


2023 Youth Safety Focus Groups Summary

Department of Children, Youth & Their Families
August 2023



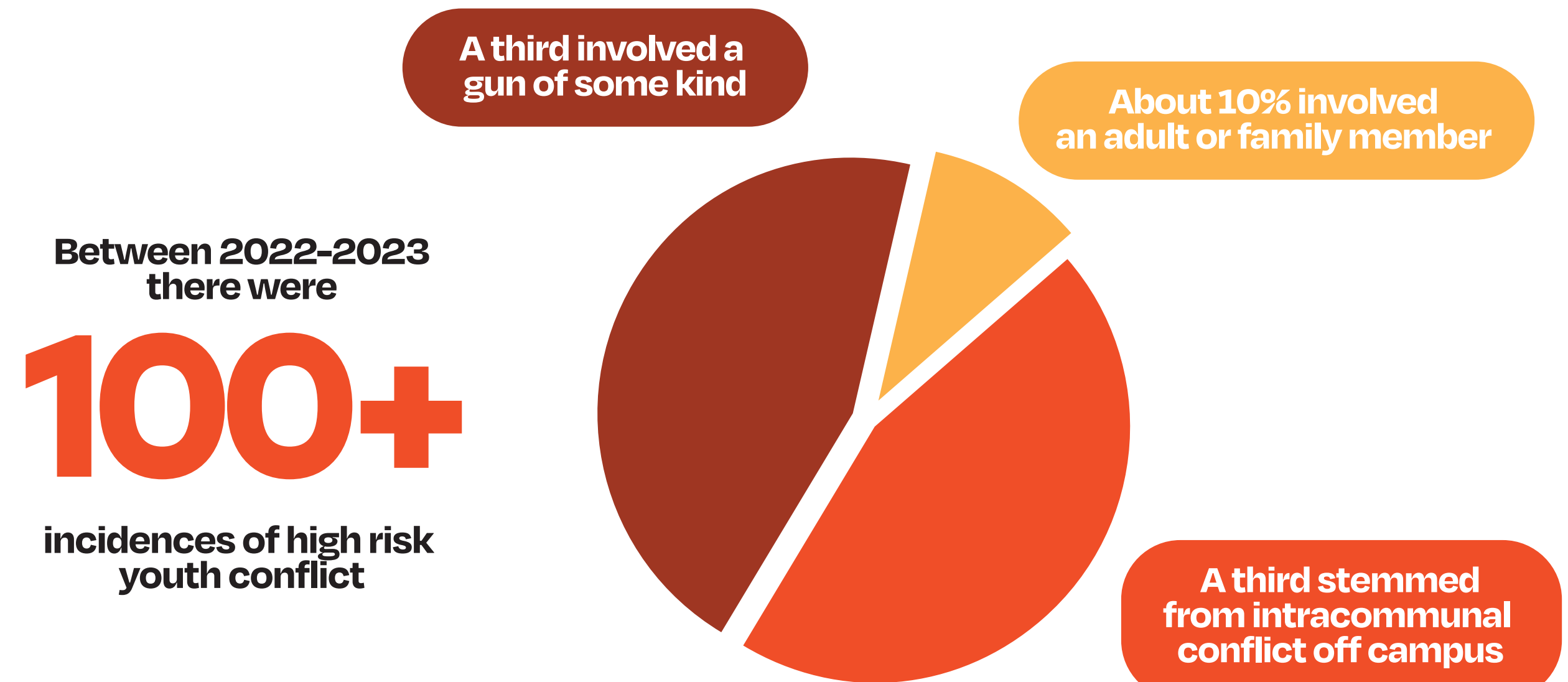
Overview

- 1. Staff Intros**
 - 2. Focus Group Context: Youth Safety on Campuses**
 - 3. Findings & Takeaways**
 - I. Youth Definitions of Safety
 - II. Unsafe Experiences
 - III. Messages from Youth
 - IV. Brainstorming Solutions
 - 4. Group Reflections & Discussion**
 - 5. Next Steps**
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School Crisis Support Initiative (SCSI)

- San Francisco saw a **40% increase** in homicides between 2019 and 2021, according to the National Institute of Criminal Justice Reform. Many of these incidents **involve youth**.
- Upticks in youth violence across San Francisco reflect national trends and data, which show **diminished social emotional learning** among youth due to pandemic isolation.
- DCYF and SFUSD are partnering to better understand conditions and deliver **youth-centered conflict & violence interventions**.

