



WAVES FOR HOPE



# EVALUATION

REPORT

—  
CYCLE 1 - 2019/2020

June 9th 2020

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**Waves for Hope** offers a surf therapy programme for at-risk youths in the rural communities of Trinidad.

Our mission is to improve the physical, emotional and mental well-being of young people. We provide a safe space, caring mentors, the fun activity of surfing and evidence-based exercises to build healthy relationships, develop coping skills and improve confidence and self-esteem.

Our goal is to encourage positive life choices and create role models in under-served communities in Trinidad & Tobago.





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**BACKGROUND**



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## Background

### HOW IT STARTED

The origins of Waves for Hope go back to Chris Dennis, a professional athlete who has officially represented Trinidad and Tobago for more than twenty years regionally and internationally in the wonderful sport of surfing. In addition to being a keen competitor, he has also focused his efforts in helping to improve the sport locally by coaching and mentoring young and upcoming talent, especially those in his local community of Balandra.

It is through the intervention of sport that Chris saw the possibility of positively affecting the lives of young people in the community and dissuade them from a life of failure and frustration.

Waves for Hope (WFH) is a non-profit organization founded in 2019 by Chris Dennis and Manuela Giger. Both are very passionate about surfing & believe in the healing nature of the ocean in combination with surf therapy. Waves for Hope is a member of the international surf therapy organization "The Wave Alliance".

### OUR PROGRAMME

The Waves for Hope Surf Therapy programme runs for a duration of 6 months and works with groups of up to 24 youths at a time. These young people live in vulnerable situations and are exposed to poverty, violence, abuse and family breakdown.

Our surf therapy programme provides young people with the opportunity to practice new behaviours and coping skills that can improve the way they deal with the impact of stress.

### FUNDING

The South African NGO "The Wave Alliance" and a local sponsor, together with the co-founders, funded this 6-months pilot project.

### GOALS

The aims of the pilot project were:

- **Funding:** This project is used as a springboard to attract further funding.
- **Experience:** We wanted to adapt the learnings from our Surf Therapy training in South Africa to the needs of our local communities.
- **Mentors / Club:** The older participants who showed positive characteristics will be trained to become future mentors for both the Surf Therapy programme and also the Waves for Hope Youth Club. Participants who complete the Surf Therapy programme will graduate into the Waves for Hope Youth Club, where they will continue with surfing, have access to various trainings including home work center, art, music and life skills. This will give them the opportunity to maintain the positive relationships and skills forged through Waves for Hope.

