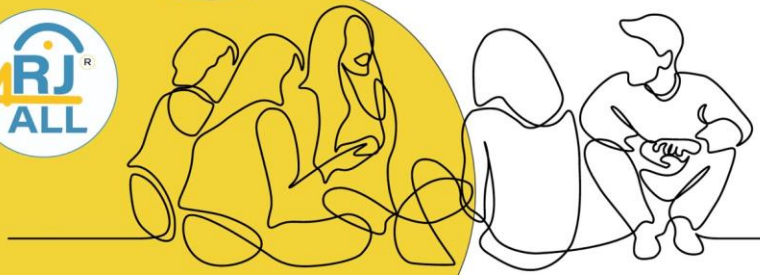


RJ4ALL BUILDING THE WORLD'S FIRST
RESTORATIVE JUSTICE POSTCODE

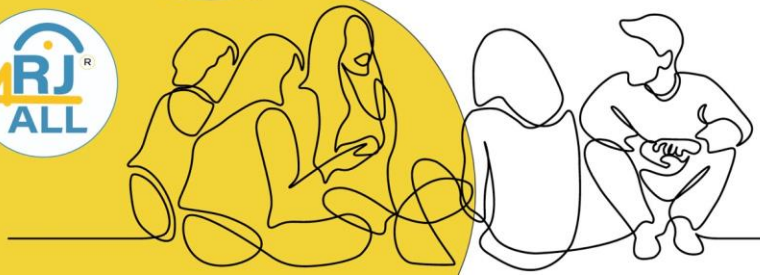
Building the World's First Restorative Justice Postcode

Third Quarterly Impact Report from November 2023 until March 2024

Abigail Richards, Sofia Sideridou and Dr. Theo Gavrielides

Restorative Justice for All

March 15, 2024



RJ4ALL BUILDING THE WORLD'S FIRST
RESTORATIVE JUSTICE POSTCODE

Strengthening Safety: The Catalyst of Community Agencies and Organisations

Abstract

Purpose

In January 2023, the Restorative Justice for All International Institute (RJ4All) embarked on a postcode-wide project to build the world's first restorative justice postcode in SE16. As the project just entered its second year of implementation, RJ4All continues to monitor the effects of direct services delivered from its Community Centre in SE16 London and online to combat poverty, several forms of injustices, power abuse, inequality and the complex reasons that lead to anti-social behaviour and community tensions at the interpersonal and intercommunity level. The provision of our services is based on restorative justice values and our broader vision is to instil the same principles in all keys provided services in SE16.

Since the project's inception, RJ4All has organised three Speak Up events. This paper serves as a follow-up report to the inaugural year of the project (2023) and its monitored activities, actively contributing to the continuous gathering of up-to-date evidence. Its objectives include compiling and analysing qualitative accounts to assess the project's impact and formulate actionable recommendations. It aims to provide information to achieve three primary objectives: 1) inform the

RJ4All team and the project's Steering Group, 2) support ongoing project development, and 3) serve as a strategic communication tool for other stakeholders.

Methodology

There is substantial evidence indicating that power abuse stands as a significant underlying factor contributing to inequalities, criminal behaviour and human rights violations, necessitating urgent action to redistribute power more equitably. RJ4All tackles this issue by creating platforms for local voices to be heard and amplified through Community Consultation Forums. Building upon the success of our previous "Speak Up!" Community Forum, in October 2023, RJ4All hosted its third event in February 2024. Employing a research method akin to "**focus groups**", the RJ4All team brought together stakeholders to glean insights from community members regarding safety issues in SE16 and the role of multiple agencies, following on the principles of restorative justice.

The event centred around the tragic shooting incident that took place on January 30th at Bywater Place in SE16. Nevertheless, the questions posed were also contextualized within the broader framework of the project, aimed at addressing the prevalent lack of trust between the community and public authorities, and the underlying causes of unsafety, harm and injustices.

Summary Findings from the first quarter of the second year of the project

From the February 2024 community forum, which was shaped around one big community circle, we found that demographically speaking, attendees represented predominantly the SE16 area fairly accurately, which does not negate our constant effort for better inclusion in ages, ethnicity, and gender. The circle resulted in quite significant emerging topics, including:

- ***Safety concerns and the prevalence of crime and violence***
- ***Lack of funding in mental health services leading to a variety of unmet needs***
- ***Police and other public agencies failings and injustice compounded by abuse of power, invisibility and lack of accountability and transparency***
- ***Astonishing need for community spaces, community unity and community healing***

Our research suggests a need for enhanced efforts to:

- ***establish and cultivate community spaces and community unity***
- ***commit to efforts to establish long-term funding in critical services***
- ***improve mental health services***
- ***bridge trust gaps currently prevailing between the community and public figures and address police and other public agencies failings***
- ***continue restorative justice work, by broadening its provision, and invest long-term in community prevention and direct intervention restorative justice work***

Originality

This report reflects on the third Speak Up! Forum; the first focus group of Year 2 (2024) of the Restorative Justice Postcode Project. The results unveiled are unique, mirror community needs and concerns and offer a clear picture of where SE16 is and where it should be. The report offers valuable insights through comparison with Year 1 findings, enabling the RJ4All team to maintain a consistent monitoring of the effectiveness of its services and explore avenues for change when needed. This endeavour marks a substantial stride toward establishing the world's first restorative justice postcode, underscoring the imperative for the team to prioritise the regular implementation of such events. This

is essential for gauging the community's pulse, providing a platform for expression, and subsequently ensuring the dissemination of information to all key stakeholders in SE16.

Research Limitations

The recruitment of the focus group took place through an open call in all RJ4All social media, direct emailing to community members, stakeholders and prior attendees, dissemination of our newsletter and the word of mouth, to cast the net wide and get people from the entire SE16. However, the insights discussed and analysed below originate from a non-probability purposive sample of 21 individuals (excluding RJ4All staff). Making it our largest Speak Up event, we still recognise that this sample size may not fully represent the preferences of the entire SE16 community, and therefore we suggest exercising prudence when deliberating on our recommendations.

