SECTION 4

Extending Learning Opportunities



Learning opportunities for food education can be extended by using available on-site and off-site resources

These opportunities have the most impact when they are planned with intention, embedded into everyday routines rather than treated as one-off events, and give children a real role in growing, choosing, preparing and sharing food.

Returning to the same garden, market or community partner over time builds familiarity and confidence, and linking these experiences back to the service menu and program helps the learning carry across the day.

These resources help children develop a deeper understanding of food, nutrition, sustainability, environmental responsibility and cultural diversity and traditions. They also enhance children's sense of self and belonging as they promote social connection and community involvement.

On-site resources

Traditional foods available in the area. The case study, *Food from home*, explores the creation of traditional bush tucker books to enhance children's learning about cultural foods and traditions.

See Case study, page 96 of this module

On-site garden at an ECEC service. The case study, *Growing, caring for and cooking plants* outlines the use of an on-site service garden to teach sustainability, life skills and caring for Country.

See Case study, page 72 of Sustainable Food Practices

Off-site resources

Visits to local community gardens, farms, markets and shops. The case study, *The Community Classroom*, shows how visits to the local park and shops builds children's awareness of environmental responsibility, nutrition and sense of community.

See Case study, page 94 of this module

Reflective questions

Service Leadership team

- *Think of an off-site experience or service you currently engage with. How could this develop into an ongoing partnership? Could it be sustained beyond a single term or year?*
- *How does your outdoor and on-site environment support children's ongoing access to food-related learning? Are there physical resources or spaces you could develop further?*



CASE STUDY

The Community Classroom

Blending environmental responsibility, community connection and food literacy into embedded practice

SERVICE	Craigie Early Learning Centre
SERVICE TYPE	Long day care
MEAL PROVISION MODEL	All meals provided on-site
BUSINESS MODEL	Private, for-profit
AGE RANGE	Birth to 5 years
NUMBER OF APPROVED PLACES	44
NUMBER OF STAFF	10
REMOTENESS AREA CLASSIFICATION	Major cities

LOCATION

Perth, WA



Background

Craigie Early Learning Centre is located in Perth's northern suburbs. The Reggio Emilia approach guides their educational program, with a focus on family, community and ensuring the child's voice is heard and incorporated into the everyday. Staff describe Craigie Early Learning Centre as "a magical place in a magical place". Part of this is because the community is so kind and welcoming to the children when they see them out and about on their Community Classroom excursions. There is always a friendly face, and a smile and a wave for the children and educators wherever they go.

What did you want to do?

- Help children connect with Country and learn about sustainability and environmental responsibility.
- Help children learn about and connect with their communities.
- Help children understand where their food comes from.
- Community Classroom excursions are now an embedded part of the routine and program at the service.

What did you do?

The Community Classroom journey so far...

The Community Classroom started with walks on Country at the local park. It then expanded to include walks to the local supermarket where elements of Country were explored and integrated into cooking experiences with the children.

This has led to the development of their Chop and Grate program where:

- Children decide what to make for e.g. afternoon tea.
- Children and educators:
  - Look up a recipe together online.
  - Create a shopping list.
  - Head out to the local supermarket to buy the food.
  - Come back and prepare the food together, and sometimes even share it with families at home time.

How does the Community Classroom run?

Educators in the kindy space prepare children for participation in Community Classroom excursions via:

- Talking with the children about safety in the community, formally and informally.
- Teaching body awareness for safety, formally and informally.
- Bringing community members into the service for children to meet before they go out of the centre.
- Inviting the local supermarket to come to the service and talk about the different types of foods they sell (e.g. fresh, frozen, canned, packaged).

Next, children are brought out on Country to:

- Practise these body awareness and safety skills.
- Learn how to care for the environment by being present in nature at the park and observing all the wonderful plants and creatures around.
- Learn how food is grown by watching plants grow in the park and planting their own fruits and vegetables at the centre.
- Find a sense of belonging in the community through seeing the same staff and people when they go out – and saying hello!
- Learn about a variety of foods by exploring the local supermarket.
- Increase literacy and numeracy skills through reading posters, price tags and labels at the supermarket.

What steps are involved?

Before going out:

- If pre-planned – check child permission forms the day before going out.
- If spontaneous – check child permission forms before going out.
- Remind children of safety in the community before going out.
- Allow children to ask questions about the excursion before heading out.
- Put on hats, sunscreen, shoes, get water bottles.
- Roll call/head count.
- Line children up in pairs.
- Staff member at the front of the line reminds children of the process.

While walking to location:

- One staff member at the front, one in the middle and one at the back.
- Prepare children for each section along the way.
- Ensure extra safety around traffic – one of the teachers becomes a crossing guard.
- Roll call/head count multiple times throughout the walk.
- Enjoy the walk and chatting with the children.

What about permission?

