Community Coaching/Mentoring as a Strategic Asset in Addressing the Negative Impact of Gang Subcultures in a Gang-Affected Community in Gqeberha, Eastern Cape, South Africa

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Abstract

Gang subcultures continue to be a significant threat to safety and security in various communities throughout South Africa. Despite largely punitive approaches and strategies to address gangs, very little meaningful and viable results have been achieved. While it is important that attention should be focused on gang formations and how they operate, very little attention has been paid to the communities within which gangs emerge and thrive. Little to no strategic community support is provided to affected communities. This article argues for a consideration of community coaching/mentoring as a strategic asset and support mechanism for addressing the impact of gang subcultures. The discussion is based on the author's research on gang subcultures in a community in the Northern Areas of Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth), in the province of the Eastern Cape, South Africa.

Keywords

Coaching/Mentoring, Gang Subcultures, Northern Areas, Gqeberha, South Africa

1. Introduction

One of the biggest challenges affecting various urban communities in South Africa is the management of gang subcultures and their impact. In 2023, gang violence in the community of Westbury in Johannesburg had reached such levels that it prompted the National Minister of Police to personally visit the commu-

nity to launch a plan to address gang violence and criminality in the area (SA News, 2023). Furthermore, an opinion piece in the *Sowetan* highlighted gang violence and human trafficking as the two main issues that marked South Africa's "descent into hell" (Mahlatsi, 2023, n.p.).

This article argues for community coaching/mentoring as a strategic asset to holistically address gang subcultures. The author begins with defining what community coaching/mentoring is, and how it can be applied in a community context. In the latter part of the article, the author demonstrates the potential application, and value, of community coaching/mentoring in a gang-affected community in the city of Gqeberha, in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa.

The methodological approach used in the article is literature based. The author draws from the scholarship on both community coaching/mentoring, as well as the literature on gang subcultures in the area under discussion. There is much scope for further research on the use of community coaching/mentoring to address the challenge of gang subcultures in the community under discussion, which opens up opportunities for possible future empirical studies.

The article is structured as follows. First, a conceptualisation of community coaching and community mentoring is provided. Second, an outline of some of the reasons for considering community coaching/mentoring is given, in order to contextualise the value of community coaching/mentoring. The third part of the article discusses possible coaching models that would be relevant for a community context, as well as two examples of how these models could be applied. The final part of the discussion focuses on the example of the Northern Areas community in Gqeberha, South Africa, and how community coaching/mentoring could assist in addressing the challenge of gang subcultures. Some recommendations are also provided as a way forward.

2. Understanding Community Coaching and Community Mentorship

Community coaching/mentorship has been used with significant success in various community contexts in the US. Authors Emery, Hubbell and Miles-Polka (2011), in their *Field Guide to Community Coaching*, state that "the field of community coaching is alive with possibilities" (2011: 1). Throughout their field guide, the scholars describe various examples where community coaching was used with great success to assist communities to achieve their goals and/or address social challenges in their community development. This argument supports an earlier work by Cohen, Higgins, Sanyal and Harris (2008) who asserted that community coaching was an "innovative" approach to community development initiatives. Similarly, several scholars have alluded to the value of community coaching in the field of health, including community health coaching (Holland, Greenberg, Tidwell, Malone, Mullan, & Newcomer, 2005), the management of HIV self-testing services (Dunkley, Wang, Worrall, Skipper, & Evans, 2017), safe handling of agricultural pesticides (Ibrahim, Tawfik, & El Lassy,

2018), obesity management (Heerman, Cole, Teeters, Lane, Burgess, Escarfuller, Bonnet, Barkin, & Schlundt, 2019), and disabilities (Romano, Schnurr, Barton, Woods, & Weigel, 2021).

