



African Community Understandings of Ubuntu and its Application to Design of a Junior Basketball Program to Support Health and Wellbeing in Melbourne, Australia

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Abstract

Sports-based youth-development programs are found to increase community connection, health and wellbeing within migrant communities, yet there is a little attention paid to integrating Indigenous viewpoints, cultural norms and practices in the early conceptualisation, design and development of such programs. We analyse African-Australian community members’ views and practices of Ubuntu to inform the co-design of an existing sports-based youth development program, the Black Rhinos Basketball Program, for a younger age-group. Drawing upon data from a larger study exploring community members’ views about Ubuntu, community, health and wellbeing, this study employed individual interviews and focus groups with 22 community members to explore participants’ personal understandings of Ubuntu and how they could be employed in the co-design of the expanded program for children, young people and their families. Thematic analysis of the data highlights an integrated understanding of Ubuntu, health and wellbeing, which includes recognition, respect, sense

of family and belonging and reciprocity. These conceptualisations of Ubuntu were then applied to the design of the basketball program, with an emphasis on sport as an opportunity to practice role modelling and leadership. This study suggests that integrating indigenous philosophy and worldview into health interventions may cultivate and enhance values and skills that strengthen a young person's cultural identity.

Keywords: Ubuntu, community, health and wellbeing, co-design, sport

In 2022, Afri-Aus Care (“AAC”) in partnership with RMIT University Social Work secured funding from the Victorian Health Promotion Fund (VicHealth) to expand the existing Black Rhinos Basketball Program to support mental health and wellbeing among young people in South-Eastern Melbourne, Victoria. The aim of the project was to explore how a sport-based program could support young people (aged 5-14) and their families to connect with culturally responsive services that support physical and mental health and wellbeing. The proposed expansion incorporated a primary prevention focus, working with primary school aged children and their families to integrate leadership development, youth mentoring relationships, education tutoring and after school and holiday programs with the involvement of parents and family members in the program. Given the paucity of African worldview and values in existing sports-based programs (Onsando et al, 2021), a key aspect of the proposed project was to understand how African community members understand, experience and practice Ubuntu, and how that knowledge could be used as a framework of support for African Australian youth (5-14 years old) in an expanded Black Rhinos Primary Prevention Program.

Background to Afri-Aus Care Inc.

Afri-Aus Care (AAC) is an African-led not-for-profit community organisation that provides support services to African and other culturally and linguistically diverse community members in South-Eastern Melbourne, Australia. AAC has been working with RMIT University since 2019. AAC works to empower community members through culturally responsive service provision and operates as a drop-in community centre where service users can access employment support, job readiness training, culturally responsive counselling, community garden initiatives, sports programs, drug, alcohol and mental health information sessions, disability support and advocacy, and mental health assessments and referrals (AAC, 2023). Many

service users are immigrants from forced pathways who experience low-income and high rates of unemployment and represent disproportionately impacted communities who experience health disparities due to resettlement challenges, and inadequate and culturally unresponsive support services.

AAC partnered with the University of Melbourne and the Australian African Foundation for Retention and Opportunity (“AAFRO”) to deliver the *Empowering African Mothers: Ubuntu in Practice* program funded by the Department of Justice and Community Safety over a three year period (2020-23). This partnership resulted in the development of a set of Ubuntu guidelines, a toolkit, and practice principles that outline how to support African Australians and work in an “UBUNTU Way”. The new partnership between Afri-Aus Care and RMIT (from 2019) expands on the existing body of research and knowledge, including existing understandings of Ubuntu from administrators and staff, and aims to develop an understanding of Ubuntu from community members and service users connected to the Black Rhinos program.

AAC have managed the Black Rhinos Basketball Program, a grassroots crime prevention sports program for African youth (aged 18-30) since 2017 in Melbourne (Onsando et. al, 2021). The Black Rhinos began as a community-led initiative to prevent crime and build the resilience of at-risk youth (Onsando et. al, 2021). The program uses sport as a vehicle to connect at-risk youth and their families to culturally appropriate services at AAC, provide young people with opportunities to connect with other community members and develop positive social skills, and support their effective reintegration into the community (Onsando et. al, 2020; Young & Block, 2023). The Ubuntu philosophy was chosen as an underpinning framework to guide the culture within the existing Black Rhino’s program for youth 18+ years old and was considered appropriate for co-designing a new integrated and inclusive basketball program for children 5-14 years old.

