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Gunay, A

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Experiences of youth mentoring through street dance: mentee and mentor perspectives

Amber Gunay

and

Alison M. Bacon

University of Plymouth, UK

Corresponding author:
Dr Alison M. Bacon
School of Psychology
Plymouth University
Drake Circus
Plymouth PL4 8AA
Tel: 01752 584805

Fax: 01752 584808
Email: ambacon@plymouth.ac.uk

Abstract

There has been limited research regarding the effectiveness of mentoring for at-risk youth in the UK and none focussing on a dance-based intervention. The present study explored experiences of a mentoring through street dance programme. Eight participants (age 16-18) and their mentor took part in semi-structured interviews which were transcribed verbatim and the data subjected to thematic analysis. Three emergent themes were identified: Relationship with mentor, Changes in outlook, and Coping with emotions. Data indicated that the programme resulted in increased mental wellbeing, desistance from antisocial behaviours, positive future outlook and greater awareness of life opportunities. A trusting, non-hierarchical mentor-mentee relationship was central. Inclusion of mentor narratives was a novel aspect of the study and allowed for insight into how this was achieved. Street dance itself provided a framework for confidence building, social levelling and bonding. Results are discussed in terms of future directions for good practice.

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Conflict of interest

Neither author have any conflict of interest to report.

Introduction

In 2016-17, 28,400 young people aged 10-17 were cautioned or convicted in England and Wales. Although this figure fell by 14% compared with the previous year, 16,800 of these young people were first time entrants into the criminal justice system (Youth Justice Board, 2018). While there is a substantial body of research concerning risk factors for criminality, rather less has focused on identifying factors that may divert already at risk young people away from an offending lifestyle. A recent Ministry of Justice review (Adler, et al, 2016) highlighted how therapeutic programmes tend to be more effective than those which focus on punitive and control approaches. One suggested approach is mentoring which is becoming an increasingly popular method of crime prevention, intervention and rehabilitation (Hanham & Tracey, 2017; Sullivan & Jolliffe, 2012; Ministry of Justice, 2014). This paper presents a study which explores the effectiveness of a long-term mentoring through dance programme as an intervention strategy for young people who are either at risk of offending, or who have previously offended. Despite widespread interest in youth mentoring, there has been limited empirical research regarding the effects of mentoring on young offenders in the UK (Bouffard & Bergseth, 2008; DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011; Hanham & Tracey, 2017) and none that we are aware of which has focussed on a dance based intervention.

The Ministry of Justice (2014) described mentoring as “*the pairing of offenders with a member of the community to help them improve their lives and reduce reoffending*” (p. 28). Mentoring relationships generally involve a person with greater experience, (mentor) providing guidance, instruction and psychosocial support to a less experienced person (mentee; DuBois & Karcher, 2005). Mentoring relationships may emerge naturally and informally (e.g. from a working relationship) or be established purposively, whereby an organisation matches volunteers from the community with young persons for a specified

period (Schwartz, Rhodes, Spencer & Grossman, 2013).

It has been suggested that mentoring comprises a series of complex interactions in which the goal is personal growth for the mentee (Holmes, Hodgson, Simari & Nishimura, 2010). Chan and Henry (2013) offer some explanations as to the mechanisms by which this growth may occur in the case of young offenders suggesting that psychological and instrumental social support can buffer against the influence of negative social contexts such as dysfunctional family relationships and antisocial peers. Mentors can serve as role models and offer encouragement to reengage with education, work or sport. Biographical accounts of young offenders have highlighted the establishment of a caring relationship with a non-parental adult as a watershed in positive life transformation (Chung, Little & Steinberg, 2005) and Adler et al (2016) highlighted how mentoring can be especially effective when used early on in a young person's potential offending career. Indeed there is a fair amount of evidence to suggest that mentoring can have numerous positive influences on youth, such as making them less likely to substance abuse (Cavell, DuBois, Karcher, Keller, & Rhodes, 2009), improve academic achievement (Grossman & Tierney, 1998) as well as reducing offending and re-offending (Maguire, Holloway, Liddle, Gordon, Gray & Smith, 2010). At risk mentees in the Big Brother, Big Sister (BBBS) programme in the US (Grossman & Tierney, 1998) were 32% less likely to have committed a violent act over the past year than young people without mentors. They also showed improved peer and family relationships, compared with a control group. A similar programme in Australia (Delaney & Milne, 2002) was shown to result in reduced offending, increased community involvement, improved self-esteem, communication skills and motivation. These outcomes were consistent in reports by the projects, the young people themselves, their families and police. Families in particular reported positive changes in attitudes and behaviour and associated improvements in family relationships in general (Delaney & Milne, 2002). A review by Jolliffe and Farrington (2008) suggested mentoring to

