**BUILDING THE PRACTICE OF
COMMUNITY COACHING
IN SOUTH JERSEY**

Landscape Report

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Executive Summary

In February 2020, the Community Foundation of South Jersey (CFSJ) launched a new program, known as Transform South Jersey, which was designed to help small cities and towns build trust, increase social cohesion, and work together to inform community development based on shared values. To help the selected Transform South Jersey towns advance through the process, four community coaches were engaged to support and guide residents of the towns as they sought to self-organize and create action plans. CFSJ staff expect to offer community coaching as support for change efforts in South Jersey in the future and wanted to know more about how other organizations and other communities were working with coaches to support residents in making change. Capturing the positive experiences of Transform South Jersey coaches, while also learning what could be improved, is an additional priority in planning for future community coaching engagements.

CFSJ is interested in developing a practical, replicable approach to community coaching that draws on current best practices and supports professional growth of its coaches towards increased effectiveness in communities. To aid the organization in developing its approach, I developed two reports: a landscape report and operational guide. In this landscape report, CFSJ staff and board will find information on the broader landscape of community coaching programs, including:

1. How community coaching is defined by practitioners
2. The three change goals are most commonly supported by coaching
3. How coaches are hired and positioned in relationship to the community
4. The skills coaches most often possess and what roles they play within a change effort
5. Common challenges faced by community coaches and coaching programs, and ways to mitigate those challenges

Immediately following the discussion is an appendix listing the coaching programs referenced or consulted for this report and a list of researchers and publications that cover the topic of community coaching.

An accompanying operational guide builds on the landscape report to help organizational leaders think through choices that need to be made to establish a community coaching practice and what supports can be provided to help. The intended audience for the guide is funders, intermediary organizations, or other similar entities[1] seeking to add community coaching as a support for change efforts. A resource appendix offers some specific trainings, exercises, books, and articles organizational leaders (or individual coaches) can use to build skills and confidence.

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[1] Information for individuals on how to effectively coach communities can be found in *A Field Guide to Community Coaching* or the monograph *Guiding Sustainable Change*, both of which offer a slate of additional resources to learn about the practice of coaching.

Introduction

The Community Foundation of South Jersey (CFSJ)'s mission is to "help South Jersey residents harness the power of philanthropy to transform their community and the issues they care about most."[2] CFSJ manages donor-advised funds, raises funds from other grantmakers to re-grant to local nonprofits, and runs a limited number of programs directly. All grants and programs are focused in the eight southernmost counties of New Jersey. Transform South Jersey, launched in February 2020, is a program designed to help small cities and towns build trust, increase social cohesion, and work together to inform community development based on shared values. To support this work, CFSJ committed $100,000 to each town for staffing and project expenses, training and coaching supports, and assistance establishing a locally controlled endowed community fund.[3] Interested towns attended information sessions, performed a "community readiness" self-assessment, and applied to CFSJ through a competitive process to be selected as a Transform South Jersey community.

CFSJ adopted the Orton Family Foundation's "Community Heart & Soul" model as the framework for Transform South Jersey's project activities. Community Heart & Soul is a four-phase process of resident engagement, created in 2004 and designed specifically for small towns.

To help the selected communities advance through the program, four community coaches were selected to work with the following six Transform South Jersey municipalities:

- Hammonton (Atlantic County), population 14,781
- Willingboro Township (Burlington County), pop. 31,887
- Winslow Township (Camden County), pop. 38,669
- Downe Township (Cumberland County), pop. 1,501
- Woodbury City (Gloucester County), pop. 10,086
- Salem City (Salem County), pop. 5,297

While initially intended to be a two-year program, significant delays during the COVID-19 pandemic have extended the timeline for completion. CFSJ staff anticipates that the program will now wind down in the summer of 2023.

Objectives and Research Questions

CFSJ staff expect that they will want to offer community coaching as support for change efforts in South Jersey in the future. Community Heart & Soul is one framework for coaching, designed to support a specific engagement process, but the idea of coaching for community change has been around for at least forty years.[4] CFSJ wanted to know more about how other organizations and other communities were working with coaches to support residents in making change.

At the same time, the Transform South Jersey coaches, who had been gathering regularly to discuss their experiences and challenges, were noticing the value of their coach cohort in generating its own

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[2] Community Foundation of South Jersey website. Retrieved October 6, 2022 from: https://www.communityfoundationsj.org/aboutus/

[3] Press announcement. Accessed March 17, 2023 from https://njheartland.org/cfsj-announces-transform-south-jersey/

[4] See Appendix A for a short description of how, in the 1980's, MDC Inc. played a role in spreading the idea of "guiding" communities rather than "leading."

social capital. One described the experience as its own special community that both enhanced the experience as an individual coach and made the collective network stronger.[5] Capturing the positive experiences of Transform South Jersey coaches, while also learning what could be improved, became an additional priority in planning for future community coaching engagements.

CFSJ is interested in developing a practical, replicable approach to community coaching that draws on current best practices and supports professional growth of its coaches towards increased effectiveness in communities.

