



# Annual Report

March 2020 / February 2021



# Welcome!

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## Founders remarks

In February 2020, Apish and I were in the middle of a speaking tour of the UK with our friends and partners at Finisterre. We were presenting some of our exciting new work with the Wave Alliance discussed in this report. Half way through the tour we started reading the news of travel disruption caused by a new and unknown virus. We left the UK as the first Covid-19 cases arrived on their shores and landed back in South Africa as our team completed registration for almost 2,000 children eagerly awaiting the launch of a new and exciting year of Surf Therapy. In the weeks that followed South Africa entered one of the world's strictest lockdowns. As a programme that thrives on promoting meaningful human connection, we'd never been so isolated. From our new remote working locations we pulled together. We shifted funds from programming into a huge food delivery programme. We launched online support groups for our families and coaches who got access to mentors and psychologists on demand. We worked hard with our donors to retain our staff and ensure that while the world around us moved in unpredictable and unsettling ways, we retained a safe and predictable environment for our team and our young people. It's been a hugely challenging year. I'd like to thank our team for keeping Waves for Change a consistent and supportive presence in the lives of our Coaches and the children in our service. Many of our team and our wider community have lost loved ones this year. From Waves for Change we send our condolences to everyone impacted by COVID-19. We have a lot of work ahead of us in 2021.





# Our journey over the last 10 years

**Key:**

- Number of Children
- Coaches
- Significant Moments
- Awards

2011

**45** **3** **ISIQALO**  
THE FIRST STEP

- We started off as the Isiqalo Foundation before we evolved into Waves for Change.
  - Surf Club launched in Masiphumelele.
  - First partnership with the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation, South Africa and Vimto (Our first funders).
  - Paid for fuel, wetsuits, combi, food and our first 2 ever youth Surf Coaches, Apish and Bongani.
- Winner of Best New Programme at Beyond Sport Awards held in Cape Town that year.



2015

**WAVES FOR CHANGE**  
#SURFTHERAPY

**220** **13**

- Completed feasibility study w/ University of Cape Town - looking at if Surf Therapy works and how we can improve delivery to maximise our impact.
  - Completed study into how children form sense of self w/ University Western Cape and developed first surfing + psychoeducation curriculum w/ University of Western Cape.
  - Surf Therapy is born!
  - Receive first major grant with Comic Relief to action our research findings, improve programme delivery and start consolidating a SA team.
  - Shortlisted Best Sport for Health award at Beyond Sport.
- Tim Conibear awarded Ashoka Fellowship to grow use of physical activity to promote mental health.

2017

**730** **21** **WAVES FOR CHANGE**  
#SURFTHERAPY

- Waves for Change logo evolves to represent Surf Therapy, the 4 hands showing social connection and the sense of belonging children gain at the beach.
  - Increase female participation from 16% to 40% - maintained throughout to 2021
  - Expansion into the Eastern Cape province as East London and Port Elizabeth (now Gqeberha) sites open.
  - First grants to start designing the Wave Alliance project which would allow Waves for Change to share its method with partners globally.
- Waves for Change win the Laureus Sport for Good Global Award.



2021 & beyond

**WAVES FOR CHANGE**  
#SURFTHERAPY

**1777** **40**

♂ **60%** ♀ **40%**  
♂ **48%** ♀ **52%**

- Waves for Change logo evolves to represent the youth led nature of our service. This logo was voted for by the W4C Coaches who take an increasingly leading role in service design, delivery and decision making.
- We have set up a global network of 24 partners who deliver community-based, mental health services to young people in under-served communities, using physical activity and mind-body therapy.
- Waves for Change establishing as a best practice hub for social prescription / sport therapy in South Africa and other Low-Middle Income settings. We use the evidence and learning we generate from our 5 sites to do high quality research, advocacy and training for other organisations.



# Our team

The W4C service is delivered by a vibrant group of young Coaches, who represent the wonderful diversity of South Africa in race, gender and language. They are the heart and soul of our Surf Therapy service.

My name is Fundiswa AKA Fura. I am 24 years old I was one of the first kids to join W4C, when it was still an after-school programme. I became a Coach when I was old enough to apply. Although all of us kids from Masiphumelele were black, it felt as though everyone else at the beach was white. So, with our team, we said "right, let's do it and see how it goes". With that we pushed ourselves into the water, some of us stood on a surfboard sooner than others... We supported one another and challenged each other to keep trying.

