SMALL STEPS SURFING

EVALUATION REPORT

Salt Rock Pilot | February - July 2021

Changing lives through Surf Therapy
MISSION
Small Steps Surfing South Africa aims to create a safe space with caring adults/coaches and fun, challenging activities through surf therapy that help build social and emotional skills that empower our young learners to better cope with their outside worlds.

We recognise that every young person is different and each responds to challenges differently. But we believe that with the right assistance and support they can all achieve their goals.

BACKGROUND
Small Steps Surfing (Pty) Ltd was founded in 2017 by Jurgen Jacobs with a dream to help those less fortunate than himself. This was shown through his vision for his company to consistently give back to communities and Non-Profit companies around South Africa. On top of SSS and working full time overseas, Jurgen started a free learn-to-surf program in Sodwana Bay for the underprivileged youth in the area.

Jump to 2021, add a new face or 2 (Josh Chaplin – Head of Operations, Matt Sutherland – Head of Marketing), Small Steps Surfing South Africa (NPC) was founded, or as we like to call it, S4A.

At S4A we work with 11-18 year old boys and girls from the iLembe District who are exposed to high amounts of trauma in their outside world that has a negative effect on their mental and physical wellbeing, which can lead to unhealthy behaviour. Using surfing as the medium or ‘Surf Therapy’, we help build the emotional and social skills of our participants using evidence-based activities and try to tailor to each of our kids personal needs to ensure each child receives the full benefits of our program. We track these benefits with a structured evaluation process using validated well-being scales. Our goal is to build self-confidence and self-awareness, developing independence in our participants.

Further to our program we have implemented a feedback system, where previous participants who have now reached the age of 18 or older and eligible to work, are filtered back into the program and trained to become caring coaches for the next group of participants that join the program. We are currently training two of our participants to join us as coaches for the next season.

The Program launched with training and equipment support from Waves for Change and is funded by our founder, Jurgen Jacobs.
We currently have 26 participants in our program. 11 of our participants were referred to us by iLembe Surf Riders Association, our district surf competing body. 14 participants who joined were either family or friends of the original 11 participants or through parents who had heard of our program and asked if their child/children could join.

We have capped our program at 25 participants until new coaches have completed their training and funding is available to support more participants.

Most of our participants are between the ages of 11 and 14. The ratio of male to female is 7:1 (see below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>11-14</th>
<th>15-18</th>
<th>19-21</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
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The majority of our participants are based in Shakashead which is roughly 2km from our base at Salt Rock main beach. These participants are the most consistent with their attendance as they have the closest access to our safe space.

From Shakaskraal through to Thembeni, distances from our base range from 10km to 25km. These participants often can’t make sessions due to transport issues.

Table 2: Participant Living Location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>SHAKASHEAD</th>
<th>SHAKASKRAAL</th>
<th>GROUTVILLE</th>
<th>THEMENBI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NO OF PARTICIPANTS</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among financial issues many of our participants families face on a daily basis, some experience trauma related to violence in their areas, gangsterism, having absent parent/parents or coming from broken homes. This trauma created by their outside worlds has a negative effect on their inside worlds, creating stress that is detrimental to their health and their characters as children.
Intervention

Our project was modelled on the successful Waves for Change programs running throughout Africa. We were trained on the W4C curriculum which we have since adapted to fit the needs of our participants. After recruiting our participants, we delivered a 16 week program. Sessions took place on Saturday mornings starting at 8:30am and ending at 11:00am. Sessions ran from Salt Rock main beach just north of Ballito, KZN. Soft top learn-to-surf boards, leashes and fins were sponsored by W4C and sessions were managed by our project coordinator Josh Chaplin. Josh led the sessions in person and coordinated teams of coaches and participants to work at least 1:1 in the water. As volunteers were not always available, Josh and our coaches took turns assisting each participant while the other participants waited for their turn in the water, ensuring at least a 1:1 coach to participant at all times.

Funding for transport was limited so most of our participants made their own way to the sessions, although we did collect and drop off the participants that live in Shakashead.

Participants met at Salt Rock main beach where they got changed and then took part in a warm-up activity, mainly an ‘actionary’ run on the beach with boards in hand to our designated location for the session. They were then briefed on the activity for the day and given an ocean safety talk according to the conditions of that day. We then teamed up into pairs ran a sensory breathing exercise to help the participants relax and calm themselves before entering the water. After the activity for the day the group gathered together and reflect on the session we have just had, focusing on how we can use the things we learned in the session away from the beach. We end every session with a meal (usually burgers), fruit and some juice.

Over the course of the 16 weeks, participants have built new relationships with the coaches and each other, worked on their surfing and gained more confidence in the sea and in themselves.

