

SEEDS FOR A REVOLUTION:

RECLAIMING OUR FOOD SYSTEM



For a Just Food and Climate Transition in Tower Hamlets and Beyond

Part 1: Executive summary, food stories & recommendations

This publication was created through research from the Blueprint Architect Group. It is a part one of a series of 3.

Part 2 will be launched by March 2023.

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Foreword

Our menu for a community-led food system served at our publication launch event at Amnesty International UK on Wednesday 8 February has been created by Keke of Seeds of Wild plant based food consultancy.

The following menu was created in collaboration with members of the Blueprint Architect group drawing inspiration from the people, culture and heritages of Tower Hamlets today:

-  Savoury lentil stew with seasonal winter veg, earthy herbs & spices (GF)
-  Irish cabbage and potato salad with shallot vinaigrette (GF)
-  Parsnip and spring onion fritters (GF)
-  Cracked wheat mushroom pilau (contains GLUTEN)
-  Turkish style flatbread (contains GLUTEN) and Injera (GF)
-  Naga Bangladeshi hot sauce
-  Italian style bean puree with roasted garlic and basil
-  Simple spelt flour cake with a mulberry and apple compote.

* GF refers to gluten-free



As much as possible, suppliers and ingredients were sourced from Tower Hamlets and the Greater East London area to showcase food that is grown locally and seasonally available. Some examples of this include:

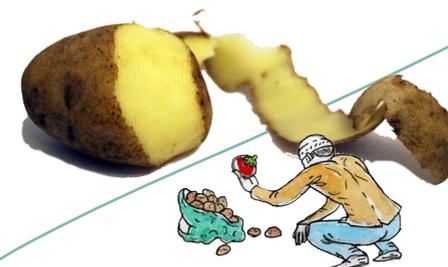
Bay leaves as a foundational flavour for our hot dishes came from Forest Farm Peace Garden helping with health through gardening and growing (ecotherapy). There, they grow organic vegetables, fruits and medicinal plants, keep bees and improve wildlife habitats with an ethos that stems from permaculture and care values that centre people taking care of the earth.

Cabbage for our salad and parsnips for our fritters from Stepney City Farm – a community food growing site. With generous support from the Big Lottery Fund's Local Food Scheme and Power to Change, in just a few short years we have transformed food growing into a sustainable social enterprise.

Sage, rosemary and thyme from Limborough Food Hub, based in Poplar – a thriving integrated cook, grow and eat, community food and action hub. It empowers local people to cook, grow and eat in a way which is healthy for people and planet. They grow vegetables all year round to support the local community including many culturally inclusive ingredients that are usually grown abroad.

Spices for most of our dishes today have come from St Hilda's Food Co-op – a community food enterprise that enables people to buy fresh, healthy and locally grown food with affordable organic options grown locally and dry goods from brands like Suma and Zaytoun.

Mushrooms grown by Fabulous Fungi and Paul's Organics as recommended by Alani, our resident mushroom expert who will soon be growing oyster mushrooms as a sustainable source of protein at the community food & material testing site, R-Urban Poplar.



Executive Summary

“The ultimate goal of farming is not the growing of crops, but the cultivation and perfection of human beings.”

– Masanobu Fukuoka

In Tower Hamlets, many people, communities and organisations are responding to local issues in a food system which is in crisis.

Whether it’s providing a soup kitchen, establishing a food bank or a co-op, setting up growing spaces or campaigning for plastic free businesses, commitment, energy, passion and a fundamental sense of justice is seen in each one of these actions.

Amongst those taking action on food justice, food growing, and food solidarity in Tower Hamlets are members of the Blueprint Architect group: a collective of over 30 local people who are all deeply committed to exploring, building and manifesting a community-led food system. Here in this publication, their knowledge and experience are at the heart of creating the principles and building blocks for an alternative food system that is democratic, environmentally sustainable, and people-driven.



Our group and research process is led by and centres communities most negatively impacted by our current food system - over 80% of group members are BPOCs and a majority either come from a working-class background and/ or are currently on low incomes, whilst many of us have histories of migration and families impacted by the legacies of colonialism. This approach enables communities at the forefront of the issues at stake to be central in the policy thinking that seeks to address these issues: here food justice.

Local initiatives for change must ensure that traditionally marginalised groups (whether on account of geography, ability, economic status, gender, age, sexuality, residency or other status) benefit and thrive without being further impacted by systemic inequalities. This is key to embedding sustainability, improving well-being, and promoting thriving neighbourhoods that build community wealth sustainably for the benefit of current and future generations.

Rather than existing in isolation or at a distance from those living and working on the front lines of food injustice, this publication aims to be an extension of the work already being carried out across Tower Hamlets and outside of it. We hope to speak in solidarity with our community, rather than for or over anyone.



A number of key findings have emerged from our research with the Blueprint Architect Group since the project started in 2020.

The methods used to gather the information for this publication have been a combination of brainstorming during group convenings, focus groups and one on one interviews. To guide our analysis of the current food system and how to improve it, we collectively identified the following core principles:

1. Food systems are about more than just providing food:

A holistic understanding of food systems needs to be adopted as climate justice intersects with other social justices. Tackling climate change goes hand in hand with addressing a number of social issues faced by communities. The group's food stories share insight into the complexity of the relationship with food. Important spaces are created through community food initiatives and activities. Not only are these spaces important for the day-to-day running of projects but there are also sentimental attachments, memories, experiences and deep connections to such spaces. Examples of spaces are community gardens, allotments, parks, community kitchens, a community hall/office, a corner shop, a kitchen.

2. Redistributing land ownership is key to democratise access to food:

Society is becoming more widely aware that access to land is one of the biggest barriers to accessible, healthy, nutritious food, whether this be a raised bed in communal flats, a community garden or a small farm holding. The concept of land ownership is both theoretically and practically a hindrance to food justice as it relies upon restricted access to resources that could and should be used as spaces for collective use, including food growing.

3. We must centre and value existing community and cultural knowledge:

Existing knowledge can support the transition of our food system and this knowledge needs to be recognised and valued. There are a wide variety of practices from different cultures from across the globe and inherited intergenerational knowledge on food practices which are central to creating a just food system.



4. Genuine connection is key to working together:

Creating a space that allows people to feel comfortable to exchange ideas can facilitate accessible conversations about difficult subjects which the world could be feeling anxious about. People can use their own words and language and speak about how climate change affects them. It is a shared learning experience. In creating a safe and welcoming environment for all to understand and learn about one another, we can then be better equipped to help and support each other, come together sharing knowledge and resources.

The process of being together in the wider community with one another is complicated, but it is ultimately this solidarity that allows for spaces to flourish and provide not only food but mutual care and understanding to community members. Limborough Community Food Hub near Mile End does this effectively by providing a space for people to come together, share ideas, food, and skills using a gradual approach to introduce ideas around climate change while avoiding anything too prescriptive.

5. Housing & migrant justice are at the core of food justice:

Undocumented/documentated migrants with no recourse to public funds are at greater risk of food poverty and tend to experience a greater dependency on food banks. The grave precariousness of such circumstances can also be exacerbated without access to housing in the borough and as such may struggle with accessing food provision. This also connects to wider housing justice issues that are of significant concern for communities within Tower Hamlets as ongoing gentrification is pricing out locals and inextricably linked with issues around the affordability of foods available in the borough.

On this basis, our Architects have come up with a number of policy asks and general recommendations centred on the themes of food poverty, advocacy and agency, resourcing and funding, knowledge and training, and land use.

Their asks are geared towards a number of different audiences including councils & local authorities, policy makers, funders, businesses and charity organisations, schools & other educational institutions, and local community groups & individuals as summarised in the table across the next few pages.