reduce reoffending by between 4 and 10%. A recent longitudinal study followed adolescent males who were mentored during their transition from a juvenile justice centre to the community (Hanham & Tracey, 2017) and reported how participants valued their mentor as a guide, confidant and “watchdog” against re-offending.

However, mentoring young people from vulnerable populations can be particularly challenging (Hanham & Tracey, 2017; Miller et al., 2012). Young offenders have often experienced negative relationships with authority figures and some mentors may be ill equipped to deal with difficulties which arise. A mentoring relationship which is terminated prematurely risks reinforcing the mentee’s negative perceptions of themselves and of adults, (Karcher, 2005; Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico, 2013). Furthermore, inconsistent, irregular relationships that last less than three months, where there is a disconnect between personalities, interests and expectations can have detrimental effects on the young person’s prospects (Jekielek, Moore & Hair, 2002). Both mentors and mentees bring with them a range of (often unconscious) needs, expectations and beliefs and the ability of both parties to work with these is paramount (Spencer, 2012).

The present study presents a qualitative evaluation of a community mentoring programme in which the key component is participation in street dance. This form of dance developed within informal, primarily urban, communities as a form of expression for young people and is popular across much of the world. Most contemporary street dance styles are associated with hip-hop and break-dance styles and are frequently improvisational and social in performance (Stevens, 2006). More recently, street dance has been utilised as a form of physical exercise, for artistic expression, and in competition (Saito, Soshiroda, & Tsutsumi, 2006). As an energetic form, street dance can therefore have similar health benefits to other forms of exercise, both physically and psychologically, such as stronger muscles, enhanced balance and spatial awareness, improved mental functioning, greater self-confidence and self-

esteem, reduced isolation and exclusion and greater trust (de Mota et al, 2011; National Health Service, 2016). Dance is also said to be a powerful tool for transformation of the mind, as well as the body (Lewis & Lovatt, 2013), improving cerebella function and cognitive processes (Hillman et al., 2014; Warburton, et al, 2013). Free movement can improve divergent thinking (the exploration of many possible responses to a challenging situation) whereas, choreography aids convergent thinking, finding the single, correct solution (Lewis & Lovatt, 2013). Dance has been used as a therapeutic technique for children with attention and emotion disorders such as ADD and depression (Hornthal, 2015) and to improve social competence in children for deprived backgrounds (Lobo & Winsler, 2008). It has been suggested that the strongest and most consistent psychological benefit of mentoring is the reduction of depressive symptoms, as well as heightening perceptions of vitality, energy, strength and general health (Koch, Morlinghaus & Fuchs, 2007). A study with girls aged 13-18 who had previously reported depression, constant fatigue and low self-worth, found that those who participated in dance classes twice a week, reported fewer stress-related symptoms than a control group who were not involved in dance. The benefits of the classes lasted between four and eight months after they had stopped participating (Duberg, Hagberg, Sunvisson & Möller, 2013). The inclusion of a dance element in the mentoring of young offenders therefore would appear judicious. However, we are aware of only one reported in the literature, the evaluation of a Hip-Hop dance program for disadvantaged youth in Canada (Beaulac, Kristjansson & Calhoun, 2011). The evaluation reported benefits in terms of improved social behaviours health and wellbeing, but did not focus on offenders or young people known to be at risk.

The present study examined the lived experiences of a street dance based intervention from the perspective of the young participants and the mentor. The aim was to examine how the experience had changed or influenced the young people involved and what they most

valued about it. We took an interview-based approach, recommended as appropriate for working with vulnerable participants (Miller et al., 2012) and widely used with youth offending populations (e.g. Hanham & Tracey, 2017; Newburn & Shiner, 2006).

