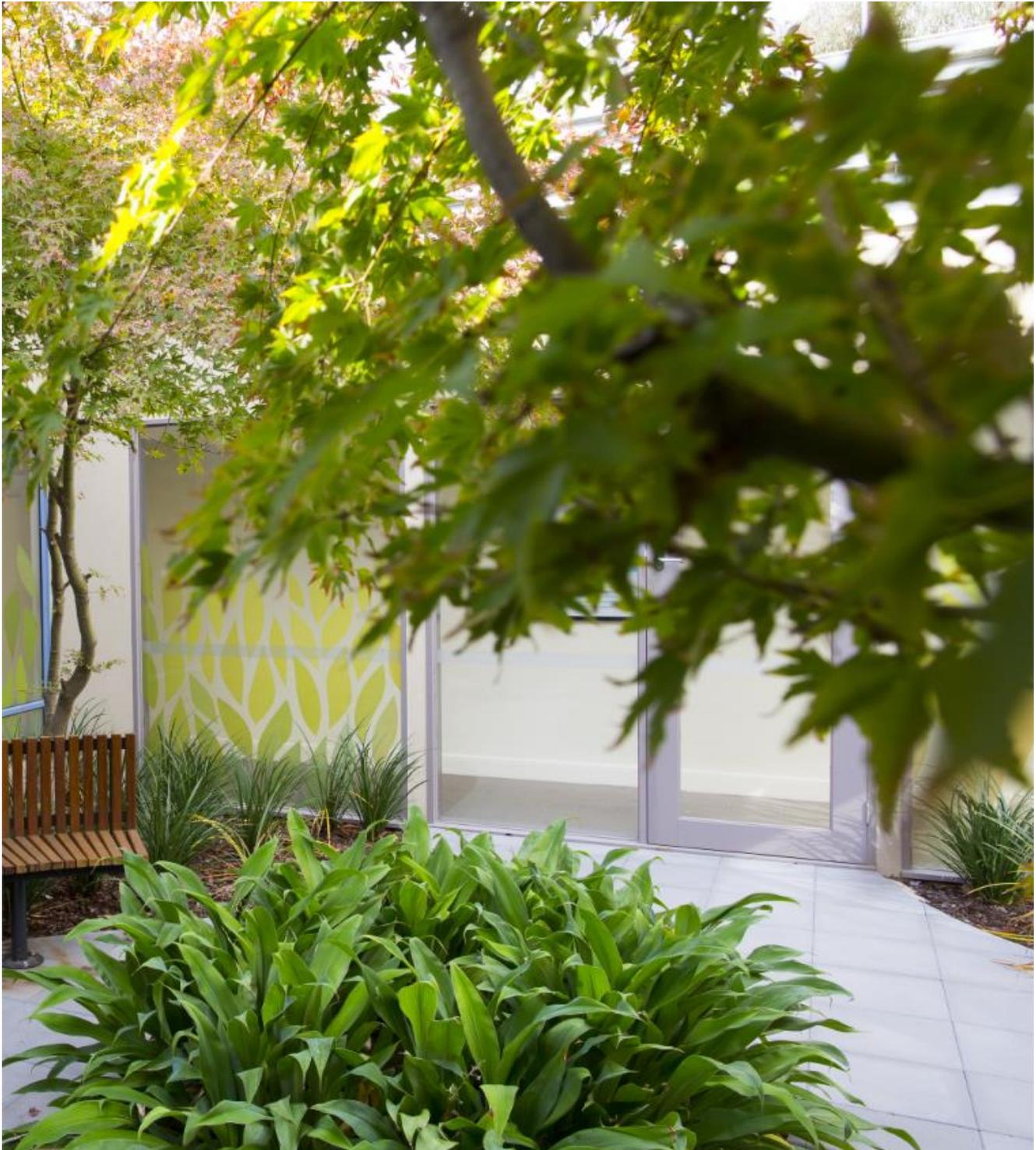

QEC Therapeutic Gardens Masterplan



QEC Therapeutic Gardens Project

In 2013 QEC received a generous bequest from the Estate of Walter and Alwynne Jona that enabled the development of this project.

QEC therapeutic gardens project will create an outdoor environment that sustains QEC staff, residents and visitors, and supports and enhances the therapeutic sensory and functional programs of QEC. The project also aims to enhance connections between the programs and physical environment with neighbouring services, program partners and the local community.

Gardens have been shown to reduce stress levels and lead to feelings of hopefulness. These positive emotions are particularly important to those who have suffered trauma or who are in difficult emotional and physical situations.

QEC families often describe traumatic childhoods experiencing neglect, abuse and very few positive moments. This lack of positive parenting means that without parenting education and nurturing the parent is unable to provide loving and learning environments for their children.

Without intervention the cycle of neglect and abuse continues resulting in life long negative impacts on mental and physical health and ability to form secure adult relationships. We show the parent how fun playtime impacts on their child's brain development and ability to learn new things. The parent starts to enjoy time with their child.

