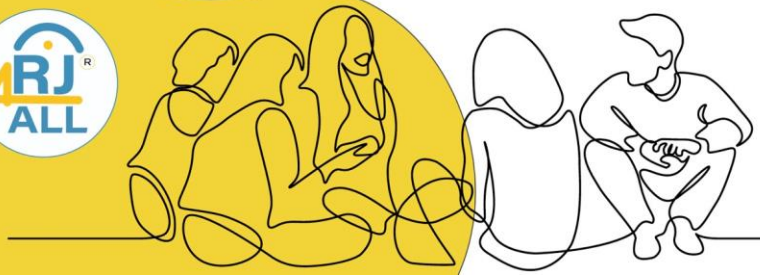


RJ4ALL BUILDING THE WORLD'S FIRST
RESTORATIVE JUSTICE POSTCODE

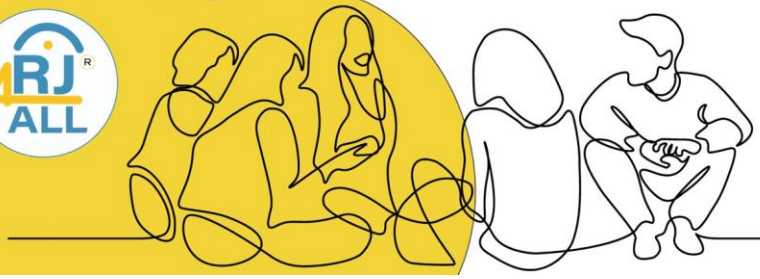
Building the World's First Restorative Justice Postcode

Fourth Quarterly Impact Report from April 2024- July 2024

Hannah Kebede, Sofia Sideridou and Dr. Theo Gavrielides

Restorative Justice for All

July, 2024



RJ4ALL BUILDING THE WORLD'S FIRST RESTORATIVE JUSTICE POSTCODE

Dissecting Mental Health: A Step Towards Acknowledging and Rebuilding Community Solidarity

Abstract

Purpose

In January 2023, the Restorative Justice for All International Institute (RJ4All) undertook a mission to build the world's first restorative justice postcode in SE16, sought through a postcode-wide project. In the project's second year of its operation, RJ4All maintains the responsibility to monitor the effect services delivered from its Community Centre in SE16 London and online to tackle underlying inequality, power imbalance and abuses, social fragmentation that influence anti-social behaviour and community tensions at the interpersonal and intercommunity level. In light of restorative justice values, RJ4All services seek to reflect this sentiment, as well as influence international implementation.

This paper marks the fourth qualitative instalment of the restorative justice postcode project, examining the fourth Speak Up event RJ4All has organised. This report serves as a follow- up report to the inaugural year of the project (2023), contributing to a continuous gathering of up-to-date qualitative evidence. Its aims consist of collating and analysing qualitative accounts, enabling the assessment of the projects impact and proposing recommendations. Ultimately, it aims to provide information to achieve three fundamental 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 considerable evidence framing power abuse as paramount to underlying inequalities, unmet mental health needs and human rights violations. This urges immediate action to redress power imbalances and re-centre community voices. Through the utilisation of Community

Consultation Forums, RJ4All creates a space to boost local perspectives and insights. In light of previous success in our "Speak Up!" Community Forum, in February 2024, RJ4All hosted its fourth event in July 2024. Using the research method of "focus groups", the RJ4All team invited local community members, public authorities and stakeholders to discuss the prevalence of mental health in the SE16 community.

This study examined the manifestation of mental health; its community impact, root causes and practical solutions, followed by the role of public and other agencies. The questions were framed within the wider model of the project, identifying fractured relations between the community and public authorities and thus persistent level of distrust surrounding mental health support. This paper also aimed to reveal widespread stigmatisation and marginalisation in light of the ambiguity surrounding mental health.

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

From the July 2024 community forum, insights provided from various attendees represented predominantly Southeast postcodes. With a majority of SE attendees, SE17 and SE8 in addition to SE16, as well as East London attendees, this sheds light on the widespread impact and eager contribution to the restorative justice postcode project. It remains imperative to the nature of the project, that there needs to be better inclusion of age, gender and ethnicity representation. The study presented emerging themes, including:

- ***Disruption of education and employability***
- ***Increase of alternative criminal lifestyle, due to mental health stigma***
- ***Stigmatisation and subsequent marginalisation, exclusion***
- ***Necessity of increasing accessibility to public services***
- ***Level of distrust in public authorities***
- ***Cultural shift***
- ***Lack of knowledge on mental health***
- ***Insufficient signposting***
- ***Devolution and re-centering the voices of community members***
- ***State action***

- ***Employing restorative justice values***
- ***Power of online mental health forums***

Our research suggests a requirement for improved efforts to:

- ***Expand and improve accessibility to community spaces for mental health support***
- ***Employ a better integration of mental health into institutional frameworks***
- ***Continue to encourage restorative justice values for both internal and external implementation***
- ***Increase utilisation of online mental health forums***
- ***Repair the fragile relationship between the community and public authorities***
- ***Increase streams of funding for public services including mental health facilities***

Originality

This report provides insights into the fourth Speak Up! Forum; the second focus group of Year 2 (2024) of the Restorative Justice Postcode Project. The results reveal nuanced perspective, reflect community needs and concerns, as well as propose an ideal landscape of where SE16 should be. With reflections on Year 1 findings, this report draws comparisons to previous conclusions, enabling the RJ4All team to regularly assess the efficiency of its services and seek new avenues. This examination stands as a significant contribution toward establishing the world's first restorative justice postcode, highlighting the necessary regular implementation of the Speak Up! event. Hosting community consultation forums prove to centrally position community perspective and widen communication lines to key stakeholders in SE16.

Research Limitations

The recruitment process involved facets of engagement including an open call in all RJ4All social media platforms, direct emailing to community members, stakeholders and prior attendees, publication of our newsletter and the word of mouth. This was implemented with the intention of recruiting a wide net of people from SE16 and Southeast London more broadly. The non-probability

sample of 8 individuals (excluding 4 members of RJ4All staff) contributed, marking this sample group as considerably smaller than the previous Speak Up! Event. We acknowledge that this sample size may not be reflective of the entire SE16 community- limiting demographic representation of age, gender and ethnicity. Therefore, it is advised that these limitations are considered when deliberating on our recommendations.

Keywords: restorative justice postcode, mental health, community spaces, accessibility to public services

1. Introduction and purpose of the paper

The current landscape of London reflects a city divided by inequality and adversity, faced primarily by marginalised groups in society (Shankley & Williams. 2020). Inequality manifests through human rights violations, a de-prioritisation of marginalised groups, increasing criminality and fractured social cohesion. Through this experience, there is a clear impact on community belief in state systems, and subsequent state dependency. There is a noticeable collapse of trust in public authorities with many who perceive these institutions as inefficient and in turn, unable to engage with community needs. Consequently, there is an urgency to repair the relationship between the community and public authorities. This begins with re-centering the power of communities as they provide the insight and knowledge of local needs, facilitating fundamental change.

