RJ4ALL BUILDING THE WORLD'S FIRST
RESTORATIVE JUSTICE POSTCODE

Building the World's First Restorative Justice Postcode

Fifth Quarterly Impact Report from August 2024 – November 2024

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Restorative Justice for All

December 2024

RJ4ALL BUILDING THE WORLD'S FIRST
RESTORATIVE JUSTICE POSTCODE

Youth Social Perception: Youth Voice and Service collaboration for a better neighbourhood

Abstract

Purpose

In January 2023, the Restorative Justice for All International Institute (RJ4All) embarked on a mission to establish the world's first restorative justice postcode in SE16 through a comprehensive initiative. Now finishing its second year, RJ4All continues to monitor the outcomes of services provided from its Community Centre in SE16, London, to tackle root issues such as inequality, power imbalances, abuse, and social fragmentation that contribute to anti-social behaviour and community tensions at both interpersonal and intercommunity levels. In line with restorative justice values, RJ4All services aim to reflect this ethos and influence international implementation.

This document represents the ***fifth qualitative report*** on the Restorative Justice postcode project, focusing on the last Speak Up! event held by RJ4All in November 2024. It acts as a follow-up to our previous Speak Up! Events that occurred since last year, 2023 and contribute to an ongoing collection of current qualitative evidence. The report includes the gathering and analysis of qualitative narratives shared with us through the Speak Up community consultation, allowing for an evaluation of the project's effects and the development of recommendations. Ultimately, it seeks to provide insights to achieve three key goals:

1. Inform the RJ4All team and the project's Steering Group,
2. Facilitate continued project development and
3. Function as a strategic communication resource for other stakeholders.

Methodology

Substantial evidence indicates that power abuse acts as central to the underlying inequalities, unmet mental health needs, and human rights violations. This needs urgent action to correct power imbalances and emphasise community voices.

By doing Community Consultation Forums, RJ4All creates a space to enhance local perspectives and insights. After the success of our previous Speak Up! Community Forum in July 2024, RJ4All conducted its fifth event in November 2024, focusing on youth issues. Employing focus group research methods, the RJ4All team invited community members, public authorities, and stakeholders to engage in discussions about the youth's voices and needs within the SE16 community.

This research explored the narratives surrounding youth, their impact on the community, strategies for addressing these issues, and the roles of community service providers. The topic of youth aligns with the project's broader framework of addressing antisocial behaviour and community empowerment. Communities have been impacted by the perpetual negative perception of youth, further decreasing their relationships with younger members and public authorities.

Summary findings from the last quarter of the second year of the project

From the November 2024 community forum, insights were gathered from various attendees predominantly representing Southeast Postcodes. For the first time, most of our attendees mainly came from our SE16 postcode, along with SE17 and SE8. The participation of young people is also noteworthy, as it highlights the importance of younger voices in our project. The study presented emerging themes, including:

- ***The role of media in impacting community cohesion***
- ***Inclusion of younger people in the community***
- ***Levels of distrust in public authorities***

- ***The impact of poverty on youth***
- ***The importance of service collaboration***

Our research indicates a need for enhanced efforts to:

- ***Amplify youth voices in the community through better involvement and recognition***
- ***Expand the provision of youth services in the area***
- ***Repair fractured relations through youth-led speak-up events***
- ***Encourage using Restorative Justice discourse and framework when addressing youth conflict and incivilities.***

Originality

This report provides insight into the last Speak Up! Forum: the last focus group of Year 2 (2024) of the Restorative Justice Postcode Project. The results reveal an urgent need to address youth's position in the community and society for increased community cohesion and a proposed possibility for SE16 service providers to collaborate for further efficiency.

Reflecting on Year 1 findings, this report compares previous conclusions, enabling the RJ4All team to assess its services' efficiency and seek new avenues regularly. This examination significantly contributes to establishing the world's first restorative justice postcode, highlighting the necessity of regularly implementing Speak Up! events. Hosting community consultation forums proves to centralise the community perspective and widen communication lines with key stakeholders in SE16.

Research Limitations

The recruitment process involved various engagement facets, including an open call on all RJ4All social media platforms, direct emailing to community members, stakeholders, and prior attendees, publication of our newsletter, and word of mouth. This was implemented to recruit a wide range of people from SE16 and Southeast London more broadly.

The non-probability sample of 10 individuals (excluding seven members of RJ4All Staff) is similar in size to the previous Speak Up! Event. This small group size allows for deeper discussions compared to a larger one, where the time allocated to each participant would be more limited. We acknowledge that this sample size may not reflect the entire SE16 community, with a limited demographic representation of age, gender, and ethnicity. Therefore, considering these limitations when deliberating on our recommendations is advised.

Keywords: restorative justice postcode, youth, youth voice, service providers, youth services, incivility, media narrative, poverty

1. Introduction and purpose of the paper

On the 19th of November 2024, we held our fifth speak-up event, this time on ***youth***. Speak-up events are community forums where we invite people from various backgrounds in our local community to discuss specific topics. Through these events, we seek to reduce inequality by enabling every person's voice to be heard and rebuilding trust between marginalised groups and the local authority. London is the most unequal place in the United Kingdom, with persistent poverty and inequality after the pandemic. Children living in London are more likely to live in poverty than those living in other parts of the United Kingdom. For instance, Child Poverty Rates in Southwark, where we are based, amount to 43% compared to 31% nationwide (WPI Economics, 2023).