A project for our diverse community in consultation with our community

The QEC Therapeutic Gardens Project will be delivered over a period of 5 years over stages:

Residential Unit Internal Courtyards

Jona Sensory Children's Garden

2. Woodland and Kitchen Gardens
3. Family Recreation Garden
4. Family Retreat Garden
5. Staff Retreat
6. The Welcome Garden

Our 2015 site renovations included refurbishment of our Residential Unit internal courtyards. Development of an 2 courtyards offering an alfresco and play area offers families and children a welcoming play area within the buildings, whilst the second courtyard is a quiet contemplative relaxing garden.

The Jona Sensory Children's Garden is a playful outdoor areas used as an extension to QEC's indoor programs, in particular the early childhood program. The garden is a therapeutic workplace and a place where families can play, relax and spend time together within a natural, non-threatening setting. The garden was completed November 2016.

Our stakeholder advisory group includes City of Greater Dandenong, TLC Aged Care, GoodStart Early Learning and Kevin Heinz Grow with specialist advisors invited to attend as required.

Early involvement with the City of Greater Dandenong has led to the refurbishment of the park adjacent to QEC and TLC Aged Care: a park that for some time had been a site for antisocial activity and therefore was not utilised by families. The park is now in regular use by our neighbours including stakeholders listed above, local residents and children and families attending Noble Park English Language School.

Our internal working group, comprised of QEC clinicians and consumers, has a focus on incorporating the use of the therapeutic gardens into programs. Consumers will represent the diversity of clients attending QEC, with our first consumer representative representing parents with an intellectual disability.

Woodland and Kitchen Gardens – incorporating intergenerational programming

The location of our next Stage has inspired the development of the Woodland and Kitchen Gardens, a space that will feature areas where families, residents and staff can socialise, play together or relax in a natural garden setting.

The kitchen garden links to the neighbouring Noble Gardens Aged Care and has raised garden beds to enable easy access for all generations. Horticultural therapy programs with QEC and Noble Gardens Aged Care residents can take place here with gathering places located nearby. At the northern end of this garden, a multi-directional swing and half court provide space for socialising and games for all ages enhanced by a sheltered seating area nearby.

This area is adjacent to the Noble Gardens Aged Care. Residents will be able to access the therapeutic gardens, through a gate in this area, to participate in a range of intergenerational programs with QEC clients including nature walks, gardening, cooking and music therapy. Intergenerational programs are progressively being rolled out in Aged Care and Child Care facilities around the globe. Benefits of these programs have been shown to include:

For the elderly – enhanced socialisation opportunities and a greater sense of engagement in their communities. Better emotional and mental health as well as stronger physical health than their counterparts in more traditional facilities. A sense of purpose and increased dignity.

For the children – improved academic performance, a more positive attitude to ageing and more socially and personally mature than their peers. Children also had a stronger ability to handle delayed gratification and greater sensitivity to persons with disabilities. (www.carecom/a/the-sandwich-generation-solution-day-care-for-kids-and-seniors-12191129).

Drivers for the therapeutic gardens project

The needs that we are looking to address in our programs, supported by this therapeutic environment are:

- Lack of emotional attachment of parent and child
- Lack of understanding of child's ages and stages and the importance of play
- Impact on early brain development through lack of play
- Stress and anxiety associated with the parenting role
- Social isolation of families
- Depression and mental health issues
- Lack of knowledge of healthy eating
- Staff need space for quiet and mindful time
- Neighbours experience social isolation
- Continued innovation in QEC program design and delivery to improve outcomes for families
- Improved financial sustainability for QEC

Our target audience

QEC practitioners work with vulnerable families and high risk infants from across Victoria. Families receiving a QEC program by DHHS region in 2014/15 included: Metropolitan - Southern (3157), North and Western (97), Eastern (20). Rural - Gippsland (124), Grampians (6), Hume (35), Loddon (5). Total of 3444 families. Of these families 1053 attended residential service, day stay or playgroup programs at QEC Noble Park. The remainder of these families received programs in-home, many having commenced their journey with QEC through the residential programs.

Other groups to benefit will include staff, volunteers, students, neighbouring services including Noble Gardens Aged Care and GoodStart Early Learning, QEC training participants and in home community program partners.

Short Term Outcomes

- Parent child relationship improved as calming environment supports therapeutic programs
- Programs illustrate the benefits of outdoor play for child developmental needs
- Programs illustrate the importance of play on early child brain development
- Families have increased choice in therapeutic programs
- Families play together in the gardens
- Families realise that they are not alone, that other families have the same challenges
- Improved mental health as environment supports stress reduction
- Improved understanding of healthy eating
- Staff able to access gardens for reflection
- Increased connectedness of neighbours
- Increased partnerships
- Increased philanthropic funding

Long Term Outcomes

- Parents understand the benefits of nature and play
- Increase in parents knowledge and confidence to provide children with play opportunities in parks and gardens
- Parents mix with other families in local parks
- Parents and children develop strategies to lower stress and increase pleasure in an outdoor environments
- Improvements in parent and child mental health
- Improved well-being and behaviour through healthy eating
- Improved well-being of staff
- Improved well-being of local community through social connections
- More partnerships
- Programs illustrate the benefits of working in partnership with vulnerable families and vulnerable communities to increase resilience of those families
- Larger cohort of funders

