Building the World's First Restorative Justice Postcode

9th Quarterly Impact Report

September - October 2025

Speak-up! Restorative Justice Circles

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RJ4ALL BUILDING THE WORLD'S FIRST RESTORATIVE JUSTICE POSTCODE

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- GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE
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Executive Summary

In January 2023, the Restorative Justice for All International Institute (hereafter RJ4All) launched the World's First Restorative Justice Postcode initiative in the SE16 postcode area. The *Restorative Justice Postcode Project* is a pioneering local initiative that forms part of our broader global effort to advance restorative justice as a cornerstone of the social justice movement. The project aims to establish a community model designed to promote a fairer distribution of power and address harm through restorative practices. Grounded in restorative justice principles, it brings together key stakeholders to collaborate in alleviating poverty, reducing crime, empowering young people, celebrating diversity, and strengthening community cohesion through dialogue and healing.

This report reflects on the Speak Up! Circle focused on **Connecting Restorative Justice to Community Lives**, attended by local stakeholders, community members, and a significant number of our regular volunteers. The findings reaffirm the growing awareness and practical application of restorative justice principles within our community and highlight areas for further development as we move into the next phase of our work. 13 participants attended the circle, with also a facilitator and a note-taker present, and the questions discussed were:

Question 1: What does restorative justice mean to you?

Question 2: What kind of factors or elements are necessary for restorative justice?

Question 3: How can you see the values of restorative justice being implemented in community life and in the way we shape our community?

Question 4: How do you see RJ4All contributing more or differently?

Key Recommendations Based on the Findings

Increasing Visibility and Understanding of Restorative Justice

- Expanding the RJ4All Education and Publication sections to make restorative justice accessible and well-understood
- Developing community-friendly workshops, online learning tools, and publications that clarify principles and address misconceptions

- Continuing to foster reflexive and critical dialogue to strengthen the integrity and practical relevance of restorative justice in community contexts

Fostering Inclusive Participation in Community Circles

- Enhancing the reach and impact of Speak Up! Circles by increasing outreach and participation across diverse groups
- Exploring opportunities to adapt the circle method for council meetings, schools, and youth programmes, and training facilitators to ensure inclusive and sustainable practice

Collaborating with Local Authorities and Partners

- Developing partnerships with local councils, schools, and community organisations to embed restorative practices in community planning, governance, and conflict resolution
- Making use of shared training and pilot projects to help mainstream restorative approaches across sectors

Expanding and Diversifying Community Engagement

- Complementing the circles with a wider range of community activities, such as arts-based projects, cultural events, and wellbeing programmes that embody restorative values
- Continuing integrating mental health, youth resilience, and poverty/access initiatives under a holistic restorative framework

Increasing Advocacy and Outreach

- Broadening advocacy and campaigning efforts around healing, justice, and inclusion, connecting individual experiences of harm to broader systemic issues
- Developing local and national campaigns, and publishing research to raise awareness of restorative justice as a community-building resource

This Speak Up! Circle illustrated the depth of restorative understanding emerging in our community, particularly among regular volunteers who have become natural advocates for

dialogue, accountability, and shared power. Their participation reflects how restorative justice can become a lived practice through consistent community engagement.

Use and Value of Findings

While it needs to be taken into account that data used in this report is limited in scope concerning its representativeness of the community as a whole, the insights gathered hold significant value for our ongoing work. The reflections of participants who know our Centre provide a grounded understanding of how restorative justice principles are experienced in practice, through our services, relationships, and community initiatives. These findings contribute directly to our learning as an organisation, helping us identify strengths, areas for growth, and opportunities to deepen restorative approaches across our programmes. They also inform future planning, evaluation, and advocacy efforts, ensuring that our work continues to respond to the real experiences and needs of our community. While not intended to represent all voices in SE16, the findings offer a meaningful snapshot of how restorative values are being lived and understood within our shared community context.

1. Introduction and Purpose of Paper

In the last quarter of our third year of the Building the World's First Restorative Justice Postcode project, RJ4All continues to develop, monitor, and evaluate its services delivered from the Rotherhithe Community Centre, SE16, with a mission to tackle the root causes of inequality, power imbalance, marginalisation, and abuse. These factors can lead to exclusion, community tension, and harmful behaviours, which our work seeks to prevent and transform.

This is the 9th Qualitative Impact Report of the Postcode Project, and it reflects the findings from our most recent Speak Up! Circle, organised in October 2025. Held quarterly, the Speak Up! Circles provide a safe and inclusive space for open dialogue among residents, service users, business owners, parents, young people, councillors, and entrepreneurs. Each session is chaired by a trained circle facilitator, following a restorative justice circle format. Participants are invited to contribute or step back from the discussion as they feel comfortable, fostering an atmosphere of respect, equality, and shared understanding. **This practice stems from both long-standing traditions and contemporary approaches to peacemaking; *circles are not simply tools for problem solving***, they are a way of being together that remind us of our shared humanity and interdependence (Pranis, 2015).