Figure 1: Youth Violence Incidences



Youth Focus Group Timeline

**Creation of Interview
Protocol & Youth
Participant Outreach**

**Focus Group
Facilitation
& Transcription**

**Findings
Analysis &
Report Writing**

**Reconvene
Youth & Present
Findings**

**June
2023**

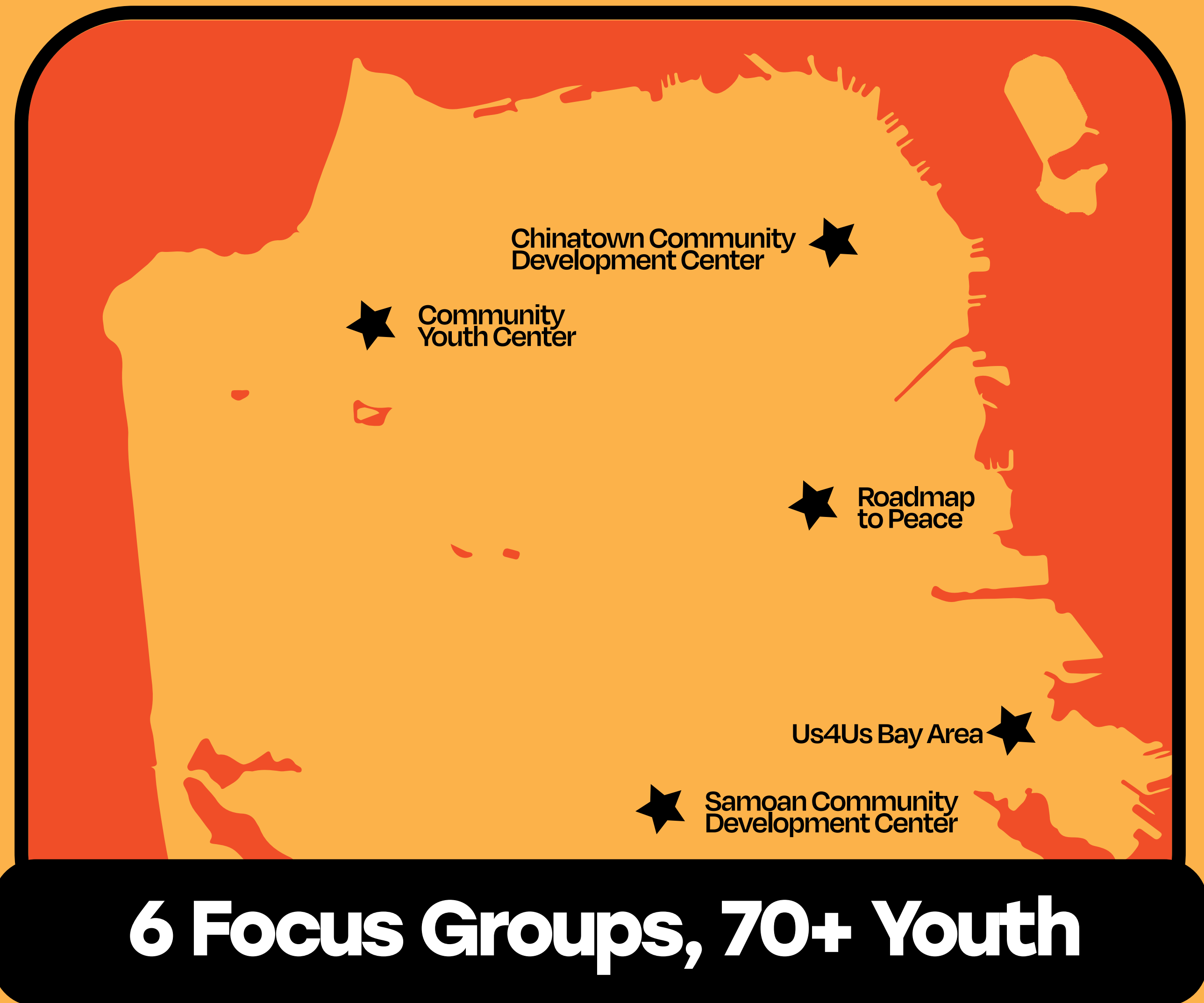
**July
2023**

**August
2023**

**September
2023**

Focus Group Design

- We spoke to 70+ youth from 5 different Community Based Organizations across San Francisco about their experiences around safety. **We led six focus groups with the following organizations:**
 - Samoan Community Development Center
 - Chinatown Community Development Center
 - Us4Us Bay Area
 - Roadmap to Peace
 - Community Youth Center
- Youth from our 6 in-person sessions ranged from 12-24 years of age, with the overwhelming majority identifying as **Black/African American, Asian Pacific Islander, or Latinx.**



6 Focus Groups, 70+ Youth

Youth Engagement Principles

Vision

Young people are allowed to exercise their power to make decisions controlling their lives.

Process

Empower to participate

Provide right conditions to meaningfully participate

Direct participation where it will have an impact

Ensure lasting impact

Principles

- 1 Respect & actively affirm their knowledge, agency, and historical role in social change
- 2 Partner with them on the basis of mutual trust and transparency.
- 3 Take responsibility for providing a safe space, including taking accountability for all adults and putting in the necessary pre-work to prepare them.
- 4 Invest in education to ensure everyone has the context, language, and confidence to bring the competencies they already have to the conversation.
- 5 Guarantee that they will have meaningful decision-making power with actual influence over our work
- 6 Advocate on their behalf to our colleagues & partners without censorship.
- 7 Act as the institutional memory holding government accountable to what they've said or promised to young people.

During our focus group sessions we divided our conversation with you into the following 4 topics:

**Shared
Definitions
of Safety**

**Recent
Unsafe
Experiences**

**Messages
from Youth to
Adults & Peers**

**Brainstorming
Potential
Solutions**

Building a Shared Definition of Safety



Here's what you shared about what makes you feel safe.



Not having to fear physical harm

“Safety means that wherever we go in the city, we have peace of mind, and we're not worried about being getting attacked by anyone. It's about community freedom and respect.”

Not having to fear physical harm

I think safety for me means like, the area around you is protected. You don't have to worry much about being in danger.”

Being free from discrimination

"[Safety is] feeling comfortable everywhere I go without having to look over my shoulder or feeling nervous or anxiety or being judged or discriminated based on skin color."

Knowing you're protected and cared for

"It's feeling of protection from harm, danger, or any like...violence. It's also a feeling of happiness and not having to feel fear."

Recent Unsafe Experiences



“What makes you feel unsafe?”

Many of you expressed feeling unsafe in a wide range of settings.

Here are some places you said you felt unsafe:



Neighborhood



Public Transport



School



Shopping Centers

“What makes you feel unsafe?”

These are some of the things you expressed make you feel unsafe.

