

# CASE STUDY

## The Benefits of a Childminder's Allotment

Elaina Eakers is a childminder in Gloucester, awarded Outstanding by Ofsted in 2016 & 2020. As a Curiosity Approach Accredited and an award-winning eco-friendly setting, they like large parts of their curriculum to be nature-based. In 2024, she watched the Gardeners World programme, and inspired by a children's allotment called Skool Bean, decided to undertake her university research project on 'The benefits of an allotment in a childminder setting'. Here, she describes their journey through the growing seasons and the expected and unexpected benefits they all experienced. This is a joyous read!

### What was the challenge?



Encouraging children to eat fresh fruit and vegetables has always been a struggle in our early years. The Department for Education (DFE) expects providers to produce healthy, balanced, and nutritious meal options for children during snacks, lunch, and dinner. However, we know there is a delicate balance between offering healthy food options and limiting food wastage. By the end of the working week, our food waste bin was always full of rotting fruit and vegetables, as a vast amount of food was thrown away because the children did not want to eat the fruit and vegetables offered.

### What did they do?

I dedicated a section of our garden to become an allotment for the children who attended our setting. I removed my conventional outdoor areas, which included sand, mud kitchen, and water play, and asked the children to create a mood board showing how they wanted the garden to look. We then asked the children what they would like to grow and we got the parents on board. As a team, we set up the basic allotment plot with raised beds, quality soil, and a small plastic greenhouse. We were donated or purchased seeds, pots, trowels, forks, dibbers and watering cans.

### What happened next?



## Little seedlings grew.....

Initially, the children needed to be shown how to plant seeds and bulbs, but they soon acquired these new skills. Waiting patiently for seedlings took time, which taught the children patience and persistence. Many children arrived in the morning, asking to go into the allotment daily to see if their seedlings had sprouted. The allotment started slowly, but it was coming to life.



## And grew.....

By March, the children enjoyed seeing tete-a-tete daffodils, snowdrops, and various larger daffodils, tulips, and hyacinths. The allotment helped us talk about spring; the children felt connected to nature. The children painted pictures of the flowers, which helped the setting transition into Easter. The children also learned to chit potatoes and grow herbs in the plastic greenhouse.



## And grew.....

By Easter, the seedlings had grown into healthy young plants. Children planted the plants and made signs so that children remembered what was planted where.

## What were the results?

The children became engrossed and happy outside. Their behaviour was impeccable, and they developed listening skills and understood instructions. Staff shared that sustained thinking was evident throughout, and they role-modelled and extended questions about children's understanding.

Throughout the summer, we had successes and losses. Caterpillars ate cabbages (although annoying, what a great learning opportunity). Our two rabbits, Shadow and Storm, ate carrots all through the summer months grown by the children. We had tomatoes, sweetcorn, carrots, beans, courgettes, and blackberries. Children blogged about their experiences and shared them with parents through cameras. Children excitedly invited parents into the setting to show them what was growing in the allotment.

Children's interest in mini-beasts excelled, as did Maths; this took on a new role as children weighed, measured, and compared the size of vegetables. We spent little time inside our playroom because the allotment became the focus throughout the summer and allowed us to follow the children's interests.

What difference did this make?



## What were the benefits to the children, setting and staff?

I hadn't anticipated the uptake of eating fresh fruit and vegetables. Suddenly, the idea of growing, picking, cleaning and eating homegrown fruit and vegetables was inspiring for the children, and all children participated in the daily adventure of collecting fruit and vegetables in wicker baskets. Faces lit with delight as they returned to the kitchen, ready to show their daily pickings. The parental feedback showed that children's uptake of vegetables also improved at home.

This experience taught me that changing a small part of my garden into an allotment has had many positive outcomes for the children, including increased fruit and vegetable intake. The amount of fruit and vegetable waste has been reduced, and children have felt more connected with nature. One area of my research I did not anticipate would be improving staff mental well-being. Staff feedback was that they felt happier in the garden allotment and took pride in helping children grow food to eat, gaining newfound skills, and feeling a sense of accomplishment. The whole project motivated us to do it all again in 2025.



### Getting Started Yourself.....

- Find DFE guidance for the EYFS, about nutrition, food safety and sensory food education on [Help for Providers](#).
- Have a look at: [Skool Beanz Facebook](#)
- Register with the [Royal Horticultural Society School Gardening Programme](#)
- Explore [TastEd's](#) free online training and resources for EYFS settings to support them to deliver sensory food education.
- Explore The [Children's Kitchen](#), an award winning Bristol organisation working with the Early years. It focuses on helping children build a healthy relationship with food, exploring food and learning about Plot to Plate.
- There are Children's Kitchen videos, resources and recipes from them on the [Bristol Early Years](#) website. And you can watch our recently recorded webinar here: [Exploring and Growing Fresh Produce in a Childminder Setting With The Children's Kitchen](#)

