

Interfaith Restorative Justice Project

The
Faith
& Belief
Forum



Why me?
Transforming lives through
Restorative Justice



Solihull Community Listening Circles: Findings and reflections

Introduction

The Faith & Belief Forum, with partners Interfaith Glasgow and Why Me? aims to explore how Restorative Justice practices can be applied to address hostility against and between faith communities in Solihull and Glasgow. The 3-year project commenced in November 2023 supported by The National Lottery Community Fund. It will offer faith communities training in restorative practices, principles and support to apply these to faith conflict in their local area. Restorative Justice (RJ) is an approach to justice that emphasises repairing the harm caused by criminal behaviour through an inclusive and collaborative means. It involves all stakeholders, including victims, offenders, and community members, in a dialogue to address the impact of the crime and find ways to make amends. The primary goals are to promote healing and reconciliation, encourage accountability and responsibility, and prevent future harm by addressing underlying issues. By focusing on empathy, understanding, and community involvement, Restorative Justice seeks to build stronger, more resilient communities and foster a sense of mutual respect and cooperation.

As part of the project, a series of Community Listening Circles (CLCs) were conducted between November 2024 and January 2025 to better understand, listen to the sentiments, thoughts and feelings of the diverse communities in the borough. Given the work we have already convened through the IRJP project, along with our longstanding connections and networks, we are in a unique position to mobilise RJ experts to support the affected communities. It forms part of the research included in a broader report “[UK Summer Riots 2024: Restorative Responses and Interfaith Instincts](#)” released in April 2025.

The Faith & Belief Forum

The Faith & Belief Forum is a charity that works towards building good relations between people of all faiths and beliefs and aims to work towards a society where people have

genuine friendships and differences are celebrated. It does this by creating space in schools, universities and the wider community, where people can engage with questions of belief and identity and meet people different from themselves. The programmes enable people from diverse backgrounds – both religious and non-religious, to learn from each other and work together.

Interfaith Glasgow

Glasgow is Scotland's biggest and most religiously diverse city – home to large and various Christian denominations and the biggest Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, and Hindu populations in Scotland, as well as smaller populations of Jews, Baha'is, and Pagans, for example. Interfaith Glasgow is a Scottish charity which promotes and facilitates positive engagement between people of diverse faiths and beliefs – religious and non-religious – to help create a better-connected, safer, and more harmonious city for all.

WhyMe?

Why me? are a national charity delivering and promoting **Restorative Justice** for everyone affected by crime and conflict. Many victims of crime feel sidelined by the criminal justice process. Restorative Justice gives them the chance to ask questions about the incident, explain the impact that it had on them, and have a say in how the harm can be repaired. This restorative dialogue transforms lives by helping people affected by crime to recover and helping people who commit crime to stop.

Summer 2024 riots

Over the summer of 2024, the UK experienced civil unrest following a tragic incident in Southport where three schoolgirls, Bebe King, six, Elsie Dot Stancombe, seven, and Alice da Silva Aguiar, nine, were killed in a knife attack at a Taylor Swift-themed dance and yoga event. Eight more children and two adults were injured. This led to misinformation to spread online, falsely claiming the attacker Axel Rudakubana, a 17-year-old, was an asylum seeker from Muslim background. This led to widespread anger and unrest, with far-right groups inciting violence against Muslims, asylum seekers, and ethnic minorities. This triggered widespread riots across the country, lasting for six days.

Mosques and asylum seeker accommodations were targeted. The riots highlighted the dangerous impact of Islamophobic rhetoric and misinformation, which were amplified by social media and inflammatory political discourse underpinned by far-right ideology. A total of 302 officers were injured, with fifty-four hospitalised.

Funding Uplift by the National Lottery

Shortly after the riots, Interfaith Restorative Justice Project (IRJP) team were approached by the National Lottery with the offer of an uplift from the project to investigate the impact of the riots on communities in Solihull and Glasgow.

While the existing IRJ Project will equip faith communities with the skills to restoratively address hostility and hate overall, this does not offer much repair or healing in the immediate aftermath of the far-right violence witnessed during the riots. The team decided to run five Community Listening Circles (CLC) across a diverse range of communities in Solihull and Glasgow to understand their experiences and perceptions of the rioting and violence. [You can read about the listening circles in Glasgow here.](#)

Methodology

What is a Listening Circle?