Architect Asks and who each ask is directed towards	Councils & Local Authorities	Policy makers	Funders	Businesses, charities & others orgs	Schools & other educational institutions	Local community groups & individuals
Food Poverty						
1. Develop local and affordable networks for food distribution						
Direct local residents towards existing affordable and community-led food initiatives						
Commit to funding to improve the efficiency of local food distribution systems						
2. Integrate food policies into wider cross-sector policies						
Connect food justice policy with existing policies on climate, health and wellbeing and housing						
Make food infrastructure a central aspect of green space strategies						
3. Repurpose waste materials and reintroduce them into the food system						
Introduce new policies designed in collaboration with the community that explicitly address composting, toilets and waste management in relation to the food system						



Architect Asks and who each ask is directed towards	Councils & Local Authorities	Policy makers	Funders	Businesses, charities & others orgs	Schools & other educational institutions	Local community groups & individuals
Commit to funding and resourcing the research of the potential of repurposed waste materials within urban communities						
Advocacy and Agency						
1. Increase transparency throughout the council and the policy-making process						
Provide more clarity around which specific areas each council member is responsible for, as well as outreach to improve institutional literacy						
2. Community involvement throughout the process of policy making						
Create authentic pathways towards participatory-led local planning						
3. Distribute power from council and local authorities into community, particularly over communal spaces + needs						
Implement 'public stewardship' opportunities, where - with the support of local councils -communities have increased ownership and responsibility over the green spaces around them						

Resources and Funding						
1. Fairer wages for those working in the food system to reflect their importance in our society, particularly food growers						
Recognise food providers as civil servants due to their service to the community and advocate for them to be salaried accordingly						
2. Fund local initiatives that are working towards a more just and fair food system						
Commit to ensuring that more long-term and sustainable funding is available for community-led food projects to avoid high-turnover and an overreliance on volunteer labour						
Reduce supermarket subsidies in favour of more local peri-urban and rural food growing s to support affordability for urban demand						
3. Incentivise businesses to engage more meaningfully in our local food system						
Develop grants to encourage innovative and sustained engagement with community-led growing spaces						
Set up business awards for good alternative & sustainable growing practice, as an opportunity to build relationships and celebrate success						



Architect Asks and who each ask is directed towards	Councils & Local Authorities	Policy makers	Funders	Businesses, charities & others orgs	Schools & other educational institutions	Local community groups & individuals
Knowledge and Training						
1. Provide paid opportunities and training for people to work within the food system, particularly in food growing						
Commit to providing paid training opportunities to increase access into the food industry						
Develop schemes that retrain people, particularly youth, on how to transfer their existing skills into sustainable food growing practices						
2. Integrate knowledge about food system into local schools and curriculums						
Integrate just and fair methods of food growing and food consumption into curriculum to support long-term cultural shifts towards sustainability and fairness						
Procure produce for school meals from local food growing initiatives to develop relationships between schools and community organisations						
3. Recognise, resource and connect local sources of knowledge of food and food growing						
Recognise the value of local knowledge of the land, food growing, and						

community needs by properly resourcing people with the relevant knowledge and expertise to advise on projects						
Create an accessible network of local food growers and of other local individuals and organisations working within the food system						
Land Use						
1. Policy that advocates for more communal access to land						
Commit to developing more public spaces that also exist as food growing sites, including more parks, community gardens and allotments						
2. Better use of existing public spaces						
Improve legislation, research and transparency about both the land quality and land ownership of public green spaces						
Introduce policy that prevents existing gardens from being concreted over, and recognises their significance in both our food system and our local environment						
3. Incentivise the use of private space for public good						
Provide incentives to encourage people to use their private spaces to benefit the wider community						



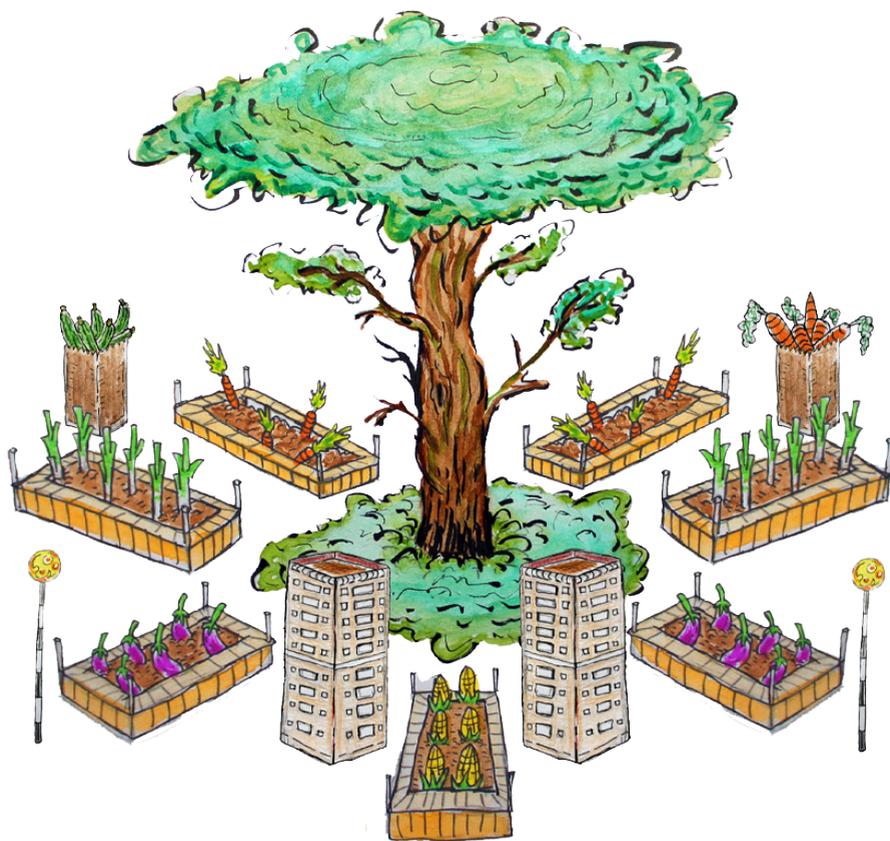
The people behind the Just FACT Programme:

seeds and solutions emerging from community spaces



The food stories that follow have been collected from members of the Blueprint Architect group and reflect the wide variety of approaches to food justice that exist across Tower Hamlets. From growing to cooking and waste management, each member of the group joined with their own experiences and priorities and yet with the mutual recognition of the centrality of food justice in transitioning towards a more just and fair world.

For many of the Blueprint Architect members, the organising they do around food justice is a natural extension of their own lives and work. There is a shared understanding that food justice can and must intersect with the other causes that exist within their lives and communities, including medical and disability justice, housing and land justice, and environmental justice. Ameen emphasises the interconnectedness of food justice and medical justice in his work as a GP, whilst Honufa, Sonja and Rachel all centre education and youth empowerment in their work around food justice.



However, there is also a shared recognition that one of the most significant barriers to transitioning towards a more just and fair system is the lack of resources and support. This includes the lack of funding, of skills-sharing opportunities, of people, and of organising space. KI and Alani both reflect that their organising and outreach work requires access to affordable (if not free) growing spaces and materials, including compost and healthy soil. Similarly, Andy, Chrissy and Rebecca need funding in order to support their expanding projects, whilst Shaheda and Nambi reflect on the importance of having a network of people who are able to provide both knowledge and labour.

