

Gardening a labour of love

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Flagstaff Hill retirees Terry and Helen Harmer know how important it is to enjoy a garden of your own.

The passionate green thumbs set aside a day each fortnight to help maintain the gardens of older South Australians as part of the ACH Group Home Assist Onkaparinga volunteer gardeners program.

They commenced with the program in April last year to help people who wanted to live at home but found physical tasks a challenge.

They make a point of taking direction from the customer on all their work, which includes trimming, raking, sweeping, pruning and weed control.

'We're here to help, not to take over,' Terry says. 'We ask how much they would like something cut back or how they would like something shaped, because everyone has their own ideas.'

Helen says as gardeners themselves, she and Terry are aware of how important it is for people to be able to maintain their outdoor areas.

'Being outside in a natural environment is so good for your overall wellbeing – both emotionally and physically,' she says. 'We enjoy helping people, too. It's a nice feeling.'

'We're another point of social contact for people,' Helen says. 'We always chat and provide a listening ear as we do our work.'

Helen and Terry are both retired but lead busy lives, squeezing in babysitting their four grandchildren, caring for Helen's mother, travel and social commitments as well as keeping up with their own garden – a big block of mixed natives, raised vegetable beds, herbs and fruit trees.

'Our garden brings lots of birds – lorikeets and rosellas,' Helen says. 'Terry has built the grandkids a cubby and they just love the garden.'

ACH Group Home Assist Onkaparinga is always looking for volunteers to assist residents in the local community. Volunteers are allocated a team of either two or three and carry out basic low level gardening assistance on a four-weekly or eight-weekly basis.

A variety of tools are provided and volunteers have access to regular training workshops, including fruit tree pruning and ACH Group mandatory training and safe practices.

ABOUT ACH

ACH Group is a not-for-profit aged care organisation that has been offering services to support good lives for older people in South Australia since 1952.

As well as accommodation options across Adelaide, the Fleurieu Peninsula and East Melbourne, the group offers a range of health, wellbeing, respite and support services, help at home and social activities.

Our 1700 specialist staff and hundreds of volunteers share the belief that older people should be valued and respected, connected to their communities and in control of their lives.

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VOLUNTEER GARDENERS HELEN AND TERRY HARMER.