Project Objectives
- Provide context for CFSJ staff and board by describing the current landscape of community coaching
- Identify the characteristics and tools needed to be an effective coach
- Create an operational guide that outlines the skill-building, professional development, peer network, and other supports, that CFSJ should provide to future community coaches to foster their professional growth and enhance their effectiveness

Research Questions
- What are the models of community coaching that have been demonstrated to support positive community change?
- Where are community coaches currently working and in what context? What current researchers, funders, and communities of practice are supporting the field?
- What skills, tools, and other supports do coaches rely on most in the course of their work with communities? What roles do they play in communities?
- What skills, tools and other supports were missing in Transform South Jersey?
- What specific supports should CFSJ provide to community coaches and how?

Process
To create a landscape report and operational guide for CFSJ, I began with a review of published articles, guides and evaluations of community coaching practice. CFSJ staff provided *A Field Guide to Community Coaching* by Mary Emery, Ken Hubbell, and Becky Miles-Polka as an introduction to the field. Additional information was located by searching peer-reviewed journals for articles focused on community coaching, community development, and foundation-funded community change initiatives. When research articles identified a community coaching program as currently operating, I reviewed organizational websites to gather further information.

In late 2022, I held informational interviews with staff of the Orton Family Foundation and Building Healthy & Equity Communities - New Jersey, and with a community coach within the Hometown Pride program of Keep Iowa Beautiful. I also held an informational interview with a staff member at Dakota Resources, who both manages the program and serves as a coach. Interviewees provided additional clarity on how programs are structured and how coaches engage with communities.

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[5] Author's notes, May 2022.

In December 2022, I held qualitative interviews with each of the four Transform South Jersey community coaches. Coaches were interviewed individually, using a standard interview protocol (provided in Appendix C). Three of the interviews were recorded and transcribed prior to coding. One was not recorded, and subsequent coding is based on my written notes. Interviews were coded for definitions of community coaching, themes of skills used and roles played by coaches, gaps in coach training or program structure, as well as for themes of how and where coaches seek support.

Findings from published research, web sources, and interviews were then synthesized to create this landscape report and an operational guide. The operational guide builds on the landscape report to help organizational leaders establish a community coaching practice. The intended audience for the guide is funders, intermediary organizations, or other similar entities seeking to add community coaching as a support for change efforts. Information for individuals on how to effectively coach communities can be found in *A Field Guide to Community Coaching* or the monograph *Guiding Sustainable Change*, both of which offer a slate of additional resources to learn about the practice of coaching.

Limitations of the research
There are limitations to both the review of published sources and interviews that CFSJ should take into consideration. While the literature review was thorough, it was not exhaustive. Sources use different names for similar practices and approaches, and it is therefore possible that relevant sources were inadvertently excluded from the search.

Qualitative interviews were limited to current Transform South Jersey coaches. The small sample size for coach interviews (4) and small sample size of communities in which the coaches work (6) limits generalizability of the findings and the recommendations in the operational guide. What worked this time may not work in all South Jersey communities or in communities in different regions. Additionally, one of the South Jersey coaches highlighted that evaluation of and feedback for coaches is limited. There are no formal mechanisms for coaches to receive feedback from community members or from CFSJ. Therefore, the efficacy of coaching practices has been self-reported and may be more or less effective than coaches perceive them to be.

1.   What is community coaching?

"Sometimes it is easier to list what community coaching is not than to say what it is."[6]

While descriptions of the practice abound, it can prove challenging - even for those working as coaches - to provide a succinct distillation. Publications describe coaches as being engaged in goal-setting[7][8][9], fostering learning[10][11], and guiding or stimulating change[12][13] in communities. Importantly, goal-setting and work processes are oriented to the community's interests and aspirations, not the coach's[14][15]. Coaches foster individual and collective growth in community members by releasing potential[16], empowering participants[17], and building capacity[18].

During interviews, I asked Transform South Jersey coaches and coaches working in comparable programs to provide their own definition of community coaching. Multiple coaches described themselves as being a resource or guide, knowledgeable of, but also one step removed from the community, and oriented towards helping a community maintain focus on goals and achieve success. Interviewees provided definitions of the practice which, when combined, encapsulate community coaching as understood by current practitioners:

> *Community coaching is providing a group of people that want to come together with the tools to be successful in meeting their goals.*

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[6] Mary Emery, Ken Hubbell, and Becky Miles-Polka, *A Field Guide to Community Coaching*, (2011), 11. Accessed from: https://cyfar.org/sites/default/files/cyfar_research_docs/A%20Field%20Guide%20to%20Community%20Coaching.pdf

[7] Kenneth Cohen, Lorie Higgins, Nick Sanyal, and Charles Harris, "Community Coaching: Answering the Call for Innovative Approaches to Community-Based Development Initiatives", *Community Development*, 39, no. 4 (2008): 74. doi: 10.1080/15575330809489659

[8] Antonia Lewis, Elena Tamanas Ragusa, and Jonathan P. Scaccia, "Coaching Practice in Public Health Partnerships: The Role of Coaching in Advancing Community-Based, Public Health Collaboration," New Jersey Health Initiative (October 2022): 4. Accessed from: https://dawnchorusgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Coaching-Practice-in-Public-Health-Partnership.pdf

[9] Community Heart & Soul, "Coach Training Program" (Community Heart & Soul, 2022), 2.

[10] Ken Hubbell and Mary Emery, *Engaging in Sustainable Community Change: A Community Guide to Working with a Coach,* (2009), 2. Accessed from: https://search.issuelab.org/resource/engaging-in-sustainable-community-change- a-community-guide-to-working-with-a-coach.html

[11] Lewis, "Coaching Practice in Public Health Partnerships," 4.