Waves for Change has definitely had a big role in facilitating racial inclusion and diversity at the beach. When I started surfing as a child, there were hardly any black people, and it was mostly men. Now, everyone surfs, especially women. Now, Muizenberg is totally mixed - an inviting space to everyone.



My name is Luxolo, AKA Lux, I am 25 years old. I started as a kid in the programme and now I'm a Coach. Where I grew up, gangs were not optional. You weren't asked if you are a gang member or not. It depended more on where you were living and if you went to another area, you might end up dead. They (boys from other areas) will kill you because it was like a turf war. You were not asked if you were in a gang. Every little boy who was at that age was in a gang as far as they knew.

My escape is that I started to surf, I was spending most of my time at the beach. So, I used to go to the beach for a surf, come back late and come home to sleep. So, I didn't give the fighting much interest.

It is also hard being a man in our community, because there are many expectations. People expect many things from men in our community. They say things like "men don't cry", "men are supposed to work hard".

So as a man in our community, you have to support your family physically. If there is danger coming to them, you have to be the first one to step out and fight. Financially, you have to buy them things. You have to even support them spiritually.

Since being at W4C, I have learned things as they have equipped me with many tools. I know if I am stressed now, I know how to calm down by doing meditation and take5. I share this with other boys now.

My name is Nkululeko (Nkuja), I am 26 years old. When I first learned to stand on a surfboard, I felt like I was on top of the world because I am walking on water. Every time I catch a wave, I feel I am overcoming my challenges that way. It is so therapeutic.

The experience working with children with Autism has been great because those kids, there is something that draws them to me. For instance, there is a participant who likes to call my name "Nkuja! Nkuja!" and she has even made a song for me in Xhosa that goes "Njuka is bananas, Njuka is bananas!".

The programme has helped children with Autism a lot because they now have an escape to the beach and a safe space away from all the trauma and stigmas they face in their communities and schools.

I have learned that Autism is a spectrum, it not something that divides the kids from Noluthando Primary from other kids. It's just that their minds work in a different way to other kids.

When we were first introduced to the kids on the Autism spectrum, me and the other coaches were worried that the children would be difficult for us. But even on the first day that they arrived, they were not at all how I expected because they showed interest in understanding the programme.

They have even adopted the take5—they like it a lot. Even if they don't do it conventionally, they know the purpose of a take5. They have adapted it in a way that suits them.



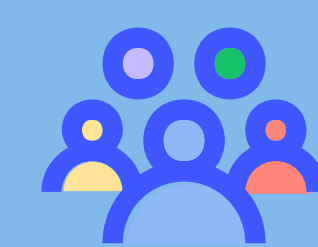
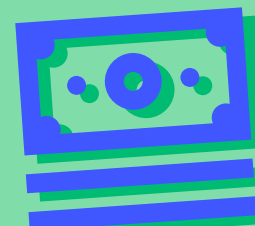
My name is Busiswa, and I am 27-years old. I am married by traditional Xhosa custom, and I am mother of three. My first born is 6 years old, the second is three and the youngest is 1.

This picture has a lot of significance because I posted it on Instagram and Facebook and received so many reactions from different people. Because our culture does not normally allow a married woman (newlywed or Makoti), to do the extra murals she may desire to do. Because when you are married, there are things that we are expected to do and not to do. So, surfing as a black Makoti is rare. I think I am the first person who is pictured in her amaDaki (attire for a newlywed Xhosa bride) holding a surfboard and going for a surf. This has a lot of significance for me because I believe I am the first Xhosa Makoti who goes surfing. And this is important for representation.





# Our model: how change happens at our sites





# Sharing and scaling: our contribution to the mental health system

## Impact of toxic stress

On average, children living in the communities W4C partner with experience at least 8 traumatic/adverse events per year (including seeing someone being shot, hunger or no food at home, bereavement, caregiver substance misuse)



Toxic stress can affect children's ability to control their behaviour, emotions and thoughts in pursuit of longer term goals, known as self regulation. This can make it difficult for children: not to overreact to situations (e.g. get angry too quickly); to learn how to be calm and think clearly; and to find the volume control on strong feelings.

It can also significantly increase the risk for a wide range of adult-onset mental health disorders such as substance addiction, anxiety and depression.

## The treatment and prevention gap

- Community mental health resources overburdened
- Services not culturally or age appropriate leading to low uptake and dosage
- Services that are offered are short term and no safety nets for children and young people
- Mental health challenges are not identified during adolescence and develop into more serious conditions such as substance misuse / antisocial behaviour / depression / PTSD

## Task Shifting

Community based youth are equipped to provide a preventative, positive mental health and wellbeing service. This early intervention is adequate for many children. Coaches are also trained to identify severe cases and refer up into the clinical system where necessary.



