



Evaluation Report

United Sierra Leone Sussex Village Pilot

September 2019 –April 2020

WHERE WE STARTED



WHERE WE ARE



An evaluation of the impact of surfing on 30 young people in Sussex Village coming from deprived background who are faced with violence, drug abuse, unemployment and teenage pregnancy.



United Sierra Leone Mission

We are United Sierra Leone, a member of the Wave Alliance, we work with children and young people between the ages of 10 to 25 years in Sussex village. These are children coming from deprived background who are faced with violence, drug abuse, unemployment and teenage pregnancy.

We provide them with a child-friendly environment, safe space, caring adults, fun activities and life coping skills to be able to cope with stress and traumatic experiences, be independent and become productive citizens in the community.

We provide an internationally recognized evidence-based surf therapy programme. This is a programme that seeks to help empower young people and help them to be able to contribute, in creating a better and United Sierra Leone.



Background to this project

Sussex is a coastal fishing village, near the town of York, around the peninsular, in the Western Area Rural District of Sierra Leone. The major industry in Sussex is fishing, alongside coal and stone mining. The village lies about twenty-five miles outside Freetown. The village was first inhabited by the Sherbro in 1750. Sussex was later settled by liberated African American slaves in 1824. It is a beautiful community. It has excellent weather, beaches and island, mountains and rich biodiversity. The community possesses substantial human and natural resources. Yet, like every parts of the country, Sussex village is still recovering from a devastating 11-year civil war which ended in 2002, and more recently affected by Ebola and COVID 19 pandemic.

Our Surf Therapy programme has been established, in response to an evidence-based report, following several years of work by United Sierra Leone in Sussex. The evidence shows that communities and young people need a safe space for themselves where they will be guided in the right path. Young people need it the most, since they are the most vulnerable and susceptible treacherous events and ideas and hence need the place where they can do everything to accomplish their goals and success with a positive mindset.

Safe Spaces are being used to provide informal education or other needs related to young people, a space where young people can come together to play, relax, eat, express themselves and feel supported. They can also learn skills to deal with the challenges they face, in particular people affected by the war, ebola, mudslides, COVID 19 and other traumatic episodes. Our safe spaces are designed for young who may be unsafe or otherwise exposed to inappropriate activities in coastline communities including violence, drug abuse, unemployment and teenage pregnancy.

Through access to safe spaces, caring mentors, and a provision of weekly Surf Therapy sessions, the programme gives young people skills to cope with stress, regulate behaviour, build healing relationships, and make positive life choices. United Sierra Leone members have completed training and vetting process in Cape Town, South Africa which helped us design surf therapy programme that aligns with the needs of our community as well as best practice and evidence globally.

The United Sierra Leone has been accredited as part of the Sierra Leone Wave Alliance. The Wave Alliance is an initiative led by the NGO-Waves for Change. The Alliance provides the training, equipment and mentoring needed for passionate individuals to introduce locally-owned evidence-based surf therapy to their coastlines. We are being supported by the Messeh Leone Foundation Trust, The Wave Alliance, Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs National Tourist Board, Ministry of **Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs.**



Project aims

The aims of the pilot project were:

1. To create a safe space where young people will take ownership of, discourage them from engaging in violence, drug abuse and other harmful practices; and being able cope with stress and become productive and responsible citizens.
2. To set up a permanent surf club which would enable young people to engage, interact, make friends, and develop close links with the local community for on-going emotional wellbeing and social inclusion.
3. Self-esteem, self-confidence in young people, and help them realise their true potentials.





Participants

Of the 30 young people involved in the project, 15 young people were used as sample for this evolution report referred to the course by the community, and 12 completed the course. They were all aged 3 to 16, and were referred by, professionals, families and community leaders.

With support from The Wave Alliance and Messeh Leone, the following local partner institutions and individuals assisted in identifying and referring the young people to the programme including families, village chief/headman, village community of elders, community youth organisation, mosques, churches, local hospital, school, **and the Children’s** Forum Network which is a local child-led charity organisation supporting children across the country.