**Students and peers brandishing weapons
(guns, knives..etc)**

**On and off campus fights, especially
initiated by unaffiliated individuals**

**Campus-wide lockdowns, especially
when staff withhold important information**

**Bullying, harrassment, discrimination from
peers, authorities, and teachers**

**Students and peers brandishing weapons
(guns, knives..etc)**

"At PE some guy fell and he had a knife fall out of his pocket. I kind of felt unsafe at that moment."

" Last time, when everyone was waiting after school, there were guys holding a gun in the front of our school, they had graduated from our school before. Luckily, they didn't do anything."

On and off campus fights, especially initiated by unaffiliated individuals

"I saw something weird that happened with BART, three guys just like came into a parked car and then they like beat up somebody in the back. It was kind of scary being there. And by the time somebody reports what happens people already left."

**Campus-wide lockdowns, especially
when staff withhold important information**

"I was an immigrant first time being in middle school and they have a drill that's preparing for bad guys coming from gun shooting so at that time I was scared because I have a thought that this country this might be often thing happening in this country, so I got scared."

When the schools' on lockdown and we asked the reason – they don't tell you so you feel (scared) and think 'oh, maybe it's something really bad' ...and they just never tell you what it was that they're locking down for"

**Bullying, harassment, discrimination from
peers, authorities, and teachers**

"I had this one incident, where I was really mad at my teacher, but she had this box where you could put anonymous cards in it and write about your feelings. So then I wrote about my suicidal thoughts. And she recognized my handwriting. And then she got me to get a counselor and she told the principal and had them tell my mom and the suicidal thoughts were because I was going through sexual harassment and assault and none of the parents believed me."

**Bullying, harrassment, discrimination from
peers, authorities, and teachers**

"I feel like sometimes police officers are too rough with kids especially like on the news police officers do too much sometimes. That's why most kids don't feel safe around police officers. Not all are bad I guess, but like most of them, they are really like aggressive towards kids when it's unnecessary."

Messages from Youth to Adults



“What do you want adults to know about youth safety?”

You all had strong messages to share with adults & peers about youth safety.

What you want from adults:



Trust & Support

You said you want adults to be consistent sources of support, compassion & care. You want adults to show up for you and to be reliable allies.



Restorative Approaches

You expressed that expulsions, police escalation, and blanket punishments are ineffective and harmful. You want thoughtful approaches that address root causes behind youth violence.



To Hear & Believe Youth

You want adults to hear you out without passing judgment, blaming, or dismissing you. You want adults to validate your knowledge and experience as a young person and value your perspectives.



Trust & Support

"[Adults should] create a place where a young person can come if they don't feel safe out there. A place where they can come in and you know, take the time they need, whatever it is they're going through, and leave there feeling a lot better"

"If we have more adults in the community trying to help get these kids and stuff out of gangs and showing a different path I feel like it'll be less people in a gang and more people getting jobs"



Restorative Approaches

“[Adults] should try to find the root cause of the problem. If you don't really find the root cause and you're just always trying to prevent it from happening, then I don't think that's going to really solve anything. Suspending or like expelling students is not going to help them because they're just going to do other things outside of school.”



Restorative Approaches

“Everybody here has like a different way that their parent is like raised them with. It could be either like they had a rough childhood and it causes them to like go off on somebody outside. It all comes from home basically.”

“There should be better structures for conflict resolution. If we're talking about youth violence, like people don't fight without a reason. There must be like a reason why they fight like, it's like, I feel like it's controllable. You can de-escalate it if there were more care or more attention for at risk youth.”



Restorative Approaches

"You expose somebody [to] something different you show them like, you don't have to gang bang and you [can] be a doctor, a teacher... It makes a bigger difference because people who grow up around all that... people scamming, robbing ...if that's all you see growin up. That's what you're gonna be like. No, you could be a doctor. A teacher... it's a bigger world out there, but like this my little neighborhood and what's going on here."



Hear & Believe Youth

“Adults should actually be listening to the news because a lot of adults I don't listen to kids because they're kids. Parents feel like they have control over us. So like they don't listen to what we have to say. Until it's like too late and there's like now you have to listen to us in trouble or whatever”

