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THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

Project Report

Makesense – Aging Well

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Introduction

Supported by the global NGO Makesense and the Laidlaw Central Leadership-in-Action initiative, the "Ageing Well" programme tackles the critical issues of elderly care and quality of life in Marseille. This programme partners with Les Jardins d'Haïti, an elderly care home, by transforming an underused community garden within the centre into a vibrant, intergenerational hub. "Ageing Well" as a project lasted for six weeks and was funded by the Laidlaw Foundation, encompassing the training, community engagement and hands-on work of three Laidlaw Scholars. By creating a shared space for gardening, social events, and relaxation, the programme engages the community and provides a more interactive environment for ageing residents.

As a Laidlaw Scholar, supporting the "Ageing Well" initiative at Les Jardins d'Haïti is a critical response to the growing social isolation and inadequate care the elderly face, particularly within dense urban environments like Marseille. This cause directly confronts the social marginalization of older generations commonly found in elderly care centres, recognising that their well-being is intrinsically linked to sustained social engagement and access to green community spaces. By reactivating the underutilised garden, the project moves beyond traditional care models to champion a more holistic, humanistic approach to ageing and elderly care. This aligns profoundly with the Laidlaw Foundation's core values of ethical leadership and community-driven change, offering a tangible opportunity to apply leadership skills to co-create a sustainable, inclusive space that facilitates "ageing well".

This report details the objectives of the "Ageing Well" project, along with its goals. The process of event planning and ideation are illustrated in-depth, while the milestones and achievements of the project are clearly presented. A full report of the project is present, with detailed resources available. For access to this lengthy version, please contact the author or the provided Makesense contact person via email.

Objectives

Three Laidlaw Scholars were tasked with a primary objective to transform the underutilised second-floor garden at Les Jardins d'Haïti into a vibrant, intergenerational community hub that simultaneously serves elderly residents and welcomes neighbourhood participation. This transformation involves creating a multifunctional space in the garden that balances the need for quiet relaxation of the elderly with opportunities for social connection and community engagement. To achieve this ambitious vision, we have been provided with four key objectives that guide our work. The first involves accessibility, allowing local residents from the surrounding neighbourhoods to access this garden, and to engage with the residents at Les Jardins d'Haïti.

Our other goal is to create a diverse, year-round event calendar featuring activities ranging from gardening workshops to game days that appeal to different generations and interests. We then aim to increase the garden's visibility through strategic partnerships, native communications, and community outreach to ensure local residents know they are welcome. Finally, we will implement sustainable engagement strategies, including recurring volunteering activities, to maintain momentum beyond our initial project period. Through these strategies, we aim to create an environment where elderly residents can interact with members of the wider community to form meaningful connections across generations. The garden will become not just a beautiful green space, but a living embodiment of Les Jardins d'Haïti's mission to foster joy, connection, and community.

Main Goals

Our project is strategically organized into two complementary missions that together will transform the garden into a thriving community space. The first mission focuses on physically and socially opening the garden to the neighbourhood through comprehensive

accessibility improvements. We will conduct a thorough assessment of the social and physical barriers preventing the full utilization of the area. In the short term, this includes collecting public opinion on visiting the second-floor garden at Les Jardins d'Haïti, while long-term goals may involve physical modifications, including widened and better maintained pathways for wheelchair access. Simultaneously, we will develop social accessibility through activities and online promotion, including weekly community gardening sessions, treasure hunts, and pétanque game days that encourage organic relationship-building. These initiatives will be designed with careful attention to creating low-pressure entry points for first-time visitors.

The second mission takes a broader community development approach, working to deeply integrate the garden into neighbourhood life. We are tasked to actively identify and address participation barriers through multilingual surveys and programming materials and partnerships with local social welfare organizations. A key component will be establishing a community engagement group composed of residents, neighbours, and local organizations to provide ongoing upkeep and engaging activities for social events. Through these collaborative efforts, we aim to cultivate genuine shared ownership of the space, both for the community and for the residents of Les Jardins d'Haïti. This approach towards accessibility combined with deep community integration will create the foundation for sustainable and meaningful connections across generations, promoting aging well and intergenerational bonding.

Supplementary Goals

To complement our two core missions, we will implement three crucial supporting tasks that will amplify the garden's impact and ensure its long-term success. The first task requires us to develop a comprehensive, year-round event programming plan that will bring

the garden to life. This will include weekly intergenerational activities that facilitate meaningful exchanges between residents and community members, and monthly cultural events showcasing Marseille's diverse heritage, including pétanque competitions and garden apéro. Each event will be designed with clear objectives, resource requirements, and facilitation guides to ensure consistency and quality.

