



# Mile End Community Garden

Evaluation of the community co-design and build of  
an accessible compost toilet

## Overall Aim of the Project:

The aim of the project was to design and build a compost toilet by bringing together the various groups using the garden as a community project.

The purpose of building a fully accessible compost toilet will allow groups to stay at the garden for longer periods of time, maximising the opportunities for community food growing using the eight raised beds and helping to cultivate a small forest garden.

# What we wanted to do...

- To co-design and co-build an accessible all gender compost toilet at the Mile End Community Garden
- To work in partnership with the Compost Mentis Co-op
- To hold design and build workshops throughout the project
- To make the garden accessible for the wider community, by reflecting the needs of individuals
- To use reclaimed and recycled material where possible
- To include the young people who come to the garden

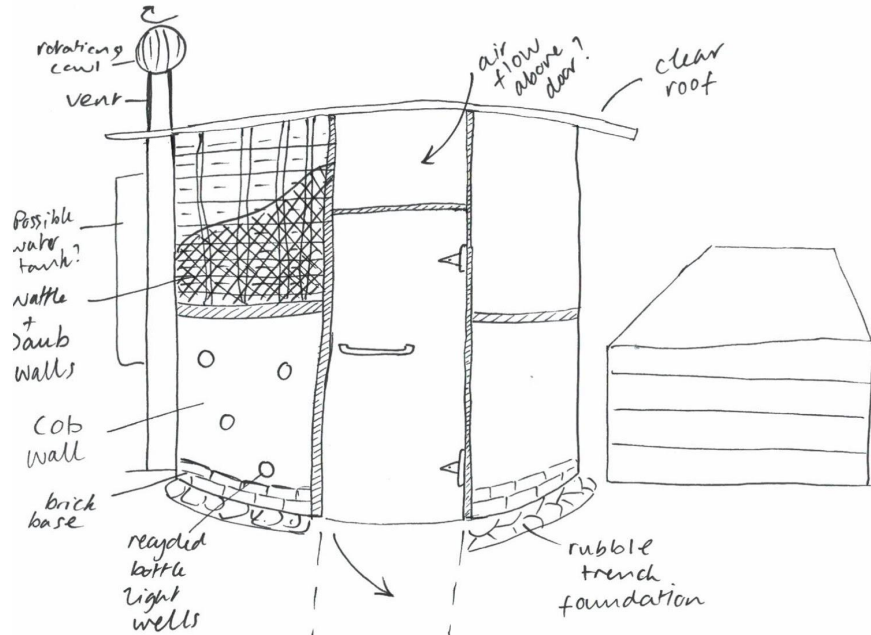
# The design...

## What's your ideal toilet?

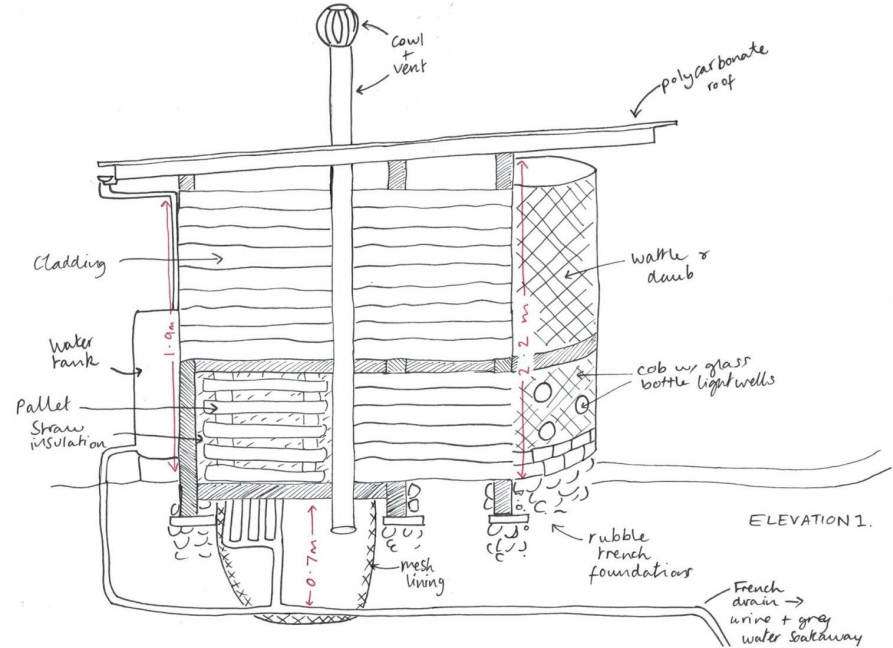
At the first co-design workshop, we asked people to describe their dream toilet (video below).



