

Evaluation Report: “Together We Heal and Recover”

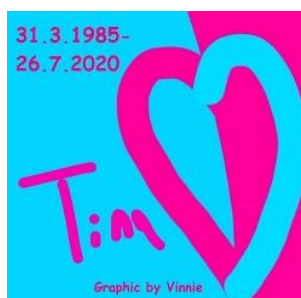
A story of hope for change

Abstract

Impacts, outcomes, and learning from a project funded by the first round of The Mayor’s Opportunity Fund to creatively address the invisibility of Black and minoritised women in female recovery settings.

Dr Sue Robson with Shinasa Shahid

May 2026



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Foreword

There is a particular kind of invisibility that is hard to name. It is the invisibility of being present in a community, in a system and still not being seen. I have spent several years in research trying to name it. Specifically trying to understand why women from African, Caribbean, and South Asian backgrounds, women who are already carrying the weight of addiction, trauma, patriarchy, abuse, and violence, so often cannot find themselves reflected in the spaces that are supposed to help and support them.

The literature gives you frameworks such as intersectionality, structural racism, cultural barriers, feminism, etc. The words are very useful but words on a page do not prepare you for what it feels like to sit with a woman who tells you she did not seek help because she was afraid of what people would say. It's because of her community, her family, her faith, her and the family's reputation? And the shame was built around her long before she needed support.

As a South Asian scholar, I know something about the architecture of that shame. That is why this project is so important and goes beyond academic interest or professional contribution. When Dr Robson and I began talking about what was needed in the Northeast of England, I recognised it as an instinct. The instinct that recovery cannot be separated from belonging. That you cannot heal or treat what you cannot name. That bringing women together across race, culture, and lived experience, around food, around art, around the land, is serious work.

I want to be honest about something before you read it. Three months into the project and a violent racist attack shattered the lives of Nigerian families in Horden. Children who had been playing in a park were traumatised, parents who came to this country with hope were afraid to step out, and the institutions that should have responded quickly did not always do so.

The project's response to that moment held the community and stayed with them and this is woven through this report. It should not have to be. The fact that it is tells you something about who fills the gaps when systems fail. And it tells you something about what community-led, feminist, arts-and-nature-based practice can do when it is trusted and funded.

We must read this report carefully. Read it as evidence and more importantly read it as testimony. These women's experiences, their healing, fear, joy, ongoing waiting for justice deserve to be taken seriously by everyone who holds any power over recovery systems in this country. This project began, in part, from conversations with me about what my research was finding. I want to be clear that the work that followed belongs to the women and organisations who built it together. Although I was a starting point, these women are the story.

Shinasa Shahid
PhD Scholar,
University of Derby May 2026

Acknowledgements

The Barn at Easington is the accountable body for the Together we Heal and Recover project.¹ Key partners are Sangini – a friend; a Black and minoritised women-led community arts organisation² and The North East of England African & Caribbean Association (NEEA&CA).³Shinasa Shahid’s research on addiction and culturally tailored recovery services inspired this project.

Point North awarded a grant of £8,276 from the Mayor’s Opportunities Fund for the project, and the total project cost is £16,346. The following agencies also supported and contributed funding to the project: Network for Social Action, No More Nowt⁴, The Hope Box and The WiRE Project (National Lottery Community Fund), and The National Trust.

An immeasurable amount of pro bono work has also been conducted by the Chair and Vice-Chair of NEEA&CA, artists, and practitioners from The Barn at Easington, and an expert in policing, racism and hate crime, in response to racist violence that Nigerian families from Horden were subjected to on 30th August 2025.

The project has collaborated with:

- Coalfield Regeneration Trust.⁵
- Durham City of Sanctuary.⁶
- Ensemble ‘84 makes theatre based on local stories and experiences.⁷
- Heather Wood, an artist collaborating with Syrian refugees in Easington Colliery, was also involved in the Ken Russell film “The Old Oak” (2023), set in Horden.⁸
- A local partnership led by Durham County Council that aims to create a plan for inclusive, efficient place-based working across public, private, and voluntary sectors, empowering communities, individuals, and organizations.⁹
- The National Trust¹⁰ and key partners in the development of Tina’s Haven Nature Reserve on the East Durham Coast at Horden, including Durham Wildlife Trust,¹¹ North East Community Forest,¹² and Species Survival Fund.¹³



Figure 1: Community Nature Festival at Tina’s Haven Nature Reserve, 26 July 2025 (photo by Steve Brock).

Executive summary: Together We Heal and Recover

Introduction

This is an evaluation report of Together We Heal and Recover, a creative, community-led project funded by the first round of the North East Mayor's Opportunity Fund. Led by The Barn at Easington in partnership with Sangini – a friend, the North East of England African and Caribbean Association (NEEA&CA), and advisory collaborator Shinasa Shahid, the project set out to address the invisibility of Black and minoritised women within female recovery and well-being settings.

Drawing on Black feminist theory and trauma-responsive community development practice, the project built bridges through nature, art, and sisterhood. It promoted recovery and cultural connection for women in East Durham, an area of natural beauty on the stunning coastline that is also marked by post-industrial decline and poverty.

The evaluation, conducted by Dr Sue Robson, reflects upon the implementation and practices, and examines outcomes across the four interconnected levels of power and empowerment defined by Patricia Hill Collins (2000): interpersonal, community, organisational, and institutional.

Context and Purpose

Horden and the wider East Durham coast have significant social and economic deprivation and, increasingly, diverse migrant and refugee populations. Building upon the art-based Sanctuary Project and Shinasa's research, highlighting that recovery and well-being infrastructures often fail to reflect the experiences of Black and minoritised women (Shahid 2023; Shahid & Best, 2024), the project aimed to:

- Create safe, inclusive spaces for women's recovery through nature-based and arts-led work.
- Foster solidarity and intercultural understanding.
- Strengthen organisational and community capacity around trauma and racism.
- Influence systemic awareness and practice in public institutions.

Whilst the intention is to support Black and minoritised with other marginalised women by promoting personal growth, self-empowerment, and recovery; the initial approach has been to build connection and trust with families and communities

Three months into delivery, a violent racist attack on approximately thirty-five Nigerian adults and children in Eden Park, Peterlee (30.8.2025) reframed the project. Alongside its networks, the project collaborated in mobilising an emergency community response, exposing flaws in statutory safeguarding and catalysing regional anti-racist action.

Evaluation Approach

The evaluation integrated qualitative and quantitative methods within a reflexive Black feminist framework (Collins 2000; Kellogg Foundation 2004):

- Reflection sheets completed after each session ("what I say, take-away/ dream/bin").
- Thematic analysis of eighty-four participant narratives (66% response).
- Focus groups and reflective conversations with artists and partners.

- Review of survey data, correspondence, and meeting minutes from the response to the racist attack.

This participatory approach embedded reflexivity and recognised the positionality of both evaluator and participants, merging research and lived experience into action learning.

Key findings

a) **Interpersonal outcomes – healing, empowerment and belonging**

Nature-based, creative gatherings had powerful restorative and transformational effects. Participants reported personal growth, reduced anxiety, new friendships, and a sense of belonging. Participants described reconnecting with hope and confidence:

“After joining hands with so many people, I now feel confident to start a new initiative for local families.” (Tree of Hope event)

“It was a revelation to try classical Indian dance... the deeper we went, the more I realised what we were experiencing was universally human.” (Dance Workshop participant)

The combination of landscape, creativity, food, and shared conversation created emotionally safe spaces where women could process trauma and rediscover agency. Acts of solidarity, such as the planting of the Tree of Hope, symbolised collective renewal after violence and loss.

More recent evidence (May 2026) also indicates that these interpersonal outcomes are translating into action. Participants described increased awareness and growing confidence to challenge racism and apply anti-racist practice in their everyday lives. This reflects a shift from reflection to active engagement.

“Not being racist is not enough... this challenges my inner self and what I can do better” (Sharing learning and conversation event)

b) **Community outcomes – solidarity, joy, and transformation**

Community-level change was marked by unity across cultural, religious, and social divides. Events such as The Old Oak film night, the Diwali in Nature celebration, and the Community Nature Festival generated trust, friendship, and collective pride:

“Strangers became friends, friends became family.” (Festive celebration participant)

“We can unite our diverse community against the forces of hate and racism through collective endeavour and trust.” (Community response meeting, 4 September 2025)

Participants consistently expressed feeling seen, valued, and safe experiences often absent in their daily lives; bringing hope that attitudes within the wider community could begin to change, noting greater empathy and curiosity about difference. For one woman, The Old Oak event was:

“The first time I have felt completely safe at an event since coming to England”
(Participant, The Old Oak event) “

Joy, often missing from discussions of trauma and racism, emerged as a transformative force. Food, music, and celebration became acts of resistance, renewal and recovery:

“Joy, warmth and inspiration... the spirit of new beginnings from tough times.” (Festive event)

These collective experiences began to shift social imagination in Horden, from deficit narratives of decline toward stories of resilience, creativity, and hope. However, evidence gathered in March 2026 in the aftermath of the Eden Park attack also demonstrates that, while community solidarity and care were strong within project-led spaces, many affected families continued to experience fear, withdrawal from public space, and loss of trust in statutory protection, highlighting the fragility of community level gains in the absence of consistent institutional safeguarding.

Evidence from May 2026, further highlights that these community spaces are generating a shared sense of purpose and momentum for change, with participants expressing a strong desire for this work to continue, expand, and be adopted more widely by other organisations and communities.

“We were all there together for a shared purpose of healing, connection, and recovery.”

“For other organisations... to follow suit.” (Sharing learning and conversation event)

c) Organisational outcomes – partnership, practice and capacity

The project demonstrated exceptional growth in collaboration between grassroots recovery organisations, arts groups, faith networks, and statutory partners. Events were described as:

“A great example of working in partnership to deliver an event” (Tina’s Haven Nature Festival).

Through the crisis following the racist attack, the partnership rapidly developed emergency mobilisation capacity, coordinating multi-agency response meetings and building relationships of trust with the Nigerian community. Organisations integrated trauma-informed and culturally grounded arts practice into service delivery. Partners began designing new joint projects, including arts-and-nature programmes for mothers and children, and adopting shared approaches to safeguarding and inclusion.

Unexpected organisational outcomes included enhanced strategic advocacy, capacity for policy engagement, and development of new data-monitoring systems within East Durham schools to record and analyse racist incidents.

Recent evidence (March 2026) demonstrates that organisational outcomes extended beyond partnership working into sustained advocacy and system-navigation roles, with project partners supporting victims to engage with statutory processes, challenging inconsistencies, and translating lived experience into formal accountability mechanisms. These changes represent significant movement within the “disciplinary” domain of power (Collins 2000), where every day organisational routines become sites of transformation.

The evidence (May 2026) also demonstrates that these organisational changes are leading to concrete action, including shifts in governance, recruitment priorities, and service delivery approaches, indicating that learning from the project is being actively applied within participating organisations.

“We are going to recruit someone of colour [sic] on our board... as a matter of priority”
(Sharing learning and conversation event)

d) Institutional outcomes – recognition, accountability, and fragility

At the institutional level, early but meaningful changes were noted. Statutory bodies: including local government, police, the National Trust, funders, and schools, acknowledged the cultural, social and health value of the project’s holistic methods. Institutional representatives described events as “uplifting, inclusive and powerful.”

The project’s forums became credible spaces for strategic dialogue and advocacy. Multi-agency discussions with the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), the North East Mayor’s office, and the local MP led to tangible outcomes: the criminal trial for the Eden Park attack was brought forward by nineteen months following ministerial correspondence (Morris & Lammy MPs, 2025–26).

Schools established a fifteen-school anti-racist taskforce, implemented shared digital reporting of racist incidents, diversified curricula, and began positive-action recruitment to governing bodies. The National Trust offered free Community Passes to affected Nigerian families, recognising nature as a protective and therapeutic space for recovery (9.2.1 of Narrative account).

However, the withdrawal of one statutory partner midway through the response process highlighted ongoing institutional fragility. As one community member noted, “The warmth... had now reversed,” revealing the precariousness of trust between marginalised communities and formal systems of power. More recent victim testimony indicates that institutional recognition has not yet consistently translated into reliable safeguarding, communication, or care, reinforcing the uneven and fragile nature of institutional change.

The recent evidence (May 2026) also indicates rising expectations among participants that institutional recognition should translate into sustained commitment, consistent delivery, and wider adoption of these approaches, highlighting the growing gap between acknowledgement and lived experience of support.

“Would love for this to be a regular thing” (Sharing learning and conversation event)

Assessment of progress across the four domains

Using Collins’s four-domain framework; interpersonal, community, organisational, and structural—the project achieved the following trajectory of movement:

- **Interpersonal:** Significant transformation in confidence, well-being, and self-worth; a shift from isolation to belonging.
- **Community:** Substantial solidarity and intercultural connection; shared purpose and joy as vehicles for healing.
- **Organisational:** Strong new collaborations, improved reflexive and trauma-aware practice, and growth in strategic advocacy and data systems.
- **Institutional:** Emerging recognition of arts and nature practice and some tangible reforms, though institutional commitment and delivery remain uneven.

These cumulative outcomes illustrate how community-rooted, feminist, and creative practice can generate movement outward, from personal healing to organisational and structural engagement, challenging the “matrix of domination” (Collins 2000) through lived experience, relationship-building, and collective action.

The most recent evidence (May 2026) also demonstrates a clear progression from personal reflection to collective and organisational action, strengthening the case for sustained and scalable impact.

Learning and significance

Partners reflected that anti-racist practice must be “central from the start, not an add-on” and must be properly resourced and embedded. Deep partnership and sisterhood between grassroots organisations supporting marginalised women were described as essential to progress: “We are stronger together.”

The evaluation emphasises that trust takes time. Engagement with communities facing trauma requires slower, more relational approaches and consistent investment from funders. Practitioners also recognised the transformative role of nature and creative expression in levelling hierarchies and enabling healing: “Nature levels hierarchies and softens boundaries.”

Emotional warmth, food, music, and creative ritual emerged as powerful tools of inclusion and solidarity. Shared creative practice succeeded where formal engagement sometimes fails, building cohesion, dignity, and hope

Conclusion

Together We Heal and Recover offers a compelling model for transformative community development practice built on intersectional feminism, arts, and nature. The project has generated measurable impacts: enhanced personal well-being, strengthened community cohesion, greater organisational capacity, and incremental institutional change. The most recent evidence (March/ April 2026) also shows that the project now operates as a critical civic bridge: sustaining spaces of joy, healing, and belonging while simultaneously responding to ongoing trauma generated by structural and institutional shortcomings.

Its response to violence and racism demonstrated how creativity, care and partnership can repair trust and mobilise hope. Structural progress remains emerging, yet the foundations laid are profound, showing that healing itself can be a form of social change.

