Building the World's First Restorative Justice Postcode: Understanding and addressing the reasons that lead to community tensions, poverty and disadvantage

Second Quarterly Impact Report from June 2023 until October 2023

Sofia Sideridou, Abigail Stevens-Stone and Dr. Theo Gavrielides

Restorative Justice for All

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Abstract

Purpose

The Restorative Justice for All International Institute (RJ4All) has embarked on a postcode-wide project to build the world's first restorative justice postcode in SE16. Within this scope, RJ4All is currently monitoring the effects of direct services delivered from its Community Centre in SE16 London and online to combat poverty, injustices, power abuse, inequality and the complex reasons that lead to anti-social behaviour and community tensions at the interpersonal and intercommunity level.

This paper seeks to compile and discuss the qualitative accounts on the impact of the project during the second half of its first year. Additionally, it serves as a follow up to the first Impact Report and adds up to the existing up to date evidence. Ultimately, 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 ample evidence to believe that power abuse is the biggest silent driver of inequalities and human rights violations and there is urgent need to disseminate power in a more equal way. To do this, RJ4All provides space for expression and amplification of local voices through Community Consultation Forums. Following the success of our former "Speak Up!" Community Forum, in October 2023 RJ4All hosted its second event. The RJ4All team utilised the research method of a "focus group" to bring stakeholders together and gather insights from community members behind the values of restorative justice. The event had as a starting point the existing lack of trust within the community with public authorities and the root causes of harm, crime and injustices.

Summary Findings from this quarter

From both discussion groups, we found that demographically speaking, attendees represented predominantly the SE16 area and generally Southeast London quite accurately, which does not negate our constant effort for better inclusion. Both groups resulted in quite similar emerging topics, including:

- Inadequate Communication and Access to Information that concern decisions on public matters, like working stages of public infrastructures that remain closed for months, opportunities, public decisions and community initiatives.

- Not feeling safe

- Lack of Community Engagement,

- Power Abuse by elected officials who break their political promises

- Silencing of Communities, and

- Lack of Accountability and Transparency by elected politicians and all types of authorities with an emphasis on police officers, who remain unaffected regardless their wrongdoings.

Our research suggests a need for enhanced efforts to:

- ***strengthen community engagement,***
- ***empower youth***
- ***address socioeconomic inequalities***
- ***bridge trust gaps and lack of information, as well as***
- ***continuance of restorative justice services and long-term investment in community prevention and direct intervention restorative justice work***

Originality

This report reflects on the second Speak Up! Forum, which occurred several months after the inaugural event. The results unveiled are unique and offer valuable insights, enabling the RJ4All team to maintain a consistent monitoring of the effectiveness of their services. This effort is a significant step towards the realisation of the world's first restorative justice postcode and undoubtedly the RJ4All team should make it their priority to implement these events on a regular basis.

Research Limitations

The recruitment of the focus group took place through an open call in all RJ4All social media, direct emailing, 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 13 individuals. Recognising that this limited sample size may not fully represent the preferences of the entire SE16 community, we advise a cautious approach when considering the recommendations.

Keywords: restorative justice, restorative justice postcode, peace circles, community engagement, accountability and positive growth.

1. Introduction and purpose of the paper

The present landscape is characterised by extreme inequalities, with a rigid divide between the affluent and marginalised populations. This multi-level inequality is logically translated into widespread human rights violations, high levels of criminality and conflict-based communities. Given these, there is a noticeable erosion of trust in public authorities, as many perceive these institutions as failing to address their concerns effectively. In response to these conditions, there is an emerging need to reestablish 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 reduce greed and distribute power more equitably, taking a unique approach distinct from traditional methods that focus on the negative aspects leading to crime. Over the past decade, 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, as a result, has taken significant steps toward establishing a model that nurtures individuals' strengths.

After 10 years of local, national and international work driven by these virtues, RJ4ALL decided to take decisive actions and 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 our 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. In reality, this consolidates our vision to see restorative justice principles instilled in the local institutions and community.

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 set their three-year strategy in place, turning a neglected building into an accessible 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 for improvement. We have also created a Steering Group with members from various sectors to aid in program implementation/evaluation. Currently, they are recruiting 5 more members to expand the network and enhance project endorsement. 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 repository of comprehensive findings, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative data, derived from the October 2023 focus group as well as a set of recommendations tailored for relevant stakeholders. These insights are placed within the broader framework of RJ4All's mission to establish the world's first restorative justice postcode.

2. Research Methodology and sampling

2.1. Recruitment process

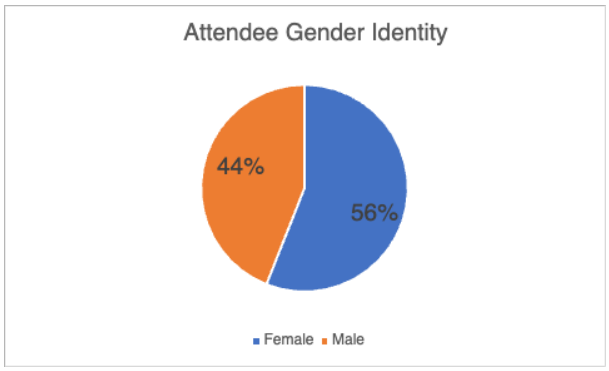
Participants for the focus group were recruited through diverse communication channels. An open call on RJ4All's social media platforms, newsletters, and direct emails targeted a broad network of stakeholders, encompassing local and national representatives, community members, and service users. Word-of-mouth tactics within the community enhanced engagement. Outreach extended to various organisations and professionals in criminal justice and community sectors, including law enforcement, Ministry of Justice, probation, police, local councillors, and public authorities. This comprehensive approach aimed at ensuring a diverse and inclusive representation for a well-rounded analysis within the focus groups.

