

An Evaluation Report Kent/Bureh Surf Therapy Pilot



An evaluation of the impact of surf therapy on 18 young people in Kent/Bureh village in Freetown, Sierra Leone who are faced with various challenges including lack of education, lack of opportunities, lack of safe space; and are exposed to violence, stress and other mental health challenges.



Young Leaders Mission Statement

We are the Young Leaders of Sierra Leone- a branch of Young leaders Africa Network. We are part of the Wave Alliance Surf Therapy Programme, and currently working with Youth and Children between the ages of 9-22 who are faced with various challenges including lack of education, lack of opportunities, lack of safe space; and are exposed to violence, stress and other mental health challenges.

We provide an evidence-based surf therapy programme in a youth –friendly safe space with educational and mental health services, and support them with lifelong skills to prepare them to overcome challenges and access to opportunities in the community; and as well as help them to believe in themselves and be able to have positive minds, strong bodies and good community.

The Young Leaders surf therapy programme enables the young people to be independent, develop coping and life skills, mastering trust and build healthy relationships and to become good leaders of today and tomorrow.



Project Background

According to a Young Leaders survey report in 2018, young people are at risk in the community when they experience inadequate support, lack of education, lack of opportunities, lack of safe space; and are exposed to violence, stress and other mental health challenges. Violence and abuse harm the young people and affect later learning, behaviour and health; even chronic neglect can lead to serious challenges in the children's development.

In the Kent and Bureh community, majority of the population lives in poverty, and only few young people were engaged by an adult household member for fun activities. The lack of caring adults, safe spaces, copying skills make life difficult for the young people in Kent and Bureh to achieve their full potentials. The young people in Kent and Bureh who risk not reaching their full potential may face lifelong consequences and never reach their full potential for learning, health and personal development.

While the Young Leaders of Sierra Leone organisation kept meticulous records at the community level and made home visits to young people who need support, families had no information of their children's access to services in the community. The responsibility for engaging and empowering young people fell completely on the parents and guardians. During the planning phase of this surf therapy project in Kent and Bureh, the Young Leaders of Sierra Leone proposed the idea of establishing the surf therapy programme. It took few months to persuade the community, who did not understand how the Surf Therapy programme would improve positive minds, strong bodies and good community for their children and they felt that allowing their children to participate in the programme would expose the them to further risks, especially surfing in water.

In September 2019, the Young Leaders of Sierra Leone organisation received permission from the local community and parents to pilot surf therapy in the target areas of Kent and Bureh. Armed with knowledge about project with the programme activity, parents showed up at the beach asking for their children to join, something that had never occurred before. This quickly removed any doubts of the project, and parents who reported on the community consultation meeting.

The Young Leaders have been running a surf therapy and mental health programmes in Kent/Bureh for young people between the ages of 9-22. We started the surf therapy programme with 18 participants. We were able to select young people from the community for the pilot phase, with the help of community leaders and a local orphanage home and school authorities in the community who referred young people to the programme. We also recruited some local volunteers to help us in the project and training was provided to them. As a member of the Wave Alliance, and with support from Wave 4 Change our partner organization in South Africa, and Messeh Leone Trust Foundation a Sierra Leone based organisation, we were able as an organisation to travel to South Africa for a two weeks training course in surf therapy and mental health services. The Wave Alliance training was supported by the Swedish Post Code Lottery and Comic Relief

Our Project Aims

The aims of the pilot project were:

1. The programme aims to empower young people and their communities with surf therapy programmes in a safe space, enhance educational, life skills and mental health services.
2. Participate and practice better mental and physical health activities through weekly group sessions conducted by trained mentors and coaches, with a view to sustain the surf therapy project and encourage more young people to join.
3. To help give confidence, self-reliance and create a sense of believe and belong in young people to be able to cope with stress, forge healthy relationships with their peers and support them to grow mentally, physically and socially and to become productive leaders of Sierra Leone.





Project participants.