For this edition, the Circle was on **Connecting Restorative Justice to Community Lives,** exploring the meaning and practice of the concept *restorative justice* in everyday life, examining how its principles shape community wellbeing, strengthen relationships, and foster safer and more supportive neighbourhoods. Participants discussed four core questions*: What does restorative justice mean to you? What kind of factors or elements are necessary for restorative justice? How can you see the values of restorative justice being implemented in community life and in the way we shape our community? How do you see RJ4All contributing more or differently?*

This event continues the Speak Up! Circles launched in 2023 under the Restorative Justice Postcode Project and builds on the legacy of earlier community forums dating back to 2020. Supported by Rotherhithe Consolidated Charities, a key local funder and member of our

Steering Group, this circle contributes to an ongoing collection of qualitative and quantitative evidence informing the design, development, and delivery of our Postcode Project. Through these community conversations, we capture lived experiences and insights that support three core aims: to inform the RJ4All team and Steering Group members, guide the continued evolution of our restorative justice services, and act as a communication resource for wider stakeholders invested in community empowerment and restorative practice.

1.1. Who are we?

Restorative Justice for All (RJ4All) is a South East London-based organisation dedicated to addressing power abuse, conflict, and poverty through restorative justice principles and practices, with expertise in preventing and addressing harm at the individual, community, and inter-state levels. We promote equality, dignity, respect, and fairness by delivering social justice and poverty relief projects, educational programmes, and community initiatives, transferring complex criminological and social justice concepts into practice through real-life pilots and community projects.

At RJ4All, we view and deal with harm in a holistic manner and through positive, user-led methods. Our projects and campaign work are drawn from the belief that the most persistent driver of inequality is power abuse and that the bio-power that exists to prevent and control it is found in restorative justice principles. Therefore, we base our work on this ethos, which is the stance point we approach this topic and report from.

At RJ4All, we work from the following maximalistic definition:

> *"Restorative Justice is an ethos with practical goals, among which is to repair harm by including affected parties in a (direct or indirect) encounter and a process of understanding through voluntary, safe and honest dialogue. Restorative justice adopts a fresh approach to conflicts and their control, retaining at the same time certain rehabilitative goals"*
>
> (Gavrielides, 2020: 139).

2. Research Methodology and Sampling

This Speak Up! Circle opened with a short dissemination segment, using infographics and accessible explanations to introduce restorative justice definitions, principles, and processes, and to frame RJ as a practice rooted in healing, hope, and addressing harm. This helped to establish a shared understanding before discussion began.

2.1. Recruitment Process

To ensure the Speak-Up! Circles reflect the needs and voices of our local area, we implemented a targeted and inclusive recruitment process. Local residents, community groups, schools, businesses, and public authorities were invited to participate through a combination of direct outreach, partner networks, and online dissemination. Information was shared via RJ4All's website, social media channels, newsletters, and collaborations with local partners, including Southwark Council and community organisations.

Given that restorative justice remains a relatively unfamiliar concept to many, we developed clear and accessible communication materials to support recruitment. This included a poster explaining the core principles of restorative justice and information leaflets distributed during outreach activities. They included interpreted associations such as *'healing'*, *'harm'*, and *'hope'*. These materials aimed to raise awareness, clarify the purpose of the circles, and encourage informed participation (please see below).

All Speak-Up! Circles are held at RJ4All's premises to promote accessibility and inclusivity to the local residents in SE16 and neighbouring towns, allowing community members and decision-makers to engage directly in a welcoming and restorative environment.

2.2. Participants

13 participants attended the circle including regular service users, RJ4All volunteers, local funders, and community stakeholders. The strong presence of volunteers reflected their ongoing commitment to restorative justice values, while stakeholder attendance demonstrated growing interest in learning about RJ and its application in community settings. Most participants had previously taken part in RJ4All initiatives, meaning many were already familiar with restorative approaches. However, representation from certain key

local actors, including councillors and police representatives, was absent. This gap indicates the need for enhanced outreach and engagement strategies to strengthen institutional participation.

2.3. Method

The discussion was guided by a set of pre-defined questions designed to explore participants' perspectives on restorative justice. A dedicated event website enabled online registration, while drop-in attendance was also accommodated.

Data collection included both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data was self-reported via digital questionnaires, with participants given the option to provide demographic information such as age and ethnicity. Consent forms were explained and signed to allow collection of qualitative data during the circle.

Qualitative data was captured through detailed notetaking by an RJ4All intern and subsequently analysed. The insights gathered were used to produce this report and to develop written recommendations.

2.4. Procedure

Constructed from a restorative justice perspective, this research utilised a focus group that mirrors traditional peacemaking circles. This method was selected to encourage group discussion within a safe environment where all participants could share their opinions, comments, and experiences on a given topic without fear of judgment. Such circles enable people to relate as equal human beings, and communicate respectfully and constructively. This format promotes insightful discussions among people from diverse backgrounds and encourages open dialogue.

During these circles, we use a 'talking piece', represented by an object (United Nations, 2016). It serves as a tool to ensure equal opportunity to speak, with no interruptions, allowing each person to be heard as the talking piece is passed sequentially. Participants who prefer not to answer a question are free to pass the talking piece to the next person.

2.5. Limitations

The findings presented in this report should be understood within the intended scope of the community forum and project evaluation. The forum was designed to explore how participants connected to our Centre and our work within the community, understand restorative justice and its relevance to community life. As such, the insights reflect experiences within this specific context rather than representing the full diversity of perspectives on restorative justice.

Sample Size and Representation:

Our sample size was 13 (not including the facilitator and note-taker), relatively small and should not be reflected as representative of SE16 area as a whole. However, this was consistent with the forum's purpose: to gather in-depth, qualitative reflections from those familiar with our restorative justice-informed work and community environment.