FOUNDED  
June 2019

FOUNDERS  
Chris Dennis & Manuela Giger



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## **PARTICIPANTS**



## 02

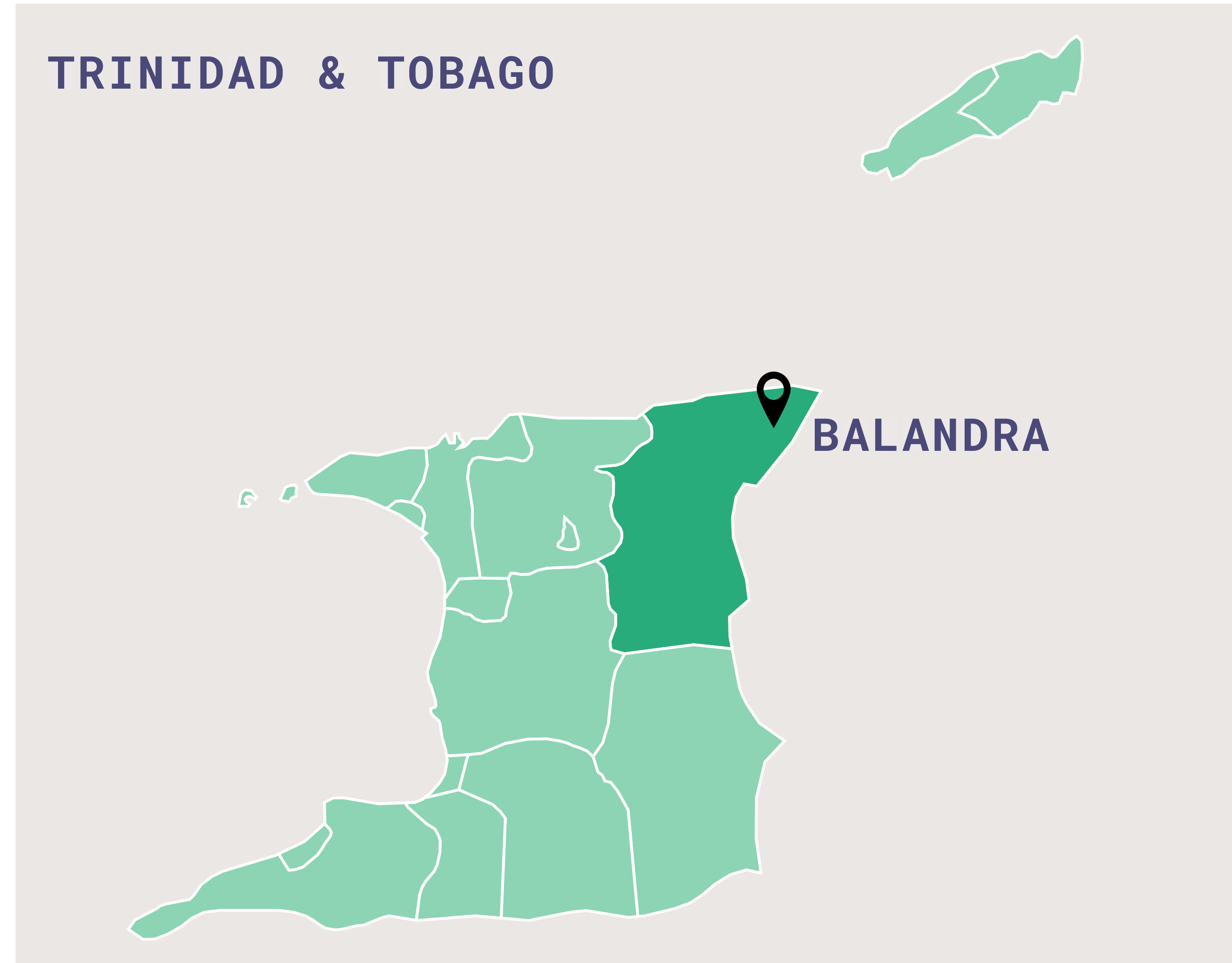
# Participants

### DEMOGRAPHICS

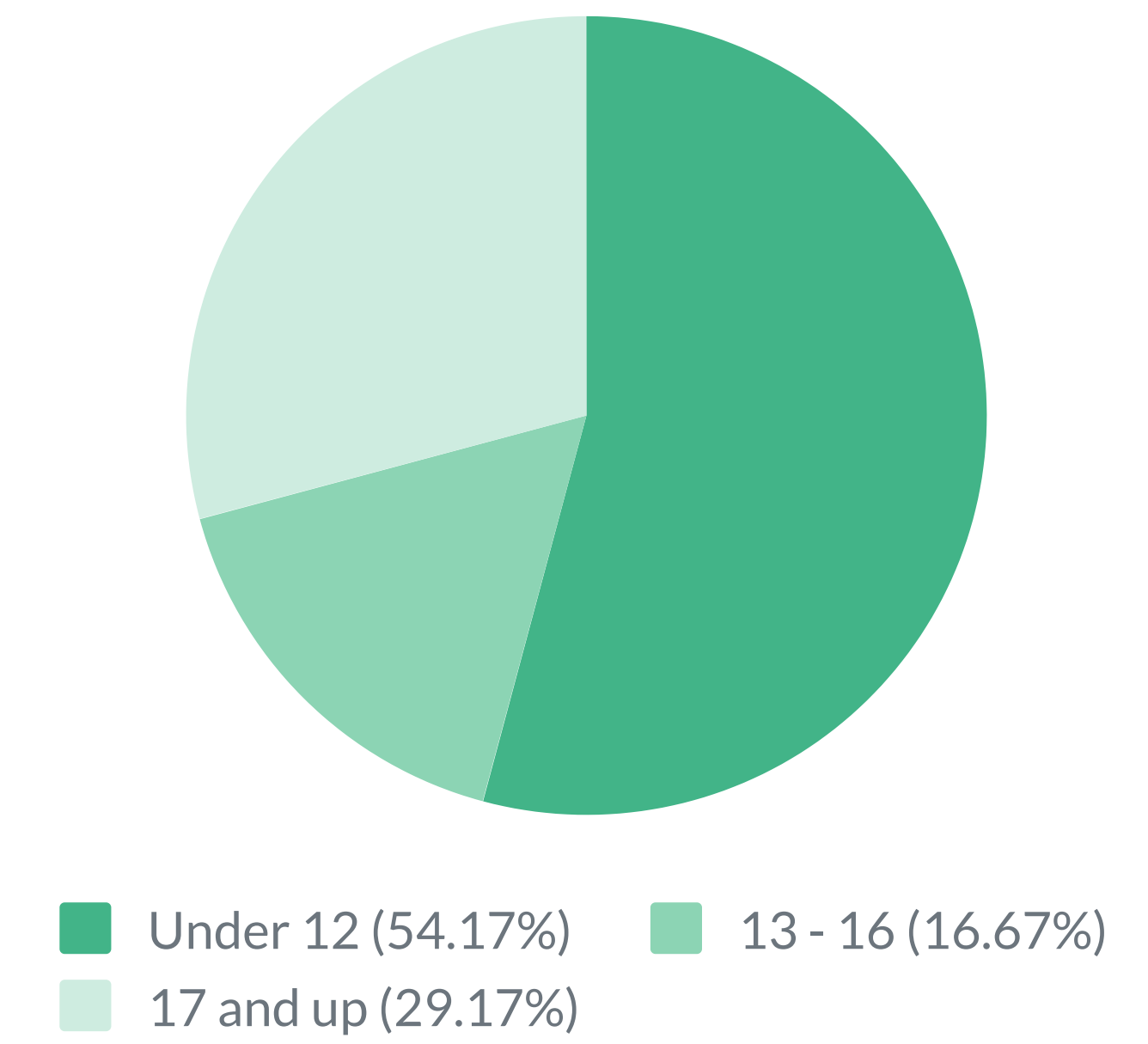
We enrolled 24 kids and youth aged 7 to 18 into our programme, and 21 completed the 6-months course. All participants come from the village of Balandra on the east-coast of Trinidad and were hand-picked by Waves for Hope mentors due to their background and their interest in surfing.

Most participants were aged under 12. The ratio of male to female was 2:1.