18 young people were enrolled into the surf therapy programme/safe space and all 18 completed pilot programme. Participants were selected in the community between ages of 9-16 and were referred by community leaders including the headman, the women’s leader, school’s heads and orphanage organisation working in Kent and Bureh community.

The children who participated in this initial evaluation were all males under the age of 16 and from Kent community. Some parents were initially worried about their kids going into the water. And due to parental concerns, logistical constraints, and pre-tests restrictions, we were unable to conduct a survey for the children who came from the Bureh community who are mostly girls. They joined the programme at later stage. They will however, form part of the subsequent evaluations. Female participation was initially lower than hoped because of the local believe in Sierra Leone about sport they perceived it as it's for only men. This is a perception we are seeking to change through our surf therapy. We tried our best to include female participation but was very difficult when the project started. After doing our pre-test we started having girls coming to asked us to be included in the project but we promised them that they will be enroll in the subsequent project. They were with us for the six months project but were never captured in the evaluation report the pre-test and the post-test only captured participants who started the project with us.

Table1: Participant Gender/ Age

Age	8-13	14-16	17-18
Male	7	7	4
Female	0	0	0

Due to the ethnicity make-up of Sierra Leone and particularly at Kent Village, the Community is dominated by two ethnic group, that is the Krios who are the founders and early settlers of the village and the Temnes who moved from the north to Freetown to engage in business and fishing activities.

Table 2: Participant Gender/ Ethnic

Ethnic	Krio	Temne
Male	7	11
Female	0	0



Our Programme Intervention

The pilot phase of the project was modelled after a successful Wave Alliance two weeks training, we participated in in Cape Town South Africa. The training helped the Young Leaders of Sierra Leone design surf therapy programme that aligns with the needs of the Kent and Bureh communities. In addition to the training in Cape Town, we previously received remote support from Wave Alliance with a beginners' curriculum on surf therapy/mental health course which lasted for five months.

Our sessions were always held over the weekends, on Sundays as most of participants were school going children. The programme was designed to ensure the young people stay focused on their normal school days from Monday to Friday. The surf therapy sessions always started at 1:00pm and ended at 3:30pm every Sundays and after the church service as majority of the participants are Christians. The parents and guardians took them to church first before coming for sessions. The young people came to the programme via recommendations from the community leaders, parents and local institutions including schools and the Bureh Surf Club and one youth organisation in Kent.

We ran our sessions at the famous Kent beach known for its historic salve trade sites and is very close to the community. Some sessions were held at the Bureh Surf Club. The sessions are conducted and moderated by the project coordinators, the persons of Mr. Sullayman Keita and Miss Oullematu Jalloh. We brought onboard seven volunteers from the community who were later trained, with some of them as life guards and coaches. This really helped in making things much easier in engaging the kids.

Surfboards, kits, footballs, transportation and other support were provided by the Wave Alliance and the Messeh Leone Foundation Trust. Safety was at the heart of the programme as participants/children were not allowed into the water without considering the weather or flow of the sea. Safety is our number one concerns. Each child had a mentor/coach in the water. The project did not encounter any major safety issue, except one child who stepped (bare-footed) on metal and injured on his way to the programme. This was a minor issue and the child was immediately treated by the local hospital.



Evaluation Measures

The evaluation measures were organized to assess the impact of project on the young people in the community. This evaluation utilised the Stirling Children's Well-being Scale (SCWBS). This scale was developed by the Stirling Council Educational Psychology Service (UK) as a holistic, positively worded measure of emotional and psychological well-being in children aged eight to 15 years.

Drawing on current theories of well-being and Positive Psychology, the scale measures the effectiveness of interventions and projects designed to promote children's well-being and emotional development. It has proved to be a reliable and valid measure of well-being meeting the benchmark criteria set out for measurement validation and has been used effectively to assess interventions in a wide range of contexts.

Satisfaction scores related to fun, safety and wish to continue participating in surf therapy were also assessed as part of the evaluation. 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. The young people participated in a pre-test and post-test evaluations with a questionnaire that used this scale to measure their achievements in the programme including physical and mental health.

