

Annual Report 2023-2024 – A snapshot of the year

This Report is a snapshot of what has occurred in the garden during the year.

Chairman's report

A busy year by all accounts with an increase in visitor numbers, volunteer participation, infrastructure, garden projects and events. We have 3 new buildings, over 100 more trees planted and newly developed gardens in the spring and native areas.

Over the year we have given 4 talks on the gardens and held 6 regular events, 2 memorial services, 2 building opening events, 4 workshops, and 2 extra private garden openings. We have taken 4 bookings from external groups or individuals.

The Education building, now referred to as the Function Room while it waits for an official name, was completed and opened in April 2024 by the funders the Federal Government represented by Stephen Jones, the State Government represented by Judy Hannan and 2 private benefactors Chris Blaxland and Charles Moore. The building provides for 80 guests in the public space, with a large galley kitchen, store/av room and a large walk-in pantry. Over the coming years this building will provide opportunities to increase the income of SHBG without the direct input of Friends or volunteers.

On the same April day this year we opened the maintenance shed, sponsored by Chris Blaxland. This shed will house our tractor, second ute and ride on mower with the eastern portion suitable for operating workshops or working bee activities. The pre-loved garden books offered for sale at events are also housed in the maintenance shed.

The Louisa Atkinson Walk and the northern entry from Alice Avenue was officially opened. The entry has 4 slate artworks, created by artisan Ian Marr, depicting plants named to honour Louisa etched into slate, mounted on the dry-stone walls created by Steve Bensley.

The walk from the northern entry (Alice Avenue) to the southern entry (Kangaloon Road) includes interpretive signs by Meg Probyn, featuring work by local artist Isobel Kate Scott. The purpose of the artwork is to attract and encourage visitors to read the signs by engaging with the garden character. Several benches have been installed along the walk to provide visitors with places to sit and enjoy the garden.

A new northern toilet block has been completed with facilities for male, female and an accessible toilet with baby change table. This will provide amenity to visitors in the spring garden and volunteers working in the nearby maintenance shed.

The committees of SHBG continue to carry out invaluable work. Through the diligent hard work of the Governance committee, and with particular thanks to Christine Hawkins, SHBG has now been granted Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status, allowing SHBG to take tax deductible donations from individuals and philanthropic groups. Until this point in time, we have relied on our partnership with the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR) to provide this service.

The Business Development Committee and the Grants Committee, both chaired by Lyn Collingridge, have worked hard throughout the year meeting at least once each week and often more frequently. Thanks also to Lynda Cowley for her detailed work in managing the finances of SHBG. This has been an involved task this year due to the number of active

grants, all of which need careful financial management to ensure they can be acquitted on time and within budget.

Operational expenses continue to be an issue. The need for a lead gardener is becoming urgent, however funding is not available to employ a gardener. Currently approaches are being made to Council to consider supporting the operations of the gardens until SHBG can become self-supporting, a time frame for which has been outlined in the SHBG business plan.

The education program for schools has continued to be developed under the watchful eye of Dr Jennie Marston, an experienced curriculum writer and educator. It has proven difficult to entice schools to the gardens. A major barrier is the cost of transport to the gardens for students. Work is currently underway to source grant funding for transport for students.

SHBG continues to collaborate with SHBG Park Run which operates every Saturday morning from the car park. A change of the gate opening volunteer now allows Park Run participants and their supporters to access the gardens, the playground and the toilet amenities from 7am.

Our volunteers continue to be the backbone to the gardens. Our Tuesday working bees have swollen to now include an average of 40 volunteers each week. Our Thursday plant growers' group has also increased with more skilled volunteers participating in nursery activities under the capable leadership of Christine Steele.

The Friends group continues to grow, from active participants to armchair Friends. Clive and Meg Probyn were presented with a Life membership of the Friends group in December 2023. From participating in the very first working bee in 2010 to editing the newsletter, opening their garden as a fundraiser and joining the Friends Committee, Clive and Meg have made a significant contribution to the gardens.

My thanks to Chris Levy who steps down from the board this year. Chris has made an invaluable contribution to SHBG, with his vision for marketing and better recognition of SHBG in the community.

