

# BOIL & BUBBLE BOWDEN



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# BOIL & BUBBLE BOWDEN

Founded in 2022, Boil & Bubble CIC is a community cooking social enterprise turning surplus food into shared meals, workshops, and opportunities for learning and connection.

Our sensory cooking sessions help children and families explore taste, culture and creativity while reducing food waste and stigma.

## ABOUT THE BOWDEN PROJECT

With funding from the JustFact Network, from March 2024 to August 2025 we partnered with Bowden Primary, a specialist school for children with social, emotional and mental-health needs, to create a kitchen garden, run sensory cooking classes, gardening sessions and host a community café .





# FOOD, BELONGING, AND CLIMATE JUSTICE

Many Bowden families face barriers to healthy food and inclusive community spaces.

We wanted to create a hub that would:

- Reduce isolation through shared growing and eating.
- Improve food networks by turning disused ground into productive beds and intercepting surplus fruit and vegetables from Streetbox London.
- Ensure just access to nutritious meals through a pay-what-you-can café.

Rising food costs, climate anxiety and limited hands-on food education made this work urgent.

By bringing people together through cooking and gardening, we built resilience and belonging while demonstrating local climate action.



## THE GOALS:

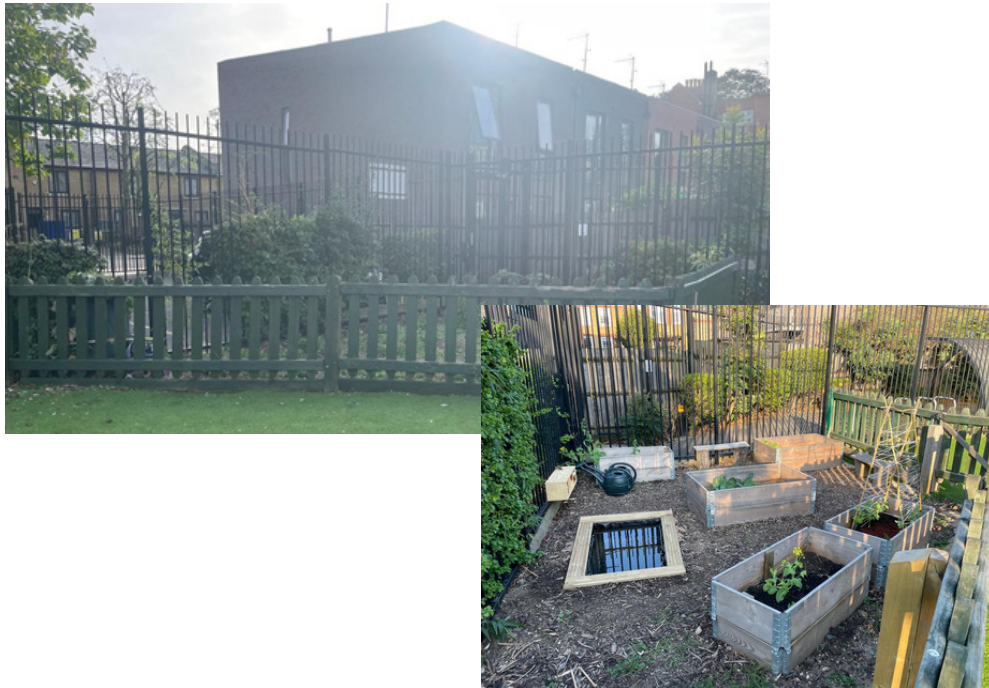
- **Reduce isolation** among children and families who often experience marginalisation, by creating welcoming spaces to grow, cook and eat together.
- **Improve local food networks** by turning disused playground space into a productive kitchen garden and intercepting surplus produce from Streetbox London, demonstrating a small-scale circular food system.
- **Ensure fair access to fresh, healthy food** through a free or pay-what-you-can café model that removes stigma.
- **Build practical skills** in growing, harvesting and cooking — showing how everyday choices can support climate-friendly living.
- **Model climate justice education** by linking hands-on food activities to wider conversations about sustainability and community wellbeing.

# TRANSFORMING THE SPACE

## FROM DISUSED PLAYGROUND TO KITCHEN GARDEN

Children, staff and volunteers transformed 30 m<sup>2</sup> of unused playground into a vibrant kitchen garden with raised beds, pond and compost heap. Every step — digging, planting, designing — was led by the children, families and volunteers themselves.

When the school's site manager went on long-term leave, staff and parents stepped up, managing the entire build and strengthening community pride.



## OUTCOMES:

- A living outdoor classroom supporting curriculum learning.
- A biodiversity boost on school grounds.
- A visible symbol of collaboration and care.



***"It's the best feeling picking something when you planted the seeds and watched it grow." – Child participant***



# SENSORY COOKING & COMMUNITY CAFÉS

We ran six sensory cooking workshops exploring taste, texture and culture through simple, plant-based recipes.