“That hope can come out of the worst of tragedies.” (Tree of Hope participant)



Figure 2: The Hope Box, the evening before the screening of “The Old Oak”, 30 July 2025.

Key Recommendations

Drawing on the evaluation findings, the following priority actions are recommended to embed anti-racist practice in East Durham. These reflect consistent themes across participant experiences and align with a four-domain model of change.

1. Strengthen interpersonal anti-racist practice through reflection and action

- Establish regular safe, facilitated spaces for reflection and dialogue within organisations and communities
- Support individuals to move from awareness to confident, everyday anti-racist action.

2. Build inclusive, culturally grounded community spaces that foster belonging

- Deliver sustained programmes of multi-cultural events, creative activity, and shared experiences, particularly centred on food, storytelling, and nature.
- Expand opportunities for young people’s anti-racist learning and peer education.

3. Embed anti-racism into organisational practice and accountability

- Introduce practical measures such as:
 - anti-racist “first aiders.”
 - anti-racism as a standing governance agenda item.
- Ensure services, training, and policies are co-produced with communities and grounded in lived experience.
- Develop stronger organisational capacity for advocacy, system navigation, and trauma-informed support.

4. Drive structural and institutional change through accountability and investment

- Require public services and funders to embed anti-racist practice into policies, funding criteria, and performance frameworks.
- Improve data systems for recording and understanding racism, including patterns and impact.
- Ensure institutions move beyond recognition of issues to consistent delivery of safeguarding, communication, and care.

5. Sustain and scale effective community-led models

- Continue and expand the Together We Heal and Recover model, which has demonstrated strong outcomes across all levels.
- Support replication across organisations and localities, with long-term resourcing and partnership commitment.

Embedding anti-racist practice in East Durham requires coordinated action across interpersonal, community, organisational, and structural levels, sustained through long-term investment, accountability, and community-led leadership.

1. Introduction

This is an evaluation report of “Together we Heal and Recover,” a partnership project funded by the Mayor’s Opportunities Fund to creatively address the invisibility of Black and minoritised women in female recovery settings.¹⁴

Dr Sue Robson, the project evaluator, brings forty years of experience in feminist community development and has a strong background in evaluation and research. She founded Tina’s Haven with The Barn at Easington in honour of her late daughter, to support women’s recovery from trauma-based addiction.¹⁵

This report tells the story of how the project has unfolded and the change it has generated:

- a) How we have measured and evaluated the difference the project has made to date.
- b) How the project has made a difference to the partner organisations and collaborators, the lives of beneficiaries, and the wider community.
- c) How the artists and practitioners involved in the project responded to a major challenge when Nigerian families, including many children, were subjected to a mass violent racist attack, three months after the start of the project.
- d) How the project has worked in collaboration with the Nigerian community in Horden to address the issues surrounding the racist attack and its aftermath.

Racism is conceived in this evaluation as structural and institutional, according to the following definition.

Structural racism is defined as the macrolevel systems, social forces, institutions, ideologies, and processes that interact with one another to generate and reinforce inequities among racial and ethnic groups (Powell 2008).

Systematic and structural solutions are needed to eliminate barriers to healing and recovery from violence, trauma, addiction, racism, and other forms of oppression affecting women and girls. The evaluation method combines logical project assessment (Kellogg Foundation 2004) with Black feminist theory, which seeks not just individual and collective change but also the transformation of unjust social institutions (Collins 2000:277-288).

Patricia Hill Collins’s (2000) concepts of domains of power and empowerment underpin the project’s theory of change, thus the evaluation set out with the intention to question whether there have been changes at the following four levels:

- a) Interpersonal level – have there been any changes in skills and knowledge, individual consciousness, and everyday lived experiences of women, including access to decision making about their own lives?

- b) Community level – have there been any changes in attitudes and collective consciousness among women, artists, and practitioners, including shifts in ways of thinking and being in the world, and evidence of solidarity building? For example, collective consciousness refers to the shared beliefs and values that unite a group of women, while solidarity building involves actions that foster mutual support and collaboration among participants.
- c) Organisational level – have there been any changes in organisational practices and processes delivered by collaborators and external organisations, including funders?
- d) Structural level – have there been any changes in the policies and practices of statutory agencies and institutions? Here, statutory agencies refer to government bodies or public institutions established by law, such as local councils, who have formal responsibilities in society.



Figure 3: Willow weaving Community Nature Festival 26 July 2025 (photo by Steve Brock).

2. Project outline

The second round of the Mayor's Opportunities Fund supported community cohesion, inclusion, and resilience. The intention being to:

“...Bring together diverse communities to develop strong relationships and thriving neighbourhoods...delivering hyper, local activity that supports inclusion, cohesion and resilience some of the region's most disadvantaged neighbourhoods.”¹⁶ (Kim McGuinness, North East Mayor, 7th March 2025)

This project falls within the following themes of the Mayor's Opportunities Fund:

- Activities that get more people involved in their local community.
- Projects that bring people from different backgrounds together.
- Working to address prejudice, discrimination, and conflict within communities.
- Community celebrations and cultural events.

The project is based at The Barn at Easington, a rewilded thirty-acre farm on the Durham coast; a beautiful, calm, safe and natural outdoor space. The intention is to support Black and minoritised and other marginalised women by promoting personal growth, self-empowerment, and recovery through their connection with the land, with each other, and themselves. However, the initial approach has been to reach into Black and minoritised communities in Horden and nearby Easington Colliery, with a family and community-based approach, linking with events to develop Tina's Haven Nature Reserve with the National Trust and other partners.¹⁷

The project supports opportunities for women to be deeply connected to nature, through a diverse range of artistic, creative, mindful, and meditative activities, and sharing and learning about cross-cultural crafts and foods. It is supported by a diverse team of trauma-responsive artists, growers, and practitioners who are highly experienced in nature, well-being, addiction and violence against women and girls (VAWG) recovery, female self-empowerment, and solidarity building.

The project unites female-led grassroots recovery groups in County Durham, such as Women in Empowerment and Recovery (WiRE) and The Free Women's Community, with Black and minoritised women from Sangini, NEEA&CA, and the Nigerian community in Horden. Activities with Sangini are integrated into WiRE's existing arts and nature sessions at The Barn.

The concept of “power-weaving” is central to our ethical practice, and we are constantly strengthening, deepening, and expanding our networks to ensure that as women, we can hold each other. Our practice is based upon consciousness-raising and building unity, sisterhood, and solidarity between women. Almost all the women involved in the project, including the artists and practitioners are affected by trauma from being subjected to abuse, violence, racism, and punishing state practices, such as child removal.¹⁸

3. Anticipated project outcomes

Acknowledging that discrimination and oppression are shaped by structural forces, this project aims to bring about meaningful change in the lives of Black, minoritised, and other marginalised women in Horden and surrounding East Durham across four levels: individual and interpersonal, community, organisational, and institutional.

At the individual and interpersonal level, the project intended to provide tailored support; at the community level, to foster collective empowerment; at the organisational level, to advocate for inclusive practices; and at the institutional level, it set out to challenge systemic barriers.¹⁹

Table 1: Anticipated outcomes of the “Together We Heal and Recover Project”, as stated in grant application.

Individual and interpersonal level	Community level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Improved well-being and recovery. b) Respite and escape in natural spaces. c) New opportunities, possibilities, and ways of being. d) Growth in personal development. e) Better knowledge of different cultures and improved connections with women from different backgrounds. f) Feeling stronger, more confident, more love and have more self-worth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Feel supported, loved and cared for, and not alone. b) Enjoy trust, closeness, friendships, and love bonds between women from different backgrounds, leading to unity and female solidarity. c) Have a sense that values, beliefs, and attitudes in communities towards marginalised and minoritised women can and are changing, making safer places for all.
Organisational level	Institutional level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Improved networks, collaboration, and partnerships between organisations. b) More safe spaces for arts and cultural practices with marginalised and minoritised women. c) Wider horizons and possibilities for partnering arts and cultural work with specialisms in nature and well-being, and with those with lived experience of living with trauma from abuse, violence, racism, and punishing state practices. 	<p>Growing recognition by institutions of the cultural, health and well-being, social and economic efficacy of the holistic arts and nature-based practice methods established by this project.</p>

4. Background and context to the project

The project focused upon Horden, an ex-mining village on the beautiful East Durham coast. It is an area that ranks highly in official measures of deprivation.²⁰ In terms of the diversity of the population, initial reconnaissance at the start of the project identified the following local demographics:

- A small but significant Nigerian community, many of whom have studied or are currently studying at Sunderland and Teesside Universities, and many found to work in the local health and social care sector.²¹
- A disparate range of nationalities of people who have come from London Councils as homeless and been housed in Horden.²²
- Several Syrian refugees who were “dispersed” in more urban areas of County Durham and are now settling in semi-rural ex-mining villages.

The precursors to this project were:

- The Sanctuary Project, run by The Barn at Easington and funded by East Durham Area Action Partnership, focused on using the arts for women recovering from addiction, violence, and trauma.²³ Amid racist riots in Sunderland and Hartlepool in the summer of 2025, it became clear that Black and minoritised women’s perspectives were needed, prompting partnership with Sangini.
- Two conversation events in Newcastle and Durham in November 2024 led by PhD researcher, Shinasa Shahid, following discussions at the Women’s Resource Centre Conference in June 2024, addressed the lack of visibility for Black and minoritised women in addiction recovery services²⁴ (Shahid 2023; Shahid & Best, 2024).

Shinasa’s research is in African Caribbean and South Asian communities, “fostering open conversations about addiction and the need for more culturally optimised treatment services.”²⁵ The following themes emerged to inform the project from the North East-based conversations with Shinasa:

- Building awareness around the specific challenges Black and minoritised women face.
- Combining our focus on addiction, trauma, abuse, and recovery to support women more holistically.
- Reducing stigma and creating spaces where women from all backgrounds feel seen and valued.
- Supporting each other as we work for a more united, compassionate future.

We also know that Black and minoritised women in female recovery settings are particularly marginalised in County Durham and their needs too often overlooked by services and decision-makers. The following issues were raised in a report by Durham University about rural racism (Craig, 2012), finding that Black and minoritised women:

- Experienced racial abuse and harassment from neighbours including instances of hostility.
- Could not let their children play outside as they feared for their safety.
- Had to make concerted personal efforts to keep their culture alive.
- Experienced reduced lifestyle, opportunities, and loss of confidence; many wanting to move out of the area to somewhere more diverse.

Whilst the rural racism study is dated, research published in 2025 in the aftermath of the racist riots is testimony that Black and minoritised women are “ignored and marginalised from decision-making and public safety responses”...with “many women and children were silenced, retraumatised and left unsupported.” Stories of Colour, an Angelou Centre, and Project Resist project advocates for combining “research, healing and creative expression with advocacy and policy change.”²⁶ This is congruent with the practice principles and processes applied to the “Together We Heal and Recover” project.



Figure 4: “Diwali in Nature” facilitated by artists from Sangini, The Barn at Easington 18 October 2025.

5. Project funding and activities

5.1 Project funding and resourcing

The Barn at Easington was awarded a grant of £8,276 for the Together We Heal and Recover project from the Mayor’s Opportunities Fund. The total cost of the project is £16,346, made up of the following (see Table 2):

Table 2: Together We Heal and Recover project funding by funding body

Amount of funding	Funding body
£1,500	Network for Social Action
£1,200	The National Trust
£2,680	The WiRE Project (National Lottery Community Fund)
£1,190	The Hope Box (National Lottery Community Fund)
£1,500	No More Nowt
£8,276	Mayor’s Opportunity Fund
£16,346	TOTAL

5.2 Project activities and events

5.2.1 Planned project activities

Table 3: Together We Heal and Recover project schedule of activities, events, and number of participants

Date/ time	Activity/ Event	Venue/ activity type	Participants
26 th July 2025, 11am-2pm	Community Nature Festival: Together we Grow, including classical Indian Dance by Anusha Margasiri and a participatory display of Nigerian culture through food, fabrics, and jewellery (mixed).	Tina’s Haven Nature Reserve (Arts & nature, 1)	60 adults and children
31 st July 2025, 5pm-9pm	The Old Oak – Food, film, and conversation (mixed).	The Barn at Easington (Arts & nature, 2)	39 adults
18 th October 2025, 1.30pm-4.30pm	Diwali Networking Event (women & children only).	The Barn at Easington (Arts & nature, 3)	19 women
7 th November 2025, 10am-12 noon	Exploring Motherhood through Dance with Payal Ramchandani (women only).	The Arts Café, Peterlee (Community workshop, 1)	4 women
29 th November 2025, 12pm-4pm	Planting of the Sycamore Gap “Tree of Hope”, official public opening of Tina’s Haven Nature Reserve, and festive community celebration (mixed).	Tina’s Haven Nature Reserve & Horden House of Abundance Church (Arts & nature, 4)	42 adults 18 children

Date/ time	Activity/ Event	Venue/ activity type	Participants
29 th January 2026, 11am, 12.30pm	Festive celebration and planning mothers & children’s project (women only).	The House of Abundance Church (Community workshop, 2)	5 women
23 rd April 2026, 10am to 2pm	Our Hopes and Dreams: A Women’s Creative Gathering (women only)	The Barn at Easington (Arts & nature, 5)	23 women
6 th May 2026, 10.30am to 1.30pm	Together We Heal and Recover Sharing, learning, conversation & brunch (mixed).	The Barn at Easington (Final event)	48 participants representing 25 community, voluntary, statutory and public sector agencies.

5.2.2 Unanticipated project activities in response to the violent racist attack on Nigerian families

In response to the racist violence that Nigerian families from Horden were subjected to on 30th August 2025, NEEA&CA, and artists and practitioners from The Barn collaborated with the Nigerian community in the following activities (Table 4).

Table 4: Additional project activities largely conducted on a pro bono basis in response to the racist attack

Date	Project activities relating to the violence racist attack on Nigerian families (30.8.2025)
4 th , 10 th , 24 th September, and 15 th October 2025	Co-ordination, chairing and participating in community response meetings to the racial violence held in Horden Social Welfare Centre.
Sunday 14 th September and Sunday 3 rd November 2025.	Visits to the House of Abundance Church to show support to members of the Nigerian community and build/rebuild trust.
1st October 2025	An online meeting in response to Teesside Crown Court adjourning the trial of the accused for 30 months (a specialist in criminal justice, racism, and hate crime also advised).
3 rd and 7 th October 2025	Online meeting with Practice Lead for Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-Racist Practice at Durham County Council, and a subsequent meeting with Nigerian parents to potentially consider “early help” for the impacts of trauma upon children subjected to the attack (supported by NEEA&CA).
3 rd November 2025	A further meeting on to prepare for a meeting with the local MP and Durham PCC’s chief of staff (a specialist in police and criminal justice responses to racism also advised).
7 th November 2025	The chair of NEEA&CA supported three representatives of the Nigerian community (two males from the Christian community and a

Date	Project activities relating to the violence racist attack on Nigerian families (30.8.2025)
	female from the Muslim community) at a multi-agency meeting with the local MP, Chief of Staff, PCC’s Office, The Assistant Chief Constable, Chief Inspector from Durham Constabulary, and a senior officer from the office of the North East Mayor.
16 th March 2026	The chair of NEEA&CA supported three representatives of the Nigerian community at a meeting with Durham and Darlington PCC and her Chief of Staff. A further meeting is planned on 29 th June 2026.