Reach and Access:

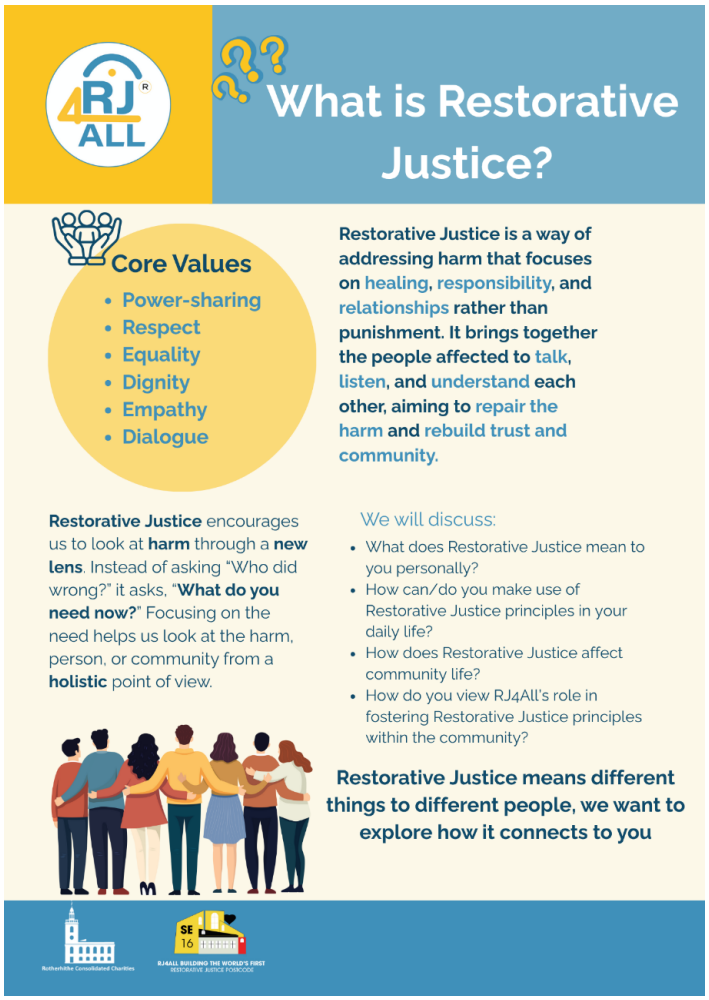
Engagement opportunities were promoted primarily through our existing communication channels, including social media, mailing lists, and direct contact with service users and partners. This means that individuals without previous connection to the Centre may not have been reached, which shaped the perspectives included in this report.

Purpose and Focus:

The forum and this report were developed as part of ongoing project evaluation, with the aim of understanding outcomes and learning among those who have interacted with our services. It is not intended as a general assessment of public awareness or attitudes toward restorative justice in the broader community.

Context and Timing:

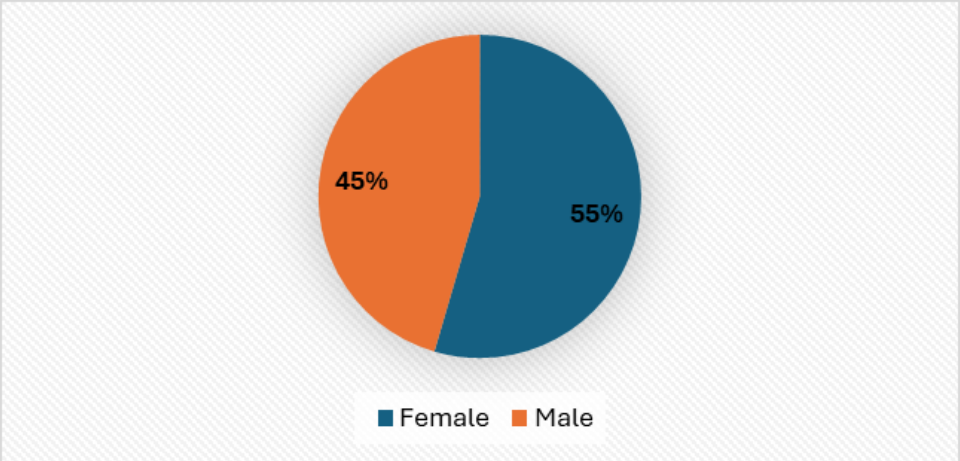
The discussions and findings reflect the local social and community context at the time of the forum. External factors, such as current local issues, funding environments, or community priorities, may have influenced the themes that emerged and should be considered when interpreting the results.



3. Results

This section presents the quantitative data collected from participants of this Speak-Up! Circle, excluding RJ4All staff (who attended the circle) from the statistics, presenting a sample size of 11. It provides an overview of participant attendance and demographic characteristics.

3.1. Gender Demographics



Six women and five men (except the two female RJ4ALL staff participants) attended this particular circle. None of the participants identified as non-binary.

