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Cover photo credit: Nelson Rosier Coulhon
Author: Jill Sloan
Designer: Werner Goss-Ross

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

I take great pleasure in sharing this report with you following another year of accomplishments and growth at Waves for Change (W4C).

I am especially proud to report that we again increased the number of girls taking part in our surf therapy and surf club activities, averaging 41% of all children in 2023. Considering that in 2017 only 17% of the children we reached were female, we have come a long way in just six years! A big shout-out to our 43 caring coaches, who showed up every day from Monday to Saturday throughout the year to provide a safe environment in which these children could share, have fun, gain new skills, explore the ocean and surf.

We are often asked whether we will be expanding our surf therapy programme at more locations across South Africa. We have pondered this question long and hard. Expanding the number of sites at which we offer surf therapy would naturally provide much-needed access to community-based mental health services to more children. However, in the longer term, this model of multiplying our direct service sites is not sustainable since it is costly and runs the risk of a dilution in the quality of the work we do with children.

We also recognise that there are many, many other organisations – both within government programmes and civil society – who already have direct contact with children through sports programmes, aftercare and educational activities. Because of this, over the past year, we have put a lot of energy into developing training partnerships through which we can share the skills and tools - our Five Pillar model - that we have nurtured, tested and embedded in our surf therapy programme. Through research, we have verified that our Five Pillar training model with partners is having a positive impact. Our training partnerships in 2023 have opened the door on a number of further partnerships at provincial level in South Africa, as well as deepened our work in Somalia and South Sudan, all of which we are moving ahead with in 2024.

An exciting development in 2023 was our preparation for a comparative and multi-year study – the ALIVE project - that aims to pilot-test interventions that prevent adolescent depression and anxiety in urban settings in three low- and middle-income countries, one of these being

South Africa. Because of our particular expertise in an approach that embeds children with self-regulation skills, the ALIVE project team invited W4C to join them as a co-investigator and implementing partner on the South African team. This has been a huge growth experience for W4C, involving strong collaboration between our MERL, programme and training teams.

I end this report with the mention of three awards that we received during 2023. Firstly, we were announced the winner of Makaton South Africa's Maggi Golding Award in the organisational category. This award is made in recognition of an organisation that has made their programmes inclusive through using Makaton. Each year our coaches are trained in Makaton and use it in morning surf therapy programmes to communicate well with neurodivergent groups, including children on the autism. Secondly, the Western Cape Ministry of Cultural Affairs and Sport awarded W4C the place of Best After School Sport and Recreation Programme for offering an effective after-school intervention for youth exposed to trauma. We are delighted to receive this recognition for the work we are doing. Lastly, as the year ended, we were really stoked to hear that our founder and Chief Executive Officer, Tim Conibear, was named as a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE). This is in recognition of his efforts in founding W4C and growing it into a sustainable and impactful organisation. Our thanks to you, our supporters who have backed us over the years and made this possible. We share these awards with you.

I am filled with pride at how W4C has gone from strength to strength over the past 13 years. A special tribute to all of the W4C staff, whose commitment to quality, hard work on the ground and shared vision of better mental health support for children makes this an organisation that I am honoured to be associated with. I am also conscious that this work would not be possible without your generous and consistent support as donors and supporters. We thank you wholeheartedly, and look forward to continuing this journey together with you over the years that lie ahead.

BONGANI DLOMO
Chairperson
Waves for Change Board of Trustees

CEO'S REPORT

Over this past year, it's been wonderful to see our surf therapy programmes becoming more and more embedded in the health and education systems of the communities that surround our five beach centres. Now almost 15 years into our existence as an organisation, we see more hospitals, clinics, social workers and learner support officers at schools referring some of their most vulnerable children into our programmes. We've become part of the multidisciplinary team that is aiming to improve access to mental health services that children want to be part of.

As we continue to receive more and more complex referrals, we've put more attention to building the capacity of our teams on the ground. At our surf therapy sites along the coast, we've invested in training for our site managers and increased psychological support and supervision for our coaches. To help our senior coaches transition out of W4C - often their first formal employment as young people - we've invested in eight-month mentoring courses that prepare them for the formal economy. In our central office, we have a growing number of our team studying for diplomas, masters and doctoral degrees in child psychology and public health. This is expanding our organisational knowledge to respond to the mental health needs of our children, and allowing us to further embed W4C as a firm part of the South African mental health landscape. This also allows us to conduct more ambitious research projects, such as the ALIVE study featured in this report.

We've continued to refine and grow our training partnership work. We believe that, to change society, we need to work with it. We know with increasing certainty that sport- and recreation- based programmes improve children's wellbeing, resilience and mental health. We also know that there are hundreds of organisations that provide sport and recreation programmes across South Africa, and thousands that provide such programmes around the globe. The solution to increasing children's access to mental health support is not opening more Waves for Change sites around the world. The solution lies in supporting partners to understand the power of sport and recreation, especially through us sharing structure and simple programmes that harness sport's power to connect and heal effectively. We're proud to now be working with UNICEF in Somalia and South Sudan, as well as with the Department of Culture, Arts and Sport (DCAS) for the Western



Photo credit: Nelson Rosier Coulhon

Cape Province in South Africa. With them, we are testing a simple, scalable programme that takes the ingredients of our surf therapy programmes and transforms them into a model suitable for any sport. The early results are encouraging, and we are setting the foundations for the next stage of our organisation's evolution. More on that later in the report.

Our sincere thanks to everyone who supports our work. Without your support, we couldn't do what we do. We hope you enjoy this report. We encourage you to share it with your friends and colleagues!

TIM CONIBEAR
Founder and Chief Executive Officer

W4C SURF THERAPY PROGRAMME



Photo credit: Bruce Vianne

SURF THERAPY

Incubated and refined over 13 years, W4C provides an adolescent mental health prevention and promotion programme that is child-friendly, culturally appropriate and community-based. It is evidence-based and effective at supporting children to cope with stress, caused by repeated exposure to violence and adversity, in adaptive ways. Five pillars underpin our surf therapy programme activities:



6
Creating physically, emotionally and mentally safe spaces for children



Providing structured psychosocial education to teach children to cope with stress, manage their emotions and live well



Building strong connections with caring coaches and peers



Enabling access to other services, opportunities and supportive social groups



Providing respite from stress through mastery of a fun, challenging activity (surfing)

"INVESTMENTS IN ADOLESCENT HEALTH AND WELLBEING BRING A TRIPLE DIVIDEND OF BENEFITS: NOW, INTO FUTURE ADULT LIFE, AND FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF CHILDREN."

