



# Low Waste **Living** Study

## PROJECT UPDATE #1



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## Aims of the study

We are exploring how **households** can help transition toward **low-waste cities**.

Households can **make change** and contribute to sustainability policy, but they have been largely overlooked by academics and policy makers as agents of change. We are interested **households' contributions** to **grassroots innovation** and their **influence on policies** and **systems change**.

This study investigates these contributions through participatory action research.



This study is part of a bigger project, looking at households in Australia and Sweden. You can find out more about the project at <https://www.monash.edu/arts/social-sciences/household-innovation-and-the-transition-to-the-low-waste-city>

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# How we did the study

This study used **household experiments** to find out about the **opportunities and challenges** of low-waste living.

- 1** We **called for volunteers** via social media and sustainability email lists. A range of diverse households from Melbourne participated in the study. **35 households** began the journey and **20 households** have completed their experiment.
- 2** We conducted **interviews** and held online **workshops** to **exchange ideas**.
- 3** Participants designed their own **at-home experiment** to trial an aspect of low-waste living. Then they implemented a **6-week trial at home**. Covid-19 lockdowns made low-waste living more challenging to put into place.
- 4** We worked with householders to **evaluate their household experiment** as it progressed. After the experiments concluded, we held workshops to share **experiences and insights** on how the experiments went.
- 5** The next step is to run co-design workshops with **householders and policy makers**.



## What experiments did people choose?

Householders in the study chose to reduce the amount of waste generated, change the way they did things (behaviour change) or experiment with influencing or educating others. The experiments included:

- Reducing waste overall
- Reducing plastic waste
- Change ways of shopping
- Change ways of cooking and sourcing food
- Gardening – establishing food gardens
- Skills – repair
- Social influence/education



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# What we have learned so far...

## Change is not easy

The **experiments in low waste living** involved different levels of **ambition, success and challenge**.

**Reducing packaging** or **single use plastic** required the most fundamental changes to everyday life. This could be **challenging** for interpersonal relationships inside and outside the home and it also challenged local economic systems.

## Householders can innovate and make change

**Householders were successful in reducing their waste**, particularly with food waste and food packaging which was the focus of many of the experiments. Substantially reducing waste is possible but takes **considerable effort**. People had to put more effort into menu planning and shopping planning. They had to **research low waste alternatives**, sometimes driving to places away from their neighbourhood to get alternatives and in some cases going without products that come with plastic packaging. Low waste living was also curtailed by **lack of local alternatives** for low packaged or sustainably packaged items.

## Systemic changes

At this stage in our study we have seen that **households are willing and able to innovate** and be mobilised to contribute to low-waste city transitions. We have learned that **change is easier with smaller changes**, such as composting or local production of food. Broader system changes are required to make more fundamental low-waste living changes, such as **reducing single-use plastic**, achievable for households.

We are looking forward to **sharing experiences and advice** from householders with policy makers.

## The researchers



**Jo Lindsay** is a sociologist who does research on family dynamics, households and sustainability.



**David Reynolds** is a sociologist and human geographer interested in waste, plastics, food and sustainability.



**Rob Raven** is an interdisciplinary scholar, Professor of Sustainability Transitions and Deputy Director (Research) at Monash Sustainable Development Institute.

## The research

This study is part of a larger project at Monash University, **Household innovation and the transition to the low waste city**. More information about this can be found [here](#).



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