2.2. Participants

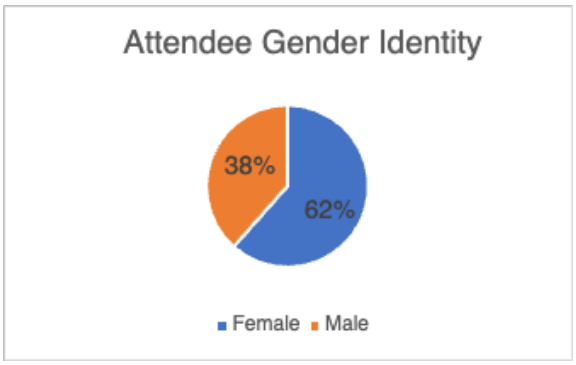
Participants registered through Eventbrite, where they acknowledged their consent for research participation. An open-door policy allowed on-the-day joiners, requiring completion of a printed consent form. On the event day, participants submitted key demographic information, including postcode, age group, gender, and ethnicity. No financial remuneration was provided, and participation was voluntary, driven by a commitment to contribute to the research. 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 Focus Group 1 and 2

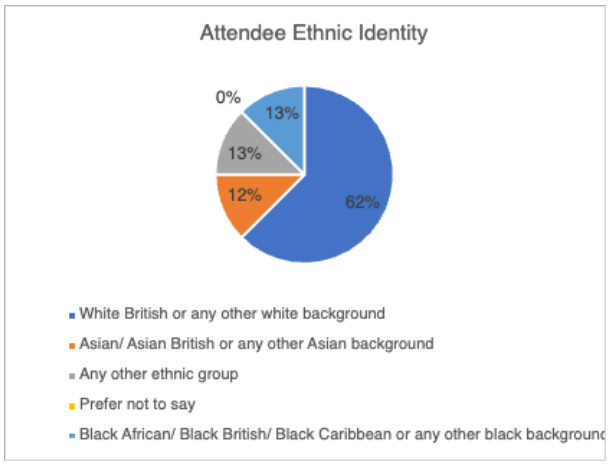
Participant Demographic Information Qualitative Study 1	**Participant Demographic Information Qualitative Study 2**

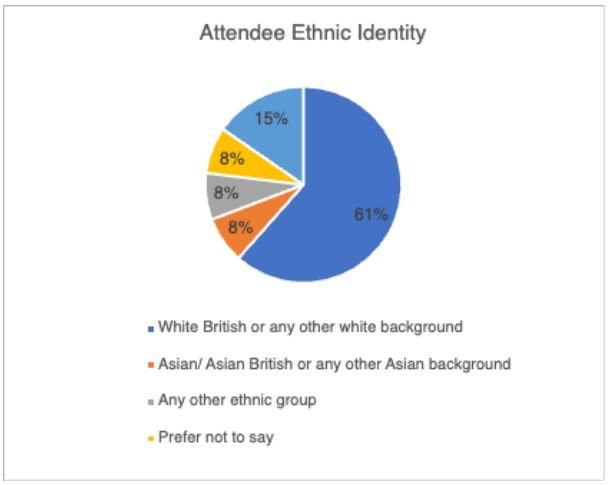


Attendance by Postcode
SE16: 56.3%
SE1: 12.6%
SE6: 18.3%
SE15: 6.3%
SW20: 6.3%



Attendance by Postcode
SE16: 75%
SE5: 8%
SE13: 8%
SE8: 8%





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 circle fostered open, inclusive dialogue, creating a collaborative atmosphere for in-depth exploration of research objectives. This structured, goal-oriented, and inclusive approach ensured community-led discussions with shared responsibility. The non-oppressive setting made use of a "talking piece" to

allow anyone holding it to speak without interruption, always respecting the topic and framing piece of the circle (United Nations, 2016).

The research deployed two focus groups within the Speak Up! Event on October 17th, 2023. Aligned with our vision for the first restorative justice postcode, local stakeholders convene quarterly for Speak Up! Restorative Justice Community Forums. These forums aim to recognise, empower, and integrate local perspectives into decision-making processes impacting 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 our community. Emphasising community engagement and individual empowerment, the Speak Up event captures, monitors, and reports on the community's concerns, needs, and visions, reflecting our core principle of inclusive community discourse and solutions.

RJ4All has made it its priority to implement these events on a regular basis. (RJ4All, 2023b). The Speak Up! event held on March 21st, 2023, marked the first Speak Up and kicked off a series of similar events, in our effort for local voices to be heard, empowered and included. The success of the first Speak Up was articulated through the first Quarterly Impact Report (Mlcek et al, 2023) and an Open Letter with Southwark residents' hopes for 2023 received and acknowledged by the Southwark Council (RJ4All, 2023c).