Growing poverty and inequality can significantly impact the overall country's economic growth, social mobility, and, most importantly, social cohesion, which can increase social instability. People suffering from inequalities can perceive their voices or opinions as being marginalised and not listened to. This situation creates frustration that can develop into increased criminality, unlawful acts, protests and social unrest, leading to a fracture between communities and public authority. On top of this frustration emanating from poverty exists a frustration led by **misconceived perceptions and judgement** on youth, especially juvenile delinquency, primarily led by the Media (UN Report 2016). If we look at data from the Youth Justice Board, Child offences in England and Wales have largely decreased between the ending year March 2013 and March 2023, with 34,300 proven offences in March 2023, a decrease of 65%. In addition, most offences committed by young people aged between 10-17 are of gravity score band 1-4, representing the least serious offence (Youth Justice Board, 2024). To address this negative social perception emanating from media's discourses and fight against marginalised groups' frustration of their voice not being heard, there is a need for service providers to provide a safe space for people to sit and have a chat on their feelings, experiences whilst for service providers to address this negative perception on youth.

RJ4All was established over ten years ago to achieve a redistribution of power through a restorative justice framework. Instead of advocating for more punitive structures to mitigate social issues, RJ4All seeks an approach that is more user-led and more positive for both offenders and victims in dealing with the harm done. Integrating restorative justice values and practices into the crime-prevention framework allows us to stop blaming the individual fully and consider the influence of societal failures and unmet needs. RJ4All uses a model that nurtures an individual's strengths and taps into community interest (Gavrielides, 2020). In accordance with these values shared for the past ten years, RJ4All decided to express its work and its vision to build the world's first restorative justice postcode through a diligent research study. The RJ4All Rotherhithe Community Centre, located in the Southwark borough in Southeast London, forms the

geographical scope. The Community Centre has been created to empower the community, giving our service users access to free services such as a foodbank, a community fridge, sports classes, digital drop-ins, and gardening or mending workshops.

RJ4All pursued and committed to rebuilding the relationship between the community and the State, striving towards a global effort encouraging restorative justice as a world social justice movement. This initiative honours this goal by reducing the gap between the community and the state, asking for both their participation and viewpoints. In practice, this means we pay strict attention to inviting key stakeholders and members of the local community, as well as local councillors up to MPs, to our community forums or other events, providing a space where equal distribution of power and voice strive. Additionally, we have created a steering group consisting of community leaders, local councillors, local authorities and organisations. Members of this group have been either selected through invitation or open call. They have a key role in ensuring the project's success by providing advice on the strategic direction, promoting the community voice and facilitating partnerships, further enhancing our impact. Quarterly, the steering group meet to review, advise and support the project.

This report is a continuation of the previous impact report, working towards our aim to achieve the first restorative postcode in the world. As mentioned previously, Speak Up! events are regular community forums that started in March 2023. They have become important events, addressing and discussing critical issues affecting the community like mental health, youth crime, anti-social behaviour, etc. The report gathers both quantitative and qualitative data that have been obtained through discussions surrounding youth. Our main concern for this introductory meeting regards the negative social perception of young people. We looked at their impact on the community and service providers and how we should address it to make it change locally.

Summary of findings from the project's second year

In this project's second year (2024), we covered three themes: safety, mental health, and youth. Our findings from this year indicate a continuous need to bridge trust gaps between the community and local authorities, provide access to safe community spaces for dialogue to foster community cohesion and increase funding for key public services like mental health facilities and schools. Key themes have emerged following shocking events in the area, such as growing insecurity and safety concerns, which increase the need for mental health services while tackling the stigmatisation of mental health issues issue.

2. Research Methodology and Sampling

2.1. Recruitment Process

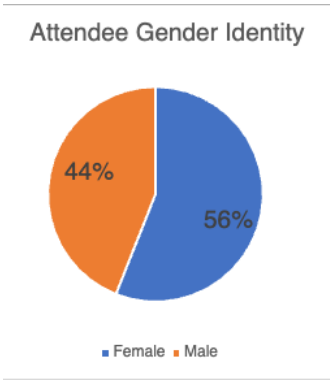
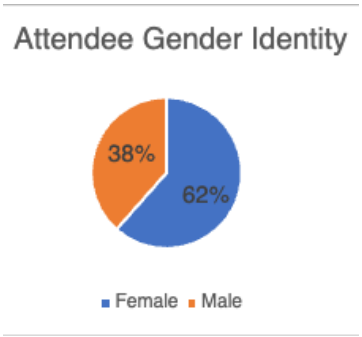
Participants for the focus group were recruited through different means. First, we created a dedicated webpage with a registration link on our website. Second, we sent direct invitations by email to our stakeholders in local schools, organisations, the Criminal Justice Service, Local Councillors and even MPs, using our own database. This widespread dissemination aimed to gather both community representatives and public authorities to discuss this important topic: youth. Finally, we shared our event on our social media pages, such as Instagram and Facebook, and sent invites through WhatsApp to our community group chat and volunteers.