# The Design



FRONT VIEW 1



# Outcomes

Diverse groups will build something together.

There will be increased confidence, knowledge and skills among the users of the garden (in particular the young people) who may not get the opportunity to build something like this.

The garden will be more accessible to a wider group of local people, improving their health and wellbeing by working outdoors, connecting to the land and being active.

# Outcomes

Users can stay at the garden for longer and be able to take a more active part in food growing there.

More compost toilets in the borough, reducing water waste and closing the human waste cycle.

Reducing the waste of water in the human waste cycle

# Methodology and outputs

We interviewed and gathered information on people's experience of the build. What tasks are people doing, and what do they think they are learning? How are their attitudes towards compost toilets changing? Have their dreams been realised? (Post-It notes slides, & videos)

There are reflections on video with the young people and all the participants before and after the build - See Vox Pops slides and written feedback from Compost Mentin, Kurshed and Peter below.

We kept track of any contacts who are exploring developing compost toilets as a result of learning from MECG - Cranbrook, Garden of Earthly Delights, Glengall Wharf and Allens Gardens Community Gardens are all exploring installing a Compost Toilet in their gardens.

Written and digital feedback survey from the build - Results slide

We tracked the number of people using the toilet during one workday using a sheet to keep tally, then extrapolated to give amount of water saved over 1 year. (Next slide)

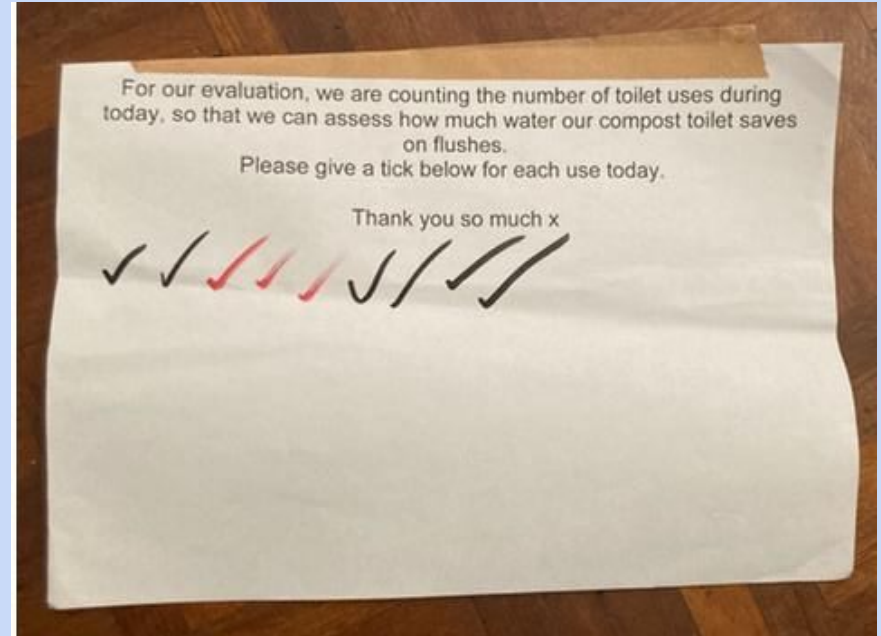
Videos of before and after gathering participants hopes, dreams and experiences.

# Water savings

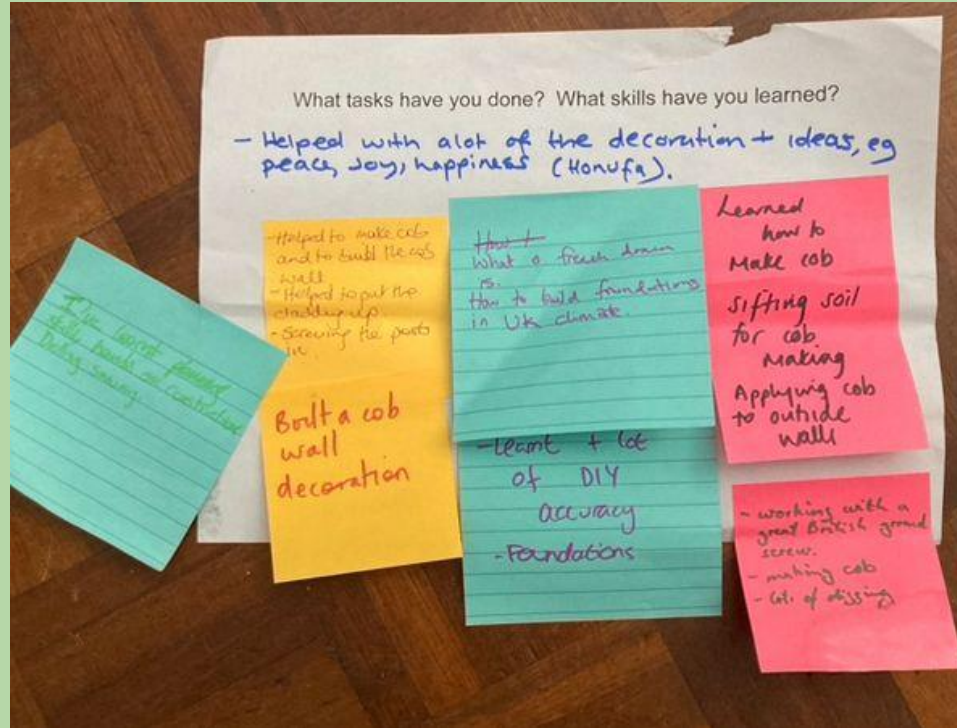
Research shows that the average flush of a modern toilet uses around 4.5 litres of water per flush.