On these grounds, the goal of continuous similar work was established and the second ***Speak Up! Event*** took place on October 17th, 2023, providing a continuance on the discussion of relevant topics. Reestablishing trust and strengthening resilient communities cannot be achieved through superficial or quick remedies. Regular opportunities for community members to be heard aim to establish a sustainable change. Guided by our core values of power-sharing, equality, and respect, these events are facilitated by Dr. Theo Gavrielides and the RJ4All team.

2.4. Procedure

We implemented a well-structured process that prioritised smaller group discussions. To accommodate a significant number of participants, we conducted two separate circles. Each circle had a consistent format, starting with an introductory statement by our trained RJ4All team member. We provided context within a thematic framework and introduced ground rules and a talking piece to ensure a respectful environment. The discussion began with the first main question, followed by a round of conversation and documentation and the second main question. Each group's circle keeper facilitated a debriefing session to ensure all participants had a chance to reflect. We recorded both focus groups 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 Speak Up event, including their gender, age, ethnicity, and postcodes. A total of 13 people (without including the RJ4All Staff that facilitated, kept notes and participated) participated in the event, with 6 in one focus group and 7 in the other.

3.1.1 Gender Demographics

Five of the 13 participants were male, and eight were female.

Figure 1

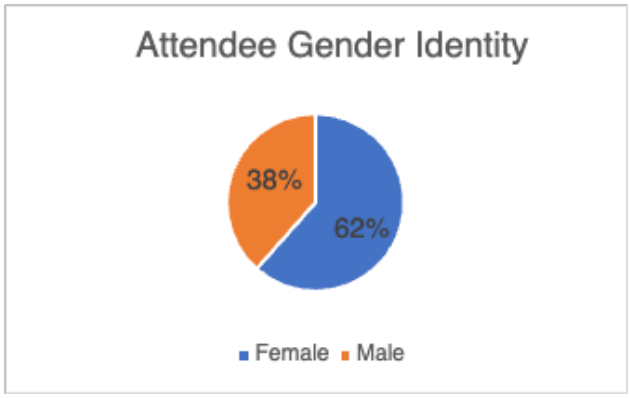
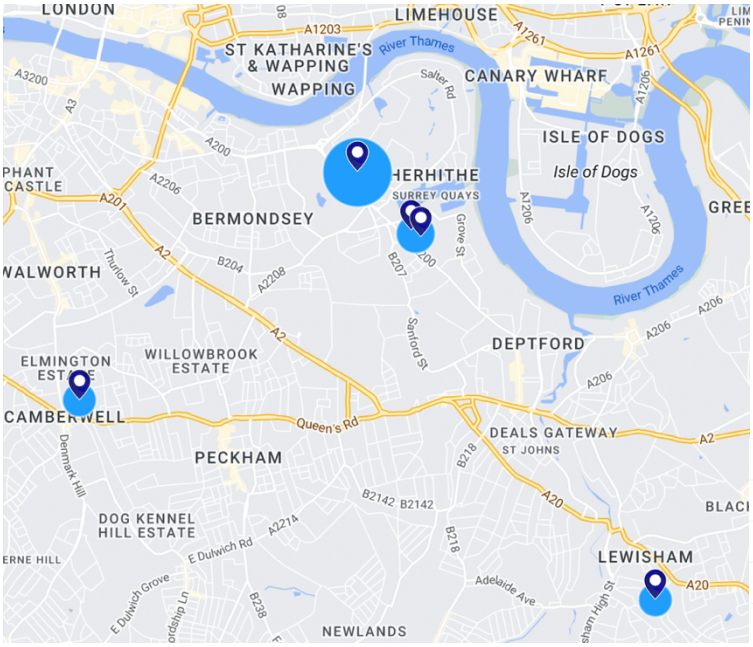


Chart Displaying Attendee Gender Identity

3.1.2 Postcode Demographics

The geographic distribution of event attendees reflects a primarily local presence, with 9 out of 13 participants residing in the SE16 area. Additionally, 1 attendee was from SE13, 2 from SE8, and 1 from SE5, highlighting the diverse but predominantly South East London representation.

Figure 2



Attendance by Postcode
SE16: 75%
SE5: 8%
SE13: 8%
SE8: 8%

Chart Displaying Attendee Postcode

3.1.3 Ethnicity Demographics

The event's attendees displayed a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds. Among the participants, 8 identified as White British or of another white background, 1 as Asian/Asian British or of another Asian background, and 2 as Black African/Black British/Black Caribbean or of another black background, showcasing the multicultural makeup of the group.