The lack of time is also overwhelmingly present in almost all the food stories, from Juliana's work at St Hilda's Food Co-op to Linda's work at the Sunny Jar Eco Hub, a social enterprise that she co-founded. Dallas feels limited in the work she is able to do outside of her university studies, whilst Sumayyah reflects that due to the current cost of living crisis, much of our time is spent worrying about affording rent, food and other basic necessities. As has been demonstrated by the diversity of initiatives within the Blueprint Architect group, the consequences of food injustice are present in all aspects of our lives and due to the lack of resources and support, it simply does not feel like there is enough time to address it all.



There is the potential for nurturing new projects or to build on the work of existing projects to further feed into the Just FACT blueprint. This will be possible through 'Action Learning' grants and the Architects themselves will be involved in the grant making process as this would be a natural extension of their involvement in local change-making.

Nevertheless, where possible, community members have been working with each other to mutually meet these needs. Honufa, for example, has been organising skills-sharing sessions to support young people in learning how to sustainably grow fresh vegetables, whilst Farha has been providing local residents with the tools and space to address justice in a variety of ways. Likewise, community spaces such as Limborough Hub have been offering their kitchens and gardens to locals to provide places for people to learn and connect.

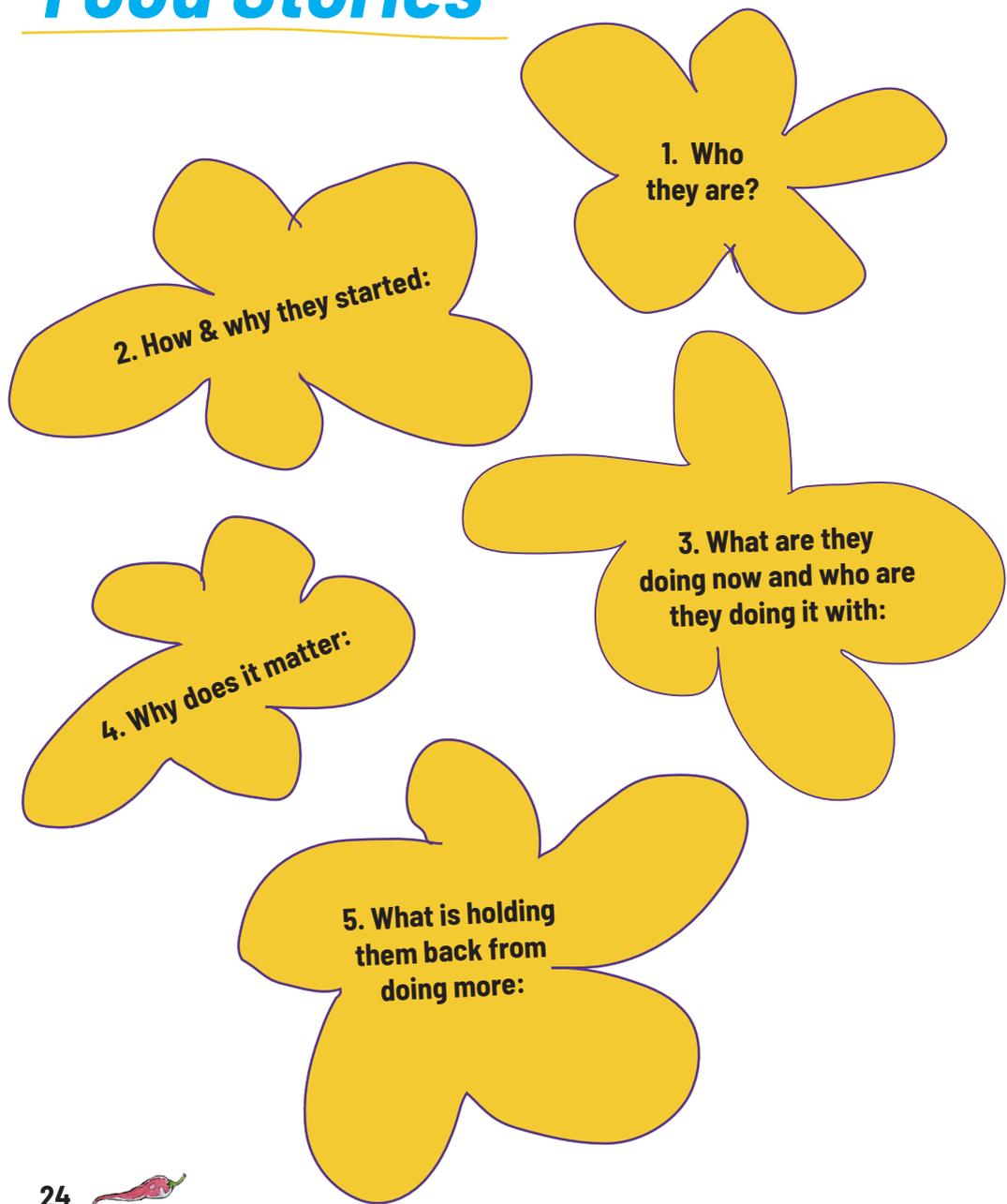


The seeds of a collective vision for a transformative local food system are emerging. The mapping work to establish what is already being done locally has been the first step towards understanding how communities are responding to the food crisis in Tower Hamlets. Secondly, understanding how these groups and individuals are connected has been pivotal in building a wider picture of the food system in Tower Hamlets and has facilitated the exchange of knowledge, skills and resources across initiatives. Building this network of initiatives has allowed us to imagine and work towards a more just and fair food system, from seed to plate and beyond.

Our next steps will include working towards a more public and accessible directory of food system actors in order to expand the outreach of our existing networks to include other local initiatives and residents. Whilst a number of directories already exist, we hope to build on the incredible work they have done to create a space that includes all aspects of our food system. Often, knowledge of relevant initiatives requires already having relationships with those who are working within them and so by creating a public platform that maps the food system of the borough, we hope to increase access for those looking for support.



The Blueprint Architects' Food Stories



Ameen

1. I'm a GP who has lived and worked in Tower Hamlets for 20 years.

2. To refuse the invitation would have been to deny the interconnectedness of health with food and land justice.

3. I'm currently working on 'Reimagining Safety - Radical Health Practice', a series of workshops with Healing Justice London, exploring what relationships based on support and trust could look like for minoritised communities. Although focused on healthcare, I can't help but think about how these themes might relate to food security.

4. Safety, dignity, belonging and accountability, transparency and representation are at the heart of access to power and resources - issues that connect health, food, and climate justice.

5. Access to resources to support people in this work is a limiting factor. There is no shortage of unpaid expertise and untapped potential within ourselves and our communities.



Honufa

1. I'm a freelance community gardener and cook.

2. I love plants, food, people, environment, animals. I teach the community to look after the environment, learn life skills such as growing fresh veg, fruit, flowers, herbs, trees, and how to cook meals, budgeting, healing through plants, food, environment, etc.

3. I am contributing my time and energy volunteering for HARCA as a volunteer gardener and carbon champion. I work freelance with WEN in different projects. I am also participating in the Just FACT Architect Group food systems work and learning to grow food in a new allotment.

4. It matters because I want a mentally, physically, psychologically, emotionally, economically and spiritually healthy society and world where everyone has access to grow and eat their homegrown food. A healthier and greener world for humanity alongside every living organism.

5. The government policies that promote corruption, destruction of the environment and every living thing. The greed of money and selfishness. We need to educate humanity about the importance of climate change and our neglect of the Earth is the key to all of our survival.