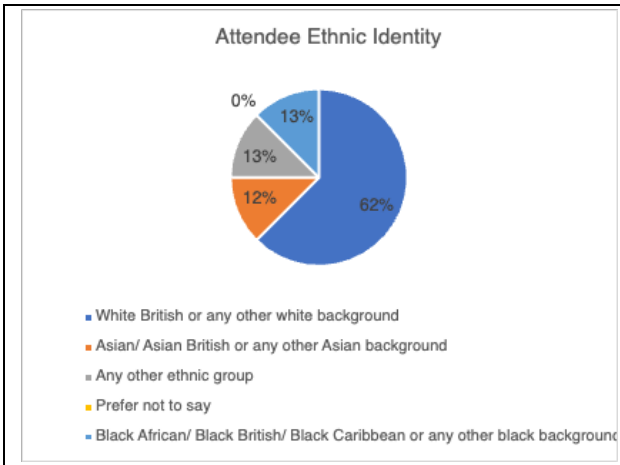
2.2. Participants

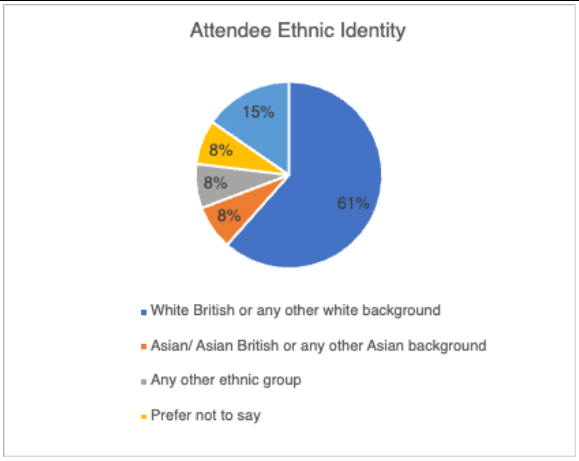
Participants were asked to confirm their attendance through Eventbrite's online booking system, for which we created a dedicated event page. During registration, participants were prompted to provide their consent to participate as research subjects. We also upheld an open-door policy, allowing individuals not registered on Eventbrite to join the focus group upon signing a printed consent form. No registration or participant fee was required, and attendees were free to join. If they ultimately could not attend, no penalty fee was imposed.

On the day of the event, all participants (both registered and walk-ins) were requested to provide their demographic information, including gender, age group, postcode, and ethnicity. This information is essential for our analysis and the conclusions we draw after each forum. Eight individuals had registered on Eventbrite for this session, of whom two did not attend. Additionally, four people walked in to participate in the focus group. In total, 17 individuals were present at this discussion, including RJ4All staff, interns, and volunteers.

Table 1. Demographic Information Comparison between Study 1 - 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%





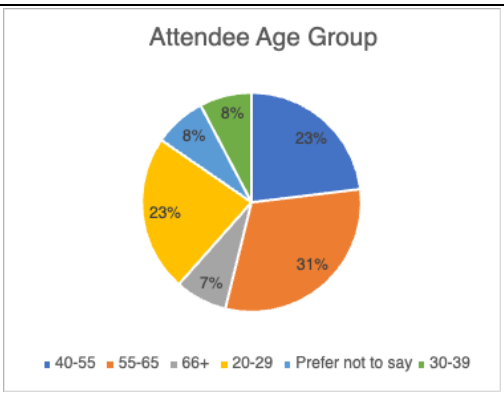
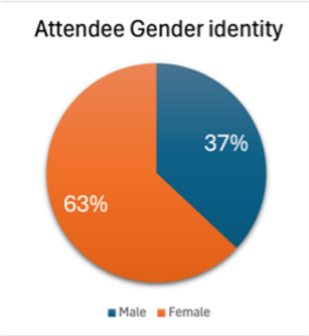
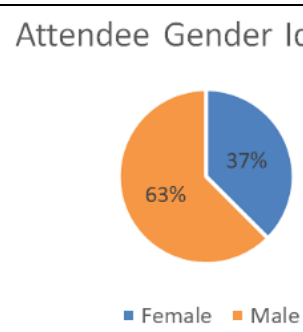
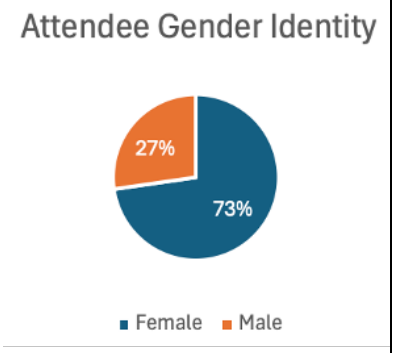
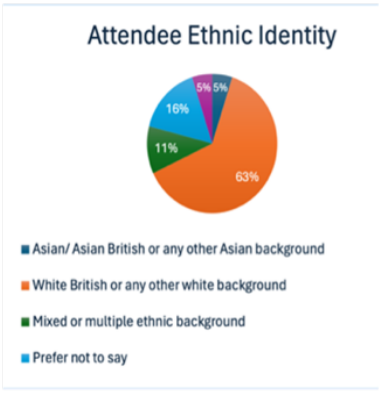
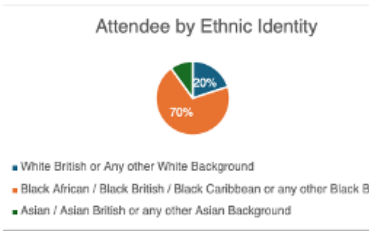
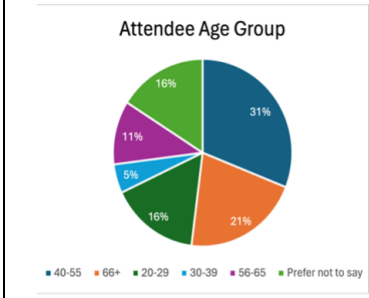
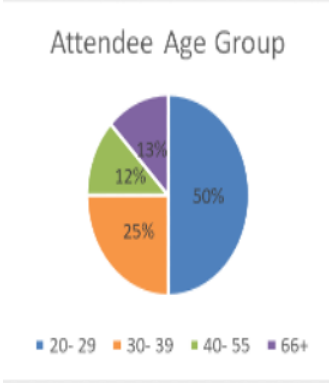