Figure 3

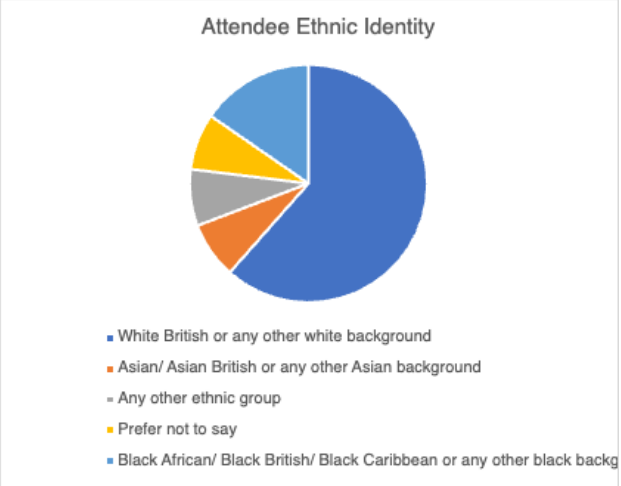


Chart Displaying Attendee Ethnic Identity

3.1.4 Age Demographics

The event brought together participants from a broad range of age groups. Among the attendees, 4 were in the 55-65 age group, 3 in the 40-55 range, 3 in the 20-29 category, while 1 belonged to the 66+ age group, and 1 was in the 30-39 age bracket, reflecting a diverse cross-section of generations.

Figure 4

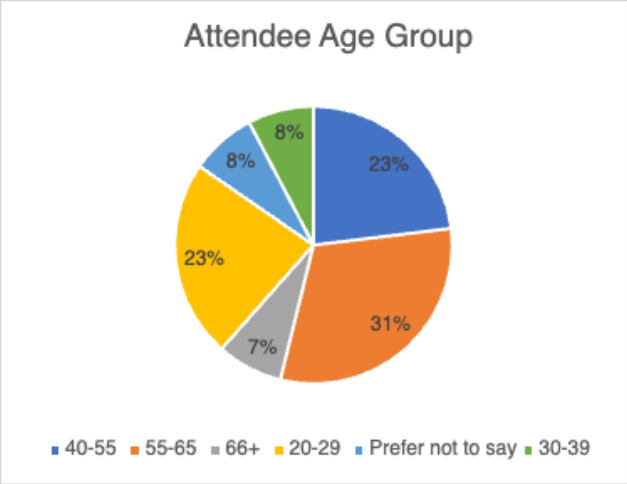


Chart Displaying Attendee Age Group

3.2 Qualitative Data Display

3.2.1 Framing Piece – thematic context

As stated above, both focus group sessions were framed within the same overarching topic and driving questions. The thematic angle for both focus groups centred on addressing the core issues of trust deficits within the community with respect to public authorities, and the underlying causes of harm, crime, and injustices. This theme was closely aligned with the broader vision of the entire project, which aims to rectify power imbalances, rebuild trust, foster community cohesion, and mitigate the root causes of harm and anti-social behaviour.

To guide the discussion, two main questions presented to participants in order to keep the circles in line with the project's goals; "What is the most significant injustice or source of harm you have encountered within our community?" and "Based on the outcome of what we discussed, what are your needs and how can the community help in this?".

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

3.2.2 "What is the most significant injustice or source of harm you have encountered within our community?" ("What has been the role of the authority on each occasion?" – subsidiary question)

Focus Group 1

3.2.2.1 "Inadequate Communication-Access to Information". Limited access to authorities' decisions on public matters and frequent strikes contribute to challenges in the community. The lack of information sharing about opportunities, public decisions and community initiatives further hampers community engagement and participation in the decision-making. Consequently, community concerns often go unaddressed, fostering frustration and a sense of helplessness. This is linked with the following statement.

3.2.2.2 "Lack of Community Engagement/Involvement". Community members are increasingly frustrated by their marginalisation in decision-making processes. They feel excluded from key consultations led by the council and police, where only politicians have a significant role, neglecting people with expertise/knowledge. This lack of community engagement has been emphasised by those involved, who are struggling to achieve meaningful involvement and seek more inclusive processes.

3.2.2.3 "Lack of protection on safe spaces, green spaces and playgrounds" Participants agreed on the constant battle to keep safe spaces open, a fact that certainly affects the youth and their wellbeing. This deficit of places jeopardises the overall quality of life and recreational opportunities in the neighborhood.

3.2.2.4 "Unsafety in the neighbourhood – lack of action". Ongoing drug issues in the neighbourhood contribute to a notable rise in street crimes, particularly vandalism, creating a pervasive sense of insecurity. Community members expressed heightened concerns about safety, evidenced by vehicle damage and an overall feeling of insecurity. Government inaction perpetuates these issues, prompting residents to resort to private measures for protection. Participants also noted the connection to hygiene problems and a decline in general health and safety.

3.2.2.5 "Disparities in Access to Community Services". This problem lies in the unequal distribution of essential resources and support systems within the community, leading to marginalised groups facing greater challenges in accessing vital services (healthcare, education, and social assistance). As noted, people feel left out and politicians make decisions without proper community input. Additionally, all immigrants shared a sense of disenfranchisement and fear due to their immigration status, suggesting that authorities have not effectively engaged with them.

3.2.2.6 "Unfamiliarity within the community/alienation". The spark levels of unfamiliarity within the community result in great alienation, where individuals feel disconnected and excluded due to their lack of knowledge about the community members.