Listening circles are a specific type of circle designed to help people process an event or issue that poses a challenge or harm to their communities or has impacted people in a significant way. They are voluntary, community-oriented forums aimed at providing an opportunity for all attendees to have a voice. They are not focused on problem solving, dialogue, or debating. Instead, they create a space for expressing views on issues, provides opportunities to connect, to increase understanding, empower community members to build capacity for listening, processing to create empathy, and build emotional connection among the participants.

The purpose of the CLCs was to understand the harm caused by the summer disturbances, specifically in Solihull and Glasgow and to help diverse communities to work through the hostility and prejudice that they have may have experienced personally or witnessed in the media.

Each CLC was intentionally kept quite small, where the maximum limit of participants was 12 people per circle. This was done with the intention of giving the participants an opportunity to express themselves, encourage them to speak openly and feeling it is a safe space for them to have a respectful dialogue. On average, around 8 people attended each circle.

All CLCs were held with a specific group of people from the same community. This was done according to age group, religious affiliation or ethnicity. The aim was to provide each community with a forum to speak freely without feeling judged by people who are not part of their social group.

The questions asked in the community listening circles were:

1. How did you find out about what happened?
2. How did you feel at the time?
3. How do you feel about it now?
4. How were you affected?
5. What's the worst of what happened?
6. What would you like to see come out of all of this?

During the sessions, some of the questions were slightly tweaked, depending on the context, discussion and the participants. There were 2 facilitators present in most of the CLCs, with one facilitator leading on the questions, while the other was the scribe, taking notes. About 50% of the sessions were also attended by an observer, who was a member of the IRJP team. The facilitators ensured all participants had the opportunity to speak and contribute to the discussion.

In total, 6 CLCs were conducted, made up of the following groups:

1. Young people (aged between 15-21 years)
2. Hong Kongers (a newly settled community in Solihull)
3. Methodists
4. Muslims
5. Anglicans
6. Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Composition of the groups

Young People

In total, 7 young people took part in the Listening Circle. Most of them were under the age of 21 years. Their Youth worker was from an ethnic background who was in his late 20s. The session was also attended by a more senior Youth lead who organised the session with us. The young people are all part of a Youth Engagement Specialist, which is a CIC that works with young people to build their self-efficacy through training and empowering projects, where they learn skills, get paid and build confidence. Most of the young people who joined the session came after school/college. The group was comprised of 4 female and 4 male participants. The area in which this CLC took place was in a deprived part of the Solihull borough, where most of the young people were from white, working-class backgrounds.

Hong Kongers

More than 120,000 people from Hong Kong have moved to the UK, out of which 5,000 have relocated to Solihull. There are several reasons for this move. The Chinese Government's imposition of new 'national security' laws and the British Government's

policy shift on British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) visas have played a significant role in this population movement.

This circle was attended by 8 people, specifically from the Hong Kong community. Most of the people felt affiliation to the Catholic faith. They were married with family, who have been in Solihull for about 3 years and had stable jobs in the UK. Some of the members were supporting people from their community to settle in by forming a safe space for all Hong Kongers to meet and befriend fellow citizens to understand British society and culture better.

The building the CLC was conducted in, is a church that provides services such as a place to practise conversational English, pray, make friends, meet local people, find out about systems and services and learn about UK history and culture for the members of Hong Kong community.

Methodists

About 7 people in total attended this circle, some of whom were Hong Kongers, while others were white methodists from the church congregation. This included the vicar of the church. The majority of the participants were from middle class backgrounds, who were either retired or had stable jobs. There were 3 men and 4 women who joined the circle.

Muslims

4 people took part in this CLC. This was held at a mosque on the outskirts of Solihull. It was held with a husband-and-wife team who were actively involved in the running of the mosque with professional jobs, from a middle-class background, along with the imam and a member of the congregation. 3 out of the 4 people who took part were men.