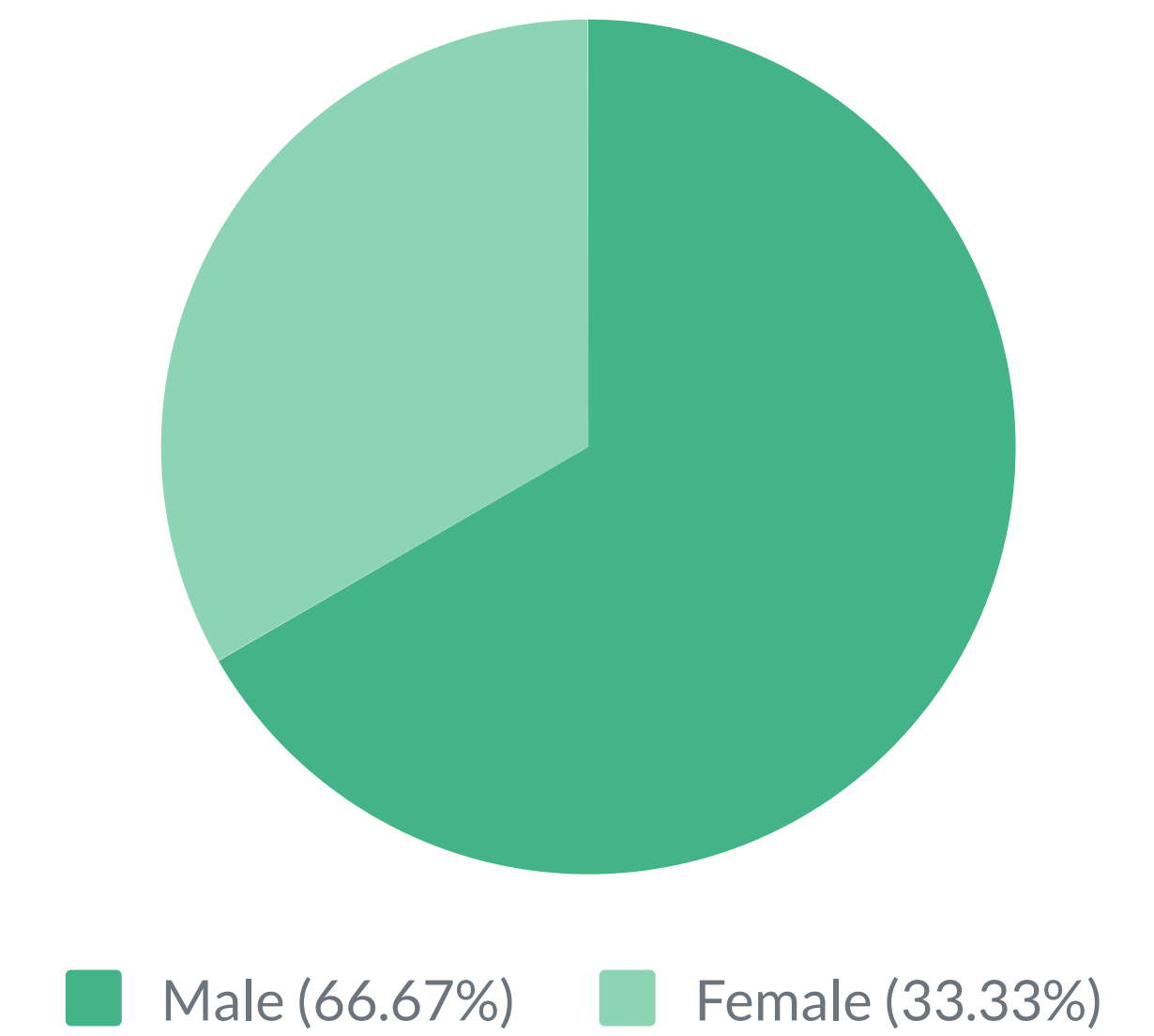
### TRINIDAD & TOBAGO



### Ages



### Gender



### GROUP SIZE

24 participants aged 7 to 18

### COMPLETION OF COURSE

87.5%



# 02

## Participants

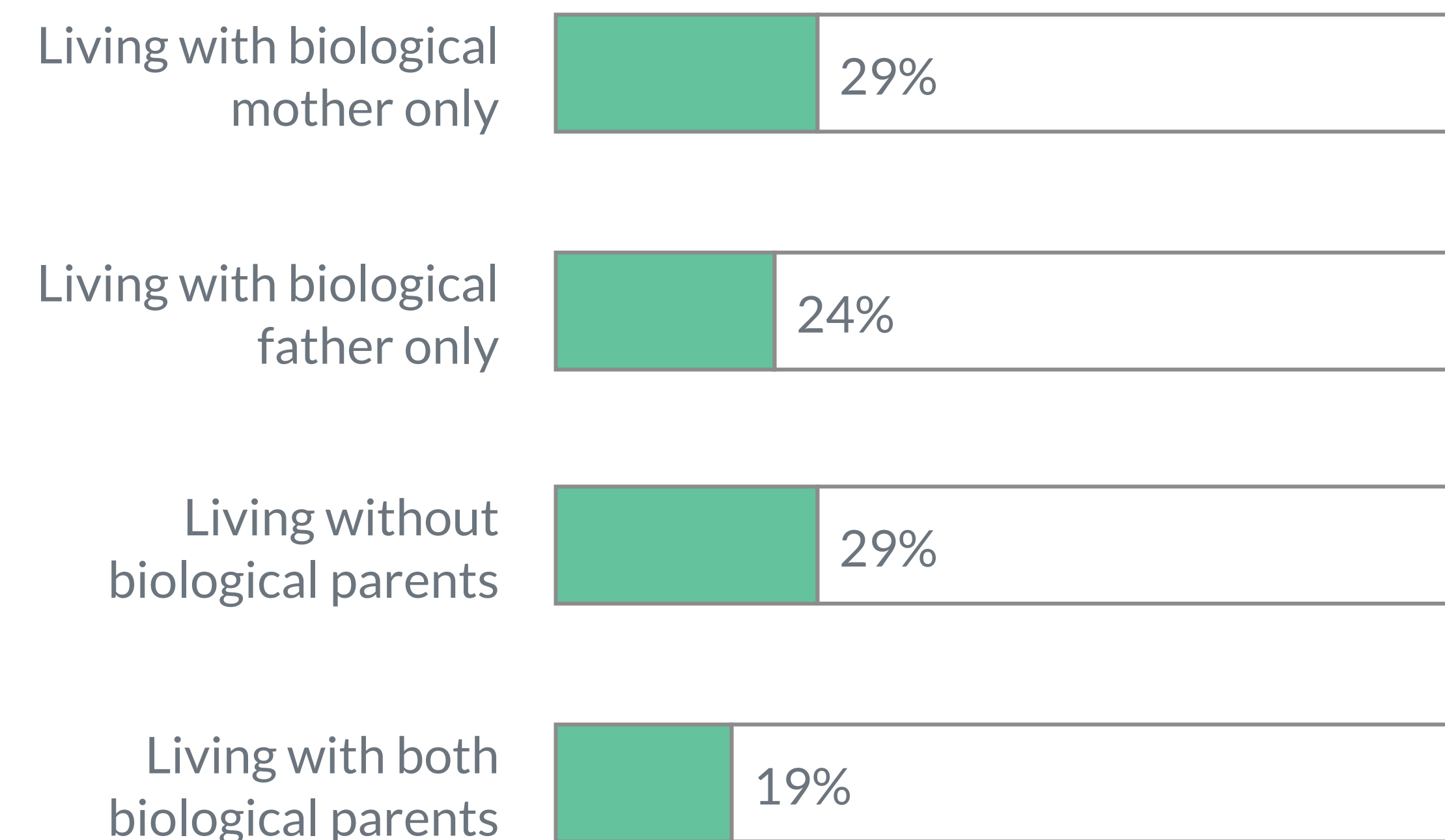
### AT-RISK YOUTHS

Unicef reported that in 2011, 76.7% of children aged 14 or younger experienced physical punishment and/or psychological aggression in Trinidad.