3.2.2.7 "Misuse of Authority and Abuse of Power". Circle participants highlighted the abuse of authority by elected officials, along with a lack of accountability, leading to fear, betrayal, distrust, and apathy. This mistrust extends to all types of authorities, eroding people's confidence. The call is for a more transparent system that treats everyone fairly and holds those who abuse power accountable. Currently, people feel stripped of decision-making power, with a sense that some officials have acted in their own interests rather than the common good.

3.2.2.8 "Voiced people being targeted". Participants stated that voiced community members have become victims of intimidation and bullying, a fact that discourages further people from engaging in the community and the decision-making.

3.2.2.9 "Lack of money and lack of creative and smart initiatives". Finances is one of the principal things that can grease the wheels of progress, and improve safety and improve progression in quality services for all. Unfortunately, money has not been used for the benefit of the community.

Figure 5

Visual Word Map with participants contribution regarding "Harms and Injustices" for Focus Group 1.

<u>Focus Group 2</u>

3.2.2.10 "Voiceless and disempowered youth". Many voiceless and disempowered youth find themselves marginalised and unable to influence decisions that affect their lives. Youth does not have a voice, and their saying is not included in any decision-making. Democracy is declining.

3.2.2.11 "Crime, discrimination against marginalised groups and socioeconomic inequalities." There is lack of engagement and support from authorities in addressing issues related to arbitrary "stop and search", which disproportionately affects marginalised groups. Additionally, it was noted that there is remarkable distance between people of different class, race, gender, etc.

3.2.2.12 "Unsafety in the streets". The pervasive sense of unsafety in the streets has left many community members feeling vulnerable and anxious while navigating their neighbourhoods. Addressing this issue is essential for creating a secure and thriving environment where people can go about their daily lives without fear.

3.2.2.13 "Lack of opportunities and reintegration for people on probation". Participants highlighted the inadequate opportunities and support for individuals on probation, impeding their successful reintegration into society and perpetuating a cycle of reoffending and incarceration. Investing in rehabilitation programs and community reintegration is crucial to break this cycle and support their transition to productive, law-abiding citizens.

3.2.2.14 "Dealing with trauma". One circle participant brought the struggle of dealing with trauma, which can have profound and far-reaching effects on various aspects of an individual's life, including mental health, relationships, and overall well-being.

3.2.2.15 "Inadequate Communication-Access to Information". Multiple participants highlighted a significant disconnection between decision-makers and the general population, with those in power often making decisions that seemed distant from the reality or remain uninformed about ongoing issues on public infrastructures etc. This lack of transparency left the community feeling excluded from the decision-making process, ultimately leading to a growing sense of frustration and disengagement among the residents. This is linked to the following statement.

3.2.2.16 "Lack of Community Engagement and Involvement". Canada Water faces a significant lack of community engagement, with participants pointing to missed opportunities despite capable individuals and organisations. This issue appears to be deeply ingrained in the community's culture, as many feel reluctant to engage with ongoing matters. This cultural problem leads to a sense of disconnectedness. This is linked to the following.

3.2.2.17 "Lack of trust between authorities and community members". The lack of trust between authorities and the community hinders effective governance and collaboration, leaving residents feeling disempowered and disconnected from decision-making processes. This distrust contributes to frustration, apathy, and a sense of hopelessness. Some may feel reluctant to report issues, fearing that their concerns won't be taken seriously.

3.2.2.18 "Illusion of a political divide and the divisive nature of online communication". Participants exchanged ideas about the fact that the illusion of a political divide often obscures the common ground and shared concerns that individuals from different political backgrounds may have.

3.2.2.19 "Alienation, disconnection, division". This is the aftermath of digitalisation and technology throughout all the settings. There are also divisive messages from the governmental agendas, which contribute to polarisation and a lack of neutrality in public discourse. A more inclusive and balanced approach to discussions is indispensable. This is linked to the following

3.2.2.20 "Digital exclusion". Digital exclusion was brought to the circle, as a pressing societal problem that widens disparities, limiting access to information, education, and economic opportunities for those without access to digital technologies.

Figure 6

Visual Word Map with participants contribution regarding "Harms and Injustices" for Focus Group 2.

3.2.3 "Based on the outcome of what we discussed, what are your needs and how can the community help in this?"

<u>Focus Group 1</u>

3.2.3.1 "Scrutiny and research into the expenditure of local authorities – availability of information". A clear division of how money is allocated and transparent access to this information empower people with the knowledge they need to hold authorities accountable for their financial decisions, ultimately fostering trust and accountability in the community.

3.2.3.2 "Better education". Education is the key to reduce anti-social behaviour and root out early in life the factors that lead to violence before it escalates. Our community needs to invest on support for school children in transitioning to secondary education.

3.2.3.3 "Development of sports". Participants emphasised how vital is to develop sports in order to promote physical well-being, foster teamwork, and provide constructive recreational opportunities for residents of all ages.

3.2.3.4 "Support green spaces, as safe spaces". The circle agreed that green spaces can be essential for providing areas for recreation, and fostering a stronger connection to nature.

3.2.3.5 "Need for community, collaboration and connections". Circle participants stressed that uniting different community groups and having a seat at the table when discussing development and changes in the area is essential. What is needed is the existence of community bonds and the feeling of unity.

3.2.3.6 "Invest on long term fixes". The government should understand that quick fixes are not sustainable, and they need to invest on achieving long term good for the community.