Qualitative feedback was also gathered at the culmination for the curriculum cycle from participants, parents, and other key stakeholders. Session attendance, interest in the programme and positive changes formed a critical part of the evaluation report.

More information on the scale used can be found at the following reference: Liddle, I., & Carter, G. (2015). Emotional and psychological well-being in children: The development and validation of the Stirling Children's Well-being Scale. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 31(2), 174-185.

Results and Findings

1. Attendance

Attendance was measured using an attendance application at each session which included a photographic record for transparency. Average attendance across the programme was 57.1%.

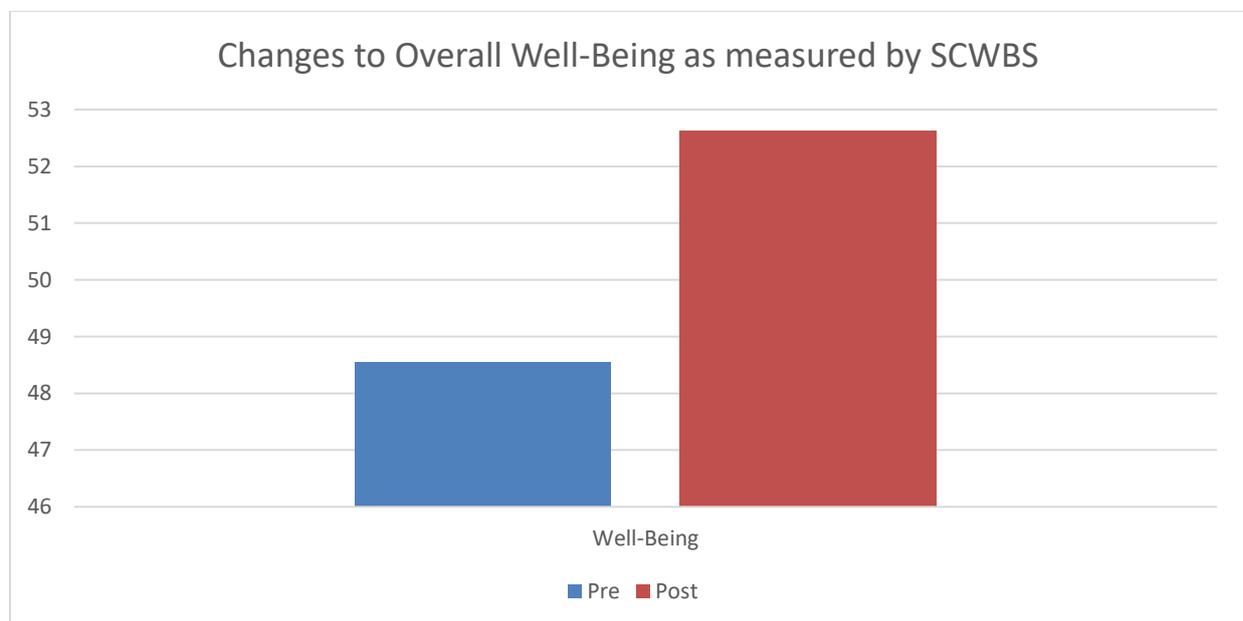
Participants who did not complete the course or not evaluated.

All the 18 young people who enrolled in the course, completed the programme. Please note that the project did not evaluate the young people including some girls from Bureh/Kent who joined the programme at a later stage. It was difficult to do a comparative pre-test with young people who joined at a later stage.