[12] Cohen, "Community Coaching," 71.

[13] Ken Hubbell and Mary Emery, *Guiding Sustainable Community Change: An Introduction to Coaching,* (2009), 3. Accessed from: https://www.aecf.org/resources/guiding-sustainable-community-change

[14] Community Heart & Soul, "Coach Training Program," 2.

[15] Hubbell, *Guiding in Sustainable Community Change*, 16.

[16] Lewis, "Coaching Practice in Public Health Partnerships," 4.

[17] Cohen, "Community Coaching," 71.

[18] Hubbell, *Engaging in Sustainable Community Change*, 2.

2. How are community coaching engagements structured?

How a coach is hired and by whom establishes the starting point for a coaching engagement. Ken Hubbell and Mary Emery, in their monograph *Engaging in Sustainable Community Change*, outline three common ways a coach enters a community: "as part of a foundation-supported change initiative, through an intermediary that is receiving foundation support to manage a technical assistance or capacity building program that involves coaching or because a community group determines the need for a coach and secures a coach for their efforts."[19] The distinction between these three points of entry does not materially affect the practice of coaching in communities; published research and interviews with current practitioners yield a relatively consistent picture of what a community coach does in the day-to-day. However, the hiring entity provides important parameters for a coaching engagement, particularly when it comes to goal-setting. In two of the three points of entry described by Hubbell and Emery, a funder establishes the overarching goal for the effort, in alignment with its own mission.

Programs consulted for this research have overarching goals that cluster in three overlapping areas of interest:
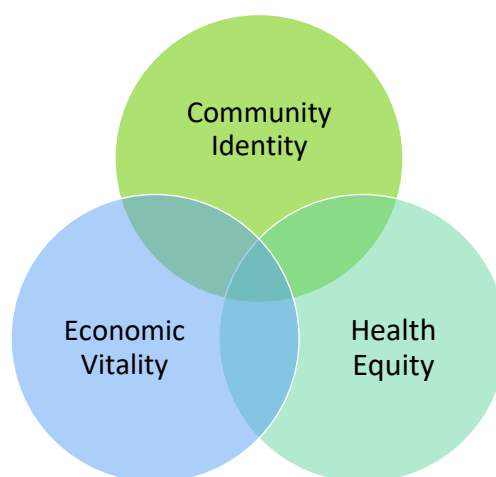
Specific examples of goals include:

- *Develop locally relevant issues and solutions for advancing health equity* - Community Partnerships for Health Equity Strategy, Colorado Trust[20]
- *Humanities-based, resident-driven community planning to strengthen the social, cultural, and economic vibrancy of place* - PA Humanities, working with Community Heart & Soul[21]
- *Develop and retain teams of local leaders to create positive economic futures* - Horizons, Northwest Area Foundation[22]

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[19] Hubbell, *Engaging in Sustainable Community Change,* (2009), 2.

[20] Courtney Ricci, Nancy Csuti, and Mia Ramirez, (2021). "The Revolution Within: What It Really Takes to Partner with Communities," *The Foundation Review* 13, no. 2 (June 2021): 105. https://doi.org/10.9707/1944-5660.1568

[21] Elizabeth Myrick, Rachel Mosher-Williams, and Laurie Zierer, "Learning as We Go: How Emergent Process Supports Sustainable Community and Philanthropic Change," *The Foundation Review* 14, no.3 (September 2022): 25, https://doi.org/10.9707/1944-5660.1619

[22] FSG, "Gaining perspective: Lessons learned from one foundation's exploratory decade", Northwest Area Foundation (2011): 7-8. Accessed from: https://www.fsg.org/ publications/gaining-perspective

Goals related to community identity frequently focus on activating residents[23], social, cultural, and economic vibrancy[24], resident skill-building[25], and love for the community[26]. Goals related to health equity reference building awareness[27], driving conversations[28], and using data[29] for locally relevant solutions[30]. Fewer programs emphasize economic vitality, but those that do highlight supporting capacity[31] and developing local leaders[32]. All three interest areas overlap significantly. Most programs seeking to achieve health equity and improve community identity recognize the influence of poverty and economic opportunity in achieving their aims. The same is true of achieving economic vitality: positive community identity and equitable access to health are important intersecting factors.[33]

Most of the time, coaching support is included as part of the program design, intended to help teams of residents and/or organizational representatives work together to achieve the goals of the program. One interviewee had experience with a coach entering the process mid-stream: a municipality sought assistance of a community coach *after* struggling to make progress towards goals identified by the residents. However, this was the only example identified in this study where coaching was not part of an initial plan.

All coaching programs consulted for this paper work with a mix of residents and organizations to set objectives and determine activities within the community, but there are differences in the balance. Programs seeking to develop community identity (such as Hometown Pride and Community Heart & Soul) more often work directly with teams of residents to make decisions about the direction of the work. In contrast, programs seeking to improve health equity (such as New Jersey Health Initiatives and Building Healthy & Equitable Communities) more often work with teams of representatives from organizations and institutions serving the community (e.g., nonprofits or government agencies).