Established over 10 years ago, RJ4All was founded with the objective to achieve a redistribution of power through a restorative justice framework. In place of more punitive structures framing the mitigation of social issues including criminality and antisocial behaviour, RJ4All seeks to employ a more holistic approach dealing with harm through positive, user- led methods. By integrating restorative justice values into crime- prevention frameworks, this creates space to consider the influence of societal failures and unmet needs as opposed to placing blame on the individual. 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. The RJ4All Rotherhithe Community Centre exists to be a hub for community empowerment, utilising free services including a foodbank, a community fridge, sport classes, digital drop ins and employability workshops .

RJ4All pursued and committed itself towards rebuilding the relationship between the community and the state through initiatives such as the restorative justice postcode project, striving towards a global effort encouraging restorative justice as a world social justice movement. The restorative justice postcode initiative honours this goal through reducing the gap between the community and the state, employing participation from both positions. This means inviting key stakeholders and members of the local community, and distributing equal power to all participating members, in turn creating an inclusive and welcoming environment.

To date, high levels of civic engagement and belonging have been reported within SE16, demonstrating improved connections and stronger community spaces. As mentioned, central to our success is the Rotherhithe Community Centre, a safe and accessible space where diverse SE16 communities come together. Initiatives including the implementation of well- being circles, food bank, cook and connect classes are reflective of this sentiment. We also have created a Steering Group consisting of community and faith leaders, local councilors, businesses, the local authority, and community organisations, which meets quarterly to advise, scrutinise, and support the pilot. This group plays a crucial role in ensuring the programme's success by providing strategic direction, promoting community voice, and facilitating partnerships that enhance the programme's impact.

This report acts as a continuation of previous accounts, further contributing towards the mission of achieving the first restorative postcode in the world. Our regular community consultation "Speak Up" events have become a cornerstone event, addressing and discussing critical issues such as community disempowerment, physical and mental health within the community, youth crime, anti-social behaviour, lack of community spaces, and the erosion of trust in public authorities due to perceived power abuse and lack of accountability. This report explores insights from the most recent Speak Up Circle held in July 2024. It comprises qualitative and quantitative data obtained through discussions surrounding ***mental health;*** primary areas of concern include ***a) community impact, b) addressing root causes and c) practical solutions***. This report marks the fourth instalment in a series of impactful qualitative accounts capturing the outcomes of our community

consultations and better facilitates a thorough understanding of societal failures in SE16 and finding solutions to achieve fundamental change.

Summary of findings from the projects' first year

In reflection of the initial year's findings (2023), there is an urgent need to encourage community cohesion and empowerment, bridge trust gaps and improve accountability of public authorities. Key themes mentioned safety concerns, prevalence of youth crime, alienation of marginalised groups, police failures and injustice and community disempowerment. The findings implied a prioritisation of addressing safety concerns, community disengagement and power abuse. Moreover, there is a clear repetition of fractured relations between the community and public authorities and this needs to be monitored through continued assessment.

2. Research Methodology and sampling

2.1. Recruitment process

Participants for the focus group were recruited via RJ4All platforms, including a dedicated webpage with registration links, social media channels like Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn, as well as newsletters and direct emails targeting public authorities and local community members. Other forms of outreach included contacting representatives through our database of service users. Additionally, communication was extended to other umbrella organisations pertinent to boosting the support of Southwark community, alongside local councillors and MPs. By creating a dynamic space with both community representatives and public authorities, this provides a holistic perspective into discussions surrounding mental health. It enables inclusive representation, encouraging a comprehensive analysis.

2.2. Participants

Through the use of online booking system (Eventbrite), participants confirmed their attendance and consent for research participation. An open-door policy enabled walk- in participants as well, requiring the completion of a printed consent form. Given the voluntary nature of conducting this research, no entry or participation fee was required. On the day of the event,

participants submitted key demographic information including postcode, age group, gender and ethnicity. The collection of this information is significant in its consideration when exploring findings and drawing conclusions. In total 12 participants were counted for this focus group. Due to the summer period, it is common to have lower participation in events like this one compared to mid-year events, such as the February Speak Up session, which attracted 21 participants.

Table 1 – Demographic Information Comparison between Study 1, and 2 (year 1)

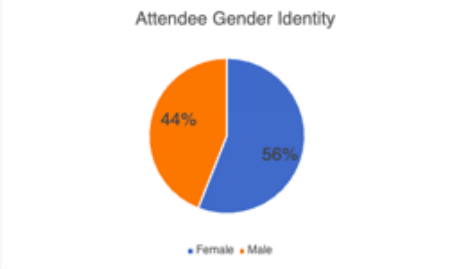
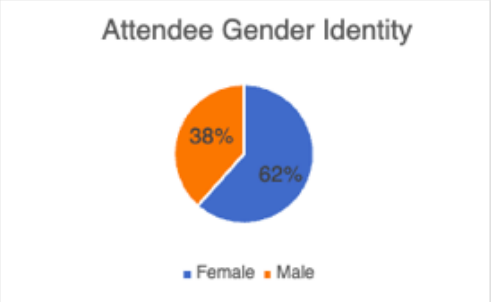
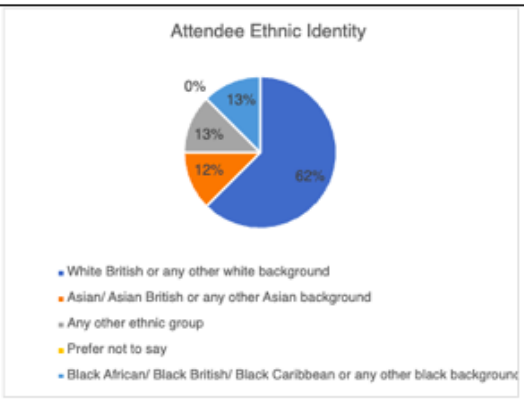
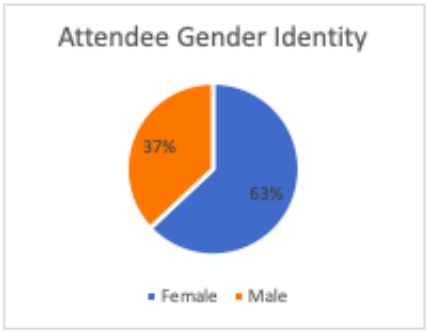
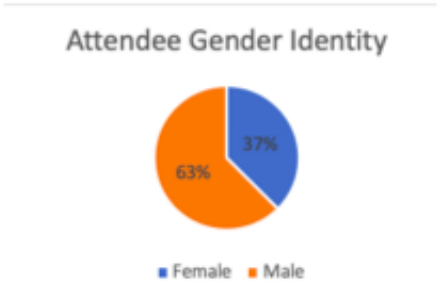
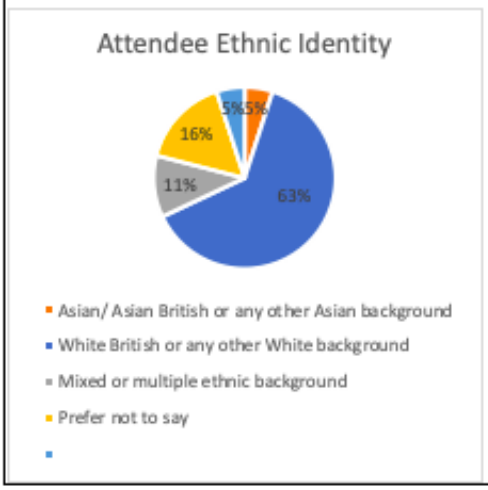
Participant Demographic Information Qualitative Study 1	Participant Demographic Information Qualitative Study 2
	