The highest reported types of abuse were neglect, sexual abuse and physical abuse. Boys are more vulnerable to neglect and physical abuse, girls are more vulnerable to sexual abuse.

Poor households headed by single women represent prime conditions for inter-generational poverty to take hold, promoting a 'learned helplessness'. Sexual violence, drug and alcohol abuse are more likely to occur in these households as opposed to non-poor households with common-law or married couples. With regards to the geographic area and ethnic distribution of poverty, the data show that East Trinidad had higher percentages of poor and indigent populations.

### Participants housing situation



As stated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) "Social dynamics within at-risk communities must also be addressed. Isolation from the wider society may facilitate the development of alternative value systems and subcultures within marginalized communities. Once such subcultures become established, they may become self reinforcing since the adoption of an alternative value system and culture may seem appropriate where community members perceive that they do not belong to or are not allowed to participate fully within the wider society. Antisocial norms will be reinforced by gangs, or may even facilitate the development of gangs. Furthermore, socialization processes will facilitate the perpetuation of such antisocial values."<sup>1</sup>

The Global School Health Survey (2007) revealed that 21.5 % of students felt sad or hopeless almost every day.<sup>2</sup>

The ability to respond effectively to mental health issues is hindered by limited human and financial resources, lack of professional capacity, limited options to place children in need of care and protection, limited treatment and follow-up services, and challenges in interagency cooperation.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.undp.org/content/dam/trinidad\\_tobago/docs/DemocraticGovernance/Publications/UNDP\\_TandT\\_Citizen\\_Security\\_Survey\\_2012.pdf](https://www.undp.org/content/dam/trinidad_tobago/docs/DemocraticGovernance/Publications/UNDP_TandT_Citizen_Security_Survey_2012.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://tparliament.org/reports/p11-s4-J-20181120-SSPA-r6-MHTT.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.undp.org/content/dam/unct/caribbean/docs/SitAN%20Trinidad%202018%20WEB%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.undp.org/content/dam/unct/caribbean/docs/SitAN%20Trinidad%202018%20WEB%20(1).pdf)



02

## Participants

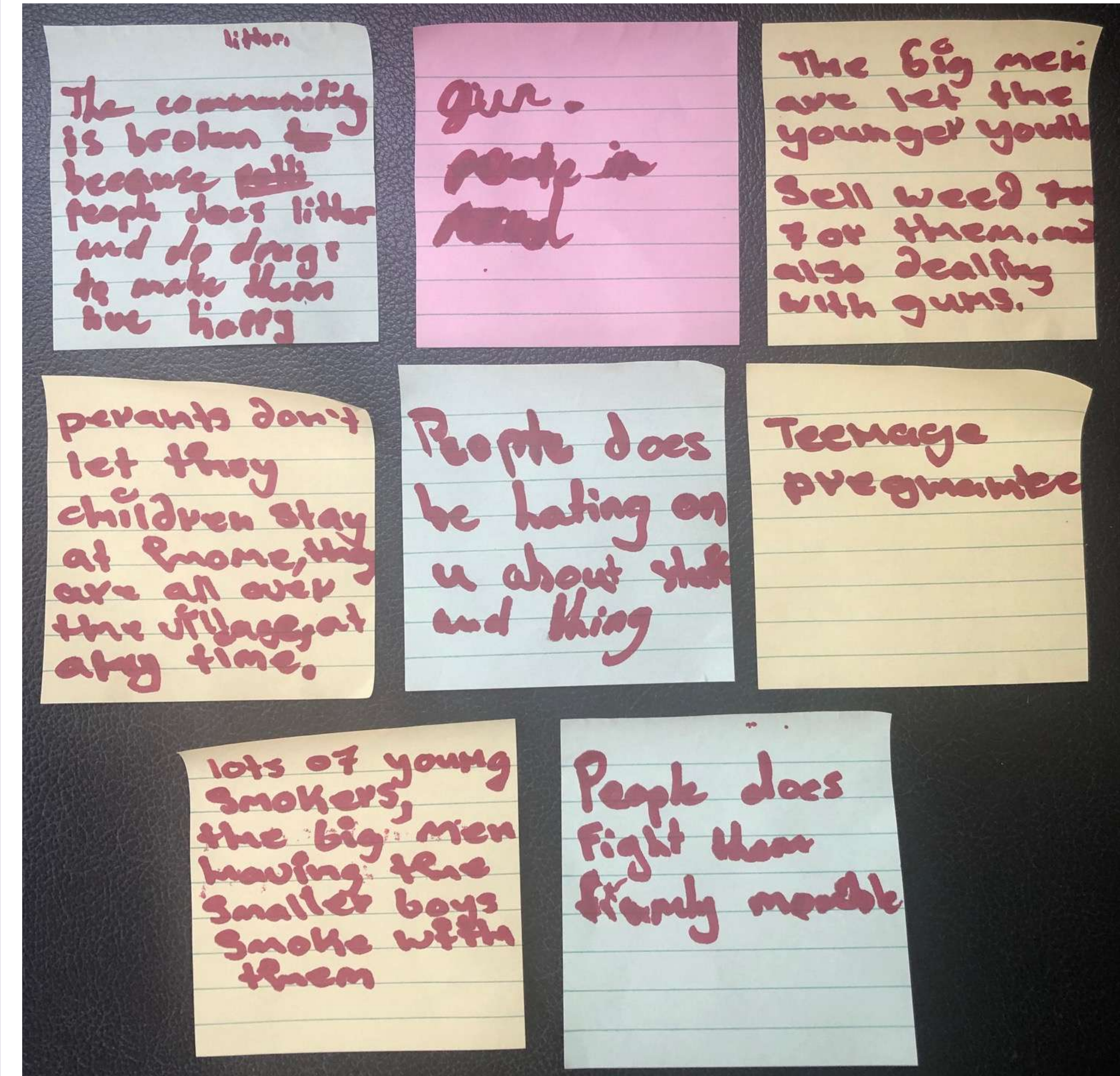
### ISSUES IN THE COMMUNITY

During our off-the-beach workshops, the participants analysed and identified issues in their communities.