2. Participants self-evaluation scores

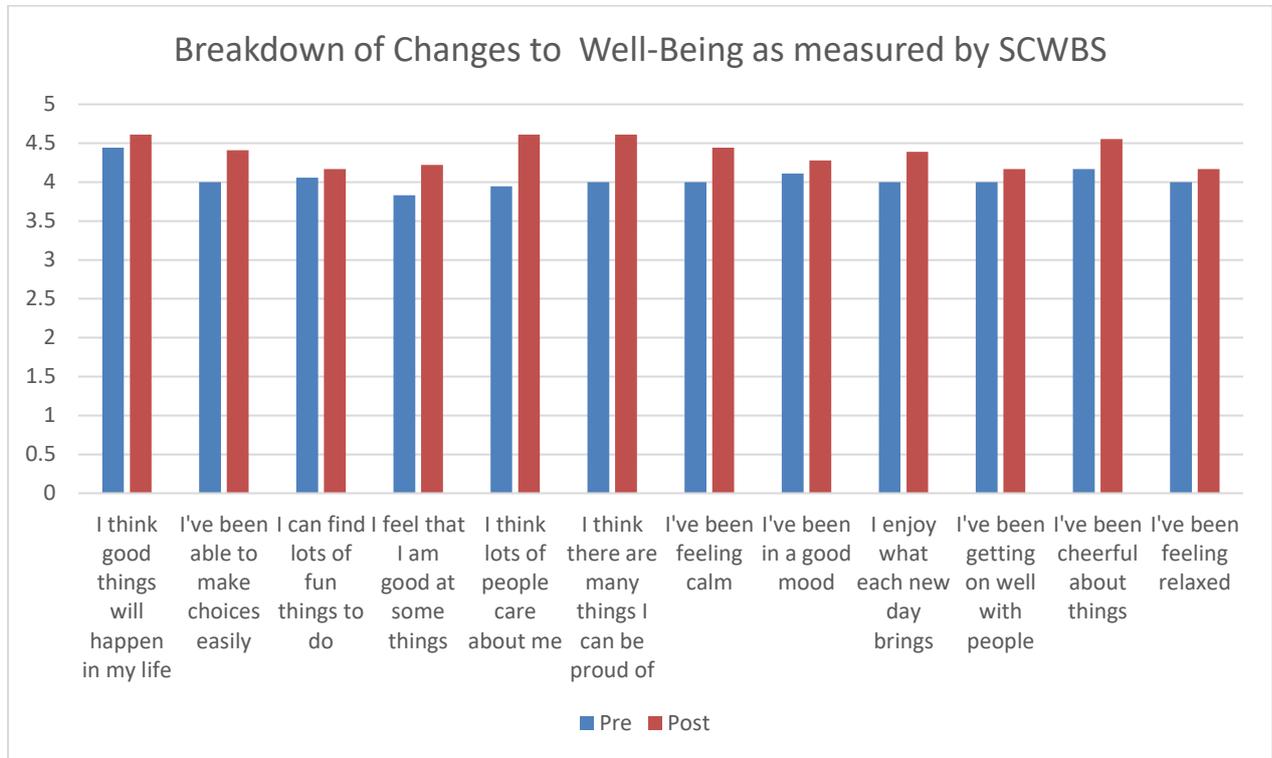
All 18 participants completed the pilot programme both pre and post evaluation questionnaire.

Table 3. 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 4 points on the SCWBS highlighting the success of this local pilot.

Table 4. Changes to participants' wellbeing by domain



The graph above breaks down overall well-being into its components as measured by SCWBS. Most notably the large change in item 5 (I think lots of people care about me) highlights additional social support that participants had access to as part of the surf therapy intervention. The positive changes to item 2 (I've been able to make choices easily) and item 6 (I think there are many things I can be proud of) may link with experiences of mastery and improvements to self-efficacy. The importance of these aspects of positive mental health are well established and are linked with day to day functioning through improved confidence in accomplishing tasks such as learning in school or problem solving within the community.

Table.5 Participant Satisfaction

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

The results of participant satisfaction surveys speak for themselves with 100% across all measures. Feelings of safety are very encouraging given surfing has only been introduced to the community very recently. Results for fun and new social connections triangulate with and support findings within the SCWBS results. All participants expressed a wish to continue surf therapy and this highlights the importance of a sustained service delivery for the community.



Results and Findings

4. Participants descriptive words

In post- evaluation, participants were asked to write down up to ten words to describe *'Me and Surfing'*. This was designed to give different insight into their experiences more frequently occurring words have been writing in a bigger font.