Keywords: restorative justice, restorative justice postcode, peace circles, community spaces, safety, accountability and sustainable funding.

1. Introduction and purpose of the paper

The current landscape in SE16, but also in other areas in London, is marked by severe inequalities, that have created a stark division between affluent and marginalised populations. This multi-level inequality is logically translated into widespread human rights violations, big societal gaps, discrepancies between needs and means to meet these needs, high levels of criminality and interpersonal and intercommunity conflicts. In light of these challenges, there is a noticeable low-level trust in public authorities, with safety concerns arising and with many perceiving key community institutions/agencies as ineffective in addressing their concerns and be responsive to

their fears and calls. It is evident that there is an ongoing need to **re-establish the pivotal role of communities**, as they are best positioned to understand local needs and foster sustainable change.

Over the last 10 years, RJ4All has actively worked to distribute power more equitably, taking a unique approach distinct from traditional methods that focus on the negative aspects leading to crime (Andrews, Bonta and Hope, 1990). RJ4All has led the way in promoting a positive, growth-oriented approach to crime prevention and community cohesion. By leveraging the principles of restorative justice, RJ4All recognises that harm results from a combination of societal failures and unmet needs. As a result, RJ4All works with a model that nurtures individuals' strengths and taps into community interests (Gavrielides, 2020).

Working in line with these values the past 10 years, RJ4All decided to eventually translate its work into a rigorous research study to materialise their vision of a restorative justice postcode. RJ4All Rotherhithe Community Centre, placed within a diverse, vibrant neighbourhood in Southeast London, forms the geographical scope. RJ4All set off on a journey of bringing together key stakeholders and our local community to build the first restorative postcode in the world.

The restorative justice postcode initiative endeavours to foster a more inclusive and participatory atmosphere that we want to pilot at a local level with the intention of replicating it elsewhere globally. To materialise their bigger vision of a restorative justice postcode, one that sees local power being disseminated equally among the community, local government and key organisations, RJ4All had to adopt a multi-faceted approach and bring different angles in capturing data.

To date, RJ4All has successfully follows its three-year strategy, turning a neglected building into an accessible and vibrant community centre offering various free services. RJ4All's services encompass programmes such as youth clubs+, resilience workshops, wellbeing circles, a community fridge, pantry, accessible sports at RJ4All gym, Warm Hub services, digital inclusion sessions, and community consultation forums. These initiatives are consistently monitored through quantitative and qualitative data for improvement. We have also created a Steering Group with 10 external members from various sectors to aid in programme implementation and evaluation. The Steering Group aims to establish a Restorative Justice Postcode Memorandum of Understanding, promoting restorative justice principles in the SE16 community.

This report serves as a continuation of previous iterations, all integral components of our comprehensive project initiative. It serves as a compilation of detailed discoveries, comprising qualitative and quantitative data obtained from the February 2024 focus group. It also includes a series of recommendations specifically designed for pertinent stakeholders. These insights are situated within the backdrop of Year 1 outcomes and align with RJ4All's overarching goal and work. This report marks the third installment in a series of impactful qualitative reports aimed at capturing the outcomes of our community consultations. Its purpose is to inform and drive our policy-oriented initiatives forward and pave the way towards the changes we advocate for.

Summary of findings from the projects' first year

The inaugural year's findings underscore a pressing need to rebuild community cohesion and empowerment and amplify community spaces, bridge trust gaps and lack of communication, transparency and accountability of public authorities, and implement sustainable, long-term solutions

compared to short transactional endeavours. Key themes that arose out of community forums in 2023 include community empowerment, active involvement, and collaboration, along with addressing issues of alienation, disconnection, crime inequalities, unsafety, and disparities.

The overarching recommendations shaped were to strengthen community engagement and prioritise long-term investments for lasting positive impacts and community resilience. Huge role in these long-lasting investments must play restorative justice thanks to each overarching values and principles which aim to root out signs and factors that long-term lead to violence, harm, and unfair treatment.

2. Research Methodology and sampling

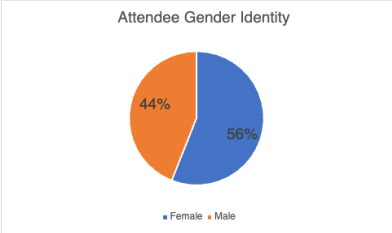
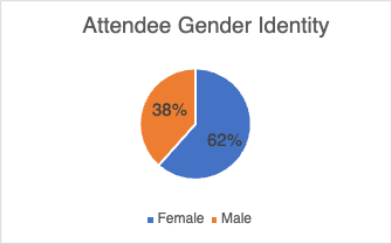
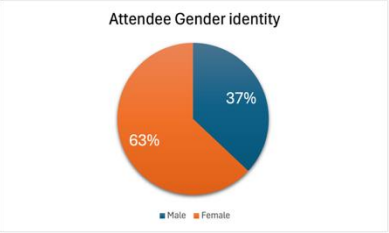
2.1. Recruitment process