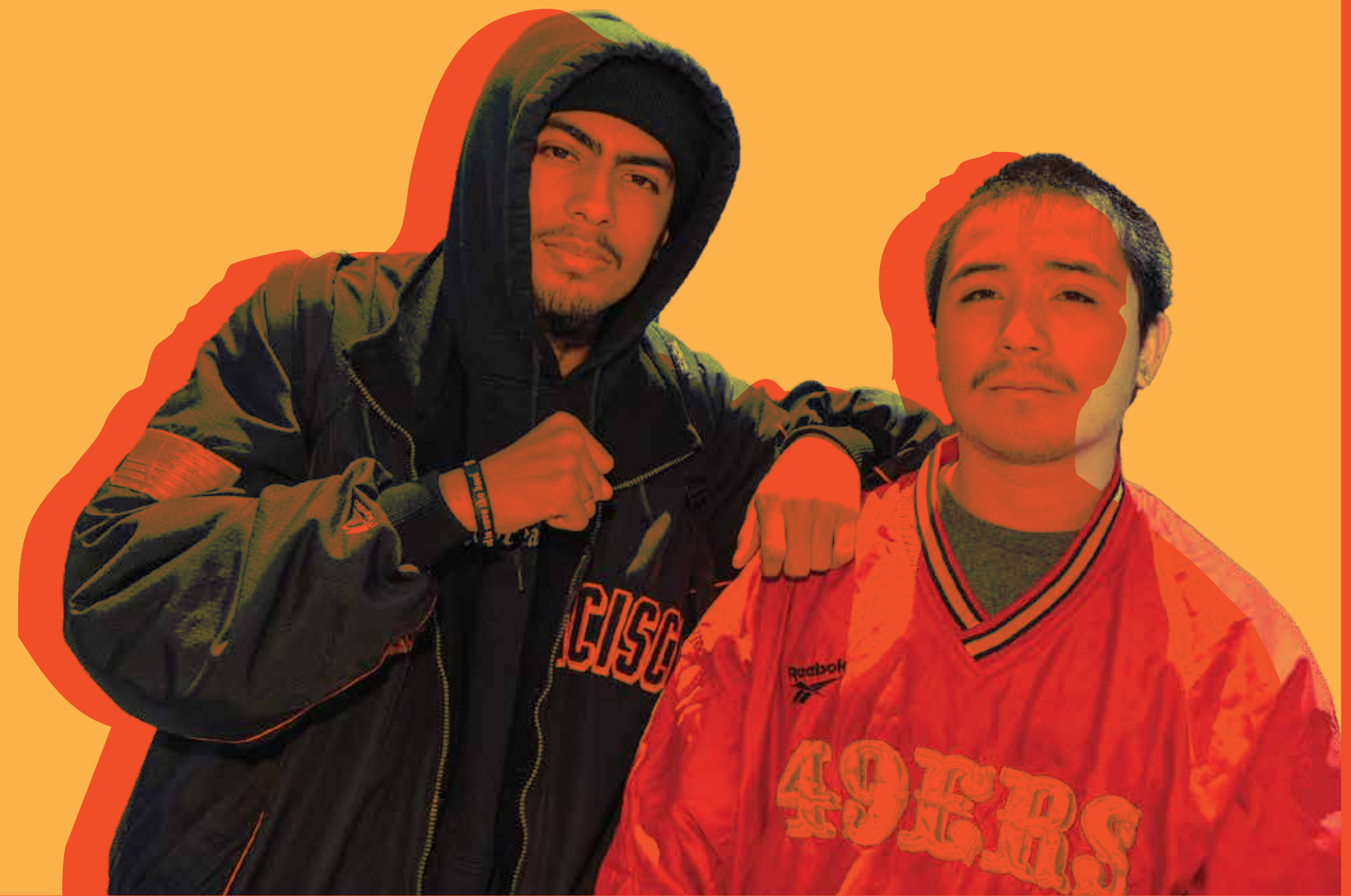
“I'd want adults to not have the mindset that all kids are “just immature” because a lot of these problems aren't even caused by youth...they're rooted in systemic discriminations. [Adults] should think objectively instead of blaming it all on youth”



Hear & Believe Youth

"I think it's important to know that the streets are always evolving. Everything in the streets is always changing. It's constantly the rules, politics, everything's always changing. So even at my age there's things that I don't know that the youngsters know now, it's just constantly changing. So just trying to keep up with that is important, because that's how you'll know exactly what's going on and why it's going on."

Brainstorming Potential Solutions





De-escalation Tools

Providing SFPD, campus staff, and security with restorative justice based de-escalation tools to improve youth violence intervention outcomes.



Community Building

Connecting with youth across San Francisco and creating regular platforms where you can have a safe space to exchange experiences, learn from each other, and build community.



De-escalation Tools

"I've had to see teachers de-escalate fights. That's not something that should be a part of their job description. Circling back to security guards, that's actually part of their job description to de-escalate those fights and conflict resolution."

"Have security also be more understanding to the young person's point of view. So that way there's understanding between both parties and both can be at peace."



Community Building

“I think one existing solution that is kind of working is collaborating and partnering with other people like parents, community organizations, and the students themselves. Um, this includes CYC, how we have these programs offered at schools and how they're connected. And I think that these are opportunities where students are able to grow, and they could address safety concerns effectively. And maybe that can also help get our voices out a little bit more with these different organizations that are partnering with our school district.”



Community Building

"I think workshops are really good. So like you can send maybe a group of people to like to school and have a workshop for students to come and express their opinions or like talk about certain issues. It's kind of like, I think it's a better way to actually hear the students opinions and like, tell them what you guys have to say!"