A bad-weather plan was put in place in case of high winds, flat or big seas, although most weekends we were fortunate enough with the conditions. When we could not surf, we practiced our paddling and swimming in the tidal pool, we skated at the local skate park, or we played football either at the beach or at a public soccer field.
Evaluation Measures

An important part of the program is evaluating whether the sessions had a positive effect on participants. We used a validated tool – the WHO-5 Wellness Scale – to measure changes to their wellbeing before, during and after the 16 week period. The WHO-5 Wellness Scale is a short self-reported measure of current mental wellbeing, validated with children aged 8 upwards.

We asked participants to complete a simple questionnaire that used this scale to measure their self-esteem, self-confidence, relationships and achievements. This was completed pre- and post-project. Success was determined on measurable self-reported improvements in mental health and self-confidence, but also included qualitative feedback eg: enjoyment of learning a new skill, meeting new people and being part of a community.
Evaluation Measures

Attendance

We faced several challenges to our service delivery and these correlated with fluctuations in our attendance data:

COVID-19 has been a continuous threat to our attendance data since inception of our pilot due to beach closures and gatherings not being permitted. We have kept up with COVID-19 protocols and managed to be consistent with our sessions.

2021 Unrest in KZN would be the most detrimental challenge we have had to face as we came to the decision to cancel one of our sessions (the only Saturday we have not run the program since inception). The unrest also took a toll on our participants and coaches alike and it was made very difficult for our participants to find transport to get to our sessions.

Pollution causing beach closures. During the unrest, an unfortunate chemical and pesticide spill found its way into our East Coast seas and all beaches along the coast were closed for public safety. We are fortunate enough to have ‘bad weather’ plans in place so we could still run our program, however, our kid’s parents are quite uneasy about letting their children attend in the case one of them get sick as a result of poison in our waters.

Considering the Covid-19 pandemic, closure of beaches and public transport facilities and the most recent civil unrest in SA, our attendance has been very good, sitting at 65% over the 16-week period. From the initial 25, 5 have since moved over 200km away but still manage to join the odd session.

What we have found is a solid core group of 16 participants (15 male, 1 female) who do whatever they can to be at sessions, and if they can’t make the sessions for personal reasons, they always contact in advance to let us know. This core group’s attendance is 88%.

It should come as no surprise that our core group all live in Shakashead and have the easiest access to our program. Transport is our main hurdle to get over, especially for those living areas other than Shakashead.
EVALUATION MEASURES

OUR MEASURES

For this evaluation we used the World Health Organization-5 Wellbeing Index (WHO-5). This scale was developed and scientifically validated to enable the measuring of mental wellbeing in the general population and the evaluation of projects, programmes and policies which aim to improve mental wellbeing. The scale has been widely used and translated into over 30 languages to support monitoring, evaluating projects and programmes, and investigating the determinants of mental wellbeing.

We also assessed participants access to social support before and after the intervention alongside satisfaction scores related to fun, safety and wish to continue participating in surf therapy. All measures were administered before surf therapy commenced and after the culmination of a surf therapy curriculum cycle to measure any changes over the course of the intervention.

More information on the scale used can be found at the following link: https://www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/who-5/about-the-who-5/Pages/default.aspx

Five participants submitted usable paired data from before and after the surf therapy for this evaluation report. This number is small as post test data collection occurred around the 2021 Zuma riots that had a significant impact on local communities. Five sets of data were collected prior to the riots, and it was deemed not appropriate to continue data collection on both safety grounds and due to the large confounding effects these events would likely have had upon participant wellbeing. All quantitative conclusions should be read with the size of the data set in mind, however qualitative data was collected from most participants (19) as this occurred prior to the riots.

RESULTS

WELLBEING

As can be seen in the results above, within the small data set collected the intervention led to a small improvement in overall wellbeing by almost two and half points on the SWEMWBS with a moderate effect size of 0.6. on the WHO-5 with a small effect size (r = 0.2).

It should also be noted that the pre test scores collected were very high, well above expected values based on population data.

Given participants had already been exposed to elements and personal of the intervention prior to pre-test collection, these scores may have been inflated or have included a degree of response bias. Given the possibility of inflated scores the fact that the intervention still saw an increase is notable.
The findings highlight the changes in use of social support by participants within the surf therapy intervention. It is noticeable both in terms of encouragement and support the biggest change was related to interaction with surf coach/mentors.

One of the key aims of S4A is to provide children with access to a safe space and caring adults and the increased use of coaches/mentors in these roles suggests the project has been successful even within this small sample.

This development of positive social support provides a direct and evidence-based pathway to further sustainable improvements to mental wellbeing both in and outside the intervention.

The results of participant satisfaction speak for themselves with all participants reporting 100% satisfaction across all measures. The fact all participants reported making new social connections triangulates with social support conclusions mentioned above. The wish from all participants to continue with further participation highlights the value participants placed on the intervention and need for continued service provision.