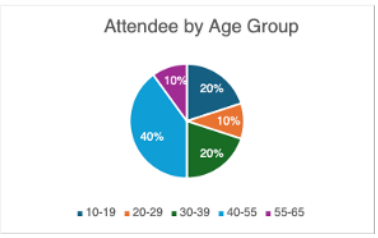
Table 2. Demographic Information Comparison between Study 3, 4 and 5 (Year 2)

Participant Demographic Information Qualitative Study 3	Participant Demographic Information Qualitative Study 4	Participant Demographic Information Qualitative Study 5

		
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%	Attendance by postcode: SE16: 80% SE17: 10% SE8: 10%
		







2.3. Method

Constructed through a restorative justice lens, this research employed a focus group that mirrors traditional peace-making circles. This method was selected to foster group discussion in a safe environment where every participant would feel free to share their experiences and opinions. Such circles enable people to relate as equals and communicate respectfully. They invite insightful discussions among individuals from varying backgrounds and promote open dialogue between the local community and local authorities or public figures. During those circles, we used a 'talking piece' materialised by an object. The talking piece is a tool used to provide an equal chance to speak, with no interruptions and be heard by the whole circle, as it is passed down to every participant consecutively. Participants who do not wish to answer a question are free to pass the talking piece to the person next to them (United Nations, 2016).

For this research, we had a focus group consisting of 17 participants, including seven members of RJ4All staff, interns and volunteers. With our goal to achieve the first Restorative Justice Postcode in our area SE16, local stakeholders and public authorities assemble quarterly for Speak Up! Restorative Justice Community Forums. These forums create an equitable environment where every local stakeholder can share their perspectives on the topic discussed. By allowing

both local stakeholders and public figures to attend, those forums permit a better understanding of local needs, giving them immediate consideration and prioritisation in decision-making processes. Our Speak-up events are held at Rotherhithe Community Centre, allowing local public figures to visit the community. We also show our commitment to providing a safe place for discussion and listening to our residents, local councillors, and stakeholders. By having our Community Centre recognised as a safe place for discussion, we hope to empower the community by allowing them to share their concerns with us, knowing they will be listened to.

As mentioned previously, we began organising Speak-Up Events in March 2023 with the aim of holding them regularly (Mlcek et al., 2023). Since our first event in March 2023, we have conducted four additional Speak-Up events, the most recent being in November 2024. Each has its own theme. For example, the second Speak-Up event, held in October 2023, focused on power imbalance and injustice. This was followed in February 2024 by another Speak-Up event centring on a recent incident that heightened community safety concerns. Our fourth event, held in July 2024, dealt with the topic of mental health, frequently addressed in the previous event. Each Speak-Up event is accompanied by an impact report, where we analyse the discussions held and publish key findings that are subsequently shared with our stakeholders. Efforts to tackle community needs and concerns should be consistently upheld through these community forums and projects. Furthermore, issues that cannot be resolved in one session should be explored in separate meetings. This is our intention following our Speak-Up Event on Youth.

The most recent Speak-Up event was held on 19th November and facilitated by Dr. Theo Gavrielides and Ronja, an RJ4All intern. The discussion topic was youth, emphasising the negative social perception and narrative surrounding youth, highlighting their impact on our community and service providers and how we should tackle these issues. We chose to cover this topic now due to its significant relevance in the community, as it has been frequently mentioned in previous Speak-Up events. We are also interested in understanding the community's needs regarding youth for our forthcoming youth work that will begin in Spring 2025. This speak-up event can be viewed

as an introductory meeting for the youth-related working groups in Southwark, which are planned for 2025.

2.4. Procedure

The RJ4All facilitated a semi-structured group discussion led by Theo Gavrielides, RJ4All's founder, and Ronja, an RJ4All intern, who encouraged participants to engage in the discussion as equal community members and create a safe place for sharing.

To start this forum, Theo started by sharing the context and purpose of this discussion to bring a better neighbourhood by addressing the negative social perception of youth. He invited all attendees, starting with himself, to present themselves whilst answering a question: W*hat is your connection to the topic?* Following the introduction of every attendee and after breaking the ice of being in that circle, Theo introduced the community centre, its purpose and the narrative behind its establishment.

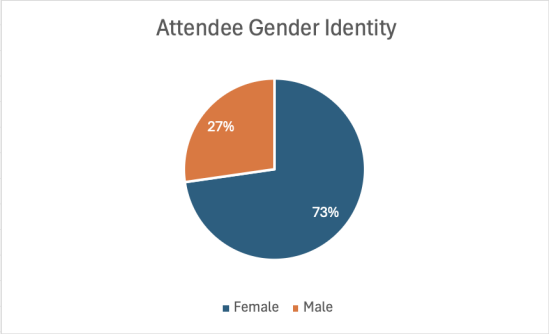
The procedure for this event was deferred from the others. Due to time constraints and our objective of allowing everyone to share their opinions and stories, we sticked to one broad question. For this round, the topic of discussion was the ***Negative Language or Defeatism in the narrative used when talking about Youth***. Every participant was given the choice to speak or not while holding the talking piece and sharing their opinions, experiences, and hopes for the future. To conclude the discussion, Theo suggested the possibility of creating a Youth Group to share ideas and resources for youth well-being and better inclusion in the community. This event sparked discussions about new initiatives and efforts for the upcoming year in Southwark. Finally, before participants left the event, they were asked to submit their feedback on the efficacy of such events on them through a QR code.