Attendance by Postcode SE16: 56.3% SE1: 12.6% SE6: 18.3% SE15: 6.3% SW20: 6.3%	Attendance by Postcode SE16: 75% SE5: 8% SE13: 8% SE8: 8%
	

Table 2 – Demographic Information Comparison between Study 3 and 4 (year 2)

Participant Demographic Information Qualitative Study 3	Participant Demographic Information Qualitative Study 4
	
Attendance by Postcode SE16: 47.4% 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%	Attendance by Postcode SE16: 37.5% SE17: 12.5% SE8: 25% E14: 12.5% E9: 12.5%
	

2.3 Method

Constructed through a restorative justice lens, this research used a focus group mirroring traditional peace-making circles. The method was intentionally employed to encourage group participation and build a safe space where every contributing member could share narratives and be heard. This enabled purposeful discussions in an inclusive space, allowing for open dialogue between community representatives and public authority figures, like the local MP. Insights were expressed using a "talking piece" providing every participant with an equal opportunity to share personal opinions, without being interrupted and always respecting the topic and framing piece of the circle (United Nations, 2016).

This research adopted one focus group consisting of 12 participants- 4 of these participants were RJ4All staff and interns. With our goal for achieving the first Restorative Justice Postcode, as mentioned above, local stakeholders and public authorities assemble quarterly for Speak up Restorative Justice Community Forums. These forums create an equitable environment where local community members are centrally repositioned to share local perspectives. This setting widens access and understanding of community needs, enabling its consideration and prioritisation in decision- making processes. Held at RJ4All's SE16 Community Centre, the forums portray a commitment of time and effort to listen to residents, councillors and stakeholders. The Speak Up events are integral to community engagement and empowerment, allowing community concerns and needs to be monitored and reported.

The recurrent organisation of Speak Up events reflects RJ4All's commitment and prioritisation of community forums (RJ4All, 2023a). The 1st Speak Up event was held in March 2023, paving the way for following Speak Up events including October 2023, February 2024 and recently passed, July 2024. This highlights a resuming goal to address local concerns within the Southwark community and factoring into decision-making processes. The success of the previous Speak Up Events is examined through the first, second and third quarterly Impact Report with key findings identified in an Open Letter to key stakeholders conveying the community forums results (RJ4All, 2023b). Continued efforts are seen by the fourth Speak Up Event that took place on July 25th, 2024, further exploring discussions addressing community needs and concerns. It is apparent that nurturing fractured relations between the community and public authorities take time and effort. It is imperative that regularised community forums are maintained to ensure this objective is met.

Guided by our values of power-sharing, equality, and respect, these events are facilitated by Dr. Theo Gavrielides and the RJ4All team. For the first time in this event series, the community circle was facilitated by an RJ4All volunteer trained in conducting restorative justice circles. This created a powerful experience, enabling a self-sustaining community circle and a citizen-led event.

The Speak Up! event, held on July 25th, 2024, focused on the topic of ***mental health***, with particular emphasis on three key areas: ***community impact, root causes, and practical solutions, as well as the role of public and other agencies.*** Mental health was highlighted as a triggering topic in the previous Speak Up event, with community members, including local police officers, expressing concern over the lack of attention given to it. This topic was chosen to expose mental vulnerabilities within the community, address underlying causes, and emphasize the responsibility of public agencies and others in driving meaningful change.

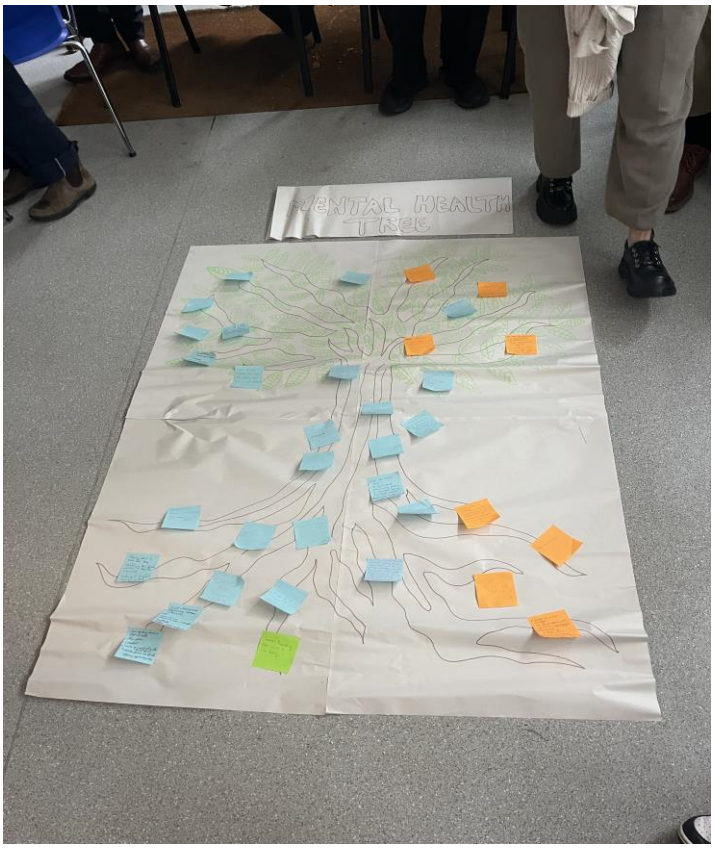
2.4. Procedure

The RJ4All facilitated a semi-structured group discussion led by Louise Ronnest, an RJ4All volunteer, who encouraged participants to step out of their professional roles and engage as community members to create a safe space for sharing. Building on mental health concerns raised at the previous Speak Up event, Louise introduced the topic of mental health, restated the ground rules, and used a "mental health tree" metaphor to guide the conversation, identifying branches as community impact, roots as practical solutions, and the trunk as where to take these ideas to. A large, printed tree was also placed in the center of the circle, as shown in the picture below, to visually represent this metaphor.

Initially, the first question examined community impact- *'How has mental health affected the community as a whole? Feel free to draw from those around you or personal experience.'* Participants were advised to write their answers on a post- it note and keep it with them until they had the talking piece sharing what they had written down, later placing it on the tree. This was followed by the second question exploring root causes- '*How can we address the roots of mental health issues in the community?* And then the final question- *'following up on what we can do to alleviate mental health stressors, how or who can we address to get these ideas that we have discussed improved? Please consider also the role of restorative justice'*. These questions followed the same process of writing down answers on post- it notes, sharing answers and placing them on

the mental health tree. To close the discussion, the focus group were asked 'what feelings are you taking with you from today's circle?', finishing with a debrief informing participants of the next steps including a report of the circle's discussion. We recorded the focus group with participants' consent and note- keepers ensured comprehensive data collection and analysis.

