

# HOLISTIC GROWTH

# THROUGH ENGLISH

MAY-NOVEMBER 2023

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# INTRODUCTION TO DRI & OUR WORK WITH LANGUAGE

**A not-for-profit social enterprise that empowers ethnically diverse communities in Sussex.**

DRI was established in 2004 by Mebrak Ghebreweldi and Dr. Yaa Asare to support new migrants by informal befriending to ensure equal access to services. Currently, DRI's Theory of Change operates through 4 core activities:

1. Community Development
2. Community Research
3. Leadership and Enterprise
4. Training towards Equity and Inclusion.

**The impact we aim to achieve from the above activities are:**

1. A full representation of minoritised communities creating a more just society.
2. Research that leads to positive social change and the reduction of inequalities.
3. New generations of minoritised leaders who feel enabled to build a fairer world.
4. Full participation from minoritised communities in the provision of services that directly impact us.

DRI over the course of its work has recognised that one of the biggest barriers to accessing services and integrating into the local community is **language**. The mechanism to address this barrier is twofold: one to make services more friendly to non-English speakers such as increasing access to interpreting services; and two, to provide opportunities for community members to improve their English skills and confidence.

DRI works closely with our sister company Vandu Languages, an interpreting and translation agency, to address the first fold of the above strategy. Since 2004, DRI has trained over 600 community interpreters and 52 bilingual advocates who are the backbone of our work. Working alongside the interpreters and bilingual advocates creates an ongoing feedback loop with community members to understand what the needs of ethnically diverse communities.

For the second fold of bringing English skills and confidence to community members, since 2022 DRI has organised several holistic English groups across Seaford, Peacehaven, Uckfield, and Hastings/St. Leonards.

In DRI's latest research across East Sussex in 2023, language was a consistently raised theme. Some things the participants had to say were:

*"If the NHS is for the public, more English classes with other social skills should be provided so [that the] NHS [services] can be accessed openly. If people's English is improving then that is also [improving] health, employment, etc. Language is a part of everything, especially a part of healthcare."*

*"Ideally, ethnically diverse people need more access to language services, not just for GP but also for mental health and more resources."*

# English as a means to opportunity

## THE AIMS OF THE PROJECT

### What we set out to do:

- Deliver flexible and inclusive English classes for ethnically diverse community members in Uckfield and Peacehaven. Primarily led by a qualified ESOL instructor.
- Provide support to ethnically diverse community members to build confidence and the tools to access services, activities, and information.
- Support learners during their work towards skill improvement, understanding of the local neighbourhood and its institutions, and community building (building relationships and confidence in a learning space).
- Create an inclusive opportunity for community members to get to meet other ethnically diverse residents.
- Introduce volunteers halfway through the project to meet with learners and help them practice outside the class, building in the sustainability of the English language learning.

# English as a means to opportunity

## THE AIMS OF THE PROJECT



### What we did about it:

- DRI established friendly and informal spaces for ethnically diverse community members to express the needs that could be addressed through the English sessions.
- We tailored the sessions, activities, planned trips and guest speakers to support the aims of each group. For example, the Uckfield group included older participants, so it was important to have a friendly, informal space to learn English for daily use to socialise with people outside their family circle. On the other hand, in Peacehaven, younger members were hoping to re-establish their careers and understand the work culture in the UK.

# English as a means to opportunity

## THE AIMS OF THE PROJECT

- To keep the learning going after the end of this six-month grant, DRI matched most of the students with community volunteers to continue practising and build further connections in the wider community.



# PLANNING

# TRAINING

## OVERALL AIM

To support ethnically diverse individuals thrive in life.

## OUTCOMES

1. Access to services and opportunities by increasing confidence and removing the language barrier.
2. Reducing isolation and increasing engagement with the local community and people who may have similar experiences.
3. Provision of tools and knowledge to make integration easier.