Methods

Participants

The participants were recruited from a Youth Centre in a provincial UK city. The centre is non-profit and run by a charity which provides free and confidential information and support to young people aged 13-25. Service users can be referred to the centre by support workers or school, or attend of their own volition - it is situated in a busy area and invites drop-ins from young people in need of support at any time. The locality has several nearby areas classed some of the most deprived in the UK (Public Health, 2016). Participants were a male mentor from the centre and eight service users, aged 16-18 who had completed the two-year mentoring through street dance programme within the previous 6 months. All had either offended or were considered at risk of doing so. The latter were identified as at risk by their school or family due to their behaviour and/or because they were mixing with known offenders. Fifteen young people (12 males, 3 females) had completed the scheme within the previous 6 months, and were still using the centre and therefore still known to the mentor on an informal basis. The mentor approached them all informally at first, discussed the study with them. Ten of the fifteen initially expressed interest in taking part and subsequently met with the lead researcher (first author) to find out more and have any questions answered. Of these, eight young people agreed to participate, two female, six male. The imbalance of male to female participants reflects participation in the programme and demographics of the Youth Centre where only 25% of service users are female.

The mentor also participated. He was a NVQ Level 3 qualified youth worker with 10

years of experience working with young people. The mentor specialised in behavioural problems and had worked extensively with young people with challenging behaviours which led to their exclusion from mainstream schooling. He was also a dance teacher and choreographer. He was selected to work with this group of young people due to his experience and had been working for the Youth Centre for a number of years prior to taking on this role. The mentor as stated previously embodied values promoted by the youth centre of respect for young people, collaboration, empowerment, patience, celebrating difference, diversity and inclusivity.

Table 1 presents participant details, including pseudonyms used in presenting our results. Further details of the centre or participants cannot be presented for ethical reasons. Ethical approval for the study was gained from the university ethics committee and the youth centre. All participants gave informed consent. Parental/carer consent was not required as all participants were aged at least 16.

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Table 1. Participant details

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Schooling	Trouble with school/police?
Aiden	M	18	Regular	At risk
Charlie	M	16	Regular	Both
Kai	M	18	Excluded from multiple schools - Pupil Referral Unit	Both
Sasha	F	17	Excluded from boarding school	School
Olivia	F	17	Regular	At risk
Leo	M	18	Excluded from 5 schools in a month – Pupil Referral Unit	Both
Logan	M	17	Home Schooled	At risk
Dylan	M	17	Regular	At risk
Mentor	M	28	Mentor on the scheme	

The Intervention

The overall programme ran for two years and offered three to four, two-hour sessions per week, starting after school. Meetings comprised structured group choreography and mentees also learned the social history behind the steps they were performing. At the end of each session, mentees had an opportunity to freestyle in order to practice, build confidence and express themselves in a personal way. Outside these dance sessions, the mentor worked on a one-to-one with each mentee in a dedicated timeslot each week. These meetings were mentee led in terms of what they wished to discuss. They were also encouraged to approach the mentor at any other time if they wished to. The 1:1 sessions aimed to provide the young people a safe space to express or reflect on their thoughts, feelings and behaviours (past,

present and future) as well as allowing the mentor to check in with them, ascertain progress and make adjustments to the support he provided if necessary. This also allowed the mentor to judge whether the mentee was ready for additional responsibilities, for instance supporting him in teaching a dance class by running warm up and cool down sessions.

Every month, the mentor would dedicate half a session to group work where the young people would discuss in a group a dedicated motivational topic such as future aspirations. The rest of the session would involve team building and problem solving games to build the young people's resilience and ability to work with others. The mentor aimed to work in partnership with the young people to create a collaborative space in which sharing of ideas was encouraged. The Youth Centre itself aims to engender strong values of respect for others, belief in young people, creating a sense of community, self-praise and pride. The centre employs highly experienced youth workers and dancers from diverse backgrounds who embody these values and undertake to demonstrate patience unconditional positive regard towards the children and young people they teach.