Most project activities listed in Table 4 were conducted pro bono, reflecting the established connection and trust with the Nigerian community, as well as a shared commitment among artists from The Barn, Easington, and NEEA&CA to oppose racism.

The project also donated £250 to the “Indentureship to Diaspora: Narratives of Migration and South Asian Identity” conference at Northumbria University on 14 October 2025, recognising NEEA&CA’s support for the Nigerian community in Horden following a violent racist attack on 30 August 2025.²⁷

6. Challenges and how worked to resolve them

6.1 The challenge: Violent racist attack on Nigerian families

On 30 August 2025, around thirty-five Nigerian adults and children from Horden were violently attacked by a racist mob during a picnic at Eden Park, Peterlee. The group faced racist abuse, Nazi salutes, chants of “White Power,” and were pelted with eggs and stones while exits were blocked. One family was followed home, photographed, and targeted online, forcing them to leave their home for two nights. Children are now fearful and feel unsafe in school and their community.^{28,29}

Although arrests were made and seven individuals were charged, court delays pushed the trial to March 2028. This was perceived to stand in sharp contrast to the rapid criminal justice response to the racist riots of 2024. Perceptions surfaced that offenders showed no remorse, while victims felt retraumatised and unprotected.³⁰

6.2 Our response to the challenge

The project response had two strands:

- Operational: Partnering with two key agencies to convene community response meetings to show unity and coordinate practical support.
- Strategic: With NEEA&CA, engaging councillors, the MP, the PCC, Durham Constabulary leadership, and the North East Mayor to address perceived systemic failings.

6.2.1 Community response meetings

The first two meetings (4 and 10 September 2025) were co-organised with the Nigerian community, Coalfield Regeneration Trust, East Durham Trust, NEEA&CA, and statutory partners. The NEEA&CA Chair, trusted by the community through lived experience of racism, chaired all four meetings.

Evaluative reflections from initial meetings highlighted that participants valued the meetings as safe spaces to share trauma, build solidarity and explore solutions.³¹ Early outcomes included Nigerian families receiving National Trust Community Passes for safe family spaces.³²

Key themes and actions from the first two meetings included:

- Improving hate crime reporting and police communication.
- Strengthening anti-racist practice in schools.
- Clarifying the role of County and Parish Councils in addressing racism.

A third meeting (24th September) drew over thirty participants, mainly from schools. However, concerns emerged that responsibility was shifting disproportionately to the Nigerian community, and meetings were becoming unwieldy. A fourth and final meeting took place on 15th October. By this time a key statutory partner had withdrawn their participation, on the basis that meetings had become strategic. Notes of the meeting on 15th October reflect that this withdrawal had dented trust.

Key unresolved concerns are reflected in the notes as:

- Assurance from statutory agencies about community safety was lacking.
- No consistent system for recording and analysing racist incidents in schools.

Following challenges from NEEA&CA and the Nigerian community through the community response meetings, the Local Authority later outlined new coordinated steps across fifteen East Durham schools, including half-termly data monitoring, curriculum reforms, and efforts to diversify governing bodies.

6.2.2 Engaging key decision-makers

On 30th September, it emerged that the Nigerian community had not been formally and collectively informed of the Crown Court outcome. With support from key partners in the Together We Heal and Recover project, and a known specialist in criminal justice, racism and hate crime also advising the Nigerian community, and an action plan was developed, including letters to be sent to the police, PCC, Chief Constable, the North East Mayor, and the local MP.

At a multi-agency meeting on 7th November, involving police officers, PCC, Chief Constable, the North East Mayor, and the local MP, Nigerian representatives raised issues including everyday racism, inadequate historical police responses, children's experiences in schools, and misconceptions about the Nigerian community's contribution. Actions included:

- MP letters to the Secretary of State for Justice requesting intervention.

- Follow-up correspondence to police, PCC, and the Mayor.
- Invitations to local officials to community events.

Out of the correspondence between the MP and the Secretary of State's office, it emerged that a 'mention hearing' had taken place, and the Ministry of Justice had brought forward the trial date by nineteen months to 17th August 2026.³³ However, survey results from nine adults (who had collectively thirteen children) subjected to the racist attack suggested inconsistent responses from the victims and witness care agency:³⁴

- Fewer than half of adults stated that they had been interviewed.
- Only a third stated that they had been contacted by victims and witness care.

Narratives from the survey conducted in early December 2025 suggest ongoing fear, loss of trust, and a perception that the severity of the attack has been minimised. One respondent stated that she continued to experience anxiety after the events of that day. Having recently moved out of the area, they had never encountered anything similar before. Their child fell out of their buggy during the attack. Although a female police officer took down their details, there has been no subsequent follow-up or welfare check. Safety remains their major concern. Another respondent felt that the police had not contacted enough witnesses, as they had been told would happen during their statement. This felt like a way of downplaying the attack.

A meeting between Nigerian community representatives and County Durham PCC took place on 16th March 2026, where issues were raised in relation to communication, engagement, information sharing, safeguarding, complaints processes, and adherence to Victims' Code standards.

Correspondence has now been received from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner outlining actions taken in response to the incident, including attempts to contact victims, provision of support, and ongoing community engagement activity (11th May 2026). This information indicates that formal processes and responses were in place. However, the accounts presented in this section reflect the lived experiences and perceptions of participants, which highlight important gaps between formal provision and felt experience, particularly in relation to communication, trust, and reassurance.

A further meeting is scheduled for 29 June 2026 involving: the PCC Chief of Staff, Assistant Chief Constable, Neighbourhood Team Sergeant, and Operations Manager for the Victim Care and Advice Service - with representatives of the Nigerian community supported by the chair of NEEA&CA.

A meeting with the North East Mayor was postponed due to unforeseen circumstances.

6.3 Conclusions about our response to the challenge

The violent racist attack on Nigerian families in Eden Park exposed some perceived safeguarding failures and mistrust between the affected community and statutory agencies, highlighting broader structural issues concerning racism, community safety, and victim and witness support.

The events of 30th August 2025 have caused lasting psychological harm: fearful children, parents uncertain about belonging, and an undermined sense of security. Delays in justice, poor communication, and inconsistent institutional involvement deepened feelings of exclusion, raising further safeguarding concerns.

While schools, the MP, and some statutory partners have taken steps towards change, such as improved monitoring, curriculum reform, and expedited trial dates; the overall response is perceived to be fragmented; suggesting that the Nigerian community continues to endure prejudice despite its significant contributions and resilient efforts.

Ensuring effective safeguarding requires timely, coordinated action and genuine trust among partners. Moving forward, the experience from key partners in the Together We Heal and Recover Project suggests that establishing anti-racist practices, shared-accountability, and community-driven decision-making, supported by systemic change, are needed for meaningful transformation. In view of this, the final event for the Together We Heal and Recover project (6.5.2026), shared the learning that has emerged, with forty-eight representatives from community, voluntary, statutory and public agencies, and invited them to collectively examine and explore the question:

“How can we build upon the learning from this project to embed anti-racist practice in East Durham?”



Figure 5: Gathering in The Barn at Easington to hear about the learning from the Together we Heal and Recover project, 6th May 2026.

7. Evaluation methodology and methods

7.1 Methodology

A reflexive evaluation process is embedded into the project, which recognises that minoritised and marginalised women need systematic and structural remedies to remove barriers to their social and political freedom and rights.

To measure the changes necessary; the project evaluation blends a logical process with Black feminist emancipatory theory (Kellogg Foundation 2004, Collins (2000:277, 28); going beyond a practice of changing individual and collective consciousness to a level of transforming practice, policies, and institutions. For Collins, power operates at four levels within a matrix of domination (Collins 2000:277, 288):

Table 5: Domains of power and empowerment, based on the conceptions of Black feminist scholar Collins (2000)

Structural Domain	Organises oppression through a network of interconnected social institutions that regulate citizens' rights.
Disciplinary Domain	Manages power relationships through the bureaucratic hierarchies of organisations by disciplining and controlling employees and clients.
Hegemonic Domain	Provides the link between institutions in the structural domain and organisational practices by justifying 'common sense' ideas behind social policy, manufacturing ideologies, and recycling old ideas in new forms.
Interpersonal Domain	Influences everyday lived experiences and individual consciousness by replacing individual ways of knowing with dominant groups' thoughts.

7.2 Data collection methods

The evaluation process blends tried and tested quantitative and qualitative methods based upon a theoretical and logical matrix to measure intended or unintended changes occurring in individuals, organisations, communities, and systems:

- a) At the end of each project activity and event, participants were invited to complete a reflection sheet to record what they wanted "to say" about the session, what they would "take away," what their "dreams" were, and what they wanted "to bin."
- b) Inviting further reflections and critical comment upon reports of each event with participant reflections collated and themed.
- c) Narrative reflections gathered from semi-structured conversations with the artists and practitioners from all the partner agencies involved in delivering the project at focus groups (14.8.2025, 12.11.2025, and 19.2.2026).
- d) Narrative reflections from participants in the first community response meeting to the racist attack on the Nigerian community, gathered from an online questionnaire (4.9.2025).

- e) Review of notes and minutes of community response meetings in response to the racist attack, and letters to and from decision-makers during the period 4th September to 16th March 2026. This included detailed twelve-page chronological narrative account (recording) of the community-based and strategic response to the racist attack on the Nigerian community from August to December 2025.
- f) Critical reflections invited from key project partners upon drafts of the evaluation report.
- g) Qualitative reflections gathered from project participants, partners, and collaborators at the end of project learning and sharing event (6.5.2026), to inform and shape the recommendations of this report.

This included four focus groups for the purpose of capturing differing agency perspectives upon how to embed anti-racist practice, where participants were grouped by sector around the four domains of domination and empowerment (Collins 2000) (see [Appendix 1](#)).

- h) PhD scholar, Shinasa Shahid, reviewed the first draft of the evaluation report in November 2025, evaluated the final celebration event in person on 23rd April 2026, and contributed her perceptions and analysis of the project’s journey.

7.3 Data analysis methods and sample size

The evaluation findings in section 8 of this report are drawn from a thematic analysis of participants’ reflective narratives collected during end-of-session evaluations. The level of participation is quantified in Table 6.

Table 6: Showing the level of participation in reflective end of session evaluation for each project activity.

Date	Activity	Participants	% participants in evaluation
26 th July 2025	Community Nature Festival: Together we Grow.	n=60 adults and children	n=13 (including n=2 children) (22%)
31 st July 2025	The Old Oak – Food, film, and conversation.	n=37 adults and n=2 children	n=25 (64%)
18 th October 2025	Diwali Networking Event.	n=19 women	n=13 women only (68%)
7 th November 2025	Exploring Motherhood through Dance.	n=4 women	n=2 women only (50%)
29 th November 2025	Planting of “Tree of Hope/ opening of Tina’s Haven Nature Reserve, and festive community celebration.	n=42 adults n=18 children (not involved in online evaluation)	n=18 (representing 43% of the adults only)
23 rd April 2026	Our Hopes And Dreams: A Women’s Creative Gathering	n=23 women	n=14 women only (61%)

Date	Activity	Participants	% participants in evaluation
	PROJECT TOTAL	n=127 invited to participate in the evaluation.	Sample of 66% evaluation participants (n=84 out of n=127).
6 th May 2026,	Together We Heal and Recover Sharing, learning, conversation & brunch (mixed).	n=48 participants.	n=24 responses (50%) ¹

As illustrated figure 6, the (n-24, 50%) responses to the evaluation of the final Together We Heal and Recover Sharing, learning, conversation & brunch was a balance sample in terms of its representation of individuals; statutory and public organisations and the community, voluntary, charitable/ not for profit sector. This is important as it was data and findings from this sample that informed the recommendations of this report.

Who were you representing at the event?

Answered: 23 Skipped: 1

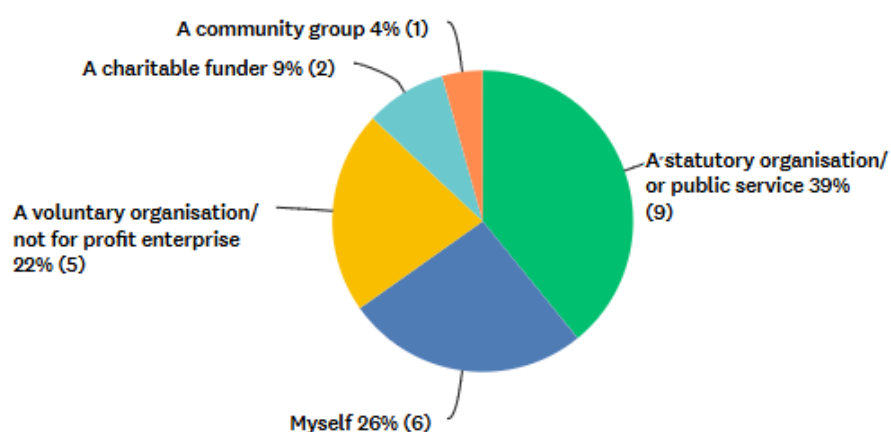


Figure 6 Showing the balance of responses to the online evaluation following the learning and sharing brunch, 6th May 2026.

Each activity was individually reported, utilising an online tool to conduct thematic analysis of narrative comments.³⁵ Thematic analysis involved systematic coding of the data, developing key themes, and validating these against the collected narratives. The themed reports from each activity were distributed to participants for further reflection and comment.

The next step was to collate and examine the individual reports and revisiting the raw data in relation to the project's anticipated outcomes, with careful consideration given to identifying any unintended outcomes.

¹ The purpose of the end of project event was to share the learning from the Together We Heal and Recover project activities; therefore, we have not included these participant numbers and the percentage evaluative response in the sample size.

7.4 Limitations of the evaluation

7.4.1 Inability to recruit a lead evaluator with a Black female perspective

The intention had been for a practitioner with Black perspective and extensive knowledge of the issues affecting Black and minoritised women in the North East to carry out the evaluation. However, during November 2025, we were informed that the evaluator was no longer able to conduct the evaluation, so Dr Sue Robson took over.

As mitigation, the evaluation methodology was based upon a Black feminist theory of change, and support was enlisted from PhD scholar Shinasa Shahid to review the evaluation report and evaluate the final celebration event. Three evaluation reflection sessions took place with the lead artist on the project. Of the four artist/ practitioners who steered the project, three have a Black perspective and have been central to interpreting the findings, drawing out the learning from the project, and presenting this for discussion with collaborators at a final learning and sharing event.