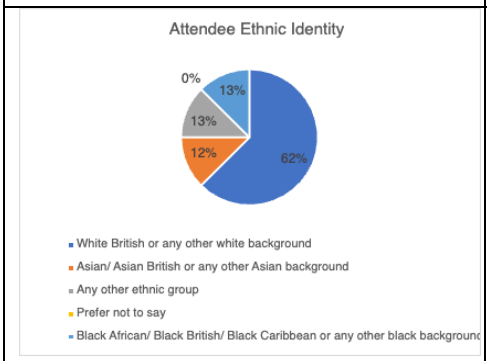
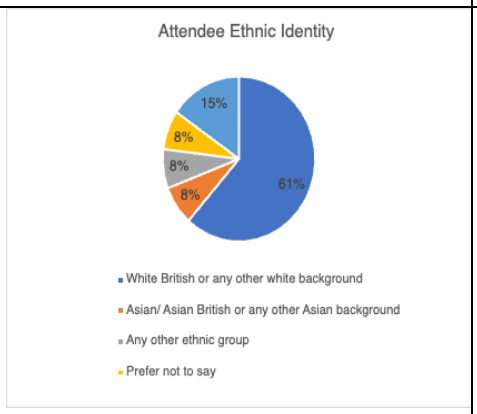
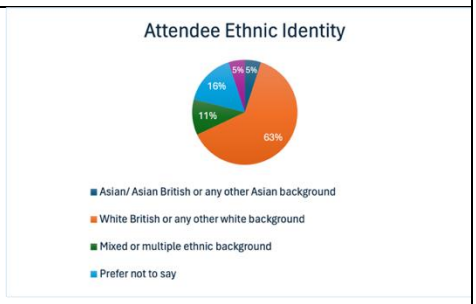
Participants for the focus group were sourced through a wide array of communication channels. An open call was disseminated via RJ4All's social media platforms, newsletters, and direct emails targeting a broad spectrum of stakeholders, ranging from local and national representatives to community members, prior participants and service users. Additionally, to bolster community engagement, word-of-mouth tactics were employed via our extensive database of service users on WhatsApp, since this has been proved a powerful communication tool. Outreach efforts were extended to various organisations and professionals in both criminal justice and community sectors, encompassing entities such as law enforcement, the Ministry of Justice, probation services, police departments, local councillors, and public authorities. This comprehensive approach aimed to ensure a diverse and inclusive representation, facilitating a thorough and well-rounded analysis.

2.2. Participants

Participants registered through the online booking platform, Eventbrite, where they acknowledged their consent for research participation. An open-door policy allowed walk-in participants, requiring completion of a printed consent form. No financial remuneration was provided, and participation was voluntary, driven by a commitment to contribute to the research and be active part of their community. On the event day, participants submitted key demographic information, including postcode, age group, gender, and ethnicity. 21 participants attended the event, however, to accommodate participants who could not attend in-person we adopted a hybrid format for this Speak Up. The two online participants are not accounted for in the quantitative demographic data as they were not physically present to sign in. Consequently, the below information represents the 19 in-person attendees. The collection of demographics was solely for methodological purposes to support the comprehensive analysis of the findings and extrapolate conclusions and recommendations.

Table 1 – Demographic Information Comparison between Study 1, 2 and 3

Participant Demographic Information Qualitative Study 1	**Participant Demographic Information Qualitative Study 2**	**Participant Demographic Information Qualitative Study 3**
		
Attendance by Postcode SE16: 56.3%	Attendance by Postcode SE16: 75%	Attendance by Postcode SE16: 47.4%

SE1: 12.6% SE6: 18.3% SE15: 6.3% SW20: 6.3%	SE5: 8% SE13: 8% SE8: 8%	E9: 5.3% SE5: 5.3% SE17: 5.3% SE3: 5.3% CR43: 5.3% SE1: 10.5% SW5: 5.3% N4: 5.3% SE15: 5.3%
		

2.3 Method

This research employed a focus group method inspired by peace circles, traditionally used for event facilitation, and aligned with restorative justice principles. The deliberate use of the circle format ensured that participants engaged in the discussion with intention, fostering a purposeful and inclusive dialogue. This format inherently establishes a non-oppressive environment, employing tools like the "talking piece." Typically, the chosen object for the talking piece circulates within the group granting its holder the opportunity to speak without interruption. The use of the talking piece

encourages intentional and respectful communication, aligning with the designated topic and framing piece of the circle. (United Nations, 2016).

The research deployed one large hybrid focus groups consisting of 21 participants, 2 of which attended online. With our vision for the first restorative justice postcode, local stakeholders convene quarterly for Speak Up! Restorative Justice Community Forums. These forums aim to empower, amplify, and integrate local perspectives into decision-making processes that impact the community. Held at RJ4All's SE16 Community Centre, the forums provide a platform for residents, councillors, and stakeholders to voice their opinions and aspirations for the community. Emphasising community engagement and individual empowerment, the Speak Up event captures, monitors, and reports on the community's concerns, needs, and visions.

RJ4All has made it its priority to implement these community forums on a regular basis (RJ4All, 2023b). Our efforts are demonstrated by the 1st Speak Up event held in March 2023 which ignited a series of similar events, in October 2023 and February 2024, in our effort for local voices to be included in decision making. The success of the previous Speak Up Events is articulated through the first and second Quarterly Impact Report and their key findings were carefully composed into an Open Letter to communicate the forum's results to key stakeholders in the area (RJ4All, 2023c).

On these grounds, the goal of continuous work throughout the second year of the project and the third Speak Up! Event took place on February 7th, 2024, providing a continuation on the discussion of relevant topics. Re-establishing trust and strengthening community cohesion cannot be achieved through superficial or quick remedies. It is crucial that regular opportunities arise for

community members to be part of sustainable change. Guided by our values of power-sharing, equality, and respect, these events are facilitated by Dr. Theo Gavrielides and the RJ4All team.

On the 30th of January 2024, the Metropolitan Police were called to reports of a man trying to break in at Bywater Place. Armed with weapons including a crossbow, knife, sword, and hatchet, an armed officer opened fire and the man was declared dead at the scene (The Guardian, 2024). The incident is now under independent investigation by the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC). Taking place in the SE16 postcode just seven days before our Community Forum, the incident was placed centre of our discussion in reflecting community concerns, responses and needs. Importantly, the circle was also utilised as a vehicle for healing, providing a safe and inclusive space for individuals to share their thoughts and feelings.

2.4. Procedure

The RJ4All Team implemented a semi-structured process to facilitate group discussion. To accommodate the need for group discussion and bigger exchange of ideas, we led one large hybrid circle with two participants joining virtually. The circle was facilitated by Dr. Theo Gavrielides, who introduced the context of the circle within a thematic framework in addition to the ground rules and a talking piece to guarantee a respectful environment. The discussion started with the first question in relation to the Bywater Place incident. Participants were asked to write one word about their feelings right now on a post-it note and place it in the centre of the circle. This was followed by a round of conversation and then a second question was posed. As the circle closed, participants were welcomed to note down their feeling after the completion of the focus group. Then, the keeper facilitated a debriefing session to ensure all participants had a chance to reflect and be informed of

the next steps. We recorded the focus group with participants' consent and note-keepers ensured comprehensive data collection and analysis.

