CASE STUDY

Connecting education to real life

The mini-chef experience

SERVICE	Montessori Minds Childcare
SERVICE TYPE	Long day care
MEAL PROVISION MODEL	All meals provided on-site
BUSINESS MODEL	Private, for-profit
AGE RANGE	1 to 6 years
NUMBER OF APPROVED PLACES	127
NUMBER OF STAFF	35–40
REMOTENESS AREA CLASSIFICATION	Major cities

LOCATION

Geelong, Victoria



Background

Montessori Minds Childcare is a relatively new service in Victoria, which has been in operation for around two and a half years. The centre serves a highly diverse and vulnerable area and plays an important role in education and support for the whole community.

The building was designed with the aim of creating a learning environment where sustainability, food education, cultural inclusion, and community engagement were embedded into daily practice rather than treated as stand-alone programs or events.

The Montessori philosophy underpins all learning experiences, emphasising real-world connections, practical life skills, observation, and respect for living things. This approach creates an inclusive environment where learning flows between the centre, families, and the wider community.

The weekly cooking experiences with the centre chef play a part in that flow of learning to the home. Children bring cooking skills and knowledge learned at the centre back to their families – everyone learns and enjoys!

What did you want to do?

- Both the centre director and owner wanted to help children develop practical cooking skills while they were at the centre.
  - Practical cooking experiences help children build independence, confidence and everyday life skills.
  - They support fine motor development, concentration and early maths and science concepts through measuring, pouring, mixing and following steps.
  - Cooking also encourages confidence and curiosity with food, language development and a sense of contribution as children take part in meaningful real-life tasks.
- One way to do this was through hands-on cooking experiences with the chef.
- This would also allow children the opportunity to develop skills that they could use throughout life, and even bring them into their family homes.

What did you do?

- Chef-led cooking experiences were integrated into the program at the service.
- It was decided that these experiences would be 'no fire cooking' to reduce risk.
- Chef experiences are used with the three- to five-year-old children at the centre.
- The children cook every week with the chef, as part of the program.
  - Smoothies are a favourite, with many parents reporting that the children have been able to remember the recipe to re-create the smoothies at home.
- Children also collect herbs from the centre's garden to use in the chef experiences, supporting sensory learning and food literacy.

The difference it has made

- Learning has extended into homes, with families reporting that children are increasingly leading cooking at home.
  - Parents have reported that children often want to re-create the food they have made at the service at home, and lead the way with creating a shopping list to buy the ingredients.
- Children have also built strong social skills, confidence and collaboration through play and cooking experiences with the centre chef.

Top tips

Use real-world activities and experiences wherever possible to create rich learning experiences for children.

Through real-world cooking experiences, children at Montessori Minds are learning all about food and cooking, building confidence and skills that will benefit them, and their families, throughout life.

These experiences also create opportunities to explore cultural foods and family traditions, strengthening children's sense of identity, belonging and respect for diversity, while inviting valuable parent involvement.

Most importantly, cooking experiences are planned around the rights, interests and wellbeing of children, ensuring their safety, voice and enjoyment remain central at all times.