Community coaching programs range in length from approximately 6 months to 8 years, with a median length of 4 years. In most cases, a coaching commitment is initially planned for 2-5 years, with extensions available. Many programs describe the coach as meeting with members of the community in

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[23] Transform South Jersey website. Accessed from the Internet Archive on March 8, 2023: https://web.archive.org/web/20210228002707/https://transformsouthjersey.org/

[24] Myrick, 25.

[25] Keep Iowa Beautiful website. Accessed March 8, 2023 from: https://keepiowabeautiful.org/programming/hometown-pride/

[26] Community Heart & Soul website. Accessed March 9, 2023 from: https://www.communityheartandsoul.org/

[27] University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, County Health Rankings website. Accessed March 9, 2023: https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/about-us

[28] New Jersey Health Initiatives website. Accessed March 8, 2023 from: https://www.njhi.org/

[29] Reinvestment Fund, Building Healthier More Equitable Communities website. Accessed March 9, 2023: https://www.bhecnj.org/

[30] Ricci, 105.

[31] Joe Bartman, Dakota Resources website. Accessed March 8, 2023 from: https://www.dakotaresources.org/news/2022-note-from-president

[32] FSG, 7-8.

[33] The Community Heart & Soul model for resident engagement, developed by the Orton Family Foundation, is used in multiple programs referenced for this study. Similarly, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, with a mission to improve the health and wellbeing of all in America, is the funder of multiple programs. Goals of Orton and RWJF are therefore present in many of the goal statements referenced here.

person at least once per month.[34] However, few establish in advance a prescribed schedule for coaching sessions, relying instead on the coach to determine the needs and meet the expectations of the community. One of the programs that did set a schedule upfront ultimately found that a responsive model was more effective: "Early feedback indicated that grantees needed flexibility; coaching became available on-demand to meet grantees' individual needs."[35]

While there is great variety in how community coaching programs are set up and run, we have seen that the typical program is:

> *A foundation-funded effort to improve community identity, economic vitality, or health equity*
>
> *With coaching integrated in the program design*
>
> *Wherein a coach meets with community teams in person once per month for a period of four years*
>
> *To support community members in meeting their goals*

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[34] Programs consulted for this paper that were operating in 2020 did not meet in person due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Most resumed in-person meetings in 2021.

[35] Lewis, "Coaching Practice in Public Health Partnerships," 3.

3. Positioning of a community coach

"It was always clear that I was an outsider, so I never took [reproaches by community members] personally, but people were also more likely to be honest with me. It's like you tell a therapist or bartender all kinds of things because they don't have anything to do with [your problems]."[36]

By design, community coaches are usually outsiders. Mary Emery, Ken Hubbell, and Becky Miles-Polka note in their *Field Guide* that "community coaching requires a degree of detachment….we want to think of ourselves as outside the group where we can observe both the group's work and our role."[37] In practice, this means coaches often live near but not in the community they coach: close enough to visit regularly and get to know community members, but far enough away to avoid day-to-day social dynamics. In interviews, one coach credited their status as an outsider with helping them bridge silos, particularly across power structures. Another said that being an outsider helps them notice when people are not being heard and support inclusion of historically marginalized voices. Coaches named these examples as benefits to being *with* the community, but not *of* the community.

Most of the programs referenced for this study employ several community coaches at any given time. Coaches work independently in one or more communities, each of which is undertaking a change effort, though often at different stages of the process. A minority of programs employ only one community coach who works with several communities at once.

One previous study identified that working alone as a community coach can lead to feelings of isolation.[38] A few programs counter the solo nature of the role by fostering an intentional community of practice for coaches. Community Heart & Soul and the community change efforts using its model (Transform South Jersey and PA Heart & Soul, for example) host monthly or semi-monthly calls for their coaches as a way to provide peer support. In a discussion with the author, one Community Heart & Soul staff member shared her belief that "it's impossible to do this work individually. Groups are always changing, situations are new…. It's community work, but even as a coach you need a community of support." In two other programs (Dakota Resources and a portion of the Horizons program), coaches are staff members of the intermediary organization, allowing them to connect with coaching peers as organizational colleagues. Of the remaining programs, representing approximately half of those included in this study, some employ multiple coaches but did not mention communities of practice, and some employ only one coach.

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[36] Ryan Allen & Paul R. Lachapelle, "Can leadership development act as a rural poverty alleviation strategy?", *Community Development*, 43, no. 1, (2012): 109. doi: 10.1080/15575330.2011.645046

[37] Emery, *A Field Guide to Community Coaching*, 12.

[38] Taylor Willhite, "Impact of Coaching by Extension Professionals on Rural Wellness Coalition Success," Masters Thesis, (South Dakota State University, 2020): 35. Accessed October 24, 2022 from: https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/impact-coaching-extension-professionals-on-rural/docview/2406952488/se-2

Coaches as Insiders

In their article on the Northwest Area Foundation's Horizons program, Ryan Allen and Paul R. Lachappelle explored how variations in program delivery affected outcomes. Horizons deployed community coaches in hundreds of communities across the Great Plains and Pacific Northwest. A significant portion of these coaches were akin to insiders: staff members of the Cooperative Extension who were assigned to coach communities where they already had relationships.