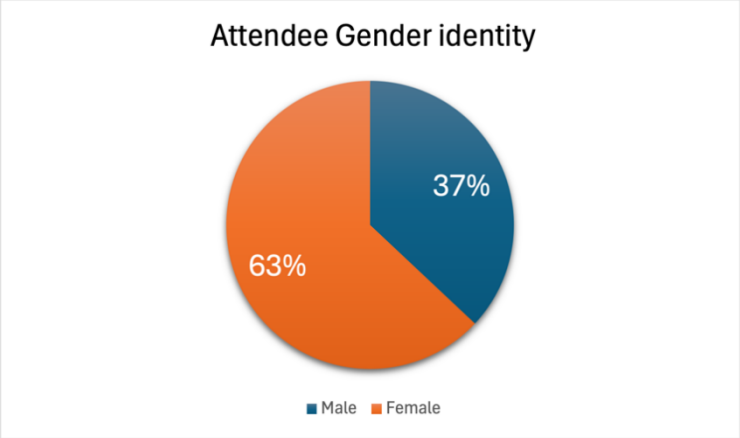
3. Results

3.1 Quantitative Data Display

The upcoming section provides demographic information about attendees at the February 2024 Speak Up event, including their gender, age, ethnicity, and postcodes. A total of 21 people (excluding the RJ4All Staff that facilitated, kept notes and participated) participated in the focus group. The data below reflects the 19 participants that attended in-person and consentfully shared their details in at the Community Centre.

3.1.1 Gender Demographics

Figure 1



3.1.2 Postcode Demographics

The geographic distribution of attendees reflects a local presence, with 9 out of 19 participants residing in the SE16 area. 1 attendee was from SE17, 2 from SE1, and 1 from SE15,

highlighting the diverse but predominantly Southeast London representation. Additionally, we had 4 attendees from postcodes outside of Southeast London, demonstrating the project's wider reach, relevance, and impact in the wider London area.

Figure 2

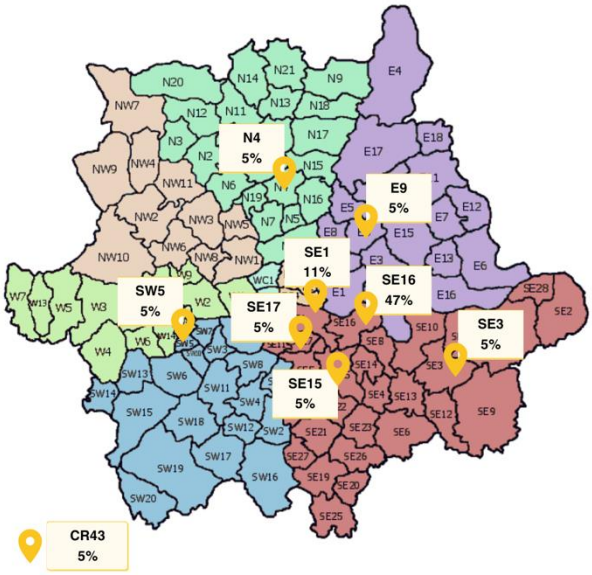


Chart Displaying Attendee Postcode

3.1.3 Ethnicity Demographics

Event attendees exhibited a diversity in their ethnic backgrounds. Out of the 19 attendees, 12 identified as White British or belonging to another white background, 2 indicated a heritage from multiple ethnic backgrounds, 1 identified as Asian/Asian British or associated with another Asian background, and 1 identified as Black African/Black British/Black Caribbean or having another black background. This demographic composition underscored the multicultural fabric of the group, which was similar to the previous Speak Up event. However, it is worth considering the potential

for further efforts to ensure a more comprehensive representation of participants in future endeavors, given that over the last Speak up events over 50% of the attendees come from a White British or any other white background.

Figure 3

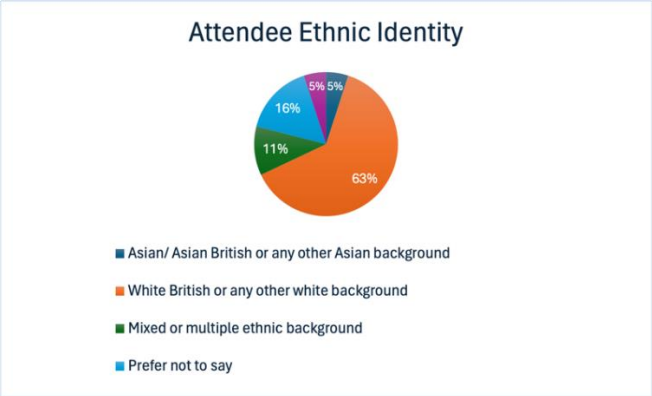


Chart Displaying Attendee Ethnic Identity

3.1.4 Age Demographics

The event brought together participants from a broad range of age groups. Among the attendees, 6 were in the 40-55 age group, 4 in the 66+ age group, 3 in the 20-29 category, 2 aged 56-65, while 1 belonged the 30-39 age bracket, reflecting a diverse cross-section of generations. Compared to the previous Speak Up event we see a broader representation of the 40-55 age group compared to the 56-65 age group.

Figure 4

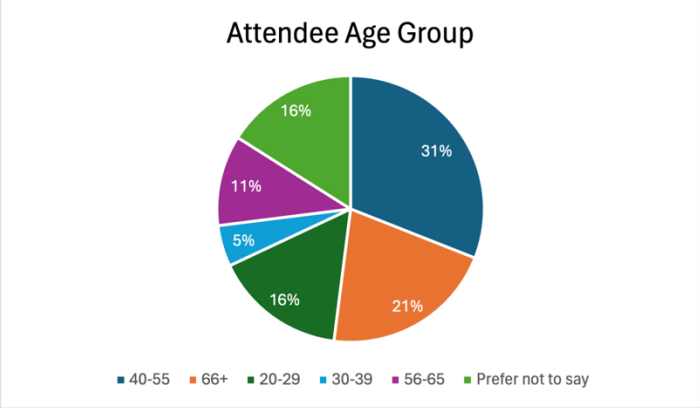


Chart Displaying Attendee Age Group

3.2 Qualitative Data Display

3.2.1 Framing Piece – thematic context

The focus group was framed within the context of the **Bywater Place shooting** that took place on the 30th of January 2024 and it was a rather heated topic which raised multiple concerns for the community. As such, the thematic angle for the focus group was centred on addressing the community's thoughts and feelings after the shooting as well as placing a spotlight on the community's expectations for local authorities and agencies in resolutions and prevention of safety matters like this one. This theme was closely aligned with the broader vision of the entire project, which aims to rectify safety and power imbalances, rebuild trust between citizens and authorities, foster community cohesion, and mitigate the root causes of harm and anti-social behaviour.

