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.