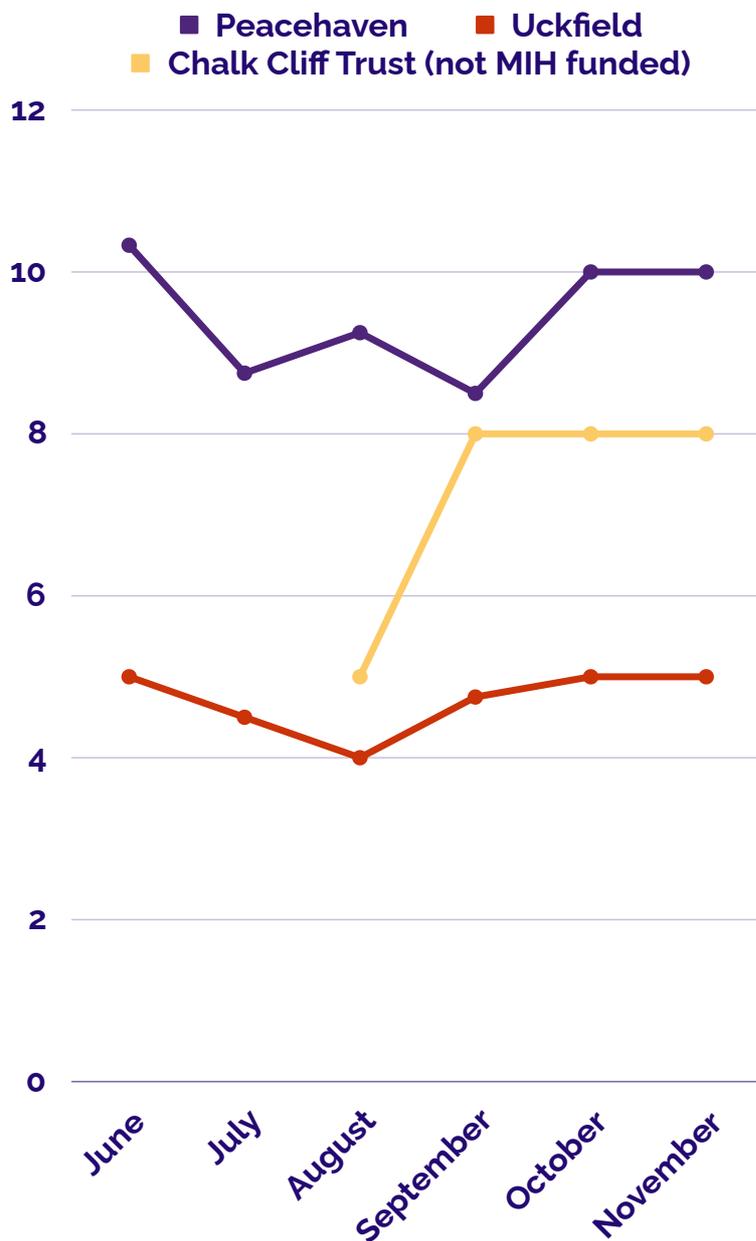
## OUTPUTS

Recipe Book		Improved Pronunciation
Job Applications	Confidence to talk to strangers	Confidence to deal with institutions such as Visa authority
Filmed cooking session	International Cafe	

# ATTENDANCE

## Over 6 months

This is the monthly average of attendance for the two groups and a stemming project entirely funded by Chalk Cliff Trust ([see p.28](#)).



**50**

Total Students Interested

**15-18**

Weekly Attendance

**20**

Total Volunteers Involved

**50**

Total Sessions held

# Principles of ABCD IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS PROJECT

A focus on voice and control, leading to people having a greater say in their lives and health

Addressing the marginalisation of the voices of ethnically diverse communities is a big aspect of DRI's Theory of Change. Through extensive research and community engagement, we recognise language as a significant obstacle for these communities to express themselves in matters concerning their lives and health. Participants provided written feedback expressing how the classes enhanced their vocabulary, pronunciation, and self-expression.

One learner notes the practical application, stating:

*"[They] helped me write emails to different parties for applications and complaints"*

While other one acknowledges:

*"The English lessons have helped me find a job and NHS information"*

# Principles of ABCD

## IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS PROJECT

A focus on voice and control, leading to people having a greater say in their lives and health

The success of the project is evident in the participants' achievements, such as planning a trip to London and gaining confidence in using English for practical purposes. A participant's solo journey to obtain a new passport is celebrated as a personal victory, thanks to the acquired language skills. Another participant highlights the cultural and practical knowledge gained, saying, 'I have been learning a little bit about British culture. I know how to use websites to find the UK government's information and how to find the jobs' information.'



Photo taken by the learner who went on their first trip alone to London.



# Principles of ABCD

## IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS PROJECT

A focus on voice and control, leading to people having a greater say in their lives and health

The learners spent an entire class dedicated to learning how to access the NHS. This covered a discussion of NHS services including 111, Pharmacies, GPs, UTCs, Walk-ins, and self-care. The language used at a GP was discussed and a role play while using this vocabulary was conducted. A few of the learners talked about how this helped them be more confident in speaking about their health and wellbeing.