To guide the discussion, two questions were posed to participants to keep the circles in line with the project's goals; "***Thinking about the incident that occurred at Bywater Place on the 30th of January, what are your thoughts and feelings?***" and "*I**n light of what we have discussed, what***

is the role of community organisations, such as RJ4All, and other authority figures in addressing these incidents? (*What are your expectations and how do you see these entities contributing to the prevention and resolution of these issues?* – Subsidiary Question)".

The follow-up section of the report provides an overview of the findings, highlighting the primary qualitative points that emerged during the focus group.

3.2.2 "Thinking about the incident that occurred at Bywater Place on the 30th of January, what are your thoughts and feelings?"

3.2.2.1 "Safety and feelings of fear". Community members expressed feelings of fear, anxiety, distress and shock in response to the incident of shooting that took place at Bywater Place (part of SE16 postcode). It was noted that Bywater Place is typically a quiet area and that individuals feel relatively safe in the area. This incident was recognised by many as a rare occurrence; however, it had left individuals feeling concerned. While serious crimes like this incident may not occur regularly, opportunistic crime remains a daily reality that concerns everyone and significantly impacts our daily lives. Youth violence is recognised as rife within the area including incidents of phone muggings and thefts as well as occasions of interpersonal violence, compared to more serious offences prevalent in other postcodes.

3.2.2.2 "Mental health and unmet needs in the community". Participants engaged in verbal reflections on the community's existing state, acknowledging the pivotal role of mental health in crime and violence, indicating a substantial unmet need. It was observed that individuals involved in the Bywater Place incident likely witnessed a *traumatic scene*. This prompted several participants to question the available resources for individuals and groups to access mental health support in the

area. Participant's stressed that community support and mental health services play a key role in preventing the escalation of criminal activities. At the same time, participants coming from police forces emphasised the importance of addressing mental health issues in the cases they encounter, underscoring the need for enhanced specialised support to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their original work.

3.2.2.3 "Police failures and injustice". Some community members expressed personal experiences of police failings describing that this had left them with feelings of injustice due to authorities and institutions expressing a reluctance to accept accountability and being transparent in their decision-making processes. Participants emphasised that this mistrust and failure perception is embedded within our culture and signifies a significant power discrepancy, ultimately resulting in the disempowerment of the community.

3.2.2.4 "Community disempowerment". Many participants conveyed a sense of frustration with their ability to effect change, emphasising a large barrier to speaking with change makers and those in power. Community disempowerment was underscored as a matter requiring urgent attention and remediation.

3.2.2.5 "Toxic behaviour towards women". Several participants emphasised that alternative community forums and spaces for dialogue have not provided a safe, non-oppressive environments. Indeed, it was expressed that some have exhibited toxic behaviour towards women, consequently affecting their confidence to engage in community meetings and leaving women feeling disempowered to engage in community action.

Figure 5

Visual Word Map with participants contribution regarding feelings after the Bywater Place shooting

3.2.3 "In light of what we have discussed, what is the role of community organisations, such as RJ4All, and other authority figures in addressing these incidents? (What are your expectations and how do you see these entities contributing to the prevention and resolution of these issues? – Subsidiary Question)"

3.2.3.1 "Rebuilding trust in authorities and increasing accountability". Participants discussed historical and current failings of the police and the council including broken promises and corrupt behaviour which has led to deep-rooted distrust in authorities, even if things are more positive in reality. Some individuals detailed personal experiences and accounts of such incidents of police failings that are still unresolved, and individuals have feelings of injustice. Community members stressed the importance of these institutions taking accountability for their actions and remain active in solving ongoing issues. These institutions should reallocate their resources and redirect their focus towards enhancing their visibility and establishing themselves as trusted entities within the

community, fostering stronger connections and instilling confidence among community members. It shouldn't be viewed as a misallocation of resources, but rather as a crucial investment.

3.2.3.2 "More efficient allocation of funds regarding local policing and other services". Participants discussed the crucial role of local policing in prevention of crime, underscoring its significance in addressing lower-level crimes that impact people more regularly. Additionally, they noted the reduced visibility of police on the streets due to funding cuts as well as the pressure on police to address gaps in other underfunded services including support for individuals in mental health crises. Therefore, the focus group emphasised the need for a better allocation of resources within police and a shift towards a more community-oriented approach to policing.

3.2.3.3 "Inclusive community spaces". Community members expressed the significance of safe communal spaces for congregating and deliberating current and prospective events within the locality, referring to our community forum as an example. This consensus underscored the importance of such spaces in addressing communal needs and fostering empowerment for collective action.

3.2.3.4 "Community support and prevention": Participants consistently emphasised the theme of prevention, as of where organisations and other authority figures should focus. Aligned with this and the visualisation of its implementation, community members highlighted the importance of community-led support that specifically addresses unmet needs and recognises warning signs. Participants articulated that through rebuilding a cohesive community, there is the potential to direct individuals toward pertinent support services and resources and prevent the escalation of such crimes.

3.2.3.4 "Restorative justice and community healing". Finally, a reoccurring theme that arose included the idea of community healing. Some participants detailed personal experiences of police failings that have left them with feelings of injustice as well as negative impacts on mental health. Restorative justice was recognised as a practice that has potential to encourage dialogue and empower individuals and the community to heal. Its contribution in restoring broken relationships and forms of injustices should pave the way for more services provided under this scope.