Rebecca

1. *I'm a local resident and mum of one. I was born in Tower Hamlets and have now lived and/or worked here for the past 16 years.*

2. *I've become increasingly interested in environmental issues over the years and after having a bout of bad health and then having a child, have had to re-evaluate how important what we put in our bodies is.*

3. *After a break from employment, I started working with young people with learning difficulties in a horticulture environment and now use some of these skills at Limborough Hub where we grow, cook and eat food with the local community.*

4. *I enjoy being involved with the residents who live around Limborough Hub and being able to learn methods of growing food and promoting how the community can help to support each other in making healthy food choices for themselves and the planet.*

5. *Having too many tasks to do and not enough working hours! Would love to be able to serve the community across more of the week and create a real hub for people to talk about food and climate issues in a friendly space.*



Linda

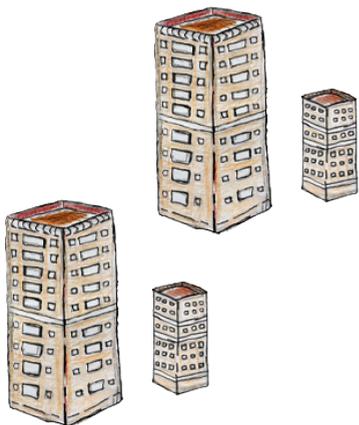
1. *I'm a Tower Hamlets resident and co-founder of Sunny Jar Eco Hub (SJEH), a social enterprise on a mission to make sustainable living easy and accessible for all.*

2. *Started SJEH as I wanted to share my knowledge and passion on caring for the environment. I felt there was a lack of similarity on these issues in the local area. Sheer determination. I was privileged to have financial support from a partner and a strong bond with the co-founder Maria.*

3. *SJEH, running sustainable living workshops all around London, however many are in Tower Hamlets. Working with the Council, Poplar HARCA, the Just FACT programme, Leaders In Community, R-Urban and Plastic Free Poplar, we work with the aim to reduce single use plastics. We also do food workshops, making easy snacks with food waste e.g. old bananas.*

4. *It's important to educate and raise awareness on the impact of food waste and single use plastics.*

5. *Ensuring we have funds to pay staff fairly. Equally time and space are lacking - busy life with kids & work part-time, as well as, not having somewhere to store materials that is easy to access.*



Farha

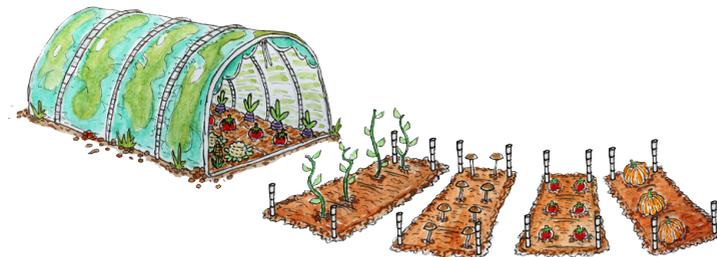
1. *I live, work and socialise in tower hamlets. I am a community organiser, particularly working with young people to cultivate social justice, often using a creative practice to do this. I also love to cycle, build boats and tell stories.*

2. *A big part of what I do is support local people to step into their power to make change based on what they are interested in and what they care about. We offer prompts, discussions and access to networks so they are able to shape their thinking & ideas. Current themes we are exploring are the impact of structural racism, violent institutions such as schools, mental health, and disconnections with indigenous knowledge and elders. I try to be part of local collective projects that connect across struggles - and that is why I joined the blueprint architect group.*

3. *With some friends, I have set up a local organisation to deliver a youth-led radical education programme. Combining theory, lived experiences and practical action, we work with young people to explore their role in building change. I also volunteer with cycle sisters as a ride-leader building confidence in local women to ride their bikes in the city.*

4. *It is literally for our survival, our freedom. Trying to build equitable alternatives requires constancy and working on multiple fronts simultaneously. I see this as one facet of a wider ecosystem of collective rethinking & action.*

5. *Limitations to funding with strings and conditions that are outcome/ product focused. Reimagining, researching, testing, trialling, failing and not knowing the outcomes is necessary for us to realise just liberatory food growing systems, but too often funding doesn't allow such flex. The lack of space for local people to convene, gather and be together (with & without purpose) is also a barrier causing deep fractures in our sense of belonging & community. Access to space is political - free community space has drastically reduced within Tower Hamlets, in particular in the west of the borough.*



Andy

1. I'm a London Irish activist and campaigner in food, climate and social justice.

2. I was invited by Kennedy Walker of Platform to join the blueprint architect group in February 2021 as it was being put together, and have attended most of the convenings since then, beginning in March 2021. This fledgling Just FACT group called to me and I listened. I saw an opportunity to stand in solidarity with the many communities in Tower Hamlets and beyond and wondered what I could contribute to food justice. I started in recognition of the solidarity between the Irish people and the Choctaw Nation during the Irish famine of 1845-1852 when the Choctaw people raised enormous funds from almost no remaining resources for the Irish.

3. I am a buddy volunteer at Forest Farm Peace Garden, a mental health charity offering ecotherapy. I volunteer at St Hilda's Food Co-op. I am also a member of the Community Food Growing Network and Landworkers Alliance and I'm currently working on connecting Peri-Urban farms that can supply free fresh organic food to food justice projects in London. I'm working with the East London Garden Society to support a wider roll out of large scale composting machines that can process household waste in all of a tower block in 24 hours, providing compost that residents can then sell to enrich their communities. We're looking at plastic free bags for Tower Hamlets as well! As one of the founding members of the Growing for Change campaign with Capital Growth, I am mapping and connecting growing spaces and community gardens throughout London in return for making a free and simple pledge for change.

4. Solidarity, community and connections for all humans and non-humans is vital if we are to live on a sustainable, thriving and resilient planet together. I believe passionately that deciding how to do that intentionally in a way that works for all life is the most harmonious path we can all choose. My projects aim to involve people of all identities to resource them from soil to seed to table with the principles of Earth care, people care and fair share.

5. I only get paid for 22 hours a month for part time work. I have limited financial and time resources to contribute more. Next steps are to connect with more like-minded people and to apply for grant funding to carry this work further.



Rachel

1. I'm a resident of Tower Hamlets. I also work in the borough with children and young people and as a food grower.

2. The pandemic was the catalyst for realising how much communities need access to local and sustainable food systems. I started to volunteer at city farms and growing projects to learn more. There can be no sustainable food systems without young people learning the skills and loving the land, but through previous experience working in schools I knew how detached from food a lot of children and young people are. I saw that there was a big need for more opportunities for children and young people to connect to nature, learn about food growing, food sovereignty and why it's important for individual and collective wellbeing and I wanted to be a part of that.

3. I am currently the Education Manager at Spitalfields City Farm. I design and deliver outdoor activities for children and young people, giving them the opportunity to experience food growing and farming in an urban environment.

4. Without teaching children and young people about food - how to grow it and why it's important - there can be no future for local and sustainable food systems.

5. Capacity to reach more young people and the limitations of the national curriculum, for integrating more outdoor education into general learning in schools, particularly secondary schools.



Shaheda

1. I have lived in Tower hamlets most of my life. I worked in schools for many years then trained as an Early Years Teacher. I gained a traineeship at Spitalfields City Farm, to learn to grow food in a busy urban setting, at the same time, studying at OrganicLea where I gained my Horticultural qualifications.

2. My connection to nature and food growing manifested before I even knew it, tangibly. I feel it was rooted from the time I was a child; my mum was the driving force. We lived in a flat with no access to growing space. In those times, they didn't have allotments or pockets of green spaces that could be handed over to locals to manage. Yet my mum always found a way. She would use every bit of space on a windowsill to grow something. Alongside her money plants, she had chillies, and some herbs popping through. I remember seeing pots with tons of coriander and mustard growing on our landing. She never got to see me continue her legacy, but I know every ounce of my green energy comes from her.