There is also scholarship that attests to the value of community mentorship, in particular the role that it can play in youth development. According to Hamilton, Hirsch, Hughes, King and Maton (2006: p. 727), "…available evidence indicates that…mentoring adds to young people's intellectual, psychological and emotional, social, and, to a lesser extent, physical assets." Reinforcing the assertion made by Hamilton et al. (2006), DeWit, DuBois, Erdem, Larose, Lipman and Spencer (2016: p. 60) argued that the ending of mentoring relationships "may have harmful consequences for the health and well-being of youth participating in community-based mentoring programs".

It is necessary to begin by first getting a sense of what is meant by *community coaching and community mentorship*, and determine how these concepts are understood and used within this discussion.

Coaching

The International Coaching Federation (ICF) defines coaching as "partnering with clients [coachees] in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential. The process of coaching often unlocks previously untapped sources of imagination, productivity and leadership" (2023, n.p.; Petrus, 2022: p. 156). This definition echoes that of Whitmore (2009: p.10), who stated that "Coaching is unlocking people's potential to maximize their performance." This definition was supported by Losch, Traut-Mattausch, Mühlberger and Jonas (2016, n.p.), as well as Grant (2013), who defined coaching as "a collaborative helping relationship, where coach and client (coachee) engage in a systematic process of setting goals and developing solutions with the aim of facilitating goal attainment, self-directed learning, and personal growth of the coachee".

The Socratic Method, as it has come to be known, was based on Socrates' idea that humans have a natural, built-in learning ability that is disrupted by teaching instruction (Whitmore, 2009: p. 10). Thus, he favoured an approach that focused on helping students to learn through developing their innate critical thinking and problem-solving skills through dialogue (Wiberding, 2021). Within this method, these skills could be developed through targeted questioning, where instead of the students being told (taught) the answers, they were led to arriving at the answers on their own, through a series of related and relevant questions.

Mentoring

Mentoring shares certain important similarities with coaching, but also has some important differences. According to Durham (2020, n.p.), the fundamental difference between coaching and mentoring is in the purpose: "Coaching is performance-oriented, focused on the shorter run, [while] mentoring is development-driven, focused on the longer run." Durham (2020, n.p.) further adds that

"A mentor assists a less experienced person by providing motivation, guid-

ance, emotional support and insight into a particular field in which they are experienced. Essentially a mentor is a trusted advisor who keeps the person's best interests in mind when they are advising them while modelling positive behaviours. It's usually a longer-term relationship and can be professionally or personally focused or even both."

In terms of similarities, both coaching and mentoring are mechanisms of support, aimed at assisting someone to identify and attain specific goals. Both are also aimed at providing motivation and/or guidance to said person on their journey towards reaching their potential in a particular field. However, some perceived key differences are also highlighted in the definition. These include that coaching is short-term focused, while mentoring is more long-term focused. Also, a coach does not necessarily have to be in the same field or have more experience than a coachee, while a mentor does typically have experience and expertise in a specific field relevant to the mentee. In fact, it is this greater level of experience and expertise that qualifies someone to be a mentor to a more inexperienced, junior-level mentee.

While there is a clear distinction between coaching and mentoring, they are, in fact, two sides of the same coin. The similarities between them outweigh the differences by a significant enough margin. Even more important is that the lines between coaching and mentoring can sometimes be blurred, to the extent that the perceived differences between them are practically non-existent. Think, for example, of an instance where a coach may work with a coachee for years (i.e. supporting the coachee for a long-term outcome), or where a coach may have relevant expertise and experience in the same or similar field as the coachee, but where the focus is on a specific short-term result, such as improvement in a specific area of performance. Thus, while one can identify distinctions between coaching and mentoring, they may not always apply in practice. It is for this reason that I use the hybrid term *coaching/mentoring* to indicate that both coaching and mentoring have equal value. They both employ the same skills (on the part of the coach/mentor), as well as the same process to achieve results.