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Results and Findings

5. Participant's feedbacks

Our participants were asked during the evaluation period to describe what made them felt different, and what they achieved from taking part in the Young Leaders surf therapy project. They were also asked to give any comments about the project in general. The feedback was very positive.

“I'm very happy to be part of the surf therapy project. I was not so attentive in class before I joined this programme but since joining this programme, I'm doing better in school now because our coordinators/mentors have been good to us and helping us a lot. They are teaching us some moral lessons apart from the surfing itself.” Surf Therapy Participant

“I was not that friendly, as I saw myself so superior to my friends in the community and school, but since I joined this surf therapy project, I have changed my mind towards my peers.” Surf Therapy Participant

“I was not frequent in school, I always go to school late, but since joining this surf therapy project, I now go to school every day, because the same friends I surf with on Sundays are all going school on Mondays. And when I look around, I don't see them at the beach, and so I have to rush to school be with them. It urged me to go to school every day because I will meet them in school. My life has changed a lot. I thank you.” Surf Therapy Participant

Results and Findings



6. Comment from parents/guardians and local community leaders.

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. Feedback was also gathered from local community leaders such as Headmen and Teachers.

“First to start with, I’m so happy for this surf therapy project in our community Kent. When I was first told about it by a friend in the same community about this project, I was afraid because of the water but later the coordinator/mentor by the name of Mr. Sullayman Keita met me at home and asked for my son to join the project. I asked him to explain to me about the surf therapy programme, and he politely explained to me well for me to understand the safety involved for my son. The following day I allowed my son to join. My son was a very stubborn boy and was not friendly but thank God after him joining the programme within few weeks he totally changed from a bad boy to a good boy. He is now more friendly than before and he always come home with friends. I will suggest this surf therapy project to any of my community members to allow their sons and daughters to join this the project.”

Aunty Emma, mother.

“My sister son was not interested in going to school at first before joining this surf therapy project. I always escort him to school with a Cain. But after joining this project and mingling with friends always now want to be with his friends. The only way to do that is on Sundays at the sessions in the beach, on Monday's he has to go to school to meet with his friends so the surf therapy project has change him totally to be a good person. I'm pleased appealing for the surf therapy project to continue”.

Pa Tunde, elder from the community

“It was great for the community for having this opportunity for the children and youth this surf therapy project has really change the behaviors of some of the kids that went through this first project. On behalf of the Kent community we are appealing to donors to please help united Sierra Leone to continue this very good project.”

Head man Kent village Mr. Massa

“It was a new experience for my school, must off my student are part of this surf therapy project and they have really change mentally and they are doing good in school he hope this project will continue for a long time.”

Mr. Cole senior teacher Kent community school





7. Conclusion

The findings from the evaluation and general feedback with interest from both the young people and community show that the project was fit for purpose and had contributed tremendously towards the empowerment of local young people. All 18 young people completed the pilot phase of the project with good attendance level. The tables above speak to the success of the project, including improvement in the health and wellbeing of the young people and commitment to the programme and their school work. The surf therapy also served to improved supervision since the programme comes with an activity for weekly supervision of the participants via local mentors and volunteers.

The Young Leaders established in the original target area as an activity to engage the young people on surf therapy. While the first activity of the project was to provide surf therapy, from the beginning Young Leaders advised young people that they could do much more for their community and encouraged them to identify priorities using the project as a platform. Unemployment and lack of opportunities for young people being of the major challenge in the community, some of the mentors and volunteers have gained employment or engaged through the Centre established by the local volunteers for the surf therapy programme in Kent Beach.

The Young Leaders of Sierra Leone Surf Therapy project in in Kent and Bureh has achieved high level participation in many of the target communities. During the evaluation, the young people and mentors were found to be highlighting some activities beyond the scope of the project, such as the construction of a small food kiosk, seating accommodation in the beach, improving the beach, and clearing the beach. They had already sought and acquired funds for such project from their personal savings and assistance from the community. The Messeh Leone Foundation Trust and other institutions have offered to provide some assistance. The volunteers are now implementing youth-led fund drives or income generation schemes to support the surf therapy programme.