Using the philosophy of Ubuntu and community-based co-design methodology (Till et al. 2022) to create a new program, the project sought to generate new evidence, opportunities, and possibilities to expand the existing program for a younger age group and define Ubuntu program delivery through the lens of the community. This paper therefore draws on data from the first stage of the program’s co-design, which incorporated the views of African community members about Ubuntu, community, and health and wellbeing. We sought to answer the following questions: ‘What is the meaning of Ubuntu for African community members connected to Afri-Aus

Care?’ and ‘How could Ubuntu be applied to the design of the new Black Rhinos Basketball program to support health and wellbeing?’.

Sports-based programs for youth development

Sports-based programs have been used to promote health and wellbeing among minority and marginalised populations in Australia (Cunningham et al, 2020). In general, such programs have been promoted on the premise of reducing marginalisation or enhancing physical and mental wellbeing, using frameworks such as ecological systems theory, supporting relationships, social capital, inclusion, sense of belonging, resilience, and navigating the social environment and social determinants of health (Frounfelker et al., 2020; Cunningham et al, 2020). While sports programs underpinned by such frameworks have been found to support integration and positive resettlement outcomes, many have been criticised as not being culturally sensitive and, being top-down and inadequately fostering stakeholder collaboration, unable to comprehensively serve community needs through holistic inclusion (Ahmad, et al 2020; Block and Gibbs, 2017; Spaaij et al., 2019).

A small number of studies emphasise indigenous viewpoints in sports-program design or delivery (Block & Gibbs, 2017; Brink, et al. 2020; Chigangaidze, 2021a). Block and Gibbs (2017) stress that anchoring program design, participation strategies and activities in community practices, norms and values, especially for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, may enhance connectedness both inside and external to the community. While these studies provide context for the role of culturally diverse communities in established sports-based programs, the literature shows little evidence of the framing and the deployment of Indigenous knowledge-based frameworks to conceptualise such programs in Australia and elsewhere, even though the concept of health and wellbeing differs between western and Indigenous cultures (Shakespeare et al. 2021). To ensure that the expanded Black Rhinos Basketball Program would effectively support young people and the health and wellbeing of their families in an ‘Ubuntu way’, incorporating the community’s views and practice of Ubuntu into the conceptualisation of the program was critical. We thus report on African-Australian community members’ views about the African philosophy of Ubuntu and its application in the co-design of a basketball program to support health and wellbeing among young people and their families.

Literature Review

Ubuntu, which is expressed in the maxim “I am because you are” or “I am because we are” is an Indigenous African philosophy (Ntibatirirwa, 2018). Broodryk (2008) defines it as an “African worldview based on the values of intense humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion and associated values, ensuring a happy and qualitative community life in the spirit of family” (p. 17). Ubuntu has at its core the recognition, valuing and respecting of personhood (Kuyini, 2013). The broad essence of Ubuntu is the strong relationship between the worth of the individual and those around them, and the value of service, participation and inclusion for collective wellbeing. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu (2000) states,

The person who has the quality of Ubuntu is one who is open and available to others, affirming of others, ...knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole....Ubuntu allows a person to say with confidence that “I am a human because I belong. I participate. I share....I am because you are” (p. 31).

Values and principles gleaned from the Ubuntu philosophy in the literature include notions of Ubuntu as community, recognition, respect for individual humanity, inclusion, participation, relationships, belonging, and collective wellbeing. Highlighting these values, Letseka (2000) asserts that “Ubuntu has normative implications in that it encapsulates moral norms and values such as altruism, kindness, generosity, compassion, benevolence, courtesy and respect and concern for others” (p. 180).

As a philosophy of life, the array of principles deriving from Ubuntu elucidate the role of values in societal conceptualisation, evolution and regulation of mores and behaviours. As Johnson and Cleveland (1999) observed, values are essential and pragmatic principles for accomplishment, learned and transmitted to successive generations as a psychological foundation for its further advancement. Values often dictate ways of thinking and perceiving the world (ontology) that lead to types of actions or behaviours expected of all members of a social group. Similarly, the values of Ubuntu generate ways of thinking and doing which are likely to be transformative for individuals and communities. In this regard the notion of “I am because we are” alludes to an integrative sense of what individuals and communities should think and do. From a social psychological standpoint,

Ubuntu values generate specific attitudes and behaviours among community members that are promoted and regulated by subjective norms (expectations of significant others) (Ajzen, 1991). The attitudes and expectations support the realisation of the goal of “I am because you are”, by requiring all members of society to strive through their thinking and behaviour.