Main issues are:

- Guns and gangs
- Drugs
- Lack of positive, supporting adults
- Teenage pregnancy
- Hatred and jealousy
- Violence
- Negative role models
- Peer pressure
- Neglect by parents
- Lack of educational support
- Lack of positive opportunities
- Abuse
- Negative music

Being around and having to deal with the above issues leaves these young people frustrated and hopeless.



Issues written down by participants.





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# PROGRAMME



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## Programme

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### A MENTAL HEALTH INTERVENTION

Our programme was modelled after the “Waves for Change” Surf Therapy programme in South Africa, which, in collaboration with various universities and researchers, has designed a program that covers the key needs of young people experiencing trauma. Exposure to repeat stressful events such as violence, poverty, abuse and family breakdown, and the lack of supportive adults result in young people feeling negatively about themselves, adopting negative behaviors and making bad life choices. Connecting these at-risk young people to caring adults, providing a safe space, opportunities and teaching coping skills has proven to increase the overall well-being of young people\*.

\*1 Waves for Change, Annual Report 2018/2019. (<https://www.waves-for-change.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Annual-Report-LR.pdf>)

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### DURATION & LOCATION

The Waves for Hope Surf Therapy course ran for a six-month period, running every Saturday from 10 a.m. till approx. 1 p.m. The sessions were held at either Roughside or Calmside Beach in Balandra, depending on the waves conditions to ensure the highest safety of all participants.

Our programme started in the beginning of October 2019 and was scheduled to finish at the end of March 2020. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the national restrictions in regards to group gatherings and beach access, the programme had to be halted in mid-March, leaving the participants to not be able to attend the last 4 sessions. In order to finish the curriculum, individual workshops with small groups of maximum 5 participants were organized.

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### MENTORS

The Surf Therapy sessions were managed and led by the co-founders

- Chris Dennis, a professional surfer and qualified surf instructor
- Manuela Giger, a qualified kitesurf instructor and life-guard

Up to two additional caring adults supported each session.

#### FREQUENCY

6 months / weekly every Saturday

#### SAFETY

Two beach options / minimum of 3 mentors



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## Programme

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### TRANSPORTATION

Transportation to the beach was organized through a local person, who has a mini-van and is also involved in school transportation for the smaller children. Meeting point was “The Junction” in the center of Balandra Village, participants who were not living in walking distance to the meeting point were collected at their home and dropped back to their home after the session.

All equipment was transported with a private pick-up, belonging to the co-founders.

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### CURRICULUM

The sessions followed a synergistic curriculum and all sessions were based on the same structure. Following set routines makes the participants feel comfortable and they can relax better.

All sessions involved a Teachable Moment, which helped the participants practice a new behavior/skill, reflect on the benefits of it (such as feeling positively about themselves or building good relationships), and share examples of what they can do to practice that behavior or skill at home and in school.

The participants learned various coping strategies (mindfulness activities, meditation, breathing exercises) as well as water skills (floating, surfing). We also included freediving exercises to improve the comfort in the water and the breathhold.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and us having to stop our programme, we set up off-the-beach workshops with small groups. The workshops focused on tools to cope with stress and exercises to build self-esteem and self-worth.

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### SKILLS EXCHANGE DAYS

We teamed up with other professional athletes and organized skills-exchange days:

- The Braves Racing Team: Cycling
- Andrew Lewis Foundation: Sailing

The skills exchange days gave our participants the opportunity to learn a new sport (triathlon, sailing), to share their knowledge of surfing with others and to connect with peers from a different social context.



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## EVALUATION



04

## Evaluation

### PRE & POST SURVEYS

An important aspect of this pilot was to evaluate whether the Surf Therapy sessions had a positive effect on the overall well-being of our participants.

For our evaluation we used the (Short) Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scales [(S)WEMWBS]. These were developed and scientifically validated to enable the measuring of mental wellbeing in the general population and the evaluation of projects, programmes and policies which aim to improve mental wellbeing.

The 7-item scale (S)WEMWBS is worded positively and items cover both feeling and functioning aspects of mental wellbeing, thereby making the concept more accessible. The 7 items can be summed to provide a single overall wellbeing score between 7 (low wellbeing) and 35 (high wellbeing).

The scale has been widely used internationally for monitoring, evaluating projects and programmes and investigating the determinants of mental wellbeing.

We also assessed participants access to social support before and after the intervention alongside satisfaction scores related to fun, safety and wish to continue participating in surf therapy.

All measures were administered before surf therapy commenced and after the culmination of a surf therapy curriculum cycle to measure any changes over the course of the intervention.

More information on the scale used can be found at the following link: <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/>

### ATTENDANCE APP

We used an attendance app to collect data such as session attendance figures and duration of sessions.

### INTERVIEWS

Qualitative feedback was generated by talking to individuals aswell as having focus group discussions towards the end of the cycle.

We talked to the participants, mentors, parents, care-givers and people in the community.

#### HARD DATA

Surveys / Attendance app

#### SOFT DATA

Interviews with participants, parents etc.