3. Results

3.1. Quantitative Data Display

This section presents the demographics of participants who attended the November 2024 Speak Up! event, including their gender, age, ethnicity, and postcodes. Ten participants (excluding the seven RJ4All staff, interns, and volunteers who facilitated, took notes, and participated) attended this community forum. The quantitative data shown below shows the details of those 10 participants.

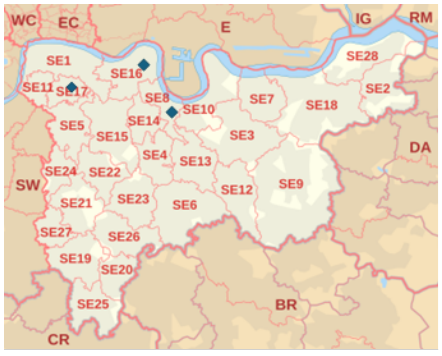
3.1.1. Gender Demographics



In this focus group, 7 participants were women, and 3 participants were men.

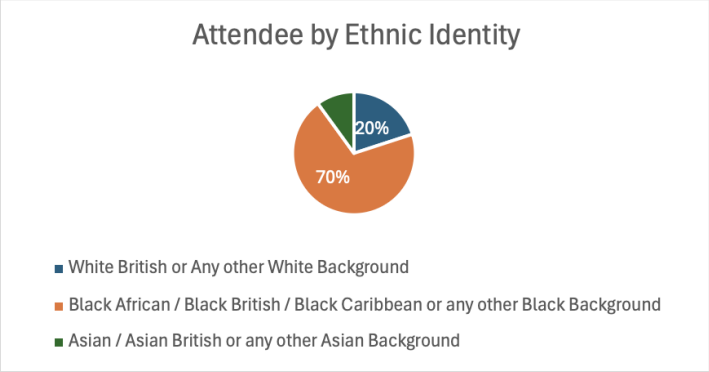
3.1.2. Postcode Demographics

Attendance Postcode
SE16: 80%
SE17: 10%
SE 8: 10%



The attendees from this speak-up event all lived in Southeast London. Eight attendees lived in our area, SE-16, one attendee lived in SE17 and another one in SE8. This high number of participants coming from SE-16 helps us have a good insight into the community's perception and needs.

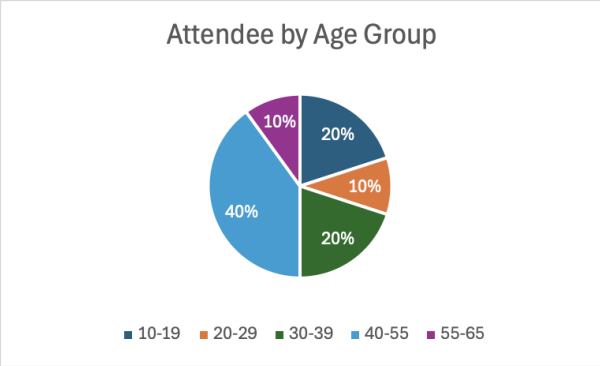
3.1.3. Ethnicity Demographics



Looking at the Ethnic representation, we can see a clear majority of Black Africans or any other black background, with seven attendees or 70% of the focus group. Two participants stated their ethnicity as White British or any other White Background, and one participant identified as Asian or any Asian Background. Compared to previous Speak Up! events whose participants identified in the majority as White British or any other White Background, this time, our data will highlight the experience of Black African or any other black background in the majority.

If this increased participation of Black Africans or people of any other Black background is positive, we still aim to have a homogeneous focus group that would permit a more comprehensive representation, discussion, and analysis.

3.1.4. Age Demographics



A wide range of age groups can be found for this group. The Youth was represented by two attendees aged 10-19, followed by one attendee aged 20-29. Most attendees were over 30, with 2 participants aged 30-39, 4 attendees aged 40-55, and 1 attendee aged 55-65. If we compare our data to the last speak-up event, we can see that the topic of youth has played a role in the presence of younger attendees aged 10-19, who were unrepresented in July 2024. However, we can note This time, only one participant was in the 20-29 age group. On the contrary, the 40-55 age group, the dominant age group, was more represented with four participants.

3.2. Qualitative Data Display

3.2.1. Framing Piece – thematic context

Youth Social Perception was the main topic of this focus group discussion. In previous forums, the community has often discussed the challenges young people face today.

In this focus group, we wanted to address those challenges, especially the negative social perception that the community have on the youth, ***gaining insight into the impact those narratives have on the community and service providers and how we, as a community, could help foster a change into a positive discourse.***

As mentioned, this focus group should be viewed as an introductory meeting regarding youth, with others to follow later. For this reason, we discussed the social perception of youth, its impact, and how we could change it. This allowed all participants to share their perspectives and

experiences. We also aimed to identify the most important needs within our community regarding youth services so that we can gradually address each of these through our future youth group and project.

3.2.2. Question discussed

For this forum, we decided to focus on one topic of discussion here presented:

To what extent do you feel the negative language narrative that has been developed is helping you, at a personal or professional level, in your role of engaging and supporting young people? To what extent is defeatist language perpetuated, and is it on purpose? How do we stop it?