Procedures

Participants were given a verbal briefing about the study, which also explained that interviews would be recorded, that they need not answer any questions they were uncomfortable with and that they could withdraw at any time if they wished. Any questions were answered and each person signed an informed consent form. Participants were interviewed individually in a quiet room at the Youth Centre. No notes were taken, allowing the interviewer to devote full attention to the participant to ensure they did not think the researcher was uninterested or worried more about the notes they may be making. There was no fixed time limit, and interviews lasted between 40 minutes and an hour. The participants were then given a written information sheet to take away which gave the researcher's contact

details and explained how to withdraw their data at a later date should they wish to do so (no participant did this). The mentor was interviewed first as we wished to obtain his perspective before we had awareness of the young people's comments. The mentor was then present for all interviews in case of any emotional distress or if support was needed, though this did not prove to be the case. He did not take part in the interviews with the young people in any way but was simply present in the background. The interviews were voice recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Analysis

A thematic analysis of the transcriptions was conducted according to the guidelines offered by Braun and Clarke (2006). A master table of themes was developed by an iterative process of reading and rereading each transcript, noting convergences and divergences in the data throughout. Both authors considered the data to ensure veracity of themes. These initial ideas were then clustered into three superordinate themes: (1) Relationship with mentor; (2) Changes in outlook, and; (3) Coping with emotions. We discuss these themes below.

Results

Theme 1: Relationship with Mentor

The mentor was asked what it takes to be an effective mentor, especially to young offenders or those with challenging behaviour. He provides serious insight into what is effective and where some mentors fall short,

You need to be able to empathise and you need to have a LOT of patience as well and be willing to try a lot of different approaches. Everybody works differently, everyone responds differently to different things and sometimes with young people, they just want to be able to talk to someone and not be, not get judged, about what they're saying. Erm, a lot of the times you'll find

that if they speak to other people, they'll be told, you know, certain things don't matter, or some things that they're saying are silly or it's not serious, but to them...it's really serious. It really matters. So to have someone who's going to listen to whatever they have to say and be able to, to empathise with them, that's a really important factor as well.

An emergent theme throughout was the importance of a positive relationship between the mentor and young person, which presents itself in a variety of ways. All of the young people interviewed said that their mentor was a person they could trust, with many stating that this was the most important factor in a strong relationship, and hence in effective mentoring. The mentor discussed the characteristics needed for effective practice,

the mentor being able to relate to the young person, is essential... So if you've got that kind of character of easily related and kind of, get on their level, then you'll, then you've got a better chance of helping them. So, it's vitally important.

One service user, Charlie, described the relationship as “close” as he met with his mentor “daily” who quickly became a person he could trust explaining it was an “important” factor in their relationship. Logan, agreed with the importance of trust and sharing Charlie’s view of closeness. When asked to describe the relationship between him and his mentor, Logan said:

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very close. Err... yeah. Over time, you gain such a bond with your mentor that it just never really goes away. Like I have so much in common with him as well so that helps a great deal.

The idea of common interests to help bond and relate to another person seems to be a clear asset in building relationships. However, the mentor believed it to be a little more complex.

You can't be the complete opposite to create a bond... Then again, it's not possible to have the same interests as everyone. I just think even if you haven't got the same interests as them, you still show interest in what they do, regardless of whether you particularly like it or not. Being interested and listening to what they've got to say about their passion is key.

Sasha thought the key to such a positive relationship between her and her mentor was *just someone that's always there when you need him ... not everyone that was there had the same approach, erm ... didn't really have the same vibe and connection with everyone else.*

When Leo was asked to describe his relationship with his mentor, he stated,

He was like a brother, like brothers

Dylan agreed,

I mean it's like an older brother thing really, for me anyway like. Someone that I know that I can always, that will always be a teacher but at the same time, someone that I can kind of go, if I have some problems, I can talk to him or if err, if there's anything that's troubling me, he'll help out you

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know. Someone who can, who I know will stand up for me and I know will teach me stuff and I know that can help me if there's any issues, someone I can always talk to

In addition to this, Dylan always wanted to impress his mentor, mentioning this multiple times throughout his interview, which he believed made him motivated to train harder and practice his dancing continuously.

like I would feel motivated every single morning like "I want to train, because next week, when I go see [MENTOR], I want to impress [MENTOR]." or its just you feel motivated, every single time, so I can impress this person