- *Our Future: A Lancet commission on adolescent health and wellbeing*

We run surf therapy during the week for children aged 10-13 years. They attend weekly sessions over the course of 10 months with their peer groups, following which they graduate and can join a surf club group on a Saturday. Surf club is available to children up until the age of 16.

Children's point of contact each week is the same peer group, as well as a consistent group of caring coaches who receive continuous training in our methodology and are supported throughout their two-year tenure as coaches.

All the children attending our surf therapy and surf club are transported safely from collection points in their communities to our beach hubs, and back to their communities again. They are also provided with a hot meal, wetsuits and surfboards at every session.

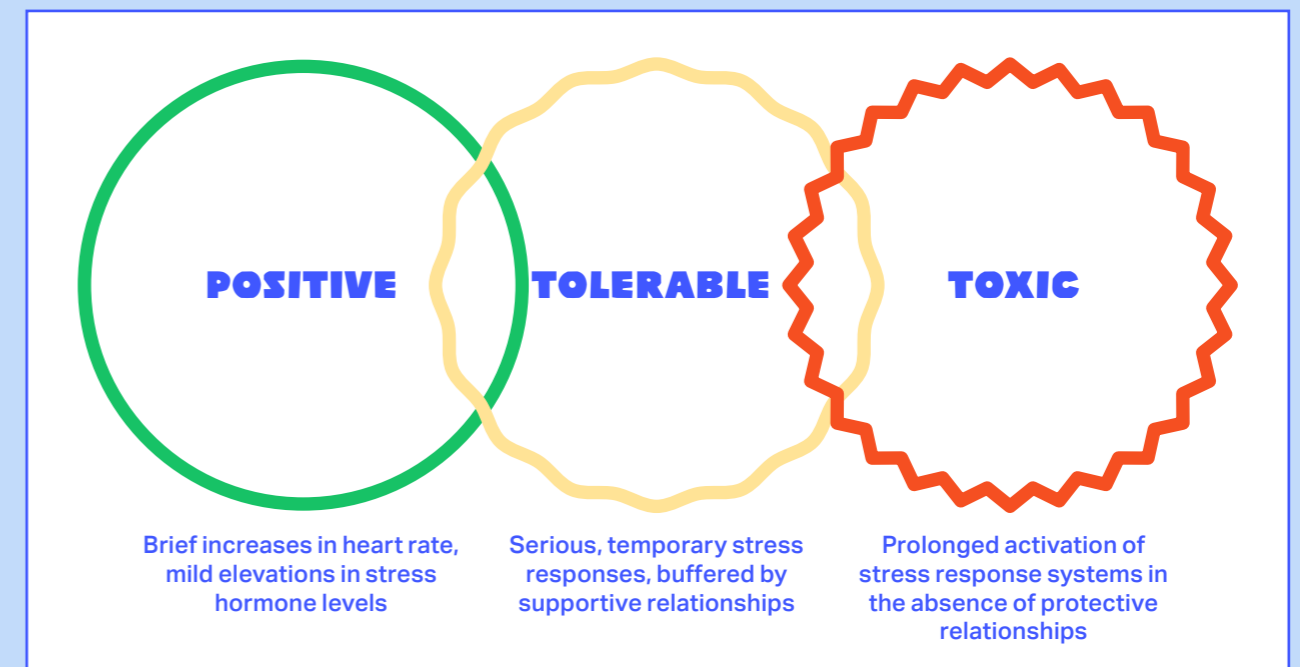
WHY SURF THERAPY

We do surf therapy to reduce the long-term impact of adversity on children. This diagram explains how adversity can have a cumulative, negative effect on children and youth.

When children face repeated adverse childhood experiences, they feel unsafe over a long period of time and do not have the buffering effect of being loved and cared for by at least one supportive caregiver or other adult. This can lead to them developing toxic stress.

Being on constant high alert impacts our brain and body and leads to lasting neurological and physical changes. At a time when their brains are flexible and developing, children who experience toxic stress during childhood or adolescence can have difficulty controlling their anger and anxiety, and may struggle to feel safe in their relationships with others. This puts them at much greater risk of developing mental health conditions like substance misuse, anxiety and depression.

This is where surf therapy helps!



REFERRAL PARTNERS

WHO REFERS CHILDREN TO SURF THERAPY?

We work continuously to establish and maintain relationships with referral partners in the education, social services and health sectors. Our model involves direct contact between our site managers and champion adults located within the organisations that refer children to us.



At the end of 2023, we had 73 referral partners across the five sites where we offer our surf therapy programme. The majority of our referral partners are quintile 1-3 schools (catering for the most under-served communities), but also include other partners, such as social workers, government departments (health, education and social services), child and youth care centres and a number of NGOs working with youth.

HOW WE WORK WITH OUR REFERRAL PARTNERS

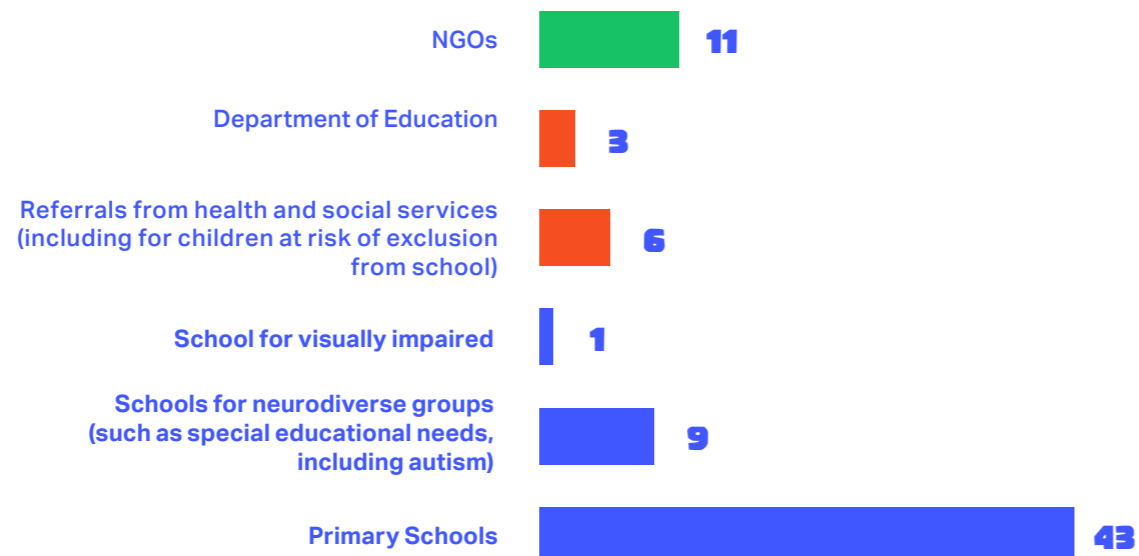
As we approach the end of each year, we review all of our partnerships. We set targets on the number of children who can be referred from schools for the following year's surf therapy sessions. We provide champion teachers at these schools with criteria for identifying children who are showing signs of toxic stress.