Photo 1



The "Mental Health Tree"

3. Results

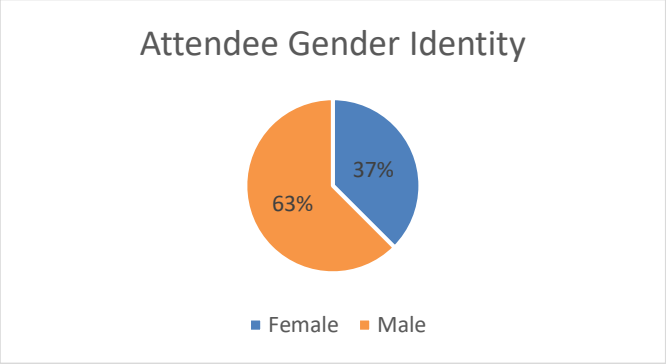
3.1 Quantitative Data Display

This section presents the demography of participants who attended the July 2024 Speak event, including their gender, age, ethnicity and postcodes. There was a total of 8 participants

(excluding 4 RJ4All staff and interns that facilitated, kept notes and participated) in the focus group. Thus, the data presented below captures the details of the 8 attending participants.

3.1.1 Gender Demographics

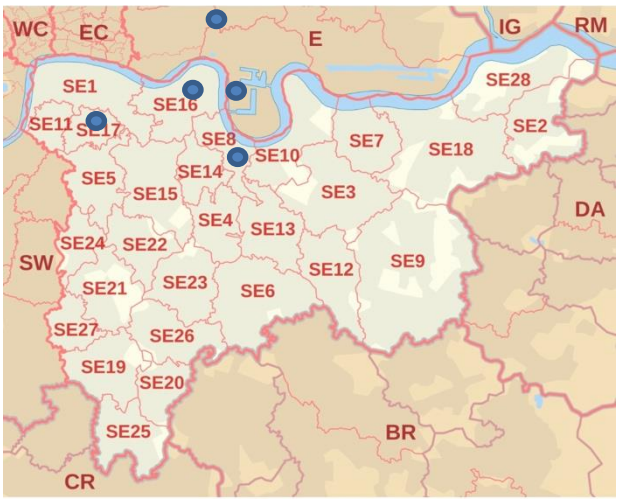
Figure 1



3.1.2 Postcode Demographics

Geographically, the participants' residence reflects a majority Southeast London representation. 1 attendee in SE17, 3 in SE16 and 2 in SE8. The other attendees were located in East London- 1 in E9 and the other in E14. This provides an insight into the diversity of participants' attending the July 2024 Speak Up event, widening discussions surrounding mental health into other areas of London.

Figure 2



Attendance by postcode
SE16: 37.5%
SE17: 12.5%
SE8: 25%
E14: 12.5%
E9: 12.5%

Chart Displaying Attendee Postcode

3.1.3 Ethnicity Demographics

Delving into ethnic representation, there is a clear majority of white British or any other white background. 5 participants stated their ethnicity as white British or any other white background, 2 identified as Asian/ Asian British or any other Asian background and 1 preferred not to say. In reflection of the previous Speak Up event held in February 2024; this demographic composition similarly highlights the monoethnicity of the last focus group. These statistics are crucial in the consideration of the data produced, as it highlights the experience of a white British or any other white background majority. Over 50% of the participants in the focus group came from a white British or any other white background. Despite our best efforts to reach out widely, it remains challenging to target specific communities and persuade them to participate. Therefore, it is important to pursue further efforts to ensure a more comprehensive representation of participants in the future.

Figure 3

Chart Displaying Attendee Ethnic Identity

3.1.4 Age Demographics

The Speak Up event attracted participants from a range of age groups this time. This focus group presented 4 in the 20- 29 age group, 2 in the 30- 39 age group, 1 in the 40- 55 age group and 1 in the 66+ age group. Evidently, 50% were under 30 and the other 50% were 30 and older, reflecting a diverse age range. There is a greater percentage of participants aged 20- 29 in the July 2024 Speak Up event as compared to the previous February 2024 Speak Up event- 50% (July 2024), 15.8% (February 2024). Therefore, there was a higher percentage of older participants in the February Speak Up event- 31% in the 40- 55 age group and 21.1% in the 66+ age group (February 2024) as compared to 12.5% in the 40 -55 age group and 12.5% in the 66+ age group (July 2024). Thus, the focus group of the Speak Up event July 2024 captured insights and presented findings from a younger group of citizens.

Figure 4

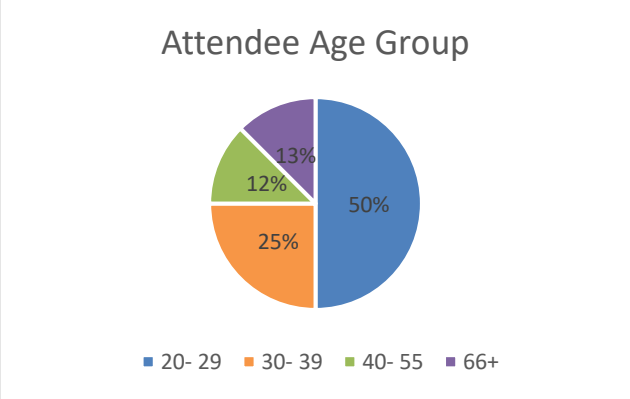


Chart Displaying Attendee Age Group

3.2 Qualitative Data Display

3.2.1 Framing Piece – thematic context

Mental health was placed at the center of the focus group's discussion, exploring perspectives such as inequalities in mental health experiences and access to services. The purpose behind the thematic approach, was to identify local community members, stakeholders and public authorities' viewpoints on mental health's community impact, ways to address root causes and the role of public agencies. Also, the last section navigated the group to the role of ***restorative justice*** in this solution-oriented discussion. This topic was utilised as an extension of the Restorative Justice Postcode's initiative to redress power imbalances, mend fractured relations between the community and public authorities, inspire social cohesion and expose the fundamental issues driving experiences of mental health issues.

To guide the discussion three questions were presented:

1. ***'how has mental health affected the community as a whole? Feel free to draw from those around you or personal experiences',***

2. ***'how can we address the roots of mental health issues in the community?' and***

3. ***'follow up on what we can do to alleviate mental health stressors, how or who can we address to get these ideas that we have discussed improved?' Please consider the role of restorative justice.***

The follow- up section of the report examines an overview of the findings, signifying key qualitative points that emerged during the focus group.