Contributing to the transformative potential of Ubuntu in respect of behaviour, Chigangaidze (2021b) states that “Ubuntu...promotes the behaviours that make life worthwhile, promote health and reduce human suffering” (p. 2). Koenane (2018) emphasised that Ubuntu rejects violence, xenophobia and promotes *philoxenia* or love for a stranger, which supports values of helping and sharing. Thus “internalising the Ubuntu values means that individuals and their communities are encouraged to perform good actions” (Koenane, 2018, p.5).

Another transformation perspective that flows from the notion that “I am because we are” is the recognition of personhood and the importance of relationships. In Ubuntu, the priority of individual first before community is reversed, because the starting point is a pre-existing society in which individuality and personhood are nurtured through social connectedness (Tutu, 2011). Thus, “you are, only because the other is”. This is foundational to respect for persons (individual) and other principles and actions that are indispensable to realising the pragmatic ideal that “you can only continue to be if the other is”. In short, one cannot continue “to be” unless one ensures that others “are”. This essentialises the need to recognise and respect others as human beings, who are automatically included in family and community, with equal status and responsibility, and leads to participation, a sense of belonging and collective wellbeing (Kuyini, In Press). Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1999, 2011, p.31) captures this transformative potential by stating that Ubuntu allows the individual to affirm their being (or humanity) because they belong, participate and share with others, which enables “the other to be.” The individual is nothing without the community, the community is nothing without the individual (Bidima, 2002).

Other writers have explored the role of Ubuntu in creating a sense of belonging and sense of community through relationships and interconnectedness (Eze, 2008; Rankopo & Diraditsile, 2020), and responsibility and reciprocity which ensures collective wellbeing (Kuyini, 2013; Rankopo & Diraditsile, 2020; Tutu, 2011). Regarding responsibility, Ubuntu requires collective responsibility, which derives from interconnectedness (Nussbaum, 2003). Endorsing this line of thinking, Tutu (2011) suggested that because interdependency is the root of our being, the

individual has irreducible obligations to others, necessitating striving to live in ways that support the needs and interests of everyone, resulting in mutual flourishing (Tutu, 2000, 2011) or collective wellbeing (Kuyini, 2013; Rankopo & Draditsile, 2020).

Ubuntu embodying health and wellbeing

Researchers such as Chigangaidze, (2021a) emphasise the value of Ubuntu in conceptualising health and wellbeing and employed it to study mental health support and the multimodal approach to service delivery. The concept of health and wellbeing is understood differently in cultures around the world. It springs from the idea of being and thriving, and cultures have different ideas of what health and wellbeing entail. Under the philosophy of Ubuntu, community or context foregrounds the space where health and wellbeing are generated and maintained. In this regard, theories pertaining to well-being must be sensitive to the cultural context of the group for which it is applied (Adams & Salter, 2007). Related to this, Ubuntu endorses the idea that community embodies the space within which body, mind, and spirit (the three domains of health and wellbeing) thrive. Against this background, Chigangaidze, et al., (2021a) citing the work of Kasenene (1994) assert that an Ubuntu based health promotion approach focuses on “personal integration, environmental equilibrium, social harmony, including harmony between the individual, the environment and community” (p.322). Ubuntu principles such as inclusivity, belonging and striving for social harmony foster health and wellbeing (Chigangaidze, 2021a; Chigangaidze, et al., 2021b).

Methodology

This paper is contextualised within a larger study that sought to co-design an expanded version of the Black Rhinos Basketball Program for 5-14 year olds, with the Afri-Aus Care community in Melbourne, Australia. The co-design study employed community-based co-design (Till et al., 2022) to incorporate African-Australian community values and practices into the design of the expanded program (Goff et al., 2024). Culturally relevant frameworks such as Ubuntu and community-based co-design are useful approaches to conceptualise and operationalise preventive health and wellbeing programs (Brink, et al. 2020; Chigangaidzi, 2021a; IDEO, 2015), to support collaboration and achieve wellbeing outcomes beyond mere participation in sports (Cunningham, 2021). The research team, consisting of

six university social work researchers and the Afri-Aus Care project manager, practised cultural humility by emphasising collaboration, curiosity, respect, reciprocity, partnership and power-sharing to position the participants as co-researchers and contributors to the development of the new program, centralising the community's cultural expertise as central to the program development (Goff et al., 2024).