As we plan for the start of each new year of surf therapy, we spend a month visiting schools to collate referral lists of children for the coming year. We follow this up immediately by requesting and obtaining parental/carer consent for children's participation in our surf therapy programme for the year.

For all our morning programmes, we require attendance by 1-2 champion teachers who are skilled in working with the children in that group and who are known to the children.

We also keep some referral spots for referral partners who are working in the sectors of education, health and social services who can refer children directly to surf therapy throughout the year as the need arises.

53 OF OUR 73 PARTNERS ARE SCHOOLS



2023 NUMBERS AND RESULTS



THREE STREAMS

1 457

children in mainstream surf therapy, running on weekday afternoons

221

children in specialised weekday morning programmes for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and learning difficulties, children with physical disabilities and those in conflict with the law

1 065

children in weekend surf club

HOW WE DID IT

43

coaches

5

South African beach sites in South Africa

73

referral partners

Western Cape Province:
Hout Bay, Monwabisi, Muizenberg

Eastern Cape Province:
East London, Gqeberha

2 344

surf therapy and surf club sessions

1 650

weekday afternoon surf therapy sessions

417

weekday morning surf therapy sessions

227

277 surf club sessions on Saturdays

OUR 2023 RESULTS ACROSS CHILDREN



IMPROVED SENSE OF CLOSENESS WITH SURF COACH AT W4C

58%

attended at least 50% of the sessions



IMPROVED OVERALL WELLBEING

What is self-regulation?

Self-regulation is the ability to understand and manage your own behaviour and reactions. It helps children and teenagers learn, trust and support others, bond within groups and become independent. Self-regulation allows young people to cope with changing circumstances and develop positive pathways as they move into adulthood. W4C's training and direct services embed children and adolescents with skills that enable self-regulation.



IMPROVED EMOTIONAL SELF-REGULATION

94-99%

reported that they had learnt something new, had fun and felt safe



Photo credit: Neil Webster

IMPACT:
WHAT DO CHILDREN SAY?

We asked children attending surf therapy and surf club what difference coming to the programme has made for them. Here are some of their answers.

"I'm making good changes, good decisions."

"I used to be really lonely and now I have new friends."

"I was a gangster before but when I come to W4C I see that things is not right for me. So I joined W4C and now my life became right."

"When I am feeling sad I think about all the things that we do at the beach with my friends and my coaches and I feel happy again."

"W4C has impacted me in a positive way, I've been a victim of bullying since grade 8. That changed when I joined last year, I found siblings, big sister but parents also. I was able to gain confidence again."

IMPACT:
WHAT DO OUR COACHES SEE?

Our coaches hold one-to-one check-ins with children. Some of the changes they have seen are shared here.

"The participant is brave [enough] to try and catch a wave even though she was not sure if she wants to try surfing..."

I encouraged her to try and she did. We celebrated her for being very brave."

"He used to have a habit of mocking and being disrespectful towards coaches. I had an earnest 1:1 with him after that day and explained to him the waves for change bananas culture, which has respect as one of its pillars. He understood this and his behaviour has positively changed ever since."

"Previously the participant would just be excited purely for the water. Now he takes all parts of the session seriously."

"She has been able to articulate herself really well: holding deep and meaningful conversations; being intentional with her progress."



Photo credit: Kaitlin Perry

COACH MUMINAH'S STORY

MUMINAH IS A MUSLIM WOMAN WHO JOINED WAVES FOR CHANGE AS A COACH IN 2023. THIS YEAR SHE IS WORKING AS A SENIOR COACH. SHE SHARES HER EXPERIENCE OF THE SPACE THAT W4C OFFERS FOR GIRLS.

"Even when I was younger I wanted to do something where water was concerned, something to do with kids. But two years ago, I didn't have a plan, I didn't have a path, I didn't know what to do. And I would pray for one specific thing: that I get a job. My friend told me about Waves for Change. And here I am at Waves for Change, working with kids and in the water. It's so beautiful how it all came together! And I'm so grateful.

I was very insecure and shy before I started here. Last year, I would wear booties all the time because I did not want to show my feet. I was too shy to do a Take 5 or do a session. I would feel like everyone was looking at me to say the right things. This year I don't wear booties. This year I don't get phased whatever your opinion is. Now I'm ready to give a whole lesson! I feel like that is growth since last year for me!

I think it's brilliant that we have female coaches as well as male, and that there's respect between the coaches. So the kids see the male coaches respecting the female coaches, and the other way as well. Basically we are modelling that behaviour, and the children are following in our footsteps.

What we do here for girls is we give them a safe space to speak and share their feelings. Us giving that to them at a young age gives them that ability for when they are bigger. Because now they are used to it: they are used to saying what they want to say; they are used to sharing their feelings; they know that they can stand up for themselves. Even between two girls, they learn to speak up for each other.

At first I just left the bucket with the reusable period pads in it and didn't use it. But there came a day about four months ago when I didn't have any money. So I took out the bucket and started using the pads. And to this day, I'm still using them! They have really helped me a lot. They are beautifully covered: no one can see what it is. When I handed the pads out to the girls at surf club earlier this year, I could tell them, 'This works for me.' I gave them my own experience. Imagine if we had this for every girl, so they can use it and wash it out, it would be amazing."

