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.

Welcome!
Find your way around...
Our journey over the last 10 years

**2011**
- 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**
- Completed feasibility study at 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 at University Western Cape and developed first surfing + psychoeducation curriculum at University of Western Cape.
- Surf Therapy is born.
- Received first major grant with Comic Relief to action our research findings, improve programme delivery and start consolidating a SA team.
- Tim Conibear awarded Ashoka Fellowship to grow use of physical activity to promote mental health.

**2017**
- 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 18% 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.

**2021 & beyond**
- Waves for Change win the Luxamus Sport for Good Global Award.
- 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.
- Tim Conibear awarded Ashoka Fellowship to grow use of physical activity to promote mental health.
- Waves for Change establishing as a best practice hub for social prescription/sport therapy in South Africa and other Low-Middle Income settings.

**Key:**
- **Number of Children**
- **Coaches**
- **Significant Moments**
- **Awards**

**2011**
- 45
- 3

**2015**
- 220
- 13

**2017**
- 730
- 21

**2021 & beyond**
- 1777
- 60%
- 40%
- 40%
- 48%
- 52%
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.

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 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 from community. They say things like “men don’t cry”, “men are supposed to work hard”. So as a man in our community, I have to support my family physically as well as emotionally. When I am in the ocean, I have the time to think about things. I have to be the first one to step out and fight. Financially, I have to 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.
Our model: how change happens at our sites

**Inputs**
- Safe spaces
- Safe transport
- Surfboards & wetsuits
- Trained surf mentors / caring adults
- Community based referral network

**Activities**
- Referrals & participant intake
- Surf mentor training and development
- Referral partner and parent engagement
- Weekly 3-hour surf therapy sessions (a fun, but challenging activity, combined with coping skills curriculum)
- Weekly after care and Surf Club sessions
- Monitoring, reflection & learning
- Ongoing child protection and safeguarding processes

**Output**
- Annual cohorts of children who complete a 10-month surf therapy course and transition to an aftercare pathway.
- Annual cohorts of surf mentors who deliver community-based mental health services.

**Short/medium outcomes**
- Improved overall well-being
- Improved Heart Rate Variability (HRV) i.e. flexibility and ability to adapt to stress
- Improved community-based network that can access and prevent mental health challenges for children
- Increased connection to opportunities for young people

**Long term outcomes**
- Increase in economically active young people: Surf mentors who complete their 2 year pathway and successfully transition into employment
- Improvement in self-regulation and executive functioning: Enabling children (10-16 year old) to regulate their behaviours, emotions, and make healthy life choices such as completing school, rejecting violence and gangs throughout their adolescent years

**Activities**
- Monitoring, reflection & learning
- Ongoing child protection and safeguarding processes

**Outputs**
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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. The risk is even higher for children living near conflict zones (e.g. South Africa’s Cape Flats), growing up in unsafe homes and frequenting substance users.

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 to respond appropriately to situations, get angry too easily, do their homework and think clearly and to control their volume in strong emotions.

It can also significantly increase the risk of 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 are overburdened
• Services not culturally or age appropriate leading to low uptake and disengagement
• Services that are offered are short-term and often do not have safety nets for children and young people
• Mental health challenges are not identified during adolescence and develop into more severe conditions such as substance misuse, alcohol/substance use disorders (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 trained to identify concerns and refer up into the clinical system where necessary.

• Transaction with 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

Mental Health Outcome
• Task shifted from expensive mental health experts and overburdened healthcare settings to trained community based youth
• Improvements in children’s oral wellbeing
• Decreased risk of substance misuse, gang involvement, violence, and other serious 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 stretched 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 Cape, 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 for whole-church task shifting approach asking community based youth to multi-task as trusted
• Bringing together DOH, mental health stakeholders and experts, children and young people themselves to understand and mobilise political and public pressure for preventative services from local and national government departments and decision makers
• Persuading donors / government to invest in physical activity for health and engaging all stakeholders in evidence based training and support for all 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.

2.2 million people

Job losses

Lost their jobs due to Covid-19 lockdowns in S.A.

This has led to increased mental health presentations such as post-traumatic stress disorder, mood disorders, anxiety disorders, phobias, and obsessive-compulsive disorders.

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:

Effect on mental wellbeing

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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.

Increase in domestic violence

The Covid-19 pandemic amplified the existing gender inequalities and may especially have affected women who are 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 2021, showed that:

33% of South Africans were depressed

45% of South Africans were fearful

29% of South Africans were experiencing loneliness

47% of adults surveyed ran out of money to buy food for their household in April

21% of adults said that at least one person in their household went hungry

15% 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. They have allowed us to stand with the communities we work during the darkest moments of the pandemic and lockdowns.

Almost 2 million

children had returned after lockdowns in 2020. Education experts expect many of the absentees to become dropouts.

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During the pandemic:

We supported 47 communities that surrounded our sites.

Reaching over 800 parents who live at our programme and enabling us to stay connected to children in the service throughout lockdowns.

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

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

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

65% of parents we spoke to said ‘yes a lot’

21% of parents said ‘to some extent’

How we helped

When asked how the W4C remote service WhatsApp groups helped parents and their children during this year, their answers included:

What they missed

When asked what children missed most of W4C, most frequent answers included:

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, enabled 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 face to face or WhatsApp groups 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 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).

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.

Video activities

Remote mental health activities and resources enjoyed by the most 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.

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What they missed

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

The goal seemed achievable until I saw a television insert of two gentlemen, namely Tim and Apish, coaching children from Masiphumelele Township on how to surf. After a quick online search, I managed to find Tim’s contact details and 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 teach others. We became much more than just surf coaches, because as mentors to the youth from Masiphumelele, 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 scholarship in my second year (the National Albie Sachs Foundation Scholarship for Academic Excellence; Intellectual Imagination, Spirit of Skepticism, Governance 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.

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 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.

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.
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.