Project participants

A total of 22 community members took part in the co-design process, all of which were purposively selected by the Project Manager to ensure a diversity of perspectives and roles. The participants were selected based on their involvement with Afri-Aus Care services, their leadership role or cultural authority within the African-Australian community or their participation in the existing Black Rhinos Basketball Program. The existing relationships between the project manager and the participants was a crucial factor in the researchers establishing trust and partnership with the participants (Goff et al., 2024). All participants lived in Melbourne, Australia and comprised of female and male adults and young people, ranging in age from 18 – 60+ years. Ethics approval was granted from the 'Withheld' University Human Research Ethics Committee (no. 25696), and all participants provided their verbal and written consent.

Data collection and analysis

This paper reports on the analysis of data collected from a broader data set related to the participants views and experiences of Ubuntu, and its potential application to the proposed junior Black Rhinos Basketball Program. The questions informing this analysis were

- What does Ubuntu mean to you?
- How can Ubuntu be integrated into the Black Rhinos program?

Because a principle of co-design is to draw upon the diverse views and experiences of key stakeholder groups to develop a desired outcome (Sanders & Stappers, 2012), the first research question allowed the participants the opportunity to reflect on their own understandings, views and practices of Ubuntu. The second question explored how these views might be operationalised to meet the diverse needs of the community as program

beneficiaries. Responses to these questions were sought across multiple stages of the co-design process to allow for iteration and development of ideas (IDEO, 2015).

All 22 participants were involved at various stages of the program co-design (Goff et al., 2024). Stage one was a focus group, which aimed to establish relationships between the participants and researchers and co-develop creative tools for use in semi-structured interviews; stage two involved semi-structured qualitative interviews, which explored participants' views and experiences of Ubuntu, health and wellbeing and community in greater depth; and a final workshop incorporating a charette protocol (Howard & Somerville, 2014) to generate insights into the operationalisation of participants' views of Ubuntu, health and wellbeing and community into the new program. The focus group and workshop were conducted face-to-face onsite at Afri-Aus Care, and interviews were a combination of face-to-face at a location chosen by the participant, or by telephone. The focus group and interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and the workshop produced artefacts that represented participants' ideas and insights.

The audio recordings from the focus group and interviews were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis method. The participants were given the option to review the transcripts of their individual interview. Each transcript was then double coded by two different members of the research team according to sensitising concepts most relevant to the project outcomes (Ubuntu, health and wellbeing, community, and program priorities). After initial analysis, the researchers met several times to discuss the categorisation of key phrases, terms and ideas, to allow for the identification of additional themes and to develop a shared understanding. The results reported on in this paper are specific to participants' views and experiences of Ubuntu, as well as their ideas for how Ubuntu should be operationalised within the new program.

Results

Emphasising the participants' views and experiences of Ubuntu, and how the philosophy should be integrated into the new basketball program, we present our findings within four key themes. Across generations, we identified participant definitions of Ubuntu, the interrelated nature of Ubuntu, health and wellbeing, specific dimensions pertaining to the practice of Ubuntu, and an envisaging of an Ubuntu-informed basketball program.

Participant definitions of Ubuntu

Participants reported Ubuntu as a multifaceted worldview, knowledge system and reality through which they filtered their consciousness, culture, and identity, all of which guide their interactions and experiences. Most participants commonly characterised Ubuntu as embodied and internalised, with these ontological characteristics contributing to their interactions and relations with others. One participant said, “I don't know how to define it, but it's in your heart and how you define it is very challenging what Ubuntu means. It means everyone... we have a background and history.”

A sense of community and collective values was much discussed among participants. Many participants, despite their age or role within the community, described how Ubuntu was a thread that connected them to each other, for the greater good. For example, a participant reported that “Getting to understand Ubuntu and its principles and how that works, will help us as communities to live, to work together for the common good of the community.” Another reported that “Ubuntu means that we want to be together.” Most participants characterised Ubuntu in relation to positive actions or attributes, such as solidarity and co-responsibility, which would enhance a community's overall wellbeing. Their narratives illustrate interactions between the ontological nature of Ubuntu and its embodied relational expressions, such as through showing “a love and unity”, and “Togetherness, expectancy, core responsibility (or co-responsibility), fairness – everybody being treated the same. Because everyone comes maybe from an unfortunate background, and we want people to feel accepted and feel important.”