The variation in the coach's relationship affected how the coaching engagements unfolded. Building trust is typically a coach's first job in the community, but with trust and social connections already in place, insider coaches could "jump start reluctant residents and infuse energy into the process,"[39] getting the process off the ground far more quickly than outsider coaches. However, "the deep connections coaches had with communities…sometimes impeded the transfer of ownership of the Horizons program," and insider coaches and steering committees were not able to attract many low-income residents to the program.[40] The authors theorize that insider coaches are more constrained by their existing social boundaries, and in this case, did not have strong connections with any low-income residents.

4.   Roles played and skills needed by coaches

Community coaches bring a variety of professional backgrounds to the work. This often includes "strong experience from the worlds of community or organizational development," and can include "teaching, consulting, ecology, education, public health, economic development and similar fields."[39] Coaches interviewed for this study also mentioned higher education, youth development, state and local government, and project management in their professional backgrounds. All have held jobs in several different fields over the course of their careers. Frequently, they described each career move - no matter how seemingly different - as building on experiences and skills they had already been using. In a sentiment echoed by most Transform South Jersey coaches, one said "once I became a coach in the Transform South Jersey work, I realized I really had been coaching all along for 15 years."[40]

In both publications and interviews, community coaches have generated an extensive list of the roles they play within communities and the skills required to play those roles. *A Field Guide to Community Coaching* includes the following table[41] showing eight major skills necessary for effective coaching and two dozen examples of how those skills may be applied.

Important Coaching Skills	Examples
Communication skills	• Framing concepts and mindsets so the group can better understand • Framing distinctions • Asking questions • Listening • Engaging in dialogue and discussion for constructive conflict resolution • Providing honest feedback
Assessment and evaluation skills	• Establishing reflective practices • Using strength and asset-based approaches • Facilitating asset mapping
Networking and relationship building skills	• Connecting groups to other resources • Modeling collaborative approaches to work • Understanding the process for creating true collaboration
Planning and management skills	• Identifying tasks • Developing timelines
Engagement and outreach skills	• Understanding how to create an inclusive planning process • Employing cultural competency
Facilitation skills	• Nurturing meaningful conversation and collaboration • Managing group conversations • Designing meetings
Understanding human and group dynamics and group process	• Supporting team building • Understanding group interactions
Conflict management skills	• Coaching people through conflict • Reframing issues • Engaging in dialogue and discussion for constructive conflict resolution

[39] Emery, 69.
[40] Interview notes, November 2022.
[41] Emery, 17.

One of the most important attributes of a coach, emphasized in nearly all accounts of current coaching programs (written material and informational interviews), is the ability to build relationships. Along the same lines, coaches are described in published articles as being engaged in building trust, strengthening relationships between community members[42], negotiating partnerships[43] between organizational representatives, and fostering inclusion[44]. As outsiders to the community, coaches are uniquely positioned to build relationships with overlooked or marginalized residents to support a more inclusive change effort precisely because they are not already part of the existing power structures.

Additionally, coaches support their assigned communities in getting the work done, using skills in facilitation[45], project management, and consistent follow-up[46] to ensure agreed-upon actions are happening.[47] Coaches also help build capacity by modeling coaching skills in collaboration, active listening, engaging through questions[48] and occasionally by delivering more formal training.[49]

South Jersey coaches shared the sense that they play a key role in supporting their communities to take action. Interviewees described facilitating meetings and helping to manage conversational dynamics, as well as ensuring plans are documented and tasks get done. In interviews, coaches also described playing an emotional support role for community members: listening and observing interactions, raising spirits, motivating groups, and cheerleading the efforts of their communities. The strong emphasis on providing emotional support - which was not a predominant theme in published articles - may be related to timing of the coaching engagement. Transform South Jersey launched in early 2020, and pandemic-related disruptions were significant. It is perhaps not surprising in this context that South Jersey coaches described themselves as being a "motivator," "cheerleader," or "spirit raiser."

Some South Jersey coaches felt challenged to name the skills or tools they use in coaching. Coaches more easily responded to a prompt asking them to describe the roles they play and actions they take in their assigned communities, but they also said things like "I've found that I was doing community coaching without knowing it" or "this is just how I show up in my work."[50] This, along with the earlier quote about coaching without realizing it (see page 13), suggests that the mindset of the coach is perhaps even more relevant to the work than specific technical skills. Ken Hubbell has noted that "*being* a coach happens alongside *doing* coaching."[51] Recent coaching resources have suggested the same: "people who are inclined toward empathy, humility, flexibility, and equity can often adopt a coaching approach more readily."[52]

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[42] Cohen, 75.

[43] Ken Hubbell and Mary Emery, *Investing in Sustainable Change*, 2.

[44] Ken Hubbell and Mary Emery, *Guiding Sustainable Community Change,* 21.

[45] Community Heart & Soul, 2 and Willhite, 34.

[46] Keep Iowa Beautiful, *Hometown Pride Annual Report 2017/2018*, 2.

[47] Lewis, 6.

[48] Lewis, 10.

[49] Allen, 98.

[50] Interview notes, November and December, 2022.

[51] Ken Hubbell and Mary Emery, *Guiding Sustainable Community Change*, 11.

