



Shewana

Female Empowerment Surf Therapy Project

February – November

2021



A Female Empowerment Project that promotes mental and physical well being by providing surfing, peer-mentoring and friendship.

Programme Background:

The Grootbos Foundation is a Non-Profit Company, established in 2003 with the VISION of conserving the Cape Floral Kingdom and uplifting the communities therein.

It is our MISSION to conserve the unique Cape Floral Kingdom, the region we call home; and to develop sustainable livelihoods through ecotourism, enterprise development, sports development and education.

Our flagship sports programme founded in 2008 works to promote sports and social development in the Overberg, an area with high unemployment rates and few educational, and developmental resources or opportunities.

Our Football Foundation provides daily coaching at 6 sites across the Overberg. Established in partnership with the Premier League, the Football Foundation is a subsidiary of the larger Grootbos Foundation and aims to uplift communities by empowering individuals through accredited skills training and leadership opportunities. It works to promote education, health, social integration and participation through sports.

Project Background:

Shewana is a female empowerment project implemented in 2021 in partnership with *Waves for Change* and the *Wave Alliance* Membership. Built on the success of the *Waves for Change* project, two Grootbos Foundation members were invited to attend training to obtain the necessary skills and curriculum to be able to implement a pilot project in Gansbaai under the umbrella of the Football Foundation programme of Grootbos Foundation.

The goal is to support mental health among young females from unstable communities. The project offers an opportunity for respite from daily stresses by being in a safe, supportive environment, having fun. Girls will learn transferable skills to cope with stress, regulate behaviour, build healing relationships and make positive life changes.

With the assistance of Sport for Good Funding from Laureus South Africa, we were able to cover transport costs to and from the beach. The *Wave Alliance* supplied training for coaches and 10 reef surf boards. The Grootbos Foundation Covid-Relief



Kitchen provided hot meals after Shewana sessions. *Black Girls Surf* donated *Hurley* rash vests and *Next Gen Surf* donated swimming shorts which helped a great deal to boost the young women’s confidence and dressed in matching gear, making them feel more like a team with a sense of pride and belonging.

Participants:

14 Girls were selected from two different communities; 8 girls completed the programme. All the girls were aged 14 – 15 years; two were in Grade 7 and twelve were from Grade 8.

Girls who stood to most benefit from the Shewana programme were referred by local community coaches and teachers from the local high school who have worked with these youths on the field and in the classroom.

Participants	Shewana
Male	0
Female	14
Age 11- 14	5
Age 15-18	9
Black	6
Coloured	8
White	0



Intervention:

Increasing female participation in our programmes has always been a goal of Grootbos Foundation due to the risk of young women being more likely to drop out of formal sport after primary school. Many fall into patterns of cultural expectation and family responsibility like maintaining the household and caring for younger siblings, putting their own education and career paths aside.

Grootbos Foundation's sports programme tried and tested many ideas of how to address and inspire female empowerment. This has been an ongoing struggle as most young women seemed disinterested in classroom-based engagements (like during Life Orientation lessons). The environment in which to encourage female empowerment needed to change, but young women had shown themselves reluctant to come to the community sportsfield in the afternoons once they began high school.



We started a female rugby programme which proved surprisingly popular. Many of the girls noted that they did not feel as physically self-conscious on the rugby field as there is a position for all body shapes, unlike in some other more traditional female sports codes.

This got us thinking! How could we adapt our female empowerment programme into something that would make young women feel more comfortable and free to share.

After attending the surf therapy training in Kalk Bay with Waves for Change it was clear to Programme Manager, Natasha Bredekamp, and junior coach, Maxene Valentine, that running a surf therapy project would be the new route to female empowerment. Surfing is something different yet forms the pathway to female empowerment which is necessary for the young girls of our community.

We selected two groups of girls from the different race communities, to ensure we were addressing both the Coloured and Black communities of Gansbaai. In this way, girls could learn from each other and find similarities between their life experiences.

Sessions took place during the week on days that the girls were not at school as local schools were still on a rotational timetable due to Covid lockdown. Over the duration of the

programme, the girls got to know the coaches and each other, worked on their communication, surfing and gained more confidence within themselves and in the water as their skills gradually improved with every session. They coped well with cold water, bad-weather and constant changes of Covid Regulations and shifting school time tables.