Overall, the project provides a platform for community members to assert their voices, fostering increased confidence over time in expressing concerns about their lives and health.



Photo taken by a learner on their walk near Birling Gap.



# Principles of ABCD

## IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS PROJECT

Equity, leading to a reduction in avoidable inequalities

DRI's Theory of Change underscores the importance of fostering strong role models and promoting fuller representation of ethnically diverse leadership to combat the lack of visibility in leadership roles. In the Peacehaven group, participants aimed to re-establish their professional careers in Sussex, having held technical jobs in their home countries. To secure equivalent positions in Sussex, enhancing English skills and building confidence was crucial. They are very passionate about contributing to the local economy. This project was keen on developing these skills and confidence to reduce the avoidable inequality of ethnically diverse community members facing underemployment.



# Principles of ABCD

## IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS PROJECT

Equity, leading to a reduction in avoidable inequalities

Two sessions were dedicated to understanding British culture with a volunteer who was a guest participant, discussing and providing insights into the challenges of integration. There were also dedicated sessions addressing how to approach the job market including CV writing, job search, writing a cover letter, interview role plays and a work survey. According to the work survey designed by the instructor, the learners were ideal for a range of jobs: Healthcare, Marketing Assistant, Chef, Systems Administrator, Secretary, School Catering, Graphic Designers, and NHS. We also had a guest speaker from the Employability team at the SCDA to talk about the various services available to the group to receive support in finding jobs. A learner with interest in food noted:



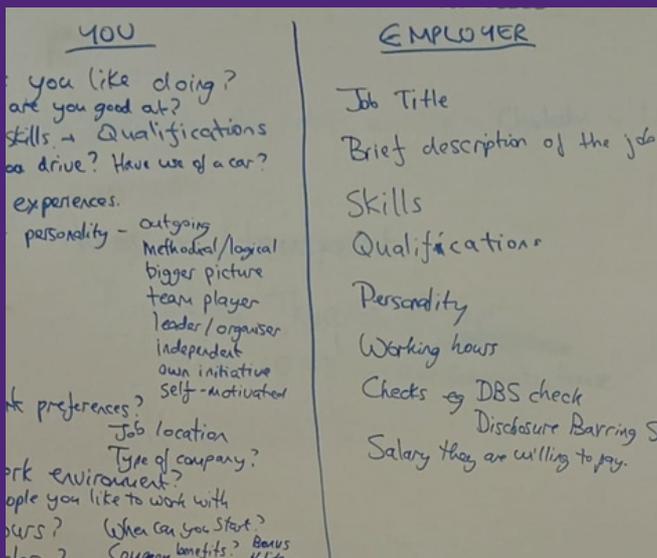
***“The biggest learning in class is [when we] talk about food and recipes. It [lets] me know more words in cooking, how to describe the food and cooking [methods]”***

# Principles of ABCD

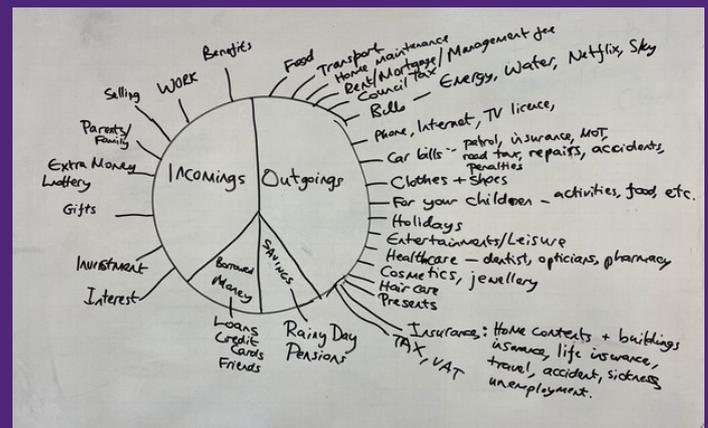
## IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS PROJECT

Equity, leading to a reduction in avoidable inequalities

Guest speaker Kevin Lam, a successful businessman who migrated from Hong Kong to England, shared insights on setting up a business, fostering valuable connections with participants. One of the graphic designers in the group lead the designing and compilation of the recipe book which the group plans on publishing to sell at local community venues. This project has brought the participants closer to their goal of establishing careers with one participant withdrawing from the class because they started a job.