While these findings may be limited due to the small sample size discussed above, when combined with in depth qualitative data also reported, they highlight the positive impact on participants that is associated with the Small Steps surf therapy programme. Further evaluation with a larger sample who have no prior experience of Small Steps would be valuable to build upon these promising findings.

WHilst surfing, I...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Felt Safe</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Had Fun</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made new friends</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want to join a surf club</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WORD CLOUD

Words our participants used that they associate with our program. The more times a word was used the larger it appears.
As part of our evaluation, we asked for written feedback from participants, their parents and third-party stakeholders. For participants and parents this feedback is completely anonymous to ensure they feel free to offer any and all feedback they wish.
“I learn to respect others and give others the space and exercised our bodies and we feel new.” S4A Participant

“I like the breathing exercise and when you are scared everyone will help you nicely and teaching us to take care of ourselves and teach to respect each other. If you are scared of doing things no one will force you, you are free to say no at any time.” S4A Participant

“I feel happy and free because I am not scared for the beach and our new friends are respecting us when we train.” S4A Participant

“There are so many changes for child since he’s been attending surf therapy. He is not going around anymore. He is behaving like a child as well. He is respectful and I’m satisfied for that.” S4A Parent

“They have developed a passion, a burning desire and never want to miss a surf session. It’s more than a sport to them. At least it keeps them busy and off from loafing around. The school grades are improving even through surfing.” S4A Parent

“He has changed a lot. He is more independent and confident. He exercises a lot and gains some muscles. He likes to take a good care of himself. He is more punctual and focused. He is a go getter and he does whatever it takes to get what he wants.” S4A Parent
My understanding of S4A is taking young kids out of their towns, exposing them to the ocean and teaching them how to swim, how to surf which they can’t do on their own with obvious transport issues, peer pressure and all the rest. Basically, a program for the underprivileged where you teach them the skills that everybody in KZN should have, living by the sea. I have noticed a big change with the guys. Go back a few years and you never saw many of these kids on the beach, we only had a few coming through, most of who have become lifeguards to this day.

So, it’s a great project to inspire them and get them to know the sea. Who knows? They could become professional surfers, lifeguards, divers, get onto the ships or get involved in any part of the ocean and the lifestyle that it offers. So yes, I’ve seen a huge change in the guys. They’re respecting the ocean now and they’re not scared of the ocean anymore like they used to be so that is a good sign.

-Steve Honeysett, Municipal Beach Manager-

As part of our evaluation we asked for drawing based feedback from participants. Some participants find this method easier to express their feelings toward the ocean and to the program than in written answers.

Witten is: Power of “I will”
What I’ve drawn here is a person who is scared for waves but he is believing in the power of “I will”

“The power of I will” is not something that we explicitly teach at our program. However, the statement aligns with other identified outcomes within this evaluation that suggest, through the program, participants feel more confident, able to overcome fears and envisage themselves achieving their goals.
A WORD FROM WAVES FOR CHANGE SA

“The Small Steps Surfing team was kind enough to welcome me into their safe space earlier this year. Based on the culture of respect they have fostered together, and the pride they so clearly have in themselves and their team, it’s no surprise that they were so inclusive - an underlying current of kindness and care for each other ran through every moment of the session, even during the competitive teasing during a tag-team paddle-battle or the race for second helpings of Josh's burgers (which he, incredibly, spends his Friday nights making). I think it is this current - as well as the progressive surfing and high-energy of the surfers in the water - that seemed to draw so many people in: in just one session, there were so many enquiries from beach-goers about the programme and how they could help we started to joke that Josh needs a business card! Everyone wants to be part of the Small Steps culture and safe space, and so they should.

It’s been incredible to see a true integration of a well-being service into an existing sport programme, without any loss in surf training or support for the surfers who want to grow and master their skills or disempowerment of the original surfers - rather than changing things entirely, they have strengthened their programme and widened it’s sphere of impact.

This is a tricky process to manage, but Josh and the team have done it respectfully and collaboratively with their surfers. Being led by their surfers (and thinking through every aspect of their programme with care and deliberation) is one of the things I admire most about the Small Steps team - it is so clear that their surfers are at the heart of everything they do.

A powerful signal of this shift for me was that the surfers were all at their beach site despite a lack of waves, spending time together, helping each other and participating in the group meditation and check-in.

I’m so grateful that Jurgen and Josh trusted us enough to join us in the Wave Alliance community, and have contributed so much to it already. There has been such growth - in confidence, focus, passion, and delivery - throughout this pilot process, from the first sessions in Cape Town to now, and it’s been an honour to witness this programme thrive, despite the many disruptions over the last 12 months. I so look forward to the next stages in the Small Steps journey!”