Our second supporting task focuses on strategic marketing and communication to build awareness and participation. We'll create a multi-channel outreach approach using eye-catching posters to be distributed across the neighbourhood during events, as well as an enhanced social media presence highlighting upcoming events and featuring resident spotlights. Recognizing the importance of personal connections, we'll recruit community volunteers in aspects of event collaboration and practical gardening advice. All materials will be designed with accessibility in mind - using large fonts, clear language, and visual cues to overcome language barriers and reach diverse audiences.

The third supporting task addresses sustainability by developing systems to maintain engagement after our departure. This includes creating an event timeline with clearly defined objectives and activities, documenting planned events in easy-to-follow templates, and establishing partnerships with local organizations who can adopt certain programs. We'll also implement feedback mechanisms like simple surveys and suggestion boxes to allow continuous improvement based on community input. These supporting tasks will ensure that the garden's transformation extends beyond physical changes to create lasting social impact.

Challenges

Our project operates within several important constraints that shape our approach while challenging us to be creative and resourceful. With limited financial resources, we must prioritize low-cost solutions that maximize impact, such as repurposing existing materials and

leveraging community partnerships. The tight five-week implementation period requires us to focus on achievable, high-priority interventions while establishing solutions that staff can continue developing. Perhaps most significantly, we must thoughtfully address cultural and social barriers by designing locally comprehensible materials and surveys that respect Marseille's local community and make all participants feel welcome.

Despite these challenges, our team is energized by the opportunity to create meaningful change within these parameters. We are committed to developing sustainable solutions that align perfectly with Les Jardins d'Haiti's mission of fostering joy and dignity for the elderly. By focusing on inclusivity, community collaboration, and smart resource allocation, we strive to create a transformed garden space that will continue enriching lives long after our project concludes.

Ideas for impact

1. Potential partnerships

Encouraging community use of the garden and Les Jardins d'Haiti can be done in two key ways: targeting individual members of the local community, or using third-party organisations to reach wider groups. The latter involved reaching out to a number of locals and community bodies, through the recommendations from our connections in Marseille and beyond. They fall within a range of categories, from similar community gardens that could offer advice to potential sources of funding.

2. Community Engagement

One of the major steps in our ideation process is questionnaire development. Surveys were thoughtfully designed to gather valuable insights from residents and staff of Les Jardins d'Haiti regarding their perceptions and aspirations for the second-floor garden. It also serves

as a critical tool in the broader initiative to transform the garden into a vibrant, intergenerational space that meets the needs of its primary users. By focusing on both current usage and future possibilities, the questionnaire aims to bridge the gap between the garden's existing state and its potential as a community hub. The simplicity of its format ensures accessibility for elderly respondents, using clear language and visual cues to encourage participation. The inclusion of both closed-ended and open-ended questions allows for quantitative data collection while leaving room for creative input, ensuring that the voices of residents and staff directly influence the garden's redesign.

The ideation behind this questionnaire reflects a deep commitment to inclusivity and community-driven design. By prioritizing the input of residents and staff, the survey ensures that the garden's transformation is not imposed from above but co-created with those who will use it most. The emphasis on social activities, such as garden parties and pétanque, aligns with Les Jardins d'Haïti's mission to foster joy and connection among its residents. Ultimately, this questionnaire is more than a data-collection tool; it is a foundational step in building a garden that truly belongs to its community, reflecting their desires and enriching their daily lives. The insights gathered will guide the physical and programming changes needed to create a space that is not only beautiful and functional but also deeply meaningful to those who call Les Jardins d'Haïti home.

3. Short-term and Long-term Events

One of the features of the ideation process was brainstorming event ideas which could take place in the shared garden and throughout the third space to encourage the wider community to enjoy what Les Jardins d'Haïti has to offer. Within this process, it is important to consider events which are already successful in the space, such as 'Apéro Live'; a key feature which makes Apéro Live successful is the regular nature of the event, as it takes place

at the same time every 2 weeks. Therefore, when considering ideas for more events which could take place regularly and could continue successfully after our departure from Marseilles, it is important to take inspiration from such a successful example.

One initial idea is a volunteering event which could take place regularly and encourages volunteers to help with gardening to create a garden which can flourish and host many events. Ideally, this volunteering event would take place in partnership with an organisation such as Benenova or Centre Ste Elisabeth to mobilise the wider community in contributing to the garden. Furthermore, as the project began in the summer months when the weather is mainly hot and dry, it is important to consider that the first few months of volunteering and gardening must consist of tidying, raking, weeding and creating a space which is ready for planting in Autumn and Spring.

Furthermore, fun event ideas such as a 'Family Day' would support community engagement in the garden. An event of this nature could take place every other Saturday or Sunday morning, with the intention of welcoming the families of the residents into the garden for a series of activities which could vary based on the week, for example treasure hunts, music, story-time, and of course gardening. Another idea similar to this which could encourage the neighbouring community to experience the space is a pétanque tournament, as this is a popular activity in Marseille and therefore would likely welcome a large crowd. Another possibility that was initially considered was including the Youbee for Kids crèche in these event ideas, however this may not be possible because of limited staffing and the conditions of the garden not being suitable for extremely small children.