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## RESULTS



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Results

## 01

### OVERALL WELL-BEING

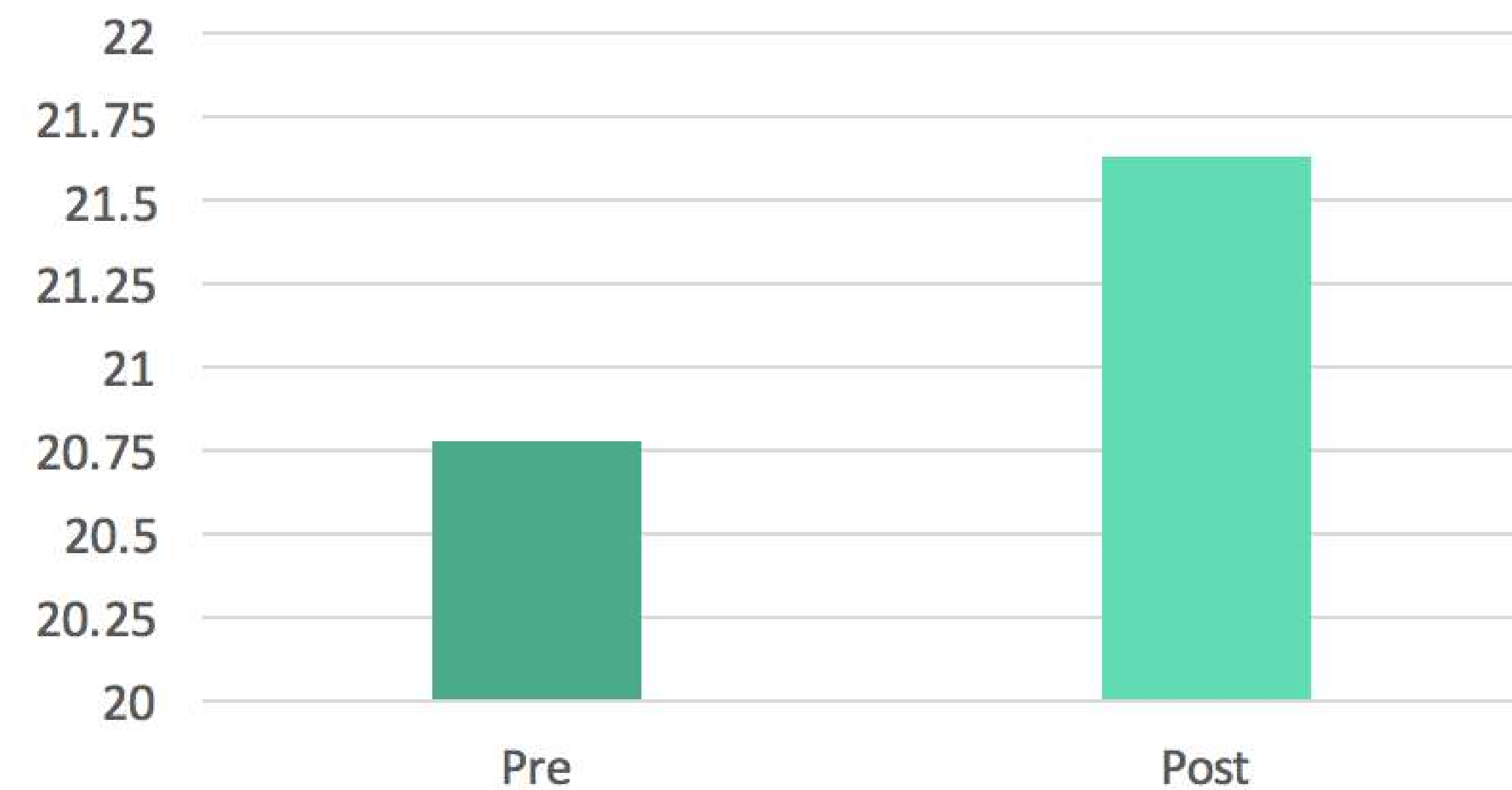
Eighteen participants submitted usable paired data from before and after the surf therapy for this evaluation report.

As can be seen in the results below, the intervention led to an improvement of overall well-being by almost a point (0.91) on the (S)WEMWBS scale, with a small to moderate effect size of 0.32.

### COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Both the intervention and data collection were interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants missed out on a number of sessions, their graduation ceremony and it was impossible to collect post-test data until several weeks into the lockdown situation. These factors may have suppressed well-being scores at post-test collection making the positive change found very encouraging despite its small size.

Change to Overall Well-being as measured by the (S)WEMWBS





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# Results

## 02

### FEELING RELAXED / FEELING CLOSE TO OTHER PEOPLE

When breaking the scale down to individual items the most notable difference was an improvement in item 3 (I've been feeling relaxed) and item 6 (I've been feeling close to other people).

Feeling relaxed can directly relate to reductions of stress and improvements to emotional regulation for participants. These elements can have positive impacts not only on mental health but wider day to day functioning away from the beach such as at home and at school.

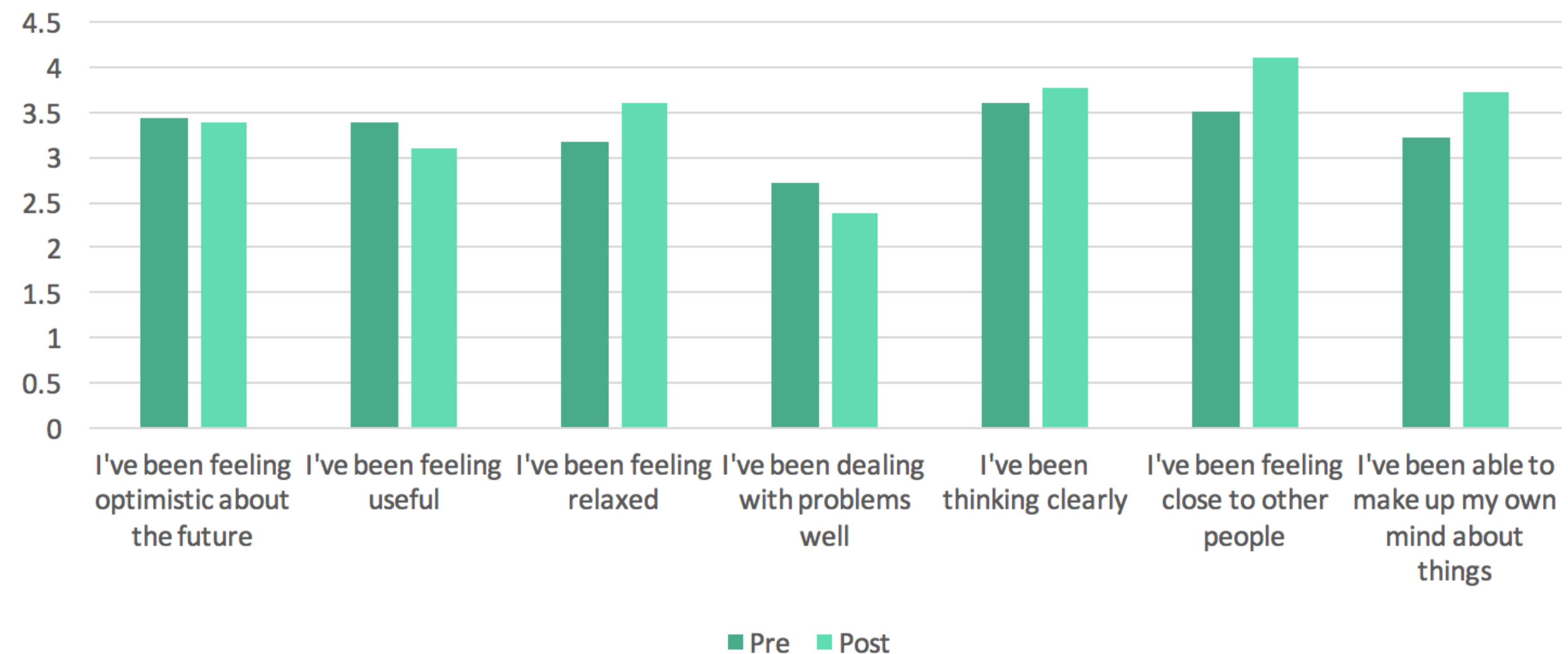
The improvement in feeling close to others suggests access to new forms of social support through the Waves for Hope intervention. Feeling socially connected and having access to social support is integral to youth mental health.