The Surf Therapy project location continues to be a point of contact for the young people when there is the need to communicate with the community at large or organize an activity. The surf boards, kits and minutes of meetings are often stored in the center, enabling team to keep abreast of programme decisions and activities. The young people who participated in the programme consistently expressed a good feeling. They always wanted more surfing. They wanted to do more activities. They wanted to always come. They always run to the mentors and volunteers – like a kind of a family. And they would cry sometimes when sessions were about to end, they just wanted more, and more!



8. Challenges

When the project started in Kent and Bureh, in some of the remote communities, young people had not been involved in any group activities or surf therapy programme. It was a new venture hence the project faced some challenges as follows:

- **LOCAL BELIEFS AND COMPETITION:** General acceptability for the programme was a challenge. As already mentioned, the challenge noted was that local cultural and traditional beliefs state that certain activities are for boys not girls. Surfing was deemed to be an activity for boys hence it was difficult to attract girls to the program at the initial state we started. There is a small surf club in Bureh, just about 15-minute walk to Kent, and some young people were not interested in the surf therapy project at the initial stage. They saw the surf therapy as a programme created to compete with them and to take away their clients. The Bureh surf club is mainly created for tourists coming to the beaches and is a paid for service, while the Young Leaders surf therapy is a free-service for young people. It however, took some time to persuade the young people in Bureh to join and who eventually embraced the programme. A branch of the surf therapy programme has now been created in Bureh and the surf club there is assisting to bring the young people on board.
- **TRAVEL AND FOOD:** The participants and mentors faced a challenge with travel and food. It's a disadvantaged community and most of the young people there lack income to survive. They need money for food and transport. The kids would always ask for food after the sessions. This challenge was addressed with establishment of the food kiosk on



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the beach by the volunteers and mentors on the programme. Also, the programme received some financial assistance from Wave Alliance and the Messeh Leone Foundation Trust to cover travel and small expenses for the coordinators. The coordinators admitted that the transportation provided was a big factor in reaching the community and do not know how they are going to maintain the project without transportation.

- **SAFTY ISSUES.** Water safety was a big one. Although the kids are used to going to the water, the surfing was a new challenge for them. Parents and community leaders were particularly worried about the safety of their kids in waters. It took some time and effort for the parents to understand that the programme was a safe place to be. Most parents would come to the beach during session to monitor and one could sometimes see the fears on their faces. But as the project evolved, the community members/parents were satisfied and are now allowing their kids to participate, albeit a few parents still had some concerns.

9. Next Steps

First mission accomplished. We are now in discussion with the Wave Alliance, Messeh Leone Trust Foundation and other partners including community members to take the following bold steps but not limited to:

1. **Funding** is critical for the continuation of the project. We are seeking to work with Wave Alliance, Messeh Leone foundation Trust and other partners to raise funds for the project. There is a plan to develop a grant proposal to secure funds to cover 3-years of programme starting 2021.
2. **Safe Space** in the community. The plan is to improve and build on the work already. We started effective communication, community engagement and trust building have been credited for bringing more females to the programme. The boys who attended sessions would go home and encourage their sisters and female friends to attend the programme, the females later joined the project after the saw few girls attended and gave positive feedbacks. They all said the enjoyed the programme. Our mentors and our local coaches were also able to engaged and dispel to traditional beliefs held by the community that surfing is for boys not girls. It is hoped that more girls will join the programme in the next cycle. Unfortunately, this evaluation did not capture the feedback from the girls as the late to join the programme and did not take part in the pre-test. We will continue to support the young people in the community to establish a permanent safe space on the beach where the kids can come to surf, play, eat, relax and participate in the programme. This space will be managed by a team of locally trained volunteers and mentors from the community, and on a long-term basis.
3. **Ongoing sessions** are a must. The kids, parents, mentors and everyone involved in the project are very keen to continue with the surf therapy programme. However, the community leaders have recommended some few



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female participants to the project maintaining that equal inclusion is key to successful programme.