- Trained in mental health and wellbeing
- Provided with an evidence based curriculum to structure group engagement with children using physical activity such as surfing
- Develop community referral network to refer in and out of the service
- Supervised by experienced mental health professionals



Relatable, young, community based Coaches drive attendance and adherence to the service by fun, child friendly non-clinical environment.



## Mental Health Outcome

- Task shifted from expensive mental health experts and overburdened healthcare settings to trained community based youth



- Improvements in children's overall wellbeing
- Decreased risk of substance misuse, gang involvement, violence, and other severe mental health disorders
- More accessible, community based, early intervention and preventative mental health support
- Improved uptake of services by children / young people during adolescence



- Reduced burden on limited community based clinical mental health services



## Research

- Collecting evidence on effectiveness of task shifting approach to local Coaches in under resourced communities across the Western and Eastern Cape and across other Low-Middle Income countries
- Development of training and supervision pathway for community based youth to deliver a service that is safe and fit for purpose
- Exploring impact of task shifting approach on mental health systems in Low-Middle Income settings via a network of South African and global partners



## Advocacy

- Elevating child and youth voices to shape the future of community based preventative mental health services in South Africa
- Providing best practice model from which task shifting approach utilising community based youth could be scaled
- Bringing together CBO's, mental health role players and experts, and children and young people themselves to demand more resourcing of physical activity based preventative services from local and provincial government departments and decision makers
- Persuading donors / government to investment in physical activity for health and opening up access to our evidence based training and support for other organisations.





# The impact of Covid-19

The impact of Covid-19 has been far reaching. Children's safety, nutrition and health has been compromised, and their education has been severely disrupted. Children and young people growing up in under-resourced communities in South Africa are not only battling the pandemic, but also other huge violations such as poverty, violence and loss of household livelihoods which have deepened the impact of the pandemic and created an even greater need for mental health support.



## Job losses

2.2 million people

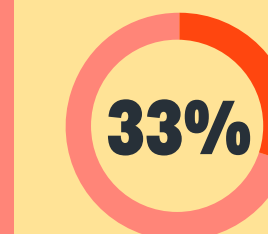
lost their jobs due to strict Covid-19 lockdowns in S.A. This has (unfortunately) caused one of the biggest economic declines in South Africa in nearly a century.

## Effect on mental wellbeing

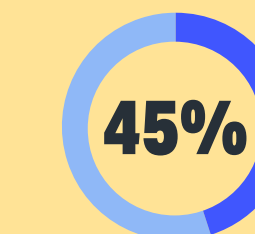


Due to public biological, psychological, and social predispositions in South Africa, Covid-19 may have led to increased mental health presentations such as post-traumatic stress disorder, mood disorders, anxiety disorders, phobias, and obsessive-compulsive disorders.

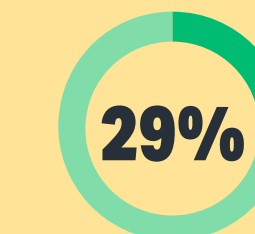
A study conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (2020) reported that during the first lockdown period:



of South Africans were depressed



of South Africans were fearful



of South Africans were experiencing loneliness

## Effect on education

Learners are between **75% and a full school year** behind where they should be.

400,000-500,000

learners have reportedly also dropped out of school altogether over the past 16-months. This is most likely for children living in informal urban and rural settings.

The total number of out of school children is now up to 750,000; By January 2021, the department's Director-General Mathanzima Mveli reported that about 15% of public-school students (both primary and secondary),

Almost 2 million



children hadn't returned after lockdowns in 2020. Education experts expect many of the absentees to become dropouts.

## Increase in domestic violence

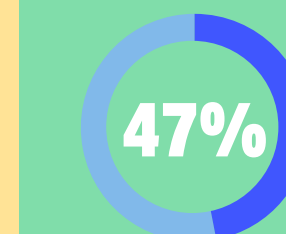
The Covid-19 pandemic amplified the existing gender inequalities and may especially have affected women who survive on the peripheries of the economy. The perpetuation of violence against women and children is tightly interlinked with social and economic relations. The suspension of regular income may further have increased tensions in the home. During the Covid-19 lockdowns imposed by Southern African countries, some homes across the region became enclaves of cruelty, rape and violence for women and children trapped with abusive family members and nowhere to report or escape the danger.