3. I now work for Women's Environmental Network as a Therapeutic Gardener with survivors of Domestic Violence and on a local estate in Poplar coordinating food growing projects and cooking workshops.

4. My ultimate visceral sensory pleasure is a vision of the world growing food, flowers, and everything green, locally on a mass scale. At WEN, we are in a small way contributing to that dream and utopian landscape that embodies and captures a snapshot of the green world we want to see. It matters because our life depends on it.

5. We need more people power, capacity, resources, and funding. What holds us back is centralised ideas and ideals of how the world should be, destroying the environment, planet and people, keeping the colonialist rhetoric and practice alive. A white supremacist capitalist patriarchal world will only seek to extract in unethical ways.



KI

1. I've been living in Tower Hamlets for 5 years. I was born in Bangladesh and arrived in the UK in 2015 after spending 8 years in South Korea.

2. I was involved in community research and food poverty in Tower Hamlets, through this work I got to know about the Just FACT programme. I was interested because people from the Bengali community were involved. I thought that I could bring my community's perspective, knowledge and expertise to the group.

3. During COVID I started growing chillies and tomatoes while I had to stay in the house. My sister in law has a garden with raised beds so I took the opportunity to grow in the garden. I started growing garlic, rosemary, chillies, tomatoes and onions. I want to encourage individual people to grow regardless of what space they have or don't have.

4. There is a joy in growing. What's the point of leaving a space uncultivated? Also you have all your basic ingredients for salads and curries. I'm doing my bit by growing my own salad instead of buying pre-packed from Sainsburys.

5. I am already experimenting and growing myself but love to see others do so and if we can have access to free/ affordable compost and soil. Also someone to share knowledge and skills about what can be grown in small spaces (i.e flats or balconies) and to suit the local weather and season.



Nambi

2. In Jan 2021 I signed up to a Hackney based CSA to get more locally grown vegetables (I wanted less processed food and more organic produce with a shorter supply chain from soil to my plate). Throughout 2021 I grew a variety of veg on a raised bed in my back garden (wanted to make use of the garden space I currently have access to). In summer 2022 I began volunteering at Cranbrook Community Garden (wanted to grow as a gardener by learning from more experienced & consistent growers).

3. Trying to cook with more vegetables and grains, develop a more intentional and nutritional diet. Educating myself on the seasonality of fish and seafood. Taking part in the Blueprint Architect group.

4. Doing more home-cooking with raw & minimally processed (plant) food, sourced locally and in season when possible is better for my body and the environment in the long run.

5. Fresh food and veg is expensive. Lack of knowledge about food growing (particularly pest control).

Dallas

1. I'm a student, studying sustainability, reduced consumption, degrowth from a psychological and behavioural perspective.

2. At the beginning of my PhD, I felt passionate about studying human behaviour and understanding how individuals could do their part to fight against the climate crisis. I was looking for ways to engage in this work. Outside of academia too, which is when I found the Just FACT project and the blueprint architect group. I have since shifted my focus in integrating system-level change as the main mechanism for making a difference and integrating the individual and system-level perspective. The architect group exemplifies the critical work in integrating individual action with a vision for and engagement with the structural changes needed to bring about real change.

3. I am studying the individual-system connection with respect to degrowth. Degrowth is a critique of the growth imperative under capitalism, instead calling for downscaling production and consumption from harmful industries, whilst instead reorienting society toward a focus on community, social support, conviviality and a return to shared commons. I am specifically interested in the role of everyday citizens in this broader 'system-level' agenda, as it is mostly missing from the degrowth debate. One example is understanding how Americans (my home community) view specific policy proposals set out by the degrowth agenda, and how their policy preferences relate to their engagement in reduced consumption behaviours. This is all research done through my university, London School of Economics.

4. Degrowth is a justice-oriented agenda, so it explicitly centres equity and promoting quality of life over growth or the economy. I think it is important to think about how this agenda relates to people's everyday lives & practices and how people can get engaged to bring about changes that should improve their quality of life - not just from a "well-being" perspective, but by expanding access to social and financial support, community driven food projects, etc.

5. As a student with part-time paid work I have limited time to engage in more community oriented work on the ground. Once I graduate, I hope to find more time and financial resources to become more involved directly as opposed to just engaging in research.



Sonja

1. *I'm a human who is trying to make the world a better place, sharing my skills with my children so they can make choices that contribute to making the world more sustainable.*

2. I am in the process of reconnecting with my own upbringing - I grew up on a farm. I am trying to find any small space or pasture to convert into a food growing space.

3. I am doing it as an individual person, connecting with others on estate work showing that anything small can make a difference. I share food through apps like Olio and Too Good To Go which model the sustainability of food being based on how much use one can get from an apple for example.

4. Food is a basic need so it's important to work on how we all can influence food being used better - less waste, seasonable, sustainable. It matters that children can understand the value of food and ensure that food will last for generations to come.

5. Time, space, resources. Being able to connect with like-minded people.



Juliana

1. *I am currently a volunteer at St Hilda's Co-op and will hopefully be volunteering at the Bow foodbank again next year.*

2. I started volunteering at Bow Foodbank and got excited about volunteering more. And then with St Hilda's Co-op, besides the community aspect, there was the physical, real contact with food, which I enjoy & value.

3. I volunteer on the 'market' with the other volunteers and Cindy, the coordinator at St Hilda's food co-op (who used to be a volunteer too). We arrange everything from the market & takeaway when it's over. I help with the 'accountant' job afterwards.

4. I believe in St Hilda's work, facilitating access to real, fresh food with fair prices to the (mainly) local people is really good work. I think it definitely creates an alternative to more mainstream shops & processed food.

5. Mostly time...



Lauriem

1. *I'm a Caribbean musician and food justice organiser working for Platform London (as Laurie Mompelat), currently coordinating the Blueprint Architect group.*

2. I've been growing an interest in food and land justice since learning about a large-scale land poisoning scandal affecting our communities in my home islands, Guadeloupe and Martinique, due to harmful pesticides being used across banana plantations despite their known toxicity.

3. I've been coordinating the research and convenings for the Blueprint Architect group for the past year and a half. On top of this work, I am also a musician and sound-maker invested in raising awareness and community power in the face of land exploitation in my homelands and beyond. This takes the form of writing and performing conscious lyrics in homage to the land and the people who have suffered and resisted colonial exploitation enabling certain food commodities to be accessed in the Global North (i.e. bananas, sugar, rum). It also looks like building solidarity between movements in the UK and those active in the Global South so international food corporations can be held accountable for how their profit-making practices harm and exploit both the environment and indigenous people.

4. It matters because our communities are on the line. The pesticides that have been applied on my homeland were approved for usage by the government because corporations and big planters' profits were prioritised over workers and communities' health and wellbeing. The same patterns so often apply to the food system in the UK, it's all connected. This work also matters because the potential for healing and repair is huge. For black Caribbean communities whose ancestors have been enslaved to cultivate the land for colonial benefit, reclaiming our ability to cultivate and distribute food for our own nourishment, in deep joy, respect for and intimacy with the land is beautiful and life-changing.

5. Having to operate within the charity sector and navigating constraints that the funding system often places onto this work means that we are often unable to do as much as we would like. Funding for international projects is also harder to find in the UK. Sometimes grants will enable salaried staff to undertake some of this work, but it is hard to gather enough resources to ensure a whole community organising group is well resourced to take part. It is also difficult to find funders who are willing to support this work across multiple years, which is crucial to provide a sense of sustainability to such projects and all people involved.



