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**GAREMA PLACE TAKEOVER ATTRACTS NEARLY 200% MORE PEOPLE**

Results are in from the #BackyardExperiment, a pop-up park in Canberra’s Garema Place designed to test the power of simple interventions to attract more people to an underused public space. Time-lapse footage has revealed a stunning transformation in visitor numbers and the diversity of people attracted to the place.

Street Furniture Australia launched the pop-up park and social study in collaboration with the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA), the ACT Government and In the City Canberra.

The park, designed by landscape architecture firm Context, featured movable furniture, knitted trees, lighting, living lawn, free Wi-Fi and book shelves, making the space more colourful, green and inviting.

Before #BackyardExperiment, 97% of visitors passed through Garema Place without stopping. During the experiment visitor numbers to Garema Place almost doubled, increasing by 190% in just 8 days. The number of people who stayed increased by 247%.

A lot more pedestrians chose to walk through Garema Place instead of diverting along other routes, attracted to the spectacle of the pop-up park.

“When you consider that #BackyardExperiment relied on word of mouth to attract people the results are all the more astounding. We didn’t actively promote the park to the community or stage a launch, we simply built it and people came,” said Street Furniture Australia Marketing Manager June Boxsell.

The most significant changes were seen in demographic diversity. Before the experiment 98% of dwellers were adults, mostly from the street and homeless community. Locals described the space as “intimidating,” “rough,” and “tired.” Few families and seniors visited Garema Place.

During #BackyardExperiment an incredible 631% more children were seen staying and enjoying the area. Groups of friends almost doubled, couples grew by almost 4 times and families almost 5 times - on the weekend 8 times.

“This transformation was particularly marked at night. Garema Place is a bit of a hotspot for adult nightlife but during the experiment we noticed a lot more families with young children playing in the park after dark. The lighting and yarn wrapped trees created an environment that felt magical and safe, families really seemed to respond to that,” said Boxsell.

Movable furniture created flexible places for people to sit by themselves or in large social groups. Locals warned that these seats would not be safe from theft. However, the street community agreed to watch over the park, and of the 60 movable seats, not one went missing. One seat was damaged on the last night of the experiment.

“Even in a spot like Garema Place, which can have a rough reputation, movable furniture does not necessarily disappear. It was a pleasant surprise given the warnings and concern we had from the local community, but very much in line with thinking about movable seats in places like Paris and New York,” said Boxsell.

“We wanted to test the theory that the fastest and most cost-effective way to attract people is to provide more places to sit. With the addition of greenery and colour the space has been transformed with very little cost. The experiment shows just how effective quicker, lighter, cheaper interventions can be for placemakers looking to brighten underused spaces.”

The experiment took place over eight days from 22 – 30 October, 2016, with time-lapse cameras capturing the activity from three angles. The footage was used to measure foot traffic, the number of dwellers and changes in demographic groups.

The ACT Government visited #BackyardExperiment with a survey team to collect responses to the park and the future of Garema Place. An online survey on the [Your Say](https://yoursay.act.gov.au/) website was promoted via social media. The survey targeted people who currently use the space and who might be interested, if improvements were made.

Of those surveyed, 99% said they liked the furniture and would like to see more of it. All elements of the Backyard Experiment appealed to the various users, particularly the style of furniture and the chalk-painted paving.

“The #BackyardExperiment pop-up park has received a great response from the local community. The research results, and results from our own survey, will assist the ACT Government to implement its City Action Plan, informing future events and installations in areas such Garema Place,” Karen Wilden from ACT Government said.

The #BackyardExperiment was part of the [2016 International Festival of Landscape Architecture: Not In My Backyard](http://www.aila.org.au/imis_prod/NIMBY/Not_In_My_Backyard/NIMBY/Overview.aspx) held in Canberra in October 2016. The biannual festival aims to connect the public with landscape architects, the program including a Conference, the National Landscape Architecture Awards, Festival Party and a host of public and industry tours, exhibitions, city activations, screenings and talks.

A white paper and 10-minute documentary film with the full results are available for viewing at [streetfurniture.com/au/backyardexperiment](http://streetfurniture.com/au/backyardexperiment/).

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**Further findings**

1. On the weekend, the number of children seen grew even further by 780%;
2. The community response via Twitter, Instagram and Facebook was overwhelmingly positive across the board;
3. #BackyardExperiment was good for business - local vendors claimed business improved over the 8 days and wanted a more permanent solution;
4. “The impact is amazing for businesses in the area. I run King O’Malley’s Pub and I know quite a few of the shopkeepers here. It’s transformed it, people feel safe, they linger, they can have a cappuccino, buy a pair of shoes and just be in the space and it’s uplifting. The shopkeepers and owners can see there’s something positive happening. They can see there’s a change. It just lifts everyone’s spirits.” Peter Barclay, owner of King O’Malley’s pub.

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**About Street Furniture Australia**  
Street Furniture Australia is a design and manufacturing house dedicated to improving the public realm through product innovation. Since the first seat prototype in 1978, Street Furniture Australia has been involved in the supply of street  
furniture for more than 25,000 projects, both public and private, around Australia and the world. [streetfurniture.com](http://www.streetfurniture.com)

**About the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA)**

AILA is the growing national advocacy body representing 2,900 active and engaged landscape architects, promoting the importance of the profession today and for the future. Committed to designing and creating a better Australia, landscape architects shape the world around us. aila.org.au

**Acknowledgements**

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