

The Early Years Kitchen Garden Project

Evaluation summary

About

Due to increasing interest from the early childhood education sector, the **Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation** – with support and funding from The Ian Potter Foundation’s Alec Prentice Sewell Gift – began work on a three-year project in 2017 to develop a kitchen garden program specifically for early childhood settings.

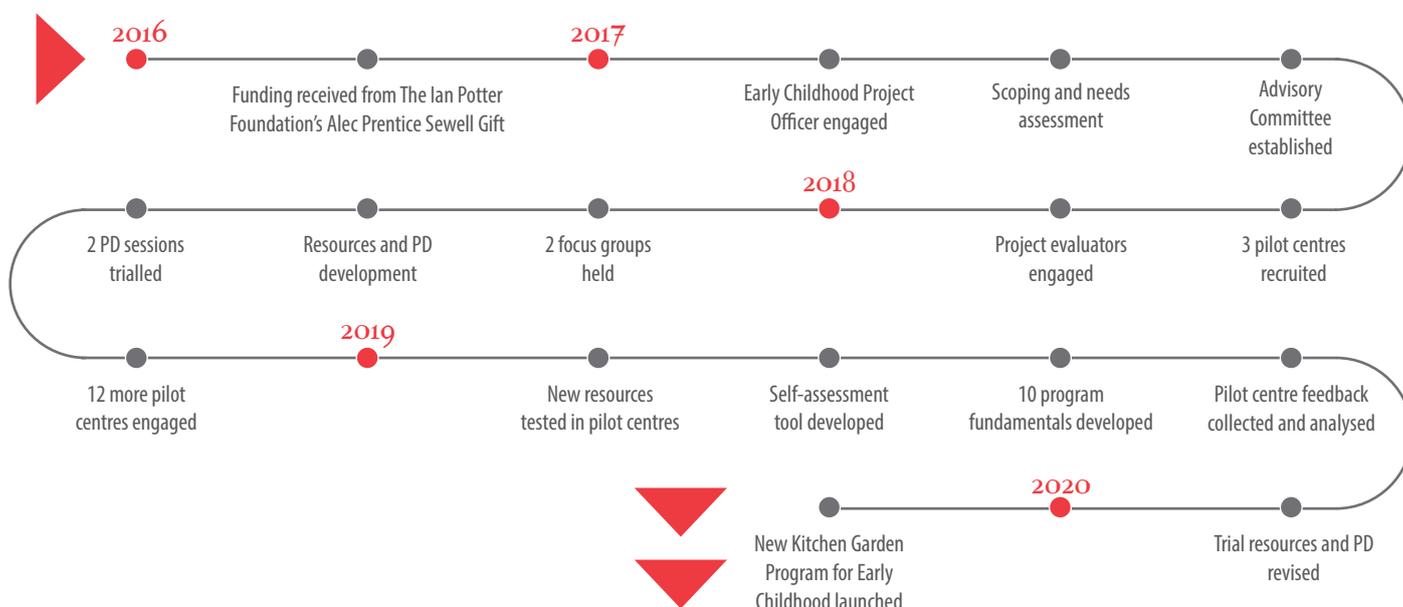
The project, known as the **Early Years Kitchen Garden Project**, aimed to adapt the Foundation’s already successful kitchen garden program for primary schools so that children can dig into pleasurable food education as early in life as possible.

In 2020, the Foundation launched the **Kitchen Garden Program for Early Childhood** – incorporating a tailored package of professional development, resources and support services developed in collaboration with the early childhood sector – that aligns with frameworks and helps support national standards in early childhood education.

Who was involved?

15 early childhood services	292 early childhood staff	1500 children	20 Kitchen Garden Foundation staff
12 Advisory Committee members	The Ian Potter Foundation	First Person Consulting	Stephanie Alexander AO

What were the project activities?



- Knowledge-sharing with Foundation staff
- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation
- Collaboration with pilot centres and Advisory Committee members
- 9 Advisory Committee meetings
- 55 site visits
- Presented at 4 conferences and events

What did the project discover about the needs of educators running a kitchen garden program?



A flexible approach to delivering pleasurable food education



Short, simple visual recipes



Resources to guide a kitchen garden program implementation



Time-saving tools, templates, videos and information sheets



Guidance on linking to frameworks and national standards



Self-assessment tools to track progress

What is the project providing?



10 program fundamentals describing what it takes to deliver a best-practice Kitchen Garden Program for Early Childhood.



A model of **play-based cooking and gardening 'experiences'** for very young children.



7 downloadable workbooks that guide kitchen garden program implementation and delivery.



Visual recipes in a variety of formats to engage children in cooking experiences.



Tailored **face-to-face professional development** sessions for early childhood educators and centre cooks.



Examples, case studies and resources for **innovative approaches to cooking and gardening** (e.g. using portable equipment and local community gardens).



Illustrations & infographics to describe the cycle of growing, harvesting, preparing and sharing in a kitchen garden program.



A kitchen garden community of early childhood educators, networking and sharing professional practice.

Findings

92%

of pilot centre staff reported that the workbooks **increased their understanding** of how the Pleasurable Food Education Philosophy could inform their practice.

77%

of pilot centre staff reported that the visual recipes made it **easier to cook with children**.

91%

of staff reported feeling more **confident in involving children** in cooking experiences after the trial professional development session.

Where to next?

The Foundation has reached 306 early childhood services as at January 2020, but there are still over 10,000 more to reach. The Foundation needs investment to continue inspiring and supporting early childhood educators and service providers to deliver pleasurable food education.