Ash Heese, Partnership Manager - Waves for Change
Challenges we still face

Fundamental challenges S4A and our participants face are the lack of transport, equipment, coaches, food and drink, safe space, and a higher standard of education. We wish to alleviate the stress cause by these challenges.

Transport

Transportation appears to be the most complex and common of the challenges faced by participants and mentors in the program. It affects the hours of the program, who is able to participate and the cost of the program. On this pilot program, Josh collected kids from Shakashead in a borrowed van, and all others made their own way to the sessions. Given the limited availability of public transport, as well as their cost, there is a challenge to attend sessions regularly for those living outside of Shakashead, and to bring more kids to the program.

The evaluation of the program suggests that while the surf therapy program may reach many children who live in disadvantaged circumstances, additional effort is needed to attract the most disadvantaged young people.

Equipment

Our kids do not have the financially capabilities of affording wetsuits, swim gear, surfboards and surf equipment. We have 10 learn-to-surf surfboards for our beginners but our independent/advanced surfers require boards and equipment that best suit their needs. The majority of our sessions this year were held during winter and, even though our water is not very cold, being wet in the cold morning wind is quite difficult to handle, unless you are equipped with a wetsuit. Some of our participants have been donated wetsuits but most of our participants and coaches do not have, making it quite uncomfortable for them to join the sessions when it is cold. This is also a health concern.

Food and Drink

We have been allocated a small budget for food and drinks for the kids, which usually consists of a burger/hotdogs, fruit and juice. We are happy with knowing our kids have never left a session feeling hungry, yet the reality is a lot of them are hungry throughout the rest of the week. Also, our budget is allocated to the size we currently have, as we grow we will need to raise more funds to supply food for the new participants.

Lack of food and poor diet effects the health and behaviour of young people. It is important to note that diet and nutrition are not only important features of health promotion, they also have a direct impact on behaviour and mood.
Throughout this evaluation we can see the importance of a safe space for all kids. As it stands, our safe space is more a group of caring coaches and adults rather than a structure or building. Without a physical safe space we are limited as to the service we can provide to our kids. We are limited in terms of time spent together at the safe space, activities, classroom sessions and training sessions for future coaches.

Most of our kids do not have much, if any, assistance with homework and school studies, due to parents work constraints or a lack of parental involvement. Public Education in South Africa is lacking in good teachers and infrastructure. Moreover, with the current pandemic, many students may only go to school twice a week, diminishing their learning outcome.

The evaluation provided a better understanding of the future steps needed to promote engagement and empowerment of young people through surf therapy. The recommendations that follow have been distilled from the feedback from participants and parents, mentors involved in the surf therapy program, members of the community, and S4A. To be relevant to the young people and community we serve, the recommendations that follow are appropriate, necessary and highly significant for the sustainability of the surf therapy program at Salt Rock Beach.
**WEEKLY SESSIONS**

The weekly surf therapy sessions cannot only improve health and behaviour for young people, but can also contribute to efforts to mobilise the community and provide a platform to promote the program, particularly by providing a route into programs that promote mental health services and tackle social-economic and environmental challenges. The evaluations showed that more young people have a desire to coach/lead sessions but only a small number are currently taking up the opportunity due to age limitations, training requirements and lack of funds for salaries. It is hoped that any participant who is old enough can act as a mentor in due course.

**SAFE SPACE**

There is an urgent need to establish a designated safe space within the Salt Rock community to serve as the primary point of contact for all our young participants where they can access caring mentors, fun activities and develop coping and life skills. The safe space can run as a one-stop source of information on all relevant institutes helping to connect young people to the services that meet the objectives and needs of the local community, in particular the surf therapy program. This safe space can serve as a clubhouse and a classroom, where kids can gain access to volunteer teachers to assist with their homework and studies, to help grow their knowledge or to learn something new.

**GOAL**

Our main goal is sustainable growth and upskilling our participants, to reach as many young learners as possible and to keep filtering them back into our program as we grow. Our growth is solely dependant on funds available.

**CONCLUSION**

South Africa is a third world country, with one of the largest wealth gaps in the world. Thus, contributing to its extraordinarily high levels of crime and poverty. We believe that the change does not come from passively waiting, but through active transformation in our immediate communities. Surfing is not just a sport, but a vehicle to bettering mental wellbeing. A wealth of scientific data can prove that, by using surfing as a medium, we are able to achieve an improved sense of self, focus and mental stability. Small Steps Surfing South Africa is one of the few surf therapy programs in the country, but we dedicate ourselves to seeing our participants grow.

With the success of this pilot program, along with feedback from local members, we can see a great need for S4A to continue in Salt Rock and reach new participants in our area. We believe that we can make a difference in our area and wish to eventually deploy new programs in areas that we find need similar assistance.