Most participants were aged under 16. The ratio of male to female was 5:1 (see below)

Table 1: participant gender/age

Age	3-7	9-13	13-20
Male	3	7	4
Female	1	0	1

It is also important to note parents are mostly reluctant or afraid to send their girls to outdoor activities hence the reason for the less participation of girls. However, the project hopes new intake will generate many girls as the impact of the project in the community is now being felt, and so parents are already referring girls for the next circle of the project intake.

Due to the ethnic makeup of the local area, most of our participants are from the Creole tribes which is mostly spoke in the community. This location is mostly known for settlement of the Creoles since the abolition of the slave trade. Sierra Leone is home to about sixteen ethnic groups, each with its own language. In Sierra Leone, membership of an ethnic group often overlaps with a shared religious identity.

Table 1: participant gender/tribe (ethnicity)

Tribe	Creole	Mende	Limba	Temne	Fullah	Shaboro
Male	2	1	1	1	1	3
Female	2	0	0	0	0	4



Intervention

The project was modelled from a successful Waves for Change courses in Cape Town, South Africa. United Sierra Leone members have completed training and vetting process in Cape Town, South Africa which helped the organisation design surf therapy programme that aligns with the needs of the local community as well as best practice and evidence globally.

Participants were referred by community stakeholders and local service provided, and placed on a course lasting 6 months. Sessions took place on Sundays between 2.30 and 4.30pm. Sessions ran from Sussex village, in the western area of Freetown. Surf boards, kits, wetsuits, training on water safety and funds were provided by The Wave Alliance and the Messeh Leone Foundation Trust.

The sessions were managed by a team of 9 local mentors/coaches including the lead project coordinators Mr Sallu Kamuskay and Miss Margaedah Michella Samai, trained surf mentors. The sessions were led in person and coordinated teams of volunteers to work 1: 1 with participants in the water.

Funding for transport was available for mentors and coaches, because the participants were based in the community, they made their way to our local space where they dressed in their kits. As the sessions were being held on an island, a boat was provided to us by the community people on Sundays to move with participants to the location.

Participants met up at the surf club where they were changed and took part in some warm up games. Then they walked about 100m to the beach carrying their surf boards. Participants assembled on the beach for a safety briefing with the mentors/coaches and they all got in the water together and all water safety measures were observed. Each participant had his/her own personal mentor/coach, but it was not necessarily the same person at each session. However, in some cases participants gravitated towards a specific mentor/coach who they felt comfortable with, and they were left to work together. This method empowered the participants to decide who they wished to work with.

Over the course of the 6 months, participants got to know the mentors/coaches and each other, worked on their surfing and gained more confidence in the sea as they improved. They coped well with the water conditions (both cold and warm). A bad-weather plan had been put in place in case of high winds or flat sea, but in fact the conditions were excellent throughout the course, with clean waves and consistent swell.



Evaluation measures

An important part of the project was to conduct a preliminary evaluation to determine whether the sessions had a positive effect or otherwise negative effect on the participants.

With the assistance from Jamie Marshall - a researcher at the Edinburgh Napier University in Scotland and a member of The Wave Alliance, we used a validated tool - **the Stirling Child Wellbeing Scale (SCWS)** - to measure changes to their wellbeing before and after the course. This is a positively worded measure developed by Stirling University in 2010, with 2 subscales measuring emotional and psychological 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 e.g. enjoyment of learning a new skill, meeting new people and being part of a community.

We also looked at hard measures such as session attendance figures, and positive changes participants made to their lives after the project, such as joining a surf club or another club.





Results and findings

1. Attendance

Attendance was good. The mean attendance score for the project overall was 64% (where 100% would indicate each participant attending every session).

Participants who disengaged

Out of 16 referred clients, only 2 did not complete the full course. These were children below the ages required who had showed interest when the project started session. Anytime they advised by mentors for them not to come to the beach because of their ages, they will cry and insist to come to the beach. They felt good when they were involved in the project. They were initially involved as the beach used at the time was not far from their houses. It was just about 100 steps to the beach.

Unfortunately, they were dropped from the programme when the sessions finally relocated to its permanent own safe space provided by the community at the island which required the team to use boat to cross. It was not safe for them, as they needed special attention. The mentors thought it was little bit dangerous for children below five years. As a way to encourage them and not to feel bad, they were assured about joining future intakes when they eventually attained the required age for the project. This experience has also informed our referral age ranges for future programmes.