[52] The Prosperity Agenda, "Tool: Hiring Coaching-Inclined People," Family-Centered Coaching website (n.d.). Accessed April 7, 2023 from: https://familycenteredcoaching.org/coaching-toolkit/hiring-coaching-inclined-people/

5.   Common Challenges and Pitfalls

"[People] come because they want to be a part of making their community a better place. And understandably, some folks just don't get excited about planning."[53]

To begin a community change initiative, the organization directing the work has to determine where it will happen. Municipal or geographic boundaries are often used to define a community for the purposes of the change initiative, but as one coach pointed out in discussion, "a natural community includes people outside those lines." This coach gave the example of a major employer or supplier who is located outside of the municipality but nonetheless is an important leader inside the community. Evaluations agreed, highlighting in two additional programs that a community defined by the funder may hinder efforts to make change if it is neither relevant nor meaningful to the people within.[54]

An additional challenge related to beginning a community change initiative is aligning goals. As discussed earlier, funders often provide an overarching goal for the program. However, according to Emery's *Field Guide*, "coaching works best when community stakeholders see their work with a coach as an opportunity to help achieve <u>local</u> goals and ambitions" [emphasis added]. Matching the two sets of goals can present a major stumbling block. Emery, Hubbell, and Miles-Polka recommend that a coach spend time getting to know a community's interests and desires and at the same time, build trust and manage expectations with funders.[55]

Once launched, programs must balance planning with action. Building a diverse community team takes time, as does developing an equitable plan of action. But, residents who became early advocates for a change initiative have put their social capital on the line to get others to participate. Lack of action risks their credibility. Inaction may also be perceived as a lack of commitment to the community from the organization directing the work or as confirmation that the effort is a waste of time.[56] Momentum slows and enthusiasm for the change effort disappears. Coaches can mitigate this risk with early action projects, or "quick wins" to help community members see the value of their effort and build interest in planning for more.

Transform South Jersey coaches also highlighted a challenge with maintaining momentum and enthusiasm among their resident teams. While the COVID-19 pandemic played a large part in slowing community progress,[57] coaches also felt that they lacked awareness of the big picture of the Community Heart & Soul coaching process. The phased training through each stage of Heart & Soul, combined with the slow pace of relationship-building in the pandemic environment, led to situations where some coaches felt ill-equipped to answer questions like "Where is this going?" Most Transform South Jersey

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[53] Community coach interview, November 2022.
[54] Myrick, 33 and FSG, 23.
[55] Emery, 37.
[56] Ricci, 110 and Cohen, 77.
[57] The relationship-building phase of the Transform South Jersey work in communities was significantly delayed by pandemic-related restrictions on gathering and stress to health and economic well-being.

coaches felt that they could have better guided and motivated their teams if they had a more complete understanding of the big picture.

Of special relevance to change efforts seeking to affect health equity - in which teams are more likely to be comprised of organizational representatives - articles highlight difficulty in attracting participation from residents when a community team is made up of professionals.[58] There are often logistical barriers like meetings scheduled during the work day that community members cannot attend or inequity in compensation: professionals participate as part of salaried work while community members are expected to volunteer.[59] Professionals trained to review and respond to data may also (intentionally or not) devalue the lived experience of community members in comparison.[60] At the same time, community change initiatives are more likely to see progress and be sustainable if community members are meaningfully engaged.[61] To help a team of professionals achieve its goals, the coach must find ways to move them towards greater inclusion of community members.

Finally, most Transform South Jersey coaches encountered challenges adapting the Community Heart & Soul coaching model to culturally and socioeconomically diverse communities. According to one coach, "when there's diversity, there's sometimes very different opinions and feelings about the same places." New Jersey is among the most diverse states in the nation,[62] and therefore requires different approaches than those used in more culturally homogenous regions of the country.

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[58] Researchers at Mathematica define professionals in this context as representatives of institutions or nonprofit agencies, rather than the people being served by those organizations. (Kim, Schottenfeld, Cavanaugh, 20).

[59] Cohen, 77-78 and Kim, 21.

[60] Kim, 21.

[61] Daniel Kahl, Mary Emery, & Patricia Holmes, "Community coaching: Insight into an emerging practice," *Community Development Society*, 20, (2016): 49–55, quoted in Kim, 20.

[62] New Jersey Department of Health, "Complete Health Indicator Report of Population Demographics," New Jersey State Health Assessment Data website, Updated November 30, 2022. Accessed March 14, 2023 from: https://www-doh.state.nj.us/doh-shad/indicator/complete_profile/Demographics.html

6. **Conclusion**

Over the decades the practice has been in use, community coaching has been shown to be a helpful and meaningful support for community change. In 2004, an evaluation found that "the most effective tool, as evidenced in all data collection done by the MSDI evaluation team, has been coaching at the community team level."[63] Again in 2021, a different evaluation of a different initiative looked at "the coaching relationship's impact on grantees and reaffirm[ed] that coaching is an asset and benefits the work."[64] Though community coaching is not new, it continues to be a somewhat under-the-radar tool for building community capacity for change. In interviews, most of the Transform South Jersey coaches were not aware of the practice before hearing about it from Community Foundation of South Jersey staff.

In 2009, Ken Hubbell and Mary Emery laid out four reasons why community coaching is needed, calling these reasons "the case for coaching for community change as an innovative practice." While the context may have changed a little, the four reasons remain a relevant call to action to implement community coaching:

> *Rapidly changing communities*
>
> *New leadership structures*
>
> *Increased emphasis on impact*
>
> *Increased return on investment*

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[63] Hubbell and Emery, *Investing in Sustainable Community Change*, 3.
[64] Lewis, 9.