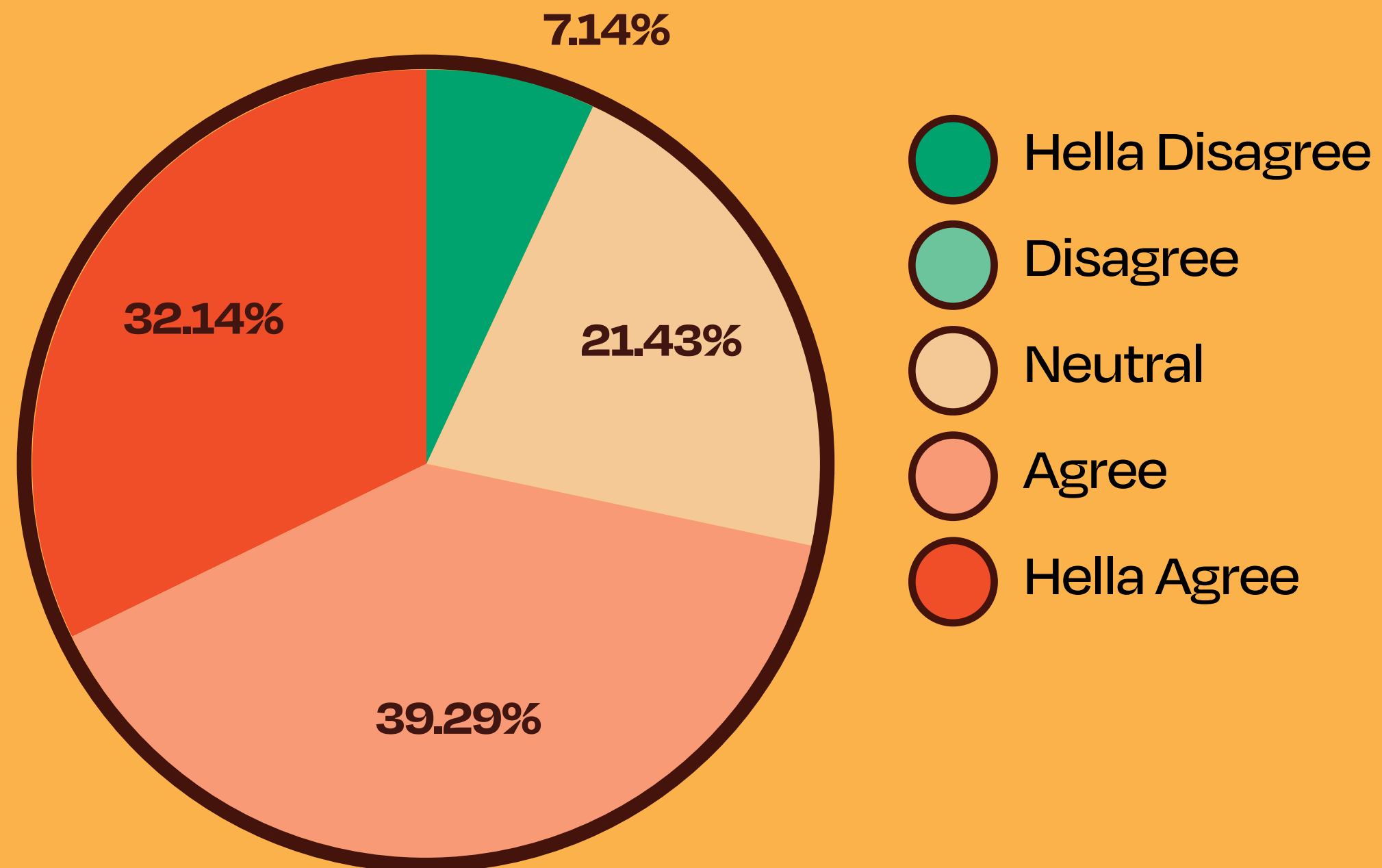
Community Building

“We make it a culture where sharing our problems is okay and supported. For example, a couple times this year at our school, there were walkouts for sexual harassment awareness and sexual assault awareness...once people started talking, they’re also starting to talk with their stories”