Results and findings

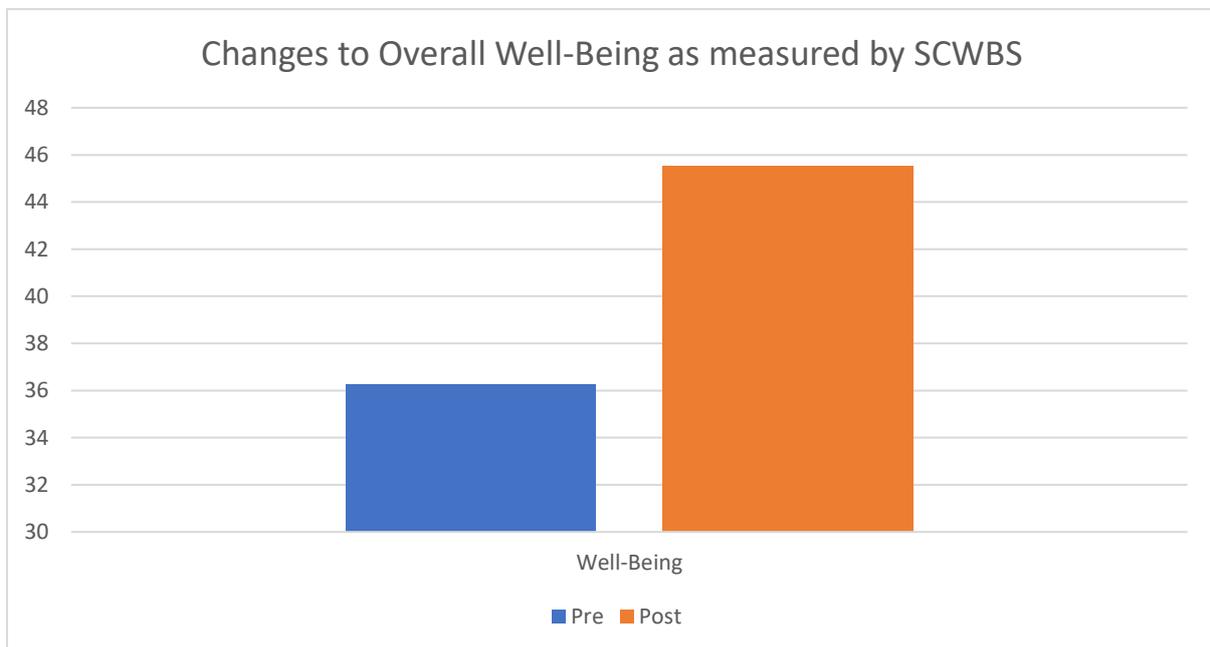
2. *Participants' self-evaluation scores*

Out of 14 participants who completed the course, 12 completed both pre and post-test evaluation questionnaires.

The pre evaluation questionnaire was completed around 2 weeks before participants started the course while post evaluations were completed at the start of their final sessions.

The table shows the group the mean scores of all participants (based on 12 paired completed forms). Clients were asked to rate their wellbeing using the Stirling Childrens Wellbeing Scale (SCWS).

Table 4. Changes to **participants'** wellbeing (group mean)