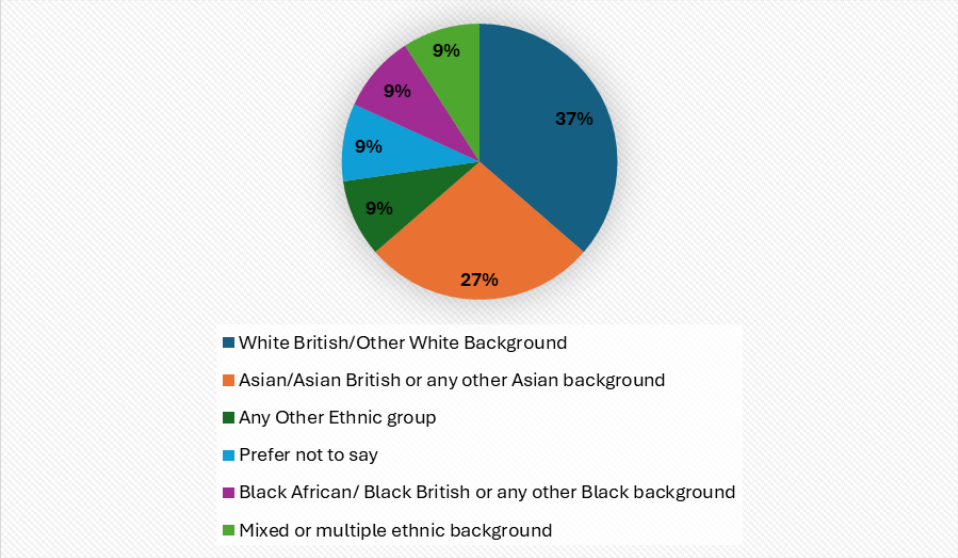
3.2. Postcode Demographics

As seen in the table below, most participants were based in SE16 and SE8.

Participant 1	SE17
Participant 2	SE16
Participant 3	SE16
Participant 4	SW4
Participant 5	SE16
Participant 6	SE8

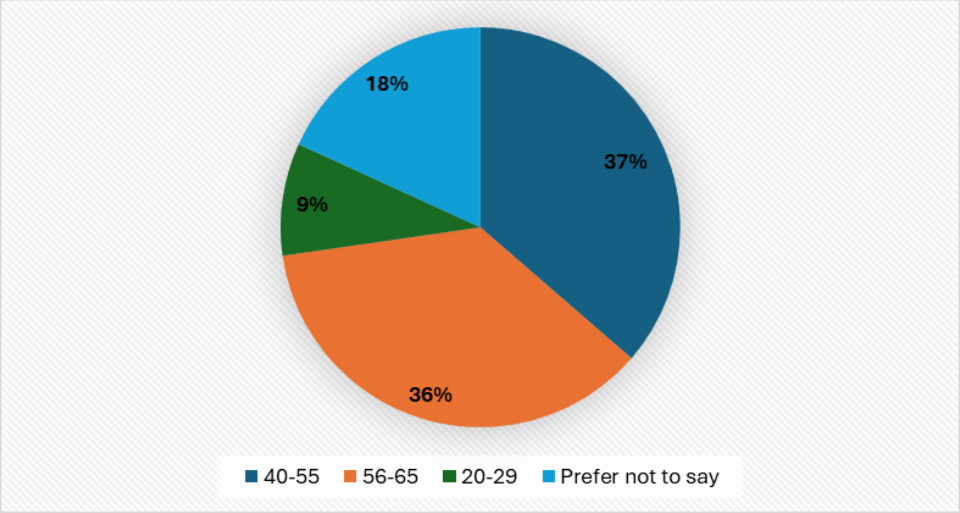
Participant 7	SE8
Participant 8	SE8
Participant 9	N4
Participant 10	SE16
Participant 11	SE16

3.3. Ethnicity Demographics



Four of our attendees identified as “White British or any other white background”, three identified as “Asian/Asian British or any other Asian background”, one identified as “Black African/Black British or any other Black background”, and one identified as “Mixed or multiple ethnic background”. One of our eleven sample size attendees has chosen not to communicate their ethnicity.

3.4. Age Demographics



For this circle, the participant age range was more diverse compared to previous sessions. Four attendees were between 50 and 55 years old, and another four participants were aged 56 to 60, representing the majority of the group. We also had one younger participant aged between 20 and 29. Two participants preferred not to disclose their age.

4. Qualitative Data Display

4.1. Thematic Context

This section explores participants' perspectives on restorative justice, highlighting their reflections, shared meanings, and experiences. Restorative justice (RJ) has gained increasing attention as an alternative approach to traditional punitive systems, emphasising dialogue, accountability, and community repair rather than punishment. Yet, it remains a contentious field, often debated for its varied definitions, inconsistent implementation, and risk of being co-opted by formal justice systems (Gavrielides, 2007). RJ4All advocates for a community-based, inclusive approach to restorative justice that extends beyond the criminal sphere, embedding its principles into everyday social interactions, and local development. As scholars in the field focus on the importance of relations, restorative justice is not primarily about punishment or forgiveness; it is about healing and the reparation of harm within "the web of relationships" that connect us (Zehr, 2015).

This Speak Up! Circle brought together RJ4All volunteers, many already familiar with restorative justice values through their work, as well as community members and stakeholders who may be new to the concept but eager to explore its relevance. Their participation demonstrates a shared interest in understanding how restorative justice values can be applied in community settings, particularly in SE16.

The analysis aims to identify recurring themes and differences, while connecting these insights with those from previous Speak Up! Circles. The circle included a high number of RJ4All volunteers, reflecting their intense engagement with restorative justice principles and commitment to the organisation's work. Community stakeholders also participated, demonstrating interest in understanding restorative justice and its application in community settings. Participants reflected on how restorative justice values relate to local projects in SE16—particularly those led by RJ4All—covering themes such as community cohesion, conflict resolution, mental health and wellbeing, poverty and access, and youth resilience, alongside research and advocacy initiatives. Participants were highly engaged, and the discussion extended beyond the scheduled time due to their willingness to contribute and share insights.