Community coaching/mentoring

While community coaching/mentoring is not a new field, having been around at least for almost two decades (see, for example, Holland et al., 2005; Hamilton et al., 2006; Cohen et al., 2008), most conventional ideas about coaching/mentoring tend to focus on the more "traditional" forms of coaching/mentoring, namely individual (one-on-one) or group (team) coaching/mentoring. However, since the mid-2000s, various scholars have argued in favour of community coaching/mentoring as an effective tool in assisting communities to achieve their goals, or overcome challenges (Holland et al., 2005; Hamilton et al., 2006; Cohen et al., 2008; Emery et al., 2011; Ibrahim et al., 2018).

But what exactly is community coaching/mentoring? One of the earliest definitions of community coaching/mentoring was put forward by Cohen et al. (2008: p. 71), who defined community coaching/mentoring as "an adaptive practice tai-

lored to unique community contexts to guide systemic change via participant empowerment". The key aspects of this definition are, firstly, that community coaching/mentoring is an *adaptive practice*. This suggests that community coaching/mentoring is both flexible and responsive to the specific and, often, dynamic nature of communities. Whether in terms of community-based goals, needs or challenges, the changing nature of these, as well as the community context within which they are identified and defined, requires an effective coaching/mentoring approach that can keep pace with these changes. A second key aspect of the above definition is that community coaching/mentoring strives to *guide systemic change*. In other words, community coaching/mentoring is a tool designed to facilitate social change. This suggests an inherently collaborative component, where the community is in control of the nature, direction and pace of change, while the community-based coach/mentor acts as a change agent or facilitator. This relates to the third key element in the definition, namely *participant empowerment*. The aim of all coaching/mentoring is to guide the coachee/mentee towards *self-empowerment*, mainly through self-reflection, skills development, and clarifying vision, goals and direction. The idea is that the coach/mentor should gradually decrease support as the coachee/mentee gradually increases in confidence and capacity.

The above definition of community coaching/mentoring is supported by both Emery et al. (2011) and Ibrahim et al. (2018). According to Emery et al. (2011: p. 1), a community coach/mentor "is a guide who supports communities and organizations in identifying and achieving goals" (see also Ibrahim et al., 2018: p. 39). This view, while simpler than that of Cohen and colleagues (2008), still encapsulates the same ideas of community coaching/mentoring as a process that supports positive community change through guidance and empowerment.

Echoing the views of Emery et al. (2011), Ibrahim et al. (2018: p. 39) state that community coaching/mentoring "is an extremely efficient tool to help groups [communities] reframe their operating systems, develop new ideas, move to new leadership and negotiate partnerships, [all of which are] critical skills for successful community building efforts". They further elaborate that

> "Effective community coaching [and mentoring] recognizes that every individual has something to contribute, but people often need a catalyst to bring into a group innate wisdom. [Community] coaching [and mentoring] can open the door to a process of transformation that unlocks wisdom, intuition and group insight." (Ibrahim et al., 2018: p. 39)

Hence, the value of this kind of coaching/mentoring lies in its ability to capacitate community leaders, civic organisations, and even ordinary community residents towards achieving collective goals, and initiating meaningful social change. These two fundamental principles of community coaching/mentoring are contained in the above definitions, and thus it is these interpretations of community coaching/mentoring that underpin the rest of the discussion.

3. Reasons for Community Coaching/Mentoring

Why has community coaching/mentoring become important? Below are a few reasons.

Communities are undergoing rapid change

Internal and external dynamics impacting on communities are causing increasingly rapid changes to occur that may strain the ability of communities to adapt adequately to these changes. Thus, coaching/mentoring can serve to aid communities in their effort to adapt. According to Ibrahim et al. (2018: p. 39), "Communities are currently seeking change more than ever and many are finding coaching to be an effective strategy to aid them in their efforts." Thus, communities may see coaching/mentoring as a valuable tool or resource that can help them more easily or efficiently make the necessary adaptations to the changes they may experience, or actively seek out.

This point echoes that made earlier by Emery and colleagues (2011: p. 4), who argued that

"Coaching offers communities a way to make use of promising practices and outside expertise by learning how to adapt those practices and knowledge to existing community assets and capacity by integrating local wisdom, [thereby] supporting the creation of new ways of seeing and doing."