- Muminah Cornelius

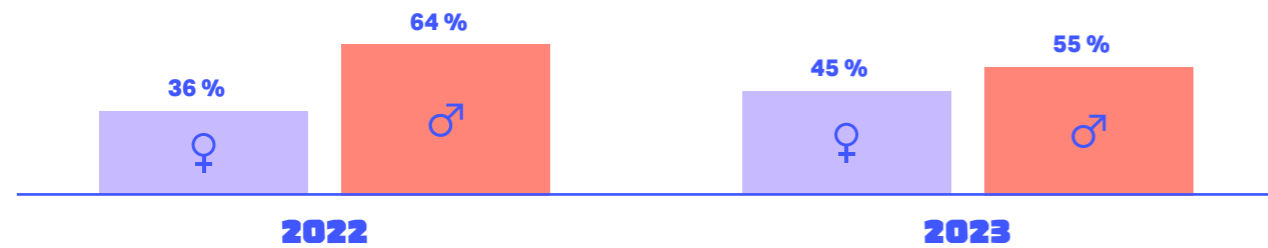
"BEING IN A POSITION AS A SITE AND AS A BROADER ORGANISATION TO BE ABLE TO BRING A SOLUTION TO COMMUNITIES AND VULNERABLE FEMALE PARTICIPANTS IN THE FORM OF PALESA PADS HAS BEEN HEARTWARMING.... SEEING THE JOY ON THE FACES OF PARTICIPANTS WHEN WE HANDED OVER THE PADS AND EXPLAINED THAT THEY WILL ALLOW THEM TO CONTINUE THEIR WAVES FOR CHANGE EXPERIENCE EVEN THROUGH THEIR PERIOD."

- Waves for Change coach

INCLUDING GIRLS IN SURF THERAPY

In 2023, we were pleased to see a 2% increase in the number of girls completing surf therapy and being retained in surf club (41% vs 39% in 2022).

In particular, we saw a very significant increase in the percentage of girls attending surf club in 2023:



Last year we worked on solutions to key challenges that we had pinpointed with girl recruitment and attendance. We share these below.

CHALLENGE	SOLUTION
Referral partners are more likely to overlook girls than boys during recruitment. Research suggests toxic stress more often leads to girls internalising, becoming quiet and withdrawn rather than externalising, such as becoming aggressive. It can therefore be less common that girls are identified as needing the service.	We encouraged our referral partners to refer through equal numbers of boys and girls to our programme. We also updated our indicator checklist for referral partners to emphasise that toxic stress can manifest in children in different ways.
Girls not having protective covers such as swimming caps that fit and are tailored to Black African hair.	We introduced Swimma caps at all our beach sites. These are especially designed in various sizes that accommodate a wide range of hair types and styles, including long hair, braids, afros and dreadlocks. We agree with girls - they should not have to choose between maintaining their hair and enjoying activities like surfing!
Girls often stay out of school and other activities when they are on their periods.	We introduced Be Girl period panties and Palesa Pads for all female coaches and girl participants who menstruate. These both have highly absorbent reusable padding that absorbs menstrual blood while females are exercising and in the water
Surfing is traditionally a male activity, and some of the girls who come to surf therapy are initially hesitant to get into the ocean and express themselves openly in front of boys. Parents/ carers can have different expectations of girls. For example, girls should do chores.	Our female and male coaches are trained to challenge patriarchal norms. For example, our male coaches will often serve food and clean the site, and our female coaches take children who want to surf bigger waves out to the backline. We also engage with parents and caregivers regularly to reassure them about safety in the water. We also encourage attendance even in rainy conditions, and explain how we ensure children get home safely, especially in winter.

CHILDREN WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

In 2023 the W4C Gqeberha beach site entered into a partnership with the Khanyisa School for the Blind. This school is home to children with visual impairments. Five children joined surf therapy in 2023, graduating at the end of the year to join surf club on Saturdays. An additional five new children from the School joined surf therapy in 2024.



Photo credit: Mhlabi Baleni

Below, we share some comments from a coach on working with this group of visually impaired children.

"To work with children in this group as effectively as possible, I remain as close as possible to the children. Things need to be explained in more detail to this group of children because they need to picture what we are saying in their minds first. We as coaches also need to be more observant in the water for the waves and rip currents.

Sindi is one of the children from the Khanyisa School for the Blind. She is 11 years old. When she started at W4C she felt very uncomfortable with being in the water. She now feels more comfortable with the coaches by her side. She has shown a lot of bravery when going into the water.

Being in a small group and having a 1:1 coach-to-child ratio has really helped with developing the participants' confidence, as well as building a strong connection with the fellow group members. When they attend surf club, they feel more assured that the coaches will protect them as well as their friends, and find it easier to make friends with other participants thanks to that individual attention they get."

-Coach, Gqeberha beach site



INCLUSIVE SURFING

Working with neurodiverse children requires a more tailored approach, with a focus on adapting the surf therapy coaching style to meet the individual needs and communication styles of children. At the start of every year, Waves for Change's coaches and site managers are trained in using Makaton. Makaton is a communication, language and literacy approach using signs, symbols and normal grammatical speech that facilitates communication with non-verbal and neurodiverse participants. We keep the group size smaller to ensure each child receives personalised attention and support. We incorporate activities that promote social interaction, communication and empathy, such as sharing, taking turns and teamwork. Coaches use visual aids and clear communication to help the children understand and engage with activities. They also adapt their coaching style to be responsive to each child's unique needs and abilities.

One of Waves for Change's morning surf therapy groups in East London is 12 children from the Autism Fountain, who have been attending surf therapy for 18 months. Autism Fountain includes a school specialising in supporting children on the autism spectrum. We spoke to our East London site manager, one of our coaches and a champion teacher about this morning group.

SITE MANAGER

"What stands out for me about our morning programmes is the enthusiasm and excitement the participants experience when arriving and during the session. They love the Take 5 and check-in using the Makaton arm bands. These children have made great strides in confidence, social skills and emotional regulation. Their willingness to participate and their resilience as they continue trying if they have not yet mastered an activity is incredible to see. Our specialised morning groups are an absolute joy for our participants as well as our coaches.

Initially the champion teacher, school and parents were sceptical about including their kids in our surf therapy session considering the ocean and surf boards. After observing the sessions for a few months, the champion teacher could see the benefit of the programme and how the kids were responding to how the coaches communicated with the participants. Seeing the kids leading energisers and learning independence, like changing into wetsuits on their own, has been amazing."

-Site manager Pierre Fray, East London beach site

COACH

"One child that comes to mind is Lundi, aged 16. Since joining the programme, he has shown significant improvement in his social skills and ability to regulate his emotions. Him not being able to verbally communicate has not stopped him from talking to us or expressing himself or even leading activities like kilos. Lundi saw other participants diving in the deep pool and wanted to join. Despite not being able to swim, he trusted that the coaches would be there to support him. Seeing the sense of pride and accomplishment he felt was very heartwarming."

-Coach, East London beach site

CHAMPION TEACHER

"We are very grateful for the partnership between W4C and Autism Fountain. The aspect of the morning programme that works best is the combination of surf therapy and social skills that has boosted self-confidence and communication skills. This programme and the ocean has helped in the reduction of anxiety and in promoting relaxation for our kids."