Our approach views restorative justice and healing from harm through a **holistic lens**, recognising that to build understanding and community cohesion, multiple and intersecting needs must be addressed. Participants who know our Centre understand restorative justice through the services we provide. The services we provide are not delivered in isolation or at random, but within a broader framework of fostering dialogue, accountability, and collective wellbeing within the principles of restorative justice.

The connection between the concept of restorative justice and how we disseminate it through community projects could be identified through these categories:

- Community cohesion
- Conflict resolution
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Poverty and access

- Youth resilience

Alongside these service areas, the Centre also engages in research and advocacy to deepen understanding and application of restorative justice within the wider community context. This work seeks to bridge practice and policy, ensuring that restorative approaches are grounded in the lived realities of our community members and beyond.

The analysis in this report focuses on three main areas: how participants understand restorative justice and the principles they associate with it, the factors they consider necessary for restorative practices to be meaningful and effective, and how they envisage restorative justice values being embedded in community life to shape the ways communities address harm, support one another, and build stronger relationships.

4.2. Key points

Understanding of Restorative Justice

- **Familiarity:** Many participants have taken part in RJ4All events or projects, and were familiar with ideas connected to restorative justice. They viewed it as a means to foster empathy, dialogue, and a sense of community responsibility.
- **Community and Connection:** Participants stressed the importance of meeting in-person and building connections, especially in London, where people can feel isolated. It was underlined that talking across neighbourhoods helps people understand challenges, reduce fear, and feel more part of the community.
- **Individual Action and Change:** Several participants said that change starts with individuals. Simple actions, conversations, and holding people accountable can improve behaviour and influence the broader community over time.
- **Barriers and Challenges:** Participants pointed out that poverty, lack of opportunities, and practical problems can make it harder for restorative justice to work. Tackling these issues is essential for making it meaningful for everyone.

- **Participation and Volunteering:** Being involved in restorative justice projects helps participants feel connected and able to make a difference. Volunteering supports others while also giving a sense of purpose, awareness, and hope.

Factors and elements necessary for Restorative Justice

- **Acknowledgement:** Participants emphasised that recognising the harm caused is essential. This process relies on human connection, empathy, and understanding, which helps build trust, foster dialogue, and facilitate the development of forgiveness. Restorative justice is viewed as a deliberate and thoughtful process that demands patience and genuine engagement.
- **Dialogue and Facilitation:** Open dialogue between those harmed and those who caused harm is central. A neutral facilitator is crucial in guiding these often-challenging conversations and ensuring that all participants feel heard and respected.
- **Community Involvement:** Restorative justice is not just about the individual victim and perpetrator. Participants emphasised the crucial role of the broader community in repairing harm, fostering dialogue, and rebuilding trust.
- **Access and Support:** Practical access to services and opportunities is essential to allow participation, especially for those facing barriers such as digital exclusion or lack of resources. Ensuring people are ready and able to engage is critical.
- **Inclusion:** While achieving complete agreement can be challenging, coming together despite differences is valuable. Including community representatives and people in positions of authority can help share power and strengthen outcomes.
- **Challenges:** Participants recognised that it can be difficult for people who have caused harm to acknowledge and repair it. In these cases, restorative justice may rely more on community support and structured processes to address harm.

Values of Restorative Justice Implemented in Community Life

- **Fostering Dialogue and Connection:** Participants highlighted the importance of open communication across neighbourhoods to raise awareness of local challenges, reduce fear, and build a sense of inclusion. Restorative justice can provide structured

spaces for these conversations, helping the community work together toward positive change.

- **Active Practices:** Activities like this circle show the value of putting restorative justice into practice. Participants emphasised that regularly engaging in such activities helps strengthen community norms and ensures restorative principles are ingrained rather than remaining theoretical.
- **Bringing People Together:** Many participants noted that restorative justice initiatives help counter isolation by encouraging in-person engagement and volunteerism. These activities foster a positive sense of belonging and ownership of the community.
- **Empathy, Dialogue, and Values:** Restorative justice encourages empathy, forgiveness, and dialogue, even when people have different principles or perspectives. Participants saw these values as essential for shaping community attitudes and fostering mutual respect.
- **Practical Access:** Participants highlighted the importance of ensuring access to opportunities, services, and resources to enable meaningful participation. This includes simplifying application processes for community programs, reducing delays in accessing local services, and making participation requirements clearer and more flexible. These adjustments help ensure that restorative justice initiatives can be fully experienced and embedded in community life.

Enhancing RJ4All's Contribution to the Community

Participants suggested that RJ4All could further showcase the principles of restorative justice by expanding opportunities for engagement and outreach. While RJ4All effectively incorporates restorative justice practices into its community projects, participants noted the importance of wider dissemination, sharing models of how others can apply restorative justice, providing clear guidance on access, and increasing awareness through campaigning. Reaching different audiences, engaging more broadly across the community, and collaborating with local authorities, such as the Council, were also seen as ways to strengthen the impact and visibility of restorative justice in practice.

5. Discussion

5.1. Quantitative Data

This section outlines the demographic profile of the participants who took part in the October 2025 Speak Up! Circle, covering gender, postcode, ethnicity, and age. All demographics were optional to share. We will analyse the demographics as a disclosure for the impact of the report. We have analysed the quantitative demographic data of participants in the circle to provide context and insight into the findings, and to acknowledge any possible effects these demographics may have had on the outcomes. This analysis is not intended as a demographic representation of the wider population of SE16, nor as an attempt to generalise the conclusions to the community as a whole, but rather as a way to situate and better understand the voices that were present in this forum. In particular, we recognise that the views expressed in the forum should not be assumed to represent the perspectives of entire demographic groups. The purpose of this section is therefore only to situate the discussion within its specific sample, enhancing transparency.

