

**GARDEN
GET-TOGETHER** –
Lark Ellen residents
interact around the
therapeutic garden.



Garden makes sense

A SMALL plot of vegetables and herbs is proving positive therapy for residents of an aged care facility in southern Sydney.

The garden at Lark Ellen Nursing Home was designed specifically to meet the physical restrictions of aged care residents and as a form of psychological therapy to help process grief and ease pain.

Lark Ellen intern psychologist Liz Angel said the garden as an innovative form of therapy.

"In Australia up to 80 per cent of residents in aged care facilities have some level of depression," Liz said.

"Almost all residents experience significant grief related to loss of meaning in their lives,

and of independence, social contact and significant others.

"Many also struggle with memory loss related to age or dementia. As well, many aged care residents have had to face changes in life which have been challenging, for example the depression, WWI and WWII."

Liz said connections could easily be made to gardening.

"Here, plants are sown, they grow and die," she said.

"Each seedling needs a good contact (with the earth), must be firmly grounded, and must be well rooted in order to grow healthy and strong.

"Tending the garden, where growth is a tangible topic, provides a great vehicle for people with depression to find hope

and purpose," she said.

"This sort of engagement tells a lot about how residents are feeling in the present and how they process the past."

Liz said several residents had benefited from time at the garden.

It had provided a vehicle for reminiscence and life review, a sense of purpose, enjoyment and new interests, recognition and celebration of the past, new ways to reduce stress, and memory enhancement. It had also helped structure daily routine.

Socially isolated residents have been able to come together and talk as they tend the garden.

■ Lark Ellen Nursing Home, Jannali Ave, Sutherland, 9521-2339.