

Case Study: To bin or not to bin, that is the question: The Riverside Theatres' waste campaign

COUNCIL NAME

City of Parramatta

WEB ADDRESS

www.cityofparramatta.nsw.gov.au

SIZE

84 square kilometres

POPULATION

243,276

Overview

The Riverside Theatre is a 'living' demonstration of how the urban and natural environment can co-exist as it uses a multi-pronged approach to divert 90% of the Theatre's waste from landfill by 2038. In its first year of engagement and changed practice the Theatre has halved the amount of waste that it sends to landfill, significantly increased recycling and eliminated many forms of plastic waste.

Background

Council's leadership in sustainability is important to its community, and Council has set ambitious targets in its Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2017:

- 90% waste diversion from landfill of Council's operational waste and 85% waste diversion from landfill for community waste (including businesses) by 2038
- 35% reduction of community resource consumption (from 8.2kg to 6.1kg per week)
- 40% reduction of litter by 2020
- Ensure Parramatta River is swimmable by 2025, necessitating a significant reduction in waterway litter and pollution.

With Council's vast range of facilities, a bespoke solution is needed for each area of operation. Riverside Theatres' staff had a keen interest in reducing their waste, particularly at Front of House, where patrons could be involved and a pilot project could show other areas of Council what could be achieved. With over 400 restaurants, cafes and bars generating significant waste and disposal costs in the Parramatta CBD alone, the Theatre was also identified as the ideal demonstration site for surrounding businesses.

The Theatre's waste campaign aimed to:

1. *Significantly increase waste diversion from landfill from Riverside Theatres' Front of House.*
The aim was to meet Council's operational target of 90% waste diversion from landfill by 2038 from a baseline of only 2-10%, with 50% diversion achieved in the first year.
2. *Empower Riverside Theatres staff to engage in waste avoidance and reduction.*
Staff and patrons needed to be at the centre of the project's design and feel empowered, knowledgeable and confident to actively engage with the patrons on waste avoidance and reduction as well as make changes to their personal behaviour, both at work and home.
3. *Provide practical and easily implementable solutions*
Feedback from staff was that any behaviour changes needed to be practical and easily implemented.
4. *Demonstrate leadership through role modelling*
As a Council-run entertainment venue, Riverside Theatres wanted to demonstrate and influence not only the 2,200 theatre patrons each week but other entertainment venues in the CBD.



Implementation

The primary target audience was Front of House staff who act as bar staff, ushers and cleaners that have the most direct and influential contact with patrons. Working with senior members of the Riverside Theatres staff, the sustainability team developed a five-stage, staff-centric behaviour change program:

1. Engage early and often. Front of House staff workshopped the various waste stream issues and brainstormed ideas for improvement and identified the opportunity to address 36 waste items.
2. Audit: A four day waste audit was undertaken to benchmark improvements over a spread of different types of productions and audiences. During the audit 253kg of waste was generated with only 35% (by weight) being recycled.
3. Buy In: A second workshop was held to ensure staff buy-in for the implementation phase. Agreed actions, including changes to procurement practices, recycling behaviour and marketing initiatives were discussed and committed to with responsibilities allocated.
4. Implement: The plan was implemented over 13 months and created awareness, built knowledge and inspired participation. A few examples of actions taken include:
 - Replacing single use items including disposable plates and cups with re-usable.
 - An 'only if you ask' program for straws, with paper straws replacing plastic straws
 - Sugar sachets replaced with sugar dispensers.
 - Rubbish collection plastic bags replaced with red and yellow collection tubs.
 - Food ordering reduced to two orders per week, significantly reducing food waste.
 - Washable cloth replacing paper towels for managing bar spills.
 - Interleaved paper towels were placed neatly on the washroom counters to reduce paper towel waste from ill-fitting dispensers.
5. Measure: A post-implementation audit was conducted as well as a staff participation survey.

A communication campaign was developed to support implementation. Over 100 hours was spent on this project, with \$2,000 allocated to undertake the audits. Additional expenses included the purchase of re-usable bar materials, with payback savings realised within five months, as well as new bins which will have payback period of 12 months.



Outcomes

The target of 50% diversion from Front of House operations was overachieved by 25% and recycling increased by 40%.

76% of surveyed Riverside Theatres staff said they were producing either slightly or significantly less waste than twelve months ago, with the remainder estimating they were producing about the same. All surveyed staff involved with the project were able to identify perfectly, or almost perfectly, the waste materials that can be recycled.

Solutions were easily implemented with a continuous feedback loop between staff and the sustainability team. These learnings are now being used to develop a waste avoidance and diversion plan for other areas of council operation.

A case study is being made available for other entertainment/venue-based businesses in the LGA encouraging businesses to undertake a site visit where they can hear and see the system and processes for themselves. To date, patron response to the changes has been positive.

Long-standing policies and barriers, preventing good practices were completely removed. For example, a policy preventing breakable glassware to be taken into theatres was removed, allowing the team to eliminate disposable cups from the waste stream altogether. Reusable cups are now collected at collection points with signage at theatre exits. Half-used toilet rolls (changed to new before performances) are now taken to staff toilets for use instead of being thrown out. It is anticipated that the recycling behaviours will continue and these learnings will be implemented across the rest of Council operations.

Key Learnings

The key learnings include:

1. Continuous engagement is required to maintain momentum. The sustainability team spent over 100 hours meeting regularly with staff to address issues and challenges and reward behaviours.
2. The team responsible must own the project. Riverside Theatres managers who took full responsibility. They were upskilled and are no longer reliant on the expertise of the sustainability team for most waste minimisation work so benefits should be ongoing. Managers can see that this is a great way to engage positively with their team, save money and demonstrate leadership to the community.
3. Managers need to model the expected behaviours and provide appropriate training and reinforcement to ensure staff are following through.
4. The community will get on board if you make it simple.

The sustainability team will undertake at least two similar projects each year. A waste audit of Council is almost complete and will be used to determine priority areas. At this stage, it is envisaged that we will look to eliminate single use plastics at all Council facilities and Council-run events.

The extension of this project will look at soft plastics recycling working with our food suppliers to eliminate items such as cling wrap and chocolate wrappers, using reusable and bulk packaging alternatives. There is further opportunity to reduce food waste through composting and we hope to engage with our business community to look for partnership opportunities to address this.

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This project was the 2018 winner of the Behaviour Change in Waste Award at the LGNSW Excellence in the Environment Awards