The first beach location is 5.8km away from the community. Participants were collected by bus and walked 400m from the beach parking lot on the beach to the safest beginners' spot to surf. The location was near a river mouth and once this opened to the sea, we were unable to cross to reach the good surfing spot.

We went on a search for a beach that was easier to access and safer. We found a beach 22km away which was much safer and easier to access. Participants were collected by bus and transported to Castle Beach in Pearly Beach, which became our new home. Most days we had the beach all to ourselves, which gave the girls more confidence to try and make mistakes with no unwanted spectators.

On bad-weather days, we used the club house at our sports field facility which was closer to the community. We did indoor activities that focused on boosting self-worth, different breathing techniques and tips on how to create a safe environment at home.

The Shewana girls participated in environmental excursions so that they would develop an appreciation for the environment in which they live. The girls assisted in a reforestation programme, planting 1 000 trees, spent an afternoon with an Entomologist to learn about insects, the importance of the relationship between insects and plants, and how this all fits into our ecosystem. The girls participated in a beach clean-up, addressing the continuous issues of coastal pollution and why it is important to keep our oceans and beaches safe.



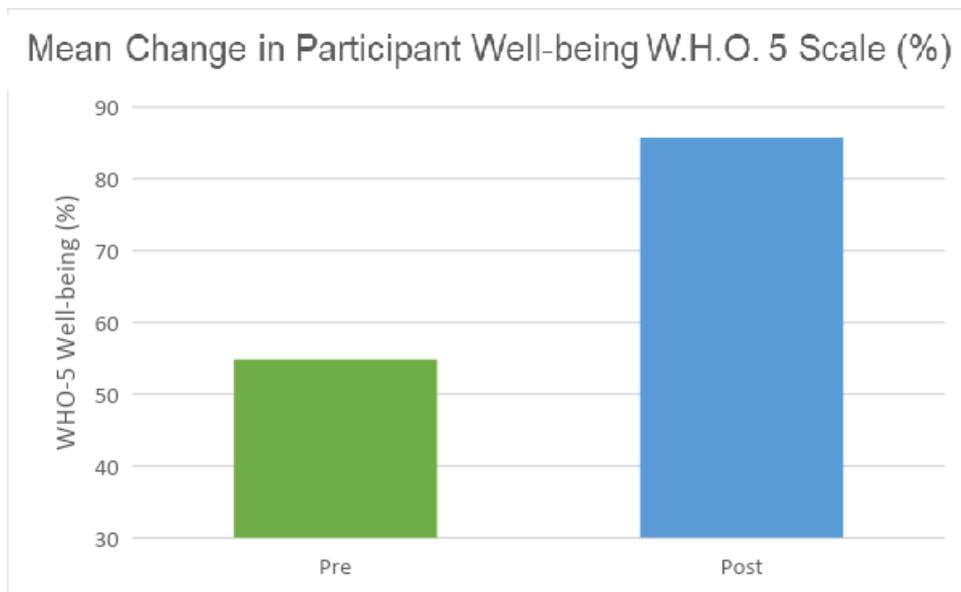


Evaluation Measures:

An important part of the project was evaluating whether the sessions had a positive effect on participants or not. We used the World Health Organisation Well-Being Index (WHO-5) to measure impact and below is the Summary and Analysis.

Quantitative Summary and Analysis:

The World Health Organization Well-Being Index (WHO-5) was used to measure the impact of Shewana surf therapy intervention on subjective psychological well-being. The WHO-5 has been validated for a range of populations and contexts across the world. Measures were taken before the start and at an end-point of the intervention. For Shewana 7 participants completed measures with 6 data sets excluded for -paired data. The WHO-5 outputs well-being as a percentage with 100% indicating highest well-being.



When comparing the pre and post-tests we see there is an increase in well-being with a very large effect size ($r = 0.89$) that was statistically significant ($p = 0.018$). It should be noted that due to the small sample size ($n = 7$) these conclusions are not sufficiently statistically powered, however they provide encouraging insight into the viability of the Shewana surf intervention. All participants reported improved well-being on the WHO-5 scale with an average increase of 31%. These improvements to participant well-being are of special note due to the disruption of intervention delivery experienced due to COVID-19 over the past 12 months. Positive themes aligned with improved well-being also featured within qualitative data where participants conducted a word association exercise with the intervention. The larger a word features on the following word cloud, the more often it was reported within the word association activity.



