



THE YOUTH AFFAIRS COUNCIL OF WA

# Supporting young people to reduce their waste

A summary of young people's waste knowledge and  
behaviours

# Young people's views on waste

## Waste knowledge

Many young people are confused about how to correctly dispose of and manage their waste, as well as what happens to their waste after it is taken away.

*"There are a lot of assumptions on what happens to our waste after it is thrown away."*

Knowing what happens to waste and the impact that waste reduction has on the environment motivates young people to reduce their waste.

*"I know that it (waste) is a problem, but I don't really know the impact it has."*



## Youth-friendly resources

Young people report a lack of age-appropriate resources for them to learn about waste reduction.

Many young people think it is important to acknowledge diversity in income, accessibility and cultural differences when creating resources.

Focusing on ways that young people can avoid waste together was suggested as a more desirable and practical approach to addressing the waste problem.

*"There is too much of a focus on recycling rather than just reducing your waste in the first place."*



## Shame and stigma

Many young people avoid discussing their waste habits with others to minimise feeling shameful. Media messages that focus on the negative impacts of their waste behaviours often makes young people feel guilty and leads them to disengage from waste reduction altogether.

*"We are all trying our best and we don't want to be made to feel bad."*

Juggling a number of commitments makes it difficult for young people to find time to engage in waste reduction.

## Perception of individual impact

Some young people understand the link between how reducing their waste impacts climate change, and how engaging in these practices could help alleviate their climate anxiety.

However, not knowing the impact that individual actions could have on a collective scale can result in young people feeling a sense of hopelessness and decreases their motivation to reduce their waste.

*"I know that it (waste) is a problem, but I don't really know the impact it has."*



# Barriers to waste reduction for young people



## Financial limitations

*"Reducing your waste can be costly... it is worth it in the long run, but hard to afford straight up."*

In relation to young people's **food waste** habits:

- Saving money influences their food shopping habits and what they decide to buy, even if that leads to producing more food waste.

In relation to young people's **textile waste** habits:

- Buying new clothing items from fast fashion stores is seen as more affordable and accessible.

*"Buying new (textiles) can sometimes be more cost effective than repairing goods."*

In relation to young people's **plastic waste** habits:

- Being unable to afford reusable items limits engagement in single-use plastic waste reduction.

## Lifestyle factors

Personal circumstances such as **work, living or study** arrangements impacts young people's capacity to engage in waste reduction practices.

Young people find it challenging to find the **time** to practice waste reduction with other commitments they have.

Many young people find it difficult to **transport** goods without a plastic bag or buying items in packaging to make it easy for them to carry.

Some young people who **live with parents** find it difficult to reduce their waste if they have no control over household decisions. Young people that **live in share houses** sometimes find it difficult to motivate housemates to manage or dispose of their waste correctly.

## Inaccessible resources

Young people report that there is limited information around waste reduction that is informative, relevant and engaging for their age group.

Many young people learn about recycling in school, however report that their waste education does not extend further than this.

Young people say that most waste reduction resources typically focus on the zero waste message, which is alienating as it seems unattainable.

## Social stigma and pressure

Young people understand that reducing their waste has environmental benefits, but they are also aware that some people who actively promote this lifestyle are viewed negatively.

Young people say how some individuals tended to be punitive in educating others about reducing their waste, and how it leads them to further disengage from the issue.

*"We should be affirming the good things that people are doing, not accusing them of what they aren't."*



# How you can support young people to reduce their waste

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## Media messaging

Young people can feel overwhelmed with information about how their actions contribute to the waste problem.

What you can do to raise their awareness is share stories that show young people what they can do to address the issue, rather than statistics that highlight the problem.

*"We don't work on numbers... we are motivated by stories."*

## Positive reinforcement

Many young people view positive reinforcement as an effective way to maintain their engagement towards reducing their waste.

Highlighting the benefits that waste reduction has on the individual and then expanding this to how this would benefit the environment will provide an incentive for them to take action.

*"We want to know the problem and learn the practical skills to address them."*

## Peer education

Young people like to learn from other young people (peers) who have experience in waste reduction. Young people like having role models their own age discussing how and why it is important for them to reduce their waste.

You can engage or employ peers to share waste reduction stories and resources with other young people to maximise participation and engagement.

## Online engagement

Young people find social media an effective way to learn about waste reduction. They like having information accessible to them online.

Share waste reduction tips and ideas online to help young people to learn how to reduce their waste and can help them to create a sense of community with others.

*"I want to know what is the most impactful thing I can do, and how to create a ripple effect onto others around me."*