Together, the community members who participated in the research understood Ubuntu by its embodied and integrated interconnectedness to culture, history, identity, community and mutual wellbeing, all of which are promoted through a sense of collective responsibility.

Relationship between Ubuntu and Health & Wellbeing

Some participants demonstrated an integrated understanding of Ubuntu and the concept of health and wellbeing, which includes mental, physical and emotional wellbeing. Participants highlighted that their practice of Ubuntu informs and mediates health and wellbeing. Other responses capture this integrated understanding: “When I have family, I have everything (inclusive of health and wellbeing)”, and “You can't have

wellbeing without health”, and “Wellbeing is linked to happiness and satisfaction with life”, which Ubuntu offers.

For several participants, Ubuntu supports community harmony, which facilitates health and wellbeing. One participant noted that Ubuntu “helps us as communities to live, to work together for the common good of the community”, and that this harmony builds the social and psychological conditions for sustained wellbeing. Another participant suggested that Ubuntu principles and values were integral to maintain peaceful coexistence with others:

I see Ubuntu as the pinpoint to a happy life. Ubuntu is kindness, the values behind it is instilled in our culture, it’s instilled in all our religions. It is instilled in what our parents tell us every day... It’s instilled in human rights. It’s instilled in ethical values. So, I think anyone with a moral compass will agree with the Ubuntu principles and the message behind Ubuntu. And if you don’t, you are not one for peace and community.

For another community leader, such integration “starts with community teaching ... if there’s none of that teaching it would be difficult for us to grow as a community.” Thus, teaching is necessary and is facilitated by a sense of family and belonging which supports the development of self-concept, self-worth and wellbeing through a sense of belonging, social connection, family, and community. As social constructs, self-concept, self-worth and wellbeing are the result of social experiences and relationships with others in context (Crocker & Brummelman, 2018). In this regard, one participant said: “If you don’t belong you are lost.”

Dimensions of Ubuntu

Within the participants’ overarching definitions of Ubuntu and its relationship to health and wellbeing, specific dimensions of Ubuntu were identified. These were respect, responsibility and recognition, belonging and sense of family, and equality, sharing and reciprocity. They are presented as sub-themes below.

Respect, responsibility and recognition

The responses of participants showed that respect for others and responsibility were expected within the African Australian community. Participants articulated their understanding of Ubuntu as involving respect

for other people, acknowledging their being, which is about recognition. One of the participants explained:

We teach our kids about respect. You have to respect Uncle, you have to respect Aunty, you have to respect someone when they tell you something. Don't just throw the word [around]. You have to respect the other people when you are young. So, when there is respect in the community, there is love. When there is no respect, there is no love."

This response highlights the benefits of respect and responsibility, and failure to take responsibility can have negative effects. In explaining the implications of failure to take collective responsibility in relation to a past incident, one participant said, "I am because we are." In this regard, responsibility offers a connection to a sense of community.

Similarly, co-responsibility implies equality in showing reciprocity, sharing of burdens, duties, joy, problems, and making mistakes. Younger study participants who were active members of the existing Basketball program discussed their sense of responsibility to their team and each player's role within it. One said, "We all had responsibility as to why he [a team-mate] left. We had responsibility as individuals involved on the court at training" (to ensure he remained in the group). Another then responded, "Accepting responsibility in where we may have made an error." Acting on one's responsibilities to others was therefore considered by participants as a reciprocal process of 'being ok.' In their words, Ubuntu "makes sure someone is ok, someone also makes sure I am ok... we can all be ok."

Belonging and sense of family

To many participants, Ubuntu is a sense of belonging and family, which flows from recognition and respect for the individual. The benefits of belonging and the potential for distress associated with not having a sense of belonging are well documented (Allen et al., 2021; Cacioppo et al., 2015; Hari, 2019) and the participants' responses reflected both. Alluding to sense of belonging and family, participants stated that Ubuntu means togetherness and family: "It's like coming together, randoms I didn't even know would call me 'Oh Brother'. Family-hood. Bringing together, togetherness... so, for example, me helping people." Another participant reported that "Ubuntu is like family, first is like family and coming together. It's a reunion. To come together and help each other, with respect, with equality, and just 'we care

too'. And that's everyday life." To these participants, belonging and family, like respect, recognition and responsibility, means acting in ways that create a better community.