Appendix A: Programs Utilizing Community Coaching

This landscape report was created from descriptions of other programs that utilize community coaching (found on organizational websites and in published articles) and from one-on-one interviews with coaches working in comparable programs. Brief descriptions of each program, along with web links for further information, can be found below.

Past Programs

Community Partnerships

https://www.coloradotrust.org/strategies/community-partnerships/

Colorado Trust's Community Partnerships funding strategy ran from 2014-2022 and sought to help communities organize towards systems change for greater health equity.[65] The Trust hired staff members known as "Community Partners" throughout the state, who played some similar roles to those of community coaches. The transition towards directly funding the work of residents and lessons learned through the process is documented in articles by the Trust's former evaluation staff: Dr. Nancy Csuti and Dr. Courtney Ricci. A macro-evaluation was later produced by research firm Community Science. [See bibliography for all three articles] The Trust is making final grants to end this funding strategy in 2023.[66]

County Health Rankings & Roadmaps

https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/

[This program is still operating, but no longer offering community coaching.] CHR&R is a program of the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute and is funded by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. From 2014-2018, CHR&R, with support from RWJF, offered coaching to teams or individuals within a community to improve their ability to advance health equity. Coaching was light-touch compared to the other models in this study, with coaches meeting teams monthly (primarily virtually) for 3-11 months. An evaluation from research firm Mathematica examined coaches' abilities to move teams towards a greater focus on equity, community engagement, and systems change.

Horizons

https://www.nwaf.org/

In 1998, the Northwest Area Foundation (NWAF) announced a new vision to "invest $200 million directly into communities over the next 10 years."[67] The Horizons program was one component of the strategy which paired coaches with rural communities to build capacity of local residents towards reducing poverty. Between 2003 and 2010, Horizons deployed community coaches to nearly 300 communities in Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Washington, and Oregon. The program has been written about extensively by evaluators, foundation staff, and the coaches who participated. In this report, I cited papers on coaching practice, but additional published works evaluate community-level outcomes and address special considerations for working with Native communities.

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[65] Colorado Trust website. Accessed March 12, 2023 from: https://www.coloradotrust.org/strategies/community-partnerships/

[66] Colorado Trust website. Accessed March 13, 2023 from: https://www.coloradotrust.org/stories/first-grants-awarded-in-culminating-phase-of-community-partnerships-strategy/

[67] FSG, 4.

Other programs were influential in the writing of the *Field Guide to Community Coaching* but are no longer available online or documented in journal archives. These include W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Kellogg Leadership for Community Change, Ford Foundation's Rural Community College Initiative, and other efforts supporting rural economic development, tribal education, and community forestry in the 1970's-1990's.[68]

Current programs

Building Healthy & Equitable Communities, New Jersey
https://www.bhecnj.org/
BHEC-NJ is run by Reinvestment Fund, with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. One coach, known as a City Team Liaison, supports cross-sector collaborations in four New Jersey cities. Each city team is comprised of organizational representatives from different sectors who work together to improve health and well-being in their communities through the built environment. Reinvestment Fund supports city teams with additional technical assistance in data and policy analysis.

Community Heart & Soul
https://www.communityheartandsoul.org/
The Orton Family Foundation, a private operating foundation in Shelburne, VT initiated Community Heart & Soul in 2004. The program has a specific four-phase model of community engagement leading to a resident-generated values statement and action plan, developed over approximately two years. Orton staff train community coaches to support teams of residents in working through the model in small cities and towns throughout the country.

Dakota Resources
https://www.dakotaresources.org/community-coaching
Dakota Resources, based in Renner, South Dakota, is a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) offering loans, new market tax credits, and a suite of programs to support economic and community development in rural communities. Community coaching is one of the program offerings. Coaches may work with a town for a period of years or provide on-demand support like facilitating important meetings, or structuring learning sessions.

Hometown Pride
https://keepiowabeautiful.org/programming/hometown-pride/
Hometown Pride launched in 2012 as a program of Keep Iowa Beautiful, the state affiliate of national nonprofit Keep America Beautiful. A community coach, hired by Keep Iowa Beautiful, works with resident teams and municipal government in small towns across the state to develop community plans, build connections, and put the plans into action. Towns can expect to participate in Hometown Pride for a period of five years, but many continue after the initial commitment. Keep Iowa Beautiful has 6-8 community coaches at any given time, who have worked with over 50 communities.

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[68] Emery, 6.

MDC Inc.
https://www.mdcinc.org/
MDC is a nonprofit organization in Durham, NC, credited by Mary Emery and other experts in the field with spreading the practice of community coaching in the 1980's. MDC worked as an intermediary, program manager, and technical assistance provider for change initiatives across the south in educational reform, workforce and economic development, using community coaching as a support for community decision-making.[69] The organization today continues to focus on equitable change in the South and incorporates coaching in many of its initiatives.[70]

New Jersey Health Initiative
https://www.njhi.org/about-us/
NJHI has been providing grants to advance health equity in New Jersey since 1987. The program is funded by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and encourages cross-sector collaboration to influence policy. In the last iteration of the program, a community coach supported collaborations to work together more effectively and then to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic. NJHI is on hiatus in 2023 for a period of intensive planning.