3.2.3.7 "Redistributing power and promoting positive community engagement". Based on all the discussions about harm and injustices, participants highlighted the need to redistribute power amongst the community and uplift the community discussions. Additionally, there is a dire need for recognition and appreciation for community members who contribute positively. This is linked to the following.

3.2.3.8 "Fostering a positive attitude in the community". Fostering a positive attitude is crucial for promoting social cohesion, resilience, and a sense of collective responsibility, ultimately leading to a more harmonious and thriving local environment. Participants talked highly about "togetherness".

3.2.3.9 "Transparency and accountability in community matters". This need arose on different occasions and mentioned by everyone as something we are lacking. It is evident that in order to build trust with the authorities, community members need to be involved and respected.

3.2.3.10 "Fairness – appraisal and reprimand". Ensuring fairness in the appraisal and reprimand processes is vital for maintaining a just and equitable system where individuals are recognized and rewarded for their contributions, and consequences are applied consistently when necessary.

Figure 7

Visual Word Map with participants contribution regarding "Needs and community support" for Focus Group 1.

<u>Focus Group 2</u>

3.2.3.11 "Need for community bonds, community hubs, engagement and connections". They stressed the significance of community centres as hubs for people to connect, know each other, and

collaborate. The vanishing physical focal points and diminishing meeting spaces are concerning, emphasising the need to create places for activities and connections to build a sense of community. They propose that the community should proactively rebuild this sense and not depend on external forces.

3.2.3.12 "Less isolation and segregation – take the time to connect". Find shared interests and build on bonding and connecting. The group mentioned the importance of making people feel welcome, respected, and valued in their participation.

3.2.3.13 "Development of sports". The circle discussed the disconnection among young people and the importance of having opportunities, such as sports or activities, to reduce isolation and create connections. They mentioned that the community should make an effort to understand and address the reasons behind certain behaviours.

3.2.3.14 "Better access to information and better allocation of money". Several participants touched upon the need for information hubs and greater coordination of resources, such as job opportunities and apprenticeships, in the community. They suggest that there's an abundance of resources but a lack of central hubs to connect people with those opportunities.

Figure 8

Visual Word Map with participants contribution regarding "Needs and community support" for Focus Group 2.

4. Discussion

Following the presentation of outcomes from the two focus groups, the next section offers a detailed examination of topics discussed in circle sessions and the demographic profiles of participants. The goal is to provide an overview of both focus groups, comparing outcomes and drawing meaningful conclusions. The results will be discussed in the context of the previous focus group and RJ4All's efforts to establish a restorative justice postcode.

4.1 Qualitative Data Analysis

In this paper's discussion section, we thoroughly analyse outcomes from both focus groups. Commonalities in responses, concerns, and identified needs emerge, despite distinct demographic compositions. This consistency enhances external validity and generalisability, affirming the

robustness and relevance of our research in a broader context, aligning with efforts to establish a restorative justice postcode in SE16.

The discussion is structured around two key questions: *harms* and *injustices*, and c*ommunity needs*, with comparisons between the groups before connecting with the previous Speak Up event in the Restorative Justice Postcode Project.

4.1.1. Harm and Injustices

In addressing sources of harm and injustice in the community, results from both groups revealed common themes and challenges. ***Transparent governance*** and ***declining community engagement*** are shared concerns in both groups, where distrust in authorities is recurrent and often tied to unmet needs and broken promises. The interconnected nature of these issues is evident, touching on ***disempowerment***, ***barriers to engaging with authorities***, and ***information inaccessibility (about public decisions for areas that concern everyone, new initiatives, funding allocation etc.)***. Participants underscored the importance of inclusive, accountable decision-making to address community challenges and foster engagement and support from authorities, empowering individuals and revitalising democratic processes. The community strongly desires their ***voices to be heard***. Furthermore, both groups highlighted ***safety issues, increased criminality***, and a pervasive ***drug problem***, leading to escalated street crimes, vandalism, and youth crime. Furthermore, ***discrimination*** against marginalized groups results in ***inequalities*** and disparities in accessing community services. ***Alienation, disconnection, and division***, along with mistrust from constant authority abuse, are significant factors in community struggles. Discussions also covered ***divisive societal discourse***, ***digital exclusion, financial constraints, limited creative solutions,*** and ***reduced opportunities for at-risk youth.***

These shared themes underscore the significance of these issues within the SE16 community and the urgency to address them comprehensively.

4.1.2. Needs and the community

In addressing needs and the community's role, both circles focused on similar key transformations for a coherent community and the eventual establishment of a restorative justice postcode. The first group stressed ***transparency in local authorities, improved education and sports, heightened community collaboration, positive engagement,*** and ***recognition of contributions*** as crucial for addressing trust issues, challenges and enhancing overall well-being. The second focus group reinforced these findings by highlighting common needs, including reestablishing a ***sense of community, creating physical spaces for social connection and activities, combating isolation,*** and ***motivating community participation.*** Both discussions reveal a shared desire to **combat power abuse,** as this is currently experienced by local authorities and councillors who broke their political promises as well as police officers in local community units. Aligned to that, participants expressed their need to get back to the centre of community discussions and redistribute the power equally. Unfair treatment by public bodies and lack of accountability of politicians and police officers are acknowledged as significant issues causing fear and discomfort, leading to further disconnection and isolation. Prompt and efficient action is necessary to reinvigorate the community's role, as emphasised by both groups.