7.4.2 The positionality of the evaluator, and her connectedness to the project

Sue having stepped into the evaluator role midway through the project, and her connectedness, particularly with the events and responses that followed in the aftermath of the violent racist attack on Nigerian families, means that her positionality is highly subjective. The reflexive and public acknowledgement of the identity and positionality of the evaluator is the first step in mitigating bias. Thus, the deliberate act of making public the subjective self of the researcher and revealing her bias and prejudices, brings dimensions of objectivity, independence, and rationality (Hall 2003).³⁶

A central mitigating factor is that the evaluation embeds the thesis of reflexivity by making modest claims to truth, instead, it is based upon a process of dialogue concerned with possible interpretations arising from various personal experiences, rather than expressing certainty (Winter 2003).

Examples of embedding of cyclic learning and facilitating interpretive and iterative dialogue within the evaluation process are the reflective conversations in three focus groups with the artists and practitioners (14.8.2025, 12.11.2025, 19.2.2026), and the end of project learning and sharing event (6.5.2026), to inform and shape the recommendations of this report.

In this sense, the evaluation constitutes action research, and has an emancipatory agenda, an emphasis upon participation, democratisation, and contributing to building local knowledge in the pursuit of “practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people” (Denscombe 1998; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Reflecting the dual positionality of the evaluator, action research rejects the oppositions of “researcher” and “researched” involved in traditional research and evaluation; instead, there is a merging of these two roles (Fox 2003:90).

Other mitigating factors are the triangulation of the research data, including the use of multiple qualitative and quantitative methods from large samples, and the convergence of a wide range of data sources used in the analysis and findings; and the involvement of

PhD scholar, Shinasa Shahid in the evaluation to bring an element of independence in addition to a Black perspective.

7.4.3 The project adopting a family and community-based approach to reach marginalised and minoritised women

As stated, although the intention is to support Black and minoritised and other marginalised women by promoting personal growth, self-empowerment, and recovery in single-sex settings; reaching and establishing trust initially relied upon a family and community-based approach with better known community partners.³⁷

Because only 35% of participant responses in the sample relate to the women-only events (n=29 out of n=84 narrative responses), the evaluation findings can only be understood in relation to the project beginning to create the conditions for deeper trust, connection, and solidarity between women at a community level.

7.4.4 The tendency to attract participants from outside of East Durham at the community-based events.

The Community Nature Festival on Tina's Haven Nature Reserve (26.7.2025), and the Planting "Tree of Hope, opening of Tina's Haven Nature Reserve, and festive community celebration (29.11.2025), both attracted participants from outside of East Durham. At the Diwali Networking Event (16.10.2025), all the Black and minoritised women who participated from Sangini were from Sunderland and South Tyneside (42%, n=8 out of n=19).

As a measure of this trend, out of the festive community celebration participants, n=18 responded to an online survey after the event. Only n=2 stated they lived and/or worked in Horden, n=3 lived in Peterlee, and n=1 in Easington Colliery. The majority of those who responded (n=10, 56%) lived outside of East Durham.

This means that the project outcomes, particularly in relation to the interpersonal and community domains, cannot be considered entirely translatable to an East Durham context, particularly in terms of the experiences and sentiments of local people.

7.4.5 Narrow engagement of public sector agencies in the evaluation process

On 6th October 2025, a local authority manager informed the Together We Heal and Recover project and the Chair of NEEA&CA that they would no longer send a representative to a series of community meetings that were set up in response to the racist attack in Eden Park as they deemed the meetings were a strategic and systematic approach whereas their department's approach was more of an operational one.

Representations were made urging them and other partners committed to the community response meetings to hold at least one more meeting to evaluate and capture the learning. There was no response to this request.

All key collaborators, including twelve representatives from the local authority, have been invited to the final event for the Together We Heal and Recover project will share the learning that has emerged, and to examine and explore the question: “How can we build upon the learning from this project to embed anti-racist practice in East Durham?”



Figure 7: Connecting, Tina’s Haven Community Nature Festival (photo by Steve Brock)



Figure 8: Lunch is served! Chair of the North East of England African and Caribbean Association at “Our Hopes and Dreams event, 23rd April 2026.

8. Evaluation findings

This section documents the evaluation findings at each of the following levels:

1. Interpersonal level outcomes.
2. Community level outcomes.
3. Organisational level outcomes.
4. Structural level outcomes.

It draws upon the sample of data outlined in section 7.3. of this report.

8.1 Individual and interpersonal level outcomes

The anticipated outcomes at an individual and interpersonal level were as follows:

- a) Growth in personal development.
- b) Respite and escape in natural spaces.
- c) Improved well-being and recovery.
- d) Better knowledge of diverse cultures and improved connections with women from different backgrounds.
- e) New opportunities, possibilities, and ways of being.
- f) Feeling stronger, more confident, more love and have more self-worth.

These are outlined in turn, drawing upon the evidence gathered for the evaluation.

8.1.1 Growth in personal development

Participants' narratives demonstrated significant personal learning, skill development, and expanded self-awareness across all events, as evidenced in the following examples:

“I tried new things.” (Diwali participant)

“I left with wanting to try new things and pushing myself to meet new people in new environments.” (Tina's Haven festival)

“A lot to think about and how I can contribute more.” (The Old Oak screening)

“It was a revelation to try and learn the rudiments of classical Indian dancing. It seemed so alien at first but the more we got into it, and the deeper it went. I realised that what we were experiencing was universally human.” (Dance workshop participant)

Further evidence of personal growth and reflective learning is provided by participant feedback from the Our Hopes and Dreams event (23.4.2026). Participants described renewed confidence, aspiration, and self-orientation, with reflections emphasising imagination, possibility, and self-care. One participant described the experience simply as “the best day of 2026”, while others noted “dream big” and “time to think about myself”.

These reflections collectively highlight a pattern of participants stepping outside their comfort zones and gaining insights that transcend individual events. The evidence

demonstrated that the events created safe spaces for participants to challenge themselves, discover new capabilities, and develop greater self-reflection and purpose. In safe, supported arts and nature-based environments, participants were able to step beyond routine roles, reconnect with creativity, and re-imagine personal futures. These outcomes align with the project's aim to foster personal growth and intercultural understanding among participants.

8.1.2 Respite and escape in natural spaces

The Community Nature Festival at Tina's Haven Nature Reserve, held on 26th July 2025, brought together individuals from varied backgrounds to participate in guided walks, mindfulness art and nature-based sessions, and sharing of food, all thoughtfully designed to promote both connection and emotional restoration. These nature-based activities offered vital respite from everyday pressures, creating calming spaces for emotional processing and healing. Participants expressed how immersion in nature and the sense of community profoundly impacted them; one describing the festival as

“A very worthwhile and important place where there is a deep connection with peace and hope.” (Tina's Haven festival)

Another participant described it as:

“An excellent event for getting to know people, talking to people and just relaxing in a beautiful unspoilt setting.” (Tina's Haven festival)

Connection in nature was a common theme running through participants narratives, for example one noted:

“More personal connections to nature and how this can make you feel.” (Tina's Haven festival)

And another, further illustrating the event's therapeutic value:

“The feeling of community and peers, immersion in nature.” (Tina's Haven festival)

The gratitude and appreciation for Tina's Haven were evident, as another participant simply stated:

“Such a wonderful place thank you!” (Tina's Haven festival).

Overall, the evidence from the Community Nature Festival demonstrates that these natural settings provided essential emotional restoration, fostering a safe and welcoming environment for personal reflection and healing.

Participants at Our Hopes and Dreams consistently described the environment as calming, restorative, and emotionally sustaining. Words such as “peace”, “relaxation”, and “stillness” were frequently used, alongside appreciation of walking, sitting outdoors, and working with natural materials. These responses further strengthen the evidence that immersion in nature, combined with collective activity, provides vital respite and emotional regulation for participants living with stress, trauma, or ongoing pressure.



Figure 9: Arts and nature-based session - Our Hopes and Dreams event, 23 April 2026.

8.1.3 Improved well-being and recovery

Evidence from the evaluation data shows that events in nature, both at Tina’s Haven Nature Reserve and The Barn at Easington, contributed to emotional well-being, reduced anxiety, and supported recovery journeys.

“Less anxiety, connectedness.” (Diwali participant)

“Hope for future healing and connection. On a personal level it gave me so much hope for the future.” (Tree of Hope event)

“Strength and healing.” (Tree of Hope event)

“Love and acceptance and the fight to strive for more than adequate support for addiction and trauma.” (Tree of Hope event)

“That hope can come out of the worst of tragedies.” (Tree of Hope event)

“That Tina’s legacy is to bring people together, to acknowledge trauma and that healing is possible.” (Tina’s Haven festival)

Participants at Our Hopes and Dreams explicitly described the event as “safe”, “welcoming”, and “a space where I could just be myself”. Others named feelings of joy, love, calm, and belonging as central to their experience.

Overall, the findings indicate high levels of trust, psychological safety, and inclusion, demonstrating that the combination of carefully facilitated arts and nature-based spaces and community created safe environments where participants experienced reduced anxiety and renewed hope and progress in their recovery journeys.

8.1.4 Better knowledge of diverse cultures and improved connections with women from different backgrounds

The events brought together people from a variety of backgrounds, offering opportunities for meaningful connection and mutual learning. One participant described the atmosphere at the Diwali event as:

“Absolutely beautiful time. Lovely to connect with women from different cultures.” (Diwali participant)

At both the Diwali event and the dance workshop, participants expressed joy at being able to connect with women from different cultures and try new experiences, such as tasting unfamiliar foods and meeting new people.

“New experiences were great. Tried new food and met new people.” (Diwali participant)

“A genuine communication across cultures.” (Dance workshop participant)

The evidence suggests that these gatherings were not only social occasions but also spaces where cultural diversity was celebrated, for example in the following narrative:

“It was a truly hopeful event made rich and connected with the Nigerian community and South Asian artists from Sangini.” (Tina’s Haven festival)

At another event, a participant reflected:

“I felt like I’m in my own little village in Syria.” (The Old Oak participant)

Demonstrating how the events provided a sense of belonging and home, even far away from one’s country of origin.

Crucially, the evidence demonstrates that project activities broke down barriers and cultivated empathy, leading to lasting networks of support. The sense of unity was apparent, with participants noting genuine communication across cultures and the vision of building a vibrant, mutually supportive multiracial community in East Durham.

“What stood out for me was the cultural diversity that was displayed and also not to forget Tina in a bid to support women.” (Tina’s Haven festival)

“That we continue to build a rich vibrant mutually supporting multi-racial community in East Durham.” (Tree of Hope event)

Such outcomes underline the importance of creating spaces where women from diverse backgrounds can share, listen, and celebrate together, forging bonds that endure beyond the events themselves.

8.1.5 New opportunities, possibilities, and ways of being

Analysis of the evaluation data shows that participants expanded their sense of what was possible and identified new pathways for engagement and growth through their involvement in the project. For example, participants reported increased confidence in pursuing leadership roles and discovered new opportunities for collaboration within their communities. This was evidenced by feedback such as “partnership opportunities” (Tina’s Haven festival), And:

“The power of bringing diverse people together with real meaning stood out, with so many opportunities to collaborate” (Tina’s Haven festival)

One participant expressed leaving an event with:

“ With more embedded ways of thinking about ‘system change’ work and that its fully driven by relationships and the environments we co-create” (Tina’s Haven festival).

Another noted, “Lots of ideas and connections with other people” (The Old Oak participant), emphasising the importance of unity, safety, and “making dreams a reality” through collective action.

“Everything is possible! To continue to join together and grow making dreams reality.” (Tree of Hope event)

“Unity and safety, protection and love realisation beyond us that we can and we will make things better.” (Tree of Hope event)

The evidence suggests that at the Tree of Hope event, the atmosphere of unity and safety was not just uplifting, it was the foundation for tangible progress within the community. By fostering a sense of protection, belonging, and self-empowerment. The event inspired new thinking, potentially motivating participants to step into expanded roles, create meaningful partnerships, and collaborate in ways they had not previously imagined.

“Unity and safety, protection and love realisation beyond us that we can and we will make things better.” (Tree of Hope event)

One participant shared:

“After joining hands with so many people, I now feel confident to start a new initiative for local families.” (Tree of Hope event)

The Tree of Hope event highlighted how unity prompted tangible results and lasting progress. It inspired new perspectives, partnerships, and roles within the community, broadening participants’ outlook. The motivation from the event turned ideals of unity and safety into practical collaborations and opportunities, highlighting the importance of these values. Participants in the Hopes and Dreams event articulated future-orientated hopes that point to internalised and sustained change. These included intentions to spend more time in nature, continue creative practices, invest in friendships, and prioritise well-being. Several also expressed hopes that the work would continue and expand, reflecting identification with the project’s values and confidence in its wider relevance.

Combined, the evidence highlights that participation in the project opened up new ways of being and encouraged continued engagement beyond the events themselves.

8.1.6 Feeling stronger, more confident, more love and greater self-worth

Across the Tree of Hope event (29.11.2025), Tina’s Haven festival (26.7.2025), and the wider community response, participants described a powerful journey of transformation marked by heightened self-esteem, confidence, and personal value. The words chosen by those present, “Hope, faith and courage and a sense of belonging,” reveal more than fleeting emotions. They signal a deep, rooted shift in self-perception. Such expressions of warmth and connection, “Love, Hope, Warmth, Kindness, Care”, illustrate an environment where people felt genuinely nurtured, valued, and seen.

The recurring theme of belonging emerges vividly from the events at Tina’s Haven Nature Reserve: “a sense of belonging” and “the love from so many people getting together to make a big change in Horden” reflect how acts of collective care inspired individuals to recognise their own significance within a wider supportive network. This sense of togetherness was transformative:

“Strangers became friends, friends became family.”(Festive celebration participant)

Suggesting that the events did not simply foster social connections but also cultivated a profound sense of kinship and mutual trust. The positive impact extended beyond the immediate participants, as one participant reflected:

“A feeling that all is not lost in the world today... that there are still people who care and put caring into action.” (Tina’s Haven festival)

Here, hope is not just an abstract ideal but a lived reality, underpinned by tangible acts of kindness and solidarity. Even those who were not local felt a sense of pride and inclusion, confirming the boundary crossing potential of such gatherings.

“Pride (as a non-local!) in being part of an event which shows the best of Horden, people, and place.” (Tina’s Haven festival)

The centrality of support is emphasised in another reflection, this time from the first community response meeting, initiated by the Together We Heal and Recover project, alongside other partners and collaborators; just five days after the violent racist attack that Nigerian families were subjected to in a public park in Peterlee.