During a half day work session, attended by 12 people, we monitored the compost toilet usage. We estimate that during that afternoon we saved 40.5 litres of water.

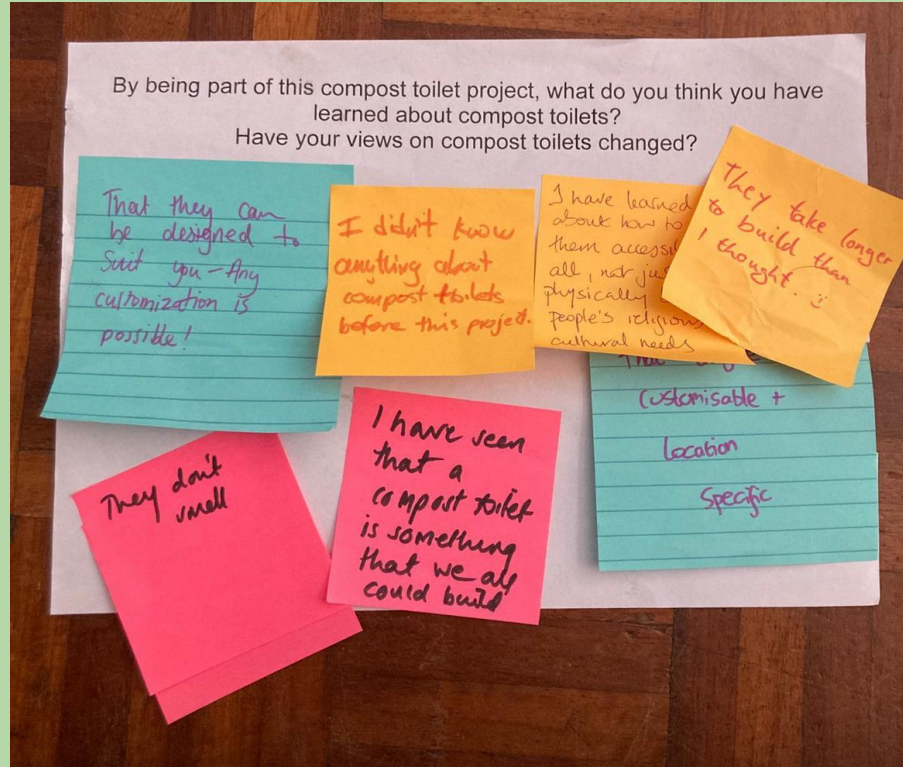
Extrapolating this data we estimate that over the course of a year, calculating around 25 organised work days, we will save around 1000 litres of water.



