

## CHILDREN PLEDGES FOR A BETTER COMMUNITY REPORT

### Background

#### About the Pledge

The idea of developing a pledge for Peckham came from Cllr Mark Glover the chair of Nunhead and Peckham Community Council who thought it would be a good idea to have discussions with young people particularly in schools, about the negative attitudes and behaviour they experience or observe in their local community and what could be done to change these attitudes for the better. It was suggested that the young people would identify negative behaviour first and then come up with ideas to encourage people to change their behaviour or attitudes in order to improve the quality of life of people living in the area.

The Peckham Programme commissioned COVO Connecting Voices to deliver workshops in ten primary schools in Peckham and Nunhead in order to come up with pledges on positive behaviour in the public realm.

In parallel to these pledge workshops, the school children were consulted as part of the Peckham Area Action Plan, commission by the Council's Planning Policy Department, in order to find out children's views and suggestions for the development of key local sites such as Peckham Square, Rye Lane and Peckham Rye Station.

#### About COVO Connecting Voices

COVO Connecting Voices is a charity based in Southwark since 1999. The mission of Connecting Voices is to bring together the voices of young people and adults through dialogue and empowerment in order to address conflict, disaffection and underachievement in education and the workplace.

#### COVO Methodology

COVO is specialised in consulting and engaging communities in decision-making by using a systemic and whole school approach to bring about positive change.

Working in educational settings with practitioners, educators, parents, young people and children and in partnership with voluntary and statutory organisations, COVO develops projects systemically according to the issues raised in consultation with the participants and the emerging needs identified by the school, community or organisation involved. We believe this is the most effective way of bringing about sustainable change.

COVO uses a creative approach to engage and support participants to develop a voice in their community, raising confidence and self-esteem while

developing social and emotional skills in order to work more effectively together to overcome the difficulties and barriers they experience.

### Aims

#### The Aim of Peckham Pledge was:

- For children to reflect on the positive and negative behaviours portrayed in the streets of London
- For the children to reflect on their own behaviour as well as the attitudes of people in their local community
- For children to make a pledge as young citizens striving to improve their behaviour while encouraging others to join them.

### Outputs

Workshops took place in the classrooms with whole classes of year 5 or 6 pupils aged between 9 and 11 and their teachers.

The consultation workshops took place in a total of 10 schools, including 9 mainstream primary schools and 1 special school in which the parents of autistic children were consulted on their behalf. An average of 27 children per school took part in the pledge workshops, and six parents, making the total number of participants 251.

#### Schools who took part in the Pledge:

Schools	Number of children
John Dunne Primary School	30
Bellenden Primary School	27
Ivydale Primary School	25
Gloucester Primary School	28
Francesca Cabrini Primary School	29
Oliver Goldsmith Primary School	20
Royal Oak Primary School	30
Hollydale Primary School	22
Camelot Primary School	10
Haymerle Special School	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>245</b>

Special School	Numbers of Parents
Haymerle Special School	6

## Summary of Methods used in the Workshops

A variety of methods were used to engage the students through a process of reflection about their immediate environment in order to come up with personal as well as group pledges.

### Workshop content included:

- Circle time to stimulate children to reflect on their local environment and describe what they and their families experience living in the area. Children shared what they see as examples of positive behaviour and what they witness as negative behaviour in their local community.
- Emotional Literacy to support children to express how they feel when they see and experience incidents of anti social behaviour in the streets and their local community.
- Pledge cards to invite the children to write down a personal pledge aimed at improving their own behaviour and influence their immediate friends and family, which they presented to their classmates.
- Whole class discussion to decide on the type of pledge the children wanted to make as a group and put forward to Peckham Action Plan.

## Workshop Outcomes

### Brainstorm / Circle Time

The children were asked to share their experiences of positive and negative behaviour they witness or display in the streets through a brainstorm exercise in which all the children participated.

### Outcomes

In the brainstorm exercise the children were able to reflect on their local environment by thinking about their behaviour and the behaviour they witness in the street. The exercise was valuable because it gave the children room for sharing some positive experiences they have and the sense of community and solidarity in their local areas that is manifested in the way people show kindness, consideration and respect for each other and their local environment. It gave the children the opportunity to share their personal experiences of helping someone in the street and taking responsibility for their own actions such as keeping the streets clean. They were also encouraged to share how it feels to show kindness and respect and why some people find it difficult because of peer pressure for example.

The brainstorm prepared the children to reflect on the behaviour they themselves wish to change or want other people to change.