The following section provides an overview of our findings through key points gathered from the discussion.

3.2.2.1. Key points

- **"Lack of services/structures"**: The primary concern regards the lack of services in the area. One participant explained that parents may strive to provide the best for their children, but with low income, they cannot do so without external service provision. The closure of multiple youth clubs in the area was also mentioned. This affects parents and children, who have to search for similar services in nearby areas, increasing the pressure on their services.
- **"Role of Media"**. Media has been identified as a key player in perpetuating the social perception of youth. Those in power also relay this discourse, creating a sense of truth even when the data suggests otherwise. One participant noted that these repeatedly conveyed false narratives affect the community's social perception, hindering social cohesion.
- **"Youth Voice."** One key point voiced by our younger attendees was the need to further include Young People in the discussion. They conveyed that to understand young people and their needs better, we should ask them directly, which is rarely done. Community

members should recognise and acknowledge young people more. This lack of recognition in the discussion can hinder their sense of community membership, causing them to feel that their incivility has little impact on the community.

- **"The role of Parents"**. Parents also have a role to play in this issue. It has been said that while some parents strive to provide the best for their children, they face challenges due to a lack of income and services, while others may benefit from their children's incivility. Indeed, some young people contribute to the household income, leading parents to avoid taking responsibility for their children's actions.
- **"Collaboration of Service Providers"**. The need for service providers to collaborate has been highlighted to address the lack of services and structures. Service providers should view each other not as competitors but as collaborators. As suggested, a collaboration among service providers would help join resources and services, addressing both current needs and existing offerings to enhance youth services.

4. Discussion

4.1. Qualitative Data Analysis

This section will analyse different perspectives, comparing participants' accounts and opinions on youth. Additionally, this report seeks to identify commonalities and themes, tracing similarities to various concerns raised in previous Speak Up! events.

This analysis will have three parts. First, we will examine the impact and ways to address youth social perceptions. Second, we will examine the role of community service providers in addressing these needs. Finally, we will analyse our findings from this focus group and compare them to those from previous Speak Up! events.

4.1.1. Impact and ways to address that narrative

This discussion concerns parents' perceived insecurity about leaving their children outside alone, particularly during the shorter days of the year. The media perpetuates a negative social perception that fuels this insecurity and exaggerates an unnecessary fear within the community. Our participants raised several points, outlined below, regarding addressing that perception and the factors that have influenced it.

Discussions began with the necessity of **integrating services** to enhance service delivery for those in greatest need, as individuals living in poverty are more inclined to engage in criminal activities. Those involved in service delivery play a crucial role in the community's well-being. Service providers must be accessible to the population and possess empathy for the community they serve. We will explore the role of service providers further, as they are instrumental in addressing and reshaping that narrative at the community level.

One of our young participants emphasised the importance of **incorporating youth voices** into the conversation. Youth voices often need to be more represented than they currently are, making understanding their needs and motivations challenging and adversely affecting our capacity to support them effectively. This led the discussion to the **role of parents**. While parents hold a significant position in young people's lives, they are frequently unavailable. Even with good intentions, parents may lack awareness of their children's activities and needs, particularly when working. One participant noted that poverty often drives individuals to crime, which can lead some parents to perceive their children's misconduct as advantageous, unfairly placing the responsibility of earning income on them, a duty that should not rest with children. Additionally, there was a call for parents to take responsibility for their children's behaviour, as neither they nor local services currently seem to address the increasing concerns about safety arising from recent incidents and general incivility. The **role of education** was also discussed. Schools are places where children spend most of their day; however, one participant described educational services as inefficient

and expressed regret over their absence from the focus group. This lack of adequate school services places additional pressure on the community to step in and provide support.

The media further exacerbates this narrative. Throughout the conversation, participants identified the media as a significant contributor to the spread of negativism, which is fuelled by exaggeration, misleading information, and, most critically, repetitive messages. Participants discussed how frequent exposure to such narratives affects personal perceptions, which can be echoed by the larger community, and the necessity of thinking outside this narrative. Participants emphasised the need for **better integration** of young individuals in the community, starting with simple gestures of recognition in public spaces to help them feel acknowledged, based on her observations of their responses to such interactions. Our capacity to change the media's narrative and the overall perception of youth is limited. However, what service providers can do at the community level can help shape a different perception of young people and improve their conditions as community members.

4.1.2. Role of community service providers

As mentioned, **Service providers** have been identified as key community actors in the fight against this social perception.

Improved collaboration among service providers has often been highlighted as a way to address youth issues. Community youth services are declining following the closure of various youth clubs. This leaves parents with limited options: find another nearby club for their children, keep them at home, or let them wander around in the streets. Youth services are not just there to supervise children; they can also help meet essential needs that may not be fulfilled at home. For instance, one participant noted that some children receive only one hot meal a day, while others may need a safe space to stay where their needs can be monitored and communicated to their parents if required. Poverty plays an important role in the need for people to have recourse to crime. An increased amount of service provided in the local area could tackle the lack of access to

basic needs, provide fewer incentives to move to crime and improve the conditions and well-being of the community. However, service capacities are limited, highlighting the need for providers to collaborate, share ideas, and pool resources to address those demands and needs effectively. While community service providers cannot alter the widespread media narrative, they can strive to change perceptions at the local level, thereby promoting community cohesion. To tackle this issue, the community should offer more space where community members, including younger people, can voice their opinions on the community, feelings, and needs.