“Love and support from the partners was massive” (Community response meeting participant, 4.9.2025)

This highlights the essential role that encouragement and collective effort play in bolstering individual resilience and well-being, even in the face of terror and trauma. Indeed, the broader impact was undeniable: the warmth, acceptance, and appreciation experienced by participants significantly strengthened their sense of worth and belonging, while also fostering greater self-confidence and resilience.

Through these events, ideals of hope, unity, and mutual care were not only articulated but also enacted, with community members finding renewed confidence and purpose in an environment where compassion and connection flourished. These personal stories and evocative quotes together paint a meaningful picture of how collective endeavour can empower individuals, transforming self-doubt into strength and isolation into belonging.

8.1.7 Cross-cutting themes

Two distinct cross-cutting themes, emerge from the evaluation data in the interpersonal outcomes theme, one about community healing and unity, and the other about the

motivation for sustaining future engagement in arts and nature-based activities and the development of Tina's Haven Nature Reserve.

Community healing and unity: The events held at Tina's Haven Nature Reserve and related community activities revealed powerful themes of healing, unity, and ongoing engagement. Participants consistently reflected on the capacity of collective action to challenge hate and foster reconciliation. As one participant of the community response meeting affirmed:

“That we can unite our diverse community against the forces of hate and racism through collective endeavour and trust.” (Community response meeting participant, 4.9.2025)

This highlights the significance of solidarity in the face of adversity. Moments of renewal were especially evident at the Tree of Hope ceremony, where another participant expressed:

“It was incredible moving and powerful to see the tree planted and the nature reserve opened. A powerful message that hope, and healing can happen after the darkest of times” (Tree of Hope event)

This event, and others like it, served as living proof that, even after trauma, communities can generate hope and transformation through shared action and compassion.

Sustained engagement: The impact of these experiences was not fleeting. A strong desire to remain involved and sustain these connections was articulated repeatedly. As voiced by several Diwali festival participants:

“I want to come again.” (Multiple Diwali participants)

While another at Tina's Haven festival expressed:

“Going forward I would like to be part of further gatherings of this kind.” (Tina's Haven festival)

This enthusiasm was echoed at the Tree of Hope event, with one participant sharing:

“I want to keep visiting Tina's Haven to see it grow what a nice place.” (Tree of Hope event)

Together, these quotes reveal the emergence of a resilient, inclusive community, where acts of kindness and shared purpose inspire ongoing involvement and nurture a sense of belonging. The events did not just provide immediate comfort; they laid the foundation for sustained healing, mutual respect, and a collective vision for the future.

8.1.8 Summary of interpersonal level findings

The evidence demonstrates that nature-based, culturally inclusive community events delivered substantial outcomes across all anticipated dimensions. Participants experienced genuine personal growth, cultural understanding, improved well-being, and enhanced self-worth. The combination of natural settings, creative activities, shared food, and intercultural exchange created uniquely powerful conditions for healing, connection, and self-empowerment .

Beyond these individual benefits, the events fostered a deep sense of hope and renewal. Symbolic acts such as tree planting and the opening of Tina’s Haven Nature Reserve resonated powerfully with participants, serving as tangible reminders of the possibility of transformation after adversity.

Regular expressions of desire for ongoing involvement, such as a wish to revisit Tina’s Haven or attend future gatherings, highlight the sustained impact and the formation of lasting social bonds. Importantly, the events did not only provide immediate comfort; they served as catalysts for building a resilient, inclusive community grounded in kindness, shared purpose, and mutual support.

The interpersonal connections forged contributed to an enduring sense of belonging and collective vision, laying the groundwork for sustained healing and ongoing engagement. These outcomes provide strong evidence of the project’s effectiveness in nurturing individual resilience and strengthening community cohesion at the interpersonal level.

The evaluation evidence (6th May 2026) further strengthens these findings by demonstrating a clearer transition from reflection to action at an individual level. Participants described not only increased self-awareness but also a growing confidence to act on that awareness in both personal and professional contexts. For example, one participant reflected:

“‘Not Being Racist’ is not enough... this challenges my inner self and what I can do better.” (Sharing learning and conversation event)

Others described this as a catalyst for ongoing self-examination and behavioural change:

“It got me thinking a lot about my own awareness around racism.” (Sharing learning and conversation event)

In addition, there is stronger evidence that emotional safety and calm are not only outcomes, but key mechanisms enabling this transformation. Participants described the environment as:

“A truly peaceful and calming experience... a deep sense of calm.” (Sharing learning and conversation event)

This suggests that emotional regulation, safety, and stillness are central conditions that enable participants to engage in difficult reflective work and move towards action.

8.2 Community-level outcomes

The anticipated outcomes at a community level were:

- a) Trust, closeness, friendships, and love bonds between women from different backgrounds.
- b) Feeling supported, loved, cared for and not alone.
- c) A sense that values, beliefs, and attitudes toward marginalised and minoritised women can change, creating safer communities.

Because only 35% (n=29) of participant responses related to the women-only events, the Diwali (n=13), Dance Workshop (n=2), The Hopes and Dreams event (n=14), these findings should be understood as evidence that the project began to create the conditions for deeper trust, connection, and solidarity between women at a community level.

8.2.1 Enjoy trust, closeness, friendships, and love bonds between women from different backgrounds

Across all events, participants consistently described powerful feelings of connection and unity that crossed cultural, ethnic, and social boundaries. One person noted that strangers quickly felt like close friends, even family. Others recalled that the gatherings were a beautiful experience and appreciated the chance to connect with women from diverse backgrounds, creating spaces where they could truly come together.

“Music, singing, creativity and love, blessed to be.” (Festive celebration participant)

The strength of these gatherings came from their ability to cultivate genuine relationships grounded in mutual respect and shared humanity. Participants emphasised the meaningful impact of bringing together people from diverse backgrounds and described the events as spaces where they could experience a deep sense of connection and purpose.

“It felt really joyful, warm and welcoming, a true celebration of community and diversity.” (Tina’s Haven Festival participant)

For some participants, the events offered a rare sense of belonging. One Syrian attendee said it reminded her of being back in her own village. This sense of connection across difference was echoed by a dance workshop participant, who described the experience as something universally human and a genuine exchange across cultures.

8.2.2 Feel supported, loved and cared for, and not alone

The events consistently provided participants with deep experiences of being cared for and valued. As one person described, the gatherings were:

“Welcoming Supportive inclusive perfect for everyone one size truly fits all delivered with love and hope.” (Festive celebration participant)

Many participants left feeling they had experienced deep warmth, care, and hope, and many described finding a long-missing sense of belonging. For those who had lived through trauma, isolation, or displacement, these gatherings offered vital emotional support. Participants spoke of gaining:

“Hope and transformation, that a new beginning is always possible.” (Festive celebration participant)

And:

“New connections hope strength knowledge understanding support.” (Tina’s Haven Festival participant)

Importantly, the gatherings helped restore participants’ faith in human compassion. One person shared that the experience reassured them that kindness and care still exist in the world.

The healing dimension was especially meaningful, with participants noting that Tina’s legacy lives on in bringing people together, acknowledging trauma, and showing that healing is possible. For many, the events eased anxiety and strengthened their sense of connection to others and to hope.

8.2.3 A sense that values, beliefs, and attitudes toward marginalised and minoritised participants can change

Perhaps most importantly, participants felt these events were actively shifting attitudes within local communities and helping to create safer, more inclusive spaces for marginalised women. After the first community response meeting following the racist attack (4.9.2025), one participant said the gathering showed that the community could unite across differences to stand against hate and racism through collective effort and trust. The project also inspired hope that East Durham could continue building a vibrant, mutually supportive, multiracial community. Participants expressed confidence that collective action could strengthen unity and understanding, while also recognising that meaningful change requires ongoing commitment and reflection

“We can spread the benefits of togetherness, to be kinder to one another. To stop and think about what your reaction/response to situations and how this could be better to encourage to ensure safety and inclusion for all.” (Festive celebration participant)

Educational and intergenerational change emerged as key themes, with hope that.

“Education will help children and in turn adults to understand that we can all learn to live together in peace without hatred and fear.” (Community meeting participant)

Participants also expressed dreams for structural change, including:

“Hope that Durham Police can work together to support asylum seekers and refugees.” (The Old Oak participant)

And recognition that:

“This way of working being seen as vital to our local community’s growth, health and well-being, and not just seen as a ‘nice to do’.” (Tina’s Haven Festival participant)

Written submissions made to the PCC in March 2026, following the racist attack on Nigerian families in Eden Park (30.8.2025), provide important contextual evidence alongside these findings. Community testimonies described ongoing fear, emotional trauma, social withdrawal, and loss of confidence in public spaces, particularly among children.

Read alongside the project’s community-led events, this data highlights the continued necessity of safe, culturally responsive spaces where healing and solidarity can be actively practised.

While project activity supports positive shifts in values and community connection, the evidence also demonstrates how fragile these gains remain in the absence of consistent institutional protection.

8.2.4 Unanticipated outcomes at a community level

Beyond the intended outcomes, the events generated several powerful unexpected impacts.

- **Unexpected Professional Partnerships and Collaboration:** Beyond the intended outcomes, the events generated several powerful unexpected impacts. Participants identified “partnership opportunities” for future collaboration, and noted:

“Great networking and show of working together.” (The Old Oak participant)

- **Pride, Community Identity, and Strength-Based Narratives:** The events also helped reshape how participants viewed the local area and its community identity. Some spoke of feeling proud, despite not being from the area, to be part of something that highlighted the best of Horden’s people and place. Others recognised:

“How amazing our community is.” (The Old Oak participant)

This shift to strength-based narratives is significant for long-term community confidence, and a counter narrative to recent deficit-based narratives that have been dominant in mainstream media recently.³⁸

- **Cultural Exchange, Diversity, and Connection to Nature:** Cultural pride and exchange emerged naturally, with participants celebrating the area’s diversity, through the range of cultures represented, the enjoyment of local food, and various artistic expressions. The events also deepened participants’ connection to place and nature, helping them form more personal relationships with the natural environment and appreciate how such connections can positively affect their well-being. Participants valued

“The importance of connecting and celebrating in nature in order to grow as a community.” (Tina’s Haven Festival participant)

- **Tina’s Haven: Symbol of Hope and Transformation:** Tina’s Haven itself became a powerful symbol of hope and transformation. Participants dreamed:

“That the sapling grows into a big tree bringing hope to whoever is on their journey of self-discovery, and healing. That Tina’s haven is a place for recovery and peace.” (Festive celebration participant)

And committed to being able to:

“Tell the stories for generations to come of how Tina’s Haven provides a place for recovery, healing, new beginnings, and hope.” (Festive celebration participant)

Joy as a Transformative Force: Perhaps most unexpectedly, joy emerged as a transformative force. Participants spoke of:

“Joy warmth and inspiration.” (Festive celebration participant)

“the spirit of joy in new beginning from tough times.” (Festive celebration participant)

And the love shared by so many people coming together to create meaningful change. This joy was not a surface-level celebration but a deep form of collective healing that revealed the power of “Food, dance and happy people” (Tina’s Haven Festival participant) to create lasting community change.

8.2.5 Summary of community level findings

The project resulted in substantial transformation at the community level, with participants repeatedly describing circumstances in which unfamiliar individuals formed connections, friendships deepened, and a strong sense of unity prevailed. The events

were characterised as inclusive celebrations, bringing together women from various cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds. This fostered genuine trust and solidarity among participants, who felt welcomed, supported, and included. The atmosphere was described as nurturing, filled with warmth, kindness, and care, which helped to reduce feelings of isolation and cultivate a sense of belonging for all involved.

Importantly, there was a strong conviction among participants that attitudes within the community were evolving, with optimism that collective action and trust could overcome prejudice and division. There was also a commitment to promoting togetherness, encouraging kindness, and fostering a more supportive environment for everyone.

In addition to the expected outcomes, the events facilitated productive networking and collaboration and contributed to a positive reimagining of local identity. Participants felt a renewed pride in their community, recognising its strengths and the contributions of its people. Furthermore, the atmosphere of joy, warmth, and inspiration was seen as central to the process of healing and renewal, illustrating how collective happiness can drive long-lasting change and foster resilience in the face of adversity.

Overall, these outcomes indicate that the project achieved more than individual healing and connection; it brought about authentic transformation at the community level, offering a promising vision for a more inclusive, compassionate, and unified future.

The recent evaluation evidence also reinforces the importance of sustained, relational community spaces in generating these outcomes, particularly through shared emotional experience and collective presence. Participants described strong feelings of unity across difference:

“Although we all come from different backgrounds... we were all there together for a shared purpose of healing, connection, and recovery.” (Sharing learning and conversation event)

At the same time, there is stronger evidence that these community gains are being actively translated into wider aspirations for change. Participants expressed a clear desire to extend this model beyond the project:

“For other organisations and charities to follow suit.”

“I hope there will be more of these events.” (Sharing learning and conversation event)

This indicates that the project is not only generating localised community cohesion but is beginning to influence wider cultural expectations about how anti-racist and community-building practice should be delivered.



Figure 10: “Bless the ground”, planting of the “Tree of Hope”, 29 November 2025 (photo by Paul Harris).



Figure 11: Sharing film, conversation, and food, “The Old Oak” event, 31 July 2025.

8.3 Organisational level outcomes

The anticipated outcomes at an organisational level were as follows:

- a) Improved networks, collaboration, and partnerships between organisations.
- b) Wider horizons and possibilities for partnering arts and cultural work with specialisms in nature and well-being, and with those with lived experience of living with trauma from abuse, violence, racism, and punishing state practices.
- c) More safe spaces for arts and cultural practices with marginalised and minoritised women.

8.3.1 Improved networks, collaboration, and partnerships between organisations

The project has generated significant organisational-level impacts that extend far beyond individual experiences, catalysing new forms of collaboration, expanding organisational capacity and positioning agencies for long-term community engagement. Strategic collaboration strengthened substantially. Participants described events as:

“A great example of working in partnership to deliver an event.” (Tina’s Haven Festival)

And praised

“Great networking and show of working together.” (The Old Oak).

These collaborations produced tangible “partnership opportunities” (Tina’s Haven Festival) and facilitated “closer working between professionals” (The Old Oak).

The crisis following the racist attack demonstrated the potential strength of collaborative infrastructure. Community response meetings brought together “representatives from police, local authority, community and voluntary sector agencies, and local schools” (narrative account), showing the project’s ability to rapidly mobilise diverse organisational resources. Major events were delivered through broad coalitions including regional trusts, regeneration agencies, refugee support groups, arts organisations, women’s recovery groups, and churches.

Multi-agency networks emerged to include organisations such as The Free Women’s Community, Together for Children, Durham Sanctuary, Syrian and Nigerian community groups, Women in Empowerment and Recovery, Durham Council, and community centres (The Old Oak evaluation). In education:

“We have a group of 19 schools from the area who now meet regularly and are working on some joint projects as part of anti-racist practice.” (Correspondence 19.3.2026)

Notes from the meeting with the PCC and Chief of Staff (16.3.2026) further evidence the project’s role as a trusted convenor and advocacy platform. Project partners supported community members to articulate concerns directly to senior decision-makers,

challenged inconsistencies in official responses, and ensured victim experiences remained central to the discussion.