Sumayyah

1. I'm a community organiser, researcher and loyal Tower Hamlets resident.

2. Housing justice has always been an essential part of my lived experiences within the context of social housing in Tower Hamlets. As I worked more closely with my community, it became clear that housing and food justice are inextricable. They are both key sites of control and resistance within the lives of residents of Tower Hamlets.

3. I am currently working with a number of local organisations to nurture new possibilities by creating relationships of care and solidarity that extend across and beyond Tower Hamlets. I am also producing research on the injustice of the housing and food systems of Tower Hamlets by drawing connections between the management of social housing in Tower Hamlets, prisons and other colonised spaces.

4. I want to support my community in working towards a food and social ecosystem that centres our own needs and desires. Particularly for those experiencing racialised, gendered and class-based violence, food and housing justice are necessarily key spaces to reclaim agency and develop solidarity. By building connections across communities and organisations, we can create both local and global systems of solidarity and care to materially resist the injustice of the present. This extends to also developing more conscious relationships with the land that we inhabit and moving from methods of extraction to practices of mutual care.

5. The widespread lack of energy, space and time. Communities are necessarily preoccupied with surviving within a socio-political system designed to destroy them, and thus it is hard to collectively organise towards something better. Most people (including myself) spend most of their energy on being able to afford rent, food and other basic necessities and there is little time and energy leftover for anything else. The demands of the present are destroying our ability to imagine a radically different future. Our work must always include ensuring that all members of our community have their basic needs provided for and that their needs and desires are centred.



Chrissy

1. I'm an agroecological food grower/ farmer.

2. Started my farming journey growing food for restaurants with the highest purchasing power in and around Tower Hamlets - that was the easiest, most convenient and most profitable way to sell my wares as a new and inexperienced farmer.

3. We recently started offering veg boxes to people in Tower Hamlets - there is an affordable price option that is heavily subsidised through our new Food Access Fund which is primarily made of donations from the restaurants that we continue to sell to. Any extra money from our Food Access Fund also allows us to grow food and donate it to a food hub in Tower Hamlets.

4. Exceptionally well-grown, nutrient-dense, culturally appropriate food should be accessible to everyone. This is not the case for many people and one reason is lack of funds - if we price our produce so that it reflects its true production cost it is unaffordable for many people. Our Food Access Fund allows us to grow and distribute food in a more equitable way.

5. Lack of time to build community and understand their food needs. Lack of funds in our Food Access Fund to continue providing affordable food for our community in Tower Hamlets. Being part of the Just FACT Blueprint Architect Group helps us to build community, understand their needs and also lends us legitimately when raising funds for our Food Access Fund.

Alani

1. I'm a queer vegan born and raised in Tower Hamlets.

2. I grew up on the Isle of Dogs, a food desert of the borough scattered only with Tesco extras and ASDA superstores. By 15, I had become radically critical of society and the most empowering choice I could make at the time was to become Vegan - An ideology where I would attempt to cause the least amount of unnecessary harm to other living beings as I could. At 18, I went travelling and worked on an eco-project that was the first time I was exposed to an alternative way of living and it blew my mind, I was working on regenerative agrofarms and living in the forest, this is where I first became acquainted with seasonal eating and more importantly fungi.

3. I facilitate mushroom cultivation workshops, attempting to raise awareness and also to start looking and critiquing society through a fungal lens (Queer and collective!). I attend Misery Plant Magic forage walks to get myself into nature and connect with like-minded BPOC Londoners. I am also a resource coordinator for The village, a community hub start-up that focuses on four pillars of sustainability- food, mental health, environment and social. Lastly, I am in the process of being employed by MadLeapAD where we will start a circular design mushroom farm at R-urban in Poplar starting in early 2023. It will increase local food supplies and employment in the area (with a focus on SEN adults through the JET/ tower gateway project).

4. Fungi decomposes waste and toxic materials. It is the fastest growing, highest yielding crop you can cultivate in the smallest spaces. This is vital for urban resilience and local production.

5. I need a lab for my RandD to have access to equipment and space to refine community and home mushroom growing. I also need customers to experiment on and for feedback.



Just FACT projects:

Learnings from the ground



St Hilda's Food Co-op

Their work:

The Food Co-op at St Hilda's East Community Centre is a pop-up shop which serves around 80 customers a week. It provides healthy, affordable culturally appropriate produce for local communities, including fresh and nutritious fruit and vegetables. It also increases access to produce that is organic, locally sourced and packaging free.

The Co-op is a place to shop, chat and meet. It is a space where people can access other services, including projects designed to improve wellbeing, increase social networks and tackle isolation. It provides work experience, training and mentoring for volunteers - the majority of whom are local women.

What is needed to sustain, scale or expand the work and impact?

St Hilda's has been supporting the development of a new network of Food Co-ops in Tower Hamlets, giving other community organisations the opportunity to try out the model and build confidence, through running pilot pop-up food co-ops and providing ongoing support.

New food co-ops are being piloted at Limehouse Town Hall and the Teviot Centre.

Managing rising costs and the need for subsidy

The Food Co-op is needed more than ever, especially with the cost-of-living crisis and people needing access to healthy affordable food. Customers comment on fluctuations in food prices, and there's pressure to keep costs down and continue supporting people who are struggling to make ends meet.

So far, the food co-op has been able to maintain an affordable approach to food. But this is getting harder with the rising costs of fruit and veg. It is getting more expensive for the Co-op to buy produce from suppliers, and so far, there's no solution for how rising costs are covered. The only way of keeping costs down for people who need it will be subsidising this increase.

Options for subsidising could be through a pay it forward model or further funding. There's the challenge of time and capacity needed to develop a new model and think it through carefully. Middle income shoppers are also under pressure financially, so many are not in the position to pay it forward. Unless there's any major perks to a membership scheme, it could be challenging to roll out.

Organic options unaffordable for low-income shoppers

Agroecological food, which is produced in a way that is better for people and the planet (i.e the organic produce range) is more expensive, so not an option for many low-income shoppers. How can you get someone to prioritise the environment over their own wellbeing, if they're struggling to make ends meet? Sustainably produced food should be the same price - if not cheaper - than conventionally produced food, though currently there's no simple solution.

Working with funders

Funders need to understand the on-the-ground work and evolving project needs. The Just FACT team has been very involved in the Food Co-op and have helped problem solve along the way. This has enabled the project to adapt and change in response to the shifting needs and social climate. When funders are completely detached, you have to go out of the way to convince them of any changes.

There's a pattern with people avoiding grants that are given by the local government - because they often have really high targets and intense reporting requirements. There's a lack of understanding of how the charity sector works. Even if funding was increased by local government people will ask 'is it worth the effort?' and are less likely to want to apply. There needs to be a way for the voices of people delivering projects to be heard more to help harness local action and knowledge.

Capacity and people power

Capacity of the staff is stretched. Time and capacity is limited to develop additional initiatives that might support the project. For example, setting up a bulk buying system could be an option, but time is needed to set it up and figure out a pay system. It would be good to explore capacity-building solutions for the sector - for example by providing more training and support, but there's a question of how to do this when people are time-limited.

The Food Co-op could benefit from more volunteer support, but the initial recruitment and onboarding of volunteers also takes time; inhibiting the ability to capitalise on volunteer mobilisation. In addition, people are often less inclined to want to engage in things like marketing or strategy, which feels more like 'work', and instead seek opportunities that feel valuable and fulfilling, as well as more hands-on e.g. through the customer service and running of Food Co-op. Recruiting, onboarding and managing volunteers also takes time, which can inhibit the ability to capitalise on volunteer mobilisation.