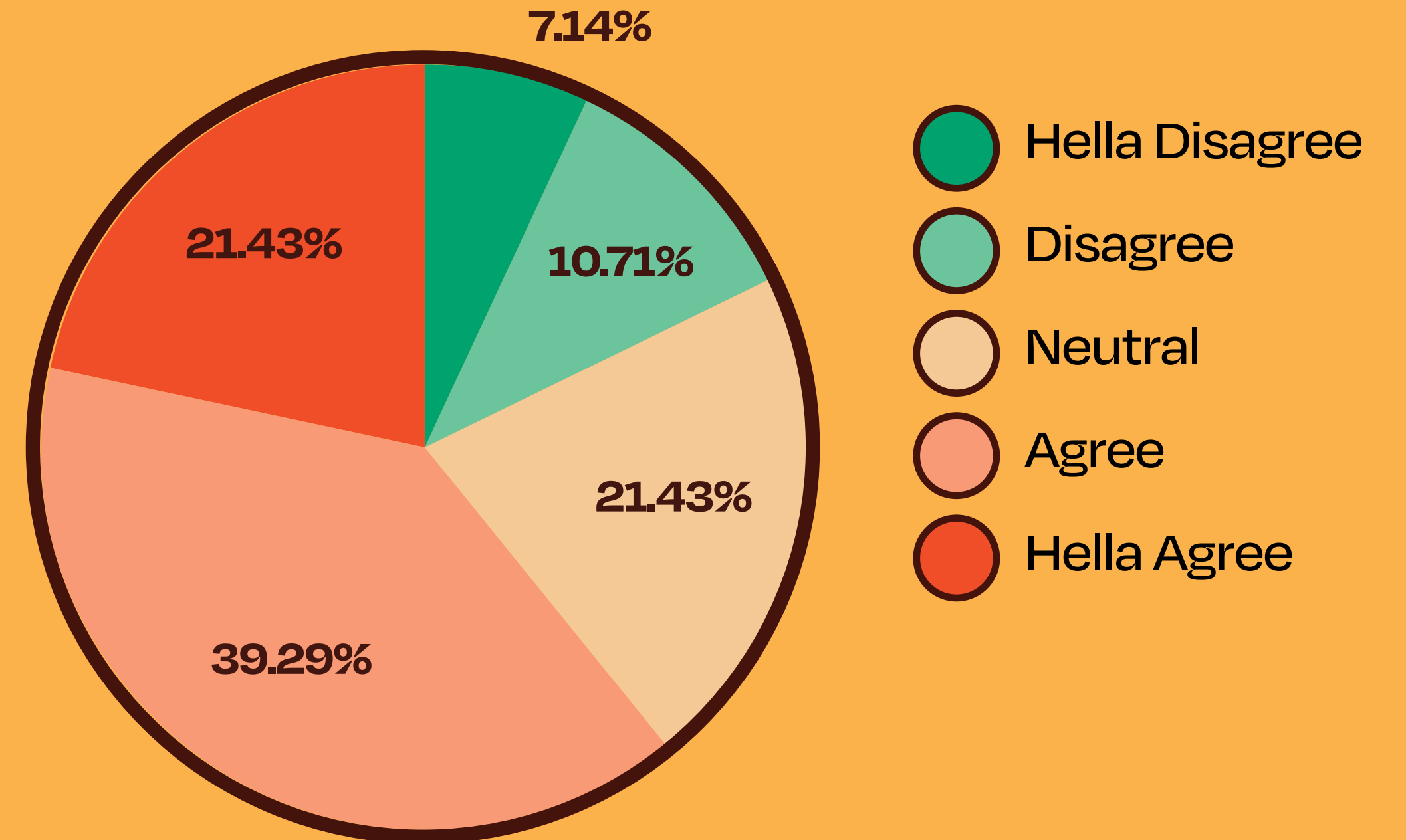


Post-Focus Group Survey Findings

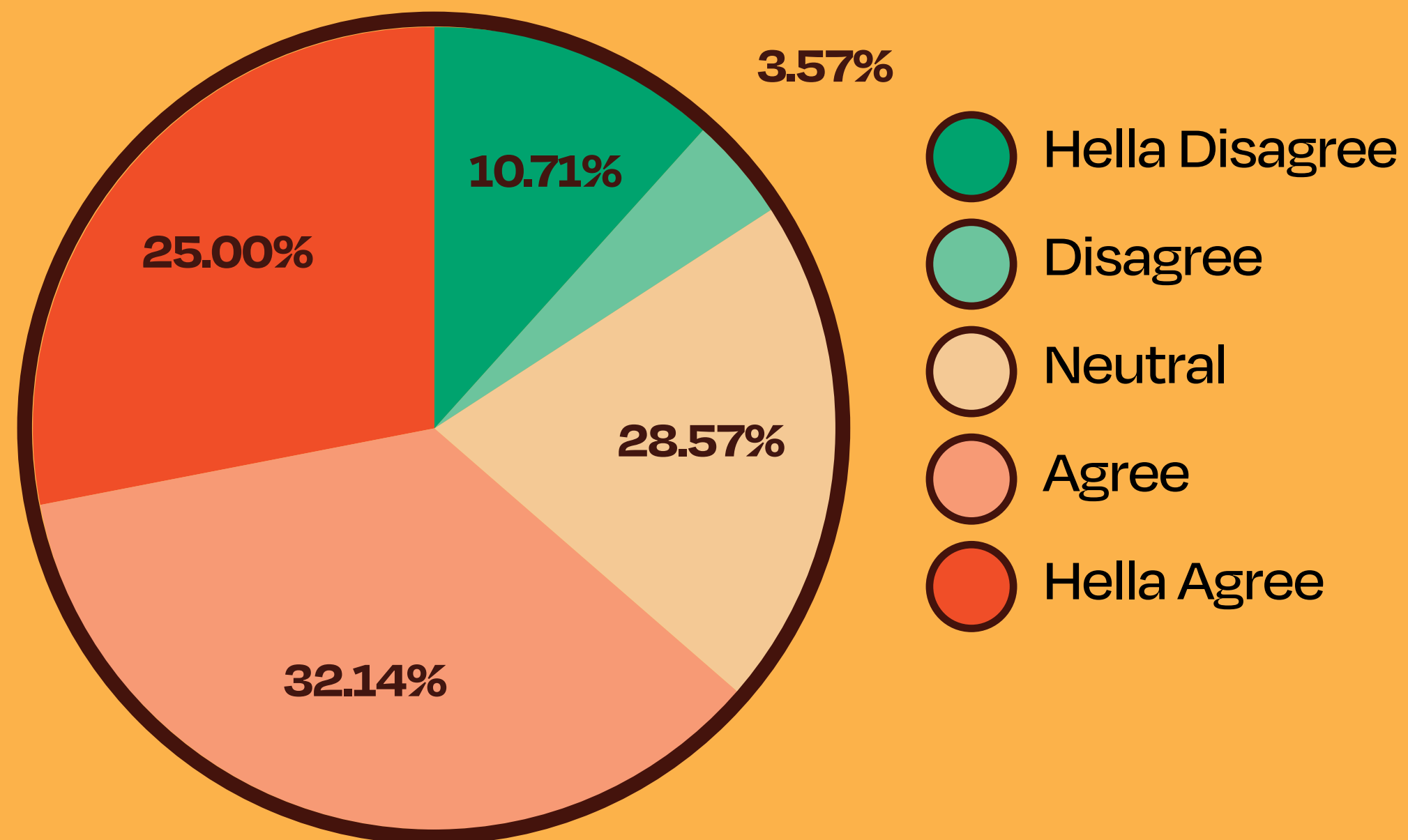
"I felt safe and respected"