These findings evidence deep structural collaboration that extends beyond the original project, demonstrating organisational capacity not only for delivery, but for system navigation, accountability, and trauma-informed advocacy.

8.3.2 Wider horizons and possibilities for partnering arts and cultural work with nature, well-being, and lived-experience expertise

The project has expanded organisational understanding of what integrated arts, nature-based and trauma-informed practice can achieve. Organisations witnessed the profound impact of this approach:

“The courage, strength and commitment to healing using arts and nature shone through in abundance at the event.” (Festive celebration)

This has strengthened commitment to these methods, with calls for:

“The work of Tina’s Haven and the Barn at Easington to continue... the power of connection and healing using arts and nature is so powerful.” (Festive celebration)

Arts-based intercultural practice also opened new possibilities. Participants in the dance workshop reflected that the experience felt universally human, while practitioners saw potential for further growth and expansion.

“That we could bring this classical workshop to the Barn at Easington... a genuine communication across cultures.” (Dance Workshop Participant)

Events integrated South Asian artists from Sangini and the Nigerian community offering a scalable model for multicultural programming.

Organisations also deepened their understanding of nature-based healing. The festival underscored the importance of connecting with and celebrating in natural environments, especially for communities living with trauma. Participants also recognised the need for specialist, trauma-aware approaches and emphasised:

“Women who experience trauma in whatever form need a space and support to heal.” (Tina’s Haven Festival)

This informed new developments, such as the “arts and nature-based project for mothers and children” (narrative account), funded by Point North and created to meet “evolving needs” in the aftermath of the violent racist attack on Nigerian families.

Crucially, sector attitudes also began to shift. One participant summed up a widely shared organisational aspiration: that this way of working be recognised as essential to

the community's growth, health, and well-being, rather than dismissed as something merely "nice to do."

8.3.3 More safe spaces for arts and cultural practices with marginalised and minoritised women

The project created genuinely safe environments that marginalised women and their families could trust. Community meetings were described simply as "Safe space" (community meeting), and events were experienced as deeply supportive:

"Welcoming supportive inclusive... delivered with love and hope." (Participant, Festive celebration)

For one woman, The Old Oak event was:

"The first time I have felt completely safe at an event since coming to England." (Participant, The Old Oak event)

The project centrally contributed to strong organisational responsiveness to safety concerns. Following the racist attack, "Nigerian families were given access to a free National Trust Community Pass to access safe spaces for children and families" (narrative account). Programmes were consistently framed around inclusion; Diwali in Nature was advertised as "women and children welcome," ensuring accessibility for those most vulnerable.

The project strengthened organisational capacity to create and govern safe spaces. Securing a Point North Community Grants came to enable dedicated arts and nature-based support for Black, minoritised and other marginalised women (narrative account). This work is now guided by "a small, diverse steering group," establishing sustainable, community-led governance.

Trust-building became a central principle. To support traumatised families, "the first mothers and children's session took place at The House of Abundance Church" (narrative account), a culturally familiar setting chosen specifically to build confidence among participants. Cultural celebration became integral to these safe spaces, with events described as:

"Truly hopeful... rich and connected with the Nigerian community and South Asian artists from Sangini." (Tina's Haven Festival)

Participants valued "the cultural diversity that was displayed" and highlighted moments such as "the beautiful dance demo by Anusha Margasiri!"

These developments show that the project has not only created safe environments but has enabled organisations to understand how safety, culture, arts, and well-being intersect in meaningful, sustainable ways for marginalised women.

8.3.4 Unanticipated outcomes at an organisational level

Unexpected organisational outcomes evidence that the Together We Heal and Recover project made a central contribution to the development of advocacy and political engagement capacity, in the following areas:

- High-level strategic engagement.
- Policy influence and system change work.
- Strengthening crisis response, emergency mobilisation, and rapid-response infrastructure.
- Data systems development and monitoring capacity, and new data collection infrastructure.
- Community engagement reflection.

These themes are now discussed in turn:

- **High-level strategic engagement:** This represents significant expansion beyond typical community service delivery into strategic advocacy and is evident in the following:
 - Organisations developed capacity for engaging with senior decision-makers, including “letters to Durham PCC, the North East Mayor to request individual meetings, and to the Chief Constable of Durham Constabulary” (narrative account).
 - “Drafting a letter to the local MP, asking him to convene a meeting, which would include a proposal for him to contact The Rt Hon David Lammy MP, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice” (narrative account).
- **Policy influence and system change work:** Representing development of capacity to challenge institutional responses and demand accountability, and movement from service provision to system change advocacy. This is reflected in organisations becoming involved in “addressing systemic issues and perceived failings related to the racist attack” (narrative account).
- The project’s role in **strengthening crisis response, emergency mobilisation, and rapid-response infrastructure** represents new organisational capacity for emergency community support, and demonstrated by:
 - A central contribution to “organising the first two community response meetings to the racial violence for 4th and 10th September 2025” within days of the attack; with “n=16 participants at the first community response meetings” and “n=25 participants at the second meeting” (narrative account)
 - “The development practitioner was informed of the situation by a local authority officer... early on Sunday morning, 31st August” and immediately mobilised response (narrative account).

- **The project’s contribution to ensuring that data systems development and monitoring capacity, and new data collection infrastructure, which led to:**
 - Schools developed “Google Forms tool each half term (approximately every six weeks). This will include some additional detail to help in analysing for patterns and trends” (narrative account).
 - Recognition that “Generally, data collected is only the number of racist incidents, not the scale and nature of them” led to system improvements (narrative account).
 - Development of “scaling system for how the racism manifests” similar to behaviour recording (narrative account).

- **Community engagement reflection:** Reflecting the development of sophisticated analysis of community engagement challenges
 - Recognition that “more of the local engagement is needed” (Tina’s Haven Festival participant)
 - “I’d also look at the methods of marketing for future events... What would make it even better would be more engagement/attendance from the generationally ‘indigenous’ [sic] community” (Tina’s Haven Festival participant)

These unexpected outcomes demonstrate that participating organisations developed capacities far beyond their traditional roles, moving into advocacy, crisis response, data systems development, media engagement, and complex partnership management, representing significant organisational growth and adaptation. The Together We Heal and Together project was a central agent in these developments.

8.3.5 Summary of organisations level findings

Across the evaluation period, the project has driven substantial organisational development, strengthening cross-sector collaboration, transforming working practices, and expanding the capacity of partners to respond to trauma, racism, and community need. Agencies that previously worked in isolation now collaborate through sustained networks, joint programming, and multi-agency forums, with organisations consistently describing the work as “a great example of working in partnership” and emphasising the value of shared learning, joint problem-solving, and crisis mobilisation.

These collaborations have catalysed new models for integrating arts, cultural practice, nature-based activity and lived-experience leadership, leading to innovative multicultural programming and the creation of safe, trusted spaces for marginalised women and families. The project has clearly shifted organisational attitudes, with partners recognising this holistic approach as essential to community well-being rather than “a nice to do.”

Unexpectedly, the project has also contributed to significant organisational growth in areas beyond its original scope. Working with other key partners to rapidly develop crisis, response infrastructure, political advocacy skills and system, change capabilities, coordinating emergency meetings within days of the racist attack, gathering community-

led data, monitoring online hate, and engaging directly with the PCC, Chief Constable, North East Mayor, and local MP.

Organisations also built new evaluation, media, and storytelling capacities, strengthening ethical practice frameworks and deepening their understanding of racialised harm and institutional accountability. Although the withdrawal of one statutory partner created strain, organisations responded by consolidating principles of trust, transparency and community-led decision-making.

Overall, the project has centrally contributed to wide-ranging organisational impacts: building resilient partnerships, expanding holistic practice, creating safe and culturally meaningful spaces, and equipping organisations with the strategic, operational, and ethical tools required to support communities facing trauma, racism, and injustice.

These capacities position the partnership ecosystem for long-term sustainability and for continued leadership in community-centred, arts, and nature-based transformation.

The evaluation evidence provides stronger confirmation that these organisational changes are translating into concrete action, rather than remaining at the level of intention or partnership. Participants described immediate organisational responses, including changes to governance and practice:

“We are going to recruit someone of colour [sic] on our board... as a matter of priority.” (Sharing learning and conversation event)

There is also clearer articulation of the need to move from dialogue to measurable impact, with participants calling for:

“Translation... into tangible action points to create measurable impact in the community.” (Sharing learning and conversation event)

This strengthens the evidence that the project is contributing to shifts within the disciplinary domain of power, where organisational norms, decision-making processes, and accountability mechanisms are being reshaped through lived experience and reflection.

8.4 Institutional level outcomes

The anticipated outcomes at an institutional level were as follows:

- Growing recognition by institutions of the cultural, health and well-being, social and economic efficacy of the holistic arts and nature-based practice methods established by this project.

8.4.1 Growing recognition by institutions of the cultural, health and well-being, social and economic efficacy of the holistic arts and nature-based practice methods

Evidence across events, community-response meetings, and multi-agency engagement shows a clear shift in how statutory bodies, schools, funders, and civic partners

understand and value the project’s holistic methodology. Institutions increasingly recognised that arts and nature-based practice provide a powerful vehicle for cohesion, trauma recovery, well-being, and community engagement.

Strong cross-sector institutional participation signalled belief in the project’s methods. Across all major events: Tina’s Haven Festival (26.7.2025), The Old Oak screening (31.7.2025), Diwali in Nature (18.10.2025), and the Festive Celebration (29.11.2025), representatives from police, local authority, schools, National Trust, funders and elected officials attended, many describing the approach as “uplifting”, “inclusive”, “powerful, warm, accepting” and “an honour to be present” (Festive Celebration and Old Oak event).

Institutional attendees also clearly recognised the value of the project’s community-led approach. They highlighted strong partnership working, the meaningful impact of bringing diverse groups together and the quality of collaboration and networking across organisations. This is particularly evident in ‘The Old Oak’ event (31.7.25) and the Community Nature Festival (26.7.2025).



Figure 12: Women and children from Sangini, The Barn at Easington, Women in Recovery and Empowerment, and FREE Women’s Community celebrating Diwali together, 16 October 2025.

The project became recognised as a vital community asset that fostered hope, cohesion, and recovery. Organisational participants repeatedly highlighted its contribution to strengthening community well-being, noting the sense of strength, and healing it generated, the way it enabled communities to bond despite adversity and trauma, and the courage and commitment to healing expressed through arts and nature. They also praised it as an excellent activity rooted in bringing people together from all backgrounds. This is particularly evident in reflective narratives of those who participated in the Festive Event (29.11.2025) and the Community Nature Festival (26.7.2025).

Institutions also recognised the economic and social value of the nature-based assets, namely The Barn at Easington and Tina’s Haven Nature Reserve:

“An asset on the doorstep... great networking.” (Old Oak event participant)

“It feels like a great starting point... with potential for growth and longevity.”
(Tina’s Haven Festival participant)

8.4.2 Unanticipated outcomes at an institutional level

The unanticipated outcomes at an institutional level all relate to operational and strategic project activities in relation to the response to the racist attack upon Nigerian families in Eden Park (30.8.2025). Whilst these outcomes are not entirely attributable to the Together We Heal and Recover project, it is evident that the project made a central and significant contribution to the outcomes that emerged.

Statutory agencies, such as local authorities, police, and schools, at least initially, acknowledged the community response meetings’ value as safe spaces where the Nigerian community could safely articulate experiences:

“The opportunity to voice their fears and emotional trauma.” (Community Response participant)

Schools formally strengthened anti-racist practice, directly influenced by issues surfaced in these forums. Following the meetings, a cluster of nineteen East Durham schools established a recurring anti-racist taskforce and adopted new cross-school systems (Table 3, narrative account), including:

- Shared incident-reporting via Google Forms every six weeks.
- Work to diversify curriculum resources.
- Positive-action recruitment to governing bodies.
- Ongoing collaborative Black History Month work.

School representatives explicitly acknowledged the need to “support all communities within their schools” (Table 2, narrative account) and recognised that “more racist incidents are being reported” (Table 3, narrative account), showing increased awareness (narrative account).

“This initiative responds to evolving needs... following a violent racist attack affecting families and children.” (point 9.2.2 of the narrative account)

The National Trust’s endorsement further highlighted the therapeutic and safety value of nature-based practice. By providing free Community Passes for Nigerian families to visit Souter Lighthouse, Gibside, Crook Hall Gardens and Washington Old Hall (9.2.1), the organisation signalled its recognition that access to nature is essential for safety, family well-being, and recovery, particularly for communities experiencing trauma.

Multi-agency leaders endorsed the project as a legitimate arena for addressing systemic issues. The MP, PCC, North East Mayor's office and senior police officers used project-anchored meetings to address the racist attack and wider community safety concerns. The MP wrote to the Secretary of State for Justice, whose office subsequently alerted the Nigerian community to trial being brought forward by nineteen months (letter 28.11.2025). This demonstrates a high-level recognition of the project as a credible convening space for serious strategic issues.

The evidence suggests that the withdrawal of a key statutory partner after the third community response meeting (24.9.2025) resulted in a negative outcome at and institutional level. Consequences expressed by community members included:

“The warmth... had now reversed.”

“The narrative of working together in partnership is perceived as rhetorical.”

“There is a sense of shutting the door on the Nigerian community.”

(Community response meeting 15.10.2025)

This suggests institutional disengagement, the opposite of the intended strengthening of collaboration.

Victim testimonies presented in March 2026 also suggest ongoing institutional limitations, including inconsistent communication, lack of clarity regarding safeguarding, and unequal experiences of victim and witness care. While institutional engagement continued at senior levels, this evidence suggests that recognition of harm does not yet consistently translate into meaningful protection, reassurance, or justice for affected communities.

8.4.3 Summary of institutional level findings

Institutional engagement with the project grew significantly over the delivery period, with statutory bodies, schools, funders, and civic partners increasingly recognising the cultural, social, health and economic value of its holistic arts and nature-based approach. Attendance and active participation across major events demonstrated a clear shift in how institutions understood the project's role in fostering cohesion, well-being, and trauma recovery. Partners consistently described the work as inclusive, uplifting, and impactful, highlighting the strength of its community-led model and the quality of cross-sector collaboration it enabled. The Barn at Easington and Tina's Haven Nature Reserve also became recognised as important local assets, valued for their contribution to community connection, recovery, and longer-term social and economic potential.