A total of 13 community members attended the session (not including one RJ4All staff who facilitated and one RJ4All intern who supported with note-taking), 11 of those were included in the reporting on demographics, as RJ4All staff (who attended the circle) were not included.

The circle brought together a group of participants, with slightly more women than men (six women, five men). None of the participants identified as non-binary. Gender shouldn't be analysed solely on its own, and it is important to note that the roughly even representation in terms of gender but may not be representative of intersectional needs.

The group was strongly representative of 40-65 age bracket. Although the event attracted engaged and experienced community members, younger people were less represented, mirroring a wider challenge in involving youth in community dialogue spaces.

Similarly, ethnic representation reflected the usual demographics of RJ4All's local area, with limited scope for analysis on potential consequences, due to small sample size and spread sample demographics.

Most participants were based in neighbouring SE16 and SE8 areas, reflecting RJ4All's local community focus and SE16 Postcode Project.

5.2. Qualitative data

This section will analyse different perspectives on restorative justice, comparing participants' corresponding accounts and opinions. Additionally, this report seeks to identify commonalities and themes, tracing similarities to insights gathered in previous Speak Up! Circles.

The discussion began by exploring participants' understanding of restorative justice and how they personally engage with its principles. Restorative justice was broadly characterised as a practice that encourages empathy, dialogue, accountability, and community support. One participant defined it as *"bringing it back to people who are affected by an issue being involved in resolving a harm"*, highlighting agency and relationship-building as central values. Another noted that restorative justice *"relies on both parties wanting it"*, pointing to the voluntary nature of the process and the difficulty of achieving mutual willingness. Some participants connected restorative justice to broader social or structural issues. For instance, one commented that *"it's connected to power and money",* and that only few community centres focus on such discussions.

It was also acknowledged that while these principles are widely valued, they are not always easy to implement, and the process can be challenging for both individuals and communities.

Some participants noted that while events attract already engaged community members, they do not always reach those whose involvement is most needed, which can feel discouraging.

Some participants had prior exposure to restorative justice through RJ4All projects or similar activities, and most felt confident in applying its concepts in their own lives. This reflects the strength of the culture that is fostered through the organisation but doesn't necessarily represent the general populations' views on restorative justice. A clear distinction emerged between understanding the principles and feeling able to implement them effectively in the

broader community. While participants recognised the importance of dialogue, accountability, and community involvement, they noted practical and structural barriers that can limit engagement, including poverty, limited opportunities, social isolation, and restricted access to resources. Many spoke about poverty and day-to-day pressures making it difficult for people to attend events or take part in initiatives, with one participant noting, *"even when people want to take part, life pressures just make it impossible."* Others described social isolation and limited opportunities for connection, explaining that people often feel disconnected from the wider community or unsure how to get involved. Restricted access to resources was also raised, including difficulties navigating digital services, booking systems, and support opportunities, with one participant emphasising, *"people need access to participate; if services are digital and complicated, it excludes many."* These barriers, participants stressed, can prevent restorative justice principles from being fully realised, even when there is willingness and interest to engage.

Another barrier identified was the lack of accountability, either for an individual denying or not understanding they caused harm or from authorities and representatives who may fail to take responsibility for their actions. This absence of accountability can undermine trust, limit opportunities for repair, and reduce the effectiveness of restorative justice processes.

A recurring theme was the importance of active participation and human connection. Participants highlighted that restorative justice begins with individuals taking responsibility for their actions, engaging in open dialogue, and fostering empathy. They stressed that meaningful change requires both personal accountability and supportive structures within institutions to reinforce trust, address harm, and promote community cohesion.

Several participants linked restorative justice to the challenges posed by technology. One participant underscored that *"AI and digitalisation block dialogue and lead to disempowerment"*, suggesting that human connection remains vital for authentic restorative justice processes. Others saw technology as a potential area for skill development, arguing that *"training people to work side by side with new technologies is increasingly important."* These contrasting views highlight the evolving relevance of restorative justice in a digital age.

Participants also discussed the role of community support in implementing restorative justice. They highlighted that engaging the wider community, including representatives in positions of authority, can help repair harm collectively and create a culture of care. Active practices, such as discussion circles, were considered essential for integrating restorative justice into everyday life and fostering a positive sense of belonging, ownership, and inclusion.

Reflections were made on the use of practices of restorative justice such as these circles being a useful format that should be adopted by the local council. Moreover, participants reflected on how RJ4All could strengthen the visibility and impact of restorative justice in the community. While RJ4All successfully applies restorative principles in its projects, participants suggested that wider dissemination, sharing practical models, guidance on access, and increased campaigning would help more people to understand and adopt these practices. Expanding outreach to diverse audiences and collaborating with local authorities were also considered essential for ensuring that restorative justice is accessible, practical, and meaningful for the broader community.

Summary findings and observations from the fourth quarter of the third year of the project

- Participants actively demonstrated restorative justice (RJ) values during the circle (respect, listening, equal speaking time, adherence to rules).
- There was a shared core understanding of restorative justice, but diverse interpretations and personal definitions.
- Participants showed strong appreciation for in-person gatherings and face-to-face dialogue rather than online settings.
- Compared to previous Speak Up! Circles (except the September Speak Up! Circle, for which we had the same number of participants), this session had a higher attendance, reflecting growing engagement and interest from the local community.

