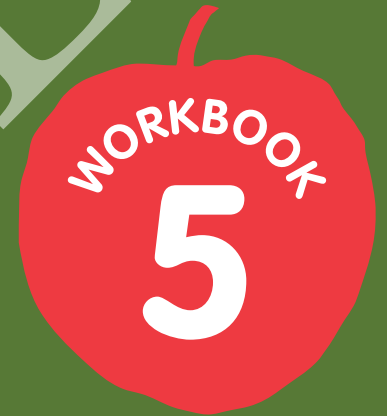


KITCHEN GARDEN PROGRAM for EARLY CHILDHOOD



Whole-service
approach and
community
engagement



A whole-service approach

The whole-service approach encourages all children, staff and families to participate in and celebrate the kitchen garden program and pleasurable food education. It is at its best when all members of the service are aware of and understand the program and can find their own way to support its success. The shared goal is for the service to provide an environment for children to form positive food habits for life and experience the joys of growing, harvesting, preparing and sharing.

When staff, families and children work together and utilise the skill sets and passion of the whole service, you create a culture that will have an impact on the service for years to come.

Ideally, a whole-service approach includes incorporating your program into strategic planning and the service philosophy; consulting with and seeking feedback from children, families, staff and management when reviewing your food and beverage policies; and allowing the philosophy of pleasurable food education to inspire fundraising, food-related initiatives and celebrations at your service.



JENNY'S EARLY LEARNING CENTRE – BENDIGO HOSPITAL

The kitchen garden program at Jenny's Early Learning Centre at Bendigo Hospital extends beyond the centre gate. It is seen and encouraged by the local community, including hospital patients and families who often walk by to explore and photograph the colourful garden. This has allowed the centre to obtain resources such as compost from the community to maintain the garden. The centre has also run bake sales, using goods the children have made, to raise money for their local volunteer fire service. Currently they are growing large quantities of garlic to sell at a nearby community market to help fund their kitchen garden program.

The centre encourages the children to 'take the program home' by giving them worms to put into their garden at home. Children love to take ownership of their worms, motivating the whole family to get out and explore the garden. Similarly, sending seeds home with children to plant with their parents encourages vegetable-growing as a family practice. Families have also been inspired to take the simple garden ideas from the program to incorporate into their own homes.



Include the children

Children's participation in your kitchen garden program is more than just asking them for their ideas and views. It's about listening to children, providing opportunities for them to influence matters that affect them and, where possible, turning their ideas and suggestions into reality.

Giving children a voice in the decision-making process means that they feel empowered and develop a sense of agency and ownership over the program. This way, children learn to express their views and respect the views of others, fostering social inclusion and citizenship. It is a powerful way of letting them know that they are important members of your kitchen garden community.





GOODSTART EARLY LEARNING

Goodstart Early Learning in Morwell, Victoria, is attended by two families of Chinese background. These families were keen to share their culture, so early childhood educator Jane invited them to celebrate Chinese New Year with the wider service community.

Together, Jane and the families decided to teach the children about Chinese culture and host a dumpling afternoon tea at the service.