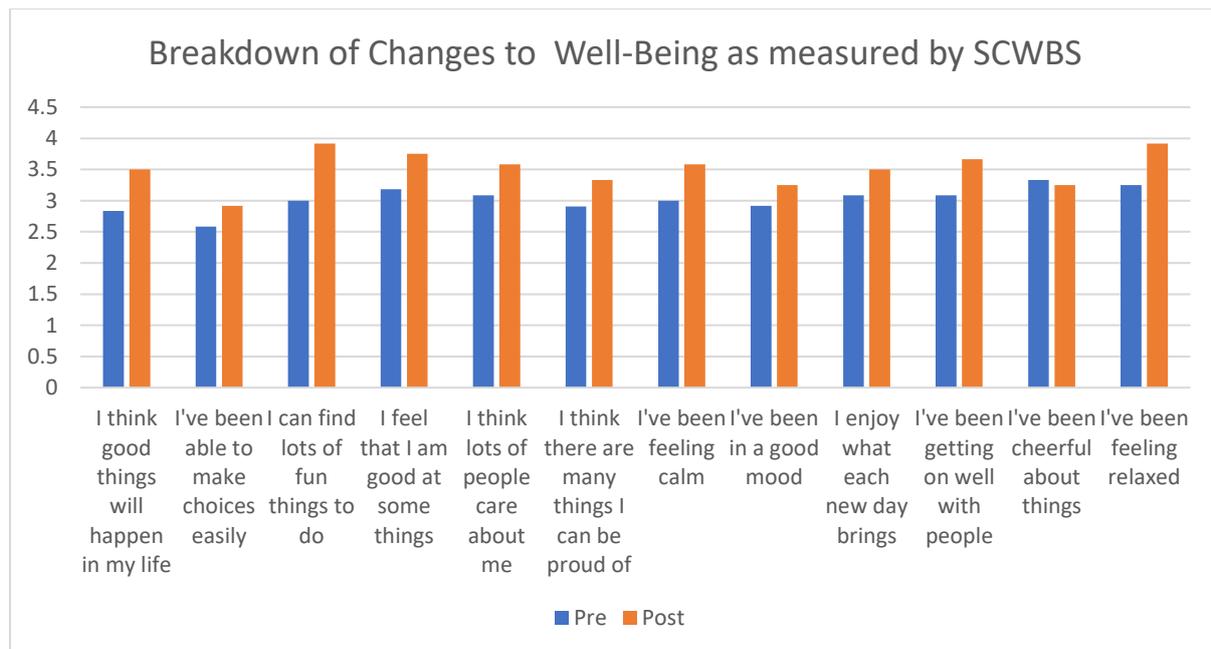


As can be seen in the above results the surf therapy delivered is associated with a large improvement to participant well-being. The intervention is linked with an improvement of 5.9 points on the SCWBS highlighting the success of this local pilot.



Results and findings

Table 5. **Changes to participants' well-being breakdown (group mean)**



The graph above breaks indicate overall well-being into its components as measured by SCWBS. The large changes in item 1 (I think good things will happen in my life) and item 3 (I can find lots of fun things to do) associate with improved participant outlook, hope in the future and happiness in the present.

These items are established indicators for wider mental health in positive **psychology**. The improvements to item 7 (I've been feeling calm) and item 12 (I've been feeling relaxed) may be associated with the successful utilisation of emotional **regulation tools within the intervention's curriculum**. Improved emotional regulation is linked with positive functioning in day to day life with examples including improved school engagement and decreased antisocial behaviours



Results and findings

Participants were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the project by answering YES or NO to questions. They were also asked to give the project a safety score out of 3, and an overall satisfaction out of 10. The good news is that all the 16 participants filled in the questionnaire.

Table 6. Number of participants registered positive change ()

Satisfaction measure	Yes	No	Satisfaction rating %
While I was surfing...			
I felt safe	12	0	100%
I had fun	12	0	100%
I made new friends	12	0	100%
I want to join a surf club	12	0	100%

The results of participant satisfaction surveys speak for themselves with 100% satisfaction across all measures. Safety was a priority for the intervention given the introduction of surfing to the local community and it appears that participants did feel safe.

The element of fun triangulates with previously discussed improvements on the SCWBS results. This triangulation is also the case for participants making new social connections. Finally, the importance of the intervention for participants is highlighted in the demand shown for continued service delivery.



Results and findings

3. Participants' descriptive words

In post evaluation, participants were asked to write down up to 3 words to describe me and surfing. This was designed to give a different insight into their experiences. More frequently occurring words have been written in a bigger font.





