

Waste not...

Scrap stores are helping settings kill two birds with one stone by providing art and play resources that are cheap as well as sustainable and diverse. By **Katy Morton**



With childcare settings facing increased operating costs and reduced budgets, scrap stores are growing in popularity and saving hundreds of tonnes of waste from going to landfill.

According to Reuseful UK, a volunteer-led organisation supporting a network of 90-plus scrap stores, creative re-use and resource centres across the UK and Ireland, 70 per cent of its members are nurseries, childminders and schools, with numbers continuously rising.

'As cuts are felt across the sector, settings will constantly be on the lookout for ways to access more competitively priced materials for art and play – scrap stores are the answer,' says Louise Lucas, managing director of Reuseful,

whose network is utilised by 80,000 community groups, supporting up to seven million children, students and families.

She adds, 'Settings can also use scrap stores knowing they are picking the best option for the environment.'

HOW SCRAP STORES WORK

Open to community groups and members of the public, scrap stores facilitate the re-use of unwanted resources for the benefit of children and communities.

Products stocked at stores are either offcuts, end of line, surplus, production mistakes or clearance donated by manufacturers and businesses.

'Most products are hard to recycle and would otherwise be landfilled,' explains Ms Lucas, who is based at the Scrap Creative Arts Project in Leeds, which diverts

Children collaborate to build towers and bridges (see case study)

around 100 tonnes of waste from landfill each year.

She adds, 'As long as materials are clean, non-toxic and non-hazardous, we accept them. Our donors save on waste disposal and landfill fees, and demonstrate environmental awareness.'

Scrap stores offer either free membership and charge for individual items or charge an annual fee. Membership to the Children's Scrap Project in Hackney, London, for example, costs an average of £150 per annum.

UNIQUE MATERIALS

Another benefit of using scrap stores are the types of materials on offer, which are open-ended and ever-changing, says Ms Lucas.

This is part of the appeal for Sunderland-based childminder Beverley Metcalf. 'Scrap stores offer so much choice. The products they stock have endless possibilities' ➤

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and enable the children's imaginations to run wild,' she says.

'With the products we got from the Scrap Creative Project, the children and I have made a snail shade for the garden from a piece of waterproof material and ribbon rings for sensory learning for the babies in my care.

'The blue corrugated pipe we picked up has had many uses. It has been a tunnel for cars, waterfall, used to roll balls through, shout and look through.'

Ms Lucas, who works at the scrap store in Leeds, says coming to a scrap store is a unique experience.

'You see the reaction when people first come to the store – it's excitement, a genuine feeling of finding resources which can bring out creativity, imagination, challenge, inspiration, exploration, innovation and experimentation, at an amazing price that literally does not cost the earth.

'Our store in Leeds is packed with

an ever-changing stock of interesting and unusual materials.'

Products available at scrap stores include anything from paper and card to foam, plastics, piping, reels, fabrics and haberdashery.

More unusual items at the Scrap Creative Arts Project have included Hindu ornaments, crisp ribbon and archive boxes.

'Many customers enjoy the challenge of what they can do with the stock. They are aware that often it's a case of when it's gone, it's gone,' explains Ms Lucas.

'Some scrap stores offer themed packs of repurposed materials with a focus such as water play, STEM, construction and heuristic play.

'Scrap store staff also tend to be very creative, knowledgeable, full of ideas and happy to explore options.'

Scrap Creative Reuse Art Project in Leeds also provides scrap sheds – containers filled with large loose parts for outdoor play – to primary schools/early years settings.



Reception and primary children work together at Oakwood Primary Academy

CASE STUDY: OAKWOOD PRIMARY ACADEMY'S FOUNDATION UNIT

For this Reggio-inspired setting in Leeds, products from the Scrap Creative Arts Project are used to support class projects.

'We did a Blue Planet Project, inspired by David Attenborough, a few years ago. The children wanted to make the sea so we looked for products and materials in the scrap store, picking things that were blue and green,' explains early years lead Maeve Birdstall.

She says the open-ended products they get from the scrap store are good for problem-solving and encourage their nursery and Reception children to work together. The unit is registered for 60 Reception and 46 nursery pupils.

'We see a lot of collaboration between the children when they are building things from the scrap materials such as castles, towers and bridges. This type of activity is great for problem-solving and encourages perseverance,' says Ms Birdstall.

'The children like to build really tall towers and knock them down. More recently, one of the children made an ant tower.

'We mix the products we get from the scrap store with the more natural resources we have in the setting, such as wooden blocks.'

The unit uses smaller pieces they find in the scrap store, such as little figures once included in cereal packets, for counting and maths.

'Using the scrap store saves us a lot of money, particularly at a time when budgets are tight, and allows us to give the children more varied resources to play and build with,' says Ms Birdstall. ■



FURTHER INFORMATION

- **Reuseful UK**, <https://www.reusefuluk.org>
- **Children's Scrap Project**, <http://childrensscrap.co.uk>
- **Scrap Creative Arts Reuse Project**, <https://www.scrapstuff.co.uk>

IDEAS FOR SCRAP-BUILDING

Morris Bennett, project co-ordinator/manager of the Children's Scrap Project in Hackney, London provides ideas for ways in which settings can use products from scrap stores:

- Cardboard – good for making mazes and using in scenery.
- Tubes – building guttering or making drums.

- Fabric remnants – making outfits for 'fashion shows', turning into aprons for children.
- Material – good for den-building.

Can you help?

The Children's Scrap Project is looking for paper or card companies that are able to donate their surplus stock.