CASE STUDY

Hopping along to Little Joey's Community Garden

Building partnerships to create extended curriculum and learning opportunities

SERVICE	Little Joey's Early Learning Centre
SERVICE TYPE	Long day care
MEAL PROVISION MODEL	All meals provided on-site
BUSINESS MODEL	Private, for-profit
AGE RANGE	6 weeks to 5 years
NUMBER OF APPROVED PLACES	80
NUMBER OF STAFF	30
REMOTENESS AREA CLASSIFICATION	Major cities

LOCATION

Narre Warren East, VIC



Background

Little Joey's Early Learning Centre is located in the semi-rural area of Narre Warren East in Victoria. They have a lot of space, a lot of time outdoors, and a program called Little Joey's Community Garden, run in partnership with the farm next door.

At the farm, the farmer runs a bush kinder where the children at Little Joey's learn all about where food comes from, how to look after it, harvest it and cook with it. They also learn about the lifecycles of different animals on the farm and enjoy close encounters with them throughout the year.

An element of the Community Garden is the fruit and vegetable garden at the service that is looked after by the staff and children, with excess produce shared with all families at the service.

What did you want to do?

They accepted the invite from the farm to create a partnership in order to:

- Become more embedded in the community.
- Allow children to have a unique farm experience where they also learned about farming and where foods come from.

They established the Community Garden at the service to:

- Bring the gardens back to life around the service.
- Teach children about the process of planting and growing food.
- Build independence and life skills in children.
- Help children understand the importance of growing with the seasons, including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander seasons.
- Help children understand that they are a part of their environment by being involved in maintaining the garden and collecting food scraps for compost.

See Sustainable Food Practices, Section 6, page 75

What did you do?

The partnership

This partnership grew over a few years, starting with conversations between the director and the farmer. From there it has grown into a full program, based at the farm, that the children at Little Joey's can enjoy from the start of their time at the service.

Logistics

Fees:

- The Bush Kinder incurs a fee that is included in the childcare fees that parents pay to the service.

Prior to excursion day:

- Risk assessments are completed and appropriate documentation is collected for the adults involved in the excursion (e.g. Working With Children Checks).
- Parents are informed about which day the children will be going to the farm via email.
- Little Joey's uses an ongoing permission system (updated annually) for going to the farm as it is such a regular and embedded experience at the service.

On excursion day:

- As the farm is within walking distance from Little Joey's, the children are able to get there by walking, being carried or going in prams.
- Every age group goes to the farm, including babies.
- In consultation with the service's educators, the farmer sets up activities that are developmentally appropriate for the children to experience.
- The farmer meets the children and staff at the Little Joey's entrance and walks them over to the farm.
- Around 20 children and 3-4 staff attend at a time, sometimes with a parent supporting as well.
- The farmer facilitates the Bush Kinder experience on the farm, with the support of staff.
  - Educators remain to supervise at all times and do not leave children alone with the farmer. This ensures child safety and that the relevant laws and regulations are followed.

Community garden

- To bring the gardens back to life, educators and children plan what they want to grow, and where and when they will plant it.
- Each room is responsible for planting, watering and harvesting produce.
  - These tasks form a part of the daily routine and program in each room.
  - This has now turned into a little competition between the different rooms at the service, with each room trying to grow the most or the best food.
- Some of the plants are grown from seed and are started inside the room for the children to observe, and then planted out into the garden beds outside when they are ready.
- Extra produce is donated to families at the service.
- The director lets families know there is extra produce available by:
  - Emailing families.
  - Placing baskets at the front of the service with signs encouraging families to take whatever they would like.

The difference it has made

- Children have developed an appreciation for the work involved in growing food.
- Children's understanding of food waste has increased as they understand the work involved in getting the food from the garden to the plate.
- Community awareness of the activities of the service has increased, and there has been a boost to the service's reputation.
- Community bonds have been strengthened through the partnership with the farm and sharing excess produce with families.

Top tips

- If you have a special program or project to run, ensure there is a staff or family member with the passion to get it running and keep it going.
- You can have a community garden in the city as well.
- Try using raised beds, plants in pots or plants in hanging baskets instead of a whole garden.
- Create community relationships and partnerships with whatever services and resources are around you. This could be:
  - An aged care facility where the children go and help the residents with their gardens, or the residents come in and tell the children stories.
  - A relationship with the local bakery where they come into the service and cook something with the children.
  - A partnership with the local nursery where nursery staff come in and teach the children about growing something.
- When starting your garden:
  - Know your environment and plan where to put things before planting – you will get better results
  - Get someone in to consult, like a family member or another member of the community who is keen on gardening, to help get the garden off to a great start.