# Garden (AKG)

## What is the Accessible Kitchen Garden?

The AKG is an Occupational Therapy (OT) innovation and improvement initiative that employs horticulture to cultivate a holistic engaging approach to occupational engagement in spinal rehabilitation

- Located at the Spinal Rehabilitation Facility at the Royal Talbot Rehabilitation Centre (RTRC), Austin Health, in Melbourne, the AKG is an extension of purpose built spinal therapy spaces
- Gardening is a successful and meaningful tool for rehabilitation for skills retraining, learning adaptive strategies and psychosocial adjustment
- "several studies have focussed on health promoting environments, the experience of occupations and more specifically, the therapeutic occupations performed in horticulture contexts... gardening and horticultural occupations in particular have been measured as having positive effects on life satisfaction, and bringing about changes, such as rediscovering the importance of the enjoyable experiences of everyday occupation" (Palsdottir, Grahn & Persson p.59)
- Providing wheelchair users modified and accessible gardening options, equipment and techniques
- Promoting inclusiveness, accessibility and independence, the collaborative nature of the AKG empowers people to see what can be achieved beyond the rehabilitation setting
- Encouraged by senior staff, an engaging and meaningful patient centred therapeutic space grew
- The AKG provides an authentic learning opportunity for patients to employ and engage with a range of Horticultural therapies in a practical setting

## Why was the AKG developed?

"Well designed hospital gardens not only provide calming and pleasant nature views, but can also reduce stress and improve clinical outcomes through other mechanisms...fostering access to social support, privacy and providing escape from stressful clinical settings" (Ulrich, R 2002, p.5)

- Through discussions with spinal inpatients, a gap was identified in learning opportunities for patients to participate in self-selected meaningful occupations such as gardening
- Sessions are run by a qualified Horticulturist/Allied Health Assistant who has a genuine passion for gardening, cooking and patient welfare
- "The combination of restorative natural areas with horticultural activities and traditional rehabilitation has been shown to be an efficient setting in rehabilitation" (Wahborg, P, Peterson, I. Grahn, P. 2014, p.273)
- In consultation with patients, the AKG grew from a need for a practical, complementary therapy and an underutilised outdoor space
- Establish a connection and knowledge base with wider SCI community
- Provide an after hours active shared space for patients, family and staff

#### **Special thanks:**

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#### **References/Appendix**

- 21: 58-68.
- Benefits\_of\_Gardens\_in\_Hospitals
- pp 271-276



1) Palsdottir, A, Grahn, P & Persson, D (2014) 'Changes in experienced value of everyday occupation after nature based vocational rehabilitation'. Scandanavian Journal of Occupational Therapy

2) Ulrich, R (2002) Health Benefits of Gardens in Hospitals, Plants for People, International Exhibition Floriade, Viewed 9 April 2018 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/252307449\_Health\_

3) Wahborg, P. Peterson, I. Grahn, P. (2014) 'Nature assisted rehabilitation for reactions to severe stress and/or depression in a rehabilitation garden: Long-term follow up including comparisons with matched population-based reference cohort' Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine; 46:







"It made me feel good, hands on made me feel productive...its a good separation, it distracts you from being in hospital...in regular rehab everyday, you can get lost in it, ...the gardening sessions were fun, educational and productive " AKG Participant, 27yrs.