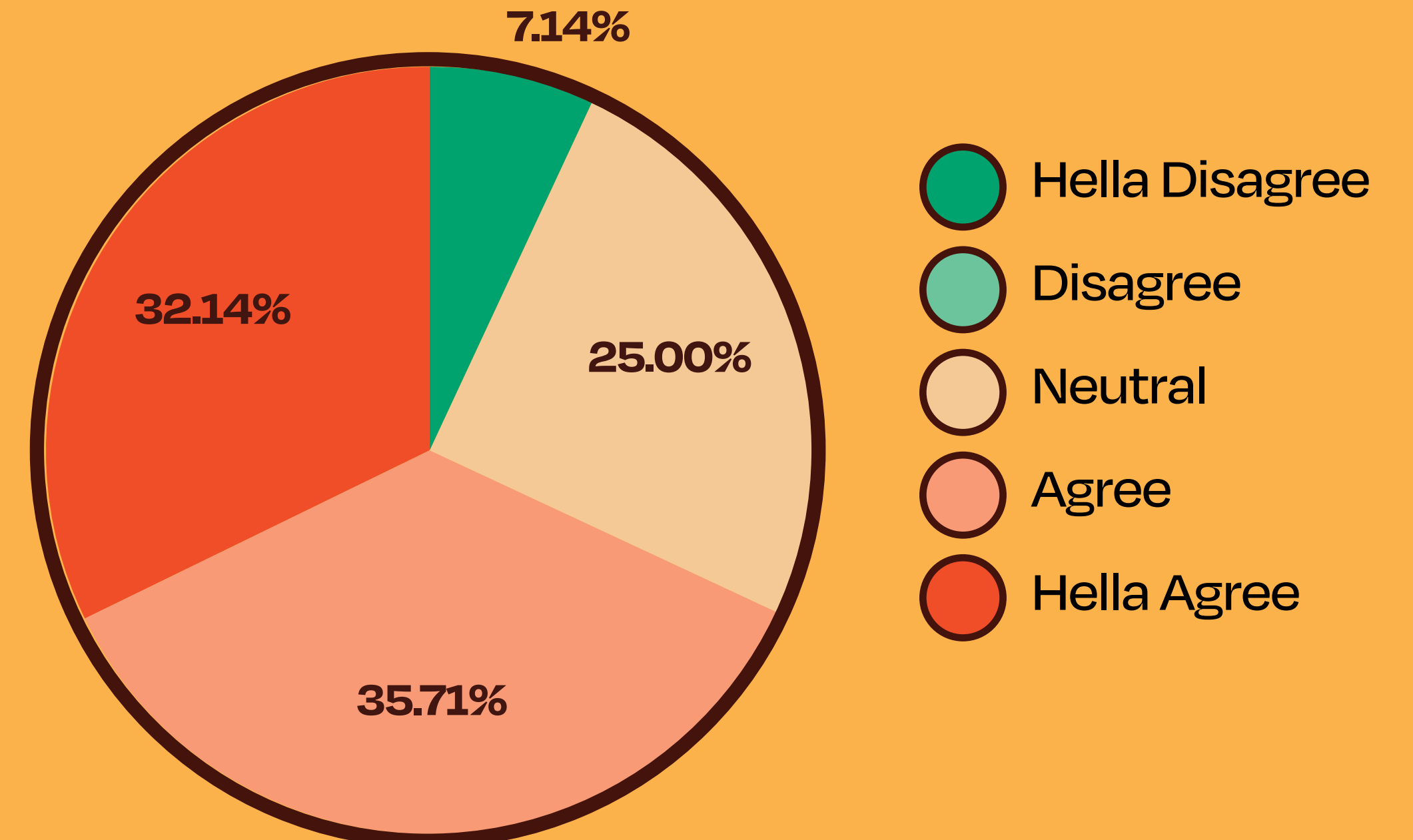
"I had enough info to participate in the discussion"



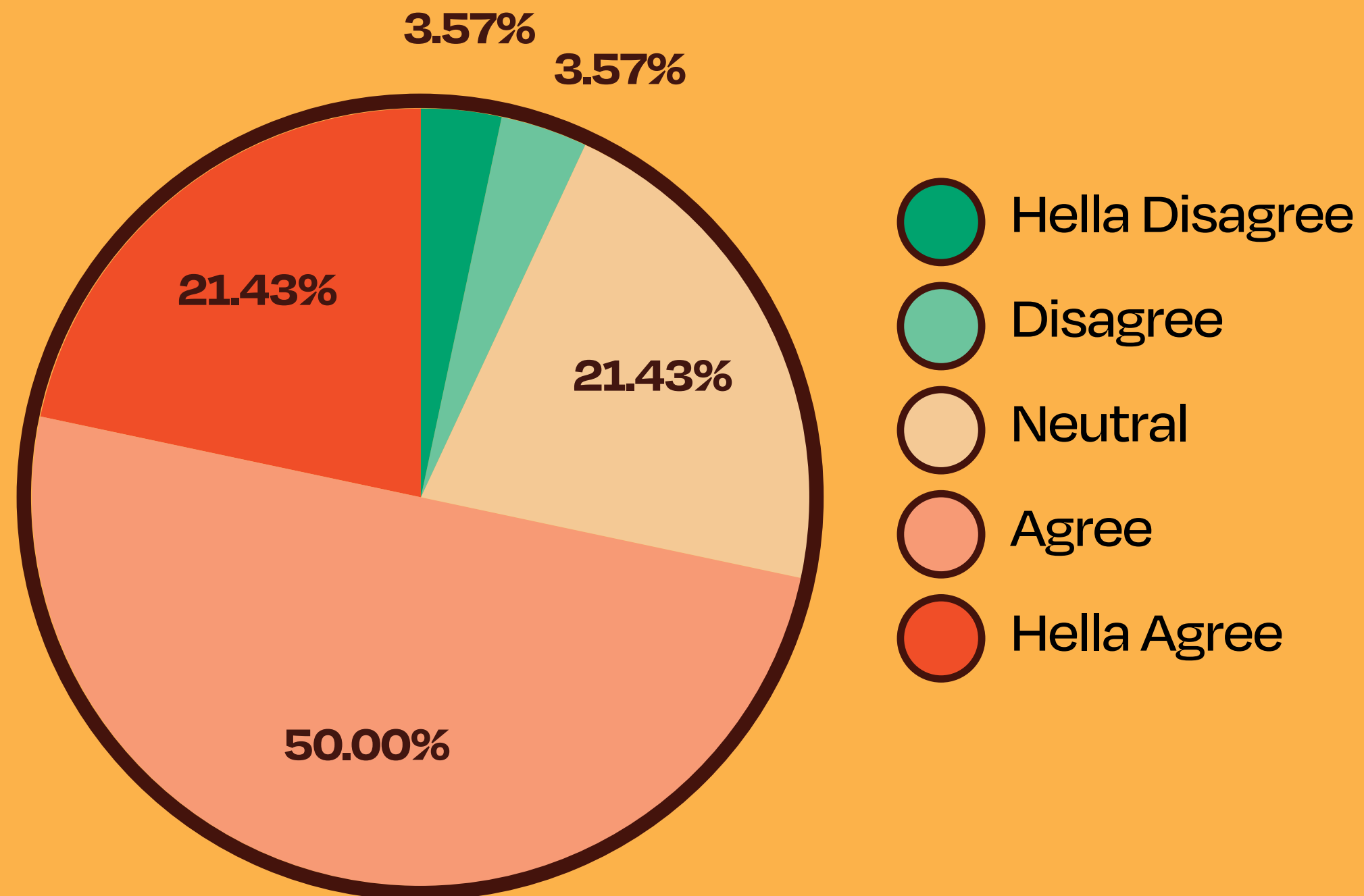
"I felt comfortable sharing my thoughts"