Proportionally, the display of negative behaviour recalled by the children outnumbered the positive ones and highlighted what the children are exposed to on a daily basis causing them feelings of anxiety and fear while simultaneously offering them a very negative example from adults and their older peers. In particular children talked about frightening experiences of witnessing physical and verbal violence, knives and gun crimes being the most common cause for major concern in the streets and estates of Peckham.

### **Individual pledges**

Following the brainstorm we invited the children to reflect on any changes they wanted in their surrounding environment starting from them taking individual responsibilities for affecting those changes.

A discussion was opened to define what is a pledge by sharing examples of people making pledges in a variety of situations such as in the case of a president or monarch. We further explored what is a pledge and how important it is to keep it when one is made. The children then shared what can come in the way of breaking a pledge and what can help you keep it. Time was given for each student to write their individual pledges on a card to be kept by the children and taken home.

### **Outcomes**

After the brainstorm the children were given an individual pledge card each and were invited to reflect on their behaviour and make a pledge based on some aspects of their behaviour that they wanted to improve. They were stimulated to think about which types of behaviour they think can cause lots of suffering for themselves and others, and pledge never to display it.

After making the individual pledges the children were invited to share them with the rest of the class if they wanted. A discussion followed on the difficulties of keeping a pledge and the different reasons while people break pledges sometimes. The children said that personal circumstances or bad influences were the major cause of breaking a pledge. Also they said that when a pledge is shared it is easier to keep it because you don't want to let the person you shared the pledge with, or yourself, down. They came up with suggestions for keeping their promise which included reminding themselves; displaying their personal pledges at home and with whom they would share it with in order to help themselves to stick to it.

The exercise had a powerful effect on the students, who took it very seriously and put a lot of thought into their personal pledges. It gave them time and a framework for reflection on how their behaviour can influence others and vice versa, and how making efforts to improve their behaviour can have an immediate effect on their surroundings. One of the class teachers noted that *'the workshop helped the children to get to know each other better, on a very personal level'*.

### **Class / Group Pledges**

In each school at the end of the workshop time was given for the class to make a group pledge based on the reflections and discussions stimulated by the previous exercises.

### **Outcomes**

A group discussion facilitated their choices of group pledges to make. The children choose together what they thought was the most common behaviour displayed by all of them as well as what was the most frequent disruptive or violent types of behaviour they witnessed in their local community that really affected them or their families and which they wanted to change. Some teachers were happy to display the class pledges in class and agree to the ways in which the children could monitor themselves in order to adhere to the promises they made.

### **The Special School**

The Pledge workshops took place in one special school in which the parents of autistic children were consulted on their behalf. Children with autism have specific social and communicatory difficulties. The schools' Head teacher was keen for the school to take part in the exercise and recommended that we deliver the workshop with the parents and carers of autistic children, seen as they are the best people to represent the views of their children.

All the parents expressed the desire for their children to be included within their local community and grow up in an environment where differences are embraced and understood.

### **Parents Pledge**

**We pledge as parents and carers of autistic children to work together with schools and within our local community to make sure that children with special needs are accepted and included in society.**

### **The 6 Pledges**

From the ten schools, 6 Pledges were selected. The first two pledges relate to verbal and physical violence that the children felt very personally about, causing the majority of anxiety and fear. The other four pledges were selected because the children witness types of behaviour on a daily basis and felt very passionate about the changes needed. They have been selected based on the children individual experience, the frequency they appeared in each class and the amount of discussion recorded from each class workshop.

**Pledge 1**

**We pledge to control our temper and not to take our anger out at someone else and hurt any person or animal.**

This was the most popular pledge appearing in 8 out of the nine schools. The children are very aware that lots of the time people are angry because someone has been angry with them. They felt that when you are calm and happy you cannot hurt people or animals. They therefore concluded that they would take responsibility for their own behaviour and actions in order to break the vicious circle of anger.

**Pledge 2**

**We pledge to never get involved in gangs, never carry knives and guns and never kill people.**

This pledge was the most common and most talked about problem with the majority of children especially in year 6. They shared experiences of witnessing older peers and adults carrying and using knives and weapons in a variety of situations in their local community. The children felt the risk of joining gangs was very high for them in their local area, since gangs either threaten you if you don't join, or offer you a sense of security and protection that your family won't or cannot offer out there on the street. However, the fear and sadness attached to their experiences of seeing gun and knife crime in their local community was the prime motivation for the children to come up with this particular pledge.

**Pledge 3**

**We pledge to keep our community clean by disposing litter in the bins and encouraging others to do the same.**

The majority of children commented on the poor state of their local streets, especially around the shopping areas and Peckham town centre. Children think that people no longer think about their actions when they litter on the floor. They discussed how this attitude can be easily changed by raising people's awareness about the dirty state of the streets and what they can do to keep the area clean by throwing litter in the bins or keeping their rubbish

with them until they reach home. The children wanted to pledge to tell other people to use the bins because they felt throwing rubbish in the street meant disrespecting oneself because the streets belonged to their community.