4. **Food** like every other program, food was a big asked from kids. The kids who came to the programme sometimes complained about feeling hungry after sessions. surfing is a physical activity and requires proper food. The issue of food was addressed by the Messeh Leone trust and the community and some food is now being provided. Its hoped that more food will be³ provided for next cycle of the programme. As transport was also a major issue for mentors and the kids, the programme seeks to engage partners organizations to provide travel support to the programme to allow more kids to engage.
5. **Awareness raising** and national campaign is part of our long-term strategy. A video of our work has been produced which we hope to use together with this evaluation reports to engage state and non-state actors to support surf therapy in Sierra Leone. We will also be working alongside the Wave Alliance, Messeh Leone foundation Trust and other partners to host an international Sport for Development and Peace conference in Sierra Leone. This meeting could provide a space to engage with both local and international agencies and individuals to support our important work in Sierra Leone.

10. Report from Project Coordinators.

This report presents the salient findings from the lead project coordinators' perspective, with a view to explain the impact of the intervention on children's mental health and development as well as behavior change in the community. It offers the government, community leaders, partners, and other actors a contextually appropriate, sustainable, low cost, and replicable solution in enhancing surf therapy programme to support young people in extremely difficulty circumstance in local communities.

The surf therapy programme is a success story. The feedback has been excellent. The community is very interested in the programme. This first of its kind surf therapy project changed children and their family behaviors and community norms, empowered local committees and youth, improved skills, motivation and morale of young people at all levels, and influenced both the local and national government to support. The Ministry of Tourism and Culture and the National Tourist Board are very supportive. Regular meetings are being held with authorities to update them on the programme planning and implementation.

The highly successful experiences in achieving impressive levels of participation in the programme and promotion of surf therapy in the community without incentives, and in mobilizing communities to understand the benefit of the programme deserve documentation and further study by the Young Leaders Organisation as models for other youth engagement efforts in local communities. The project's achievement of significant change in a cultural behavior like " children should not go to the water as there is a devil' in just few months shows what is possible with sound behavior change



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strategy and dedication. The young people now enjoy going to the beach without fear, without cultural barriers.

While the surf therapy programme is being phased over to the local mentors and volunteers and there is commitment and motivation on their part to continue, there is still the issue of lack of incentives, particularly for unemployed mentors. Due to this, it is doubtful that current engagement and volunteers support levels will be maintained on a long-term basis. An income-generation scheme for the volunteers could help in many ways to keep the programme going for the benefit of the young people in the community. Forming a Youth Development Programme with a broader scope than just the surf therapy as in the case of the surf club in Bureh, and providing them with appropriate organizational skills, enabled them to assume a true leadership, to pursue some community development projects with outside donors or internal fund-raising is worth exploring.

The technical and leadership skills of the Wave Alliance and Messeh Leone Trust Foundation team and the coaches from South Africa providing daily remote support have produced highly competent local mentors and volunteer who will continue to be an asset to the Kent and Bureh communities and surf therapy in Sierra Leone. The training coordinators gained in South Africa with support from the Wave Alliance helped greatly. The lead project coordinators Sullayman Keita and Olluamatu Jalloh have been accredited by the Wave Alliance as trained and qualified mentors/coaches for the programme. These skills have been passed on to some 15 volunteers and local mentors in the Kent and Bureh communities through weekly training sessions. The project investment in training local members paid off in that their training not only transmitted technical skills, but was also very motivational, increasing self-confidence and morale among the coordinators who received the initial training or ongoing virtual support.

We would like to thank all the young people, parents and guardians, local leaders, volunteers, mentors and supporters who came forward to our support in making this surf therapy programme possible in Sierra Leone. The results from impact evaluation of the pilot surf therapy plus ongoing local interest underpins the efficacy of a surf therapy programme in empowering young people who are faced with various challenges including lack of education, lack of opportunities, lack of safe space; and who are exposed to violence, stress and other mental health challenges.

The Young Leaders acts as a safe space within which people are valued for their participation, contributions and recognized, and receive support from caring adults, providing them with fun activities, copying and life skills.

Submitted by:

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