3.2.2 "How has mental health affected the community as a whole? Feel free to draw from those around you or personal experiences'

3.2.2.1 "Young people and School". A primary concern identified by participants was the long-term destabilisation caused by poor mental health on children and academic failure within the education system. Insights conveyed that mental health issues impacted current positions within the education system- an inability to attend school and long- term repercussions of unemployability. Future aspirations students may have for themselves were framed as undermined considering experiencing poor mental health. Other ways children face negative impact within the school is through exclusion, causing further isolation and reducing accessibility to learning and developing.

3.2.2.2 "Increased Criminality". A repercussion of mental health issues included increased criminality- individuals posing a threat to not only themselves but other people such as family members. 'Damage' was repeatedly used by one participant to further emphasise the harm proposed by poor mental health, expanding the extent of danger to multiple groups of people. Participants suggested that poor mental health can encourage individuals to seek alternative lifestyles, such as turning to criminal behaviour. One participant mentioned the 'impact on the criminal justice system' inferring that institutions such as the criminal justice system are considering decisions in light of individuals suffering from mental health issues.

3.2.2.3 "Loneliness". Several participants mentioned the different ways individuals suffering from mental issues isolate themselves. This was demonstrated through the use of words 'withdraw', 'excluded', 'barrier', 'stigmatising', 'abnormal' and 'emptiness'. Each word explores an avenue of isolation suggesting that mental health divides individuals in such a great capacity. Participants emphasised how mental health issues destabilise and fracture communities, highlighting that individuals often bear the burden of poor mental health on their own. Several participants explored further impacts of isolation. This included the experience of exclusion and its role in catalysing loneliness. Another perspective examined was the stigmatisation of mental health

leading to negative labelling such as being 'abnormal'. Isolation highlighted by participants is reflective of gaps surrounding society's knowledge of mental health issues. This can be seen by participants mentioning a lack of education, encouraging its stigmatisation. Additionally, this includes the complacent normalisation of it within the community leading to generational and familial experiences of mental health issues.

3.2.2.4 "Unifying". Parallel to the experiences of isolation perpetuated by mental health issues, participants highlighted the counter experience of unification. Mental health was proposed as building social cohesion between community members on some occasions. Several participants commented on the shared support from community members, in turn reducing the stigmatisation surrounding mental health and disseminating the responsibility of tackling mental health. One participant commented on the importance of drawing individuals into the community who feel particularly isolated, encouraging their inclusion within the community. 'Connection' was used to convey that mental health issues can be empathised by other community members. This extends from in person connection to online platforms. One participant mentioned that mental health issues can be similarly identified by not only individuals in the local area, however also through social media and the internet.

Figure 5

Visual Word Map with participants contribution regarding community impact of mental health

3.2.3 How can we address the roots of mental health issues in the community?

3.2.3.1 "Community action". Participants explored the increase of accessibility to local services such as youth clubs and communities. One participant referred to people wanting ***community-led peer support models***. There was fear attached to medical and clinical approaches to tackling mental health issues, emphasising a greater responsibility and desire for local support. Another exploration of community action was through the introduction of innovative ways to target mental health; rather than facilitating a formal space dedicated to mental health, participants mentioned enabling 'free conversations about emotions' through the idea of a 'barber shop'. Several participants built on this concept of curating a community space in cafes or a barber shop, where individuals can comfortably and informally engage with other members of the community discussing mental health issues. One other participant proposed voluntary positions community members can uptake such as working for helplines, taking phone calls- providing support to people in distressful moments.

3.2.3.2 "More state funding". Another branch of widening accessibility includes the implementation of greater funding and free services. This sentiment was emphasised by most participants, reinterring the need for increased state funding. One participant highlighted the significance of support and alert systems; knowing there are state provided facilities in support of vulnerable individuals. This perspective included paid leave for working and non- working individuals to enable financial access to mental health facilities.

3.2.3.3 "Reduce Stigmatisation". A repeated notion was the urgency to minimise stigmatisation surrounding mental health. Many participants equated the importance of physical

health with mental health, stating that both needed equal attention and care. There needs to be a better integration of mental health into the education system, encouraging its normalisation. A cultural change was identified to achieve long- term transformation, in turn improving the understanding of mental health for future generations. This addresses a fundamental and conscience effort to replace judgment and disregard for mental health. One participant explored the nuance of the suicide of men. This participant emphasised eliminating stereotypes and negative labelling of men suffering from poor mental health. Rather than casually approaching conversations about mental health and accepting vague responses, there needs to be encouragement and support to validate the seriousness of mental health issues, especially for more stigmatised nuances of mental health.

3.2.3.4 "Expanding Knowledge": Participants stated the importance of developing an understanding of mental health amongst the community. Ensuring that a range of different ages including young people and elderly people have an adequate knowledge of mental health will support individuals' role in identifying mental health issues and helping alleviate them. One participant claimed, *'knowledge is power'*, reinforcing that it can be the connecting and determining factor for an individual suffering from mental health acquiring the help they need. Whilst there may be existing services that provide mental health assistance, without the correct direction individuals will not utilise these. Signposting was mentioned by a couple participants to help guide individuals to the right services and facilities for mental health.

3.2.3.5 "Recognise and change distrust in Institutions". One participant examined the perspective of distrust in institutions, drawing focus to discrimination and the impact on marginalised individuals. This participant used the example of the NHS and decision- makers being 'out of touch'. Misdiagnosis was utilised, insinuating that through discrimination, individuals' needs are disregarded or inadequately addressed. There was mention of the NHS not offering enough primacy care or early-stage intervention when health is starting to deteriorate. The word 'barrier' was used to create a division between the individual suffering and institutions such as the NHS, encouraging distrust and a lack of dependability.

Figure 6

Visual Word Map with participants contribution regarding the root causes of mental health and practical solutions

3.2.4 Follow up on what we can do to alleviate mental health stressors, how or who can we address to get these ideas that we have discussed improved? What can the role of restorative justice be?

3.2.4.1. "Community action". Collectively, participants stated *'everyone'*. This underlines the shared opinion that every sector including community, public authorities etc. has a role to play in alleviating the pressure of mental health issues. Trying to communalise this responsibility conveys that it effects all parties and requires help from different individuals' and systems. One participant drew attention towards the issues that arise with making decisions centrally with limited outside influence from community members. 'Devolution' was discussed in re-centering community members role in decision- making and framing resolutions. Family and teachers were used as examples of the different way individuals can optimise their positions to help individuals with mental health issues. Other strategies mentioned included, the barber shop and cafes as previously discussed- enabling a space safe for individuals to have open discussions regarding mental health. The volunteer sector was revisited by one participant, claiming that there are community members who want to provide help to struggling individuals. One participant discussed the significance of diversifying spaces such as RJ4All introducing a community centre, enabling a judgment-free and inclusive environment for every person. One participant used their position as a community investment officer to explain the different ways they finance programmes such as 'back to school cuts'. This includes offering free haircuts for school children and discussing issues such as mental health. The objective is to allow young children to share personal experiences and opinions in a safe and informal space, whilst also getting a haircut.