Children experimented with new ingredients, discussed food waste, and connected cooking to climate action. The workshops worked with surplus produce from Streetbox London, saving over 24 kg of fresh fruit and vegetables from going to landfill.

In the spring and summer months, the sessions also used herbs, greens and vegetables harvested directly from the kitchen garden that the children had built themselves.



## HIGHLIGHTS

- Children who were previously cautious eaters tried new ingredients
- Practical skill development: Participants learned two new knife grips, and loads of other practical kitchen skills
- Parents, staff and neighbours ate together, breaking down barriers between school and community.
- Families left each café with surplus produce and recipes, improving food security in a positive, stigma-free way.
- Pupils led the café experience, greeting guests, serving food and sharing stories about the garden



# SENSORY COOKING & COMMUNITY CAFÉS

We then hosted four community cafés, gradually widening attendance — starting with pupils and staff and eventually inviting families and local visitors.

At the café, children took pride in serving the dishes they had made to the community, explaining what they had cooked and where the ingredients had come from.

The wider school community also had open access to surplus produce from Streetbox, which they could take home to share with their families.



**"CAN I SERVE THEM? I WANT TO TELL THEM WHAT'S IN THE SOUP." – CHILD PARTICIPANT**





# PROJECT IMPACT

The Bowden project made a deep and lasting impact on children, families, staff and the wider community. It strengthened confidence, connection and climate understanding through simple, consistent, hands-on experiences.

## CHILDREN AND LEARNING

Children who had struggled in classroom settings found calm, focus and pride in gardening and cooking. They discovered new strengths and began to see themselves as capable contributors.

- Many children who were previously disengaged attended regularly and took on leadership roles in the café.
- Every child involved tried at least one new ingredient and shared food they had prepared with others.



***"When I'm in the garden I feel at peace. I feel happy. That's been my best bit." – Child participant***

# PROJECT IMPACT

## FAMILIES AND SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Shared meals and workshops created trust and reduced isolation. Parents saw their children succeed in new ways, and staff grew closer to families through informal, joyful encounters.

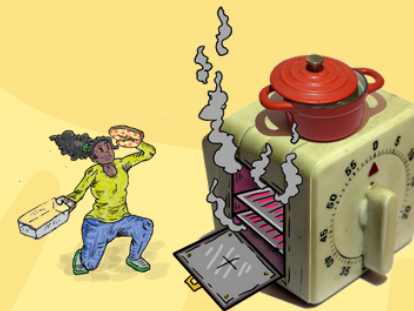
- Over 30 parents, staff and volunteers participated in cafés and workshops.
- Families left each event with free surplus produce and recipes, supporting healthier eating at home.



## ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPACT

The garden turned a once-unused patch of playground into a productive, green learning space that modelled a closed-loop food system.

- 30 m<sup>2</sup> of concrete was re-greened, and over 24 kg of surplus produce diverted from landfill.
- Children now speak confidently about composting, growing and reducing food waste as part of everyday climate action.



**"I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THIS SCHOOL WAS HERE, BUT I'D LOVE TO COME BACK AND HELP IN THE GARDEN." – DEBORAH, SAVE THE CHILDREN**



# LEARNINGS & INSIGHTS

## CHANGE BEGINS WITH TRUST.

Early in the project, we focused less on gardening outcomes and more on creating emotional safety. This meant starting small — inviting children to explore the space, make simple choices, and get used to visitors. As trust grew, engagement followed: pupils began volunteering to help with planting, welcoming guests, and leading sessions.



## START WHERE PEOPLE ARE

When the site manager went on long-term sick leave, the team adjusted the plan. Instead of pausing, school staff and volunteers took ownership of the garden build, developing unexpected skills and stronger commitment to the project.



## INCLUSION TAKES INTENTIONAL DESIGN

Activities were adapted for sensory needs and emotional readiness. Rather than opening the café immediately to the public, we introduced it in stages — first for pupils, then trusted adults, then parents and community members. This gradual approach gave children confidence to act as hosts.



# LEARNINGS & INSIGHTS

## CELEBRATE SMALL WINS

Success looked different for each participant — from tasting a new ingredient to explaining composting to a visitor. These moments built momentum and helped everyone recognise progress beyond numbers.



## PROGRESS TAKES TIME

Building community around Bowden required patience. It took months before the garden and café could open to the wider public, but this careful pacing ensured the environment felt safe, inclusive and sustainable.

## LOCAL PROJECTS MODEL BIG IDEAS.

The Bowden garden showed that climate action doesn't have to be large-scale to be transformative. In a small, specialist school, growing food, composting waste and sharing meals became living lessons in climate justice and community care.





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was made possible through the collective effort, creativity and care of the Bowden Primary School community. Our deepest thanks go to the children, families, staff and volunteers who built the garden, cooked together, and welcomed others into their space. We're also grateful to our partners — Stepney City Farm, Streetbox London, and Women's Environmental Network's Just FACT programme, with funding from The National Lottery Climate Action Fund — for their support, generosity and belief in community-led change.