#### **Pledge 4**

**We pledge not to swear, call people names or bully people.**

The children shared that they had personally experienced this kind of unsocial behaviour by being themselves at times the recipients, at times the perpetrators, or simply the witnesses or verbal abuse and bullying. The children commented that this kind of behaviour was equally violent compared to physical violence and can have a very lasting damage to people's lives which they did not want to be a part of.

#### **Pledge 5**

**We pledge not to steal from any shop and not to hurt people for money.**

Stealing was another common experience among children. They shared the prejudice that people have towards children going into shops that sometimes leads children to regrettably steal from them. Children also shared the experience of being threatened by older children for their money. The children concluded that stealing from shops and others does not make you less deprived but deprives you of your dignity.

#### **Pledge 6**

**We pledge to give our seats on public transport to older people or those in greater need.**

The children shared their experience of seeing people giving up their seats on buses and trains or themselves giving seats to people less able to stand was very common among the discussion taking place in the class workshops. Moreover, many children who previously had not given too much thought about their behaviour on public transport, changed their perceptions through the discussion and pledged to be a great example especially towards older people.

## Synopsis

The project allowed the children to reflect on the positive and negative behaviours portrayed in the streets of Peckham, with particular emphasis on their own behaviour as well as the attitudes of people in their local community. The workshops allowed space for the children to discuss a reality so close to them in a way that went beyond a moralistic and judgmental approach to involve a useful educational exercise for reflection, sharing and growth for all involved: children, teachers and facilitators alike.

The amount of time granted proved to be limited to dwell deep into the subject, but nevertheless gave the children the opportunity to firstly raise awareness of the causes, conditions and realities they experience in their immediate community, and secondly how they can contribute to affect positive changes.

In the brainstorm exercise the children freely shared what kinds of behaviour they witness and experience and were able to share personal experiences associated with it. The discussion that followed allowed different opinions and reflections to be aired. Looking at the negative behaviour and its causes proved to be a great opportunity for the children to participate in a healthy, enabling them to share their personal stories and points of view.

When invited to make a pledge to improve examples of negative behaviour, the children took it very seriously, each of them deeply reflecting on what they wanted to improve. This enhanced the children's realisation that their individual choices of making a promise to themselves and others can affect positive changes in themselves and in their community.

Overall the exercise was well received by children and teachers alike. What came out proved to be an eye opener for the facilitators involved. Reflecting on the kinds of examples children are exposed to daily, be it positive or negative, these experiences affect them deeply. Children are the windows of society, they see things untainted by self-interest, and as such they represent a clear mirror of reality. As facilitators we have become more aware that the negative behaviour displayed in the streets are a manifestation of something endemic in the fabric of society and much more complex an issue to be discussed here, yet we equally are aware of the humanity that is displayed daily in the streets that counteracts this bleak picture and gives both hope and inspiration.

For a more comprehensive result to this campaign a greater intervention would be beneficial in the form of a partnership between schools, local government, voluntary organisations and parents where a co-ordinated effort can focus on supporting adults and children's needs in the Peckham Community. Initiating dialogue across sectors and among adults and children on a bigger scale can further contribute to make this initiative more successful.

<b>Appendix: 1 Brainstorm outcomes</b>
--

**What kind of nice behaviour you witness in the street?**

- Getting off the bus / stairs to help people / to let people in or out of the bus stairs especially buggies
- Helping people/old / Blind people / children cross the road
- Giving up your seat on the bus
- Giving things to charities/ homeless
- Someone dropping money, shopping or possession, people picking it up and returning it to them
- People picking up litter and the pet litter
- Throwing litter in the bin
- Showing good manners like please and thank you / Say sorry if you bump into someone
- Showing older people respect
- Talking with people you don't know
- Helping someone that is hurt or calling emergency service
- Standing up to bullies in the street
- Opening the door for other people
- Welcoming new people to the area
- Making friends with other children in the park
- Giving people directions
- People smiling
- Families walking together
- People treating their pets nicely
- Young people helping Younger children

**What unpleasant behaviour have you witnessed in the street?**

- People/ teenagers Threatening bullying other people shouting and abusing
- Graffiti and vandalism of cars and property trees and the environment
- Stealing from shops and people
- Littering/ throwing cigarettes spit and gum on the floor
- Bus drivers not stopping or asking you to get off from the bus/ and prejudice against young people in uniforms
- Stabbing / Attacking And killing people in the street
- Fighting
- People pushing barging at you and old people
- Violence in the street; Slapping and punching
- Gangs ganging up on people and forcing them to join in and doing rude things to people x 3
- Using Dogs to scare and attack people
- Cars that don't stop at zebra crossing
- Muggings
- Drunk behaving silly in the street
- Swearing/ Swearing at the police
- Spitting in the street / Spitting chewing-gum on the floor