Words such as *happy*, *healthy* and *excited* align with well-being goals while the prominence of the word *safe* is notable. Safety is an important component of intervention delivery in terms of introducing individuals without much water experience to a new aquatic sport safely. Safety can also relate to the intervention holding an emotional safe space in terms of

discussing mental health, an important component highlighted within wider Sport for Development literature. Such a space is characterised as open, supportive, encouraging and non-judgemental. The importance of accessing such a safe space and the wider intervention is highlighted in participant satisfaction data.

These initial findings highlight the potential the Shewana programme has for supporting young women’s mental health in Gansbaai.

While I was surfing...	
I felt safe	100%
I had fun	100%
I made new friends	89%
I want to join a surf club	100%

Participants clearly valued the Shewana programme with 100% of participants indicating their desire to join a surf club as a way of gaining continued access to the benefits of the programme. It is notable that all participants made new social connections within the intervention, another well-established pathway to positive mental health. These initial findings highlight the potential the Shewana programme has for supporting young women’s mental health in Gansbaai.

Participants Feedback:

Participants were asked to describe what made them feel different, and what they felt they achieved from taking part in the Shewana Female Empowerment Project. They were also asked for general comments about the project. Five participants completed this section of the post-evaluation form. The feedback was very positive – what follows is an annotated version of client’s comments.

- “It became my favourite sport/ hobby and it really boosted my confidence”.
- “I feel happy, calm and also tired but I really enjoyed doing it”
- “Sometimes I felt scared but when I was with the coaches, I felt calm, excited and happy. The coaches constantly checked to see if we were okay and comfortable”
- “My favourite thing at surf therapy, is that you can talk about how you feel, you can talk about your emotions. The coaches care about how you feel. Since I started surf therapy, I feel free to talk whenever I want”

Parent and Guardian Feedback:

Parents and guardians were also asked to offer their observations about how the project had benefited their children. 5 parents/guardians completed the questionnaire:

- __ “The changes I have seen in my child is that she is always experiencing new things and she is happier.”

- __ “I feel happy and would recommend this project to others because it helped my child so much.”

- __ “My child is excited on the days that they are going to the beach and always tells me about the good session she had at the beach.”

- __ I would recommend this project to others because it teaches them to succeed in life and do things at their own pace.”



Conclusion and Discussion:

The results from the self-evaluation and parent/guardian feedback, attendance and personal observations give a strong indication that the surfing project had a positive impact on the lives of the participants who took part.

8 of the 14 girls completed the course and the attendance of the 8 girls were constant and didn't drop below 80% on any session. Of the 8 girls who completed the session, all showed positive change and resilience within their personal development and well-being.

Challenges/Problems:

Overall feedback from participants were very positive and while they thoroughly enjoyed it, we feel that there are some learning points and improvements that could be made:

1. Equipment - Usage of a boogie board before a surfboard might increase confidence as the surfboard seemed intimidating for some of the participants who could not swim, or were smaller and found handling the board a lot harder. Not having leashes also made it difficult for participants to control their surfboards when falling off.
2. Cold – The project does not have wetsuits for participants and while they did not complain, it did impact the length of the session as they were unable to stay in the water as long on overcast or colder days.
3. School Tiered/ Rotational Timetable – Due to Covid Regulations and the school capacity, the school operated on a tiered time table, which meant that every week, participants would attend school on different days, which created an inconsistency of securing a set day for session.
4. Covid Regulations – The inconsistency of South African Covid Levels, meant there was interruption in the flow of the programme.



Next Steps:

Currently there is minimal to no funding for this programme. With the success of the pilot, we are hoping to run this as an official programme and in order to do that, we need to obtain wetsuits and rash vests that could be used by participants. We would also like to purchase some boogie boards, as this would improve the programme, contributing to confidence in the water and becoming an additional step in learning to trust the surfboard.

We will roll out the 2nd phase of the Shewana programme using the participants from the pilot as peer mentors to provide mentor support for the new recruits, and to improve their current new skills by sharing their experience and skills gained.

Long term, it is hoped that this programme can be adapted to all our sports codes to increase mental well-being across the Gansbaai youth communities.