Service providers also have a role in **elevating youth voices** within the community by fostering their implications and integration into the community as proper members. A suggestion was made to increase the involvement of young people from the community in **RJ4All's internships and volunteering programmes**, enabling them to gain experience whilst being in close contact and sharing discussions with other community members and service users. Their involvement in such could be an example for other young people from other communities, reflecting their will for change and a better future. Youth-led speak-up events could reflect this wish by giving youth a space to share their voices and opinions on topics related to the community.

4.1.3. Links with the Year 1 and Year 2 RJ4All work

The first Speak Up! event held in March 2023 explored '*Hopes and fears for Southwark 2030*', followed by a discussion in October 2023 on '*harms, injustice, and community needs*'. Similar themes surfaced during the first focus group of the second project year, which focused on '*thoughts and feelings concerning the Bywater Place police shooting incident*'. The second focus group of 2024 investigated '*mental health impacts on the community, root causes, and practical solutions*'. These recurring themes underscore the importance of community representation, emphasising the views of SE16 and the larger Southeast London area. This aligns with RJ4All's mission to foster social cohesion, rectify power disparities, and improve relationships between community members and public authorities.

The findings from the inaugural year emphasised the necessity for ***community solidarity and empowerment, the expansion of community spaces, rebuilding trust, enhancing communication, and ensuring accountability from public agencies***. Likewise, the second year's insights pointed to ***institutional shortcomings, fear and danger, community disempowerment, and the urgent need for improved service funding***.

Similar issues were echoed **in the context of youth** discussed in the last Speak Up! event. The insecure feelings surrounding the community and the need for improved services remain pertinent in regard to the previous record in the Restorative Justice Postcode project. The need to increase the youth's voice in the community, including their recognition as community members, was a key part of our discussion at the last Speak Up! Event. Whilst there is a recognised need for Youth empowerment and youth voices to address the negative social perception perpetuated and exaggerated by the media, youth service providers have decreased in the area, complemented by an education system failing to deliver its tasks.

Moreover, discussions revealed a recurring theme of poverty and its impact on parents, children, and younger people. Poverty amplifies distrust in the system and the feeling of being marginalised. This emphasised the need for service providers at the community level, which, despite their limited capacity and help address the needs of marginalised communities.

For this reason, RJ4All opened a community centre in SE16, intending to provide as many services as possible to our local community in Southeast London. We offer food banks, sports classes, employability workshops, wellbeing circles, and more. We aim to combat food poverty through these initiatives and strengthen community cohesion and relationships with key institutions such as stakeholders, community organisations, and public authorities.

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. Similarly, findings from Year 2 highlighted similar needs for institutional accountability, building trust with the authorities, and increasing physical spaces to foster community cohesion (Richards et al.,

2024). Building on this narrative, our fifth Speak-Up event demonstrated a real and urgent need to extend our communal approach to younger people and provide them with a space to discuss topics such as mental health, safety, and positive relationships/friendships.

The feedback from this study emphasises the significance of the Restorative Justice Postcode Project and RJ4All's initiatives, particularly in fostering a safe environment for young people to express their opinions and share their experiences as community members. It highlights their recognition and importance, enabling progress in transforming the social perceptions of the younger generation. Moreover, community cohesion and trust with local authorities should improve by incorporating young people's voices within our community. Additionally, in the long run, the early integration of Restorative Justice principles through youth conflict resolution and community building will enhance the community's well-being. We hope that this study will help other community organisations working with young people recognise the need to address the issue of negative social perception at the local level.

4.2. Quantitative Data Analysis

In this section, we will further analyse the demographics of our November focus group. As a reminder, ten participants were present (excluding seven members of RJ4All staff, interns, and volunteers who were present to facilitate, take notes, and participate).

4.2.1. Gender demographics

This focus group consisted of 73 per cent women. This high percentage imbalanced the gender distribution in favour of women's voices. Given the topic of youth empowerment, limited representation of men's voices may limit the scope of youth discourses to a certain perspective and narrative. While we should welcome the strong representation of women, we cannot overlook this imbalance and the necessity for a more equitable gender distribution to improve representation in the future.

4.2.2. Postcode demographics

This time, the focus group was dominated by people living in SE16, with only two representatives coming from SE17 and SE8. This high representation of SE16 residents is a good aspect of our project, as we communicated and shared our project with the main recipients and our target group. It has also permitted our community to share their opinions on the local area with each other. We also had 2 participants from SE17 and SE18 close to our local area.

Now, we must include that a more heterogeneous group would have permitted us to have a more comprehensive approach to the topic and potentially gain new insights and ideas for our community. Previous focus groups have demonstrated a greater diversity of postcode representation, and we should aim to have a good balance between them.

4.2.3. Ethnicity demographics

This focus group was represented in majority by a Black African/Black British or other Black background perspective with 70% of attendees. 2 attendees were from a White British or any other white background, and one was Asian/Asian British or any other Asian background. This is important to consider in the data analysis, as we limit our perspective to one major ethnic background instead of multiple. However, we should recognise the increase in involvement of Black Africans/Black British or other Black backgrounds in our focus group. This is an improvement that we should acknowledge and support in future focus groups, as we should strive for better representation by having heterogeneous ethnic background participants in the future.

4.2.4. Age demographics

This study on Youth has attracted younger participants, especially those in the 10-19 age group, which is particularly targeted and the subject of the discussion. The insights of this young population were very insightful, and despite their low number, only two gave us a perspective that

other participants could not have. Additionally, we had one participant in the 20-29 age group. The rest of our participants were over 30, with a majority of 40-55 age group participants.