- People carrying weapons knives and guns
- Under age smoking drinking, drug and sex
- Going toilet in the street
- Sexual abuse
- Not cleaning Dog's foul
- People shouting at you for no reason
- Drinking and driving
- Shop keeper cheating customers
- Racism
- Not giving your seat on the bus
- Calling emergency numbers for a joke
- Old cars that should be written off pollute the environment.
- Messing around in the bus /People pressing the bell but not getting off the bus
- Someone trying to kill someone else
- Taking and giving drugs to children
- Children run over in the road

<b>Appendix 2: Class pledges Outcomes</b>
---

<b>School</b>	<b>We Pledge to:</b>
<b>John Dunne Primary School Yr 6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stop calling people names and use polite language instead</li> <li>- Not litter on the floor but put our rubbish in the bin or recycle it</li> <li>- Give my seat to older people on the bus and the train</li> <li>- Not to fight &amp; hit people and get involved in arguments</li> <li>- Never be afraid to ask for help &amp; never steal</li> </ul>
<b>Bellenden Primary School Yr 5-6 Ruby Class</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- We pledge not to spit on the street, and to help people who need help in the street</li> <li>- We pledge not to use violence, not to vandalize property with graffiti or anything else</li> <li>- We pledge never to use violence or kill anybody never in our whole lives.</li> </ul>
<b>Haymerle Special School  From Parents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Treat other people the way we want to be treated</li> <li>- Not to take our frustrations out on others</li> <li>- Interact with our children positively, make time for them and give them enough attention for them to grow and be healthy and happy</li> <li>- Do everything we can to work together with the school to support our children to grow into young independent adults</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do everything we can to make sure that children and people with special needs are accepted and included in society</li> </ul>
<b>Ivydale Primary School Yr6 Diamond Class</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Never get involved in gangs and never to kill people</li> <li>- Not to swear, Be kind to our teacher and try harder in our tests at school</li> </ul>
<b>Rye Oak Primary School YR 6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Never kill someone, carry a knife or a gun</li> <li>- Not to bully people, get involved in fights, join in gangs, take revenge and scare people</li> <li>- Never to steal and to litter</li> <li>- Always stick up for myself</li> <li>- Offer my seat to older people on the bus</li> </ul>
<b>St Francesca Cabrini Primary School Yr 6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do not misbehave on Public transport, to stop making noises and shouting on the bus, not to bully people and say thank you to the bus driver.</li> <li>- To work hard to help our parents by listening to them and do our chores.</li> <li>- Not to take our anger out at someone else and no to hurt any person or animals</li> <li>- Stop littering the road and the bus especially with chewingum.</li> </ul>
<b>Gloucester Primary School Class 6b</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stop wasting food and when possible dispose litter in the bin, or keep it in our pocket and through it at home. We pledge to look out for people dropping litter and tell them not to do it.</li> <li>- Not to shout, not reacting to someone, thinking before we act. Keep focused on our work and try to control ourselves</li> <li>- Not to steal any shop or supermarket anywhere and pledge not to hurt someone for money.</li> </ul>

<b>Oliver Goldsmith Primary School Yr 6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I pledge to never forget my best friends birthday.</li> <li>- I pledge to clean my room.</li> <li>- I pledge to never litter.</li> <li>- I pledge to remember birthdays and never lie.</li> <li>- I pledge to keep fit.</li> <li>- I pledge to never hurt anyone for my family ever again.</li> <li>- I pledge to never lie, never be violent and never be rude.</li> <li>- I pledge to never fight and play knock down ginger.</li> <li>- I pledge to not to ride my bike in the middle of the street, and when the police tell me not to ride my bike in the street I will do it instead of cussing them and running away.</li> <li>- I pledge to appreciate other people's pledges.</li> </ul>
<b>Hollydale Primary School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Be kinder to my friends and to people in the streets</li> <li>- Be more in control of my temper and improve my attitude</li> <li>- Think before I act</li> <li>- Avoid getting into arguments and fights</li> <li>- Stop using abusive language</li> </ul>
<b>Camelot Primary School Yr 5 &amp; 6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Never use a knife non a person and if a see someone do it I will testify</li> <li>- I pledge to never use violence in the street</li> <li>- We will never give into gangs</li> <li>- I will pick up litter that is on the floor</li> <li>- I pledge not to be rude to anyone</li> </ul>