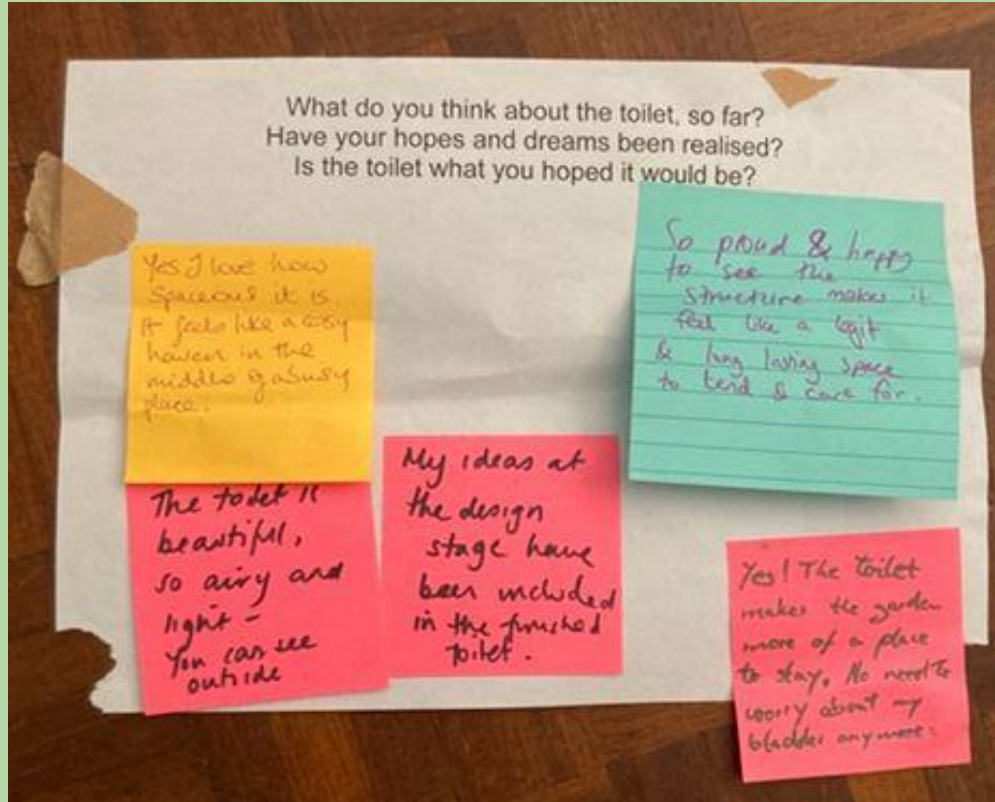
# What skills have you learned?



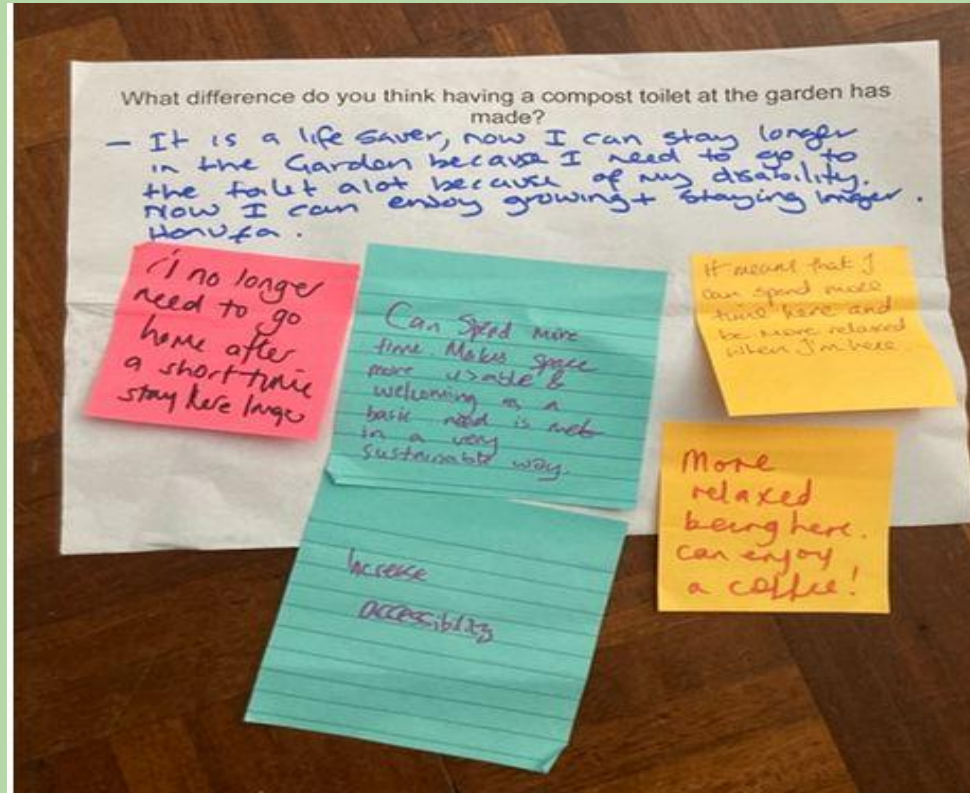
# Have your views on Compost Toilets changed?