This year we have sadly lost three important supporters of the gardens.

- Tony Davis was a founding member of the steering group which developed the idea of the botanic gardens in 1998 and a chairman of the SHBG incorporated association. He received the National Handbury Award for his contribution to SHBG as a volunteer. SHBG holds the National Tony Davis daffodil collection.
- Jenny Simons supported the gardens as a plant grower and an educator of the volunteers. Jenny started the seed collecting program.
- Jeanne Villani supported the gardens as a Friend, donor and editor of the newsletter. Jeanne bequeathed her estate to ensure the ongoing success of the botanic gardens.

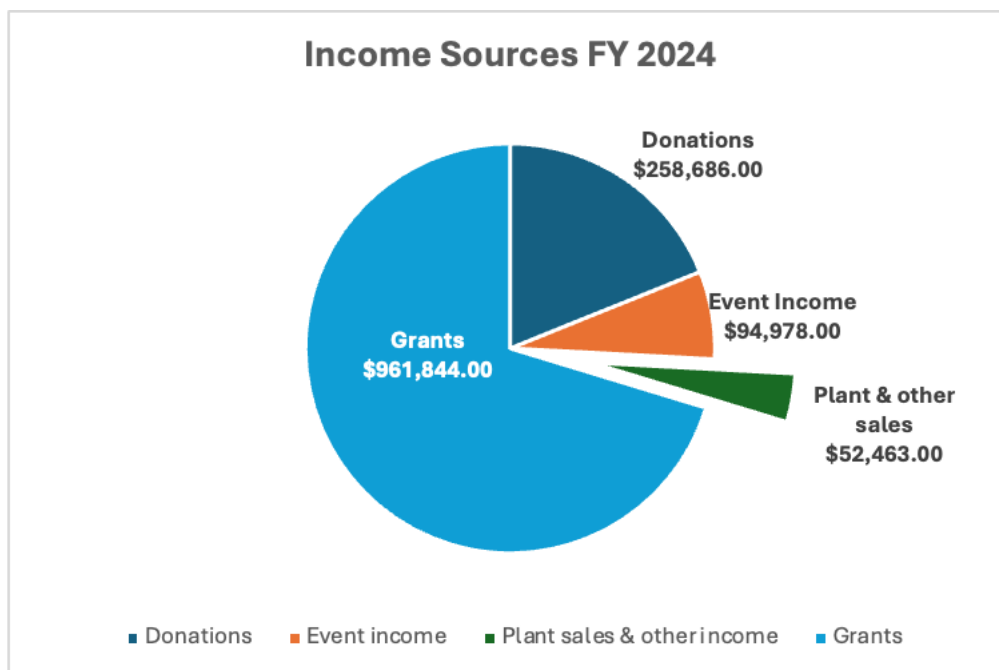
Next year we look forward to collaborating with other botanic gardens. In July we will host the Botanic Gardens of Australia and New Zealand (BGANZ) New South Wales annual meeting in our new function room.

When I retire from the board next June, I will be proud to leave the SHBG with a positive and growing trajectory. I thank all the board members for their contribution to ensure the gardens continue to grow.

Financial summary

Funding sources for the year are shown in the pie chart below.

It was a big year for grant funding and for donations received.



Our total income during the year was \$1,367,971. The bulk of this income was 'ear marked' for projects, with a small amount being available for operational costs. In explanation:

- Grants income of \$961,844 was used to fund specific projects, specifically the Education Building, northern stone wall entrance and all abilities toilet block.
- Generous donations of \$258,686 topped up the funding required for the Education building and paid for the construction of the maintenance shed.
- Event income of \$94,978 and plant and other sales of \$52,463 all contributed to the cash flow for the operations of SHBG and paid for the salaries of our two part-time employees.

Unfortunately, there is nothing left over.

Infrastructure Development

Development of major garden infrastructure depends on grant funding. Smaller projects can sometimes be carried out with the assistance of our volunteers.

Major construction activity in 2023/24

During the reporting year, the following construction has occurred:

- The Function centre was constructed in eight months, commencing in August 2023 with the official opening in April 2024. The building was funded by the Federal Government, NSW Government and two private donors, Charles Moore and Chris

Blaxland. Solar powered tower lighting was installed in the carpark as part of this project which will make it safer for nighttime events at the garden. Some finishing



touches to the building are still to occur.