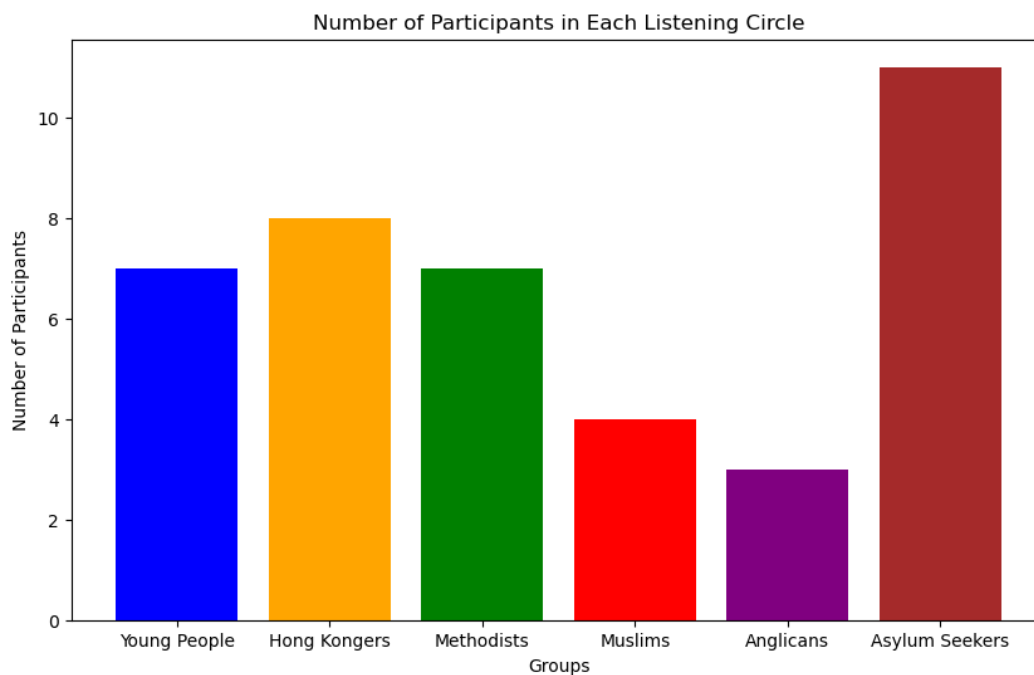
Anglican

The priest we had originally contacted to help us arrange a CLC did not get much of a response from the Anglican community, as many of them felt that the riots were not targeted at them, so they did not feel they could make much of a contribution. As a result, we ended up speaking to the one person who had an overall idea of the feelings of his congregation, who was the actual Anglican priest himself. This was a fantastic opportunity to gain insight into the experience of the people and the building that was used by rioters to 'reclaim Christianity' and used it as a base to start their march from outside the church premises. The congregation and the priest stated that this is not what Christianity teaches and were irked at their church being used for that purpose.

Asylum Seekers

This CLC was the most well attended in terms of numbers. In total, 11 people took part. The majority were men from a male-only hotel that was accommodating asylum seekers, while 2 out of the 11 were women. One of the women was an observer in her new role, while the other was the New Communities Resettlement Officer working for the council. There was a good mix of men from diverse backgrounds, with 4 people from Iran, 2 from Syria, 1 from Afghanistan, 1 from Sudan and one from Ethiopia. There were some who could not speak English and one of their fellow participants translated for them, while others could understand English, but not speak. Some were attending English learning classes, while others were working on their stay in the UK.

The chart below summarises the number of participants in each CLC:



Key themes and findings

People marching the streets were not locals

It was clear from the outset that people who marched through the streets against Asylums seekers and Muslims were not local. This was made clear by the local authority and felt that what happened in the summer, did not deserve attention and that they are likely to be the same people going around the country causing disturbance and causing fear in communities.

Social Media Influence

The other most common theme that came out through the CLCs was that social media played a big part in informing the people about what was going on through sharing of

videos and spreading misinformation about what was happening. This created a fear among people, particularly to those who were from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds.

There is a lot of misinformation about the 'other' and lack of knowledge and education has led to little empathy with people's situations and circumstances. People felt that there was a need to share their stories and speak to people they've not spoken to, for a better understanding that is desperately needed.

Scapegoating and discrimination

Most people felt that it was a tragic situation (where the young girls who were murdered), was exploited and used by the far right to blame immigrants and Muslims for the woes of current state of British people. Cost of living crisis enabled people to blame others for taking over what should be for them and making their situation worse. People were scapegoated.

One young white participant in one of the circles felt he was judged by non-white communities as being racist. He said that was far from the truth, as he had members of his own family who were from ethnic backgrounds, where he was fearing for their safety.

Government inaction

People felt that the government did not address the underlying issues that led to the civil unrest and felt that the situation is currently quite volatile, and the same could happen again. This is because the root causes of people's frustration and anger has still not been addressed.

Safety and Vigilance

Communities, particularly the Muslims, had to be more vigilant and increased their safety measures, such as locking their mosque in between prayers times, others, such as members of the Hong Kong community had to remove any visible signs of their ethnicity, while there were others (which included member of white British community) who chose not to go out at all out of fear of being attacked.