This suggests that communities can integrate coaching/mentoring with existing community resources and assets to facilitate change, as well as aiding communities in developing strategies to adapt to change. The rise of various global and local processes of change have necessitated the need for community capacity-building. This speaks to one of the key roles of coaching/mentoring in community development, what Cohen et al. (2008: p. 78) refer to as "building capacity for change".

Emergence of new community and organisational leadership structures

Leadership, at both community and organisational levels, is critical to the success of community development initiatives. It has thus become imperative for communities and their organisations to use the support of coaches/mentors, as they adapt and restructure their leadership strategies in line with the rapidly changing environment. Hence, coaches/mentors can assist by helping communities in "recognizing the assets of traditional and non-traditional leaders, while at the same time framing the work in ways that lead to the development of new leadership structures that are more fluid, adaptable and engaging" (Emery et al., 2011: p. 5). This then would increase capacity, efficiency and effectiveness of leadership, by integrating internal and external leadership structures.

Increased focus on (*meaningful*) *impact and results*

One of the keys to successful management and adaptation to change is the development of community-based strategies and assets that can help them achieve their goals despite the disruptions, and other challenges impacting on communities. The best way to measure whether communities are managing and adapting

to change is the degree to which they are able to achieve their goals under these conditions. This speaks directly to the issue of impact, that is, the impact that initiatives have in the community, and how effectively they help people to achieve their goals. In this context, coaching/mentoring can be a valuable asset, as it "facilitates [community] leaders' ability to energize and mobilize people around a change agenda, and helps community institutions become learning organizations" (Emery et al., 2011: p. 5).

A higher return on both internal and external investment

In an article by Houston (2022, n.p.), she states that in the business and corporate world, "the coaching industry has exploded…as many business owners [and corporates]…find…coaching to be a valuable investment…" This is a lesson that can also be applied to communities and their organisations. While coaching/mentoring is an investment, it also "increases the return on investment in capacity building, leadership development, [social] and economic development efforts…" (Emery et al., 2011: p. 5). Since coaching/mentoring is results-focused, it makes sense that this will be valuable in aiding not only communities, but also their funders and investors, to achieve the expected results, as this will ensure a return on investment. And, within this context, investment is not only to be understood in financial terms, but also in terms of the investment of trust, energy, effort and time.

4. Community Coaching/Mentoring Models: Identifying the Best Process for Community Coaching/Mentoring

A coaching/mentoring model can be understood as a framework within which the coaching partnership, relationship or process takes place (Champathes, 2006; Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008; Carey, Philippon, & Cummings, 2011). There are many coaching/mentoring models that have been developed. However, the models briefly outlined below are, arguably, the best suited to community coaching/mentoring.

The GROW model

The GROW model (Goals, Reality, Options/Opportunities, Will) is perhaps the most well-known, and widely used coaching/mentoring model. It was first developed by Whitmore (2009) in the 1990s, and has become the basis of many of the current coaching and mentoring models used by professional coaches and mentors working with business and organisational leaders, executives and even professionals.

The model follows the GROW sequence or process. In this approach, the coach/mentor works with a coachee/mentee to first get clear on their goals, then establish their current reality, and potential obstacles/challenges to the identified goals, then identify options and/or opportunities for achieving the goals while mitigating or eliminating the obstacles, and, finally, developing the right "inner game" or mindset or will to implement the strategies or action steps to achieve the goals (Whitmore, 2009: pp. 58-92).

While Whitmore's model has been widely used, it is not without shortcomings. Panchal and Riddell (2020) argued that while the GROW model has value, it fails to capture some important aspects of behavioural change. Brown and Grant (2010) argued that the GROW model is too dyadic (more suited to one-on-one coaching/mentoring) and thus is inadequate for group coaching/mentoring contexts.