-Champion teacher, Autism Fountain, East London





WAVES FOR CHANGE
Simunye. Sisonke.

18

19

VANS

COACH PATHWAY

Over the last 13 years, in partnership with children and adolescents, we've identified five protective factors present in effective programmes for children living in adverse and volatile communities.

These protective factors are embedded by W4C coaches who use our five steps and the Take 5 coaching routine using essential empathic coaching skills, like praise and active listening.



We employed 43 coaches (21 male and 22 female) across our five beach hubs.

- Sixteen of our coaches were in their second year with us, allowing them to take up roles as senior coaches.
- We recruited an additional 27 new coaches, who took up roles as junior coaches.

- ENERGISE**
- CHECK IN**
- TAKE 5 (PACED BREATHING)**
- SURF AND SPLASH SKILLS AND PLAYTIME**
- CHECK OUT**

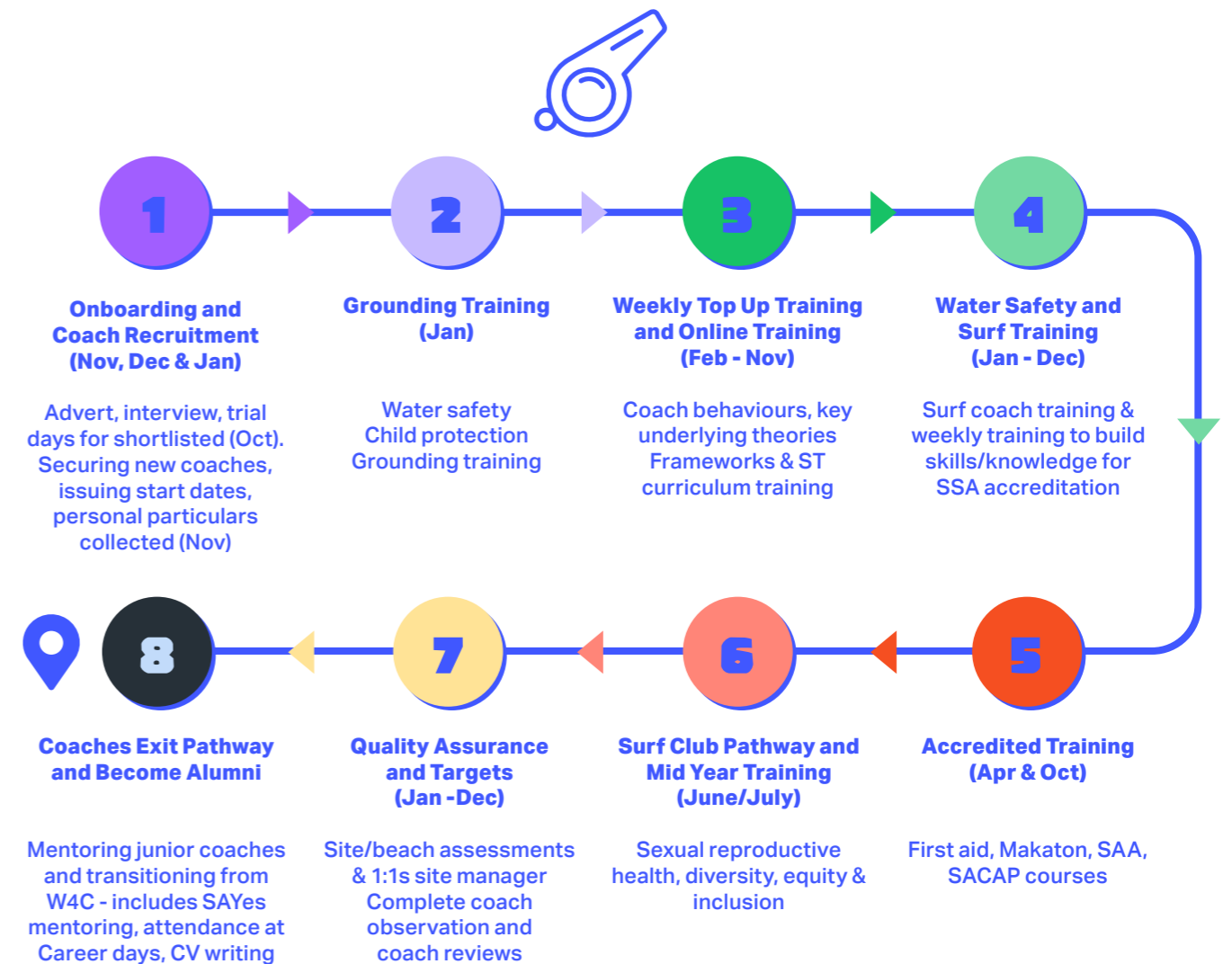
Developing a workforce of fun, empathic coaches

To help coaches understand how to introduce protective factors that can mitigate the impact of toxic stress for children, W4C has created a structured and scaffolded two-year training process that allows coaches to gradually practise and master new coaching skills whilst under the supervision of senior coaches, site managers and our support hub team.

When coaches start, they receive grounding training, which helps coaches to understand the impact of adversity and stress on children's bodies and minds. During this grounding training, coaches master a simple routine that they embed with children at the beach every week.

Weekly top-up training then supports coaches to master the empathic coaching skills (such as active listening and effective praise) they need to make children feel safe. Coaches then learn to integrate more self-regulation games and activities that improve children's ability to manage emotions and master healthy responses to stress through fun routines that children enjoy every time they come to the beach. Throughout their time at W4C, coaches are supported and supervised to manage disclosures from children and refer into other systems where necessary.

We also support coaches through additional accredited training and mentoring to enable their onward journey into employment or further studies once they exit the two-year learnership.



Coach pathway highlights in 2023

All 43 coaches attended the South African College of Applied Psychology (SACAP) course 'Developing a growth mindset' this past year.

Surfing South Africa (SSA) provides accredited training in surf coaching for coaches with strong surfing skills wanting to train as surf instructors. Nine coaches received certification for SSA Surf Coaching Level 1.

SAYes provided weekly mentoring to senior coaches over April – November 2023. Eleven of our senior coaches completed the mentoring programme in 2023.

"I WAS INCREDIBLY IMPRESSED BY ALL COACHES' ENGAGEMENT, EAGERNESS TO LEARN AND DILIGENT BEHAVIOUR DURING THE FOUR DAYS OF THE COURSE. I COULD SEE THEM GROW THEIR CONFIDENCE IN THE WATER FROM BEGINNING TO END AND THEY SHOWED A BRILLIANT UNDERSTANDING OF ALL THE CONCEPTS DISCUSSED."