Unanticipated institutional outcomes emerged in response to the racist attack on Nigerian families in Eden Park, where the project played a significant role in convening safe, trusted spaces for community expression and multi-agency dialogue. These forums prompted tangible institutional action, most notably the establishment of a new

anti-racist schools taskforce across nineteen East Durham schools, alongside strengthened reporting systems, curriculum diversification, and governance reforms. National Trust support further signalled recognition of the therapeutic importance of nature-based practice for communities experiencing trauma. Senior leaders, including the MP, PCC and regional mayoral representatives, used project-anchored meetings to address systemic issues, demonstrating high-level confidence in the project as a credible convening space.

However, the withdrawal of a key statutory partner later in the process generated a negative institutional impact, with community members reporting a sense of abandonment and diminished trust, underscoring the fragility of institutional commitment in moments of heightened need. The dual outcome: strong institutional recognition alongside perceived structural barriers provides a valuable foundation for future advocacy, partnership development, and investment.

The most recent evaluation evidence also indicates growing expectations among participants that institutional engagement should move beyond recognition toward sustained commitment, measurable outcomes, and wider replication. Participants expressed a clear desire for continuity and scale: **“Would love for this to be a regular thing,”** and for broader institutional and organisational uptake: **“for other organisations... to follow suit”**

This reinforces the emerging tension identified in these findings: while institutional actors increasingly recognise the value of the project’s approach, participants expect this recognition to translate into long-term structural support, consistent implementation, and wider system change.



Figure 13: Participants in focus group discussions at the sharing, learning, conversation & brunch at The Barn at Easington, 6th May 2026 (1) (photo by Sharon Bailey)



Figure 14: Women huddle together in the Labyrinth to spontaneously express Islamic, Hindu, Christian prayers and blessings; along with a Chinese song to pay homage to the Swallows above, Hopes and Dreams event, 23 April 2026.

8.5 Summary of project outcomes across four levels

Table 7: Project outcomes at four levels of empowerment and domination (Collins 2000)

<p>Individual and interpersonal level</p> <p>Personal growth and confidence: Participants tried new things, expanded self-awareness, and stepped outside comfort zones (“I tried new things”).</p> <p>Emotional restoration and well-being: Nature-based activities reduced anxiety and supported healing (“Less anxiety, connectedness”).</p> <p>Cross-cultural connection: Deeper understanding and meaningful relationships across cultures (“A genuine communication across cultures”).</p> <p>New possibilities and leadership: Participants identified new opportunities, began taking leadership roles, and described increased confidence to act on anti-racist practice in everyday life.</p> <p>Strengthened self-worth and belonging: Increased confidence, love, and solidarity (“Strangers became friends, friends became family”).</p>	<p>Community level</p> <p>Stronger trust and unity across difference: Friendships and bonds formed between women from diverse backgrounds (“A true celebration of community and diversity”).</p> <p>Feeling supported and not alone: Gatherings created warmth, care, and emotional safety (“Welcoming supportive inclusive... delivered with love and hope”).</p> <p>Shifts in community attitudes: Increased hope for safer, kinder, more inclusive communities (“We can unite our diverse community against the forces of hate”), alongside continued fear and insecurity where institutional protection is experienced as unreliable.</p> <p>Unexpected community pride and collaboration: New partnerships, renewed local pride, and strength-based narratives (“How amazing our community is”).</p>
<p>Organisational level</p> <p>Strengthened cross-sector collaboration: Deeper partnerships, joint programming, and multi-agency working (“A great example of working in partnership”).</p> <p>Expanded practice horizons: Organisations embraced integrated arts, nature-based and trauma-informed approaches (“The power of connection and healing using arts and nature”).</p> <p>Creation of safe, culturally meaningful spaces: Trusted environments for marginalised women (“The first time I have felt completely safe at an event since coming to England”).</p> <p>New strategic capacities: Growth in advocacy, crisis response, data systems, and system-navigation and protective support for communities engaging with statutory processes. (e.g., letters to PCC, MP, Mayor and meetings). Including evidence of concrete organisational changes in governance, representation, and practice.</p>	<p>Institutional level</p> <p>Recognition of holistic arts-and-nature practice: Institutions valued its role in cohesion, well-being, and recovery (“Uplifting,” “inclusive,” “powerful”).</p> <p>Cross-sector institutional participation: Police, schools, funders, and civic leaders actively engaged across events.</p> <p>Anti-racist institutional reforms: Schools created a fifteen-school taskforce, new reporting systems, curriculum diversification.</p> <p>High-level strategic engagement : MP, PCC, Mayor’s office used project-anchored meetings to address systemic issues.</p> <p>Ongoing institutional fragility: Despite more recognition and engagement, affected communities noted inconsistent protection, communication, and care, and trust declined after a statutory partner withdrew.</p>

9. Conclusion: Assessing the project's contribution to movement across the four domains of power

The evaluation demonstrates that Together We Heal and Recover has generated meaningful movement across all four domains of power identified in Black feminist theory (Collins 2000:277–288). The evaluation has examined how the structural domain organises oppression through institutional networks regulating citizens' rights; how the disciplinary domain manages power through organisational hierarchies that discipline and control; how the hegemonic domain links institutions and organisational practices by legitimising 'common sense' ideologies and recycling them in new forms; and how the interpersonal domain shapes everyday lived experience by replacing individual ways of knowing with dominant group perspectives.

The project's theory of change recognised that transformation must extend beyond shifts in individual attitudes to encompass changes in relationships, organisational practice, and institutional behaviour. Across these domains, the evidence shows that the project has not only met its intended outcomes but has also catalysed unanticipated forms of collective healing, solidarity, and structural engagement.

9.1 Movement in the interpersonal domain

The strongest and most immediate change occurred within the interpersonal domain. Participants reported profound personal growth, emotional restoration, increased confidence, and strengthened self-worth. Nature-based and culturally inclusive activities created conditions for healing that were both intimate and transformative. Individuals described feeling "hope," "belonging," and "love," and many articulated a renewed sense of purpose and possibility.

Recent evidence (April 2026) confirms the durability of these interpersonal outcomes over time, with participants continuing to articulate peace, joy, safety, self-acceptance, and future-oriented hope, indicating that these impacts are sustained rather than event-specific. Evidence from May 2026, further reinforces the importance of relational environments in enabling this transformation, with one respondent describing how the space created during the event led to an immediate embodied sense of safety:

"The environment... felt immediately welcoming and safe. I felt my nervous system relax" (Sharing learning and conversation event)

This highlights that interpersonal change is not only cognitive or emotional but also physiological, with safe, inclusive environments enabling participants to regulate stress responses and engage more openly in reflection, connection, and dialogue. These shifts represent significant movement in the interpersonal domain, where dominant narratives of isolation, trauma, and marginalisation were replaced with experiences of connection, dignity, and empowerment.

9.2 Movement in the community (hegemonic) domain

At the community level, the project fostered trust, solidarity, and cross-cultural unity. Women from diverse backgrounds formed friendships and support networks that extended beyond the events themselves. Participants repeatedly described the gatherings as warm, inclusive, and deeply caring spaces where they felt safe, valued, and not alone. Importantly, the project also contributed to early shifts in community attitudes, with participants expressing hope for more inclusive, anti-racist, and compassionate local environments.

These outcomes indicate substantial movement in the community domain, laying the foundations for long-term cultural change. However, subsequent evidence gathered in March 2026 also demonstrates the limits of community level transformation when structural protection is unreliable. While trust, care, and solidarity were strongly evidenced within project-led spaces, victim testimonies following the Eden Park racist attack reveal persistent fear, trauma, and withdrawal from public life, underscoring the fragility of community gains in the absence of consistent institutional safeguarding.

9.3 Movement in the organisational (disciplinary) domain

The project also achieved moderate to strong movement at the organisational level. Cross-sector collaboration deepened significantly, with new partnerships emerging between schools, statutory agencies, arts organisations, refugee support groups, and community networks. The project expanded organisational understanding of integrated arts, nature-based, and trauma-informed practice, with multiple partners expressing commitment to sustaining and developing this work.

The rapid mobilisation following the racist attack demonstrated the project's capacity to convene diverse organisations in moments of crisis, strengthening collective response infrastructure. The formation of a nineteen-school anti-racist taskforce represents a notable organisational shift, signalling new disciplinary practices and shared accountability mechanisms. The most recent evidence indicates that this organisational shift also includes advanced advocacy and system navigation functions, with project partners undertaking sustained trauma-informed protective labour to support victims, challenge inconsistencies in statutory responses, and translate lived experience into formal accountability processes.

There is also emerging evidence that learning from the project is influencing the design of practice in other organisational settings. A statutory sector participant described how the experience had directly informed their own professional approach:

“Has changed how I am going to format... to try create an environment in which people feel safe to speak and share” (Sharing learning and conversation event)

This suggests that the project's relational and trauma-informed approach is beginning to be replicated beyond the immediate partnership, indicating early diffusion of practice across systems. These developments show that the project has begun to reshape organisational behaviours and norms in ways consistent with Black feminist emancipatory aims.

9.4 Movement in the institutional (structural) domain

Movement at the institutional level, where power is most entrenched, was more emergent but nonetheless meaningful. Institutions including the police, local authority, National Trust, funders, and elected officials recognised the value of the project's holistic methodology and participated actively in key events. The project became a legitimate convening space for addressing systemic issues, evidenced by engagement from the MP, PCC, and regional mayoral representatives. The advancement of the criminal trial following political intervention further demonstrates institutional responsiveness catalysed through project-anchored forums.

The National Trust's provision of free community passes for Nigerian families signalled institutional recognition of the therapeutic and safety value of nature-based practice for communities experiencing trauma. However, the withdrawal of a key statutory partner from the community response process also revealed the fragility of institutional commitment and the persistence of structural barriers. This moment of regression underscores the ongoing need for accountability and sustained institutional engagement. Overall, the project achieved early but significant movement in the institutional domain, with clear evidence of influence but also clear limits.

Victim testimony indicates that, despite high level engagement, inconsistencies in communication, safeguarding reassurance, and witness care persist, highlighting a gap between institutional recognition of harm and the lived delivery of safety, justice, and care. In conclusion, institutional movement remains uneven, fragile, and dependent on sustained external challenge.

9.5 Overall assessment of movement across the four domains

Taken together, the evaluation findings show that the project has achieved:

- Significant transformation in the interpersonal domain.
- Substantial and sustained movement in the community domain.
- Moderate to strong movement in the organisational (disciplinary) domain.
- Emerging but meaningful movement in the institutional (structural) domains, with one notable setback.

This pattern of change aligns with Black feminist theory, which recognises that transformation often begins with shifts in lived experience and collective consciousness before extending into organisational and institutional structures.

The project has successfully initiated this trajectory of change, demonstrating that arts-based, nature-centred, community-led practice can challenge dominant narratives, strengthen solidarity, and open pathways for structural transformation.

Together We Heal and Recover has laid a powerful foundation for long-term change. It has nurtured healing, solidarity, and empowerment at the interpersonal and community levels; strengthened collaborative capacity and trauma-informed practice at the organisational level; and begun to influence institutional behaviour and accountability.

The evidence also highlights the project’s role in holding a complex dual function: sustaining spaces of joy, healing, and belonging, while simultaneously absorbing and responding to ongoing trauma generated by institutional and structural failures.

While structural change remains an ongoing challenge, the project has demonstrated that community-led, culturally grounded, and nature-based approaches can meaningfully disrupt the matrix of domination and create new possibilities for justice, safety, and collective flourishing.

The recent evidence (May 2026) also strengthens this analysis by demonstrating a clearer progression from reflection to action across all domains. Participants described increased confidence to challenge racism in their everyday lives, while organisations began to translate learning into concrete changes in governance, recruitment, and service delivery. This progression from relational engagement to tangible action reinforces the project’s contribution not only to awareness and connection, but to emerging behavioural and structural change.

Across all domains, the findings indicate that relational practice is the primary mechanism through which change is achieved. Trust, emotional safety, shared experience, and sustained connection enable participants to engage in reflection, build solidarity, and translate learning into action. This suggests that relational approaches are not an additional feature of anti-racist practice but its essential foundation.



Figure 15: Participants in focus group discussions at the sharing, learning, conversation & brunch at The Barn at Easington, 6th May 2026 (2) (photo by Sharon Bailey)

10. Key areas of learning identified through project partner's collective reflections

- 10.1 Anti-racist practice must be central from the start — not an add-on. It needs to be properly resourced and embedded.
- 10.2 Partnership and sisterhood between grassroots organisations supporting marginalised, Black and minoritised women is vital. We are stronger together.
- 10.3 Trust takes time. Engagement must be slower, gentler, and rooted in listening. Funders need to recognise and resource this reality.
- 10.4 Understanding systemic and cultural racism is essential. This work begins with personal reflection on identity, privilege, and class.

“As a white middle-class woman listening to the world view of Black and minoritised women has opened me up to seeing clearly my white inherent perspective of power and privilege. This has helped me to challenge this perspective and understand the inherent structural power base that dominates and supports racism .

It has been hard and saddening to see myself, but change is very possible with an open heart. However, real connection comes about through a combination of self-reflection and listening to each other, creating safe creative female spaces to weave stronger connections based in trust and love.”

- 10.5 A warm welcome creates belonging. Sharing food breaks down barriers. Relationships are forming, deepening, and taking root.
- 10.6 Being in nature at The Barn at Easington has opened up new possibilities. Nature levels hierarchies and softens boundaries.
- 10.7 Engagement is everything. Working with marginalised women requires time, patience, and deep learning. Strong race relations and community cohesion grow from this process.
- 10.8 Reflective learning must be built into projects, so mistakes become growth, not repetition.
- 10.9 We value and respect each other's differences and cultures without judgement. That in itself challenges the status quo.
- 10.10 Diversity is a continuum. It is deeply important to continue building on the relationships we have built so far to bring about lasting incremental change in the social and cultural landscape of the society.



Figure 16: Presenting the findings at the sharing, learning, conversation & brunch at The Barn at Easington, 6th May 2026 (photo by Nikki Crowley)

11. Recommendations

The recommendations in this section draw directly on participant evaluation responses, focus group discussions, and the thematic findings from the Together We Heal and Recover project’s final event on 6 May 2026. A clear and consistent message runs through all of the data. That is, anti-racist practice in East Durham must be relational, culturally grounded, and structurally embedded. Participants were clear that it is not simply a matter of policy or training. As one participant put it, it requires “**personal responsibility and collective action.**”

In [Appendix 2](#), the recommendations are mapped against the four domains of domination and empowerment (Collins 2000). The mapping confirms that while each recommendation is anchored in a primary domain, many operate across multiple domains simultaneously, reinforcing the interconnected nature of power and change identified by Collins. The table in Appendix 2 illustrates that several recommendations demonstrate strong links between interpersonal reflection, organisational practice, and wider cultural transformation.

Here, the recommendations are organised into three tiers based on what is achievable now, what needs planning and resource, and what requires longer-term institutional commitment.

Tier 1: Low-hanging fruit Easy, immediate changes. Minimal cost, minimal structural change.