Summary of Milestones

Week	Start Date	Milestones
1	7 – 13/07/2025	Discovered mission objectives and familiarized ourselves with Marseille
2	14 – 20/07/2025	Improved objective comprehension and engaged in leadership workshops
3	21 – 27/07/2025	Engaged in project ideation and developed plans for action
4	28/07/2025 – 03/08/2025	Tested our plans for action through community engagement and made improvements based on experience
5	04 – 10/08/2025	Finalized the project outputs and drafted future plans for action
6	11 - 15/08/2025	Presented our project impacts and submitted a final report

Achievement details

Fostering Partnerships

After multiple meetings and in-depth conversations, we have fostered partnerships and obtained advice with two main local companies or organizations. Our achievements are detailed below:

1. Ziggy Fleurs

A meeting with Nadege from Ziggy's Fleurs was scheduled in the third week of our project. It provided us with valuable insights into gardening, guiding our plans for the renovation of Les Jardins d'Haïti's second-floor garden. Through our conversations with Nadege, we discussed our immediate challenges and long-term sustainability concerns with garden renovation, touching on potential collaboration with her commercial florist business near the end of the meeting. These insights, combined with partnerships with local schools and social centres, could transform the garden into a flourishing space benefiting elderly residents and the wider community.

Recommendations made by Nadege focus on overcoming environmental challenges posed by Marseille's hot climate, a crucial factor for garden sustainability. Her suggestion to implement drip irrigation systems offers a water efficient solution for planters, which typically require more hydration than plants in the ground. This approach conserves resources while reducing maintenance needs, ensuring that the garden remains vibrant even during summer months when plants appear dormant. Her plant selection advice highlights low maintenance perennials like rosemary, thyme and oregano, which can withstand Marseille's hot climate while providing herbs for the restaurant on the ground floor. This practical element creates a meaningful connection between the garden and residents' daily lives, enhancing their sense of purpose. The discussion also emphasized the importance of seasonal planning, and what we could do to prepare for it. While summer proves ideal for soil preparation and cleanup tasks like composting and arranging woodchips, major planting should wait until spring. This is reflected in our recommended actions, where action plans for the following months will detail composting procedures. This timeline also allows us to focus on other improvements that could be made to the second-floor garden, such as refurbishing petanque facilities to encourage frequent use of the space. Nadege also offered to connect with Marion to offer guidance and support, this would provide a reliable means of consultation should gardening problems arise.

Beyond horticultural advice, potential partnership with Ziggy's Fleurs introduces exciting community involvement possibilities. Although plant donations cannot be guaranteed in advance, Nadege expressed willingness to contribute excess seedlings in spring, aligning perfectly with our planting schedule. This collaboration could extend to educational workshops where staff at Les Jardins d'Haïti can share Nadege's expertise with residents and visiting students, fostering intergenerational learning. We also explored the possibility for children from the first floor crèche to perform simple gardening tasks once

safety preparations on the second-floor garden are complete. This initiative would educate the children on gardening and nature while creating meaningful interactions between children and elderly residents. These shared activities could become central to the garden's social programming, reinforcing its role as an intergenerational hub. For elderly residents, these developments promise measurable quality of life improvements. A well maintained garden with aromatic herbs would freshen air in the compound, while vegetable plantations would provide fresh ingredients for the ground-floor kitchen.

In the future, by considering Nadege's advice, Les Jardins d'Haïti can expertly renovate the second-floor garden by preparing satisfactory planting conditions for springtime. From soil preparation to petanque games, from herb gardens to children volunteering, each element will contribute to a sustainable community garden enriching lives within Les Jardins d'Haïti and the local community.

2. Centre Social Ste Elisabeth

In the fourth week of our project, we met with Jerome, director of Centre Social Ste Elisabeth. This meeting revealed significant opportunities for collaboration that could greatly enhance the social engagement of the second-floor garden at Les Jardins d'Haïti. As a well-established social centre serving residents of Square Hopkinsons, Centre Social Ste Elisabeth brings valuable experience in community programming, school partnerships, and resident outreach. We believe that these are all important assets that fuel Les Jardins d'Haïti's mission to create an engaging and inclusive space for both their residents and the local community. By combining resources and expertise, this partnership could address key challenges while unlocking new possibilities for both organizations and their beneficiaries.