-Surf and water skills trainer, Gqeberha beach hub

COACH BUJA'S STORY

Bulelani (Buja's) school partnered with W4C and one of his teachers recommended that he would benefit from the programme. He started coming to surf therapy when he was 8 years old.

"WHEN I CAME TO W4C I DID NOT KNOW ALL THESE THINGS THAT I KNOW NOW. I WAS JUST LOOKING FOR A PLACE TO TAKE ME OUT FROM THE COMMUNITY THAT I WAS IN, I MEAN - TAKE ME OUT PHYSICALLY, MENTALLY AND EMOTIONALLY. GROWING UP IN A TOWNSHIP CAN BE HARD, I LOVE MY COMMUNITY BUT THERE WAS ALSO SO MUCH VIOLENCE, SO MANY PEOPLE STRUGGLING, IT WAS HARD TO COPE AND JUST BE A KID."

Buja fell in love with the ocean and surfing. W4C helped him to feel safe. He developed caring connections with his coaches, he felt celebrated and built confidence learning how to surf.

"I WAS ALWAYS A SHY PERSON, I WAS SCARED TO COME OUT OF MY SHELL. I COULDN'T TELL SOMEONE ABOUT MY PAST. I WOULD JUST GET TOO EMOTIONAL AND WANT TO CRY. BUT NOW I FEEL PROUD OF MYSELF. I'M BRAVE ENOUGH TO SHARE MY STORY."

Surfing was an escape. When he was in the ocean it was like all the bad thoughts left. He felt free. It wasn't just about how he felt in the ocean. Buja also learnt different ways to cope at W4C. He also learnt how to do things like the Take 5 whenever he felt really sad or angry.

Buja joined W4C's Saturday surf club after finishing ten months in surf therapy. This gave him a space to stay connected to coaches that cared about him, and it meant he could still get into the ocean and surf every week.

Buja grew up coming to W4C. He became a leader at surf club and came every week until he was 16. In grade 12, he became a volunteer assistant coach. Finally, Buja applied for and became a W4C coach when he was 19.



Photo credit: Nelson Rosier Coulhon



TRAINING PARTNERSHIPS



SCALING PREVENTATIVE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

In 2022, the Child Gauge reported that "... the majority of young people with mental disorders remain untreated and, in South Africa, only one in 10 children with a diagnosable and treatable mental disorder is able to access care. ... Half of all adult mental health problems have their origins prior to age 14 ... making early prevention and intervention essential." ('Child and adolescent mental health is everybody's business'; *South African Child Gauge 2021/2022*; p.99)

We know that millions of children in South Africa and other low-middle income countries (LMICs) experience adversity on a regular basis. Without access to protective factors, this chronic exposure to adversity leads to a build-up of stress that becomes toxic, significantly increasing risk factors for mental health conditions.

Since 2019 we have supported scores of youth development organisations across the world to

start and strengthen surf, sport and recreation programmes that improve the wellbeing, resilience and mental health of the children in their communities. With these partners, we have conducted and published research that maps how sport and recreation-based programmes improve wellbeing, resilience and mental health, focusing in on the ingredients making up effective programmes.

The scalable unit of what we do is the training, supervision and support we offer to coaches and the organisation in which they operate. In 2023, we focused on refining our model to get ready for larger scaling, allowing us to activate a workforce of coaches across South Africa and other low- and middle-income countries who are employed to work with children through partners. We offer training that supports coaches to optimise the natural benefits of fun, group-based sport, recreation and play. It also moves distressed (pre-symptomatic) children towards wellness.

W4C'S FIVE PILLAR TRAINING MODEL EQUIPS COACHES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN WHO ARE AT RISK

(Image adapted from South African Child Gauge 2021/2022)

OUR RESULTS IN 2023

We provided grounding training and regular support to 172 coaches in three countries:

	+		+	
SOUTH AFRICA THE CAPE TOWN NETWORK		SOMALIA, UNICEF, & ELMAN PEACE		SOUTH SUDAN UNICEF, GREDO & CINA
104 COACHES 17 ORGANISATIONS		23 COACHES 8 ORGANISATIONS		45 COACHES 2 ORGANISATIONS

HOW WE SCALE

Over 2023, we invested significant energy and resources into accelerating our scaling work through creating a clear and replicable training model we can now use with coaches working across a range of sport- and play-based settings across South Africa and beyond. The training model is based on evidence and learning generated from 13 years of surf therapy programmes and several acceptability and feasibility studies conducted with partners in a range of countries and contexts, using different sport- and play-based settings. We are using two key strategies:

We train coaches in our Five Pillar approach

We now provide grounding training in our Five Pillar model for coaches already working in other organisations. This runs over three to five days, and is followed by fortnightly or monthly support sessions in person or online for a minimum of six months. Our training and support are based on five key ingredients (or five pillars) that lead to change that have been extensively researched in both our own surf therapy programme and the training we have been doing with partners:



1. SAFE SPACES

When we meet together in a space where there is structure, routine and respect, we can feel safe. This helps us relax and get ready to learn.



2. CARING CONNECTIONS

Once we feel safe, we can form new friendships that teach us new social skills, and allow us to treat one another with mutual respect and empathy. We can also share problems when we feel ready.



3. FUN

When we have fun, we focus on the task at hand. We forget about our wider world and experience respite (freedom from stress). This relaxes our brains.



4. COPING AND SOCIAL SKILLS

Our coaches use simple-to-follow games that teach children to understand and control their emotions when they feel overwhelmed.



5. CONNECTION TO OTHER SUPPORT

Coaches often become a key pillar of support for children. They can refer children to other support networks and opportunities.

We have also begun to train master trainers who are now training coaches using the grounding training and follow-up support approach.

We share resources on our training model

During 2023, we developed a set of guides and resources that help sports coaches, teachers, youth volunteers, child protection officers and others working with youth deliver fun, effective, child-friendly mental health activities. These resources embed the five pillars into existing sport and recreation programmes.

Two guides are open access and available via our [website](#). They are:

Coaching Guide

Containing programme content to help coaches learn simple skills that build safe spaces and deliver engaging programmes for children.

Curriculum Guide

Featuring games and role plays working with children and youth, enabling programmes to produce better mental health outcomes.

"I WAS ALWAYS A SHY PERSON, I WAS SCARED TO COME OUT OF MY SHELL. I COULDN'T TELL SOMEONE ABOUT MY PAST. I WOULD JUST GET TOO EMOTIONAL AND WANT TO CRY. BUT NOW I FEEL PROUD OF MYSELF. I'M BRAVE ENOUGH TO SHARE MY STORY."