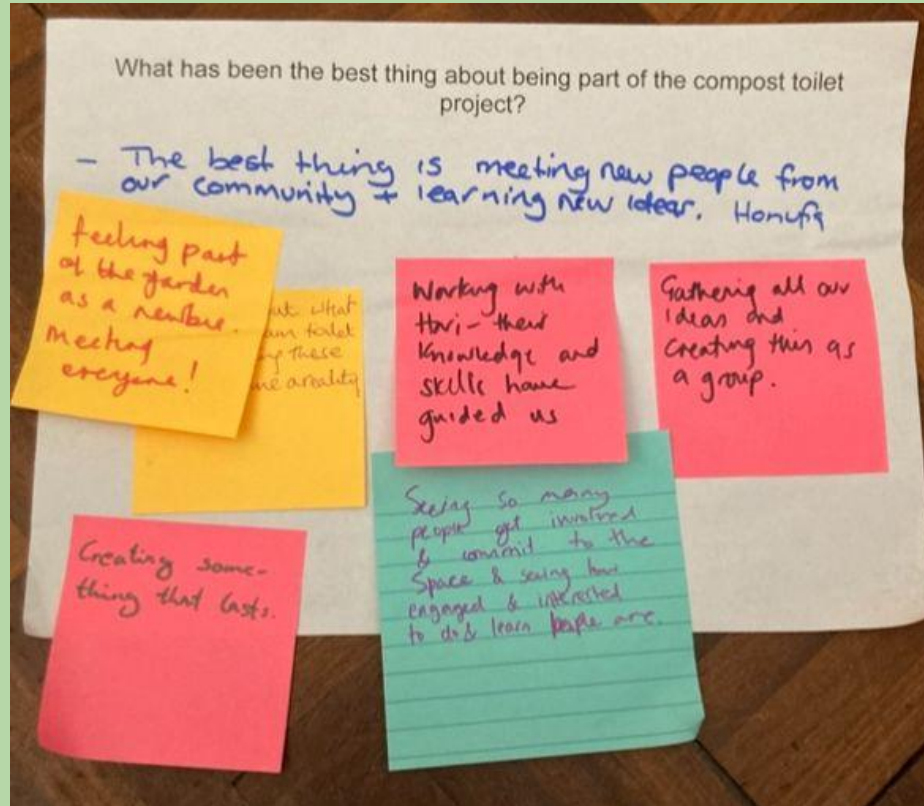
# Have your hopes and dreams been realised?



# What difference has having a compost toilet made?



# What has been the best thing about the project?



# Accessible Pathway



We received a further £1000 grant from Just FACT, to provide an accessible pathway leading to the toilet. Click below to see the build:

[Photo montage of pathway installation](#)

# Test drive of the path and toilet for accessibility

One of the users of the garden gave the path and the compost toilet a test drive how accessible it is.

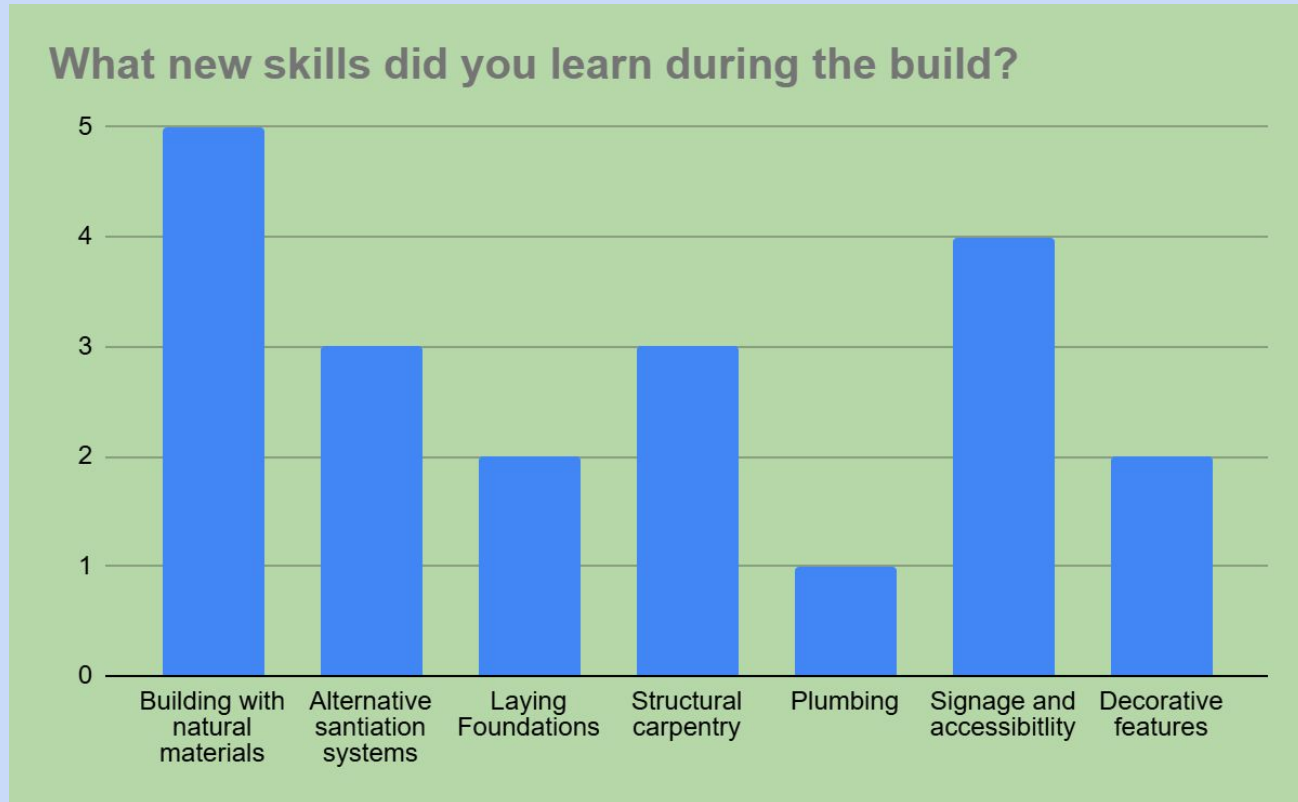
They found the path to be useable and allowed them to move freely around the garden.

