well. These aspects are as follows.

### Educators of children at the garden

- The partnership and respect between the Holistic Trust School and Project Lyttelton.
- Project Lyttelton staff got to know the children and established a good working relationship with them.

- The garden equipment and seedlings, and plants were provided which made things easier for the school.
- The school and members of the community were able to be on the same site, which resulted in great community building, and the idea of sharing the place and the activities.
- The different activities at the garden, such as gardening, education, and flax weaving, all worked well together.
- The children could experience and learn about nature's cycle in the garden. For example, the children got to see the process of seeds growing into plants through to harvesting the vegetables.
- It was great for the children to see that vegetable growing is easy, and that it is something that they themselves were capable of doing.

### **Volunteers**

- Children from the Holistic Trust School had access to the garden and gardeners, as the teachers did not always have the time and knowledge to spend time with the children in the garden.
- The relationship between Project Lyttelton staff and the children from the school.
- Having the seed exchange building, as a purpose designed building, on site, and the classrooms, provided a great resource for activities, such as seed swaps.
- The site has a long organic history, so is a *perfect* site for a vegetable garden. The gardens were well kept, and *the soil is great, like 'black gold!'*
- Education for adults and children. Sharing knowledge is easy at the garden, because everything is set up. The workshops were *awesome*, as all the resources were on site (e.g., the tools and orchards).
- Getting produce from the garden and the gratification from helping to maintain the site.
- The key Project Lyttelton staff member at the garden was uncompromising with the garden being organic -*When it was all happening, when the communications were good, people felt good, and empowered. There was healthy food and people got together. The garden is organic -not near it or maybe, and that fact made it really work.*
- The growing interest from the community itself.
- The garden had a historic and a future focus.
- The relationships among everyone at the garden and the bonding that happened.
- The garden demonstrated that it was possible to set a successful one up, and gardens could be set up in other parts of Christchurch.
- In the period that Project Lyttelton had oversight of the garden, the garden worked well. CPIT did not have to put energy into it. Neighbours and schools that accessed the garden liked that it was clean and tidy, and that it was safe.



## Neighbours

- The aesthetic environment that the garden provided - *It's like being in the country.*
- Spending time at the garden with *like-minded people.*
- Having people with real skills and knowledge who were involved, and participating on site. Project Lyttelton initially got the garden up and running agriculturally, which was a huge amount of work, and they kept it maintained.
- Supporting people who were maintaining the site.
- The *umbrella* Project Lyttelton provided Seven Oaks. Project Lyttelton did all the unseen administration in the background, which allowed things to happen on the ground.
- People employed part-time at the garden under Project Lyttelton had good oversight and clear direction of what was happening.
- Since most of the people involved in the vegetable box scheme were from Lyttelton, involving volunteers from Lyttelton through the Lyttelton Time Bank was seen as a *great idea.*
- The sociability of getting together for monthly working bees was enjoyed by the volunteers. The working bees provided a social occasion, where people could do something useful together outside.
- The garden provided a good learning environment for the Holistic Trust School.
- For part time employees, the garden provided employment and an opportunity to do work they liked to do.
- For people involved in the vegetable box initiative, it provided a way of getting vegetables sustainably and locally.

### 6.2.4 Aspects of the garden that could be improved

Interviewees were asked what aspects of the Seven Oaks Community garden that they thought could be improved. The suggested improvements are as follows.

#### Educators

- Who is doing what at the garden, and why, needs to be clarified. This could have been achieved with better communication. While communication with gardeners onsite was effective, more communication between Project Lyttelton and the Holistic Trust school would have been helpful.
- Gardeners could spend more time with the school children to explain what happens in the garden, to give them more background.
- Areas that were for Project Lyttelton's food production only, and areas that were appropriate for the children to access and/or use could be better clarified.
- There needs to be clearer boundaries to let the children know which crops are for them, and which crops are for Project Lyttelton.

- Creating smaller raised garden beds would make it easier for the children to do weeding and to look after plants.

### **Volunteers**

- The site is very big and needs lots of improvements and work done on it. For example, the orchards and glass houses need a lot of maintenance - *More man-hours would be needed to get the garden to the next level. Money is not necessarily the answer, it would be important to find ideas and ways to make it work without more money, because the site could swallow' a lot of money!*
- People involved at the garden as paid workers were spread too thinly with regard to allocation of total tasks at the garden - A few people were asked and were expected to do more than they were physically capable of doing. There was a lot of travel, or sometimes people were not available. They were not able to meet what was to be achieved. So these people felt as though they let the group down.
- Expectations of what people can accomplish need to be realistic - *People need to feel safe and take ownership of it [these expectations]...'This is what I said I could do.'*
- The transition from Project Lyttelton's management of the garden to having no involvement could have been better managed, because people involved were not provided with adequate knowledge about *what was coming next - I felt isolated....That was pretty rough. The community slowly faded away. It lost its purpose, and then it was all over.*

### **Neighbours**

- Working bees with only one or two people participating are not so effective. The working bees were on the last Sunday of the month each time - *Quite often I had things on, so if there were more working bees at different times, it may have been easier for me to be at one.*
- The garden is disconnected from the neighbourhood - *Many people know it is there, but do not know what is happening. The neighbours cannot see in behind the big trees; it is not well recognised by neighbours and neighbours were not that closely involved.*

## **6.2.5 Considerations for future similar projects**

Interviewees were asked what could be changed in the future, if a similar project was to be started up by Project Lyttelton. These considerations are as follows.

