



Green Gown Awards Australasia

Creating Impact

2020 Case Study



Choose to Reuse! Creating lasting, impactful change

The Choose to Reuse Plate Program is a reusable dish service offered at the University of Melbourne's Union House on the Parkville campus. The service allows staff, students and visitors to purchase food and drinks from retailers (15 retailers) using reusable tableware, thus reducing disposable packaging. The service is an Australian University first and has been guided by the University's target, to reduce waste to landfill to 20kg per person by 2020, as outlined in the **Sustainability Plan 2017–2020**. Driven by staff and student demand for bolder action towards these waste reduction targets, the University decided to offer a reusable option on campus.

While an existing service had been in operation for a number of years (run by the student Union) it was being hugely underutilised. Its current larger-scale, bigger and much improved iteration launched in July 2019 and has resulted in an increase of reusable items, in the first six months of launch from 19,211 items in 2018 to 244,990 in the same six-month period in 2019. **This is an increase of 1175%**. By offering reusable plates, bowls, mugs and cutlery to customers, the program has also reduced the amount of waste to landfill collected in Union House from 88.20 tonne between July – December 2018 to 67.46 Tonnes in 2019 a **decrease of 23.5%**. The program can clearly show a marked correlation with reuse items going up and waste to landfill going down.

For the 2019 program as a whole, it diverted 266,593 disposable items from landfill, compared to 38,149 in 2018 showing an **increase in reuse of 599%**, resulting in a waste to landfill decrease from 210.36 tonnes in 2018 to 148.02 tonnes in 2019. **This is a decrease of 29%**.

The program saw continued high usage at the beginning of 2020 with 29,682 items washed between January and March 2020, compared with 3,965 items in 2019 (**647% increase**). However due to COVID 19 and the campus closing on 24 March, there has been no reuse since. The program will relaunch once the campus community returns. As a result of this successful program, the reuse offerings at the University have expanded. It now includes a Choose to Reuse Events Service at Parkville, launched in January 2020. Utilising the 'dishwash hub infrastructure' Campus Services collaborated with the student led organisation Fairfood Challenge to replace the need for disposable items used at University events. This collaboration builds on the highly successful student led Unicycle scheme, recognising the significant impact that events can have on waste across the institution. The events service enables organisers to hire & wash

reuse items and is widely available as a pay per fee service. Four staff led events utilised the service in February and March 2020, before the campus closed. These are the first strides the University is making to offer a more comprehensive reuse service for its University community to support and enable a reduction in waste to landfill.

FIND OUT MORE



Environmental & Social Benefits

The Choose to Reuse program has provided numerous benefits to not only reducing waste to landfill, but also positively impacting the whole university community. These include:

- | Diverting over 267,000 disposable items from landfill and reduced waste to landfill by 29%
- | Helped to reduce food waste by the 'scrape your plate' stations for leftover food, emptied into the food waste processor unit in Union House
- | Increased the uptake of reusable mugs and coffee cups
- | Union House has had a make-over! with new bright and engaging bin labels and signage.
- | Education and engagement campaigns continue to encourage people to 'bin it right' and use the new reuse services. During the 2019 launch and at the start of 2020, 50 student volunteers engaged with thousands of staff and students for a three-week period to promote the service. Students took part in sustainability pledges, won prizes, spun the waste wheel and collectively used the reuse service.
- | Provides a real 'living lab' opportunity for waste reduction on campus. As a direct result other initiatives are in progress: Choose to Reuse Events Service, Swap cup scheme, increased compost bins and increased collection of organic waste. And is a real-life case study for student learning & teaching outcomes.
- | Successful pilot for the New Student Precinct (to open in 2022) which will see unprecedented environmental impacts. Such as expanded reuse service (including for events), with a central supplier list for appropriate disposable food items, reuse vending machines and other options for reuse.
- | Expansion to non-Union House cafés on the Parkville campus and other non-Parkville campuses in the future.

Leadership & Engagement

The Choose to Reuse Program was directly driven by staff and students' expectations, wanting the University to make a commitment to reducing waste on campus. Throughout the program's implementation community groups were consulted. Some examples include, staff, students and retail tenants asking for additional drop off and pick up stations, a variety of crockery in different sizes, more frequent delivery of items to tenancies and more signage. The project management team engaged with the university community to gain feedback after launch so that we could enhance the campus experience. Once campus reopens later in 2020, we will complete the student led competition (stopped by COVID) as a reward and incentive for continued use. The program also now operates all year round, five days a week for continuity of service. Since its launch, the program has also washed over 300 reusable items from the student led welfare breakfast everyone morning, at a cost to the University. This further promotes the challenges of sustainable events and supporting the welfare of students. This program is also incredibly easy for users to use, allowing for effective institution-wide positive behaviour change.

Wider Societal Impact

The University of Melbourne is demonstrating leadership in this area. It is demonstrating a new approach to supporting a transition to a circular economy. Its aim is to be a global leader and lead by example, and the University has a huge reach, influencing many thousands of students on a daily basis with a mission to educate future generations and deliver a world class campus experience. By providing the infrastructure to support students in adopting a more sustainable lifestyle we hope they will mirror this behaviour off campus. The Choose to Reuse program provides education about reducing material use, reusing, repurposing, and recycling and has been critical in the success of this program.

This program has not only diverted 267,000 disposable items from landfill but has also influenced individual staff and students as well as retailers to rethink their consumption choices on a personal level. With the future growth potential opportunities for this program such as completely removing the use of reusable coffee cups, implementing more organic collection stations, the program has created an immense positive impact to campus life, community knowledge and provided transferable processes for other organisations to follow. Thus, this program has the ability to influence a community of change-makers and also has several environmental benefits that has a created a huge positive impact in a relatively short period of time.

Top 3 Learnings

Reuse is the primary driver for behaviour change in waste minimisation

Engaging the University Community is incredibly important in delivering a successful program. Teaching people about the how and why has been key in the uptake of reusables

Listen to what the University community wants!