However they found some issues which still need to be addressed to make the toilet accessible for them: An area of the floor needs to be evened out so they can turn their chair around and we need an extra grab rail for support and a better lock for inside the toilet.

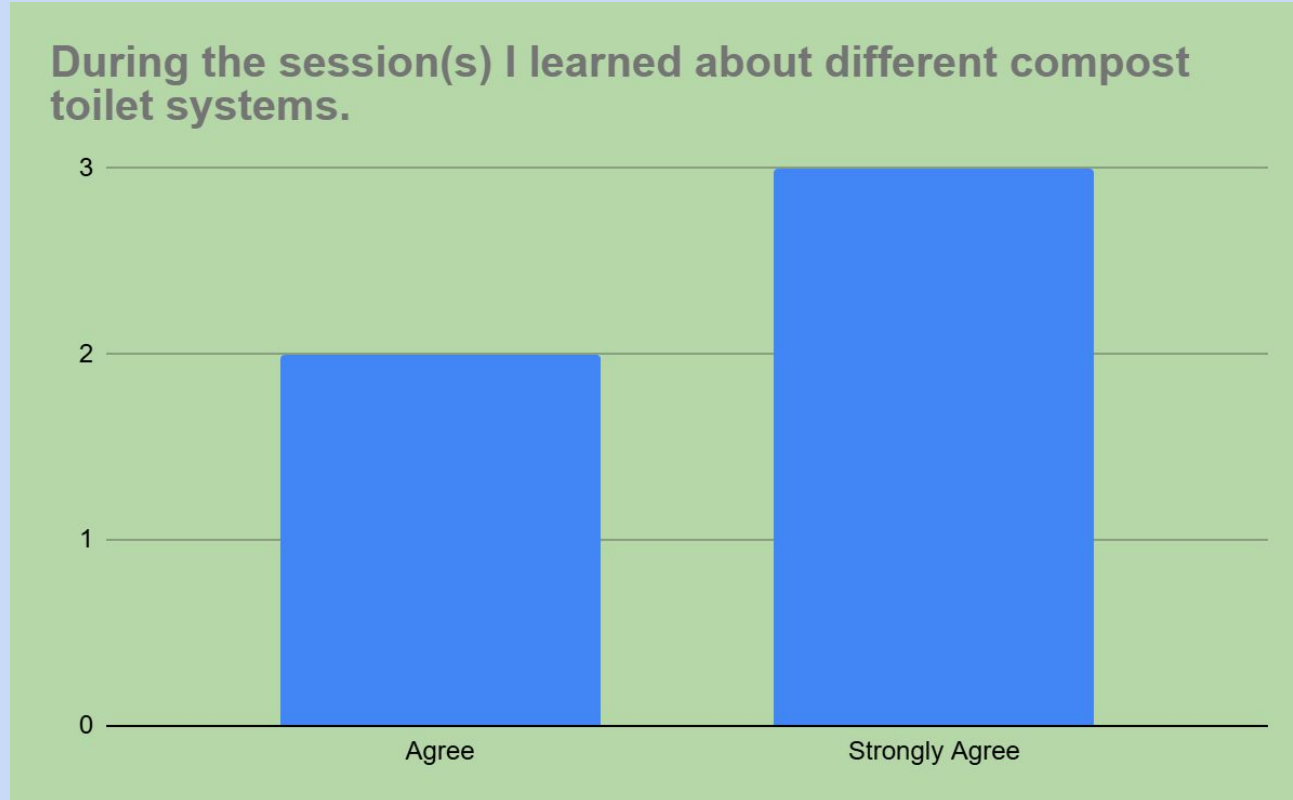
We plan to address all of these issues by the end of August.