Whiteboard from the class covering Employment.



Whiteboard from the class covering money and finances.

# Principles of ABCD

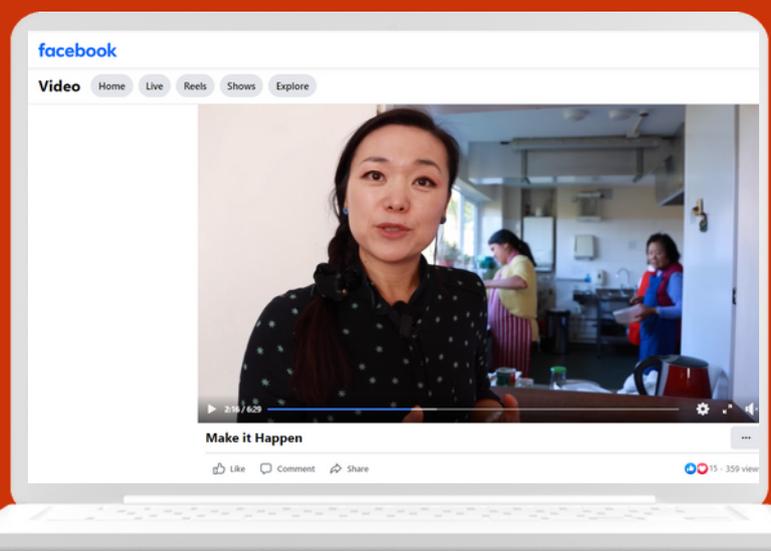
## IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS PROJECT

Social connectedness, leading to healthier and more cohesive communities

One of the key outcomes that is pivotal for DRI's Theory of Change is to create happy, engaged, healthy, well-connected, and participating communities. The impact of this project has been one step closer to this outcome. Outside of English learning, the groups in Uckfield and Peacehaven did a lot of activities. They did a 'cooking together' session, preparing the recipes they later included in the recipe book (the local coverage can be found here:

<https://www.facebook.com/thelatest.tv/videos/712921894084805/>)

The local trips include a walk from Birling Gap, the Old Police Museum, street art tour of Brighton, and Charleston Lewes and Firle. Notably, the once-strangers in the Peacehaven group have evolved into close friends and a community of learners, sharing meals and experiences.



Charleston, Firle

# Principles of ABCD

## IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS PROJECT

Social connectedness, leading to healthier & more cohesive communities:

A learner highlighted their enhanced confidence in daily interactions:

*'I am confident in daily communicating with the local people...some of my friends here need to be aware of interview practice.'*

Another participant expressed:

*'I have more confidence in speaking English than before...It helps me in my daily communication with local people,'*

While another valued the experiential learning:

*' [!] Enjoyed the visit to the Police Cell Museum in Brighton and Charleston in Lewes. It's not just learning English but also bringing us [visual] experiences and history of the UK.'*

# Principles of ABCD

## IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS PROJECT

Social connectedness, leading to healthier & more cohesive communities:

The project also benefited from community volunteers, with two consistent volunteers in Uckfield aiding in speaking and listening practice. Ten volunteers were paired with groups of 2-3 students for informal English practice, garnering positive feedback for their friendliness and shared experiences. The learners had only good things to say, "I enjoyed working with my volunteer, she is very nice and easygoing. We have discussed many interesting topics." Another learner said: "They are friendly and helpful. They are very welcoming [and] share their experiences"

In summary, within a brief six-month span, this project has significantly advanced social connectedness, fostering a trajectory towards a healthier, more cohesive local community.





# Poy's Story

**Please tell me a bit about yourself. What do you enjoy doing?  
Who is in your family?**

My Name is Poy, I am from a country outside of the UK. I have already settled down in East Sussex for two and a half years. I like Eastbourne and the UK because I think there are lots of places and they are very beautiful. I like to go travelling within England when I have time. I came here with my husband, and I have no children.

**What were your expectations from the English class when you first came? How has the class been able to fulfil those expectations?**

When I first came here, I really wanted to improve my English. I think if we can speak English fluently then we can find a job suitable for us, so it is better [if] I can practise English every day. Also, if I can take some English classes, then I can also improve my reading, listening... then I can speed up my English skills and level.