R1. Hold regular reflective conversations within organisations Introduce facilitated reflection sessions, at minimum quarterly, within community groups and organisations. These should be safe, non-judgemental spaces focused on language, behaviour, and everyday anti-racist practice, and include reflection on how these translate into concrete actions. Participants were clear that “**You have to get uncomfortable to get comfortable.**” This costs very little but signals genuine commitment.

R2. Make anti-racism a standing agenda item Add anti-racist practice as a mandatory agenda item at leadership meetings, staff meetings, and organisational reviews. This was one of the three concrete proposals that emerged directly from the focus groups. It requires no new funding, only will and consistency.

R3. Train anti-racist first aiders Designate trained individuals within services, schools, and community organisations who people can go to when they experience or witness racism. The focus groups named this specifically: “**Anti-racist first aiders who you go to in person.**” This is low-cost, practical, and immediately actionable.

R4. Use food, culture, and celebration as tools for connection Commit to regular multicultural community events, a minimum of four per year, centred on food, cultural celebration, and storytelling. This project has demonstrated repeatedly that these spaces break down barriers in ways that formal approaches cannot. As participants said: “**Love the idea of celebrating cultures together, coming together to share food.**” These events build the relational and emotional foundation for anti-racist practice, including calm, connection, and shared belonging.

R5. Create safe spaces for honest dialogue Establish regular spaces where people can ask difficult questions, reflect on their own privilege, and explore fear of saying the wrong thing. The final event showed that when safety is present, people engage honestly: “**Today was the first time I felt able to talk about how sometimes I fear I may be ‘over stepping’ when using my white privilege, which highlights how safe I felt.**”

These spaces do not require significant resource; they require skilled facilitation and consistent commitment. These spaces also enable participants to move from reflection to action, including increased confidence to speak, challenge, and act.

Tier 2: Medium-term practical recommendations Changes that need some planning, training, coordination, or resource allocation.

R6. Develop peer-led anti-racist education for young people Embed peer education in schools and youth settings across East Durham. This should include addressing inconsistencies in experience and behaviour among young people in the same communities. The focus group data was emphatic: “**Young people are like sponges. They will soak up what they are told. They are our future.**”

This needs coordination with schools, youth organisations, and community groups, and should include developing a resource bank of books and materials that reflect diverse cultures and experiences. Participants also raised the specific need to address racism in special needs settings and with young people with autism.

R7. Review organisational policies through an anti-racist lens All organisations involved in this work should undertake a systematic review of their policies and procedures to identify where anti-racist principles are absent or tokenistic. This should include measurable changes to representation, recruitment, and inclusion practices.

The focus groups asked directly: “EDI- is it related to real life? Is it being led by the right people?” Policy review needs time, honesty, and willingness to act on what is found.

R8. Co-produce training and services with communities Ensure that any training delivered on anti-racism is co-produced with people who have lived experience of racism. The Police/PCC focus group acknowledged this directly: “Co-produced training, partner with communities with lived experience.” Training that does not reflect the real experiences of local communities will not embed. Lived experience must be present from design through to delivery.

R9. Build a local anti-racism network or consortium Develop a multi-agency partnership across East Durham to coordinate, share learning, and sustain activity beyond individual projects. Participants called for “a consortium of organisations working together.” This network should include grassroots organisations, schools, statutory agencies, and community groups. Point North and the Mayor’s office should be asked to support the infrastructure for this. Critically, as noted in the team discussion, action planning must have resources allocated to it, otherwise recommendations sit on a shelf.

R10. Establish community storytelling platforms Create ongoing opportunities for marginalised women’s voices and stories to be heard, through events, creative projects, and digital platforms, including more opportunities for participants to hear multiple lived experience narratives. The thematic report from the final event confirmed: “This event brought to view the involvement of women in telling their stories.” Storytelling is a core method of transformation.

R11. Introduce shared data systems for racist incidents Develop cross-agency monitoring of racist incidents, their nature, patterns, and trends. The focus groups highlighted that “generally, data collected is only the number of racist incidents, not the scale and nature of them.” The East Durham school’s taskforce has already begun this work with a Google Forms system. This should be extended and shared across organisations and sectors.

Tier 3: Long-term, systemic, and aspirational recommendations Wider institutional, policy, or cultural changes that take longer and need structural commitment.

R12. Embed lived experience permanently into public policy and training Require public services, including policing, local government, health, and education, to include local lived experience in the design of staff training and policy development. The Police/PCC focus group acknowledged that the current police race action plan “wasn’t designed sufficiently in consultation with communities.” This needs to change structurally and not just in individual initiatives.

R13. Name racism clearly and consistently across institutions The Police/PCC focus group raised the importance of language: “Naming the issue. Move to ‘I am anti-racist’.” Institutions should move away from neutral or procedural language and make explicit anti-racist commitments in their public communications, governance documents, and accountability frameworks. Words matter and silence is not neutrality.

R14. Link funding to demonstrated anti-racist practice Funders, including the Mayor’s Opportunities Fund, Point North, and other regional bodies should require applicants and grantees to demonstrate anti-racist practice as a condition of funding, including evidence of tangible actions and outcomes rather than stated commitments alone. Anti-racism should be embedded in accountability frameworks, not left to goodwill. As this project has shown, sustained community-led work is only possible when it is properly resourced (in this instance it has relied upon inordinate amounts of pro bono work).

R15. Address structural barriers within policing The Police/PCC focus group was honest about institutional limits: “Funding/resource. Institutional structural limitations. These things tend not to be developed within policing.” Durham Constabulary and the PCC’s office should work with communities to address the specific barriers identified in this project including inconsistent victim communication, unequal witness care, and the assignment of resource based on incident classification rather than community impact. This is long-term work, but the foundations have been laid through the relationships built in this project.

R16. Sustain and scale the Together We Heal and Recover model The most consistent aspiration expressed across all data sources was simple: “Continue projects like this.” The model developed through this project nature-based, arts-led, community-rooted, feminist, and anti-racist works. It should be sustained, scaled, and properly resourced. There is clear evidence of demand for replication, regular delivery, and wider reach across communities and organisations.

The Mayor’s office, PCC, Coalfield Regeneration Trust, Horden Together, and Point North should be approached to take forward an action planning process based on these recommendations, with committed partners and allocated resources. This project has done its job. It is now the responsibility of those with structural power to do theirs.

Together We Heal and Recover set out to address the invisibility of Black and minoritised women in recovery spaces. What it became was a model of how community-led, culturally grounded, anti-racist practice can generate healing, solidarity, and structural change simultaneously. The recommendations above are grounded in what participants said, what the data showed, and what this project proved is possible. The question now is whether those with the power and resources to act will do so.



Figure 17: Participants at the end of the sharing, learning, conversation & brunch at The Barn at Easington, 6th May 2026 (photo by Sharon Bailey)



Figure 18: Participants blowing bubbles at The Barn at Easington, 6th May 2026 (photo by Sharon Bailey)

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Appendix 1: Agencies represented by participants at the learning and sharing event on 6th May 2026

Table 8: Agencies represented at the learning and sharing event on 6th May 2026, and showing the focus groups each was allocated to in the focus group discussions based upon the four domains of domination and empowerment (Collins 2000)

Community sector/ grassroots (reflecting the interpersonal domain)	Public sector (reflecting the structural domain)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Her Circle • FREE women's community • Recovery Connections • Women in Empowerment and Recovery • WOW Women's Gathering <p>Derby University (speaker/ facilitator)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Durham County Council • Horden Together • Newcastle University • South Tyneside Council (Social Work) • Newcastle City Council (Social Work) • Gateshead Council (Social Work) • Together for Children (Sunderland) <p>Sangini (speaker/ facilitator)</p>
Community & voluntary sector (reflecting the hegemonic domain)	Statutory sector (reflecting the disciplinary/ institutional domain)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coalfields Regeneration Trust • Easington Colliery Primary School • Environmental volunteer & activist • JD Creative • National Trust • Sew, Grow, Cook <p>The Barn at Easington (speaker/ facilitator)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Durham Constabulary • Office of the North East Mayor • Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner <p>NEEA&CA (speaker/ facilitator) Nigerian Community member (speaker)</p>

Tina's Haven (evaluator and overall facilitator)

Appendix 2: Mapping of recommendations against the four domains of domination and empowerment (Collins 2000)

Table 9: Mapping of recommendations against the four domains of domination and empowerment (Collins 2000)

Recommendation	Short Description	Structural Domain	Disciplinary Domain	Hegemonic Domain	Interpersonal Domain
R1	Reflective conversations				✓
R2	Anti-racism as agenda item		✓		
R3	Anti-racist first aiders		✓		✓
R4	Cultural/community events			✓	✓
R5	Safe dialogue spaces		✓	✓	✓
R6	Youth peer education	✓	✓	✓	✓
R7	Policy review (anti-racist lens)	✓	✓	✓	
R8	Co-produced training	✓	✓	✓	
R9	Local anti-racism network	✓	✓	✓	
R10	Storytelling platforms			✓	✓
R11	Shared data systems	✓	✓		
R12	Embed lived experience in policy	✓	✓	✓	
R13	Explicit naming of racism	✓	✓	✓	
R14	Link funding to anti-racism	✓	✓		
R15	Address policing structural barriers	✓	✓		
R16	Sustain & scale project model	✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes and references

¹ <https://www.thebarnateasington.co.uk/projects-1>

² <https://www.sangini.co.uk/>

³ <https://www.neeaca.org/>

⁴ Engage local people in creative activities and grow arts provision in ways that are sustainable <https://nomorenowt.org/>

⁵ <https://www.coalfields-regen.org.uk/>

⁶ <https://durham.cityofsanctuary.org/>

⁷ <https://www.ensemble84.com/about>

⁸ <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt19883634/>

⁹ <https://www.durham.gov.uk/hordenttogether>

¹⁰ <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/north-east/durham-coast>

¹¹ <https://www.durhamwt.com/>

¹² <https://www.northeastcommunityforest.org.uk/north-east-community-forest>

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/putting-nature-on-road-to-recovery-with-species-survival-fund>

¹⁴ <https://pointnorth.org.uk/mayors-opportunity-fund/>

¹⁵ “In Love & Anger”, evaluation of the Tina’s Haven pilot project (Dr Sue Robson, 2024) <https://www.wrc.org.uk/blog/tinas-haven-a-catalyst-for-emancipatory-practice-for-birthmothers-severed-from-their-children>

¹⁶ £1M Mayor’s Opportunity Fund to Boost North East Communities - <https://newcastlemagazine.com/1m-mayors-opportunity-fund-to-boost-north-east-communities/>

¹⁷ Launch of Tina’s Haven Nature reserve here (2:21 to 5.25 in video)- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1TePliUlc4>

¹⁸ The concept of “Power-weaving” is likened to the mycorrhizal fungi that supports and protects tree health, whereby a mutualistic relationship enhances tree survival rates and contributes to overall health and longevity.

Mycorrhizal fungi support tree health by supplying nutrients, water, and protection from soil pathogens. Through a symbiotic relationship with roots, they boost trees' uptake of water, phosphorus, and nitrogen, which improves survival and longevity.

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7165205/>

¹⁹ Based upon the work of Patricia Hill Collins; Black feminist thought provides an alternative framework for analysing the organisation of power structures and identifies situations and opportunities for harnessing feminist knowledge to transcend and transform discriminatory laws, policies, practices, and processes. In Black feminist thought power operates at four levels within a matrix of power and domination, as follows (from Collins 2000: p277-28).

²⁰ According to the Office for National Statistics, based on the 2021 Census, 34.6 per cent of households in the area are deprived 'in one dimension', while 27.1 per cent are deprived in two dimensions, 9.8 per cent in three, and 0.3 per cent in four.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/maps/choropleth/population/household-deprivation/hh-deprivation/household-is-deprived-in-one-dimension?lad=E07000169>

²¹ The 2021 Census identified a n=44 people of African birth in Horden out of a population of n=7,203, representing 0.6% of the population. The total population in Horden born outside of the UK was n=178, representing 2.8% of the population (compared with 16% recorded nationally) -

https://www.citypopulation.de/en/uk/northeastengland/admin/county_durham/E04010647_horden/

²² 'Take this house or you're homeless': families sent to a Durham town from London - Sammy Gecsoyler Tue 31 Dec 2024 -

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/dec/31/families-sent-durham-town-from-london-horden-homeless>

²³ <https://www.durham.gov.uk/article/1960/About-Local-Networks>

²⁴ Currency of Change - WRC's annual conference (June 2024)

<https://www.wrc.org.uk/blog/currency-of-change-vibrancy-and-inspiration-at-wrcs-annual-conference>

²⁵ DB Recovery Resources - <https://www.recoveryplusdb.com/speaker/shinasa-shahid-ma-ba/>

²⁶ "Stories of Colour," Angelou Centre and Project Resist - <https://angelou-centre.org.uk/stories-of-colour>

²⁷ Indentureship to Diaspora: Narratives of Migration and South Asian Identity - A conference at Northumbria University with an introduction at Discovery Museum -

<https://www.northeastmuseums.org.uk/discoverymuseum/whats-on/from-indentureship-to-diaspora-narratives-of-migration-and-south-asian-identity>

²⁸ Eight in court over alleged disorder in park - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cp8z87nr7v7o>

²⁹ Seven appear in court over alleged disorder in Peterlee park - <https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/25505139.seven-appear-court-alleged-disorder-peterlee-park/>

³⁰ This account is largely extracted from letter from Grahame Morris MP to the Rt Hon David Lammy MP, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (10.11.2025) on behalf of the Nigerian community following the multi-agency meeting on 7th November 2025.

³¹ Narrative reflections from participants in the first community response meeting (4.9.2025) to the racist attack on the Nigerian community, gathered from an online questionnaire.

³² Souter Lighthouse and The Leas - <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/north-east/souter-lighthouse-and-the-leas>

Gibside - <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/north-east/gibside>

Crook Hall Gardens - <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/north-east/crook-hall-gardens>

Washington Old Hall - <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/north-east/washington-old-hall>

³³ Ministerial response from Sarah Sackman KC MP to Grahame Morris MP (dated 28.11.2025)

³⁴ The online survey was conducted by the Together We Heal and Recover project at the request of collected from witnesses and victims at the request of the Nigerian community during early December 2025.

³⁵ <https://www.surveymonkey.com/>

³⁶ In contrast with the general meaning of ‘self-reflection,’ which constitutes the ‘self’ as ‘other’, the root meaning of ‘reflexive’ is understood to mean “the relation of something to itself, specifically a relationship of identity or sameness” (Kondrat 1999:747).

³⁷ Launch of Tina’s Haven Nature reserve here (2:21 to 5.25 in video)- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1TePliUlc4>

³⁸ ‘Just push us into the sea’: The frustration of an area failed by politics (18th February 2026) - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cm2136jnx1o>