One idea is that charities like the Food Co-op could link up more with universities to set up long term student placements. Yearlong internships over short-term work experience, where people can get involved regularly would be more beneficial. If managed properly they could then be advantageous for both the students as well as the organisations - who are looking to develop their skills and experience. It's also good to understand the baseline

Funding and developing a sustainable model

With the food co-op there's a need to think about how we sustain ourselves but also keep making the impact we want. We need to think long term, but dedicating time to think strategically and do that long term planning, also requires more time and capacity.

Funding is needed to resource people's time and cover the costs of running the weekly pop up. So far, the Food Co-op has been reliant on grant funding. Options for a more sustainable model are being explored. Currently the two main options a Food Co-op can pursue to attempt to achieve economic sustainability are either to reduce costs, for example by relying on volunteers and/or donated equipment; or by increasing profits, for example by supplying more commercial outlets, providing bulk deliveries and/ or introducing membership fees.



Limborough Community Food Hub

Their work:

a thriving integrated 'grow, cook and eat' community food and action hub that builds power and resilience of local people with a particular focus on, and near, the Burdett Estate in Poplar.

This unique site in East London provides a year-round education and action programme for local families and community groups, working together to grow, cook and eat in a way which is healthy for people and the planet. It consists of a community garden, greenhouse, Chelsea flower garden, community training kitchen, an established food pantry and a workshop space.

The training kitchen is a great space for cookery courses and workshops, where people can share knowledge and learn new skills. External groups can also book and use the space. It provides vital space for asylum seekers to cook culturally appropriate food, who would otherwise not have access to their own cooking facilities.

This beautiful garden space is shared with Poplar HARCA for local residents to use. We host regular gardening workshops here in the greenhouse and garden. The indoor warm, colourful, friendly and flexible space is used for multiple purposes, for both regular and one-off community events, workshops and gatherings. This includes coffee mornings, gardeners meetings, and seasonal and cultural celebrations. Two days a week the Burdett Football Club runs a community food pantry, offering low cost food to people on low incomes.

What is needed to sustain, scale or expand the work and impact ?

Capacity and people power

Having paid people to do the work is essential for Limborough Hub, you can't just rely on the goodwill of residents and volunteers. There needs to be sustained funding behind it for people to be involved and take ownership.

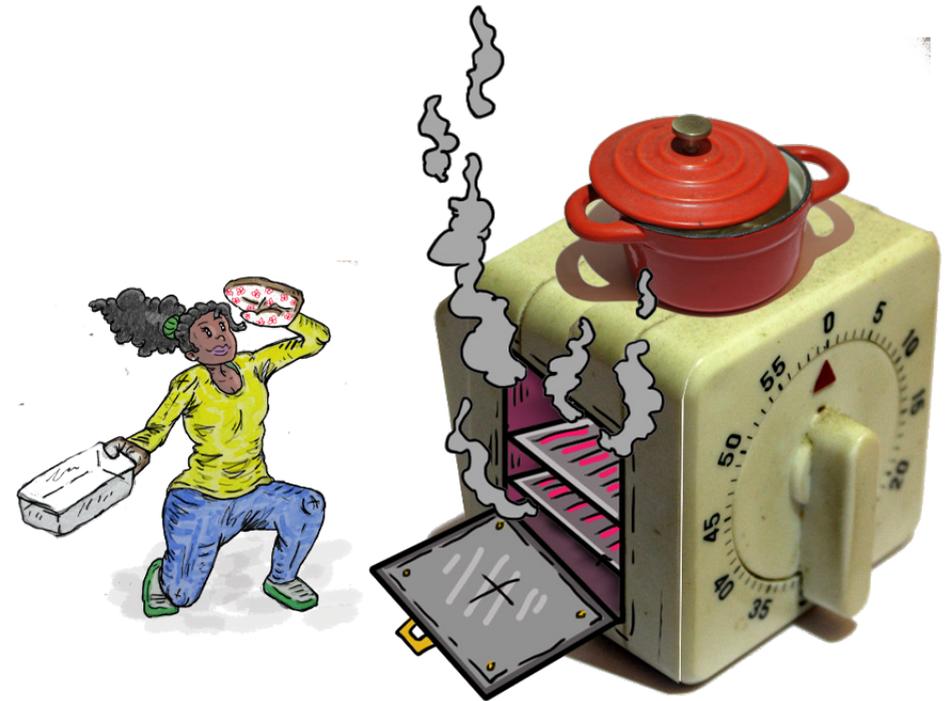
There is a lot of extra work and time that has to go into good community work, and you have to be really flexible in a space that is open to the public. You have to be able to pivot and unknown things come up, but this isn't always accounted for or covered by funders.

A lot of time working on an estate is spent relationship building, and chatting about what's going on in people's lives. It doesn't always have a direct 'outcome' but it's still important and part of community building. Perhaps it doesn't feel valued in the same way as other types of work. The value and impact of such work is difficult to measure and quantify. These parts of a project need to be acknowledged and valued more, not as an extra but more central parts.

Access to space and funding

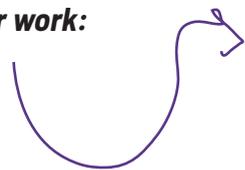
If housing associations and councils are able to offer spaces like this for free, that is amazing – it has been key for a model like Limborough, and is what makes the project possible.

The project is going to always need some funding. Revenue from kitchen or space hire could be generated, or we could look into selling garden produce to businesses, but there's a risk that all that time to focus on income generation would take away from other vital work. It might also compromise our ability to offer the space to others who might need it for free. So, we would need to figure out how to find that balance.



R-Urban Poplar

Their work:



R-Urban Poplar, off Brion place on the Teviot Estate, is a community garden and re-use facility. Using shipping containers housed in a disused car park, R-Urban provides space for green experimentation for solutions to London's biggest environmental challenges, such as poor air quality and waste management. Over the past couple years, the site has transformed into a learning facility equipped with a small kitchen, classroom, anaerobic digester, tool library, workshop and growing spaces.

Capacity and people power

Having paid people to do the work is essential for Limborough Hub, you can't just rely on the goodwill of residents and volunteers. There needs to be sustained funding behind it for people to be involved and take ownership. There is a lot of extra work and time that has to go into good community work, and you have to be really flexible in a space that is open to the public. You have to be able to pivot and unknown things come up, but this isn't always accounted for or covered by funders.

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Creating a closed loop system

A key aim of the project is to build a localised circular food system. This involves working with LEAP to develop anaerobic digestion (AD) and composting systems to deal with local food waste on the Teviot Estate. The digestate (fertiliser) from the AD, and compost from the composting units, is used to grow food in the allotment spaces, and the gas produced powers the community kitchen.

Currently organic waste is transported 10-50 miles to landfill sites or processing facilities. Local waste management through AD and growing food using the by-products for local consumption has the potential to save over 73 tonnes carbon emissions per year (per system, processing 1 tonne of food waste per day), compared with business as usual. On site waste management can also support renewable energy production and help create local green training and employment opportunities.

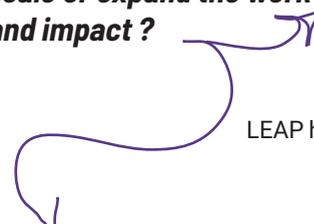
R-Urban are also testing new growing systems and technologies such as low-tech hydroponics and have installed a rainwater harvesting system.



Community building and skills

The site runs regular workshops around food and wellbeing, as well as growing, composting, and local energy production. It provides an important space for community, with discussions and educational workshops or simply a get together over a cup of tea. Hosting community meals enables people to get together, share knowledge and skills and celebrate different food cultures.