Results and findings

4. Participants' feedback

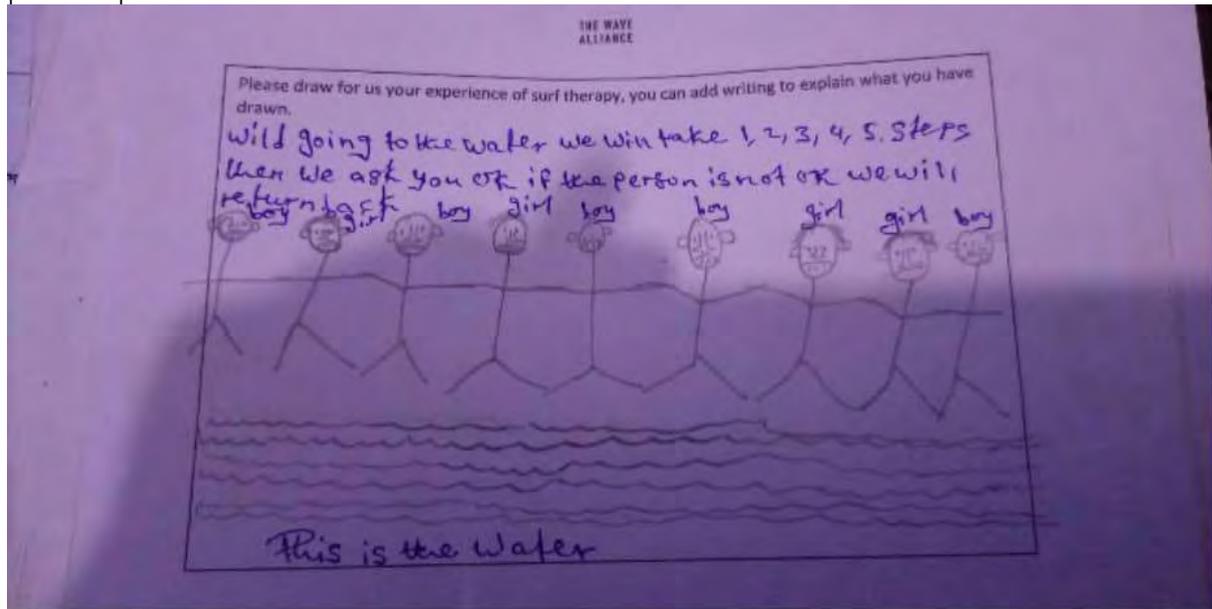
Participants were asked to describe what made them feel different, and what they felt they achieved, from taking part in the United Sierra Leone Safe Space project. They were also asked for any general comments about the project. 10 clients completed this section of the post evaluation form. The feedback was very positive what follows is an animated version of clients

- “
- *“I always feel good when I am at the beach were we normally meet every Sunday. I feel like being there all the time because at the beach, I am encouraged and praised by my coaches and mentors whenever I say or do something good, my questions are not seen as wrong questions and by mentors always take time to respond to my questions.”* Surf Therapy Participant
 - *“I like surfing, I feel like the world is mine whenever my mentor helps me catch waves, most importantly, I feel safe and cared for at the beach by both my coaches and colleagues.”* Surf Therapy Participant
 - *“With our safe space at the beach, I have been able to learn activities I can use to cope with stress whenever I am stress and want to remind myself of my greatest strength when I want to try something new.”* Surf Therapy Participant
 - *“I am very proud when am in the surfing program, I like the gathering of my fellow colleagues, when we are on surfing. I like when I and my teammates are walking together that makes me feel like am belong too a particular surf team. It makes me happy.”* Surf Therapy Participant



Results and findings

We also asked participants to draw about their experience in the surf therapy and chose to share this drawing as it shows a trust and empathy building exercise that has clearly resonated strongly with the participant.



5. Community Leader and Professional Feedback

Feedback was also gathered from local community leaders such as Headmen and Teachers. Their feedback was also positive highlighting the need for continued service provision.

“As the headman of this community, I feel really happy and want to thank the United Sierra organization, Government and their partners in South Africa for establishing such an initiative in our community for children and young people in our community. , I believe our community is safe when we have the adults looking after them. My children are part of the safe space, whenever they are home, they sometimes practice the coping skills and fun activities together, and they told me it reminded them of their coaches and the beach, infact. This is a fantastic idea.”

Sussex Kingtom Headman



Results and findings

5. Community Leader and Professional Feedback ctd.

“I am teacher but also part of the United Sierra Leone safe space as a coach, through this initiative, I have been able to have knowledge on how to deal with children in schools. They now trust me and can share their feelings with me. I feel this is a very good initiative.”

USL Coach and Teacher

6. Comments from parents and guardians

We also asked parents and guardians to offer feedback on how the Surf Therapy affected participants. Their feedback was very positive but also informed us how to improve the project further.