# Results from Feedback Survey - 5 Responses



# Survey Results



# Feedback from participants on the survey

## What were your hopes/expectations about the workshop?

- To see a compost toilet in the making and experience a bit the building of one
- Yes, I learned so much
- Contribute to the garden
- To learn more about compost toilets and to generate a sense of collective investment in the process for the garden

## What will you take away with you?

- Had a really happy day playing with making cob wall and learning how to mix the ingredients to a good standard
- How compost toilets work
- You can do it yourself
- Seeing the designs and the final product
- I found the codesign process enlightening and enriching

## What worked well?

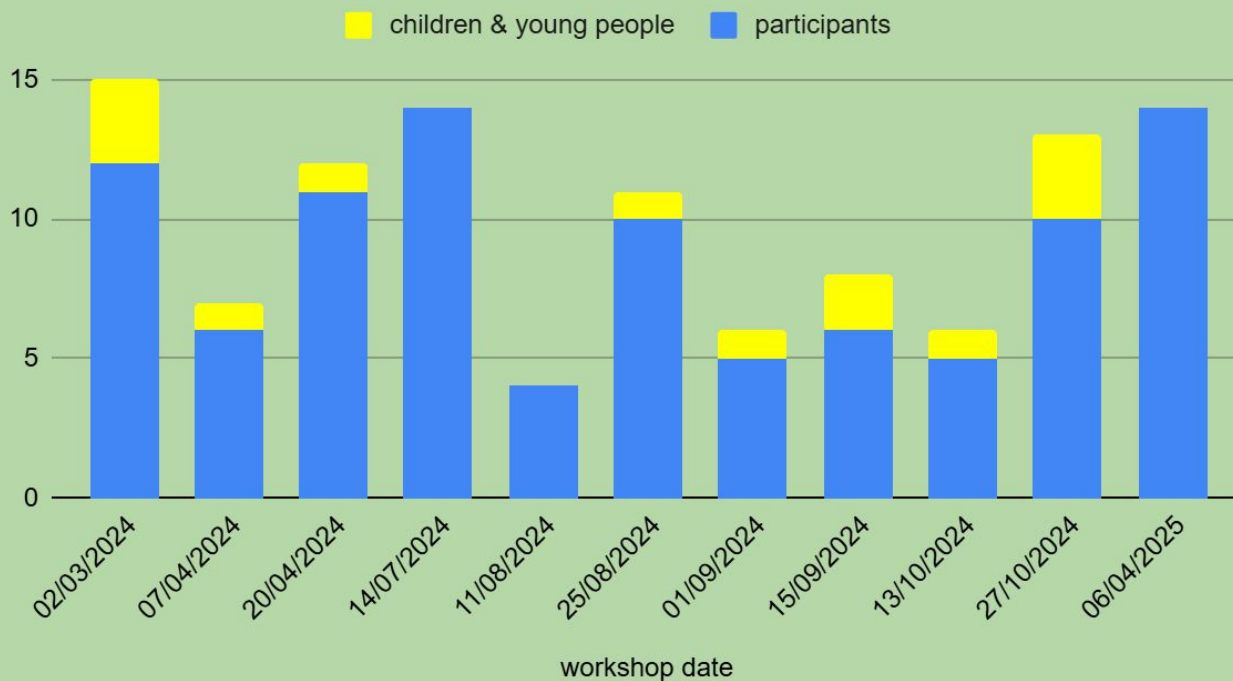
- Relaxed, informative teaching
- The presentation and joint design
- The teacher was patience, gentle and very knowledgeable
- It was driven by knowledgeable people
- How different teams of people got involved in different parts of the work and supported to learn new skills

## What could we improve/do differently next time?

- Nothing. It was a really great day.
- Nothing
- Perhaps show some examples of other types of toilet, or examples of what we were building as a final piece
- I can't think of anything as all the workshops were facilitated so well

# Participation

Number of attendees across 11 workshops



# Reflections and learnings from Compost Mentis

Collaborating on this project has been a joy and an honour, and we are proud of the outcomes and the toilet we made together.

Some things that we felt went well were:

- The high levels of participation throughout the project, we were surprised by the high turn out from the beginning, and the consistency in participation to the end.
- The process felt very participatory, from design, to build, with members of the garden making the toilet their own in many ways. The result is a very beautiful community toilet, that members of the garden are proud to share with their wider community.
- We appreciated the self-organised rhythm of working together in the garden that developed during the course of the project. There was an easeful, supportive environment of making and playing together that emerged amongst the group,
- Though we didn't engage the numbers of young people we had planned to, we were able to support a small handful of young people to connect with the garden and learn new skills. The model of working with some young people in the morning before the public workshops, allowed us to offer more tailored support, and connect on a deeper level.
- We delivered many more workshops than planned, due to the higher than expected levels of engagement with the project.