Impact on mental health

The riots created a fear in the hearts and minds of all communities, not just with asylum seeker and Muslims. This had an impact on their mental health. Some people felt that after a long time, their skin colour was apparent to them and that people had a problem with it. This led to paranoia, which made them feel judged when out in public spaces. Most people shared concerns about their own safety, a sense of belonging, and the erosion of interfaith trust.

Need for solidarity

Where people such as the asylum seekers and refugees were approached and reassured that things will be fine because the people marching the streets were not representative of the wider British community, it helped. It led to further trust in the authorities, police and members of the community who reached out to members of the community who were targeted. It was clear that there was a strong need for solidarity and support among different communities to counteract hatred.

Most of the groups felt the need to get to know one another. This was due to disinformation about the 'other.' People felt the need for dialogue, so they could prove that they are not like the way they are being portrayed.

CLC with the Young People

When listening to the young people, it was clear that they were clued up with what happened in the summer. Most of them found out what had happened through social media in its many forms of TikTok, Instagram Twitter/X, national news. If not through social media, they'd heard from parents (advising to be careful) or their Children's Centre. At the time, some were quite shaken with what had happened. One of the participants was present on the bus that had its window smashed.

Although all the young people present were from white background, most felt quite scared, particularly for their friends and family who were from diverse faiths and ethnic backgrounds. They felt angry and disgusted at the fact that the people who were targeted were not responsible for the murder of the young girls and the way people from other backgrounds were being treated. There were cases where some had to console young girls that they will be safe, as they felt they would be attacked too (considering what had happened to the 3 girls).

A couple of months after the incidents - some of the young people still felt judged by others and felt that due to the colour of their white skin, they were judged as being racist and assumed all white people are racist, when they said it's not true! Some people felt the genuine issues were not dealt with in appropriate manner and that the problems are still there. The people who have those toxic views have not been spoken to, the country is still divided and that more needs to be done to address the issues.

CLC with Hong Kongers

When we spoke to members of the Hong Kong community, they were fearful for their safety. Some were wondering what they had done to upset the people and began looking into himself to be a better citizen. One person narrated that he had a sticker in the back of his car that said, 'Hong Konger in Solihull,' someone wrote on the car 'I don't

care!' This led to the person taking the sticker off the car out of fear of the car being vandalised.

Majority of the participants from this community felt that the government could have done much more and look deeper into the issues that were causing the rioter's upset. They were busier praising the emergency services than addressing the issues they were raising. One described the rioters to be treated like 'unloved children' by the government.

CLC with Methodists

When listening to the *Methodists*, there was a general feeling that what happened to the young girls should have been defined as a terrorist attack. They would not be surprised if young girls since then, feel frightened to go out, out of fear of being attacked. Some thought this only happened in the US and were shocked at the level of ripple effect the incident had across the country. One person stated that it is not in our DNA to live in a particular place, we are designed to move around, we have all sorts of DNA that belongs to diverse cultures and that no one is illegal, as we've been immigrants in some form in our lives. One participant who was a white British, felt it did not affect her, but had empathy for those who were targeted.

It made some reflect on the cost-of-living crisis, disinformation about the 'other' through social media, whom they knew nothing about – this was the shocking bit for them, the comments were very hateful. People who were not white and 'foreign looking' became self-conscious about their own identity and looks and made them paranoid about what other people might be thinking of them, was stated by one person.

CLC with Muslims

When speaking to the *Muslims*, they felt they were being used as scapegoats, whenever something wrong was done by a Muslim sounding name, the whole of Islam and Muslim community were to be punished. This is not the same case for other communities or religions. There was a false narrative spread against Muslims through social media, and people fell for it! This could have been stopped straight away by the government taking a robust stance, especially when we found out earlier on that the person who murdered the girls was not a Muslim. This was allowed to fester. What they found sad was that some of the Sikhs, who may look or dress like Muslims are also targeted. There were experiences of discrimination, being treated as 'outsiders' who were not to be trusted. There was a need for solidarity, and it was not voiced in a way to quell the hatred.

The mosque committee felt they are no longer able to serve the local community in the way they would like to. Due to what has happened they have become extra vigilant on safety and security, whereby they are having to lock the building in-between prayer

times out of fear of being attacked. The mosque would be left open before, for local travellers from the M6, to come and use the premises.