- The northern stone wall entrance to the garden was completed and officially opened in August 2023. The project was funded by the NSW Government.
- The maintenance shed construction commenced in November 2023 and completed in June 2024. The building, having been delayed for two years due to very wet weather, was funded by a private donor, Chris Blaxland, who was also instrumental in assisting with the delivery of this project.
- Progress on the accessible toilet block commenced in early 2023 with an initial site inspection by the project manager. Six dead gum trees were identified in the location close to the site of the planned toilet construction were removed in August and construction work then commenced. The project was funded by the NSW Government and is due to be completed by the end of 2024.

SHBG funded garden development in 2023/24

With the assistance of the volunteers who continue to support the garden at weekly working bees, the garden continues to grow. In the reporting year, the following activities have taken place in the garden:

- Following the opening of the Education building and maintenance shed in April, the 'office' space in the Shed has been vacated as a storage area and very active meeting place. Consequently, the office has had a gentle makeover to make it more suitable as a single purpose office space, providing an improved working environment for the Administration Officer, Anne, who can now focus on her work without the constant interruptions that occurred in the former busy office.
- Intensive new plantings in the native garden occurred in spring 2023. The stone wall raised garden bed at the southern end of Louisa Atkinson Walk was replanted with new natives by the volunteers.



- The labyrinth has been relocated in late 2023 and is being maintained by a volunteer. It is an attraction for children.
- In November 2023, 25 new trees were planted around the Jubilee plantings. This planting includes the beginning of the Fagus (beech) collection, with 4 new species/cultivars added to the existing two.
- A new turf, Zoysia turf, on the northern side of the garden is proving successful and is water efficient and needs minimal mowing.
- The playground had a mini upgrade of some soft fall during the year.
- The main entry to the garden has been changed with a new pedestrian pathway through Gate 2, which leads directly to the playground.
- NBN was connected to the Function centre in April 2024 but still needs some technical adjustments to strengthen the signal. Wiring has been laid to the maintenance shed allowing a second access point to be installed in the shed.
- A private donation was made in June 2024 for a garden bench to commemorate the life of a loved one. We await the availability of the Cotswold bench.
- Eighty new trees have been planted in early spring. These are located near the entry to the garden, north of the playground and in the spring garden. New native plants will follow, with the first of the native conifer collection, sponsored by the Australian Garden History Society.

Operational activities

A lot of activity goes on behind the scenes to help the garden reach its Vision 'to be globally recognised as a leading public botanic garden'. Some of those small steps are outlined below.

SHBG operational projects 2023/24

A **Living Collections Policy** has been developed to set out what and how collections of plants are selected, acquired, displayed, maintained and catalogued.

SHBG's draft **policy for cyber security** was reviewed by the Board in February 2024. The policy identifies the issues to be addressed, including the documenting the critical assets that need to be protected.

A **Marketing Committee** was established by the Board in early 2024 with two board members with marketing skills being appointed to its membership.

With the completion of the construction of the Education Building (now the Function centre), the Business Development Committee put together **Event Terms & Conditions**, booking form and fee structure focussed on the hiring of the building and other garden venues for events. Separate fees apply to NFPs, corporate hiring and weddings.

SHBG has made application to Transport for NSW, in conjunction with Tourism NSW, for **'brown' tourist information signs** to inform travellers of the location of the garden. SHBG has been advised it is eligible for this signage, which is strictly controlled. The next step is an assessment of the actual signage that may occur and the cost.

A **marketing working group** has been working on a fundraising campaign, focussing on raising funds through donations and use of the site and Function centre for events.

An **education working group** is managing the education operations and offerings in the garden. With the Function centre now operational, these activities are set to increase. The working group will support Jennie Marston and develop an ongoing operation plan for the provision of education operations in the garden.

Community activities in the garden during 2023/24

Education program

School education

Jennie Marston continues to do a fabulous job in arranging, organising and managing this important activity.