- Restorative justice was discussed at both individual and community levels, with examples ranging from personal experiences to wider community issues.
- Participants highlighted that restorative justice values begin at the individual level and expand into the community.
- The circle structure was maintained using a talking piece, ensuring that each participant had an equal opportunity to speak.
- Participants emphasised that circles support community cohesion and belonging.

6. Connection to Previous Reports

Building on insights gathered during Speak Up! Circles in 2023 and 2024, this session marked the last Speak Up! Circle of 2025. As the last report in this series, it continues our commitment to a user-led approach while reflecting on the collective journey we have undertaken with the SE16 community. Drawing on the insights and relationships built over the past three years, this report highlights how residents have shaped discussions and strengthened community cohesion, marking both the conclusion of this phase of the project and a foundation for future collaboration.

Over the past three years, the Speak Up! Circles have provided an open platform for the community to explore a wide range of topics. These began with discussions on building a safe and supportive community, followed by sessions on democracy and youth empowerment, including a youth-led circle where young people shared their own views on community life. To conclude this journey, the final Speak Up! Circle turned its focus to how residents understand and experience restorative justice, bringing together the themes of trust, inclusion, and empowerment that have guided the programme since its beginning. The varied approaches reflect what was seen in earlier circles:

2023

- The 2023 Speak Up! Circles centered on strengthening community cohesion and addressing the imbalance of power between residents and local authorities. These were addressed under the topics of *"Hopes and Fears for Southwark 2030,"* followed by the second discussion on *"Harms, Injustice, and Community Needs."* Across the two focus groups, participants commonly agreed on several key points needed to build a more connected and empowered community, including greater transparency from local authorities, improved access to education and sports, stronger collaboration, and recognition of local contributions to rebuild trust and wellbeing. The discussions also reflected the importance of re-establishing a sense of community through physical spaces for connection, overcoming isolation, and encouraging active participation. The 2023 sessions revealed a pressing need for empowerment, involvement, and equitable collaboration between residents and decision-makers.

2024

- In 2024, the Speak Up! Circles focused on two themes: youth and mental health. One forum centred on youth empowerment, reinforcing the linked themes of community trust, power distribution, safe spaces, and service collaboration. Participants commonly agreed on key points for action: increasing youth voices and recognition, improving youth service provision, challenging negative media narratives, strengthening collaboration among service providers, and ensuring transparent relationships between the community and authorities. Another forum focused on mental health, discussing its community impact, root causes, and practical solutions. Participants highlighted how social isolation, financial stress, and limited access to support contribute to declining mental health, emphasising the need for more inclusive and locally grounded interventions. Recommendations included embedding restorative justice practices in schools, creating youth-led Speak Up! Circles, expanding youth and wellbeing services through stronger collaboration, increasing

opportunities for young people, and ensuring safe, welcoming spaces for dialogue and connection.

2025

- The February Speak Up! Circle in 2025 focused on lack of trust in representatives and issues concerning democratic engagement. While recommendations provided by the participants in one of the 2024 circles were revisited and addressed in our Youth-Led 2025 Speak Up, the following two Speak Up! Circles explored more about community safety and restorative justice. The circle held in September during the Mayor's Community Weekend discussed building safer communities together and this latest circle aimed to explore how the community perceives the values of restorative justice. Concerning the former, the 8th Report identified key sources of concern, such as perceived invisibility of local support services, lack of trust in authorities, experiences of isolation, and vulnerabilities tied to identity and lived experience. Due to the diverse backgrounds participants have, the discussions result in varied responses with some people acknowledging their privileged position, which makes them feel less threatened in public compared to the rest that might be considered as minorities.

Over the three years, the Speak Up! Circles evolved from exploring broad community concerns and power imbalances in 2023, to a more targeted focus on youth engagement and empowerment in 2024, and finally to a wider reflection on community safety and how restorative justice values are practiced across the community in 2025. This progression shows how the programme moved from identifying community challenges to strengthening specific groups' voices, and ultimately to recognising the shared principles and actions that unite residents in building a safer and more connected SE16. Despite differing opinions on the most effective strategies, everyone shared a sense of belonging and a desire to be part of a community built on mutual care and accountability. The act of them participating in community forum spaces demonstrates their commitment to engagement and ownership over community issues.

Alongside these reflections, residents offered constructive recommendations for RJ4All and the Speak Up! Circles. Throughout all the sessions over the past three years, participants have consistently suggested that, beyond continuing these discussion spaces, the organisation could develop further campaigns and outreach activities to raise awareness about restorative justice and promote positive narratives about SE16. These insights highlight a consistent message across all Speak Up! Circles, that residents value having their voices heard and want to see their input translated into tangible change, both through continued dialogue and visible community initiatives.

These findings helped shape RJ4All research and community projects, designed to bridge the gap between communities and authorities, promote restorative justice values, and provide residents with a safe platform to voice their concerns. Participants also highlighted that lasting change requires long-term investment, sustainable support, and adequate funding to meet the evolving needs of the SE16 community.