3.2.4.2. "State action". Several participants drew strong connections between fundamental change and state action, claiming that whilst community action was also imperative to alleviating mental health stressors, ultimately it is central decision- makers that mark significant change. Words such as 'isolating' and 'powerless' were used to describe the limited success community members uptake in achieving change. An example of a community network, now inactive, was employed to demonstrate the importance of integration and social cohesion for isolated individuals in the community. Whilst the participant highlighted the success this brought, they emphasise the pressure attached to voluntary networks and that there needs to be a reliable stream of income to sustain it. One participant referred to the responsibility and power of NHS commissioners, councils and MPs. Other participants discussed the role of parliament in driving state action, proposing it is the foundation of change. One participant used their position as MP to share a personal experience of a family member suffering from Schizophrenia and the seriousness of mental health. They reinforced the significance of hearing personal and local experiences to drive legislative change. Participants claimed that the dissemination of research amongst governing bodies is necessary, distributing the problem and building a thorough understanding of mental health. Mental health can be better addressed when institutions share their research and collectively implement change through policy and legislative change.

3.2.4.3. "Institutionalisation of mental health'. Participants mentioned the imperative role of education and integrating knowledge surrounding the topic of mental health into institutional frameworks. Through the normalisation of discussions concerning mental health, this can reduce the stigmatisation existing in institutions. One participant referred to 'trying to make it less of a big thing'. This insight shows that mental health is a shared experience and is not unusual. Another participant mentioned that the RJ4All Community Centre is a great way to create a safe space for everyone and that similar initiatives or programmes can improve by 'expanding and educating people'. Another insight suggested the implementation of more respectful boundaries surrounding mental health in work environments, to enable a safer space for employees.

3.2.4.4. "Application of restorative justice". Many participants stated that mental health could be better addressed if community centres, governing bodies etc adopted a restorative justice approach. One participant mentioned employing a restorative justice ethos in work environments such as 'expanding how employers better reflect or respect mental health among employees.' They

also stated, 'expanding regional justice inequality legislative definitions.' Another participant explored the notion that a restorative approach can enable systems to work together, 'getting all those moving parts in conversation'. Utilising a restorative justice framework conveys the way in which it creates greater space for different systems in society to cooperate and better understand the manifestation of mental health. It will allow for more collaborative efforts.

3.2.4.5. "Utilisation of technology". Several participants discussed the power of online mental health forums. One participant mentioned the access to online support through these platforms could help a range of ages- having different systems for under 25-year-olds and over 25-year-olds. Another participant inferred that online support can further accommodate to demographics including different race, ethnicity- a space online space for people of colour.

Figure 7

Visual Word Map with participants discussing the role of public agencies and other agencies

4. Discussion

In reflection of the data display above, this section will provide a further insight and discussion into the identified themes.

4.1 Qualitative Data Analysis

This section will use different perspectives for analysis, comparing accounts and opinions shared by participants on the topic of mental health. Additionally, the report seeks to identify commonalities and themes, drawing similarities to concerns raised in the project's previous Speak Up! Events in 2023 and 2024.

The discussions follow a three-prong structure of *1. community impact of mental health, 2. ways to address root causes and 3. the role of public agencies and other agencies.* The themes identified from this focus group, will then be examined in light of the findings from the Restorative Justice Postcode Project Year 1, 2023 and Year 2, 2024, as well as RJ4All's work.

4.1.1. Mental health: community impact

In response to questions about the community impact of mental health, discussions highlighted long-term destabilisation, including ***disruptions in education and increased criminality.*** Mental health issues were seen as undermining academic success and affecting employability, with school children doubting their abilities and limiting their future aspirations. ***Exclusions*** and ***isolation*** were noted as contributing to this cycle. Other effects included individuals turning to ***criminal lifestyles*** and the ***threat*** posed to mentally unwell individuals, their families, and the broader community. The repetition of ***damage*** and the ***stigma*** associated with poor mental health were central to discussions, revealing how individuals are often perceived as withdrawn and labeled as 'abnormal'. ***Stigmatisation and lack of awareness*** about mental health led to conversations about generational and familial experiences. Conversely, the notion of ***connection and togetherness*** was apparent in the role of relating and identifying with other members of the community. There was a clear sentiment of empathy expressed by participants, highlighting that mental health should be normalised and the responsibility of supporting vulnerable individuals' is shared amongst community members.

4.1.2. Ways to address root causes

A primary perspective held by many participants included the ***necessity of increasing accessibility*** to both local and community services, as well as state-led facilities. Through the

analysis of ***community action***, it became clear that community-led models are preferable and should be incentivised to support community members suffering from mental health issues.

Negative connotations were attached to medical or clinical facilities taking primary role of supporting vulnerable individuals; claiming feelings of ***distrust*** and ***fear***. Based on that, several participants built on an initiative to implement informal spaces and enable ***free conversations,*** demonstrated through the example of barber shops and collating haircuts with conversations on mental health. Rather than curating formal spaces dedicated to topics of mental health, helping to facilitate safe and open spaces was preferred. Other facets of increasing accessibility included the fundamental need of ***state funding.*** Money was presented as the foremost important necessity.

Furthermore, paramount to addressing the root causes of mental health was an incessant need to ***reduce stigmatisation***. Both physical and mental health require crucial attention, and mental health should not be treated less seriously**.** The phenomenon of ***cultural change*** was of utmost importance. Rather than engaging in loose and surface level discussions of mental health, there needs to be better validation of individuals feelings and experiences of mental health. Leading on from the concept of labelling and marginalising individuals, a better ***integration of mental health into institutions*** such as the education system is necessary to minimise this experience. Improving the knowledge of mental health will be beneficial in all ages, so that community members have a well- rounded understanding and can identify struggling individuals. The statement 'knowledge is power' was utilised to reinforce its determining role in an individual receiving sufficient care and support. ***Signposting*** was a crucial theme in highlighting the uncertainty of available services. Whilst there may be existing mental health facilities, without the right guidance or accessibility, individuals will not be aware of the support they could receive.

Lastly, one underlying perspective that remained present was the ***level of distrust in public bodies when it comes to mental health.*** This is indicative of inequalities community members face and endure in interactions with institutions such as the NHS. One participant claimed decision-makers are 'out of touch', creating a clear divide between community members and public bodies. Discriminatory experiences such as misdiagnosis was mentioned. This insight conveys an urgent requirement to tackle and eliminate prejudice felt by minority groups, achieved through the implementation of systemic changes. This participant continued to remark, there needs to be greater

primary care and preventative systems in place. This will reduce the progressive deterioration of mental health by targeting it as its early stages.

4.1.3. Role of public agencies and other agencies

Collective action was an emerging theme. Participants placed significant importance on the shared responsibility of community members and public agencies. The notion of 'devolution' was mentioned, widening insights into power redistribution- centrally positioning community members needs and concerns and in turn driving policy and legislative change. Using the example of the RJ4All Community Centre, participants suggested that similar community centres could offer an environment where individuals can feel safe. Diversifying spaces such as community centres was also incentivised to create a non-judgment and inclusive space for individuals from different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. ***Central decision-makers*** was marked as the uppermost exercising power. Whilst there was considerable influence underlying the role of community action, participants regarded this position as ultimately 'isolating' and 'powerless'. Community networks may strengthen social cohesion and temporarily alleviate mental health stressors, however if there is no stable source of income, this will not provide long- term success. Participants asserted the opinion that the foremost responsibility of ensuring fundamental change to mental health stressors falls on NHS commissioners, councils and MPs.