One of the most promising areas of collaboration lies in reactivating school-based gardening activities. Centre Social Ste Elisabeth has a strong track record of working with

local schools, having previously organized weekly gardening sessions for kindergarten and elementary students at Les Ateliers Blancarde. Although this initiative ended due to staffing and safety concerns, the social centre remains connected to two other schools through the Velten Educational Garden. Partnering with Les Jardins d'Haïti could fill this gap, providing a secure and accessible location for school groups to engage in gardening activities while fostering meaningful interactions between children and elderly residents. The social centre's ability to recruit and guide teenagers (aged 12–15) could also introduce a dynamic youth presence to the garden, creating opportunities for mentorship and skill-sharing across generations. The discussion also highlighted shared interests in recreational activities, particularly pétanque. Centre Social Ste Elisabeth's members, including seniors, sometimes participate in pétanque tournaments.

As such, Jerome expressed enthusiasm for the proposed pétanque area in Les Jardins d'Haïti's garden, especially for members keen on practicing the sport. This aligns perfectly with the retirement home's goal of creating a vibrant social hub, as pétanque is not only a beloved local pastime but also an accessible activity that encourages casual interaction. By hosting joint pétanque events, the two organizations could attract a diverse mix of participants, from elderly residents to neighbourhood families, strengthening community bonds. Beyond organising joint activities, the partnership offers mutual benefits in outreach and communication. Centre Social Ste Elisabeth's active, person-centric approach to promotion, such as using WhatsApp groups, elevator posters, and face-to-face conversations, could significantly boost awareness of the garden among local residents. Their experience in engaging the local population could help Les Jardins d'Haïti connect with neighbours who might otherwise overlook the space. In return, the retirement home's garden could provide the social centre with a much-needed venue for horticultural activities, filling the void left by their discontinued projects.

However, Jérôme raised important concerns about accessibility, which will be critical to address for the partnership to thrive. The current buzzer system and restricted operating hours at Les Jardins d'Haïti could deter spontaneous community use. While Jérôme proposed exploring a separate garden entrance, logistical and security implications would need careful evaluation. Additionally, the garden's lack of wheelchair access presents a barrier to full inclusivity to the elderly, which is a barrier recognised by both organizations. Addressing these challenges through creative solutions, such as scheduled open hours or volunteer-led access support, will be essential to ensuring the space feels welcoming to all. In addition, safety measures, such as barricading dangerous steps in the second floor garden and providing appropriate upkeep would prove equally pivotal to providing a safe and fun environment for community exploration and engagement.

The potential impact on Les Jardins d'Haïti's elderly residents is particularly compelling. Regular interactions with schoolchildren, teenagers, and pétanque enthusiasts would infuse the garden with energy and purpose, combating social isolation and creating a sense of community ownership. Through this Les Jardins d'Haïti can further promote their value of ageing well, as well as respectful intergenerational connection between residents and the local community. For Centre Social Ste Elisabeth, the partnership would expand their ability to deliver meaningful programming while reinforcing their role as a connector in the neighbourhood. Moving forward, the next steps should include joint planning sessions to design pilot activities, such as a weekly gardening day or a neighbourhood pétanque tournament, while working collaboratively to address access barriers and safety issues. In order to maintain a long-term partnership, joint activities should be organised at stable intervals. As suggested by Jerome, they could take the form of regular timeslots for teen groups to come and garden. Monthly petanque activities were also welcome by the social centre.

Mini volunteering event

Due to the time constraints of our project, we were unable to plan any large community events in the garden, specifically since our visit was in the summer, which was not the planting season. However, we did notice that the garden needed clearing as there were some debris, dead plants and litter. In response, we hosted a mini garden cleaning event.

On the 6th August, we mobilised 6 volunteers including ourselves and spent the morning weeding, ploughing, and rehydrating the soil. Though this maintenance, we hope that when planting season arrives in spring, the majority of the preparation is complete. We also made a significant effort restoring the pétanque court, where there was a build-up of sticks and debris. We first cleaned the court of fallen leaves and rubble, and smoothed out the surface of the pétanque court. We then turned to the planters, which were plagued with debris weeds and dead roots, and took our time to remove any dead plants, sticks and stones. After that, our volunteers broke up chunks of soil to facilitate planting. The soil was then moistened with water to give remaining plants the best chance at life under the blazing Marseille sun. Finally, we cleared a path towards the main entrance with shovels and rakes, removing weeds and dead grass, making it easier for less mobile residents to access the garden.

Conclusion

This LiA project, "Ageing Well", aimed to improve elderly quality of life by supporting transformation of an underutilised garden at Les Jardins d'Haïti into an intergenerational community space. Through strategic partnerships with local entities like Ziggy Fleurs and Centre Social Ste Elisabeth, we developed a practical framework for sustainable gardening and community engagement for the care home. The initial cleanup and preparation work conducted, coupled with the co-created event plans, provide a clear and

actionable foundation for Les Jardins d'Haïti to build upon. This project has established the necessary groundwork for the garden to become a lasting hub that fosters connection and well-being for elderly residents in the neighbourhood.