The OSKAR model

Another useful model for consideration in community coaching/mentoring is the OSKAR model (Outcomes, Scaling, Know-how/resources, Affirm/Action, Review) (Ibrahim et al., 2018: p. 39; Hawkes, 2018; Ives, 2008). In this model, some of the steps in the GROW process are expanded upon.

The first step, focusing on Outcomes, is similar to the Goals step in GROW. The second step, Scaling, is similar to the Reality step in GROW. Step three, Know-how/resources, resonates with Options/Opportunities from the GROW model. Step four, Affirm/Action, equates to the Will step in GROW. The final step, Review, is the most notable difference between OSKAR and GROW, as it is an additional step, involving consistent and regular assessment and reviewing of progress at each coaching/mentoring session.

Like GROW, the OSKAR model also benefits from simplicity, demonstrating a clear and simple process that is easy to follow and apply. However, also like GROW, OSKAR seems better suited for one-on-one individual coaching/mentoring, and not really for group/team coaching/mentoring.

The Integrated GROUP model

From the above it is clear that both the GROW and OSKAR models have value, but are also plagued by certain limitations, especially if they are to be applied, as is, in a group coaching/mentoring context, as one would expect in a community setting. Thus, the most viable option is a model that integrates GROW and OSKAR, but builds in a step specifically focusing on the group dimension. This model is aptly named the GROUP model of coaching/mentoring.

In contrast to individual coaching models, on which a fair amount of research and studies have been done, very little seems to have been done on group or team coaching models, making the GROUP model one of the few that are applicable to the group/team context. Several scholars, including Fumoto (2016: p. 112), Britton (2013), Clutterbuck (2013) and Thornton (2010) have argued that group coaching is an emerging field, and thus few studies have been conducted on this form of coaching (Kets de Vries, 2014). While much has been written about the advantages of individual one-on-one coaching/mentoring, there is also much value in group coaching/mentoring. The major benefit of group coaching/mentoring is found in the "collective synergy" that emerges from the group dynamics, especially if the group "is composed of diverse and aspirational participants willing to learn and develop their shared values" (Fumoto, 2016: p. 112; Sawyer, 2012, 2007; Robinson, 2011; Dolny, 2009). Furthermore, instead of participants only utilising their own individual stories and experiences, they are able to hear and engage with the stories and experiences of others, thereby fostering a

dynamic of collaboration that "offers the best space for reflection" (Fumoto, 2016: p. 112; Kemmis et al., 2005). It thus makes sense that a model specifically tailored for groups would be ideal in a community coaching/mentoring context, as well as the more conventional one-on-one coaching/mentoring.

The GROUP model is credited to Brown and Grant (2010) who, in agreement with the above scholars, argued that there are few workable models of group coaching/mentoring, and added that despite the evidence suggesting targeted interventions at group level in organisations, most coaching interventions are overwhelmingly focused on one-on-one (dyadic) interventions. Hence, these scholars presented what they refer to as the "practical model of GROUP", which, like GROW and OSKAR, is an apt acronym that stands for "Goal, Reality, Options, Understanding others, and Perform" (Brown & Grant, 2010: p. 30). This model includes elements from GROW (Goal, Reality, Options), as well as the Action element from the OSKAR model, although in GROUP it is referred to as Perform. The notable addition is the Understanding Others step, which Brown and Grant (2010: p. 30) attribute to Scharmer's (2009) Theory U model for group dialogue, that emphasises the importance of understanding the perspectives of other members of the group. Thus, GROUP is an integration of GROW, OSKAR and Theory U, all of which can be applied to the coaching/mentoring of groups. This approach is thus ideally suited to group coaching/mentoring, which is more goal-oriented compared to group facilitation (Brown & Grant, 2010: p. 30).

Below, two examples are discussed of how the GROUP model could be applied in a community coaching/mentoring context. Both of these examples are relevant to the overarching issue of how community coaching/mentoring can aid communities affected by gang subcultures.