Participants suggested that ***institutionalising mental health*** could alleviate stressors by integrating mental health knowledge into institutional frameworks. This would help employers approach employees with greater sensitivity and normalise mental health issues, reducing stigma. Many participants advocated for using ***restorative justice*** to enhance understanding and communication about mental health. They believed a restorative justice model would support employers in discussing mental health with employees and improve legislation. One participant suggested expanding definitions of regional justice inequality to include mental health, which would offer better legislative guidance and strengthen personal approaches to mental illness.

Lastly, some participants explored the potential of ***online mental health forums*** to provide support and address concerns about judgment. They suggested optimising technology by creating demographically tailored support systems, such as separate spaces for individuals under and over

25, and for people of color. These changes would help individuals relate better to others with similar experiences and feelings.

4.1.4 Links with Year 1 and Year 2 RJ4All work

The initial context of the Speak Up! Events in 2023 delved into *'Hopes and fears for Southwark 2030'*, followed by *'harms, injustice and community needs'*. Similar themes emerged in the first focus group of the project's second year- *'thoughts and feeling concerning the Bywater Place police shooting incident',* as well as the second focus group of 2024 exploring '*mental health-community impact, root causes and practical solutions'*. The continuation of these accounts highlights the significant role of community representation, focalising on the insights of SE16 and more broadly Southeast London. Moreover, this is reflective of RJ4All's mission to build social cohesion, redress power imbalances, restore fractured relations with community members and public authorities.

The inaugural year's findings emphasised the importance of ***community solidarity and empowerment, expanding community spaces, mending trust gaps, and strengthening communication lines, as well as addressing public agency accountability.*** Similarly, the second year's discoveries highlighted ***institutional failures, danger and fear, community disempowerment, and the need for better-funded services***.

These same concepts and concerns were echoed in the context of mental health discussed at the latest Speak Up event. The increased accountability of authorities remains pertinent to previous accounts in the Restorative Justice Postcode project. The repeated notion of increased accessibility to mental health services was paramount to discussions, focusing more specifically on the increased expectation from public agencies. This was illuminated through themes including ***central- decision makers, institutionalisation of mental health and level of distrust in public bodies***. Whilst community members shared the mutual value for devolution; re-centering the voices of the community to underline policy and legislative change, it became clear that the ultimate power to drive fundamental change was rooted in parliament and other public agencies. Like previous inputs (Richards et al, 2024), institutional failures and distrust in authorities were pronounced as integral issues, requiring ***'prevention strategies and directing individuals towards relevant support***

services'. Echoing the urgent need for public services and facilitating stable environments, RJ4All introduced a community centre in SE16. This centre operates as a service to the community of Southeast London, offering a food bank, sport classes, employability workshops etc. Through initiatives such as this, it strengthens relationships with key institutions like community organisations, public agencies and stakeholders.

Moreover, discussions revealed a recurring theme of ***stigmatisation*** and the subsequent need for the ***normalisation of mental health***. Exclusion and isolation were facets of mental health perpetuated by its lack of knowledge. This insight emphasised the significance of the ***institutionalisation of mental health***. This theme linked with other perspectives including the ***utilisation of internet mental health forums***. This in turn would combat experiences of marginalisation by offering alternate avenues of connection and support. Employing online mental health forums also explored the various ways it can accommodate to different backgrounds-demographically dividing mental health supporting systems. The sentiment of alienation and social fragmentation draws similarity with both Year 1 and Year 2 discussions.

The initial year's findings highlighted the community's need for ***accessible physical spaces to voice concerns and strengthen communication with public bodies and stakeholders.*** Likewise, Year 2's accounts advocate for institutional accountability, building trust in authorities and more physical spaces to foster community connections (Richards et al, 2024). Building on this narrative, insights from this current study captures the incessant need to re-centre the power of community members and in turn mend fractured relations with public authorities to improve public services.

The RJ4All Community Centre is an embodiment of environments, community members seek to find elsewhere. It utilises its services to bolster social cohesion and increase accessibility to fundamental resources such as mental health support, food and employability workshops; all necessities that alternatively cause poverty, hunger and vulnerability if denied access to (Rowley et al, 2021). With continued experiences of unsafety and power imbalance between the community and public agencies, it is imperative that tangible safe spaces are implemented to enable community members to gain access to resources they would be restricted from obtaining. The feedback received from this study reiterates the importance of the Restorative Justice Postcode Project and the RJ4All work, particularly in creating safe space for accessibility to mental health discussions and recognition of its importance. It serves as a catalyst for pivotal change, setting an example for other

communities to mirror similar values and implement initiatives, establish projects to help combat inequality in the community. This study facilitates a deeper appreciation and consideration for employing restorative justice frameworks to resolve social and political contentions in society. It conveys the strength in employing strategies to foster community healing, empowerment and encourage inclusivity within our communities.

4.2 Quantitative Data Analysis

This section of the report further examines the demographics of the July focus group. There was a total number of 8 participants (excluding 4 members of RJ4All staff and interns that facilitated, kept notes and participated).

4.2.1 Gender Demographics

This focus group was predominately male- 63%. The imbalance of gender distribution conveys an inclination towards a male perspective and that it is not entirely representative, given there being 5 male participants and 3 female participants. Regarding the discussion's topic being mental health- the greater male participation may skew insights into the extent of mental health impact. For future sessions, we aim to strive for better a representation by ensuring there is a greater balance of both male and female participants. This will facilitate a wider range of perspectives and perhaps offer new and unexplored narratives.

4.2.2 Postcode Demographics

This study presented a greater diversity of postcode representation with only 3 participants (38%) coming from SE16. Whilst this may undermine our projects geographical focus of the SE16 community, the majority of participants were from Southeast London- 75%. 1 participant was from SE17, 3 from SE16 and 2 from SE8. The other 2 participants coming from E9 and E14 convey the widespread impact of the restorative justice project and eager contribution.

4.2.3 Ethnicity Demographics

This focus group captured a majority White british or any other white background perspective-63%. participants were from a White british or any other white background, 2 from an Asian/ Asian british or any other Asian background and 1 preferred not to say. This is a significant factor to consider in the analysis of the data, as it is limited to a majority background of one racial and ethnic background. For future sessions, this event should be far more reaching to individuals from different backgrounds for better representation of the SE16 community.

4.2.4 Age Demographics

Regarding age groups, this study attracted a majority of younger participants- the highest number of participants coming from 20- 29 age group. There was also contribution captured from older ages- 25% from 30- 39 age group, 12.5% from 40 -55 age group and 12.5% from 66+ age group. It was an equal balance of different ages.