Children from the Southern Highlands Christian School attended the garden for an education day on 23 September. About 200 children attended four sessions at the garden during the day with the education program being designed and managed by Jennie



Marston. The day was supported by volunteers, teachers and some parents to accompany the children.

A popular activity following the 'class work' was the kids running around the labyrinth – in both directions at the same time.

A teachers' information evening was held on 16 September. Unfortunately, out of eight teachers accepting the invitation, only two teachers attended from Berrima Public School and St Thomas Aquinas. These two schools will potentially include the garden in their school excursions during 2025.

TAFE

On 7 May, a group of students and their teacher visited the garden for two hours as part of their TAFE course. They were given an education talk by Charlotte and Chris Webb before engaging with the volunteers over morning tea.

Further work is being done to entice TAFE teachers to bring students to the garden.

Workshops

A propagation was held in February with 25 participants. Feedback was positive.

A propagation workshop was held on 11 August 2024 with 14 enrolments. Bunnings sponsored 24 pairs of snippers and enough rooting hormone for the workshop.

A successful smartphone photography workshop was held on 14 July by John Swainston, with 14 participants.

A series of different workshops are being planned for the remainder of 2024, including one in October on Dahlias, led by Graeme Davis (Tony Davis's son). Graeme has also agreed to take on the role to curate the Tony Davis daffodil collection and dahlia display, both located in the birch grove in the garden.

Community engagement

Community events

- Kite flying day was held on 27 August 2023 with around 300 people.
- Green Footprint Fair in Bowral on 30 September saw low attendance despite the best looking and well stocked plant stall. Funds raised was \$600. Unlikely to attend again.
- Spring nursery open day on 29 October 2023 was very successful and raised \$8,000 gross. This was possibly helped by lots of new stock and listing the inventory on-line prior to the sale.
- Christmas nursery open day on 10 December 2023 included sale of plants, books, seeds and home-made produce. Income around \$6,500.
- Christmas drinks for Friends and volunteers on 12 December 2023 included a special SoHi Gin stall. SoHi also provided thank you gifts at no charge to volunteers acknowledged on the night and their sales did well. Over 80 attendees ensured a well-attended evening.
- Dementia Australia held a fundraising Memory Walk & Jog at the garden on 18 February 2024. The event was held within the fenced area of the garden. SHBG charged \$300 to hold the event on the site. Around 100-250 participants attended.

- End of summer plant sale on 25 February 2024 was a very successful event with good attendance. Funds raised were around \$5,600.
- An open garden in Burradoo on 10 March 2024 was well very successful and, together with a plant sale, around \$5,800 was raised.



- Earth Hour event, scheduled for March 2024, was cancelled in 2024 as the number of volunteers required to assist was not available to hold the event.
- Autumn Garden weekend from 26–28 April 2024 was a very successful event. The highlight was the opening of one private garden, but it was Oldbury. And it was open for three days with raving reviews. The event, jointly with the Plant Fair, grossed around \$103,000.
- Autumn Plant Fair over the same weekend two days 27-28 April 2024 drew good crowds but down on pre Covid events. Lots of attention was paid to the new Education building that was open for visitors to look around. The visiting nursery vendors reported good sales.
- Botanic Gardens Australia and New Zealand open day on 26 May 2024 was held in good weather with around 600 attendees. Approximately \$2,500 was raised from the nursery, produce sale and BBQ.
- Thank you drinks held on 16 May for volunteers who assisted at the Autumn Garden weekend and plant fair, held in the Education building, was the debut event in the building.

Loss of dear friends

Some very dear Friends have passed away during the reporting year, leaving a big gap in the support for the garden.

- **Jeanne Villani** passed away on 2 February 2024 and a memorial service was held in the garden on 3 March. Jeanne was a great supporter of the garden for many years, having opened her garden during more than one Autumn Garden weekend and editing the SHBG newsletter, *Operculum*. Jeanne, together with Jenny Simons, also contributed to the SHBG seed collection. Jeanne and Jenny worked together to index

all articles on gardens in the Highlife magazine, effectively producing a valuable data base of local private gardens as featured in Highlife from its inception. This index and the complete set of Highlife magazines will eventually be made available to the public for historical research.