After taking the class hosted by DRI, I am very happy because I feel that my English has had a great improvement. Particularly, I have confidence in speaking to local people. My communication is better than before. So I do hope that I can keep going to study in this English Class in the future. I expect that in maybe half or one year I can speak very well, like a native speaker.



# Poy's Story

## (Continued)

### **Have you made new friends through the class? How does it feel to be in a classroom together?**

Yes, I have made friends through the class. Sometimes we encourage each other so that all of us can improve our English. After the class, we also try to speak to each other in English so that it speeds up our English Learning. I feel very [in] harmony. All of us are studying in the same class and we have the same target: to learn English. Learning together really helps in developing our speaking, reading and listening.

### **What could have been different to make the classes better?**

If we can have more presentations to practice our oral skills, it would be better because we need to practice our speaking of English. In the coming classes, if we have a 30-minute presentation from us, it would be good.

### **How has it been working with the volunteers?**

Working with the English volunteer has been great, she is very helpful. After meeting one-on-one with her, I think my English is improving, particularly in speaking. She is a very kind lady.

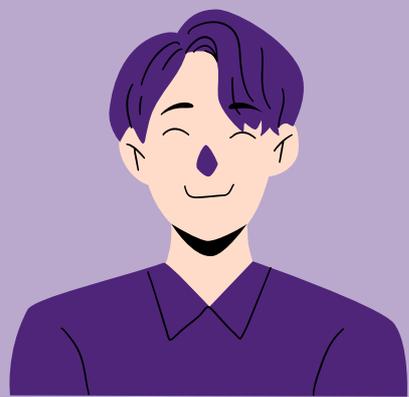


# Poy's Story

## (Continued)

### **Is there anything else you would like to discuss?**

DRI did very well. Actually, through DRI we have an English lesson, we also have other activities that we can join. I hope you can obtain more funding so we can have more benefits to learn and even maybe pray together.



# David's Story

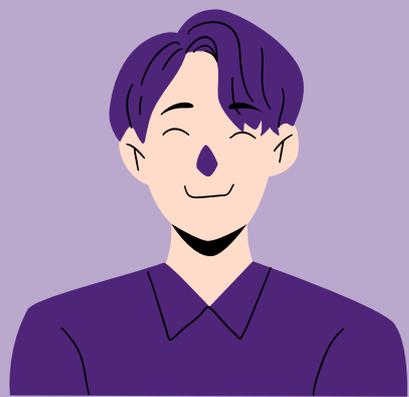
**Please tell me a bit about yourself. What do you enjoy doing?  
Who is in your family?**

My name is David. My family consists of my wife and my son. We came to the UK in 2021. We live in East Sussex. I am 54 years old. I can do all kinds of jobs. Now, I work on a farm, for grape picking. It is a very hard job because I am old. I am here to start a new life. I feel the responsibility to enhance the community here and help the English people.

**What were your expectations from the English class when you first came? How has the class been able to fulfil those expectations?**

Many years ago, I used to work in a studio, around 1992. Everyone used to speak English there, I used to understand and speak then. It has been a long time since I have spoken in English, so this is good to restart my practice of English.

The English class has made me meet more people and I can learn the UK accent because it is different from American or Indian accent. I was very bored at home, so I wanted to meet more people and communicate more to speak more English.



# David's Story

## (Continued)

### **Have you made new friends through the class? How does it feel to be in a classroom together?**

I have made many friends here. It is very useful. It feels very joyful in the class. The instructor can be sometimes less organised but I learn much more.

### **What could have been different to make the classes better?**

I have done another class in Hove council. I got to do more exercise in grammar there. My weak point in English is writing and speaking. I am good at reading and listening.

### **How has it been working with the volunteers?**

I have met the volunteers more than a few times as a group. We talk about many topics such as 'how is your life in UK, how is the culture different?'. It is nice to have another chance to practice my English.

# Volunteers

## Who did we engage with?

- DRI called for volunteers across different platforms. We partnered with the Uckfield volunteer centre, community works and 3VA for online promotion.
- We also promoted this role on Indeed and received successful responses from it. We also advertised the role in local magazines like The Lewisian, Peacehaven Directory and Ashdown Radio.
- We promoted the role at the Lewes College fresher's Fair.
- We also carried out community level outreach in Lewes, Peacehaven, Uckfield, Brighton and at network events.
- We were contacted by 25 volunteers since August. We successfully retained and match 12 volunteers. They are a mix of young people, retirees and working professionals.