### **Educators**

- There should be more dialogue about the values of both organisations, so that the two sets of values can be combined. It would be helpful to the school if this sort of discussion were continued on an ongoing, regular basis.
- It would have been helpful to the school if Project Lyttelton and the School's Trust could have met regularly.
- A clearer framework would have helped to establish a better sense of direction for the site and the organisations involved.

- Maybe the financial pressure, especially in winter, could have been handled more creatively; maybe more produce could have been sold.
- It would be great to utilise the area better and keep the garden in production all year round.
- Parts of the garden could be offered to the community, to parents, or maybe as allotments.

## **Volunteers**

- A smaller garden and site would be easier. The garden was too big for the resources available.
- It would be good to involve different community groups to raise awareness, and increase the input of volunteers (i.e., other schools without school gardens could come and use the site for gardening).
- It would be good for the local community to feel ownership of the gardens - *The more people are involved, the more passion will be unleashed onto the garden, which is beneficial for the garden.*
- More people than the one or two core people overseeing the garden are needed to keep the garden sustainable.
- Community Gardens, allotments and market gardens could be possibilities.
- Getting the beliefs and values clear. Doing this constantly through ritual and communications – *they are constantly being brought forward.*
- There needed to be an effective handing over of what was achieved at the garden. Ineffective handing over of the garden was also experienced when Project Lyttelton first took over the garden from CPIT. There needs to be better preparation for this in the future - *Recruit people to take over/take on if that day comes and you can't continue and there is no one available that a document is kind of in place. It would be beneficial. This way more people can be drawn on. And things have a natural term don't they.*

## **Neighbours**

- It may have been better if the garden had been set up as a community garden for locals - *Where you came along and worked and took vegetables when you went. This would make the work more directly related to what people received from it... I have never worked at a community garden so could only imagine what its vibe is like or how it is.*
- The timing for the working bees needed to be more flexible – *At a variety of times, rather than volunteers being involved on a certain time of the week.*
- There was an absence of a formal organisational structure at the gardens, and this is something to consider for similar projects. *There is a tipping point between how much more formalised/organised/paid professional input needs to be put in place to support the garden, or volunteers involved, before that begins to negate the volunteerism. The tipping point is quite delicate. The space for community development - creating this and not letting it fall over, is sometimes not the best. Out of chaos/ruins, new solutions enthusiasms can sprout. Time will tell!*

- If anyone was to set up again at Seven Oaks in a more formalised way around gardening/sustainability there needs to be more thought/energy for a structured way for local neighbours/community to be more involved at the garden. Efforts were made by Project Lyttelton for this to occur (e.g. there were newsletters, and fliers went out) and there was an effort to engage people, but there was uncertainty about why this engagement did not happen.
- Neighbours made up only about 25 percent of volunteers. If there was to be a similar model it could be beneficial to include neighbours in one way or another - *People who like to garden already have their gardens. However, other people are not so inclined, so in parts of the city where you do not have a chance to have one, this could be good.*
- Letterbox drops with information about the gardens might attract neighbours.
- There is still so much potential at the site of Seven Oaks Community garden as an organic learning centre. It is a *rare thing* that should be continued in the long term.

## 7 Discussion

Key findings from the evaluation relate to key successes and challenges experienced at the garden while it was managed by Project Lyttelton, and changes that could be made to enhance future CSA projects.

### ***Key successes of the garden***

- The 'sense of community' and positive atmosphere evident at the garden.
- The strong relationships that were formed between Project Lyttelton, neighbours, teachers and children at the Holistic Trust school, and other people involved in activities at the garden.
- The space and facilities which lent themselves to a wide variety of activities for people of all ages. For example, school-education for children, evening classes and workshops for adults on subjects such as permaculture and organics, social events, food production, and a seed-exchange.
- The production of healthy local and organic produce and its distribution in the community through the CSA vegetable-box system.
- The beauty of the natural setting, which provided a peaceful retreat for visitors.