- **Jenny Simons** was a supporter of the garden for many years. She volunteered in working bees and participated in Bowral High School visits to the garden. Jenny also ran the seed collection tent at the Autumn Garden weekend for some years, often with the assistance of her daughter, Fran. Jenny propagated and grew plants for sale in the Autumn Garden weekend and grew just over 100 types of plants, totalling 941 individual plants. She and Chris Webb worked on the Native Conifer collection list, refining it for plants suitable for the Southern Highlands climate. Jenny was loved by everyone and will be very sadly missed.
- **Tony Davis** passed away in early July after battling ill health for some years. A memorial service was held next to his hundreds of flowering daffodils in the garden on 17 September 2024 and attended by around 90 relatives and friends. Tony and his partner, Maureen Purtell, were founding figures in the botanic gardens vision from the late 1990s. His love affair with daffodils and dahlias will be forever remembered in the garden as his lasting legacy. Over 60 daffodil cultivars are now happily growing in the garden and have been registered on the National Register. Tony's partner, Maureen Purcell, continues her strong support for the garden.



- **Beth Millar**, a friend and volunteer for the garden, passed away early in 2024, leaving a small bequest to the garden, including a ute.

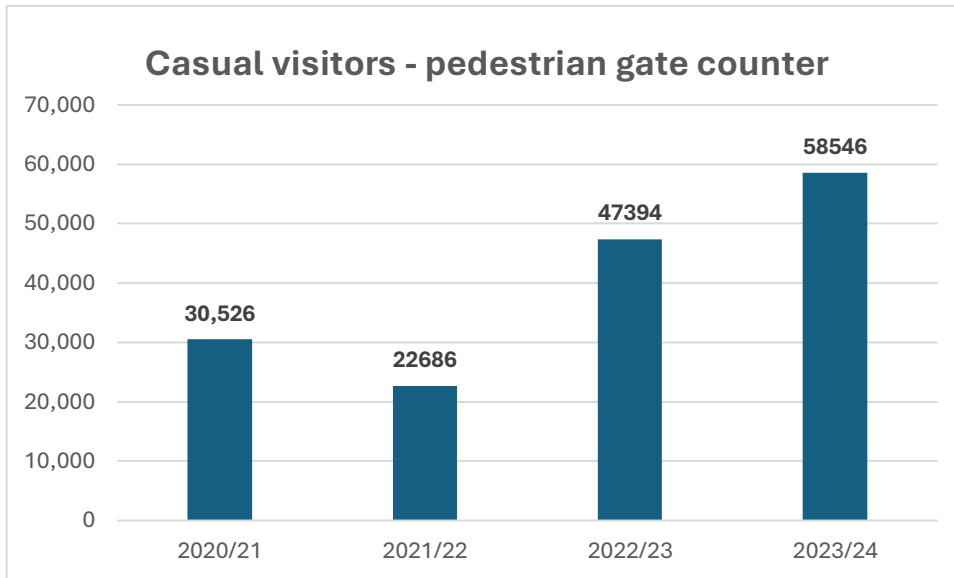
Visitors in the garden

Visitor numbers in the garden

Over 71,000 visitors

Visitor numbers are increasing every year, with the exception of the Covid period.

Our calculations show that over 71,000 visitors either came to the garden or attended an off-site SHBG event during the year. A vast increase to the number of casual visitors has occurred, as recorded by our pedestrian counter.