Dylan found himself copying his mentor as their relationship grew, wanting to be more and more like his mentor that he viewed as an older brother figure

I find myself doing stuff that [MENTOR] was doing, or I'd find myself saying stuff or like buying the same clothes

However, the mentor was aware of potential problems with this and says that he is constantly “mindful” of his actions, in and out of work

I've noticed that a lot of the young people that I've worked with, look to me as a role model and I notice, but not necessarily monitor, that they mimic what I say, do, wear, all that kind of stuff. So because I know that happens, when I'm with them or not with them, I'm always mindful of what I'm doing so I don't influence someone in a bad way.

Charlie believed that his mentor's energy, character and, the way that they both interacted was the key to success,

if he's giving good energy out he's giving it to me, I'm learning a lot from him just by him standing there and talking to me, that's all he can do.

Ben suggested that he wanted to do "bad stuff" but his mentor kept him out of trouble, just through his positivity and character

I could have had a badder person, in the mind, they could have been a bit off and I could have just become a bit off and started doing bad stuff and doing what I wanna do and being a bad kid really. He kept me on a straight path by being the person they were.

The mentor mentioned that

you can have all the qualifications and all the experience and have done all the research, if you're not good, communicating, not good at relating to people, you're not going to get anywhere

Theme 2: Change in outlook

Another prominent theme throughout the research was the change in the young people's attitude and outlook on their future. The mentor commented on this,

They've all changed, they were either in trouble and they got over that or they were really shy and they got over that or even some were a bit different and they learned to embrace that, because we were all a bit different. Like for example, I definitely stand out, I don't dress the same as anyone else or look the same so if we took a trip out and people would point or look and

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they would see how I handle that, that I would turn it into a positive which made them feel like they could be different and stand out.

Charlie found that his family noticed the change in his behaviour and that he found a new sense of motivation and concentration

my family started seeing that I was like just doing what I got to do. I wasn't slacking, I wasn't changing my mind, I was always on point doing what I needed to do in my life.

Logan also believed that he owed his change in attitude to working closely with his mentor, with his family noticing the change which has made him more driven and confident in what he does

I would say my family. Not more towards my behaviour but my attitude. Like I'm much more driven to what I want to do and much more confident and that's all down to working with [MENTOR] ... I would also stay with him a couple of hours after, to have a chat with him. Get to know him and stuff and he got to know me, which gave me a massive confidence boost.

Sasha also commented on increased confidence,

It's made me more confident, made me able to approach people and just take people for who they are and be okay to be myself.

Dylan also found a new sense of confidence which he could apply to all aspects of his life, with everything now being easier for him. He had been experiencing serious anxiety but found the stress and pressure was relieved when he started dancing,

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And now I just feel confident, I feel confident talking to people and on camera. It's led to so many things progressing, not just like my physical dance or whatever but just my confidence in general. I just find things easier... interviews!! For like college or jobs, I just find easy now ... it's not like a ... there's no pressure, I can just do it and not stressed about things, like ... I used to get paranoid about like all sorts. GCSEs. I was really paranoid about 5 years ago when I didn't need to, I was really scared about that environment. But when my GCSEs came around and I was dancing and doing all this stuff I was just like it doesn't matter, it was easier.

Some mentees also reported that the scheme had opened their eyes to new future possibilities. For instance, Dylan began to realise that dance could be a legitimate career option.

until I saw [MENTOR], do this stuff, I was like "So you can actually do it, you can actually do it as a job? You know it's not like just a hobby; something you do on the side? You can actually do it!" So definitely, it's like you see someone and you're like "that's what I want to do, I want to be there and I want be doing that thing" And you just get inspired so you just, you practice really hard and then you can do it, it shows you that it is possible, and it's not just like a dream you have, that it is possible.

Aiden had always been interested in dance but did not see a way to pursue that interest before joining the scheme,

Because I was always interested in dance but I just didn't know how to do it? So obviously... I saw them [MENTORS] talking about it and I went in

and did it and I wasn't really interested in anything else so...

Aiden developed the confidence to go for the career he wanted and had thought would not be possible:

my goal is to become an illustrator. I wanna be big because I love my art. So erm, but I wasn't very confident in myself and I didn't have the drive before to try and reach that, whereas now I have.