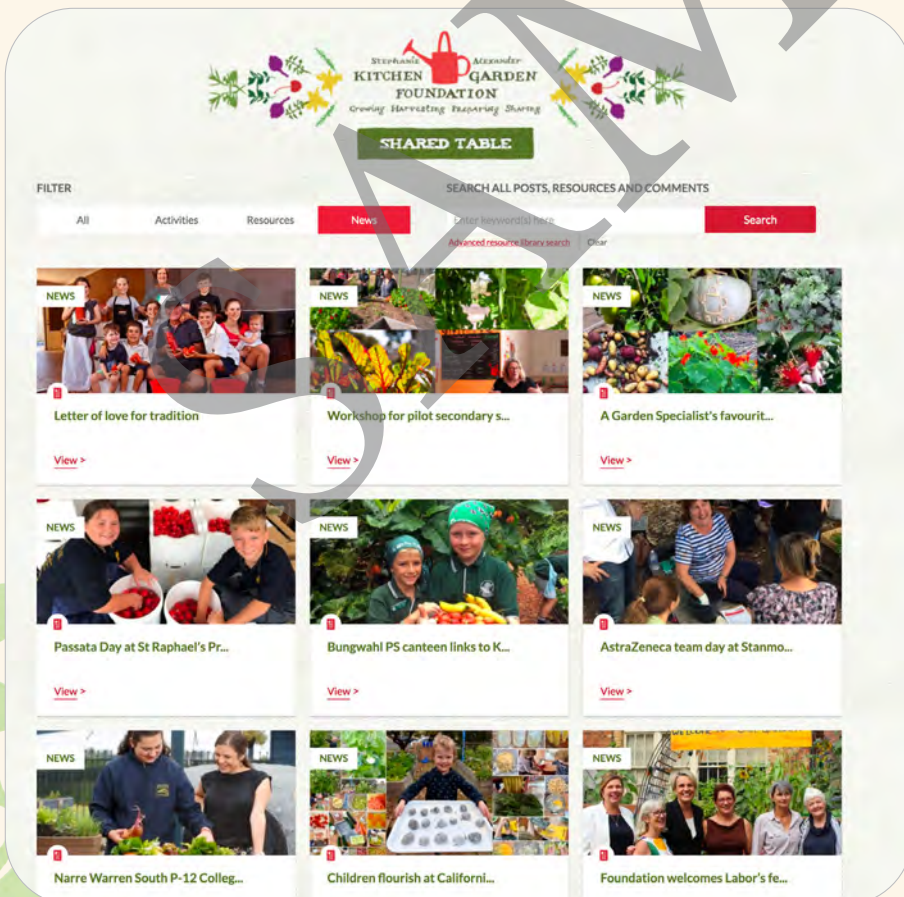
Jane invited families via the service's online documentation platform, Storypark. She made dumplings with the children in the morning, which they then cooked together with the 15 families that came for afternoon tea.

Through this cooking experience, the children enjoyed learning about Chinese culture and sharing the food they made with their families. Jane, who also has a Chinese background, extended on the learning throughout the week by teaching the children how to do traditional lion dancing, making masks, listening to Chinese opera and organising a traditional tea ceremony.



Jane was very proud to introduce her colleagues, children and families to new flavours and traditions (many tried dumplings for the first time!). She shared the recipe with staff and families, and sent everyone home with dumplings.

Through this cooking experience, Jane helped to build the cultural competence of staff, families and children and increased family involvement in service life. As a result, Thai families at the centre felt more comfortable to come in and share their culture and traditions with the service community!



Download the following resources from the Shared Table to provide ideas for exploring culture, geography, climate, language, cuisines, beliefs and questions of belonging:

- [Celebration cards](#)
- [A list of some world festivals](#)

Volunteers and family helpers

It's impossible to underestimate the power of a volunteer. Volunteers bring their own character and energy to the kitchen and garden spaces and play a vital role in building your kitchen garden community. As well as offering help, volunteers are role models who bring their own knowledge and skills to your program – from planting to sharing a delicious family recipe. Children benefit from interacting with adults who are not their everyday caregivers.

Volunteers also develop an awareness of – and keep an eye on – children's abilities, needs, strengths and challenges. They are a valuable extra set of hands, eyes and ears to make cooking and gardening experiences easier for you and your colleagues to facilitate.



Recruit help

Volunteers and family helpers benefit from being given direction and support in their volunteering duties. Early childhood services have found that providing clear information, some training, and acknowledgement of the vital role volunteers play is crucial to maintaining ongoing relationships.



VOLUNTEER REQUIREMENTS

Make sure all of your volunteers are properly inducted and have a valid Working with Children Check before they lend a hand.



Below are some tips for uncovering invaluable helpers to enhance your kitchen garden program.

- **Spread the word.** A community meeting or information session is a great place to start broadcasting your needs. So are newsletters, local newspapers, radio stations and community notice boards.
- **On campus.** Ask at local universities, vocational education centres and adult education centres. Their students might want work experience in a kitchen or garden, to work with children or to gain experience in early childhood education.