Equality, sharing, reciprocity

The majority of respondents talked about the links between previously reported dimensions of Ubuntu in relation to equality, sharing and reciprocity, which necessitates responsibility to self, others and shared or co-responsibility. Showing reciprocity was by acting towards each other, doing for self and others. Of reciprocity, participants said the following:

- It's kind of like I saved a life. And then that person could then go on and help someone else. So, it's a circle going around.
- So that's a concept of Ubuntu, because we are all helping each other. Tomorrow, they could be helping me.
- Giving back to community, reciprocity, bounded solidarity, giving more than you receive, giving first, making sure others have their needs met first.

Sharing non-material resources with others was highlighted by one participant as an enactment of reciprocity, which also illustrated its relational ontology. They said:

Everyday Ubuntu has shown me to be kind, generous and give without expecting. I think Ubuntu is 'I am because we all are equal', it taps on so many different values... And without equality, there's no equity. Without equality there is no humility, or togetherness.

Such solidarity and reciprocity also extended to sharing other resources, such as information or time. One participant reported that they 'protected' their community health and wellbeing, which included political, social and financial domains, by providing guidance or information. They reported that "I will share with my community because if all communities are well, we are all well and the wider community is well." Thus, participants felt that Ubuntu was directly related to collective responsibility to both the functioning and wellbeing of their community through reciprocal actions.

Ubuntu informing the design of the Program

The findings so far highlight the participants' views and experiences of Ubuntu, which illustrates a set of principles, worldview and actions that are embodied by individuals for the collective good. Because the purpose of the research was to co-design a basketball program grounded in Ubuntu philosophy, the participants were asked about how Ubuntu could inform the new program, including being informed by how Ubuntu already operated within the existing, senior team. As one participant said:

Ubuntu is sort of reflected in the basketball. Because, like, in order for me to be equal, we have to go together. And it's like in order for one person to be successful in the team, the whole team has to contribute together for that person's goal to be achieved. Basketball then pushes everyone to look beyond the differences that's in the community. To look beyond the colour differences, the racial, social, and just all the differences that we have. Put them aside for the moment, and just focus on building the relationships now, on just one focus. On one mission of basketball, or one mission of the local drug action team, or one mission of...whatever programs that we are doing. And it's like, that's why I am here. That's why I love the Black Rhinos.

For the new basketball program, participants believe that Ubuntu principles such as community, family, respect, responsibility, sharing and reciprocity were important to the design. In this regard participants said:

If you understand that there is a lack of trust, towards people of any other colour, that aren't of African background, you can understand that 'OK, if this is what they need, then let's cater to that'. And build them to a point where they are confident to attend any other basketball program.

I think that Ubuntu would really engage people. Not only engage them, will break down those barriers and break down those perceptions amongst the CALD

communities...It will bring a sense of community and it will bring kids together.

The importance of role models and leadership

Within their imagining of the future Ubuntu basketball program, community members suggested the need for role models, leaders, and mentoring opportunities for youth within and beyond sport.

Presently, role models include parents, significant others, coaches and mentors in the Black Rhinos Basketball program, who play this role through informal and formal interactions. The interview participants emphasised the importance of communication and the active engagement of mentors (as role models) in sports and other activities within an expanded basketball program. One participant said, “Communication between the mentor and the parents too will be very important.”

Participants maintained that success of role models will depend on engaging “People who know how to work with young people. People who can identify with the young people.” Another said:

When I think of that [engaging with young people], I think of how impressionable young kids are, and how important representation is. So, I think in terms of what the program would look like, obviously the mentors that are being a part of that being relatable, being people that kids can have a connection with.

Participants also reported that it was important to engage people who were currently or previously involved with the Black Rhinos program, to create the conditions for deep and enduring mentoring relationships, both inside the program as well as outside in the community.

According to the participants, Ubuntu is perceived as having the potential to enable a new form of leadership that enhances the prospects of young people. Speaking about older community leaders' approach, a young person said:

One thing that I've noticed is that in the smaller groups of the communities, the leadership has always been an issue and leaders have always been I guess stuck in the old ways and not wanting to

move forward... I think we have a lot of young leaders out there that I guess haven't had that opportunity because of that. They become reluctant to actually step forward and say, 'Hey I'm here, I want to be a leader and I want to be involved and more'."