# Volunteers

**5 volunteers**  
from Lewes

**10 volunteers**  
from Uckfield



**6 volunteers**  
from Brighton

**3 volunteers**  
from Peacehaven

# Volunteers

## How did we include them in the project?

- In mid-August, the midpoint of the project, we invited volunteers to join the weekly sessions. They were able to join the groups and speak to all the learners. This gave the learners an opportunity for them to find who they wanted to be matched with based on their convenience.
- Once the learners had 'buddies', we shared their contacts with each other. They worked out times when they were able to meet. DRI checks on them periodically to see if they need any assistance.
- All volunteers were given a volunteer pack describing their role, with some worksheets and topics the learners had covered. All volunteers are also DBS checked as they are working with vulnerable adults.

# Volunteers

## Role of the volunteers post-project

- DRI hosted its annual volunteer event on December 6th. During the event, we recognized and celebrated the volunteers' hard work, received feedback and suggestions, played games, and shared food.
- The volunteers are committed to continuing their work, meeting with learners, practising English, and discussing their lives. DRI will provide periodic check-ins and continue to promote this opportunity.



# Challenges and Future Steps

## Numbers in the project:

At the start of the project in May, there were 10 people interested in the Peacehaven group and 6 in the Uckfield group. Over the first month, the numbers in Peacehaven went up and there were 11 participants in the group and another 10 people on a waiting list to join the class. Meanwhile, in Uckfield, the attendance numbers dropped to 5 participants. To mitigate the lowering attendance, the DRI team did continuous community engagements in local ethnically run restaurants and shops. DRI also contacted the participants who dropped out and found out that they had irregular work schedules and were not able to follow a weekly schedule for the class. DRI found volunteers in Uckfield to be matched to these participants who were unable to join regular classes. We found out that reaching the Bangladeshi community will need more capacity from us.

Additionally, to mitigate the issue of a waiting list in Peacehaven, DRI was able to apply for a small grant from the Chalk Cliff Trust to run a group for four months with consistent attendance of 8 participants. This group focused on working towards the IELTS exam to transfer their professional qualifications as dentists, doctors, pharmacists, teachers and radiographers to become important assets to the Sussex community.

# Short-term funding for long-term goals:

As established in this report, language is the first gate someone has to pass to integrate into the community in East Sussex. Whether they intend to socialise like the group in Uckfield or to re-establish careers and settle in like the Peacehaven group. This project has been evidence to showcase how a bespoke holistic approach to learning English and building a confident community is important. The group members were able to establish long-term goals and identify strengths to work on thanks to the flexibility the project provided.

The Uckfield group built a community with volunteers and learners working to move away from isolation and to articulate their rich experiences in the English language. The Peacehaven group came together as a community of individuals building lives in a new locality and came to realise how learning English would enable them to re-establish their professional journeys in East Sussex by finding equivalent work. Their biggest interest in learning English pronunciation and accent reflects their recognition of the discrimination in the East Sussex job markets. Their hopes have grown in aiming for technical jobs and more customer-facing jobs.

The recognition of these strengths within themselves has come about over time by learning in a space of comfort. These are long-term goals set by the individuals for themselves. This project helped them identify and work towards these goals.

The funding for this project, and similar projects DRI has been part of, is short-term, aiming to address a complex web of questions for these community members in a short amount of time. Given this reality, the success of such projects relies heavily on the extra effort the people who work on the project can put in, which is not a sustainable way to bring these goals to fruition.

# All individuals make up the community:

DRI's Theory of Change for our community development work is to ensure the active participation and involvement of minoritised communities in every area of civic life. The achievements of the individuals in this project cannot be looked at in isolation from their community. Each story of an individual moving closer to their set goals contributes to the aspirations of the community and the richness of the assets their neighbourhood holds. For example, if one of the participants were to eventually become a bilingual advocate as their English skills progressed, they would be able to help other community members. In the new group we set up from the waiting list in Peacehaven, all the women were health and education professionals in their home countries. With improved English skills, they will be able to re-establish their professional careers in East Sussex, acting as important assets to the local community. This reiterates that language is a gateway to so many opportunities and a cohesive community.

At one session in Uckfield, the participants were faced with unpleasantness from one of the venues, this is proof of the need for a larger conversation about the inclusivity of communities. One important pathway for starting this conversation is by empowering ethnically diverse community members to express their views. The biggest outcome of this project has been the participants becoming more confident in using their English skills. Confident and assertive ethnically diverse community members bring us one step closer to their active participation and visibility in civic life and one step closer to a just society.

