CASE STUDY

Small changes making a big difference

Composting at a large scale to reduce waste and teach sustainability

SERVICE	Marjorie Mann Lawley Day Care Centre
SERVICE TYPE	Long day care
MEAL PROVISION MODEL	All meals provided on-site
BUSINESS MODEL	Private, not-for-profit
AGE RANGE	0–6 years
NUMBER OF APPROVED PLACES	58
REMOTENESS AREA CLASSIFICATION	Major cities

LOCATION

Mount Lawley, Perth, WA



Background

Marjorie Mann Lawley Day Care Centre has been running for over 50 years, is a private, not-for profit service, and has a philosophy inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach.

Sustainability is embedded in practice at Marjorie Mann, with children involved in activities such as recycling and composting as part of their routines every day. Reducing food waste is part of this process and forms part of helping children learn to care for the world around them.

What did you want to do?

- To reduce overall waste going to landfill.
  - To teach children about simple ways they can create a more sustainable world – "sometimes the smallest changes can make the biggest difference".
- To teach children about the lifecycle of food – food → scraps → compost → garden/farm → food.
- To support the local community garden where one of the educators volunteered.

What did you do?

First, composting started with a partnership with the local community garden. Over time the service realised that this was not an appropriate solution as:

- The service was creating more food waste than the community garden could handle.
- Educators had to bring the waste to the garden themselves, and this was not a sustainable solution.
- Next, another possibility arose that involved getting in contact with a rubbish company that specialised in composting. This was fee-for-service, and was paid from fees.

How does the company manage the food waste?

- First, the company comes to the service to do a consultation and discover the needs of the service.
- The company assists in setting up bins in the most effective way for the service to reduce landfill.
- The company collects food waste and composts it.
- The ECEC service can then buy back the compost if they need it for their gardens, etc.
  - The compost can also be used as a fundraiser. Families can pick up a bag of compost and take some home.

How does this link with the children?

- Intentional teaching around composting is included in programs to:
  - Help children learn about the cycle of food.
  - Show children how to manage food waste and compost bins.
  - Demonstrate the use of compost in the garden to help things grow.
- Learning about composting is embedded into everyday practice with the children.
  - This helps children build habits that they will take throughout their lives.
  - This also links with the service's philosophy to encourage children to be active citizens.
  - An example of embedded practice:
    - > A compost bin is included in each of the rooms at the service.
    - > Children are encouraged to scrape their own plates into the bin as part of their daily routine.
    - > Educators take the food waste to the outside bins
    - > The bins are collected each week by the rubbish company.
- Resources used to teach children about composting include:
  - Books.
  - Posters to help children use the correct bins.
  - Tabletop provocations:
    - > To encourage discussion amongst the children and educators.
    - > For children to engage in activities to practice sorting waste into the correct bins.
  - A dedicated sustainability section in the service that is a permanent fixture there.

Who manages all of this?

- One of the educators is the Sustainability Officer who manages composting.

What's next?

- The service maintains a small compost bin and worm farm at the service, as well as the bins from the rubbish company, for children to see the composting process up close.
- The staff at Marjorie Mann are working on a 'plant to plate' program:
  - Children will be able to grow their own food from seeds and seedlings, look after it, then harvest and eat it.
  - This idea came from the children.

The difference it has made

- Children at the service are able to recognise what waste goes in which bin.
- It has affected the educators who are now spreading their knowledge about composting and waste reduction in their community.
- Composting is included in the service's monthly newsletter, and has begun to be embedded practice at home with families as well.

Top tips

- Start by educating the educators about composting and sustainability.
  - This also helps to expand ideas.
- Embed sustainability education into everyday practice.
  - Ensure this is done before building partnerships – this helps the partnership to work successfully.
- Don't try to rush things when building partnerships
  - The idea has to evolve authentically to work well and be sustained over time.