The intervention also seems to have supported self-efficacy as noted in the positive change in item 7 (I've been able to make up my own mind about things), another key pillar of positive mental health.

### COVID-19 PANDEMIC

It must be noted that items that decreases in scores must be viewed in the context of the COVID-19 lockdown. Item 2 (I've been feeling useful) in particular may represent a sense of frustration in the face of necessary countrywide lockdown.

Change to Well-being as measured by the (S)WEWBS







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Results

# 03

## SOCIAL SUPPORT

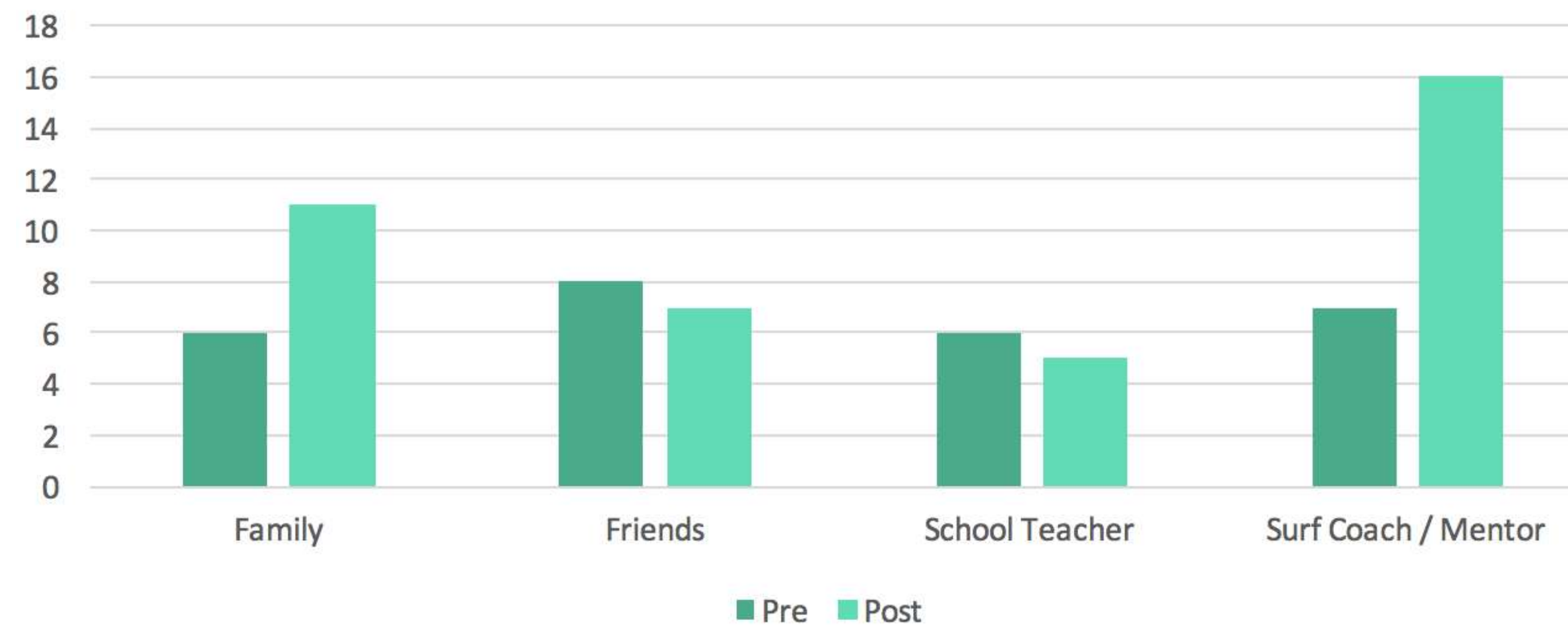
The findings below highlight the changes in use of social support by participants within the surf therapy intervention which correlate with well-being changes already discussed.

The biggest changes both in terms of encouragement and support was related to interaction with surf coach/mentors with scores doubling on both questions.

