CASE STUDY

Culture and community co-designed

The Turtle Cove recipe book

SERVICE	Turtle Cove Wandina Early Learning Centre
SERVICE TYPE	Long day care
MEAL PROVISION MODEL	All meals provided on-site
BUSINESS MODEL	Private, for-profit
AGE RANGE	3 months to 4 years
NUMBER OF APPROVED PLACES	59
NUMBER OF STAFF	30
REMOTENESS AREA CLASSIFICATION	Outer regional

LOCATION

Wandina, WA



Background

Turtle Cove Wandina is one of three Turtle Cove Early Learning Centres and one Turtle Cove Out of School Hours services located in Geraldton, WA. It is a private, for-profit service in outer regional WA. The service is licensed for 59 children each day, with staff rostered to provide education and care according to appropriate ratios. They are a Christian-based service, with kindness, compassion and giving back making up the foundation of the service's values.

The recipe book was borne from the needs of the families and children at the service. The service created a recipe book for families via extensive consultation with the children, families and staff of the service. It reflects the cultural diversity and traditions of the Turtle Cove community that helped to create it, providing a rich resource for sharing and learning, not just about food, but about each other.

The recipe book is still in development but is due to be completed in late 2026.

What did you want to do?

- Staff noticed that families were saying that their child ate well at the service but was not eating nutritious meals at home.
- Families would then ask the staff what the cook was making and ask for recipes.
- Staff would send home recipes with a take-away box of the meal, ensuring the food was handled and stored in line with food safety procedures and local regulations.
  - This way, the family could taste the meal together at home and then make it themselves.
- After doing this for a few years, and reviewing their sustainability practices, staff realised that making these copies of recipes for families was not sustainable, but the need for the recipes was still there.
- So, the idea came about that they should create a recipe book for families.

What did you do?

As part of Turtle Cove Wandina's enrolment process, families are encouraged to fill out a 'Curious about Culture' form where they include their child's favourite foods from home, and cultural meals. These are also included in the centre's menu where possible.

This is a great way to develop an inclusive partnership with families to enrich and enhance food and nutrition education collaboration.

The book was initially only going to contain centre recipes, but over time broadened to include:

- Cultural recipes from families collected over time and via the 'Curious about Culture' forms filled out at enrollment, like Dhal and South African Curry.
- Traditional bush tucker.
- Mealtime practices at the service, like getting children involved in the cooking process.
  - They have found that this encourages children to try the food that they make.
  - Turtle Cove demonstrates this through 'Turtle Tucker Time'.
  - This is regularly scheduled time at the centre where children get involved in preparing food, cooking and tasting experiences.

Steps to creating the community recipe book in collaboration with children and families:

- Staff monitored demand for recipes over time based on how many they were handing out and family feedback.
- Staff then asked if families and children wanted the service's recipes in a book format.
  - Families indicated that they did, so the decision was made to print the cookbook.
- Families, staff and children contributed to the recipes in the book.
  - The book is a collaboration with children drawing their interpretations of the meals, which will then be added to the cookbook.
- Families are then invited to come in and cook with the children on the day their recipe is made.

The difference it has made

- The family response has been overwhelmingly positive.
- Families are reporting that the children are eating more nutritious food at home and that they are cooking together at home more often.
- One parent even came in to watch the cook prepare one of the recipes so that she could learn how to do it herself!

Top tips

The process took around two years to complete. This meant that:

- It was a very organic process, heavily driven by community engagement.
- It didn't feel like extra workload on staff.
- It felt like structure was put in place to support what they were already doing.

The staff at Turtle Cove Wandina recommend working with staff, families and children at the service to develop the recipe book. This ensures:

- It reflects the cultural diversity and traditions of the community.
- Recipes are included that children enjoy eating.
- Community participation and connection are enhanced.
- Children are given the opportunity to contribute in many different ways, like:
  - Suggesting meals to include.
  - Creating artworks to decorate the pages.

All of this works towards increasing community involvement at the service, and a greater understanding and appreciation of a service's diversity, creating a closer, more connected community.