Some areas of learning / improvement were:

- We tried out various methods for capturing feedback during the workshops but found that people were often so engrossed in their tasks or in the garden, that they didn't engage much, so formal participant feedback felt a bit thin on the ground, during the delivery of the project.
- Sometimes participants arrived late, after the check in, risk assessment and health and safety briefing, which meant facilitators had to supervise these participants more closely, in future it would be good to build this in to the risk assessment, and make an improved strategy for supporting latecomers.
- One garden member who uses a wheelchair did not participate in the co-design process, so some aspects of the design needed to be adapted at the end to make it more accessible for him. Whilst this is an inevitable part of creating accessible infrastructures, it would have been good to have sought out more ways to involve him in the design process, and to have had budget for making the process itself more accessible.
- The collaboration with the Tower Hamlets Repairs team was less central than we'd hoped, as their programme changed, and fewer young people were involved. This meant that no young people from the repairs team were present to feed into the design stage, and a small number were able to participate at the practical stage. The learning here is that projects that rely on partnerships are subject to change, due to the unpredictable nature of different community organisations programmes. However, other unexpected connections emerged, and will continue to be made beyond the scope of this evaluation.
- Whilst participation in the project amongst those connected to the garden and with Just FACT felt strong, it was harder for us to reach much beyond these networks, despite outreach efforts. A learning here may be that building new community connections for short term projects is challenging, and should be part of longer term sustained efforts, which need to be properly resourced.

## Kurshed's feedback about the young people who were involved in the project

As part of their reparation work, the children were given the unique task of building a compost toilet from recycled and natural materials. At first, they were unsure—building something out of hay, mud, and scrap timber wasn't what they expected. But as they began mixing the mud with straw, shaping the walls by hand, and laughing about getting dirty, something shifted. For many of them, it was the first time they'd been trusted with a project that felt meaningful, creative, and real. Instead of being told off or told what not to do, they were being asked to build something useful.

The primitive style of the compost toilet—no fancy tools or shop-bought materials—meant everyone could contribute. They learned how to layer straw for insulation, how mud can be shaped into strong, breathable walls, and how the toilet would work without flushing. There was pride in using old bits of wood and scavenged items to create something new. Some of them even commented on how “cool” it was to use mud and straw like people did hundreds of years ago, and how satisfying it was to see their hard work become something solid.

What surprised the adults most was how much the children enjoyed themselves. These were young people who often struggled with authority or disengaged from schoolwork—but here, they were focused, smiling, and working as a team. They got messy, yes, but they also got involved.

For some, it was the first time they'd done anything like this—connecting with nature, learning through doing, and being part of something bigger than themselves. In the end, the compost toilet wasn't just a structure; it was a symbol of their effort, their teamwork, and their ability to give back in a way that was creative, sustainable, and genuinely fun.

(Kurshed Mannan, Tower Hamlets Reparations Team)

# Peter's Feedback

I enjoyed the democratic engagement in the compost toilet planning. Everyone was welcome and the space was sensitively held to include all voices in sharing their vision of how to proceed and what elements to integrate into the design. I was impressed by the warmth, empathy and open hearted kindness in guiding the imaginative process. Later meetings addressed how to match the ideal with council and health regulations, as well as budget constraints.

Everyone was kept informed of progress and invited to participate in each subsequent phase of design and construction. So many diverse people attended and joined in with the building tasks. I met interesting people with all sorts of areas of expertise. I enjoyed memorable conversations. It was good to feel part of a growing purposive community. It was fascinating to see the compost toilet emerge, considering all the technical and architectural dimensions. The care in sourcing natural materials is now eminently visible in the completed structure, which looks very much as I had imagined from the sketches and architectural drawings.

Today I used the compost toilet for the first time. The natural elegance and attention to detail is striking. It is heartening to see so many elements from the community wishlist have been fully incorporated. Urine is dispersed naturally through an underground perforated pipe, allowing it to diffuse into more distant garden soil. I was delighted to see the water butt capture rainwater from the roof, to water the vegetables. I was pleased to be able to see the treeline and sky through the airing space. I am so grateful to the organisers for involving the public in this project, and for honouring our aspirations throughout the process.

## Evaluation Video answering the following questions:

What did you learn during the process?

What has been your experience of the build?

Were the design aims achieved?

Did the build and the final toilet meet your expectations?

Feedback ratings from toilet users.



# Video Tour of our Lovely Toilet