5. Coaching/Mentoring for Coping: The Influence of Caregiver/Parental Coaching/Mentoring in Communities Impacted by Violence

Various studies have explored the relationship between caregiver (parental) coaching/mentoring and coping strategies in communities affected by social challenges, including high levels of violence (see, for example, Kliewer, Fearnow, & Miller, 1996; Gunnoe, Hetherington, & Reiss, 1999; Miller, Kliewer, & Partch, 1999; Moore, Kliewer, Douglas, Hinton, & Ray, 2005; Davids, 2017). Some scholars have referred to the use of coaching/mentoring as part of what they call a "socialization model of coping", in reference to the use of parental (caregiver) coaching/mentoring in communities experiencing violence (Kliewer, Parish, Taylor, Jackson, Walker, & Shivy, 2006).

In violence-affected communities, coaching/mentoring can play a dual role, that is, parents or caregivers coaching/mentoring their children, as well as parents or caregivers receiving coaching/mentoring themselves. Both forms of coaching/mentoring could prove most effective in equipping both youth and parents/caregivers with coping skills and strategies for dealing with exposure to

violence.

In their testing of their "socialization model of coping" (or caregiver/parental coaching/mentoring), in violence-affected African-American communities, Kliewer and colleagues (2006) made some interesting observations. One is that "There is at least limited evidence that coaching, modeling, and family context have the potential to shape children's coping with community violence…" (Kliewer et al., 2006: p. 608). In particular, the study findings "provide[d] evidence for the importance of maternal coaching [and mentoring]…" (p. 620).

An application of the GROUP model in this context would involve group coaching/mentoring of both caregivers/parents, as well as youths. By following the steps in the model, parents and their children can engage, interact and agree on collective goals, critically examine the current realities, explore options for coping strategies, understand each other's point of view and then implement the necessary actions. This would enable two, but equally significant and interrelated community-based strategic assets: proactive coaching/mentoring, and proactive coping. The former would focus primarily on problem-solving, while the latter would focus on problem-focused coping. By utilising both of these strategies, "Caregivers [parents] would benefit from education about the effects that their suggestions, their own coping behaviour, and the quality of their relationship with their children have on their children's coping and adjustment." (Kliewer et al., 2006: p. 620).

6. Conflict Coaching/Mentoring in a Community Context

Another related area where coaching/mentoring can prove quite useful in violence-prone communities is within what Brinkert (2002) refers to as "conflict coaching".

Conflict is an inevitable consequence of the prevailing structural violence enacted upon communities through stigmatisation, marginalisation, poverty, and other types of socio-economic challenges. Communities affected by gang subcultures have to deal with violence and conflict as a way of life. Thus, conflict coaching/mentoring would seem like a useful tool to assist communities affected by these phenomena. However, conflict coaching/mentoring as defined by Brinkert (2002), has conventionally been understood as a dyadic (one-on-one) coaching/mentoring process.

According to Brinkert (2002), conflict coaching/mentoring involves working in a dyadic relationship with individuals embroiled in interpersonal conflicts. There are also various approaches to this kind of coaching/mentoring, including interest-based, problem-solving conflict coaching/mentoring (Tidwell, 1997); transformative conflict coaching/mentoring (Bush & Folger, 1994); narrative conflict coaching/mentoring (Winslade & Monk, 2000); and conflict styles coaching/mentoring (Brinkert, 2002).

In communities impacted by gang violence, the above strategies could work well as alternative approaches to dealing with gang subcultures. In the South Af-

rican context, the conventional punitive approach to addressing gang subcultures has largely failed to yield sustainable results (Petrus, Uwah, Davids, & Jonas, 2022; Jonas, 2015). This opens up opportunities for alternative approaches and strategies, including coaching/mentoring for communities.

Although the conflict coaching/mentoring approach was initially conceptualised as a dyadic model, as shown earlier with the integration of GROW and OSKAR into the GROUP model, the conflict model can be similarly integrated. The value of the conflict model is that it can prioritise the focus of community coaching/mentoring on the gang challenge specifically.