What is needed to sustain, scale or expand the work and impact ?



Scaling up a replicable model

In order to create a replicable model, we need to establish food waste collections, scale up the food waste processing capacity and test the business model assumptions.

LEAP have managed to secure funding to do this across three sites:

- Gainsborough Primary School (Hackney)
- R-Urban – Tower Hamlets
- Canning Town Estates (Newham)

Each site will have food growing in polytunnels using hydroponics and raised beds as well as mushroom cultivation spaces. Gainsborough will compost food waste from the school, while R-Urban and Canning Town will digest and compost food waste from the estate residents. Once all sites are up and running we will be processing over 500kgs p/d and grow food on 1000m2 growing space. We aim to set up short circular supply chains so that food miles are minimised and nutrient levels are preserved. LEAP will be looking for local customers interested in sourcing good quality, locally grown, seasonal produce as well as match funding to help

Linking into mainstream waste management services

R-Urban are currently reliant on residents dropping off their food waste, or volunteers collecting waste from local schools. This limits the scale and increases precarity, as it relies on volunteer time and good will. Being part of a mainstream food waste collection service would enable scale and sustainability.

Regeneration and access to space

R-Urban wants to build learnings into future plans for the Teviot Estate regeneration. This includes conversations regarding a focus on circular material cycles, as well as speaking to project architects about plans for green space and growing within the neighbourhood. In order to continue they will also need to secure future space.

Growing food with our community

Moving forward, scaling up brings challenges to community involvement in the system. If the project becomes more enterprise focused, how can we sustain and nourish the existing community partnerships we have already made? How can we ensure we don't exclude others from joining and how can we maintain a community around the project?



Plastic-Free Poplar – Sunny Jar Eco Hub

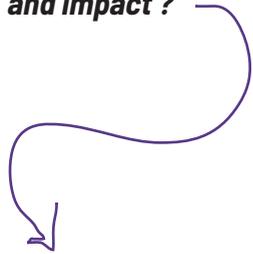
Their work:



Plastic-free Poplar is a community-led project run by Sunny Jar Eco Hub, focused on reducing single use plastic in and around Poplar, East London.

The project supports the local community to take action and come together to create a planet-friendly action plan, finding practical solutions for the day to day, to reduce plastic waste. Sunny Jar runs workshops to spark conversations about greener, low waste living and inspire people to take action. Plastic-free workshops have taken place with ESOL learners, at local festivals and community centres – focusing on craft, upcycling and wellbeing. Types of workshops include turning t-shirts into bags, plastic-free wrapping (Furoshiki), cooking skills, craft skills, and sewing.

What is needed to sustain, scale or expand the work and impact?



As part of the project local schools, Lansbury Lawrence, Manorfield and Stebbon Primary, learnt about the impact of single-use plastics. They shared how they can help and created a touring art exhibition to highlight the plastic pollution problem and raise awareness in the community. 100 children wrote to their local MP asking to ban single use plastic.

The Sunny Jar Eco Hub team has been carrying out research and creating a community action plan, gathering people's ideas on what needs to happen for Poplar to reduce its plastic use.

Make plastic-free living affordable and easy

To reduce plastic-use, the plastic free option has to be made easy for people. People do want to have a nice neighbourhood and feel proud, but they also have a lot going on in their lives and very limited head space.

Making it easy for people is partly about providing the right infrastructure. For example, access to places where people can refill their own bottles, like water fountains, good access to recycling bins, easy access to good quality reusable bags.

One barrier to reusable products can be cost. If you want people to reuse and refill that must be an affordable and accessible option. People are doing some bulk shopping, but refill shops are not in people's consciousness. They are not part of the conversation or in people's imagination, because they are so far away in terms of affordability and accessibility. Currently there are no refill shops in Poplar.

Focus on health and saving money

Lots of people still aren't aware of plastic being a problem. It is not people's priority, especially when facing other more pressing challenges like with the cost of living. It's important to make workshops relevant to people's lives and make it about saving money. When the alternative to buying is cheaper, there is more need and interest to make your own (for example – DIY deodorant and beeswax wraps). Doing things that are good for their health is also a motivator for people.

It's often cheaper to buy things new – this needs to change

Many people in Poplar already have the skills to sew, but these don't necessarily get passed on to the next generation. Why would you spend an hour mending something when it's often cheaper to buy things new? At the moment it's not a necessity for people to reuse or upcycle things. Instead people do it as a hobby, and to meet new people. Overall workshops appeal to people if they're interested in the activity for their own enjoyment and/ or if they want to meet new people.

Banning plastic

People say if plastic and plastic bags were banned or made unaffordable it would make plastic bags go away, and this needs to be enforced. A lot of people think plastic should be taxed in the same way as cigarettes. People will bring bags if there are no other options. You've got to create the conditions where the plastic decision isn't possible. Removing the option stops people from having to feel guilty. People feel guilty because they're forced to choose between convenience and what is good for the planet – which feels unfair.



Conclusion



Communities are where imaginative, ambitious ideas meet practical knowledge on pre-existing needs and gaps, which together can drive meaningful solutions.

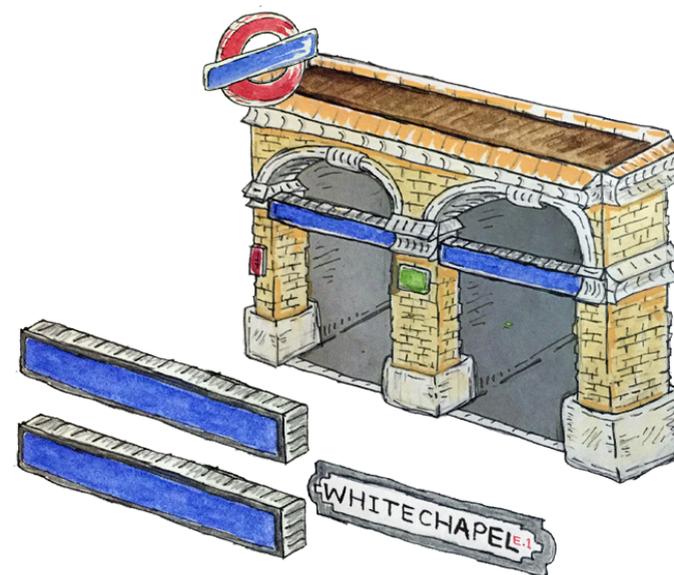
Throughout the document, we have platformed democratic and community-driven approaches to food and climate justice as they are more likely to centre collective benefit, embed sustainability, improve well-being, protect the environment and promote thriving sustainable neighbourhoods for the benefit of current and future generations.

This document aims to highlight findings about how local individuals and communities are responding to the food crisis and how their experience and knowledge can contribute to decision and policy-making, in a meaningful and visionary way. The findings are relevant to local authorities, funders, policymakers, and generally those interested in enabling and supporting practical community action towards making a collective shift in transforming our food systems in a way that benefits people and our planet, sustain cohesive and resilient communities, and enable food justice for all.

Acknowledgements

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Last but not least, we thank our funders including the Big Lottery through the Climate Action Fund, the Lankelly Chase Foundation and the Solberga Foundation for their support towards this work.



SEEDS FOR A REVOLUTION

RECLAIMING OUR FOOD SYSTEM

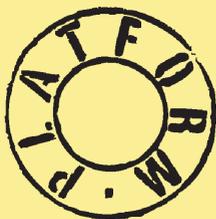
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For more information about the [blueprint architect group](#), our [community-led research process](#) and [how to join](#), please email laurie@platformlondon.org

For more information about the [Just FACT](#) programme, please email elle@wen.org.uk