5. Critical conclusions

The Speak Up event in July 2024 marked the fourth session, as part of the Restorative Justice Postcode Project. This study facilitated RJ4All efforts to restore social cohesion and strengthen the relationship with community members and authority agencies. It aimed to reinforce the objective of the Restorative Justice Postcode Project by bringing together local community members, public bodies and stakeholders to identify gaps in public services and amplifying community voices in the process. This fourth instalment of this project stands as a continuation of RJ4All's commitment to community empowerment.

Evidently in the discussions held among participants, mental health was extensively examined. Immediate issues raised consisted of ***stigmatisation and subsequent marginalisation, lack of knowledge surrounding mental health, increased criminality, insufficient funding leading to restricted success of community led projects and distrust in institutional agencies.*** Issues including the requirement of increased accessibility to safe, physical community spaces remains imperative in this study. Close analysis and established conclusions in Year 1 and Year 2 of the Restorative Justice Postcode Project, have emphasised the vital role of restorative justice in

facilitating social conflict resolution. It reinforces the importance of RJ4All's services embodying this notion to achieve deep rooted change.

Furthermore, this study has revealed an overall drive to bridge trust gaps and foster community cohesion, whilst also more specifically conveying a need to increase accessibility to public services such as mental health facilities/ mental health dedicated spaces. Enabling spaces where community members can vocalise concerns has been proven to be fundamental to motivations improving public services. Through a collaborative effort, Speak Up events reflect an active change that local community members, public agencies and stakeholders intend to achieve.

6. Recommendations

In light of the discussion on mental health, the following recommendations will outline improvements for the RJ4All team, Steering Group, and external stakeholders.

6.1. Expanding the accessibility to community spaces for mental health support: In light of the insights shared in this study, there is a substantial dependency placed on community spaces by local members. It is crucial that community spaces are prioritised, offering a safe space where the community- irrespective of demographic background, can feel welcomed and supported. It is integral to the SE16 community, that these spaces uphold a commitment of inclusivity and diversity, in addition to providing services that externally may be less accessible. These services should include, food, workshops, a library, sports facilities etc, to foster social cohesion and facilitate personal growth and development. The RJ4All community centre stands as an example of this, operating from Monday to Friday, 9:30 am- 5:30 pm. With the aim to re- centre community values, RJ4All should continue consulting with the community to ensure services are sufficient. Furthermore, concerning the Speak Up events, the RJ4All team should incentivise a more representative focus group, reaching out to a wider range of ages and ensuring equal gender distribution. It is also fundamental that the RJ4All team increase their outreach to marginalised communities to gain a deeper insight into experiences of individuals from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. The RJ4All team will ensure that the outcomes of this events are reported and considered by local authorities such as the Southwark council.

6.2 Integration of mental health into institutional frameworks. Notably, the lack of knowledge surrounding mental health was identified as responsible for encouraging stigmatisation. It is imperative to the normalisation of mental health, that it is better integrated into institutional frameworks. This can transpire through workshops dedicated to mental health operated through the RJ4All community centre. This strategy can be further implemented by partnering with local schools to normalise mental health discussions in class, as well as businesses to introduce mental health workshops with employers. This would be fundamental to providing schools and businesses with both the skills to address mental health issues and allow open discussions in how to sensitively approach conversations regarding mental health.

6.3 Encouraging a restorative justice model: Adding to the previous recommendation, it is essential to note that achievement can be maximised through partnering with external institutions. Community networks and institutions adopting a restorative justice approach as demonstrated by RJ4All, can facilitate mental health nolmalisation and build trust gaps with local authorities. Working with educational institutions, as well as other community networks and businesses could inspire a similar practice of restorative justice values.

6.4 Increased utilisation of online mental health forums. It has become apparent that online mental health forums provide a space where individuals can build connections, empathise with other individuals enduring similar mental health issues and even maintain anonymity if chosen. Through additional support provided by RJ4All, this platform could be encouraged amongst the SE16 community with signposting in the RJ4All community centre, directing local members to available online mental health forums. Developing a mental health forum dedicated to RJ4All could also enable individuals who may want to partake in Speak Up events but feel apprehensive, find an alternate avenue to sharing narratives.

6.5 Mending fractured relations. Initiatives such as the Speak Up event have captured the pivotal role collaborative efforts from local members, local authorities and stakeholders can have. Thus, it is crucial that RJ4All continue to promote open dialogue between these different agencies. Diversifying these spaces for communication can bring together councillors, MPs and other local stakeholders that have a fundamental role in implementing changes urgently identified by local

members. Facilitating open communication lines is a primary contributing factor to addressing concerns and issues, and in the process strengthening relations with different agencies.

6.6 Increasing state funding for mental health facilities. Arguably, one of the main driving forces for change is a stream of income to support public services. Whilst it is imperative that RJ4All continue to build relationships with the community and key stakeholders, there should be significance placed on expanding streams of funding to sustain service such as mental health facilities or workshops. This array of recommendations provides actionable steps for RJ4All and external stakeholders to challenge the issues raised in our focus group. There is great significance placed on the role of community led models and that re-centering the voice of local members will mobilise fundamental change. Restorative justice values should continue to be practiced, underlying the implementation of initiatives. With the ultimate goal of establishing the world's first Restorative Justice Postcode, in the consideration of these recommendations, this will facilitate RJ4Alls objective to strengthen trust gaps between the local community and authorities and foster social cohesion.

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".
Website address: www.rotherhithecc.co.uk

Rotherhithe Consolidated Charities

References

Gavrielides, T. (2020). New Directions in Preventing Violent Youth Radicalisation: Comparative and Summary Findings from the Youth Empowerment and Innovation Project (YEIP). IARS Publications.

Richards, A., Sideridou, S & Gavrielides, T. (2024). *Building the World's First Restorative Justice Postcode: Strengthening Safety: The Catalyst of Community Agencies and Organisations.* Retrieved from https://rj4all.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/RJ-Postcode-3rd-Qualitative-Paper-FINAL.pdf

RJ4All. (2023a). *RJ4All Speak- Up Community Forums.* Speak Up! Restorative Justice Community Forums. https://www.rj4all.info/speak-up

RJ4All. (2023b) *Open Letter from a Community Consultation Held at the Restorative Justice for All Community Centre:* 30th November. Retrieved from: https://www.rj4all.info/Speak-Up-Oct-2023

Rowley, J., Richards, N., Carduff, E & Gott, M. (2021). The Impact of Poverty and Deprivation at the end of life. *Palliative Care and Social Practice*, 15, pp. 1- 19 https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/26323524211033873

Shankley, W., & Williams, P. (2020). Minority ethnic groups, policing and the criminal justice system in Britain. In W. Shankley, B. Byrne, C. Alexander, O. Khan, & J. Nazro (Eds.), *Ethnicity and Race in the UK: State of the Nation* (1st ed., pp. 51- 72). Bristol University Press https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv14t47tm.9?searchText=london+and+inequality&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Dlondon%2Band%2Binequality%26so%3Drel&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3A9b65f593cf1e3b0513e13283093ee300&seq=9

United Nations. (2016, September). *Promoting Restorative Justice for Children.* https://doi.org/10.18356/2fc79c90-en