Two mentees. Kai and Leo, had particular behavioural issues prior to beginning the programme. When asked what kind of change he saw in himself, Kai said,

I felt better in myself, obviously. Because I stopped taking drugs, obviously I was always at [dance studios], helping out. So big change!.... It's helped me to grow up a bit, realise that there's different aspects in life and then just going out and getting drunk

Leo was in a pupil referral unit when he began mentoring.

I feel so much better; you know like life had changed a lot. Like I said, if I didn't meet my mentor back then, I would have carried on that way. I probably wouldn't have been here now and that's how serious it was ... I've changed a lot and everyone does say it.

The mentor explained how he had handled these two mentees,

Kai and Leo both attended pupil referral units when I started working with them and their teachers told me that they were two of the most challenging

pupils at the time. They wouldn't take directions, just did their own thing and ignored the teachers. I just spoke to them on a level, if they were playing up, I'd tell them what I was trying to do and that they were not being helpful. If they were at the back messing around, I would always bring them to the front and ask them to lead. Giving them a little bit of responsibility was really beneficial for them. They started acting differently and happy to be more involved. That wasn't very often, I mean, they realised really quick that they enjoyed it [dance] and we got on; there was a mutual respect there quite early.

Overall, this theme provides significant evidence that the mentoring scheme was effective in reducing challenging behaviour and increasing confidence and optimism about the future. While the aim was to support positive changes in the young people, the programme also promoted “being yourself”, allowing mentees to feel respected for who they were and the difficulties they brought with them. However one mentee, Olivia, did comment on the negative effects and feelings when she completed the scheme

*when I stopped having a mentor I just felt kind of lonely, I felt like I didn't really have, like my little guardian angel to go talk *laughs**

However, Olivia added that many people have noticed positive changes in her and that dance has given her the motivation to push herself. Finally, when asked what the disadvantages of the scheme were, she could not note any, what she did tell us was,

I think it [dance] helped me a lot with just pushing myself and giving myself motivation and believing myself and that I can do anything I put my mind to really and not putting myself down all the time I have had quite a lot of counsellors in my life and they've never really helped me on a personal level ... like ... someone like [MENTOR] for example who's my mentor, I felt like I could speak to him on a personal level like actually really he wasn't going to be fake all the time like I don't care, he would tell me how it is and help me out and every way he possibly could

Although Olivia had feelings of loneliness after completing the scheme, her sense of accomplishment and motivation remained. It is understandable that after two years in a formal mentoring scheme she may feel mixed emotions on completion. Olivia's story highlights the importance of ending the mentoring relationship appropriately so that gains are not lost.

Theme 3: Coping with emotions

Street dance is vigorous form and the benefits of exercise on mood are well-documented. A recognition of this is reflected in the mentor's comments when asked why he thought the scheme was so effective,

I think it's all just about getting active. I think you get active, healthy or even just learning a new skill you just feel a bit better about yourself. That helps, whatever you're trying to do, be better at college, or working or staying out of trouble. I think that mental and physical health is related so I think that people who suffer from depression or down or a low mood, physical activity can help them come out of that and when you're doing that and start to feel

better about yourself, you gain a more positive outlook on the things that you're currently doing or that you aspire to do

Every mentee commented on how dance provided an outlet for their emotions in some way, or allowed them to forget their problems. Having been excluded from mainstream schooling, Leo found a constructive way of releasing his anger, which positively changed his behaviour for the long term

I'm not as angry, you know like, I had that way of venting out my anger, I've calmed down.

Charlie also spoke about releasing and learning to control his anger:

Its kind like your emotions, if you get angry at someone you're just gunna explode but you've gotta learn how to control that and be nicer around people.

Logan was home-schooled, and reported feeling bored, isolated and depressed prior to joining the programme.

But I think it's just helped me express myself, like I have an outlet now, to let out those things that I couldn't express before, those things that I was too scared or too afraid to express I can now express through dance, you know. That mentor helped me learn that outlet, helped me find something that I could express myself with.

Olivia highlights how before joining the programme,

I didn't really have anywhere where I could release myself, like nowhere to go to express myself and dance. I just had my bedroom...