Figure 6

Visual Word Map with participants contribution regarding the role of the community and other authorities in addressing safety issues

4. Discussion

Following the above data display, this section will offer a discussion space of the themes brought onto the table. These results we be discussed with consideration of the wider findings of the project during 2023 and RJ4All's efforts and dedicated work to establish a restorative justice postcode.

4.1 Qualitative Data Analysis

In the forthcoming discussion section, we endeavour to collectively analyse, compare, and collate the insights shared by participants regarding both the Bywater Place shooting and the involvement of community organisations and public agents in addressing such incidents. As demonstrated by the community's feedback, prioritising prevention measures and prioritising community spaces and empowerment should be a collective focus for all stakeholders. This underscores the significance of **proactively addressing underlying issues**, including safety, fostering responsive and present community environments.

Our aim is to identify commonalities and emerging themes, recognising that the outcomes of this focus group mirror the concerns raised during the project's inaugural year (2023). This alignment significantly bolsters the validity of our results, underscoring the consistency of the information gathered and its relevance to our target group in SE16.

The discussion is structured around two key topics from the circle questions: ***Bywater place shooting: community concerns*** and then ***Responsibility of authorities and other agencies***. The themes and challenges found from this focus group, will then be examined in the light of the findings from the Restorative Justice Postcode Project Year 1, 2023.

4.1.1. Bywater Space shooting: community concerns

In addressing the thoughts and feelings of community members that arose in response to the Bywater Place incident, the analysis of the data reveals common themes and challenges. ***Safety concerns*** and the ***prevalence of youth crime*** were common worries among the community. Feelings

of anxiety, fear and distress were initially noted down by the audience in post-it notes. Although participants recognised high levels of crime, it was agreed that incidents such as that at Bywater Place are rare. Conversely, ***opportunistic crime*** such as phone muggings remain rife and are low-level crimes that affect individuals more frequently and on a regular basis leading to changes in behaviour and general ***safety concerns.*** The prevalence of crime was highly emphasised as interconnected with the ***lack of mental health services*** available to support individuals in crisis. It was stressed that this has resulted in individuals in the community having a variety of ***unmet needs*** which can potentially and dynamically contribute to the prevalence of crime in the area. Likewise, mental health emerged as a focal point in the discussion also from the perspective of the police force, highlighting its prevalence in the incidents they handle and the substantial allocation of resources it demands. Addressing this issue is imperative, with the consensus being that additional support from specialised experts should intervene before cases escalate to involve the police. Additionally, ***ongoing drug use*** was highlighted as a contributing factor to crime in the area and something that needed to be addressed at a higher level. The discourse on safety was coupled with ***deep-rooted mistrust towards the police*** and ***other public authorities,*** alongside a prevailing sentiment that the police are not to be relied upon.

Reflecting on the event at Bywater Place, participants emphasised the urgent need for fostering strong community connections to provide support for individuals and curb the escalation of unmet needs that could potentially lead to criminal activities. The shooting incident brought to light significant issues of ***community disempowerment*** and the ***historical exclusion and alienation of marginalized groups***, impeding the development of these connections. Citizens currently lack a

sense of empowerment, viewing their ***communities as unsafe and non-inclusive***. In a similar vein, discussions addressed the pervasive issue of ***toxic behaviour towards women*** by men in authority at community forums. This alarming behaviour was acknowledged with concern, emphasising a ***lack of accountability*** and ***abuse of power*** that has enabled this behaviour and led to women refraining from further participation in such events.

The issues presented in the circle underscore the significant affects crime has on ***community cohesion, wellbeing,*** and ***participation*** of individuals in the SE16 community. The findings imply a sense of urgency to address the ***safety concerns, community disengagement*** and ***power abuse*** comprehensively.

4.1.2. Authority and agency responsibilities

The discourse surrounding the involvement of community organisations and local authorities in resolution and prevention underscores the significance of our project's objectives and aspirations towards establishing a restorative justice postcode. A theme that reoccurred throughout the discussion was historic police failings and forms of injustice in the broader SE16 community**.** Several community members disclosed personal experiences of ***police failings*** and systemic deficiencies in the justice system. Personal narratives touched upon its ***impact on mental health*** and their future ***trust in authorities.*** Leading from this, community members pinpointed the ubiquity of ***power abuse*** and stressed the importance of ***institutional accountability***. With all these in mind, in the second half of the consultation forum participants articulated a pressing need for ***rebuilding trust in authorities*** and ***increasing accountability.*** The discourse surrounding ***accountability*** and the need for community organisations and public bodies to take responsible steps emerged as a

pivotal way forward. Responsive status and active engagement in public affairs are much-needed concepts that individuals required for ***community healing***. It is crucial for public figures and key community institutions to prioritise fostering meaningful relationships with citizens, dedicating efforts to rebuilding engagement and establishing close connections. They should strive not to be perceived as distant figures of power and authority, but rather as approachable points of contact where individuals feel confident addressing their concerns.

Furthermore, participants emphasised the importance of a ***more efficient allocation of funds regarding local policing and other essential services***. The pressure on police to address gaps in other underfunded services like mental health support accentuated the need for better resource allocation within the police force but also in the broader community. ***Mental health issues*** require a comprehensive approach that involves the expertise of professionals within the community. This entails not only providing access to mental health services but also fostering a supportive environment where individuals feel comfortable seeking help and receiving appropriate care. By leveraging the knowledge and skills of ***local mental health experts***, communities can effectively address the diverse needs of individuals and promote overall well-being, which then is tied up to the discussion of anti-social and criminal behaviour.

In addition to the theme of ***community healing***, participants unanimously advocated for the creation of more ***physical spaces to foster community connections***. They emphasised the imperative for community organisations, like RJ4All, to take the lead in establishing safe spaces where people can gather and interact within the community. These spaces serve as vital meeting points, nurturing a sense of belonging and facilitating meaningful connections among community members. It was

noted that the lack of safe spaces, in addition to the over-used phrase 'safe spaces', has hindered ***collective action*** and ***community participation*** in decision making. It was emphasised that the creation of these spaces must be truly inclusive, inherently safe, and community led.