Bottom line, participants to the focus groups stressed the significance of valuing and empowering community members, giving them the power, they need to bring change.

4.1.3. Links with the first Speak Up event and RJ4All work.

The first Focus group in March 2023 shifted its focus on the Main Hopes and Main Fears for Southwark in 2030. It is noteworthy that many of the topics addressed then have reoccurred now,

firstly highlighting that the data captured represent an important fraction of the SE16 community and secondly confirming the work and top priorities set by the RJ4All team as part of their work to build the first restorative justice postcode. Below, we seek to display the recurring needs of our SE16 community, as expressed through the three focus groups and highlight their existence along with the postcode project.

Drawing from both events (three focus groups) the most remarkable finding revolves around **the lack of community empowerment, involvement and collaboration**, as well as the **alienation of community members** and the **high levels of disconnection**. This is sourced to power being gathered in public authorities' hands, with community being absolutely distanced. Subsequently, a climate of fear, untrustworthiness and disconnection is cultivated, resulting in the community missing its goal. With these heightened concerns, the RJ4All project has been formed exactly to establish **a strong connection between the local community and public authorities**, ensuring equitable power distribution among key stakeholders. The active involvement of community members so far has not only instilled a sense of ownership and inclusion but have also nurtured more resilient relationships and collaboration among stakeholders. People have been offered a space to voice it up and get some sense of power in being members of the society.

Furthermore, **crime, inequalities, unsafety, and disparities** are considered an extension of the problem. Addressing these issues requires securing safe places and tackling root causes early in life through education, sports, resilience-building, and fostering a sense of belonging in the community. In line with the RJ4All postcode project, a vibrant hub has been established, providing a comprehensive range of free services, including Youth Clubs, Well-being circles, a community fridge and pantry, accessible sports at RJ4All gym, Warm Hub services, digital inclusion sessions,

and Community Consultation Forums. These services aim to eliminate inequality and unsafety, benefiting all those utilising them.

Finally, a recurring theme in the focus groups is the need for **long-term investment in community efforts**, **sustainable solution**s, and **sufficient funding** to address community needs. It should be noted that all the abovementioned services, which are proved to mitigate community's needs, are contingent on funding and are offered to community users at no cost. Participants emphasised the importance of investing in youth development and community cohesion. RJ4All, particularly through resilience workshops for youth and services under the Postcode project, has been a pioneer in this regard. Securing ongoing funding is crucial to ensure the project and the Community Centre's long-term functionality.

The outcomes of the three focus groups conducted since the set-off of the project in January 2023 have overwhelmingly validated the significance of our initiatives, given that the break-down of our work sits exactly in a position to mitigate and address the negative feelings of the community members. The feedback received serves as a testament to the multitude of benefits encapsulated within the diverse services offered under the umbrella of our postcode project. These findings underscore the relevance of the project's expansive scope, which is the commitment to rebuilding a strong sense of community, combating inequalities, and fostering reconciliation among community members, local authorities, and the general community at large. By actively listening to the needs and aspirations of our community, we aim to open constructive dialogues that will not only bridge gaps but also contribute to the collective well-being of everyone involved.

Almost a year into this collective effort, we are able to know and showcase the benefits into the everyday life of the community members taking advantage of all our services. Service users have found the RJ4All Community Centre as a place to refer to in order to regain their community

sense, work on their well-being thanks to the well-being circles, and generally root out the factors that predominantly burden them, including poverty issues, sense of belonging and having power to talk etc. With power abuse, poverty and community tensions on the spotlight, for almost a year now RJ4All committed and achieved to address these particular needs and offer practical solutions.

The positive affirmations from the focus groups reinforce our belief that our project is not just a set of services but a catalyst for positive change and an example to be followed by other communities as well, uniting individuals and authorities in a shared vision for a more harmonious community.

4.2 Quantitative Data Analysis

This segment of the report delves deeper into the demographics of the focus groups. It should be noted that the size of the focus group was kept rather small, with 13 attendees, to gain a more in-depth understanding on the framing piece and driving questions.

4.2.1 Gender Demographics

There is a fair balance between women and men, while the same was reflected in each one of the two circles. This gender balance promotes a collaborative and equitable environment where all voices can be valued in the collective discourse. Notably, people from gender-nonconforming groups remain absolutely welcomed to these sessions and there is inclusion in follow up sessions would add up to the existing data.

4.2.2 Postcode Demographics

It is remarkable that over 60% of the attendees were indeed from SE16, which supports our project and its geographical scope. At the same time, the fact that other postcodes were also represented should not diminish the results as they would still fall within the Southeast London.

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, especially considering that in fact over 50% of the SE16 population is BAME communities and 53% migrants. Further emphasis should be placed in reaching more voices from all backgrounds that comprise the SE16 area.

4.2.4 Age Demographics

In terms of age groups, this Focus Group managed to cast the net far and wide and include voices from younger but also older age groups. Definitely, this is something to replicate in all follow up events.