Many African community leaders emerge organically within groups based on individual ability to take initiative or exhibit different forms of power. The failings of such leaders can be attributed to many factors including, limited understanding of how leaders ought to lead in the new Australian context and not holding an Ubuntu-mindset. Alluding to the latter, one of the young people said "I feel like if we all had the Ubuntu mindset we would have future leaders. More people contributing to the society and an overall better economy. I genuinely believe that."

For the young focus group participants, the current "tough times" experienced by African communities is ideal for developing leadership skills among the prospective new basketball team members, because

At ages 5-12, I believe that is the perfect time to develop great leaders. There's a quote that says, 'Tough times create great leaders. Great leaders create good times, good times create weak leaders, weak leaders create tough times. And it's an ongoing cycle. In order for us to break that cycle, we've got to find ways to create strong leaders. But not like – I guess, give them tasks that are not easy, but not overly difficult.

These words from a participant highlight how they viewed the new program as an opportunity to develop future leaders, who would embody Ubuntu values in support of community wellbeing.

Discussion

Understandings of Ubuntu

The results of this study confirm diverse understandings of Ubuntu in the extant literature but uncover other understandings unique to the study population, which will constitute supportive ways for conceptualising and implementing a new Black Rhinos Basketball Program for children 5-14 years old.

Respect and recognition as primary elements of the Ubuntu concept involve respect for other people, acknowledging their being, which support the sense of belonging. To our study participants, recognition and respect for the individuals constituted the bedrock for belonging, sense of family, and community. The relationships created by a sense of community were linked to equality with others, responsibility towards others, sharing, reciprocity and acting for a better community. Responsibility along with sharing and reciprocity were noted as occurring in relation to sharing food, parenting, including transporting children to school or sports activities and other social good with the aim of creating better community. Overall, these findings reflect the work of authors such as Bidima (2002), Eze (2008), Letseka (2000), and also Tutu (2011) who maintains that Ubuntu is embedded in community and it is in the community context that the individual learns to be, to share, and reciprocate for collective gain (Rankopo & Dradistsile, 2020). Thus, shared responsibility and reciprocity are behaviours that aim for collective good and the promotion of wellbeing.

Older community members suggested that in a foreign context like Australia, Ubuntu enables them to have a sense of belonging, safety, connection and support. In many African traditions and cultures, family and community connectedness are core elements of the social structure. When people from forced migration pathways settle in Australia, these elements are not present, and with the resettlement process comes challenges such as loss of culture, social capital, community, and language as well as the need to adapt to a new and foreign environment (Kuyini & Kivunja, 2018). By practicing co-responsibility and reciprocity, these aspects of Ubuntu enabled those participants who had migrated to Australia to feel connected to each other and their collective and individual histories as they resettled in a new place with cultural practices that may diverge from their own (Abur & Rugare-Muganbati, 2022).

Challenges associated with resettlement lead to newly arrived forced migrants feeling alienated, lonely, experiencing disadvantage, and ultimately social isolation (Cunningham et al., 2020). The re-introduction of Ubuntu into the lives of African diaspora in Australia can lead to positive social outcomes, support in rebuilding a sense of community, provide opportunities for social connections, and address some of the underlying barriers to participation in the wider society (Mayaka & Truell, 2021). In African cultures the Ubuntu worldview empowers the individual, families, and the community as a whole and embeds values such as respect, reciprocity,

togetherness, safety, belonging, and connectedness within the culture, culminating in better wellbeing.

How can Ubuntu be applied to the Black Rhinos Program?

Participants said that the existing Black Rhinos Program created a place where these different experiences of health and wellbeing could be realised. While the participants' understandings of Ubuntu provide several ideas for co-designing the new Black Rhinos Basketball Program, the notion of community is pivotal. Therefore, the co-design of the program for a younger age group could start from the premise of the child as belonging to community. By creating a community akin to the traditional African concept of community, a mix of the divine, sacred and the mundane (Mbiti, 1978; Bidima, 2002), young people should be able to cultivate specific attitudes and behaviours within a context where community others' expectations (subjective norms) generate enabling mental states to work towards collective wellbeing. As noted earlier, under Ubuntu, context or community foregrounds the space where health and wellbeing are generated and maintained. Community embodies the space within which body, mind, and spirit (the three domains of health and wellbeing) thrive. And social spaces such as sports programs, if guided by Ubuntu, will create contexts for body, mind and spirit to thrive. Additionally, the inclusion of the Ubuntu framework in the design of the expanded Black Rhinos Basketball Program will ensure that players, coaches, parents, and any other stakeholders involved have access to support, a community, and opportunities for empowerment. An Ubuntu-inspired community results in strong community bonds, and a collectivist attitude, it forges strong community relationships, and acts as a support structure for vulnerable individuals and families within the community.