7. Recommendations and Conclusions

To elaborate upon the recommendations summarised at the beginning of the report, the following suggestions have been expressed in response to the themes and insights emerging from this circle. They are intended to support the continued growth of restorative justice practice within our Centre and the wider community, grounded in the experiences of participants and informed by the principles of restorative justice. While they reflect the specific context of this project and its participants, many have wider relevance for ongoing service development, partnership work, and advocacy efforts.

Increasing Visibility and Understanding of Restorative Justice

The principles and practices of restorative justice were recognised by participants as valuable and grounding concepts, offering a framework for empathy, accountability, and dialogue. It is rare to have such a focus point and method in conventional community spaces. However, some participants also identified grey areas and misconceptions around how restorative justice operates in practice.

To strengthen the understanding and make restorative justice an accessible community resource, the expansion of our RJ4All Education and Publications sections was recommended.

This can include:

- Developing public workshops, short online learning modules (e-courses and open-access publications that demystify restorative justice concepts.
- Producing case studies and practice-based research that showcase local applications of restorative justice principles.
- Embedding reflexive and critical dialogue within our educational offerings, openly engaging with tensions and limitations to enhance the integrity and relevance of restorative justice in community life.

These initiatives will increase visibility, support consistency in understanding, and ensure that restorative justice continues to grow as a practical and trusted approach within the wider community.

Fostering Inclusive Participation in Community Circles

Participants affirmed that the Speak Up! Circles, community forums modelled on restorative justice circle processes, serve as effective spaces for both learning about and practicing restorative justice dialogues. The format was recognised as accessible and powerful, enabling participants to connect restorative justice concepts to real-life community issues.

Related recommendations included:

- Increasing the outreach and visibility of Speak Up! Circles through local networks, community noticeboards, and partner organisations to reach new participants.
- Hosting circles in different contexts, for instance, collaborating with local councils, schools, and youth organisations to integrate the circle method into meetings, consultations, or decision-making processes.
- Offering circle facilitator training for community members, staff, and volunteers to support inclusive and sustainable practice.

These actions will ensure broader engagement and enable restorative justice dialogue to become a natural, recurring part of local civic life.

Collaborating with Local Authorities and Partners

Collaboration with local authorities, service providers, and community partners was identified as essential to making restorative justice approaches more widely understood and accessible. Participants highlighted that restorative justice principles and practices could enhance existing community governance and partnership work.

Recommended actions included:

- Expanding the development of formal partnerships and memoranda of understanding through our Restorative Justice Postcode Project with local councils, schools, and community organisations to pilot restorative justice approaches in community planning and conflict resolution.
- Hosting joint training sessions or shared forums to exchange learning and promote consistent understanding of restorative justice practices across sectors.
- Leveraging existing networks to advocate for restorative justice approaches in local decision-making structures.

Such collaborations will help embed restorative justice values into everyday community processes, bridging the gap between grassroots practice and institutional systems.

Expanding and Diversifying Community Engagement

While Speak Up! Circles remain a central practice, participants also expressed a need for it to be supported by broader forms of community engagement and accountability. A variety of community activities, social, cultural, and creative, can serve as accessible entry points for restorative justice principles, strengthening relationships and ties to the community, allowing for accountability to be developed.

Practical steps may include:

- Organising community events, art-based projects, or intergenerational or intercultural activities that promote inclusion, empathy, and mutual understanding.
- Using these events to introduce restorative justice concepts informally, connecting theory with lived experience.
- Continuing to integrate mental health and wellbeing, poverty and access, and youth resilience as part of a holistic approach to healing and justice.

Through diverse and inclusive engagement, the Community Centre can continue to nurture the conditions for restorative justice to thrive.

Increasing Advocacy and Outreach

Participants underscored the importance of advocacy for individuals and groups who have experienced harm, alongside awareness-raising on the broader social conditions that create harm. There is a clear opportunity to strengthen our voice in public discourse and influence policy discussions around justice, healing, and community wellbeing.

Recommended actions included:

- Expanding the organisation's advocacy and campaign work, focusing on root causes such as inequality, marginalisation, and disconnection.
- Developing local and national campaigns to highlight the potential of restorative justice as a community-based tool for addressing harm and building cohesion.
- Publishing research findings and position papers that contribute evidence to policy and public debates.

This approach will not only amplify the organisation's impact but also ensure that restorative justice remains connected to real experiences and social realities.

The Speak Up! Circle on Connecting Restorative Justice to Community Lives demonstrated the growing depth of understanding and engagement with restorative justice principles among local stakeholders, community members, and volunteers. The strong presence of our regular volunteers as participants was particularly noteworthy as it highlighted how

individuals who have been familiar with our Centre's activities have connected to the values of power-sharing, dialogue, and mutual respect that underpin restorative justice.

Active participation of community members and stakeholders throughout different Speak Up! Circles affirmed that restorative justice practices, when consistently modelled through community engagement, naturally become part of how people interact, listen, and make conclusions together. This event served as both a reflection of three years of steady, relationship-based work and a marker of how restorative justice has become embedded in our local community fabric.

As we look forward to the next round of Speak Up! Circles and continue applying for renewed funding, we are encouraged by the evidence of growth, connection, and shared understanding. The next phase offers an opportunity not only to renew and expand these efforts in different directions but to let the concept of restorative justice evolve for continuing to serve as a living, collective practice for healing, inclusion, and community cohesion.

8. Acknowledgment

Rotherhithe Consolidated Charities supports RJ4All's restorative justice circles and Speak Up Community Circles and is a member of the Restorative Justice Postcode Steering Group. Website address: www.rotherhithecc.co.uk

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