Finally, participants consistently noted the importance of ***prevention*** and ***community-led support in addressing underlying issues, recognising warning signs, and mitigating the escalation of crimes.*** By focusing on prevention strategies and directing individuals towards relevant support services, both community organisations and authority figures can effectively promote community well-being. Furthermore, it was recognised that r***estorative justice*** offers potential avenues for community healing and empowerment. Integrating restorative justice practices into service provision can facilitate healing, empower individuals, and contribute to restoring trust and justice within the community.

4.1.3. Links with Year 1 and RJ4All work.

The first year of the project sat within the thematic context of '*Hopes and Fears for Southwark 2030*' and '*harms, injustice and community needs*'. Interestingly many of the themes drawn from these findings reoccur in the first focus group of the project's second year. This is significant in highlighting that the data captured continues to represent the voices of SE16 and more broadly Southeast London. Moreover, it reinforces the mission outlined by RJ4All through its core services conducted at its Community Centre.

Our initial year's discoveries emphasised the urgent imperative to ***reforge community cohesion and empowerment, augment community spaces, bridge trust gaps, and address the deficiencies in communication, transparency, and accountability of public authorities.*** Moreover,

they underscored the necessity of implementing sustainable, long-term solutions over short-term fixes. Key themes from the community forums in 2023 included ***fostering community empowerment, active involvement, and collaboration, while confronting issues of alienation, disconnection, crime inequalities, unsafety, and disparities.***

The topics that emerged from the present study resonate deeply with these ongoing concerns and aspirations. The persistent theme of ***safety concerns*** and ***community disconnection*** remains prominent. The community consistently articulate fear and concern regarding increasing opportunistic or youth crime and incidents of interpersonal violence. In line with previous recommendations (Sideridou et al, 2023) and input from the February focus group, ***early intervention programmes and community presence must be utilised to foster both a sense of belonging and build more resilient communities to combat resorting to crime in the area***. Eavesdropping this sentiment, RJ4All has established a hub providing a comprehensive range of free holistic services including Youth Clubs+, Wellbeing circles, a community fridge and pantry, accessible sports at RJ4All gym, Warm Hub services, digital inclusion sessions, and Community Consultation Forums. Additionally, effectively tackling these issues at its core requires the establishment of ***strong relationships with key institutions*** like educational systems, law enforcement, and community organisations. RJ4All continues to work with local stakeholders and build robust partnerships with local organisations.

In addition to safety concerns, evidence seem to suggest a notable ***lack of accountability*** and a ***pervasive distrust in authorities,*** such as the police and local authorities. Consequently, this has fostered a sense of ***disempowerment*** within the community, leaving individuals feeling

incapable of effecting change as well as experiencing high levels of injustice, negatively impacting mental health. The issue of community disempowerment and the omission of voices closely aligns with the recurring theme of ***alienation within the community***. Notably, both sets of data show that this is especially exacerbated for marginalised groups. As mentioned earlier, the February focus group highlighted a culture of toxic behaviour towards women perpetrated by men in authority, echoing the findings on the alienation and exclusion of specific groups. The results from Year 1 and the first quarter of Year 2 emphasise the urgent need for ***transparency*** in local authorities and combatting power abuse, if we wish to eliminate these incidents which seem to reoccur.

The inaugural year's findings revealed the community's demand for accessible physical spaces to voice concerns and spark collaboration among stakeholders in an effort to not only feel more included in the community, but also to gradually get to know public authorities, bolster trust and increase unity. Previous findings (Sideridou et al, 2023) passionately advocated for communal spaces as catalysts for fostering a sense of community and empowerment. Adding depth to these insights, qualitative accounts from this study underscore the ongoing necessity for physical spaces. However, most importantly, the emphasis was placed on ensuring that ***these spaces are safe, where voices are amplified not diminished, and all members of the community feel safe to contribute***.

For over a year now, we have witnessed firsthand the transformative impact of our services on the daily lives of community members. Service users have found all the missing bits mentioned above in the RJ4All Community Centre, utilising its resources to reconnect with their community, prioritise their well-being through well-being circles, and address the underlying issues that weigh heavily on them, such as poverty, unsafety and a lack of empowerment. With issues like power

abuse and unsafety under scrutiny, RJ4All has remained steadfast in its commitment to addressing these pressing needs and providing tangible solutions always following the principles of restorative justice.

The resounding positivity expressed in all the focus groups so far reaffirms our belief that our project transcends mere service provision; it serves as a catalyst for positive change and sets a precedent for other communities to follow a replicate the model we wish to introduce. At RJ4All, restorative justice manifests through direct interventions such as workshops and restorative justice circles, as well as indirectly through holistic support initiatives addressing basic needs like food, clothing, and access to warm hubs, alongside digital support to mitigate digital exclusion. These multifaceted approaches underscore our commitment to fostering healing, empowerment, and inclusivity within our communities; all things sought by community members of all focus groups and studies. By fostering unity among individuals and authorities and championing a shared vision for a more harmonious community, we are not only effecting change but also inspiring others to do the same.

4.2 Quantitative Data Analysis

This segment of the report delves deeper into the demographics of the February focus group. It should be noted again that the total number of participants was 21, however, 19 attended in person, while 2 attendees joined the discussion group virtually to make sure the group was accessible and everyone who wanted to, could contribute.

4.2.1 Gender Demographics

The focus group maintains a generally balanced gender distribution, with a slight inclination towards female participants. This increased participation from women is viewed positively, considering participation disparities in decision-making within the broader societal context, indicating our ability to foster a non-oppressive environment. For future sessions, we aim to enhance representation from gender non-conforming groups, ensuring inclusivity of all voices and perspectives in the conversation

4.2.2 Postcode Demographics

It is viewed positively that over 47% of the attendees were from SE16, which supports our project and its geographical scope. At the same time, it is interesting to see other London postcodes represented which highlight the scope of the project and its wider relevance.