For Dylan, dealing with his problems was easier due to the “happy environment” created by the mentor,

if I was feeling upset it would always be a happy environment that I could come to, somewhere I could leave kind of all those problems, all those issues behind, get forgotten, just for a bit, because it's such a positive environment

These final comments illustrate how a combination of activity, together with emotional support and a positive accepting environment have interacted to make the intervention a success.

Discussion

This study explored the lived experiences of a group of at risk youth and their mentor, following participation in a mentoring through street dance programme. Like many mentoring schemes, a key aim was to prevent the initiation or escalation of offending behaviours. This aim was clearly met, even with regard to Leo and Dylan who had the most serious antisocial histories including being educated at a pupil referral unit having been excluded from school. However, participants also reported important benefits in terms of emotional wellbeing, discussing improvements in self-confidence, a stronger faith in their future and awareness of the prosocial opportunities open to them. Overall, our data suggests that the aims he described were met in full for these participants for whom mentoring, combined with a focus on street dance, has helped overcome a range of social, emotional and behavioural issues.

A novel aspect of the programme and hence this study is the focus on street dance. This is the first UK based review of a scheme including this form of activity and the importance of

the dance element in itself emerged as an important factor throughout our participants' narratives. Street dance is energetic and complex comprising movements which require considerable physical ability to perform. Improving skill and discerning progress appear to have played a vital role in boosting confidence. The dance also functioned as a framework for social bonding, supporting the growth of trust and positive social relationships with the mentor and between mentees, and as an outlet for negative emotions (Themes 1 and 2). Interestingly however, no participants spoke about dance in terms of its physical benefits. Cain et al (2015) found that levels of physical activity among adolescents during dance classes was generally quite low and recommended young people be encouraged to take up more vigorous forms of dance. Street dance is one such form, and talk of passion and excitement suggested that it was engaging. However, its power seemed to be as a common interest amongst participants and the mentor and as a social leveller. It may be that the nature of street dance brings specific social benefits to a young disadvantaged population for whom physical health is not a preoccupation. However, the most prevalent narratives concerned improvements in mental health. A number of participants reported feeling disaffected and socially disconnected prior to mentoring. Several mentioned depression or boredom, and some loneliness, for instance Olivia who had been at boarding school, and Logan who had been home schooled. All participants reported significant positive shifts in terms of self-confidence, happiness and excitement about their lives which they attributed to mentoring and to dance.

Another important outcome was widening opportunity. At risk young people and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, tend to lack the ability to set goals for the future or to plan ahead for their adult lives. This can be impacted by a combination of affective, attitudinal, cognitive and motivational components (Steinberg, Graham, O'Brien, Woolard, Cauffman & Banich, 2009), including a perception that they have little control over what happens and a

lack of positive expectations. These can be driven by life experience and are compounded by low mood and disaffection. In the present intervention, the mentor's comments under in Theme 2, Change in outlook, reflect how he encouraged the development of confidence and self-efficacy by giving mentees some additional responsibilities, such as helping to run the class. Comments by mentees such as Sasha and Dylan under this theme illustrate the effectiveness of this. Our data was collected post-mentoring and reflected increases in confidence and aspiration. Two participants expressed the goals of making dance a career having previously not been aware this was possible. Several others are currently at college or university or were applying at the time of the interviews.

A key aspect which emerged in every transcript was the excellent relationship the participants had developed with their mentor. This appeared to underpin all other advantages and participants comments about this are discussed in Theme 1. While previous research has also stressed the importance of this (e.g. Tolan, Henry, Schoeny, Bass, Lovegrove & Nichols, 2013), the inclusion of the mentor as participant in the present study was a novel approach which has allowed for insight into his practice and ability to engender mutually respectful and effective working relationships. A key aspect appears to be interacting with mentees at a similar social level whilst keeping the appropriate professional distance. Hanham and Tracey (2017) reported similarly in their longitudinal study of mentoring for incarcerated young offenders and questioned whether this was a need specific to that mentee group. Our results suggest not. Although all our participants were considered at risk, and some had already experienced minor infringements of the law, none were serious offenders or had been incarcerated. We concur with Hanham and Tracey's suggestion that mentors adopt a non-hierarchical relationship with mentees, in contrast to a more traditional authoritarian role which many youth have learned to distrust (DuBois & Karcher, 2005). In addition, in the present study, the focus on a positive mutually interesting activity was also an important

factor. The sharing of a common interest in street dance was a factor that emerged throughout the research as a social leveller and its inclusion in the programme further supported a perception of the mentor as relatable and an appropriate role model in the eyes of the mentees.