Listening to an Anglican Priest

The respective church had rioters gathering outside the church on the 4th August. There were about 15 members of the congregation who were inside the building at the time, who were very concerned. They ended up leaving through the back doors. Later, on social media, they found out that they had covered the church sign with something against undocumented immigrants that he couldn't recall what it said. He was genuinely concerned about how difficult it must have been for the asylum seekers.

Most people knew the church was not involved, as the sign against asylum seekers was not representative of the Christian teachings. 'Our congregation was angry at the way our church was used by the people causing civil unrest. I'm glad I wasn't around at the time, as I would have gone out and said something to them!'

For him, the worst thing that has come out of all this is the realisation that (even though it was short-lived) some people felt confident enough to come out and say and do what they did. The legacy of Trump, the Capitol, Black Lives Matter, it has emboldened the Far-right.

CLC with asylum seekers

The CLC with asylum seekers was remarkably interesting! When residents at the hotel found out through their hotel about the protests, they were advised not to go out, as it wasn't safe for them to do so. There was mixed interpretation of what people felt was going on. Some felt that the hotel will be raided and were thankful to the police for stopping the protesters.

Where we assumed they would be frightened at what was happening, a few said they were more afraid that they'd be sent back home to their respective countries, which was their worst nightmare! They had family back home telling them not to come back due to danger to their life. There was one young individual who said he loved motorbikes and was very intrigued by them. He said he went out and took photos of the protesters!

Asked whether the asylum seekers have experienced any hate crime in the borough, only one said that while he was near a train station, he was told to 'go home.' The rest said they'd not had any issues and complimented the council, police, teachers and some locals on reassuring them that everything will be fine...this meant a lot to them!

Quite a few of the people blamed the media for spreading false information and creating anxieties in people about what was happening and said that people need to be

educated. Some agreed that their stories need to be told so people have a better understanding of what they have been through to come to the UK.

When asked about what they think can be done about the narrative spread about asylum seekers, the discussion led to people's stories could be told so their plight is humanised.

Summary of findings:

These themes highlight the complex and diverse nature of the issues faced by different communities and highlight the importance of addressing misinformation, building solidarity, and promoting understanding to build a more inclusive and resilient society.

Implications of Findings & Next Steps

It was clear from the CLCs conducted, that there is a need to implement the next steps in a Restorative Justice way, focusing on healing, reconciliation, and building stronger, more inclusive communities. The recommendations are:

Introduction of Community Engagement initiatives can be done through interfaith and Intercultural dialogues. They can be implemented by facilitating regular open and respectful conversations between diverse community members to ensure representation and inclusivity, where participants can share their experiences and listen to others on issues they would like to address. This helps to build empathy and understanding, reducing prejudices and fostering a sense of community. Individuals should be encouraged to share their personal stories and experiences. This will humanise the issue and help others to understand the impact of discrimination and misinformation. If platforms are created to organise and promote community events or campaigns, these can be promoted through social media.

To encourage government action, the root causes of the issues can be highlighted and policies to deal with the underlying issues of civil unrest, such as inequality, social exclusion, lack of education can be put forward as ways to address the challenges at the grassroots level. This will need engagement with policy makers or the local authority to build programs, anti-discrimination laws and support services for the affected communities.

Educational programs can be devised to create an awareness to the public about the impact of social media misinformation and the importance of cultural sensitivity. This can be done through developing educational campaigns, workshops and school programs that focus on media literacy, cultural awareness and empathy building.

Training can be provided in schools/education institutions and workplaces through building partnerships to promote cultural sensitivity and to prevent discrimination and advising them to create inclusive policies.

Support services and mental health resources can be offered to support individuals affected by discrimination and violence, helping them to rebuild their lives through Restorative Justice practitioners, hotlines specifically to the affected communities or counselling services helping them to heal and rebuild their lives. Legal assistance and social support to the victims of hate crime and discrimination can be offered to ensure they receive justice and support through legal aid organisations, community centres and social services.

Safety measures to improve security for the vulnerable communities and religious institutions can be offered. The affected communities can collaborate with the local authority to develop safety plans, while retaining an open and welcoming environment. This can be done in collaboration with wider community members and law enforcement through neighbourhood watch programs to create channels between community and the police.

Summary

When communities feel heard and supported, they are more likely to engage positively between each other and with the authorities. By addressing the root causes of unrest and misinformation, not only are we likely to see long-term stability and peace, but we are also leaving behind empowered individuals who are informed and less influenced by misinformation. These people can become ambassadors for change who have stronger relationships, promote healing and will contribute to a more inclusive and resilient society.