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[69] Cohen, 72 and Emery, 5.
[70] MDC website. Accessed March 12, 2023 from: https://www.mdcinc.org/projects/

Appendix B: Researchers, centers, and funders currently working in the field of community coaching

Individual names and academic centers
1. [Community Development Society](#), a membership organization for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners
    1.1. [Annual Conference](#), July 16-19, 2023 in Portland Oregon: "'Hood and Holler: Similarities and Differences in Urban and Rural Community Development"
2. [Center for Community Research & Service](#), University of Delaware
3. [Dr. Mary Emery](#), University of Nebraska-Lincoln
4. [Dr. Douglas Easterling](#), Wake Forest School of Medicine
5. [Dr. Mark Brennan](#), Pennsylvania State University
6. [Dr. Paul R. LaChappelle](#), University of Montana

Journals
7. [Community Development](#), Taylor & Francis
8. [Community Development Journal](#), Oxford Academic
9. [Journal of Community Practice](#), Taylor & Francis
10. [IACD Practice Insights Magazine](#), International Association for Community Development
11. [The Foundation Review](#), Grand Valley State University

Funders and funding programs
12. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (New Jersey Health Initiatives and Building Healthy & Equitable Communities)
13. W.K. Kellogg Foundation (Equitable Communities priority area)
14. Orton Family Foundation (Community Heart & Soul)
15. Pennsylvania Humanities Council (PA Heart & Soul)
16. Cooperative Extensions
17. Municipalities, via fee-for service contracts
18. State government, via regrants to an intermediary

Appendix C: Interview Protocol for South Jersey coaches

Opening Script
- Hi, it's nice to see you again. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me - I'm excited to get to talk to you about your coaching work!
- Let me first give you a brief overview of what to expect.

Purpose of Project
- This discussion is designed to dig into your experience with community coaching and how you do your Transform South Jersey work
- I do want to clarify up front that I'm not doing an evaluation. So I'm not evaluating the outcomes or effectiveness of Community Heart & Soul, Transform South Jersey, or any individual person.
- I am trying to capture what a person needs to know how to do if they're going to be a community coach, what helps you in your coaching practice, and what you had to learn along the way that you wish you had known in advance.

Participant Info
- Your responses are confidential. I won't be linking anything you say to your name or the specific community you are coaching.

Structure for Conversation / Logistics
- This discussion will last 1 hour. Here's what I have planned:
   o 1- This introductory bit
   o 2- Questions about the skills you use in coaching
   o 3- Questions about the resources and supports you lean on
   o 4- Final question to make sure I haven't missed anything you want to share.
- But you are welcome to share thoughts that go beyond my questions at any point during our discussion.
- Do I have your permission to record this session? (I want to record so that I can go back and review your responses later…I want to have a conversation today, rather than taking notes the whole time!)

Section 1: Background

Okay, let's get started.
1. Tell me a little bit about your professional background.
   o Do you live in South Jersey? What town?

2. How did you get connected with the Transform South Jersey initiative?

Section 2: Skills Used in Coaching (Aligned to Evaluation Question 3)

Now, let's dig into community coaching.

3. First, were you familiar with community coaching as a practice before Transform South Jersey?
    o [If so…] where and when did you learn about it?

4. In your words, what is community coaching?

5. I understand you work with [Community Name]. As a coach, what are the things you do most often in [Community Name]?
    o [drill down into the thing they do the most of] Is that challenging?
    o What skills do you use to help them __?
    o What are the activities or exercises you use most often?

6. We've talked about X and Y as skills that you draw on during a coaching engagement. What other skills do you think have been important to bring to your work with [Community Name]?
    o [If they have 2 coaching assignments] Is it the same in [Second Community]?

7. I imagine you brought a lot of these skills and tools with you into Transform South Jersey. But of all the ones you've mentioned so far [examples], were there any you had to learn along the way?
    o Or to say it a different way, any skills you didn't have when you started in 2020 that you've developed since?
    o Which would you say you've improved along the way?

Section 3: Resources and Supports for Coaches (Aligned to Evaluation Question 3)

We've talked a little about what you do as a coach, activities and exercises you use, and skills you draw on to help community members move forward. Now I'd like to learn more about what helps you.

8. When you encountered difficulties, where did you turn for help?
    o How do you reach out to them?
    o What were they able to do for you?

9. I understand there were a couple different venues for connecting with other coaches: the calls Erik hosts for Transform South Jersey coaches, and the calls hosted by Orton. Can you talk a little about what's been helpful or not helpful about those?

10. Were there any challenges you faced or barriers you encountered that you weren't able to get help with? Can you describe the situation?

11. I had a conversation with Orton's training team to learn more about how they see the components of Community Heart & Soul. I understand when Transform South Jersey was kicking

off, there was an initial Community Heart & Soul training in person. Then the pandemic hit and other stuff was later done online. Reflecting back on those early days, what aspects of the Community Heart & Soul training did you find helpful?

- o What aspects were not helpful?

12. Are there any references you turn to for help with coaching challenges? Books, websites, videos?

- o [If needed] As an example, I facilitate a ton of meetings at work, all different sizes and purposes. I have a book called "The Surprising Power of Liberating Structures" that I use for ideas about meeting activities.

Section 4: Conclusion

Okay, we're just about done. Last questions:

13. What's one thing you've been really proud of in [Community Name]?

14. Is there anything we haven't talked about today that you would like to share?

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