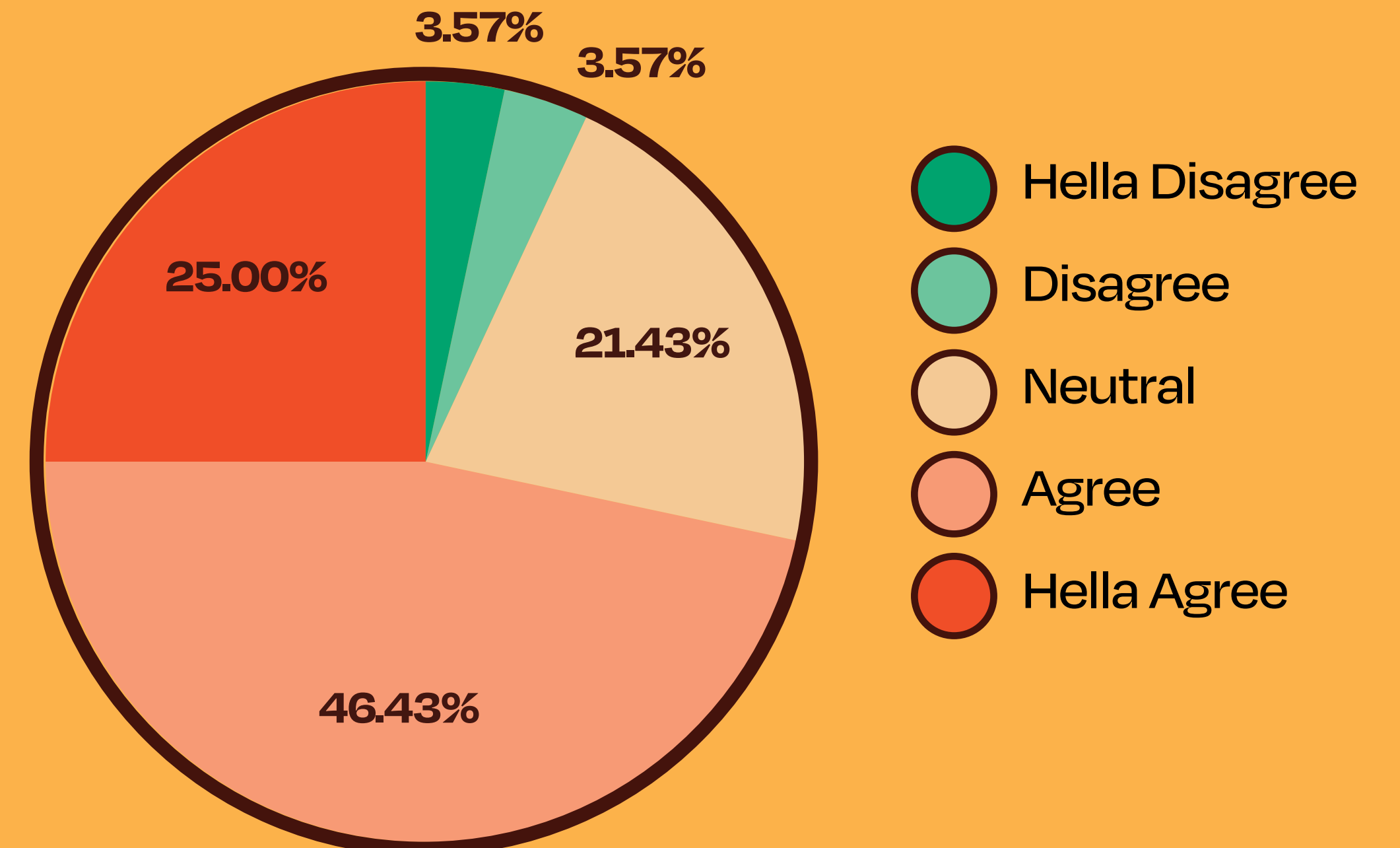
"I felt like my voice was heard"



"I feel like this was a good use of my time"



"I feel like I contributed to positive change"



Next Steps

- DCYF and SFUSD are working to inform a citywide **PSA Campaign on Nonviolence, Peace & Safety.**
- We will be incorporating data from the focus groups to make sure that **your voices are heard** by agency partners and remain front and center in this process.
- To **stay involved** and receive regular updates go to info@dcyf.org



Thank you!

