The SOG Story
Senior Organic Gardeners (SOG)

Senior Organic Gardeners was first mentioned at Fall Reflections 2010 by then chair, Margaret Tourond-Townson. It’s name for a very short while was Growing Older Organic! GOO would have been the acronym but with a few chuckles, the suggestion of Senior Organic Gardeners soon replaced that!

A number of incredible volunteers helped to bring SOG into reality: Margaret and David Townson, Rob Danforth, Sara Holzman, Debbie Holzman and the support of the whole COG OSO Steering Committee.

Year one was carried out by volunteers, Rob, David, Margaret and Sara. They planted the seeds for this developing program! Margaret became the Lead Volunteer for SOG on the Steering Committee. David became back up and Rob became the workshop presenter and organic gardener and Sara became his assistant.

SOG 2012 Pilot Project
Our 2012 Pilot Project involving one Retirement Home, Unitarian House in Westboro and one Long Term Care facility, Longfield Manor in Barrhaven was very successful and we learned many excellent lessons on how to move forward. We thank both Unitarian House and Longfield Manor seniors and staff for such a wonderful experience.

SOG 2013 Pilot Project continues
In 2013, our continuing Pilot projects continued with the two locations above and expanded to The Perley & Rideau Veterans’ Health Centre as well as Wellington Towers and Brooke Manor- both Ottawa Community Housing locations.
We were excited to introduce organic vegetable and herb gardening to interested seniors in an informal circle with photographs and plants. The seniors who decided to participate took part in short, relaxed tailored “hands-on” workshops in planning, purchasing, planting, maintaining, harvesting, and winterizing. Gardens were visited periodically, so we could check on progress, as well as offering advice and assistance when requested. All the seniors and volunteers enjoyed a closing get together to taste some organic snacks, to reflect on their gardening experiences and to begin planning the next growing season. We collected feedback and testimonials from participants to help SOG revise and plan for our program next growing season.

**SOG 2014**
In 2014, we worked in 9 locations, with Adèle MacKay joining SOG as horticultural specialist and program manager: This year we added Regina Towers, Russell Manor and 800 St Laurent in the east end as well as Good Companions. We expanded to the non-growing season with horticultural therapy activities to draw the seniors together. We offer a series of photographs as we know that pictures can be worth a thousand words!

Photos:

**SOG 2015**
SOG continued under the direction of our horticultural specialist, Adèle MacKay, to offer organic gardening workshops and hands-on sessions to seniors in the following locations: OCH Brooke Towers, Russell Manor, 800 St. Laurent; long-term care facilities St. Patrick’s Home of Ottawa and Le Manoir de Wakefield; and seniors’ residence Sully Gardens, in Wakefield.

Language interpreters assisted seniors in our multicultural locations. Two vibrant garden celebrations marked the end of the season: one at 800 St. Laurent and a final summer
celebration at Sully Gardens.

A grant from the Ontario Ministry of Immigration and Citizenship as well as a new fruitful partnership with the Quebec Farmers’ Association made this all possible.

**SOG 2016** This year we reached out to 3 multicultural OCH residences, 2 Indigenous centres and Hope Living (Shepherds of Good Hope). We were very happy to have the participation of the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health and Odawa Friendship Centre which added a new exciting dimension. We also continued our program in the Outaouais, with volunteer visits at le Manoir de Wakefield and Sully Gardens.

The multicultural OCH seniors’ residences that were on board for 2016 were: Wellington Towers, Russell Manor, and 800 St. Laurent.

The Community Foundation of Ottawa (CFO) contributed to our success throughout the year. We held a Recognition Event for CFO in September, celebrating our growing season with a beautiful drumming performance by the Wabano seniors.

**SOG 2017**

This year we offered workshops to multicultural community groups such as the South Nepean Muslim Centre (SNMC), and Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO).

We continued our program at Wabano with great success, offering workshops on plant medicines and indigenous plants.

We carried out community gardening at 3 OCH residences: 800 St. Laurent, Clementine Towers, and 300 Lacasse, celebrating diversity and multiculturalism.
Language interpreters and celebrations continued to enhance the social opportunities for seniors to draw closer together with a common theme of gardening. We held a beautiful Recognition Event and a Closing Harvest Ceremony to celebrate our successful year, funded by Ontario Trillium Foundation.

We also paid tribute to Adele MacKay as she moved on... She has been the Life and Soul of SOG for four whole, wonderful years!!

**SOG 2018**

In 2018, supported by funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, we were able to support gardeners in two types of locations: community gardens with raised bed gardening and seniors’ community groups who gathered to learn about gardening and socialize.

We welcomed our new Horticultural SOG Manager, Christine Matheson to SOG leadership. Gardening Committees were established and began to build more sustainability into the gardens throughout SOG’s interventions and beyond!

We had 4 locations with raised bed gardening: 800 St. Laurent, Clementine Towers, Russell Manor (all with Ottawa Community Housing) and the South Nepean Muslim Centre (SNMC). We also had 5 seniors groups participating in gardening workshops, including new Canadian groups and the Seniors Circle at the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health. Our seniors represented over 25 cultural groups and worked hard to include seniors of all languages and ethnicities. 300 Lacasse also participated in garden workshops although they could not access their gardens due to construction.
Every location enjoyed regular gardening sessions and/or workshops given by our Horticultural Manager and guest lecturers. We also benefited from the expertise of a coordinator who helped in the gardens, took care of the finances, records and much more!

Workshop topics ranged from: garden planning, starting seedlings indoors, growing in containers, microgreens, indoor gardening, herbs, edible flowers, heritage crops, finding organic local produce, learning about the meaning of “organics” and saving seeds. Aboriginal gardeners explored the incredible depth of their own knowledge on growing ceremonial tobacco and gathering wild plants and enjoyed a guest lecturer on wild fungus. Newcomers to Canada learned about gardening in our climate and how to grow familiar plants from their own countries here. Cross-cultural exchange was fostered through the use of cultural interpreters.

A particularly beautiful exchange was held at the Clementine location when gardeners toured the garden plots and, with the assistance of interpreters, became knowledgeable in what gardeners from other language groups were growing.

Each location enjoyed a Harvest Celebration in the fall: gardeners cooked their produce and recipes were exchanged.

During 2018, a video was made of the SOG Story! Click here to meet our Gardeners!  https://vimeo.com/301276892-

**SOG 2019**
In progress...