### ***Key challenges experienced***

- While communication with gardeners onsite was effective, more communication between Project Lyttelton and the Holistic School Trust would have been helpful, so that the two organisations would have a shared understanding of the values underpinning the project, the vision for the garden, and how activities at the garden support that vision.
- Volunteers and neighbours needed more information about the garden, the activities that occurred there, and how and when they could get involved.
- Lack of available gardeners (paid and voluntary) led to areas of neglect at the garden (e.g., maintenance in glass houses and orchards).
- Lack of resources meant that employed personnel were spread too thin (i.e. were provided with too many tasks in relation to the time allocated to complete them).
- Lack of resources also meant that working bees were only happening once a month. Some neighbours would have liked more options around working bee times and dates.
- There appeared to be a lack of physical connection with the garden by neighbours, and the fact that the garden is hard to see from the road side could have contributed to this.
- More volunteers, and a stronger connection with the neighbourhood was needed.

## **Recommended changes for future CSA projects**

- A strong vision and clearer strategic planning of the project should be developed, as this is vital for a project's success. The vision should be created by garden management and other key stakeholders, so that everyone involved understands and informs the values underpinning the project, the vision for the project, and how the activities at the garden support that vision.
- Communication between key stakeholders is important, for example through effective dissemination of information via leaflets, fliers, newsletters, and posters. In some cases regular and ongoing meetings with stakeholders might be appropriate also.
- Communication could be established through 'ritual'. For example, by using creative, non-verbal ways of connecting people to the land, such as art projects in a garden.
- Clear job-descriptions for employees/contractors to clarify expectations for employees, leading to better performance standards.
- Increased volunteer management and communication to strengthen the connection between volunteers and Project Lyttelton.
- Ways to engage more people in a CSA project need to be developed, so that all areas of the project can get adequate attention.
- Having working bees more often would provide more people with an opportunity to attend.
- More funding would be helpful to employ more people. However, finding ideas and ways to work better with existing resources is also important.
- Making sure a garden is easily seen from the road could make it more inviting and accessible to neighbours.
- Opening the garden up to different community groups and making it available for a variety of purposes, such as allotments, market gardens and schools without gardens, to engage more volunteers and strengthen the connection with the neighbourhood.

## 8 Conclusion

The garden was valued as a healthy environment and relaxed, social meeting place, giving everyone the chance to network/ team work and socialise with people of all ages. The garden was successful in providing a venue for lots of different activities, through this attracting a variety of people. The garden was successful in growing healthy, organic, local food; the box system (CSA) provided a way of getting vegetables sustainably and locally. The garden was appreciated for its aesthetically beautiful setting. Stakeholders were happy with Project Lyttelton's guardian position, working as the umbrella organisation for the different activities happening in the garden.

The experience of the garden highlights key areas for the future CSA projects as being focusing on finding, training and utilising a good pool of volunteers, strong stakeholder involvement and good communications.

## **9 Appendices**

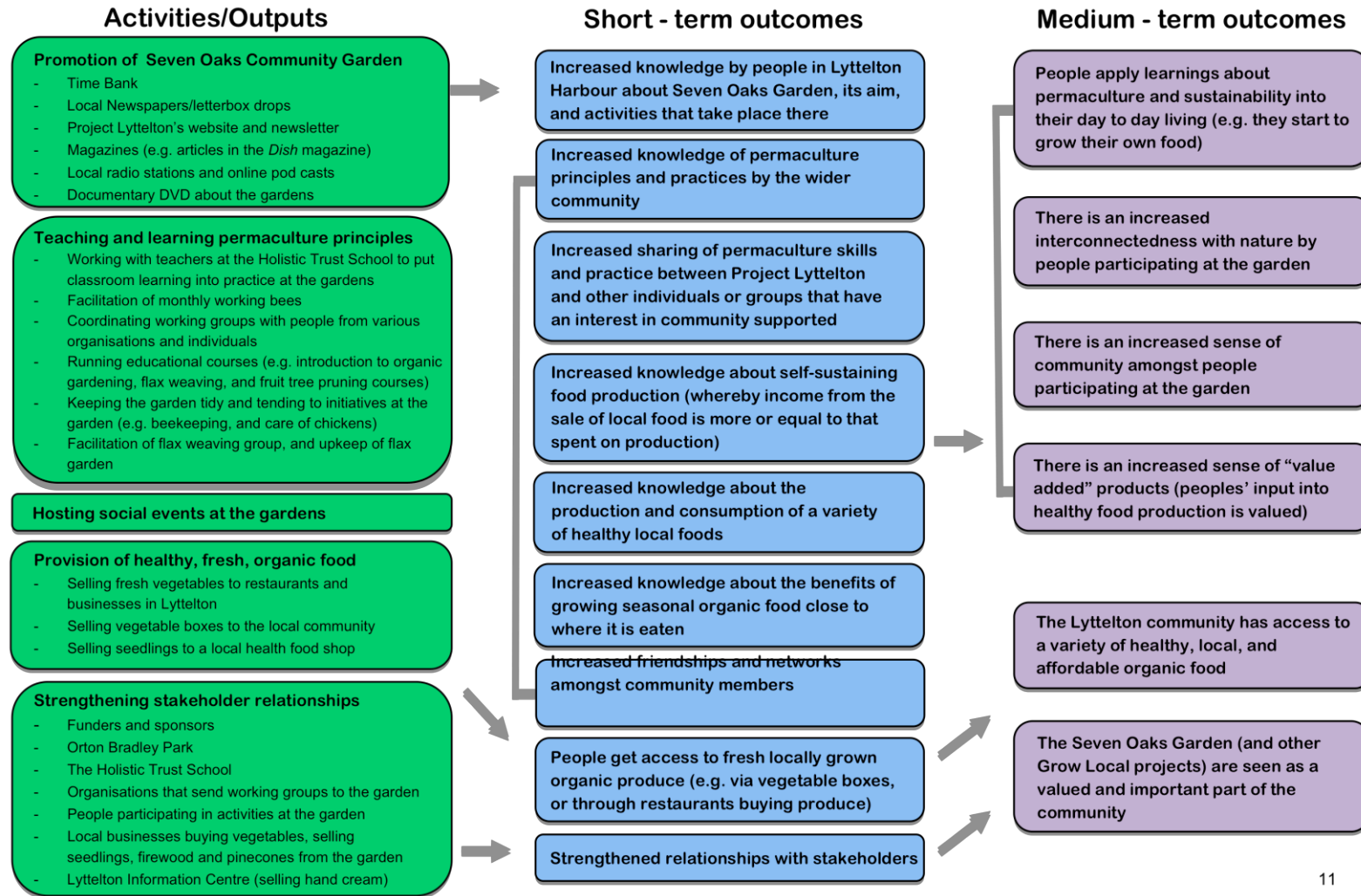
### **Appendix A - Seven Oaks Community Garden Logic Model**