Another important understanding that emerged from the participants is the integration of Ubuntu with health and wellbeing. In this sense, promoting health and wellbeing comes with practising Ubuntu. The two are not separate entities; the realisation of one leads naturally to the realisation of the other, whereby "Sport can be a bridge that leads to increased health and mental wellbeing ..allows young people to increase their sense of personal empowerment, ... ability to cope and helps with social recognition and boosts self-esteem" (Pittaway & Dandas, 2021, p.3). An Ubuntu community would strengthen this reciprocal effect of sports and wellbeing. In this study, participants believed that Ubuntu principles can be applied to

the new Black Rhinos program through an inclusive environment that allows participation in sport. Such participation will enable relationship building opportunities with peers, between parents and children, and provide support outside of sport for community members.

Sport can be used as a tool to engage young people and provide them with learning opportunities and necessary supports such as mental health education, alcohol and drug education, job readiness training, employment support, opportunities to make social connections to reduce the likelihood of social isolation and address loneliness. In this study, community members stressed the importance of education in areas such as mental health, alcohol and other drugs (“AOD”), and leadership as part of the new program. Poor mental health, and AOD abuse contribute to many social, emotional, and behavioural problems among African youth (Mwanri & Mude 2021) and education is a key ameliorative pathway. However, such an education requires culturally responsive approaches like Ubuntu. Incorporation of Ubuntu in the delivery of AOD, mental health education would create a safe, judgement-free education environment, where community members feel respected, valued, and supported. The expanded Black Rhinos will offer such a space for mental health and wellbeing education or engagement that will support health development in children.

Another finding highlighted by community participants is the importance of role models, leaders to guide personal development, and mentoring opportunities for youth within and beyond sport. Role models support children and young people’s development through social learning (Bandura, 1977). In community sport this is embodied by coaches, captains, and leaders within the team (Van Der Veken et al. 2020), who create an environment where participants have a sense of belonging, safety, and promotes values such as respect, teamwork, connectedness, and collaboration. Role models and parents play a key role in developing a child’s skill through participation in sport, therefore role models need to have a clear understanding of the Ubuntu framework to support African youth in culturally responsive ways. The Ubuntu framework will equip Black Rhinos coaches, mentors, team captains, and parents with Ubuntu values embedded into the culture of the organisation and will help the team to operate in a similar manner to the Afri-Aus Care community or an African Ubuntu community

Conclusion

Using data from a broader study, this paper highlights the diverse understandings of Ubuntu among African-Australian community members. The findings indicate an integrated understanding of Ubuntu, health and wellbeing, which includes recognition, respect, sense of family and belonging and reciprocity. The individual is grounded in community as context for developing connections, sense of family, and belonging which enhance health and wellbeing through sharing and reciprocal support. Without a context to ground the self, self-worth is not easily internalised. Therefore utilising Ubuntu as a framework supports the formation and consolidation of positive self-concept, cultural identity and perceived self-worth, which are internalised, enabling healthy developmental trajectories of children and young people. The findings also suggest that the use of an Indigenous philosophy such as Ubuntu to frame sports-based programs has both a practical advantage and, potentially, a culturally-strengthened identity and wellbeing outcome. Applying the Ubuntu principles in a sports-based program such as the expanded Black Rhinos Basketball Program will enable children and young people, through interactions with peers, mentors and community members, to cultivate values, principles and leadership skills that could contribute to health and wellbeing.

The implications of the findings for practice include fine-tuning the governing principles of Afri-AusCare; fashioning the expanded Black Rhinos program philosophy from the emergent Ubuntu principles for young people and mentors; and using the health promotion and healing principles of Ubuntu to ingrain recognition, sharing, belonging, social harmony in the community, and create bridging social capital with the broader Melbourne community. Future research could focus on how these findings can be translated into practice and their role in improving wellbeing outcomes for children and young people. Overall, the study findings add to practice ideas, informed by strengths-based and decolonising approaches, and co-design as examples of creating community-based assets and resources for improving health and wellbeing of children and young people within African communities.

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