

reflections

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FEED IT TO THE CHICKENS; AN ARTICLE ON SUSTAINABILITY

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At Gowrie Western Australia, we believe teaching children about the natural world and how to care for it, is of paramount importance. Sustainability is embedded in the operation of our services and forms a foundation for much of our curriculum and the children's daily experiences. When sustainability is embedded more broadly in all aspects of service operations, and when there is an alignment of philosophies, ethics and beliefs in a service, sustainability becomes the norm and has a positive impact on children's learning and the wider community.

We feel that a holistic approach to sustainability is essential, and does so much towards fostering children's capacity to value and respect the broader environment, and to appreciate the interdependence between people, plants, animals and the land. This position lays the foundation for environmentally responsible adulthood. To develop a sense of responsibility within the children, we place importance on understanding and practicing full cycles of sustainability.

An example of a full cycle of sustainability is the raising of chickens. The children investigate the life-cycle and care routines of the chickens and make reminders for everyone, ensuring the chickens are well cared for. As the chickens grow, the children use food scraps from the kitchen and meal times, to feed them. They discuss with the gardener that the 'chicken poop' would help their gardens to grow, so the waste is placed on gardens to provide natural nutrients. They also collect the chicken's eggs when they lay. The eggs are then sold to families who wish to purchase them for use at home, and the funds used to purchase new equipment chosen by the children.

The children use bins that correspond with the waste they are disposing of. Items are sorted into recycling, food (for composting, worm farm and chickens) and general waste. Educators encourage the children to notice when the bins are full, and advise them when to take the waste to the outside bins or most appropriate area. The worm waste is used to fertilise the vegetable and herb gardens



that children have planted and cared for. Once the vegetables and herbs have grown, they are picked to be used in snacks and meals eaten by the children at the centre. The scraps from the preparation of those snacks and meals, and left-over food are fed to the worms, and again we see the full cycle of sustainability evolving and being maintained.

Our educators work with the simple principle that sustainability is *reducing, reusing and recycling*:

- *Reducing* water usage and energy consumption, and minimising waste and harmful chemicals
- *Reusing* recyclable items such as pallets and creating new items such as shoe racks and rock climbing frames
- *Recycling* cardboard, paper, plastics and glass and using them again if possible, or disposing of them correctly if they can't be used.

The wellbeing and future of us all and our planet is reliant on sustainability and we ensure we do our best to support:

- wellbeing through the foods we eat
- children by providing them with freshly grown produce and a reduction in processed foods
- local businesses (we do our best to support local businesses over commercial one), and
- the way we plan our environments (such as the types of trees and plants we plant and maintain).

Our educators also seek deeper connection with the land and its produce through striving to understand the indigenous community and its history. We learn from the past and embed this into practices that will take us into the future. We encourage children to be stimulated and educated by the natural environment, and our educators balance this with intentional teaching experiences. Indoor and outdoor environments are used as a third teacher where watering cans are easily accessible, loose parts available and natural play spaces set up (log tepee,

walkways, tree cut offs with number/letters, tyres to climb in and crawl under, branch dancing wands etc). We encourage children, families and educators to be aware that sustainable practices not only relate to the natural environment, but also to our society and culture; our community wellbeing and health. We work to inspired children and families through our sustainable practices.

At our services we implement sustainability into our programs to ensure children develop a long-lasting understanding and respect for the environment. We believe that the way we educate children about sustainability and involve them in routines fostering and promoting sustainability, has a direct effect on the level of understanding and lifelong learning they will gain..... and if we are ever wondering whether our sustainable practices make a difference, we remind each other of the saying by Bette Reese *“If you think you are too small to be effective, you have never been in bed with a mosquito”*

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QLD www.gowrieqld.com.au

SA www.gowriesa.org.au

TAS www.gowrie-tas.com.au

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