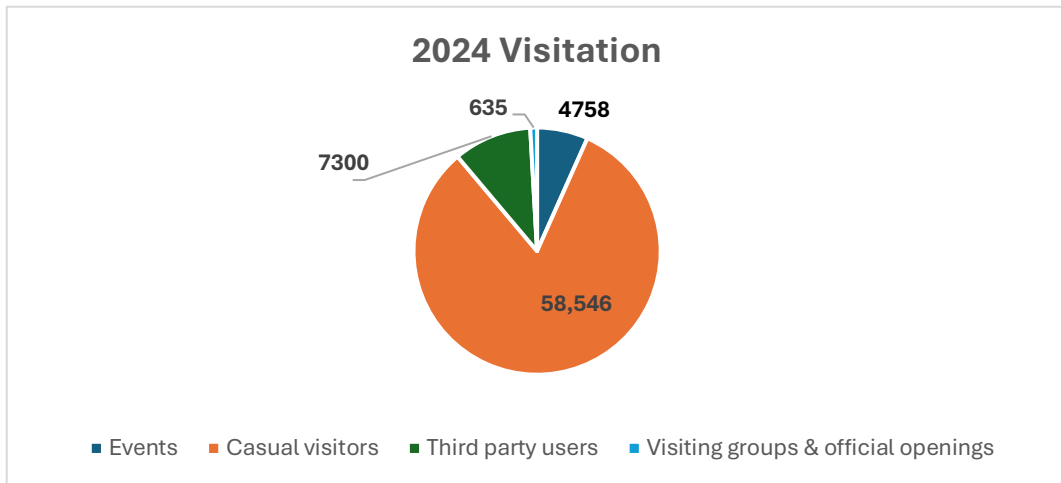


We welcomed a number of dignitaries in the garden through the year, including:

Dignitaries in the garden

- The official opening of the northern Stone Wall entrance to the garden on 11 August 2023 was a great celebration of the completion of this project. To officiate, Judy Hannan, NSW MP and Viv May, WSC Administrator, together with Charlotte Webb, all played a part in unveiling the lovely stone wall.
- At the sod turning event on 22 August 2023, Stephen Jones, Federal MP, Judy Hannan, NSW MP and Viv May, WSC Administrator helped turn some sods to mark the commencement of the much-awaited construction of the Education Building.
- Then we were back to the Education Building on 19 April 2024, having been completed in just eight months, to the official opening. The event was officiated by:
 - Stephen Jones, MP, who we thank for the Federal government funding for the building,
 - Judy Hannan, MP, who helped us obtain two NSW government grants to assist with the funding, and

- Charles Moore and Chris Blaxland who each made substantial donations towards this building.



- It is very pleasing to see picnickers in the garden on the warmer days. This is what the garden is for.

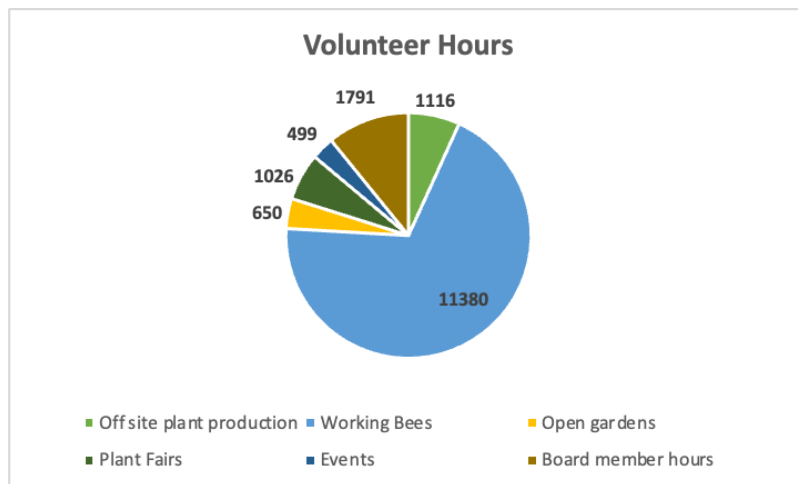


Volunteer activities

The range of volunteer activities and their value

Volunteers contribute to the garden in so many ways. The obvious regular activity is the working bees each Tuesday. But volunteers also contribute their time at SHBG events both at the garden and off-site. Some people spend time at home propagating and growing plants – off-site plant production. Board members spend a lot of time at meetings in committees or with council officials or others discussing opportunities to expand the garden’s reach to the community.

We tallied up an estimate of hours contributed over the year, which is shown in the pie chart. The total hours estimated for 2023 is around 16,500 hours, equivalent to 9.5 full time jobs. Of those hours, working bees contributed the equivalent to 6.6 full time jobs.