4.2.3 Ethnicity Demographics

This event's attendees displayed a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds. However, it should be noted that the distribution amongst all these backgrounds was not equal. Further emphasis should be placed in reaching more voices from all backgrounds that comprise the SE16 area, this will require improvement from our initial outreach and placing more efforts on our word-of-mouth tactics.

4.2.4 Age Demographics

In terms of age groups, this Focus Group managed to include voices from younger but also older age groups. In the future, we would like to capture more voices from those under the age of 25 to include their voices in community matters.

5. Critical conclusions

The Speak Up event in February 2024 was a continuation of RJ4All's vision and services. The focus group served as a tangible manifestation of RJ4All's objectives, emphasising power redistribution and community cohesion. The event reinforced the mission of the Restorative Justice Postcode Project, actively uniting stakeholders, amplifying community voices, and bringing SE16 residents together under restorative justice values. As the project continues in 2024, RJ4All will regularly provide a space for the community to gather and have their voices heard.

The discussions held among participants in the focus groups highlighted several pressing issues that demand immediate attention within the community. These include entrenched power abuse, failures within the police system leading to injustice, insufficient funding, and pervasive safety concerns. Notably, these findings closely mirror those identified in the first year of research, particularly stressing the imperative for ***transparency*** and ***accountability*** among authorities, r***emoval of barriers*** hindering collaboration with them, and ***physical spaces for the community*** to access. Furthermore, there is a growing recognition of the ***potential of restorative justice practices*** in addressing these issues, emphasising the importance of RJ4All's services and establishing restorative spaces within the community.

In summary, bridging trust gaps and providing access to safe and inclusive community spaces remain vital for fostering community cohesion and addressing unmet needs. Ensuring that individuals and groups have spaces to gather is essential for promoting dialogue, recognising community needs, and fostering collaborative efforts to address them. The collective emphasis

placed by circle participants on these factors underscores their significance in driving meaningful change within the community.

6. Recommendations

In the light of the discussion centring the Bywater Place shooting and subsequent community expectations of authorities and agencies, the following recommendations for the RJ4All team, steering group, and external stakeholders are set out.

6.1. Establish and Cultivate Community Spaces: It is imperative to persist in the establishment and maintenance of community spaces within SE16. This encompasses both indoor and outdoor physical spaces, playing a pivotal role in fostering active participation, cultivating community connections, and promoting inclusivity. These spaces must be intentionally designed with the key values of safety and inclusivity. On top of that, it is important to offer space to talk and participate in decision-making processes. As such the RJ4All Community Centre continues to be available from Monday to Friday, operating from 9:30 am to 5:30 pm, providing individuals or groups with access to the space and its associated services. Furthermore, RJ4All should actively consult with the community to determine optimal timings for all services, ensuring the inclusion of diverse voices. Also, in preparation of upcoming Speak Up events, the RJ4All Team should do further outreach to marginalised communities and encourage young people to attend. The RJ4All Team will ensure that the outcomes of these events are consistently communicated to local authorities, such as the Southwark Council, to foster transparency and collaborative decision-making.

6.2 Long-term investment in key-services. The RJ4All Team should continue to work on building relationships with the community and other key stakeholders, whilst also seeking funding that will sustain the project and its services to meet community needs. RJ4All should continue to push for ongoing collaboration with local organisations and direct service exchange, pinpointing the areas currently experiencing a lack of funding. Engaging in collaborative efforts and integrating relevant expertise are imperative for effectively addressing such topics. This is particularly crucial in the joint effort in addressing issues relating to mental health concerns, financial disadvantage, family conflicts, school exclusion and youth disempowerment.

6.3 Improve mental health services. Enhance mental health services by conducting a comprehensive assessment of the existing avenues for individuals to access such services, identifying unmet needs within this framework. By offering more comprehensive services that address not only mental health concerns but also encompass financial disadvantage, food insecurity, and physical health through community-based approaches, it becomes plausible to alleviate pressure on these services. This approach can have a sustained impact on local policing efforts currently directed towards addressing these multifaceted issues. RJ4All should persist in advocating for its wellbeing services and food provision services, with a particular focus on reaching out to communities that are marginalised and face disempowerment, ensuring accessibility to these crucial services.

6.4 Bridging Trust Gaps. RJ4All should continue to actively promote open dialogues and transparency with local authorities, such as Southwark Council, police etc.. Sustained efforts should be made to extend invitations to councillors, MPs, police, and other local stakeholders, encouraging

their participation in community forums to engage with the voices of the community to which they belong. Fostering open dialogue is indispensable in bridging trust gaps, facilitating the understanding of community needs, addressing harms, and working towards rebuilding trust.

6.5 Equitable access to restorative services. Building upon the above recommendation and expressed interest in implementing additional restorative practices, it is recommended that RJ4All give precedence to further embedding restorative justice methods in the community. Ongoing efforts are already underway as the RJ4All team undergoes restorative justice training and work towards delivering and facilitating restorative justice cases for its upcoming project, **'Empowering Communities to Address Gender-Based Violence and Hate Incidents through Restorative Justice'** funded by City Bridge Foundation. This will allow the community access to restorative justice as well as our wrap around services. As such, RJ4All should continue to foster robust partnerships with educational institutions, victim support services, and voluntary organisations to expand the support available and create further awareness of its restorative services. All of which align with our overarching objective of diverting police and criminal justice caseloads to community-based approaches.

This refined set of recommendations provides tangible steps for RJ4All and external stakeholders to address crucial themes identified in our focus group. The emphasis is on community-based approaches that holistically meet individual needs and promote community empowerment. Whilst acknowledging past accomplishments, it is imperative for RJ4All to continue its commitment to restorative justice principles all while considering the diverse needs of the community. The above recommendations will be pivotal for cultivating positive transformations, fostering community ties,

and advancing RJ4Alls overarching mission to establish the world's first Restorative Justice Postcode.

7. Acknowledgment

Rotherhithe Consolidated Charities is supporting RJ4All's restorative justice circles, training sessions and speak up events; and is a member of the Restorative Justice Postcode Steering Group".

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Rotherhithe Consolidated Charities

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