A further question is whether dance is simply a vehicle by which mentoring comes about or whether 'dance' itself is intrinsic to mentoring. It could be argued that any psychical activity may have achieved similar results simply through the positive effects of exercise. We suggest that in this case, a key aspect of the programme in question is the very accessibility of street dance for the specific young people involved. Not only is it free to do, requiring no special equipment or venue, and can be learned without formal coaching. Indeed, as Stevens (2006) explained, this form of dance developed informally within urban, often disadvantaged, communities. Furthermore, it is an established form of self-expression for young people, something many are interested in and willing to engage with enthusiastically. However, this is not to minimise the effects of the mentor in conjunction with this. His skills at supporting the mentees both emotionally, and in developing their dance skills cannot be underestimated. The Adler, et. al. (2016) review stressed the importance of interventions which are tailored to the mentees interest and abilities, help to build skills (social as well as practical) and include emotional support from the mentor. This street dance based programme presents evidence of good practice in all these respects.

Although this study has been successful in demonstrating the effectiveness of a mentoring through street dance scheme, this was only one sample of one project in one area of the UK. In other localities, where different social problems exist, alternative approaches may be equally, or more successful. Furthermore, we were only able to capture participants' experiences at the time of interview. Although all narratives presented positive outcomes, the longer term effects cannot be certain. Longitudinal studies, following up mentees outcomes

over time, and research in a range of social locations is desirable. Furthermore, we were not able to interview all who completed the programme and it is possible some other young people may have different experiences. Finally, it is worth noting that while all participants reported a positive relationship with the mentor, he was present during the interviews so there is a possibility this may have influenced responding.

Recommendations for good practice

1. Street dance appears to be a socially relevant and fun activity which can engage young people who might otherwise be at risk of offending or other unsafe social outcomes.

However, before street dance based interventions can be rolled out more widely, further evaluations will be required to test the validity of our findings in a variety of locations. These studies should also focus on explicating the mechanisms which make such programmes effective. Our first recommendation therefore is for further evaluation studies.

2. Promote interventions for at risk youth on the basis of socially relevant positive experiences, rather than emphasising health and exercise

3. Use mentoring programmes as an opportunity to widen awareness of career and study prospects.

4. Training of mentors to emphasise the non-hierarchical approach. Our present data highlighted the benefits of relating to the mentor as a role model and also to an extent as a peer, someone who had similar life experiences and could discuss issues with young people in their language and understand their position. The trust and respect that this appeared to engender was important to the establishment of mentor-mentee relationships and ultimately success of the programme (see for instance, comments by Logan and Charlie above, and the mentor describing how he spoke to challenging behaviour “on a level”). Although the mentor is managing the intervention, the ability to do so in an authoritative (as opposed to

authoritarian) way and still remain relatable appears to be a vital skill. Further evaluations can usefully examine the skills required for this type of mentoring, the extent to which mentor approach varies across interventions and the effects on success. Findings can then be built into mentor training programmes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this is one of the very few UK studies of mentoring which has considered a dance-focussed programme and the first in terms of street dance. The data have highlighted that for the young people involved the psychosocial benefits are most salient. The aspect that dominated the narratives throughout was trust and respect for the mentor. The inclusion of the mentor's experiences in the data is a novel aspect of the study which allows insight into how he was able to engender trust and support the development of positive relationships with mentees. The street dance in itself was important as a bonding activity, a social leveller and as an opportunity to develop skills in an area of passions in many cases. An important outcome over and above changes in attitude towards offending behaviour and improvements in mental health was the recognition of life opportunities which mentees had not previously been aware of. It is easy to forget that even in these times of massively widened access to Higher and Further Education in the UK, many young people are still unaware of opportunity or that it is possible for them to pursue their dreams.

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