A logic model diagram that has been developed for the Festival of Walking is presented on the next page. The logic model was developed following information documented in a Logic Model Workshop held in March 2010, as part of Phase One of the *Project Lyttelton Community Research and Evaluation* project.



# Logic Model - Seven Oaks Community Garden

*Purpose: To provide affordable quality produce to the Lyttelton community and provide education on sustainable matters*



## Appendix B - Focus Group Topic Guide



### Debrief Meeting (focus group) – 7 December 2010 Seven Oaks Community Garden

Project Lyttelton is working in collaboration with a research company (Social Foci) to evaluate six of their projects, including the Seven Oaks Community Garden.

With the decision to discontinue Project Lyttelton's oversight of the garden, the key purpose of this meeting is for participants to discuss past experiences relating to the garden, so that information shared at this meeting can inform Project Lyttelton's future decision-making about other Grow Local initiatives. We really appreciate that you have agreed to participate in this meeting, and look forward to having a bite to eat after our shared discussions with you.

#### Topics

Topics that we will cover include:

- Key successes of the Seven Oaks Community Garden, as a model for Community Supported Agriculture.
- Key challenges experienced at Seven Oaks Community Garden.
- Key lessons learned.
- Aspects of the Seven Oaks Community Garden, as a model for Community Supported Agriculture that Project Lyttelton should continue.

#### Information use

Project Lyttelton will report key information from this meeting in an Evaluation Report, which will be completed by June 2011. Participants will not be personally identified in reporting, even if quotes are used, and will be able to access the report.

We would like to record what gets discussed in the meeting, so that we can type up notes and give you an opportunity to provide further information, or to suggest changes to typed notes. Your participation in the meeting will indicate to us your consent for the meeting discussions to be recorded.

# Appendix C - Interview Topic Guide



## Seven Oaks Garden Evaluation

### Key informant interviews - topic guide

Dear [Name here]

Project Lyttelton managed the Seven Oaks Gardens in Opawa from August 2007 until September 2010.

As part of Project Lyttelton's evaluation of six of its projects we would like to gain more information about the Seven Oaks Gardens project. As part of this work, we wish to complete face-to face interviews with a selection of people formerly and currently involved with the Seven Oaks Gardens.

We intend to use the results from this to help us to improve our future planning and performance in other projects, and to share the findings with the wider community. We are also learning evaluation skills/processes so we can pass these skills on to other community groups.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in a **20-30 minute** interview. The interviewer will be either Bettina Evans or Margaret Jefferies from Project Lyttelton.

The key topics we are likely to cover during the interview include:

- Your involvement in the garden.
- Your assessment of the gardens.
- Your suggestions for changes we could make if we were to run a similar garden project in the future

If you have any questions about the evaluation, please contact Margaret Jefferies via telephone (03 328 9260), or by email ([Margaret.jefferies@clear.net.nz](mailto:Margaret.jefferies@clear.net.nz)).

Warm regards

Margaret Jefferies and Bettina Evans.