Evaluation

QEC has engaged researchers of Deakin University to undertake a mixed methods evaluation of the project. Merrin Foundation has generously agreed to provide funding for this evaluation. Research began 2016 and will continue to include the Woodland and Kitchen Garden. At this stage outcomes to be measured include:

- parents more likely to use outdoor spaces
- families more likely to engage with other families in outdoor spaces
- parents are taking steps towards healthy eating
- parents understand the impact of healthy eating on child behaviour
- reduction in staff stress
- improved workplace culture
- neighbours more connected
- partners engaged in project
- project budget achieved

Partnership

QEC is seeking a partnership to support funding, fundraising and the development of a volunteer program to enable progression of the QEC Therapeutic Gardens Project – The Family Recreation, Woodlands and Kitchen Garden.

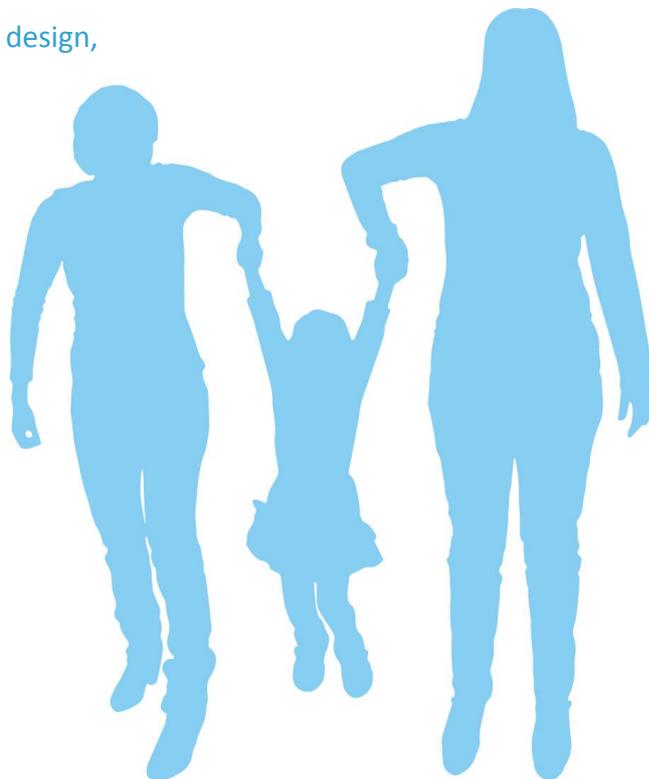
Our track record

Volume II, Chapter 10 of The Royal Commission into Family Violence Report discusses infant brain development in the first three years, child development, sense of security, emotional regulation, attachment, parenting coping skills, culturally competent programs, intergenerational trauma and early intervention services commencing in the antenatal period. The report specifically mentions effective programs - Parenting Assessment and Skills Development Programs (PASDS) and Bumps to Babes and Beyond. These programs were developed by QEC and continue to be rolled out across the sector.

Cradle to Kinder and Aboriginal Cradle to Kinder are also highlighted in the report. These programs were informed by QEC program Tummies to Toddlers.

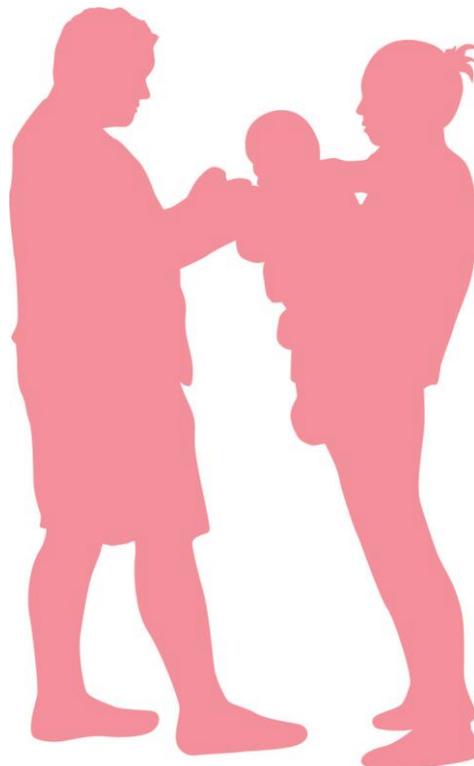
In particular Bumps to Babes and Beyond, developed in partnership with Mallee District Aboriginal Service has been recommended by Andrew Jackomos, Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, as a program that is demonstrating results. The program has been recognised in the Taskforce 1000 project and was the recipient of the Ministers Award, Early Years Awards – Vic 2015.

QEC has proven leadership and capability to design, deliver and evaluate parenting programs that respond to current and emerging need.



Smashing the cycle

“You have given a man who felt hurt and alone the return of peace in my heart and the loving best friend I thought I had lost. You have taught a fearful, frustrated and unskilled little girl the strength to be the woman, friend and loving mother she truly is. Now our baby Tom has the parents he deserved all because of the respect showed and the knowledge shared by you and for that we could never forget that. Sammy has always had the desire to smash the cycle she was born into. You have gifted her with the hammer to do so. Thank you so very much”.



For more information:

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