7. The Value of Community Coaching/Mentorship as a Strategic Asset for Addressing Gang Subcultures: The Case of the Northern Areas of Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth)

The final part of this discussion outlines some ways in which community coaching/mentoring could be applied strategically in a gang-affected community in Gqeberha, located in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. While much scholarship has been done on both gang subcultures, as well as community coaching/mentoring (see, for example, Pinnock & Douglas-Hamilton, 1997; Emery et al., 2011; Jonas, 2015; Davids, 2017), very little scholarship has been done on either in the Northern Areas of Gqeberha. This article is thus meant to be a contribution to the scholarship, especially as it relates to the region and community under discussion. The significance of this contribution is outlined at the end of the discussion, where some recommendations for policymakers, law enforcement structures, as well as civic and community-based organisations are provided.

A brief context of the Northern Areas of Gqeberha

The Northern Areas of Gqeberha shares similar historical origins to many other Apartheid-era created South African residential communities. With the implementation of the Group Areas legislation in the 1960s, people designated as "Coloured" (that is, persons defined as being of mixed racial and ethnic heritage under the Population Registration Act of 1950), were forcibly removed from their ancestral homes, and relocated to the northern outskirts of the city. Not long after these removals, the first gang was formed in 1968, known as the "Panga Boys" (Helenvale Urban Renewal Programme, 2011: p. 2). The increase in forced removals into the 1970s, created the ideal conditions for gangs to emerge and flourish. Thus, gangs found the ideal breeding ground in communities characterised by social disintegration and dysfunction (Jonas, 2015; Davids, 2017). Consequently, the gangsterism phenomenon has been an endemic part of community life for residents of the Northern Areas for decades.

In the present context, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated gangsterism in an already socially stressed community. The government-mandated lockdowns implemented in 2020 appeared to worsen the gang challenge (Thomas, Shaw, & Ronan, 2020). Prior to the pandemic, the Northern Areas communities, as well

as the authorities, were already struggling to adequately address gangsterism. The pandemic significantly increased the challenge on multiple levels. In addition to the impact of the pandemic, the ongoing macro-level issues of political contestation, corruption, unemployment, high poverty levels, stigmatisation and marginalisation, and lack of basic services have all contributed to ongoing gang-related activities in the area.

The above brief sketch of the Northern Areas suggests the need for various interventions to assist the affected communities. It is therefore within this context that community coaching/mentoring is presented as an option.

Youth coaching/mentoring

The most obvious group within the community that could benefit most from community-based coaching/mentoring programmes is the youth. Male youths are often the most at risk of becoming involved in gangs and other criminal activities. Various factors contribute to this. Perhaps the most important one is the lack of male guidance during the rite of passage into adulthood. Pinnock and Douglas-Hamilton (1997) stressed the connection between the involvement of young males in gangs, and their need for rites of passage and male guidance. Later, this argument was reinforced by Davids (2017) in her assertion that positive male role models who provide guidance to young men in gang-affected communities, could serve as a mitigating factor to gang involvement. Unfortunately, in communities such as the Northern Areas, the disintegration of the family unit, coupled with the absence of stable father-figures, have contributed to the lack of appropriate male role models. This is where community coaching/mentoring could play a key role.

Group coaching/mentoring programmes could provide a positive alternative to gang involvement. In the anthropological literature, various cross-cultural studies have been carried out on the structure and function of male age-sets, and their role in male rites of passage (see, for example, Gulliver, 1953; Foner & Kertzer, 1978; Ritter, 1980; Cronk, 1991; Skoggard & Adem, 2010). Typically, males of similar age would progress together through various stages of their growth and development throughout various stages of life, bonded together through rituals, and guided through these processes by male elders who act as mentors. A similar model can be used in group coaching/mentoring programmes for at risk youths, where males of similar age (forming an age-set), could go through various coaching/mentoring programmes that prepare them for adulthood in a positive manner, following the steps in the GROUP model, while also benefitting from the healthy male bonding that is a necessary part of the process.

