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devon talk

The magazine for people in the county of Devon



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**DEVON &
SOMERSET**
FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE



Lessons in leftovers


Do you know what London's 02 Arena and Okehampton College have in common? It's something called Big Hanna, a huge shiny composter that turns all their food waste into compost.

Big Hanna arrived in Okehampton last year and immediately made her presence felt because someone had to look after her and feed her regularly. That someone is Okehampton-born and bred Gary Drew, who went to the college himself, as did his three children, and who works there as a cleaner.

There are now three people in his marriage, but his wife knows that Big Hanna isn't, as the name might suggest, some large, demanding burlesque dancer, just a piece of earthy kit!

Compost rules

It's been a learning curve for Gary and cleaning superintendent John Kilbride, as neither of them had any composting experience, particularly with something the size of Big Hanna. At least 15 kilos of food waste leave the canteen and food technology rooms at the College each day and this is mixed with 2½ kilos of woodchips before it is fed to Big Hanna. A small amount of electricity from the College's solar panels controls the temperature and turns the waste on a timer.



The start of the process – Gary feeds Big Hanna with food waste



By marrying nature with technology Big Hanna reduces the volume of waste by up to 90%

"I have to watch the temperatures," says Gary. "Heat helps the waste rot down, and turning it over loses the heat. Before Christmas we had it set for a two-hour cycle but over Christmas when the college was closed and no food waste was going in, the temperature dropped. At present we have it on a four-hour cycle."

"I can tell if the kitchen waste is looking too wet or too dry, so I just add less or more woodchips. I've got a feel for the job now."

It takes about six weeks until compost appears, and the college celebrated the first lot by planting some apple trees in it.

"I think Growing Our Future should go nationwide. We should have gardens and composters all over the UK so that everyone can have fresh food."

Ben Bickley, Student, Okehampton College

Big Hanna was provided by Devon County Council and is part of a pilot project currently underway in the Okehampton Learning Community, which is being delivered by the 'Growing Our Future' organisation. Big Hanna's installation has contributed to the College receiving the national Specialist Schools & Academies Trust award for Sustainable Initiatives.

Annette Dentith, Devon County Council's Principal Waste Management Officer, says: "Students are learning about waste and recycling in schools and this is a great opportunity at Okehampton for them actually to practise reducing, re-using and recycling the school's waste. One hundred Devon schools will be provided with composting equipment over the next two years, so not only will the amount of waste from schools be reduced, we will be saving the cost of waste going to landfill."

"Eight secondary schools across the county as well their local primary schools will be taking part, with help from district councils and the local community. In each

of the eight areas approximately 40 tonnes of waste will be saved from landfill per year.

"And Ivybridge will be the next Learning Community to benefit from this project."

The Growing Our Future project is the brainchild of Okehampton-born Beth Hamer, who wants to grow organic vegetables and fruit trees with the help of students.

The Community Garden is based at Okehampton College and the students have been harvesting food from the garden, delivering it to the school kitchen,

eating the produce, feeding Big Hanna and then using the compost when planting and tending the plants before they are harvested.

"This project would not have happened without all the people who've supported it – the children, staff, the County Council and members of the community," says Beth. "We ran an outreach project in the 11 feeder primary schools and I'd say about a thousand people have been involved and they've all contributed to helping it take off."

In it together

"Collective action is vital to the implementation and longevity of sustainable initiatives. Everyone has got their own experience and skills to contribute; we have to support each other."

"Education and communication are really essential, because composting is the most fundamental thing we can all do to guarantee long-term food security. Without good soil, we won't have good food. Composting is so simple; anyone can do it."

"The two elements of compost are nitrogens and carbons – 'greens' and 'browns' – the 'greens' being wet, such as food waste and grass cuttings which are quick to rot and provide important nitrogen and moisture and the 'browns' being dry like woodchippings and cardboard which are slower to rot, provide carbon and fibre, and allow air pockets to form."

It's been a lot for Gary to come to grips with but he doesn't mind getting his hands dirty and, he tells us, "If I say I'll do a job, I'll do it properly."



Students at the College working in the community garden