- Youth participant and former combatant, Somalia



"WE ARE READY TO TRAIN OTHERS. THERE'S NOBODY IN SOMALIA DOING MENTAL HEALTH WORK LIKE THIS, EVEN IN THE HOSPITALS, AND WE REALLY NEED IT. THESE GAMES REALLY WORK AND IT'S GOOD TO SHARE OUR SKILLS."

-Elman Peace staff member, Somalia

FIVE PILLAR TRAINING IN SOUTH SUDAN

Supported by UNICEF South Sudan

Because of the ongoing humanitarian crisis in South Sudan, UNICEF has been piloting and researching interventions aimed at improving wellbeing and resilience amongst conflict-affected youth. In 2023, it collaborated with W4C to support the adoption and implementation of our Five Pillar adolescent mental health methodology by civil society organisations Grass Root Empowerment and Development Organization (GREDO) and Community In Need Aid (CINA) in South Sudan.

With UNICEF support, W4C has supported GREDO and CINA in South Sudan over the past year by:

1. Training a team of 45 South Sudanese inspirators (peer educators) to implement the Five Pillar methodology in six youth centres.
2. Supporting inspirators through fortnightly calls and a WhatsApp group, where inspirators shared successes, asked for advice and received new activities from W4C.

In March 2024, W4C visited Juba in South Sudan to assess the results of this work.

Results

GREDO and CINA have recorded attendance data on their individual sessions using the TeamPact app. This is the same app that W4C uses to track attendance at its surf therapy programme. Over just nine months (May 2023-Feb. 2024), they reached 1 791 extremely vulnerable and hard to reach adolescents and young people in South Sudan.

Facilitation of the Five Pillars activities within the safe spaces of the youth centres appears to have enabled participant gains in psychoeducation, notably in the area of emotional regulation. Children shared stories in which they attributed changes in their behaviour to the programme.

"I'VE LEARNED TO FORGIVE AND APOLOGISE."

-Youth participant

"I USED TO BE ALONE, I FOUGHT... I LEARNED THERE ARE BETTER WAYS TO SOLVE PROBLEMS."

-Youth participant

Children gave examples of how their behaviour has changed outside of the centres. They credited the centre and their inspirators for helping them make healthy, positive changes.

"I USED TO FIGHT AND BE IN A GANG. BUT THIS PROGRAMME CHANGED MY MENTALITY. BIT BY BIT, WE ARE CHANGING BECAUSE YOU CAN COME TO THE CENTRE AND DO WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY."

-Youth participant

Senior inspirators (coaches) also shared examples of seeing Five Pillar activities in the community and how the programme is receiving positive response.

"WE HAVE HEARD THE ENERGISERS IN THE MARKET. AFTER ACTIVITIES, THE PARTICIPANTS FEEL RELIEVED, RELAXED; AND THEY GO OUT OF THE CENTRE SINGING. [...] AFTER SEEING THIS, THE PARENTS BECOME ENGAGED AND ASK ABOUT THE ACTIVITIES. SOME PARENTS EVEN DID THE [ACTIVITIES] THEMSELVES."

- Senior inspirator

"THE KIDS ON THE STREET BECOME LESS VIOLENT AND MORE RESPECTFUL. THEY SHARE SOME OF THE STORIES FROM THE CENTRE WITH THEIR FRIENDS, WHO THEN COME TO THE CENTRE."

- Senior inspirator



Photo credit: Nelson Rosier Coulhon

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR IN 2024

Take 5: Rebranding the Five Pillar method

We have reflected on barriers to larger government departments and leading youth development agencies taking on our training and support. We are renaming our scaling approach – previously referred to as the Five Pillar Method – as the Take 5 programme to make it easier to explain and package.

We are positioning Take 5 in this way:

Designed by Waves for Change, the Take 5 programme harnesses the power of sport, play, recreation to improve child and adolescent wellbeing and mental health outcomes at scale. Take 5 is designed for use in low-resource and high-stress settings, where populations face regular adversity and access to mental health services is limited. Take 5 is suitable for organisations already delivering sport-, play- and recreation-based programmes, and for those wanting to start new programming.

The scalable unit of what we do is the training, supervision, and support we offer to coaches and the organisations in which they operate. Take 5 allows

coaches to embed our five protective factors through the Take 5 coaching routine (energise, check-in, Take 5 based activities, play/sport/recreation, check out), and to master essential empathic coaching skills (e.g. praise, listening). Take 5 is designed to be delivered by a youth workforce, so we aim to keep the approach simple and effective so it is actionable and manageable.

Deepening relationships with key stakeholders

We will deepen our partnerships with UNICEF South Sudan and Somalia, and look to connect with the regional East Africa UNICEF office, to further grow the use of Take 5 in the region and beyond. We will also begin assessing coach competencies in several sites using UNICEF's EQUIP methodology.

We will also strengthen our partnership with the Infant, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Strengthening (ICAMHS) team based at Lentegeur Hospital, by pilot-training a workforce of caring coaches employed by the Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport (DCAS) to use the Take 5 programme within afterschool programmes across priority communities in the Western Cape.

Year Beyond

- A youth service partnership in South Africa providing unemployed youth (18-25 years old) with meaningful work experience and a pathway to further studies or work, while at the same time encouraging a culture of community service

ACTSA

- A South African NGO responsible for delivering in-school social emotional learning programmes to Grade 8 children across Cape Town

UNICEF East Africa regional office

- Ongoing support to partners in Somalia and South Sudan
- Exploring opportunities to extend reach to other African countries

Further scaling of training work

The Cape Town Network:

- 16 civil society organisations

MOD

(Mass participation; Opportunity and access; Development and growth Programme) within Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport, South Africa

- An after-school programme focused on ensuring that school-going youth have access to fun, play-based activities in recreation, sport, arts and culture, after school
- MOD coaches will be training at the Cape Town Network training in 2024

New tool for measuring coach competencies

We need to develop approaches to assess the effectiveness of the workforce we are building and trying to strengthen over time. In 2024, we will be adapting the EQUIP We Act coach competency tool (developed by the World Health Organisation) to assess whether our training and support is translating into practice in cohorts of W4C and Take 5 coaches we train and supervise.

Online course

An interactive, open-access learning management system (LMS), where educators, counsellors and sports coaches throughout the world can learn the Take 5 routine and coaching skills.