The service has ongoing permission forms for excursions, as trips to the local supermarket are a regular part of the weekly routine. If a family would prefer not to give permission, or a child does not want to go out, there is always the option to stay at the service for an alternative activity with other children and staff.

What about supervision?

Up to 15 children go at a time, with three staff members – this is above ratio and helps to ensure the safety of the children and staff.

The difference it has made

These excursions are guided by children's ideas for cooking together, helping them understand they have a voice and can help plan and make decisions.

They provide children an opportunity not just to go shopping, but to also:

- Learn about where food comes from and why it's important to look after the environment.
- Connect with and be part of their community by seeing familiar faces and smiling and waving at people they know.

Top tips

- Organisation and preparation are key to keeping things safe and calm.
- Keep local excursions short:
  - No longer than a five-minute walk.
  - No longer than 15–20 minutes for shopping.
- Don't be afraid to try an excursion:
  - Start small.
  - Plan well.
  - Be well equipped.
  - Invite families so they can join in the experience, and also provide extra supervision.

CASE STUDY

Food from home

Traditional tucker books made for the community in collaboration with public health

REMOTENESS AREA CLASSIFICATION	Very remote

LOCATION

Northern Territory



Background

An Aboriginal Health Practitioner (AHP) in the field of nutrition, who also has a passion for traditional tucker, is in the process of writing two related books that will have a special significance to her and her community on Groote Eylandt, the Warnindilyakwa people. These books will showcase traditional tucker that grows on and around the island through:

- A cookbook for the children and families of Groote Eylandt.
- An educational tool to help health professionals, and the wider community, learn about the traditional tucker of the island.

She was encouraged to take on this project by another NT health professional, a dietitian, who was doing a similar project on the Tiwi Islands.

What does good food education for children look like in community?

She sees that good food education for children in community could occur in several places, for example:

- At schools and in ECEC settings.
- In libraries.
- At health services.
- With the 'Golden Girls' of the community – the Elders who take the children around the island and teach them about traditional tucker.

Other examples she would like to see to enhance food education for children include:

- Visibility of traditional tucker at the local market gardens, with traditional tucker being sold alongside western foods.
  - This would cement the importance of traditional tucker in children's minds as they would be seen as just as important as other foods at the market.
- Children and families being taught how to recognise traditional tucker and knowing how to use it so they will buy and cook with it.
- Traditional tucker being grown at the community gardens for everyone to plant, raise and use.
  - Children would be able to see the way the plant grows and learn how to look after it and then harvest it.
  - Then they might pick up the cookbook with their families and cook something with the food they had grown.
- She sees the proposed traditional tucker books as resources that could be utilised in any of these settings to enhance food education for children and families.

What do you want to do with these books?

- To share her passion for traditional tucker from Groote Eylandt.
- To ensure that the knowledge of the traditional tucker of the island is passed on to the younger generation and preserved for the future.
- To create contemporary educational tools for the whole community to learn about traditional tucker and how to use it.

What did/will you do to create these books?

- First, she asked for permission from the local Elders.
  - She explained what she wanted to do, then received consent.
- She has a plan over three years to collate the information on the traditional tucker of Groote Eylandt for this book:
  - Year 1 – Plants.
  - Year 2 – Land animals.
  - Year 3 – Sea animals.
  - This process will entail her going around the island and drawing, photographing and collecting samples. She will then:
    - Send samples to a laboratory for nutritional analysis as some of these have not been analysed for a long time.
    - Collate the information into two books.
- She plans for the books to include:
  - Cookbook:
    - Simple recipes for families in plain English and with lots of pictures.
    - Recipes that mix traditional and non-traditional foods and cooking methods.
    - Multicultural meals.
    - Information for families about growing healthy kids.
  - Health practitioner book:
    - Pictures of the foods and their traditional and scientific names.
    - Nutritional information about the plant and how it is used in cooking.
    - Information about how the plant is used in bush medicine.
- She also plans to involve the people of Groote Eylandt in the creation of the books, creating a truly community-based resource.

Top tips

She recommends thinking thoroughly about what you would like to do before you start your community-specific book:

- Think about the people you are creating the book for.
- Ask them what kind of book they would prefer:
  - For example, she describes her mob as visual people, so the cookbook will be created to have as little text as possible, will use plain English, and will have lots of photos to illustrate the steps of meal preparation and the final result.

Work with your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community:

- Go online and find the list of Land Councils.
- Find the Land Council of your local area.
- Contact the Land Council, explain what you are doing, ask for consent to do the work and have community involvement.
- Be prepared that they might say no:
  - In this case you may need to change your plan.
  - Talk to the Land Council and ask what would help to make your project more acceptable to the community and go from there.

When these two books are created, this AHP will have made something that combines ancient knowledge, local community, education and health promotion.

It will be a lasting legacy that is practical, educational, culturally grounded and meaningful – not just for herself, but for the community, families and children of Groote Eylandt.