Due to the nature of the topic this time, it is very positive to have received the perspective of the younger population through their own words. As we saw in our analysis, the importance of integrating youth voice into our discussion was mentioned, and we should aim for future events to include that perspective more. Including youth voices combined with a good representation of adults permitted a good variety of perspectives and shared opinions. We may only regret the low number of participants aged 20-29, which could have further shown variety in our narratives.

5. Critical Conclusions

The Speak Up! event in November 2024 marked the fifth session of the Restorative Justice Project. This study participated in RJ4All efforts to strengthen relationships with community members and younger people and create an opportunity for further collaboration between service providers in the area. This study aims to reinforce the objective of the Restorative Justice postcode project by bringing together local community members, stakeholders, and service providers to identify the needs we need to prioritise while giving a voice to those marginalised in the community. This marks a continuation of RJ4All's commitment to community empowerment.

During our discussion on youth, some urgent issues were raised, such as **the need to collaborate and coordinate our youth service provision**, **to increase youth voices in our forums for better integration**, and **the need to tackle this perpetual negative social perception of young people that undermines our community cohesion and wellbeing**. Analysis of the Postcode project's Year 1 and Year 2 findings and conclusion shows a need for Restorative Justice practice in social conflict resolution. This session's findings indicate that such practices should also be reinforced at the youth stage. The earlier we implement Restorative Justice principles in conflict resolution and community empowerment, the better these principles will be integrated and implemented in adulthood, fostering long-term positive change within the community. Our study has revealed that to enhance community cohesion and address the negative social perception of

youth, it is essential to further involve young people in our community by improving their access to safe spaces to voice their needs and concerns in their local area. This approach has proven effective with adults, and we should extend this opportunity to younger individuals. Additionally, by providing a space for young people to go and have activities to engage in through volunteering or internship programmes, we believe that they will be less inclined to participate in unlawful activities and will instead foster friendships and relationships with other young people in a safe environment, thus improving their relations with community members. Through a collaborative effort, Speak Up! events reflect the active change that local community members, public agencies, and stakeholders intend to achieve, and we ought to participate in those positive efforts' changes.

6. Recommendations

Following the discussion on youth, the recommendations below will outline improvements for the RJ4All team, Steering Group, and external stakeholders.

6.1. ***Encouraging the use of the Restorative Justice model in addressing the empowerment of young people :*** We believe it is important for young people to use and engage with Restorative Justice as an ethos in their daily lives, serving as a model for addressing disagreements and conflicts. The earlier Restorative Justice principles are integrated into young people's education, the more effective the dissemination and implementation of those principles will be later in their lives. Thus, as we will recommend later, the education system, particularly schools, should start incorporating Restorative Justice principles when resolving conflicts in their settings.

6.2. ***Recognising and addressing young people's needs at the local level:*** Young people's needs and demands differ significantly from those of adults. However, we cannot adequately assess these needs at the community level without appropriate spaces to express them. Therefore, employing our method of circles and community forums focused

on youth can help us recognise their needs and address them where possible. Furthermore, service providers at the community level should create spaces for the younger generation to feel their voices are valued, support them through their challenges, and, when our services fall short, direct them to the right resources.

6.3. ***Mending fractured relations through the creation of a Youth-led Speak Up! Event:*** Youth-led Speak Up! events should be our next step in empowering young people and providing them with a safe space to voice their opinions and experiences within the community. We have witnessed the positive impact of such events on our community members, and we believe that a similar forum should also be made available for younger attendees. During our last Speak Up! event, we saw how enthusiastic younger attendees were about discussing their own experiences in the community and expressing how they would like to see change implemented. Discussions among younger attendees could also serve as an opportunity for them to forge friendships and collaborate towards positive change in the community.

6.4. ***Expanding the offer of youth services in the community through increased collaboration:*** A key point raised during the forum was increasing collaboration among service providers, especially regarding youth service provision. Our local area has experienced a decrease in youth services due to the closure of multiple youth clubs. This impacts the services provided by other youth clubs, which face pressure from the growing demand. To address this issue, a plan is being developed to create a Youth Management Board to help guide our youth service provision in the local area.

6.5. ***Reforms in the education system to allow more youth services provision and encourage the use of Restorative Justice:*** We believe the education system can better address the issue of service provision. Young people spend most of their time at school,

creating a sense of familiarity in such environments. If schools in the area could provide more youth services, it would help tackle the ongoing demand for service provision. Additionally, we should encourage the use of the Restorative Justice model in school settings to resolve tensions. However, we also recognise that without proper funding, the education system cannot implement such changes and provide the support young people need.

6.6. ***Encouraging young people in the community to increase their involvement in the community's well-being through internships or volunteering programs in Service providers:*** To empower young people in the community while promoting Restorative Justice practices among youth, one of the best ways for RJ4All to increase participation is by engaging local young people in our internships or volunteer programmes. This will help them gain experience, create social connections with our community members and service users, and address the negative social perception of youth that is prevalent in the community. We also invite other service providers in our areas to offer such programmes and encourage their local young people to get involved.

7. Acknowledgement

Rotherhithe Consolidated Charities supports RJ4All's restorative justice circles and speak-up events and is a member of the Restorative Justice Postcode Steering Group". Website address: www.rotherhithecc.co.uk

Rotherhithe Consolidated Charities

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