## How does it work?

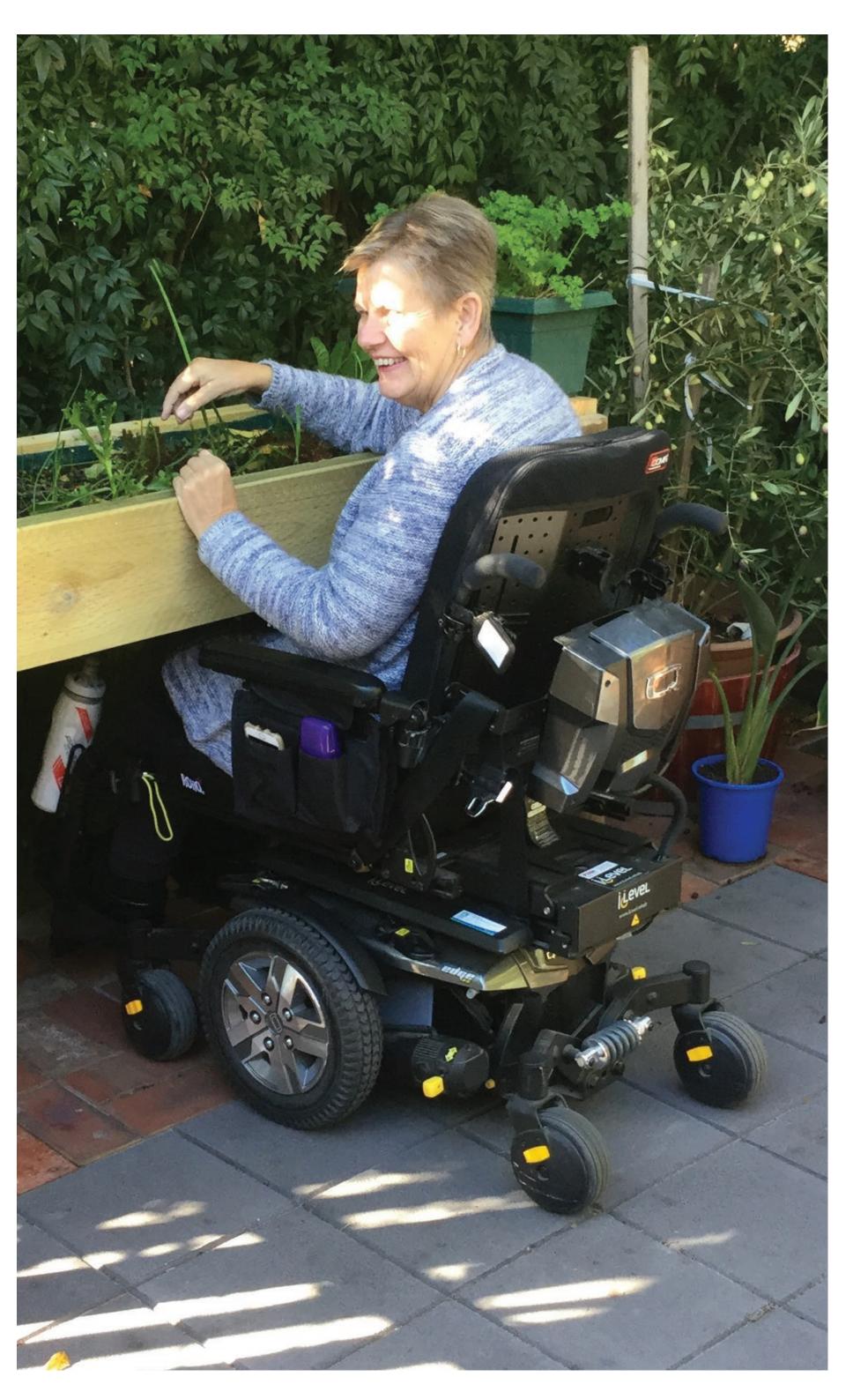
With an OT referral, patients present in the **AKG for an initial consultation followed by** scheduled, 1:1 and group based goal oriented weekly gardening sessions

- Customised wheelchair accessible wicking planter boxes were designed in consultation with inpatients and Biofilta Australia
- Adapted tools and equipment have been sourced for use and through inpatient centred practice, new tools invented to meet specific needs.
- The garden provides opportunities to integrate wider rehabilitation processes around adjustment to disability
- Authentic everyday tasks are employed to challenge a range of functional abilities and the promotion of safe wheelchair skills

### What is the impact?

The success of the AKG Program can be measured by patient's re-engagement in meaningful occupations of daily living

- In conjunction with the AKG, weekly OT cooking sessions utilise available produce from the garden. From Plant to Plate, patients sow, grow, harvest and cook with fresh, seasonal produce in the OT Kitchen.
- Promotion of edible perennial herbs/vegetables for low input accessible kitchen gardening
- AKG participants have engaged in informal discussion and feedback about the garden, reporting improved mood, interaction with other peers and participation in meaningful occupation
- The AKG is an educational tool for developing practical horticultural strategies and everyday gardening skills post-injury in a community setting
- Provides easy physical access and sensory stimuli for patients and staff during and outside of therapy hours.



#### Pruning tasks Employing long reach grip pruners to promote upper limb active range of movement and reconditioning

#### Potting up

Grip control practice using customised garden scoops and ergonomic hand tools.

#### Seed sowing Fine motor skills, in

hand manipulation and strengthen finger intrinsics





Maintenance using ergonomic long

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handled garden tools for ground level tasks that target safe balance /trunk control from a wheelchair.



Harvesting **Tenodesis practice &** lateral thumb pinch harvesting herbs and seasonal vegetables

"In the garden sessions, every challenge needed a solution, there was an outcome, a goal, a job to finish... make the decisions, I invest... its authentic rehab... AKG participant, 57yrs



## Future Implications

With ongoing support and active input from key stakeholders, the AKG has the capacity to grow into a self-sustaining, thriving adjunctive therapy program

- The current limitations of the AKG are determined by onsite operations and available resources.
- variability of patient participation affects planting successions and planning
- seasonal weather patterns can mediate participation as well as garden produce
- as a non-funded project, growth is governed by goodwill and in-kind donations
- As the garden project moves forward, collection of formal qualitative and quantitative data evaluating its effectiveness is required
- Through social media platforms and connections with the wider wheelchair community the AKG will grow to become an information sharing hub demonstrating what can be realised in accessible gardening and horticultural therapies.

The recognised benefits of Horticultural Therapy should be further consolidated and integrated into patient centred rehabilitation programs such as the Accessible Kitchen Garden.

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