# Collaboration as a way forward:

The principles of ABCD guiding the project helped DRI build good relationships with community members and understand their strengths and aspirations. This was a small start to much longer collaborations with the group members. The development of the recipe book is one example of that. The recipe book was also a big example of the great relationship built between the Making it Happen Community Development workers and DRI. This project overall helped us discover the strengths of the two organisations and the effortless symbiotic relationship we share. The community development workers opened doors for DRI with their knowledge of the locality, connections with the communities and other local organisations and assets. DRI with our expertise of working alongside ethnically diverse communities and the relationships we share with them helped expand the connections of the community development workers.

It is very important to not leave the lessons learnt and the knowledge acquired from this project behind. It would be very beneficial for DRI's Bilingual Advocates, who are the backbone of our community development, to work alongside Making It Happen's community development workers. Among other great outcomes, this would be a great way of tackling the problems that arise from the language barrier. It would be very important for us to learn from each other and not duplicate any of the other's work.

# Stakeholders involved

## THEIR IMPACT

Type of Stakeholder	Organisation/Individual	Outcome
Bilingual Advocates & Community Outreach workers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cantonese-speaking Bilingual Advocate with community contacts across East Sussex</li> <li>2. Arabic-speaking community worker</li> </ol>	Spreading the word among community members who were later participants of the English classes.
Outreach Location	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Uckfield Tandoori Indian Restaurant</li> <li>2. Star Of Bengal Restaurant</li> <li>3. Bengal Spice Restaurant</li> <li>4. Amira's Kitchen</li> <li>5. Uckfield Library</li> <li>6. Fortune Fish Bar</li> <li>7. Thai Terre Restaurant Uckfield</li> <li>8. Uckfield Fish &amp; Grill</li> <li>9. Canton Chinese Takeaway</li> <li>10. Salon 1THIRTY4</li> <li>11. Co-op Food - Peacehaven</li> <li>12. Peacehaven Community Supermarket.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We had 4-5 people who showed interest in the classes in Uckfield.</li> <li>• We have one regular participant for a class.</li> </ul>
Venues	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Meridian Centre</li> <li>2. Uckfield Civic Centre</li> <li>3. Peacehaven Library</li> <li>4. Hilcrest Centre</li> <li>5. Luxford Centre</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We were able to form a trusted relationship with the venues we used.</li> <li>• They also invited us to other community events</li> </ul>

# Stakeholders involved

## THEIR IMPACT

Type of Stakeholder	Organisation/Individual	Outcome
Trips and visits	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Old Police Cell Museum</li> <li>2. Charleston, Lewes</li> <li>3. Charleston, Firle</li> <li>4. Enter Gallery – Graffiti Tour</li> <li>5. Birling Gap</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The trips made the group closer and they formed friendships to the point where they met outside of class hours.</li> <li>• This was also an opportunity for the participants to practice their English outside of the class.</li> </ul>
Community Development Workers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lucy Rayner &amp; Vicki Ashley</li> <li>2. Jo Peters &amp; Laura Healers</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guest Speakers to talk about the organisations and events happening in the locality.</li> </ul>
Guest speakers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Patrick Nyikavaranda - DRI's Director of Research and Leadership.</li> <li>2. Kevin Lam -a successful businessman originally from Hong Kong.</li> <li>3. Julie Abson - Employability Navigator supporting people in Hastings &amp; Eastbourne</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sleep Hygiene workshop for both groups.</li> <li>• Workshops on employment and entrepreneurship. .</li> </ul>

# Acknowledgements

DRI is grateful to Qing Ling James, the instructor for the Uckfield group and Ann-Marie Brook, the instructor for the Peacehaven group, for all the time, hard work and energy they put into this project to work towards the unique goals of all the community members in their groups.

DRI is very grateful to the Community Development Workers from Making it Happen who gave us all their support and helped us connect with local projects, venues and opportunities.

DRI would like to thank the Meridian Centre and the Uckfield Civic Centre for hosting the weekly sessions for the project. We would like to thank all the guest speakers and trip organisers who were involved in the project.

DRI is thankful to the generous volunteers who gave their time to buddy up with the learners and support them to practice English.

# WE THANK YOU

FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT IN

# DRI'S COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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