Parental and family coaching/mentoring

Community coaching/mentoring programmes focusing on parents and families could provide much needed support in initiatives aimed at restoring these crucial social groups in the community.

In communities where family groups are unstable, the community as a whole suffers. In gang-affected communities such as those in the Northern Areas, there

is a direct correlation between the breakdown in families and the emergence of gangs. There is overwhelming scholarship to support the notion that gangs function, among other things, as substitute families for gang members, providing the kind of social and other support that they do not get from their actual families (see, for example, Decker, Decker, & Van Winkle, 1996; Reiboldt, 2001; Vigil, 2007; White, 2009; Sharkey, Shekhtmeyster, Chavez-Lopez, Norris, & Sass, 2011; DeLisi, Spruill, Peters, Caudill, & Trulson, 2013; Assari, Boyce, Caldwell, Bazargan, & Mincy, 2020).

Thus, interventions aimed at supporting the family structure in gang-affected communities, could have strategic value. The studies of Kliewer et al. (2006) supported the use of parental coaching/mentoring as a socialisation model for coping in violence-affected communities. Hence, utilising both the coping and problem-solving attributes of coaching/mentoring, parents/caregivers, and their children, can be supported in the development of the needed coping and problem-solving skills to enable the development of more stable family relationships and structures.

Community leadership and civic organisational coaching/mentoring

There are two ways in which community leaders could be capacitated through coaching/mentoring. The first is through coaching/mentoring training, where they could be empowered to develop coaching and mentoring skills. They would then be able to design their own community coaching/mentoring programmes, or bring coaching/mentoring skills into their consultations with community members and, in particular, rehabilitated gang members. Coaching/mentoring can be a supportive tool in assisting ex-gang members with reintegration into their community. Thus, community leaders with coaching/mentoring skills could become key resources to facilitate reintegration.

Community leaders could also benefit from coaching/mentoring as the recipients of coaching/mentoring support. They face many challenges that coaching/mentoring is ideally suited to assist them with. For example, Sullivan, Downe, Entwistle and Sweeting (2006) referred to three key challenges that community leaders need to contend with, namely, engaging with community members in the determination of community priorities; providing strategic leadership; and creating and developing collaborative partnerships with other agencies and institutions. Furthermore, community leaders also have to deal with the impact of COVID-19 on the challenges of community leadership (Ahern & Loh, 2021; Ryan, Coppola, Canyon, Brickhouse, & Swienton, 2020). Also, coaching/mentoring support for organisational leaders and their teams could be useful in assisting them to operate more effectively and efficiently. In this context, both group and individual coaching/mentoring support can play a key role.

8. Conclusion

In this article an argument has been made for positioning community coaching/mentoring as a strategic asset, particularly in programmes aimed at address-

ing the negative impact of gang subcultures. Specifically, how community coaching and mentorship can be understood within a specific context has been discussed.

Community coaching/mentorship has the potential to be a significant strategic asset for communities. This tool will enable them to address gang subcultures more holistically, and provide an alternative to the ineffective punitive strategies that have been used thus far.

In light of the above, some recommendations for policymakers, law enforcement authorities, and civic and community-based organisations are suggested. First, community and youth development policies should prioritise coaching/mentoring programmes that are essential for capacity-building, especially for the youth who are the most vulnerable to gang subcultures. Second, law enforcement structures should consider including coaching/mentoring programmes for both rehabilitated/reformed gang members, to assist them with reintegration into the community, as well as for correctional officers, to assist them with non-punitive approaches to managing offenders. Third, coaching/mentoring training should be provided for civic and community leaders, as an additional form of support, to aid them in their work within the community, but also to support them in dealing with the significant challenges of the work they do.

It should be noted that coaching/mentoring is not a silver bullet that will resolve all of the underlying issues that contribute to the growth of gang subcultures. However, if utilised effectively, it can play an instrumental and complementary role with other initiatives, as part of a holistic strategy to address the challenge.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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