Corrective Service workers

Corrective Service workers regularly do community services work in the garden. These workers are now coming to the garden about once a month, **contributing around 300 hours of their time during the year**. They do very good work under supervision by trimming the boundary fence, mowing the grass, whipper snipping the drainage line, and maintaining the EEC native area. They are a valuable community resource, and we continue to thank them for their work and contribution to the garden.

Volunteer working bees and what they do

- There has been an increase in volunteers in the garden during the year and retention of volunteers has held up.
- Between 30-35 volunteers attend working bees each Tuesday, sometimes reaching 45. Importantly, more male volunteers are now joining up, allowing diversity of volunteer projects that can be undertaken.
- Thursday working bees occur during the warmer months, mainly focussing on propagating. Around 10-15 volunteers attend on these days.
- Nursery opening hours have been limited to Tuesdays and Thursdays, when volunteers are at the garden. It has not been possible to open the nursery on other days due to a volunteer shortage. Saturday opening was trialled at the end of 2023, but trading was slow.
- Due to our handyman who cared for the playground maintenance moving away from the area during the year, two volunteers now manage this important asset to ensure the playground is in good operating order and safe. This team refreshed part of the soft fall in the playground at the end of 2023.
- About three Tuesday working bees were cancelled in early 2024 due to very heavy rain making it difficult to undertake any detailed garden work.

Nursery

- In early 2024, cuttings and seeds from the gardens of homes recently sold or on the market were collected for propagation in the nursery. This material added

significantly to the breadth of plant variety for both the garden and nursery. More than 30 new plant lines have been sourced in this way.

- In Autumn 2024, the propagation team focussed on extending the Australian native collection. A new area will need to be established to grow the natives in the nursery as their growing conditions are different to those currently managed in the nursery. This new area will, potentially, be adjacent to the maintenance shed once it is fenced appropriately.

The gate opening and closing

A roster is maintained for gate opening and closing duty each day of the week. Volunteers opting to assist with keeping the garden open to the public, do that duty on one day a week to open the gate by 9am and close it around 5pm, after checking no-one is left in the garden. There have been instances of people being 'locked in' the garden and a quick rescue has occurred after calling one of the numbers on the inside of the gate for a volunteer to come to unlock.

Volunteer value

Volunteers are our backbone. They are our work force. They are our supporters. They are our strength.

Their value is incredible.



In FY 2023/24 they contributed
\$767,458 to the garden



Since 2011, they have
contributed **\$4,998,873**

SHBG contributes to the community spirit

- As a botanic garden, there is a spirit of sharing. SHBG donated six dwarf dogwoods (*Cornus kelseyi*) to the Orange Botanic Gardens to increase their dogwood collection. Two other dogwoods are being propagated to share with Orange Botanic Garden in 2025.
- SHBG supported the unveiling event of the Charlotte Atkinson Sculpture in December 2023. The relationship between the sculpture and the botanic garden is important as we recognise Louisa, daughter of Charlotte, in our Louisa Atkinson Walk through the native garden. The recognition of both Louisa and Charlotte is nationally significant as less than 10% of sculptures in Australia are for women.
- Angels in our Town parade was a bit of a fizzer in December 2023 due to the threat of major thunderstorms. Nevertheless, some SHBG volunteers participated in the parade and the thunderstorms did not eventuate.

Carpark attractions

Who would have known the carpark would be coveted by local groups?

- ParkRun continues to attract up to 100 attendees each Saturday morning. The carpark is the mustering area for the run. The event is attended by runners, walkers, organisers, assistants, family members, dogs and observers. The carpark is a hive of activity and very visible to the passing motorists.
- Every second Wednesday morning members of the British & European Automobile Club (Southern Highlands NSW) bring their vintage cars to the carpark as a mustering location before going on a local car run.



- In November 2023, the carpark was used to advertise the Wine and Food show event held at the Bong Bong racecourse. This event is a non-profit community event, supporting the local economy and no charge was made by SHBG as a means of supporting other community activities. Council approval was obtained for the sign, as required under our lease. The sign was in place for about one week.
- In September 2024, Bowral Classic has sought to place a banner on the garden's fence near the carpark to advertise this popular annual event. The event is profit making and SHBG made a small charge for the banner placement. Council approved the use of the fence for this event.

End of Report