ALIVE IMPACT STUDY

The Improving adolescent mental health by reducing the impact of poverty (ALIVE) project, running over 2023-2026, is a large-scale, multi-country research project – led by King's College London and the University of Cape Town, and funded by the Wellcome Trust – that addresses preventative interventions that will decrease the risk of children and adolescents developing the two most common mental health conditions faced by young people living in adverse settings, being depression and anxiety.

The study is being carried out in urban settings in three low- and middle-income countries: South Africa, Columbia and Nepal. Because of W4C's particular expertise in a methodology that embeds children with self-regulation skills, the ALIVE team contracted W4C to develop the manuals for the adolescent self regulation arm of the trial, and to oversee the training and supervision for this arm of the trial across South Africa, Nepal and Colombia.

ALIVE will use a randomised control trial (RCT) to implement the interventions and collect data. Targeting randomly selected children aged 13-15 years of age and their parents/caregivers, this study will trial three interventions, one being self-regulation strengthening using surf therapy, the second being cash transfer combined with financial skills and surf therapy, and the third being an economic-only arm, with cash transfer and financial education skills only. The RCT will assess their impact in decreasing the incidence

of depression and anxiety in cohorts of children with high-risk factors. The curriculum for the self-regulation component draws substantially on W4C's Five Pillar method to promote mental health and well-being among youth living in adverse circumstances.

The RCT will collect data at the start, middle and end of the interventions, as well as 12 months later, allowing for impact measurement (longitudinal data collection).

RCTs are globally recognised, gold-standard research projects that are particularly good at demonstrating the efficacy and positive impact – or otherwise – of interventions.

They contribute to the development and adoption of best-practice models.

Results from RCTs are considered to be highly reliable because RCTs require very strictly controlled settings and stringent data collection methods.

Preparation for the RCT started in 2023. In 2024 and 2025, W4C is:



Using tailored manuals to train facilitators in all three countries in self-regulation content



Running sessions over May – November for 120 children receiving the self-regulation and combined interventions



Collecting baseline and endline data, and following children up 12 months later



Writing up and publishing findings in a peer-reviewed journal, and sharing results with partners and stakeholders

THANK YOU!

ORGANISATIONS DONATING FUNDS

Active Foundation
Allan Gray Philanthropy Initiative
Anglo American Foundation Fund Trust
2 anonymous donors
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Capital Group
Carl & Emily Fuchs Foundation
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Wellcome Trust
The Windfall Foundation
World Childhood Foundation

ORGANISATIONS GIVING IN-KIND DONATIONS

5 mental health professionals
Allan Gray Investments
Are You Okay
Casareccio
Chapmans Hotel
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Cool Dandy
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Folk Cafe
Freight Innovations
Grumpy Snacks
Halle Project
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Mami Wata

Massimos
Medpages
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Olympia Cafe
Palesa Pads
Pest Control Specialists
Postocino
Reef
South African College of Applied Psychology
Swimma Caps
Traffic Brand
Veldskoen
Wave Theatre

A big thank you to all our friends and supporters who donated wetsuits and surfboards!

FUNDRAISERS AND EVENTS

Movember Run
100k's Supporting Friends and Building Giants
Fragments Lost and Found (exhibition)
Paddle Battle
Nik Rabinowitz & Friends Comedy Show

A huge thank you to all our individual donors who supported our campaigns, events and daily work. Through your heartfelt giving and championing of the W4C flag, you inspire us!



Photo credit: Brenton Geach

FINANCIAL REPORT

This financial report addresses our financial year running over March 2023 - February 2024 (referred to below as the 2024 financial year). The economic landscape in South Africa over this period has been marked by significant challenges, including slow economic growth, high unemployment rates, rising inflation and lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Against this backdrop, W4C is fortunate to have experienced strong funder support.

Trends and highlights

Funding

As a not-for-profit entity, the majority of our funding comes from private-sector entities, international funders and fundraising campaigns. Despite increasing interest and inflation rates, we saw a 25% growth in funding for our work over the past year, reflecting the growth in our research and training partnerships work.

Increase in operational costs

We have seen an increase in operational costs, particularly for child transportation and child referrals. We introduced cost-cutting measures, such as reducing administrative expenses and optimising resource allocation. We have also embraced digital transformation to enhance efficiency and engage donors more effectively.

FINANCIALS		
Income statement	2024	2023
Donations	R28,830,069	R23,062,945
Programme expenditure	-R28,088,423	-R21,100,713
Investment income	R1,313,607	R1,163,435
Surplus	R2,055,253	R3,125,667
Balance sheet	2024	2023
Fixed and intangible assets	R1,662,930	R849,792
Donations received in advance	R20,351,509	R13,250,574
Reserves	R9,147,895	R5,490,131
Total assets	R31,162,334	R19,590,497

Looking ahead

We will remain resilient and adaptable moving forward. We will continue evolving our financial strategies to navigate the uncertain economic landscape. Key areas of focus will include:

Enhancing financial sustainability

We will further strengthen financial planning and management practices, exploring diverse funding opportunities and building reserve funds to withstand economic fluctuations.

While the economic climate poses ongoing challenges, it also presents opportunities for us to innovate, collaborate and strengthen the provision of essential mental health services, bringing about lasting transformative change and positive impact.

Leveraging technology

We continue to invest in technology to improve operational efficiencies and enhance service delivery.

OUR VALUES

The children and young people we work with are at the core of what we do. With them, we've created a set of values to drive our strategy and day-to-day interactions.



BANANAS

The W4C culture promotes protecting each other from harm, respecting each other equally, and open communication – always, anytime, anywhere!



WELLBEING

We want to increase understanding of mental health and the core pillars of programmes that improve emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing of people in under-resourced communities.



PEOPLE FIRST

Our programme focuses on the developmental and health needs of children and young people, whose wellbeing is our first priority.



DIVERSITY

Every person in the W4C family experiences acceptance and belonging. No matter what they look like, where they come from, what they believe in, or what they can do.



PARTICIPATE AND COLLABORATE

Children, coaches and community participate in developing the W4C model of learning, and we participate in the wider networks and communities of practice to support increasing access to high-quality wellbeing programmes for youth.



BE TRANSPARENT

We share how we source and spend money and how we make collective decisions by ensuring anyone can ask questions, raise concerns and give feedback.



SAFETY

By maintaining physical and psychological safety, children feel understood and accepted, supported when they try new things, and can have fun being a child!



INCLUSIVITY

We are inclusive in our work, regardless of class, disability, gender, neurodiversity, race, religion and sexual orientation.



GET INVOLVED TODAY!



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Investec Bank Limited

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40005074278

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