5. Critical conclusions including recommendations

The Speak Up event in October 2023 was a continuation of RJ4All's vision and services. The two focus groups served as a tangible manifestation of RJ4All's objectives, emphasising power redistribution and community cohesion. The event reinforced the mission of the RJ4All Restorative Justice Postcode Project, actively uniting stakeholders, amplifying community voices, and bringing SE16 residents together under restorative justice values. Following the second Focus Group, RJ4All aims to regularly provide a space for the community to gather and have their voices heard.

The discussion among the circle participants of both focus groups underscored the pressing need for rebuilding a strong sense of community in their respective areas. Transparency, collaboration, and positive community engagement are essential for addressing the needs and challenges within the community.

In a nutshell, the importance of physical spaces like community centres for restorative justice dialogue, understanding and empowering individuals with diverse backgrounds, reducing isolation

through youth activities, and promoting empathy for a stronger community was discussed. Circle participants collectively aimed to strengthen community bonds, create connection spaces, and enhance understanding, making their communities more vibrant, interconnected, and responsive to all residents' needs. Everyone emphasised the necessity for transparency and accountability in local authorities' fund allocation, advocating for openness to better align with community needs and build trust.

5.1. Recommendations

In the light of the discussion around alarming harms and urgent needs in the community, the following recommendations for the RJ4All team, the steering group, and external stakeholder can be made.

5.1.1. Strengthen Community Engagement and Inclusivity: Create regular community forums at communal spaces and events to encourage active participation, promote inclusivity, and address unfamiliarity within the community. This highlights everyone's desire for multiple physical spaces for community bonding. The Speak Up events should become a regular forum. More important, the outcomes of the events should be consistently communicated to relevant local authorities, like the Southwark Council, policymakers and in general to people with power in the community to bring some change. Participants need to feel that these community consultations are meaningful and have a profound impact.

5.1.2. Empower Youth and Address Socioeconomic Inequalities: Continue the work with youth and fostering resilience, as well as implementing our RJiNEAR model during our Youth Clubs. The Youth Clubs and all related resilience workshops and activities aim to gather people from all backgrounds and find common ground to build on commonalities, rather that dividing based on

differences. The RJiNEAR model of resilience, crime prevention and control should continue being the basis of our restorative work with young people, promoting their talents and strengths and helping them develop positive identities Our youth empowerment programme should cast the net far and wide to give this opportunity to all people and families in the area to benefit from the work on building resilience as a key element to divert from anti-social behaviour and alienation. It is good to consider targeted approaches through local schools, social workers, Youth services and organisations with relevant field of work. Considering their remarkable work on youth and sports as well as their community links with other respectful organisations, Street Games should be further involved in the dissemination and recruitment process of the Youth Clubs. Additionally, our Youth Clubs could definitely benefit from the impressively big network of our funder, Rotherhithe Consolidated Charities.

5.1.3. Bridging Trust Gaps: RJ4All should further develop and stabilise an open dialogue between authorities, like the Southwark Council and the British Land, and community members to bridge trust gaps and promote respectful communication and fact-based discussions within the community. RJ4All has already started to building bridges between the Southwark Council, the local councillors and the community and should continue expanding the networks if we wish to see a remarkable change. The role of the Steering Group regarding this should be vital and their networks should serve the scope of the project. Community members should picture the Steering group as well as their networks and connections with public authorities as members of the community they belong.

5.1.4. Improve Communication and Access to Information: RJ4All should become a point of reference and invest in improved communication channels and partnerships with local media and organizations to ensure residents have access to timely and relevant information about open calls, opportunities, initiatives to be involved and general updates about community developments.

5.1.5. Equitable Access to Restorative Services: For stronger community cohesion, RJ4All should prioritise implementing restorative justice methods in the community. The team is advised to undergo appropriate restorative justice training and signpost to the right services when necessary. Actively seeking partnerships with local businesses, educational institutions, and voluntary organizations is recommended to expand the range of services and support available, ensuring a comprehensive and sustainable response to addressing inequalities.

5.1.6. Long-term investment: RJ4All should continue building long-term relationships within the community and at the same time seeking funding that will sustain the project and its community services. As part of its broader project scope and following the evolving long-term relationships between local authorities and the community, RJ4All can expand its successful prevention and early intervention work by incorporating direct restorative justice interventions. This strategic addition aims to divert cases from the traditional criminal justice system, encompassing police, courts, and prisons. By considering this enhancement in upcoming RJ4All events, we align with our overarching objective of diverting police and criminal justice case-loads to community-based approaches.

This streamlined set of recommendations offers actionable steps for RJ4All and external stakeholders to address key themes from our focus groups, simplifying implementation and focusing on essential strategies for community empowerment. While recognising past achievements, it's crucial for RJ4All to maintain an unwavering commitment to restorative justice principles, respecting the diverse needs of the community. This dedication is essential for fostering lasting positive change, strengthening community bonds, and advancing the organisation's mission. To ensure long-term funding and sustainability, RJ4All should pursue a dedicated funding strategy, exploring diverse sources to support ongoing operations and project expansion.

6. 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".

Perhaps include our website address: www.rotherhithecc.co.uk

Rotherhithe Consolidated Charities

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