- *“[some of the changes I have seen in my child is that she has change some of her bad behaviour. She has been helpful and respectful and also being caring to her younger sister by asking her if she is ok. I took notice of question like are “you ok?” Only after about three weeks of her session at the beach.”* Participant Parent/Guardian
- *“[My son] has been more focusing on his academic work now, because I regular see him now reading his books at the veranda, he told me his mentor told them that the main aim of the project was for them to succeed and the only way to succeed is by studying. He is most times busy with his book reading.”* Participant Parent/Guardian



Conclusions and Discussions

1. Main Findings

The results from self-evaluation, participant, professional, parent/guardian feedback and (in particular) attendance levels give a strong indication that the surfing project had a positive impact on the lives of participants who took part. 12 out of 16 participants completed the course. **Participants recorded an improvement on all measures and overall well-being,** which highlights the success of the course. These changes were reflected by professional/parent feedback, which highlighted improvements to emotional regulation, attitude and behaviour. Two Participants have gone on to volunteer with the project and have been trained as mentors and coaches.

Participants narrative feedback also reflects these qualitative measures. Some of the narrative reports given by participants described beautifully their own personal, social and emotional progress. Those participants who were less able to articulate their feelings were able to describe their progress using individual words. In this exercise, the same (positive) words came up again and again **such as 'love', 'care', 'fun'** which are almost identical to our mentor training in South Africa delivered previously with 10 different local coaches from Sierra Leone. This suggests United Sierra Leone Safe Space model produces consistent outcomes.

Members of our community report that children attending our surf therapy programmes are focused in school, healthier and happier





Conclusions and Discussions

2. Challenges

Overall feedback from participants, parents, guardians and professionals was very positive, but some also made suggestions for improvements. These included:

- *Preconceptions of Water Safety:* Several participants reported that they wanted the sessions to be longer. However, there was also the issue with the parents and guardians who were a bit concerned about safety in waters at the first sessions, but as the sessions progressed, the families were comfortable with kids in the water.
- *Cold:* The project provided some of the best quality cloths available and fit for the weather conditions, but a few parents complained of being cold sometimes or warm sometimes. The project ensured participants were allowed to wear kits that suit them or sometimes they bring kits from home. However, no participants dropped out or missed sessions for this reason.
- *Transport:* We use boat rented from some people in the community to transport children to and from the island depending on the waves. This is difficult for a small budget, however, the community made arrangements for the participants to use the boats free of charge.
- *Access to the beach:* two of the participants drop out of the program because of their age, as it was not deemed safe to take them along cross through the island. This has informed age guidelines for future surf therapy courses at USL. It is important to note that the water to cross to island is very small and mentors/coaches are able to walk through without the need for a boat. The participants were always safe in the event of any incident in the boats. The kids just loved the boat as it is fun.
- *Communications/phones:* Participants were required to login to the apps provided by The Wave Alliance to monitor sessions. This required the use of a smart phone and internet connections, but this can be difficult sometimes if the phone is damaged or there were no data/connections. However, this did not affect the work and reporting as sessions were mostly recorded. Phones were also sometimes provided by the Messeh Leone Trust Foundation.



- *Food and drinks:* initially the program did not provide food and so the kids were complaining of feeling after session. This concern was raised with the Messeh leone Foundation and community leaders. Food was later provided to kids and food was prepared by local mentors. The children were very excited and were to come to the sessions. It is hoped food will continue to be provided for the next cycle of program.

3. Next Steps

No further funding is currently available to continue the project in Sussex for a long time. However, on the basis of this successful pilot, it seems clear that a service would benefit young people with mental health challenges in Sussex and the surrounding villages. The next step will be to try and obtain further funding to continue the programme in Sussex and set up a local surf club and a safe space that will provide ongoing opportunities for participants who have completed a course.

An ideal scenario would be one that the project engages and work with local and global funders to support an ongoing project. This could be done with one of the major funders such as the Mercury International supporting the post of project coordinator and providing a local office for the post; and The United Sierra Leone seeking funding to run the sessions. The coordinators would also be responsible for raising money towards the project. This system has worked well in other globally recognized surf therapy programmes, where funds have been raised

Longer term, it is hoped that some participants who take part in the United Sierra Leone Project in Sussex village will go on to volunteer on the project, and help run the surf club. In fact, this has happened already, with two of the participants from the pilot scheme already signing up as a volunteer for future projects.