## Food insecurity

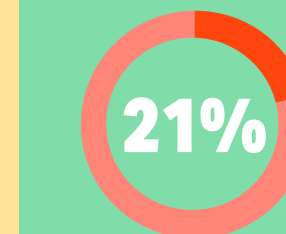
2.2 million people

This loss of income has seriously impacted the rate of household food security across the country.

The Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey by the National Income Dynamics Study published in July this year, showed that:



of the adults surveyed ran out of money to buy food for their household in April



of adults said that at least one person in their household went hungry



said that a child had gone hungry in the same period.

Over the last 12 months, the values of Ubuntu have been needed more than ever.



W4C Coaches have continued to demonstrate their incredible commitment, compassion and innovation. This has allowed us to stand with the communities we work during the darkest moments of the pandemic and lockdowns.



# Our impact in 2020 / 21 during pandemic

## Physical distancing without emotional isolation

From March 2020 our service looked significantly different - having gone from face-to-face, on-the-beach mental health service, to a remote, online service.

To overcome the digital divide and coach access to equipment to deliver a remote service, we redirected our child transport money to our coaches getting devices and data to be connected, enabling us to share vital information on ways to promote mental health at home; getting access to emergency mental health clinical referrals where necessary for extreme cases such as suicidality; and also being kept up to date with local feeding schemes, GBV hotlines and public health messaging re. Covid safety. Through online training, we equipped Coaches to be able to safely share this information and fun activities with children and households on Whatsapp groups but also via accessible face to face community networks for those households that do not have devices.

Parents/carers and children received weekly resources, activities and information, to help them cope during this difficult time - including trauma informed mindfulness/meditation, fitness and fun, promotion of mental health, relationship building in the household, self-awareness, and other coping skills. All resources were shared in English, Afrikaans, IsiXhosa and Shona. You can even do a Take 5 using Makaton sign language (especially created for children on the Autism spectrum (ASD)).

## During the pandemic:

We supported **47** communities that surrounded our 5 sites.

Reaching **over 800** parents/caregivers and households in our programme and enabling us to stay connected to children in the service throughout lockdowns.

Distributed **2500** food parcels and vouchers to support emergency food security needs.

We referred **10** children and young people to emergency mental health support.

## ASD remote support

Resources shared on WhatsApp groups for children with ASD were more visual and included the use of Makaton. Children on school feeding schemes provided with food parcels / vouchers.

## 45 new mobile devices

Tablets and Smartphones with monthly uncapped data packages for our teams to deliver regular child friendly mental health services via Whatsapp groups, and for W4C coaches to continue to access training, support and information.

## Evidence of positive shifts in mental health / wellbeing of children - a sense of the result of the support we gave during 2020 :

### Helping families

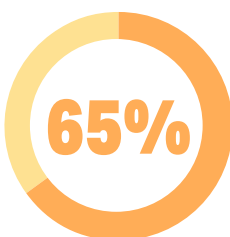
When asked how the W4C remote service WhatsApp groups helped parents and their children during this year, their answers included it helped parents and children stay active and exercise during this time, and it helped parents and children practice being calm and positive.

### What they missed

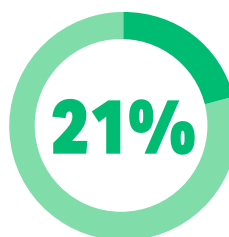
When asked what children missed the most of W4C, most frequent answers included their surf coaches/mentors (specifically not being able to talk to them and surf with them), being around their friends at the beach, surfing, and doing W4C 'kilos' and energisers on the beach.

### How we helped

When asked whether the remote services/activities shared helped them and their children cope better during the national lockdown and Covid-19 pandemic:



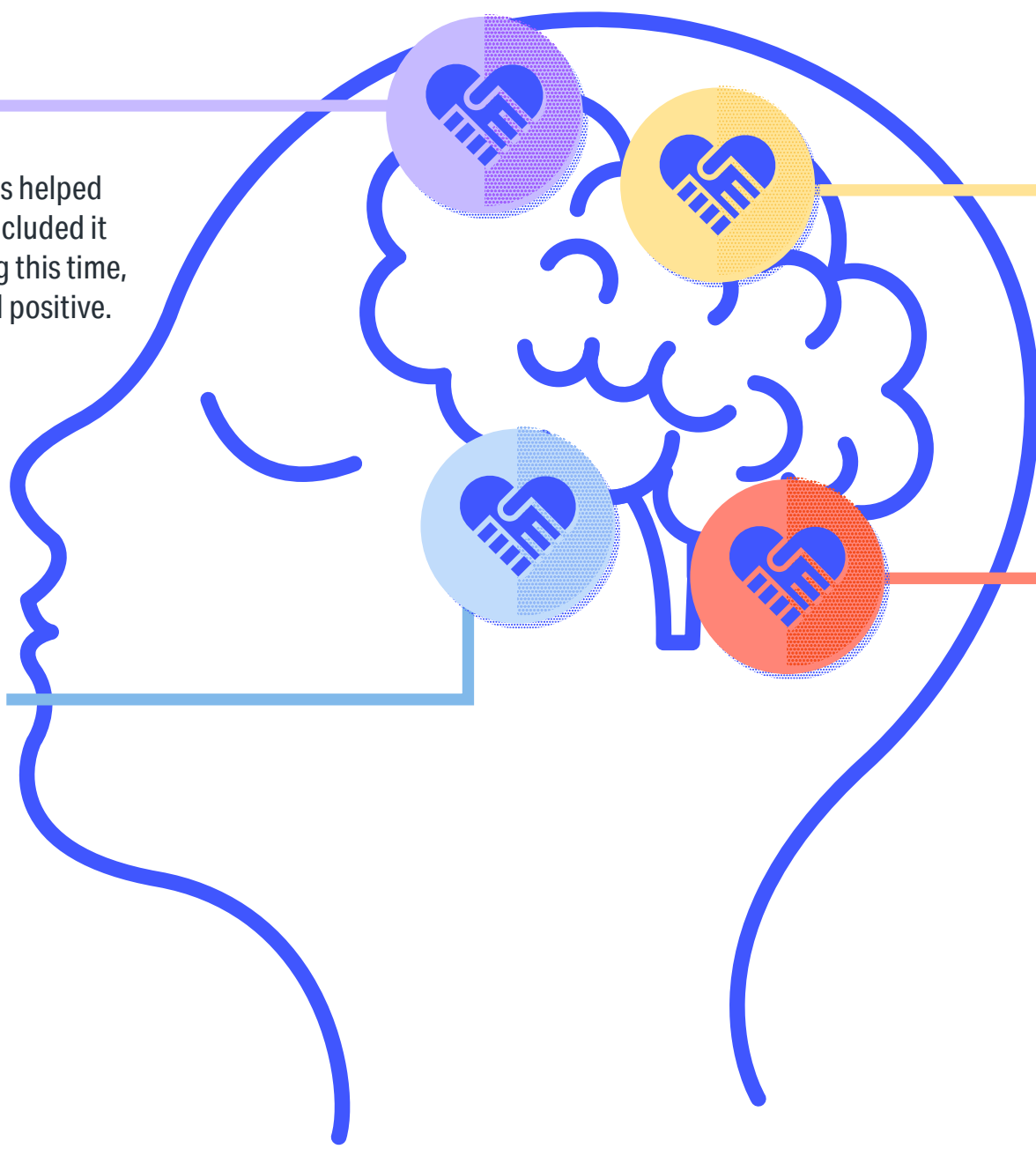
of parents we spoke to said 'yes a lot'



an additional 21% of parents said 'to some extent'

### Video activities

Remote mental health activities and resources enjoyed the most by child participants, included practicing their 'surf pop-up' (standing up on a surfboard) at home with video instructions from their coaches, fitness exercises, meditation, Power Hand, and creating W4C 'kilos' with their families.







# Our global partnerships

2020 saw the growth of our International Partnership work. As we've come to better understand the active ingredients of our Surf Therapy programmes, we've developed training and resources to help partner organisations start their own evidence-based Surf Therapy programmes. We believe that by sharing what works with other passionate community leaders and activists, we can connect more and more people to the power of the ocean.



In 2020 we helped 18 community based organisations in 11 countries launch their own Surf Therapy programmes. This network - which we call The Wave Alliance - is growing every year and increasing access to Surf Therapy along new coastlines. You can read our full Wave Alliance report [here](#).

We also adapted some of our Wave Alliance training resources to support non-surfing partners. We're proud to have worked with the Directors and head facilitators at Skateistan South Africa, Elman Peace (Somalia) and Glasswing (El Salvador) to introduce a more intentional mental health focus to their programme design, staff training, curriculum and evaluation. This work continues into 2021.