Conclusion

Overall, the United Sierra Leone surf therapy programme was very relevant in addressing the mental health needs of young people, as well as dealing with socio-economic challenges in the targeted community. This surf therapy programme contributed well in complementing the national efforts to engage and empower young people. Furthermore, its relevance lay in its alignment with the needs of the local community. The community-led and youth-led approach ensured active participation of young people in bringing change amongst themselves and their community. This approach proved to be effective in ensuring reach and breaking one of the major barriers to communication about mental health in the community. The participation of local mentors, coaches and community stakeholders in the programme was



observed to be extensive beginning from programme design, its implementation as well as planning for the next cycle of the programme. Community members actively participated in the identification of the priority youth issues and proposed intervention strategies. The programme coordinators who were trained and supported by Waves for Change in South Africa led the delivery of the programme and contextually relevant youth services and activities. At the time of this evaluation, the coordinators were observed to be still actively engaging in the programme activities, and stated that they will stay on the programme on a long term basis.

The United Sierra Leone surf therapy programme was well coordinated both at programme level and with other community stakeholders. The organisation was reported to have kept all stakeholders in the community aware of the activities they were undertaking and the progress they made through attending the monthly meetings and sharing progress reports. This success was a result of a combination of factors including the youth-led implementation and community ownership approach, involving and ensuring active participation of all stakeholders in the community, commendable programme management and the M&E system including the Waves for Change App utilised throughout the programme implementation. This evaluation concludes that this programme has generated good lessons and is the type of programme that can be replicated with some adjustments to optimise impact in the lives of young people and for benefit the wider community. Of all these impacts, the community regards knowledge and skill as the most significant. This is so because if the community and local mentors had not acquired this knowledge and skill to run the program, there would have been no programme at all. There is a great potential that the young people and the community can use this knowledge and skill beyond the project cycle and become agents of change for current and future generations in the Sussex community. Knowledge is power and it brings confidence, resilience and makes people make informed decisions about their mental health. Surf therapy is great!



Appendix 1: Project coordinators' Report.

The United Sierra Leone safe space project in Sussex was coordinated by Michaela Margaedah Samai and Sallu Kamuskay. Michaela and Sallu had previously participated in two weeks training in South Africa organised by The Wave Alliance and accredited as part of the Wave Alliance as qualified mentors to deliver surf therapy programme. This was **Michaela and Sallu's report from their** own point of view of how the pilot scheme was delivered, its successes and problems.

The United Sierra Leone Project's first intervention in Sussex has proved an incredible success. The reception by the participants, families, local government and the Sussex community and professional organisations we worked alongside was very encouraging. At many sessions we were over our quota for volunteers and of note is the significant support local communities and institutions who provided ongoing support to the project.

We are grateful for the support from the government of Sierra Leone by waving the tax for us and provided storage at the National Tourist Board. The support provided by The Wave Alliance and the Messeh Leone Foundation was great.

Access to beaches currently includes using a boat to cross over to our safe space **which can be little bit difficult sometimes as the boat doesn't belong to us, so** whenever owners of the boat are using it, we would have to wait for a while. We however, hope to secure a dedicated boat for the sessions. We are currently working to deal with this problem alongside the local community and companies, which should not only prevent this problem in the future, but would assist with disabled access to the beach for the whole local community.

The conclusions we draw from the United Sierra Leone safe space Project Pilot in Sussex are primarily of excitement for what the future holds. We are very much looking forward great programme for the many years ahead. Having participated in the Wave Alliance training in South Africa previously, we were aware of its positive effects of the project, however having now implemented a pilot project, we have seen it in a new light and inspired to continue with the project.

The achievements and improvements of the group of young people we worked with since we first met them before the course began have astounded us and subsequently fostered a real drive to sustain these positives and reach more young people. There is a clear need from a range of different services in Sussex for interventions that foster confidence and boost the emotional wellbeing of young people and we look forward to the United Sierra Leone Surf Therapy project in Sussex to be able to provide such a service on a long term basis.

Are you okay? Yes, everyone is okay.

Michaela Margaedah Samai and Sallu Kamuskay