## 24 partners in 10 different countries



# Ten years of Waves for Change

## A few words of thanks from Bongani Ndlovu, one of the first Surf Coaches at W4C 10 years ago, and now a Board member.

It would be impossible to reflect on the journey of Waves for Change without reflecting on the impact that the organization has had on my own personal growth. Eleven years ago, and prior to my involvement with Waves for Change, I realized that I wanted to learn how to surf. To be able to do so, however, I also realized that I would need regular surf lessons, a surfboard, and a wetsuit. At the time, obtaining all these resources seemed impossible as I did not know anyone who surfed and who could assist me in becoming a surfer.

The goal seemed unachievable until I saw a television insert of two gentlemen, namely Apish and Tim, coaching children from Masiphumelele Township on how to surf. After a quick online search, I managed to find Tim's contact details and I proceeded to message him about possibly teaching me how to surf. This was a year before Waves for Change was born. I had my first lesson with Tim soon after, and I have reflected many times in past blogs on that first wave. I joined the Masi Surf Club, assuming a leadership role. I qualified as internationally accredited Level 1 Surf coach and we began using our surfing skills to teach young people, from various under-resourced communities, to surf. We also taught these young people to use their skills to inspire others. We became much more than just surf coaches, because as mentors to the youth from Masi, we were equipping them to become agents of change and role models within the community.

After spending a year with Waves for Change, I was awarded a partial bursary to study at the University of the Western Cape that was financed from Waves for Change. During my first year as a Bachelor of Commerce undergraduate, I obtained high marks across all of my courses, and as a consequence, I was awarded a fellowship in my second year (the National Allan Gray Orbis Foundation Scholarship for Academic Excellence, Intellectual Imagination, Spirit of Significance, Courageous Commitment and Achievement Excellence).

I currently serve on the Waves for Change Board and Finance Committee and this is where I have been able to continue to share my passion for sport and development, and to equip agents of change in previously disadvantaged communities.

I believe it was former president Nelson Mandela who once said, *"I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb"*. That is the feeling that best articulates how I feel about our growth as an organization: we have indeed come a long way, from an informal surf club, but there remains a great deal of work that lies ahead for us, especially as we continue on this journey of trying to make a meaningful impact in the mental health space in South Africa and globally.

On behalf of the Waves for Change community and Board, I would like to thank you for partnering with us on this journey, and in particular for your support during an extremely challenging and unpredictable 2020/21.

All of this would not have been possible without you, our supporters, and our incredible committed team. A special thank you to the W4C Coaches who deliver our essential service with passion and energy every day. Please join us as we continue riding these Waves for Change.





# Donors / Acknowledgements

## Donors & Supporters

Active Foundation  
Allan Gray  
Alpha Sites PTY (USA)  
Ander Group SA  
Autism Community Development  
Bantu Wax  
BT Supporters Club  
Capital Group (USA)  
City of Cape Town  
Comic Relief  
EG Woods Will Trust  
EMpower Foundation  
Endel South Africa (Pty) Ltd  
Feisty Frog Studio  
Finisterre  
Foundation Philanthropique Next  
Friends of Isiqalo  
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GYD (Innowind)  
Investec  
Juice Film  
JUJU Surf Club  
Lancaster Foundation  
Laureus Sport for Good Global  
Laureus Sport for Good South Africa  
Lesedi Power Group  
Mami Wata  
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Svenska Postko  
Thierry Foundation  
The Lombardi Family  
The Lunch Box Fund  
TIAS Arms  
Vans SA  
ViiV Healthcare Grant  
World Childhood Foundation  
Zig Zag

## Research Partners



## Events, Campaigns and Fundraisers

Waves for Change is privileged to have a community of supporters who make contributions through various initiatives. Their efforts include, running, cycling, hiking, yoga training and many more projects and events aimed at raising both awareness and funds to support the programmes. In the past year your support has played such a significant role in helping raise unrestricted funds and we are so thankful for your support.

## Individuals

A huge thank you to everyone that has individually supported Waves for Change over the past financial year. Your unwavering support during such uncertain times has played a vital role in helping us become more flexible and adaptable. More importantly your contributions helped us continue to provide vital child-friendly mental health services to children and young people during these extremely uncertain and volatile times.

Special thanks to the Psychologists /Counsellors/ mental health experts, such as those from Khayelitsha hospital, who provided essential debrief services to children, Coaches and households throughout 2020/21. You held such an important safe space for the W4C community throughout extremely challenging times, supporting with grief, gender based violence and rising levels of stress and adversity in so many homes as the pandemic worsened. We look forward to continuing our important partnership into 2021 and beyond.

# Enkosi, Dankie, Thank you

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