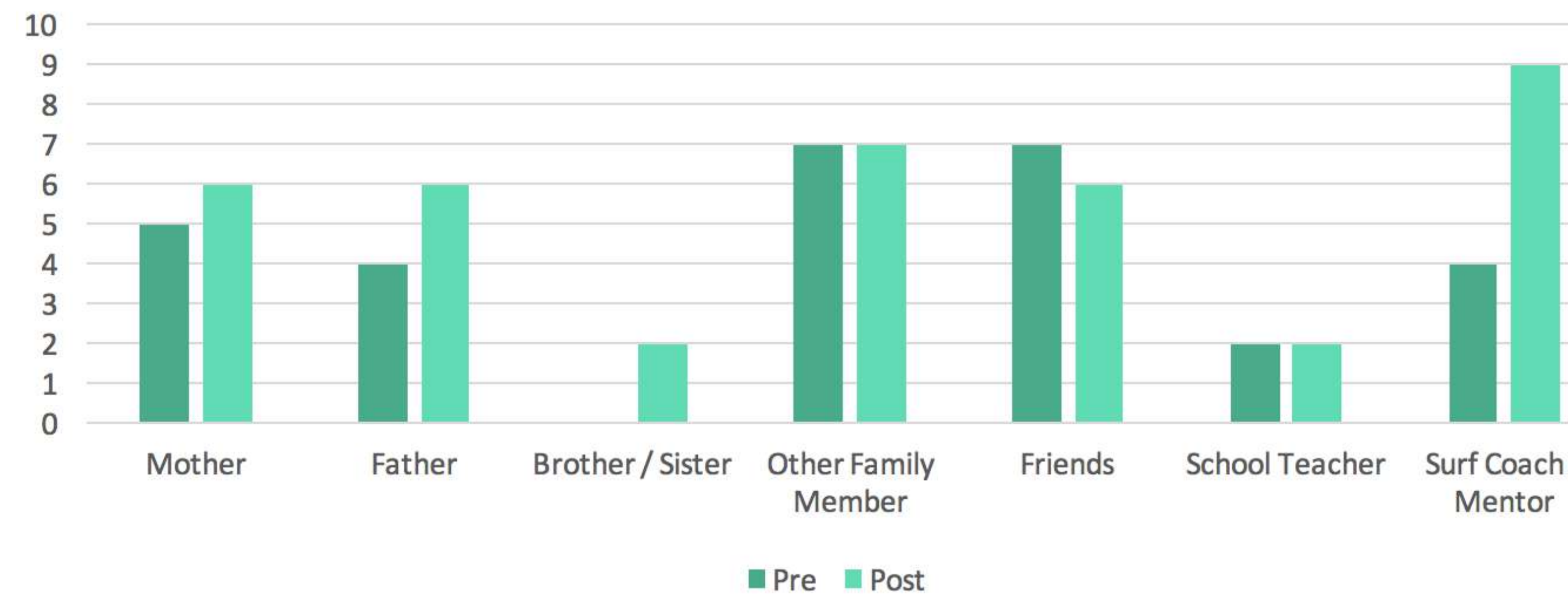
One of Waves for Hope’s key aims is to provide children with access to a safe space and caring adults and the increased use of coaches/mentors in these roles suggests the project has been successful.

This development of social support provides a direct and evidence-based pathway to further sustainable improvements to mental well-being both inside and outside the intervention.

When I try hard at things, I am encouraged by:



When I have problems or I am upset, I talk to:





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Results

## 04

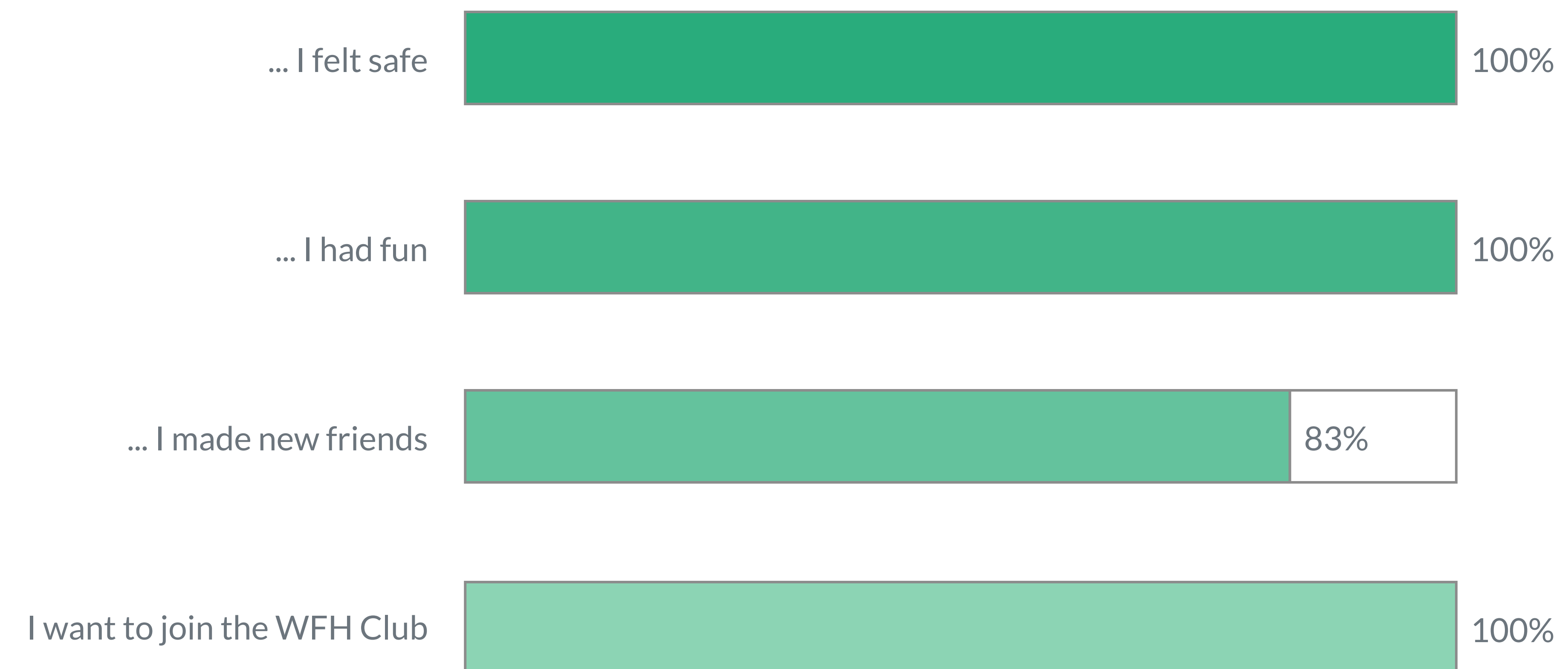
### PARTICIPANTS SATISFACTION

The results of participant satisfaction speak for themselves with all participants reporting 100% satisfaction across 3 out of 4 measures.

The feeling of safety is important when dealing with water-based activities while fun is an important metric for youth to promote continued and interested engagement.

The wish from all participants to continue with further participation in the Surf Club highlights the value participants placed on the intervention and need for continued service provision.

#### While I was surfing...





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Results

05

## WORD CLOUD

The participants were asked to name three or more words they associate with the Surf Therapy programme. This was designed to give a different insight into their experiences. More frequently occurring words have been written in a bigger font.





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**PRIVATE  
SESSIONS**



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## Private sessions

### PRIVATE SESSIONS

Alongside the community surf therapy programme, we delivered some private sessions for 1 participant and a family.

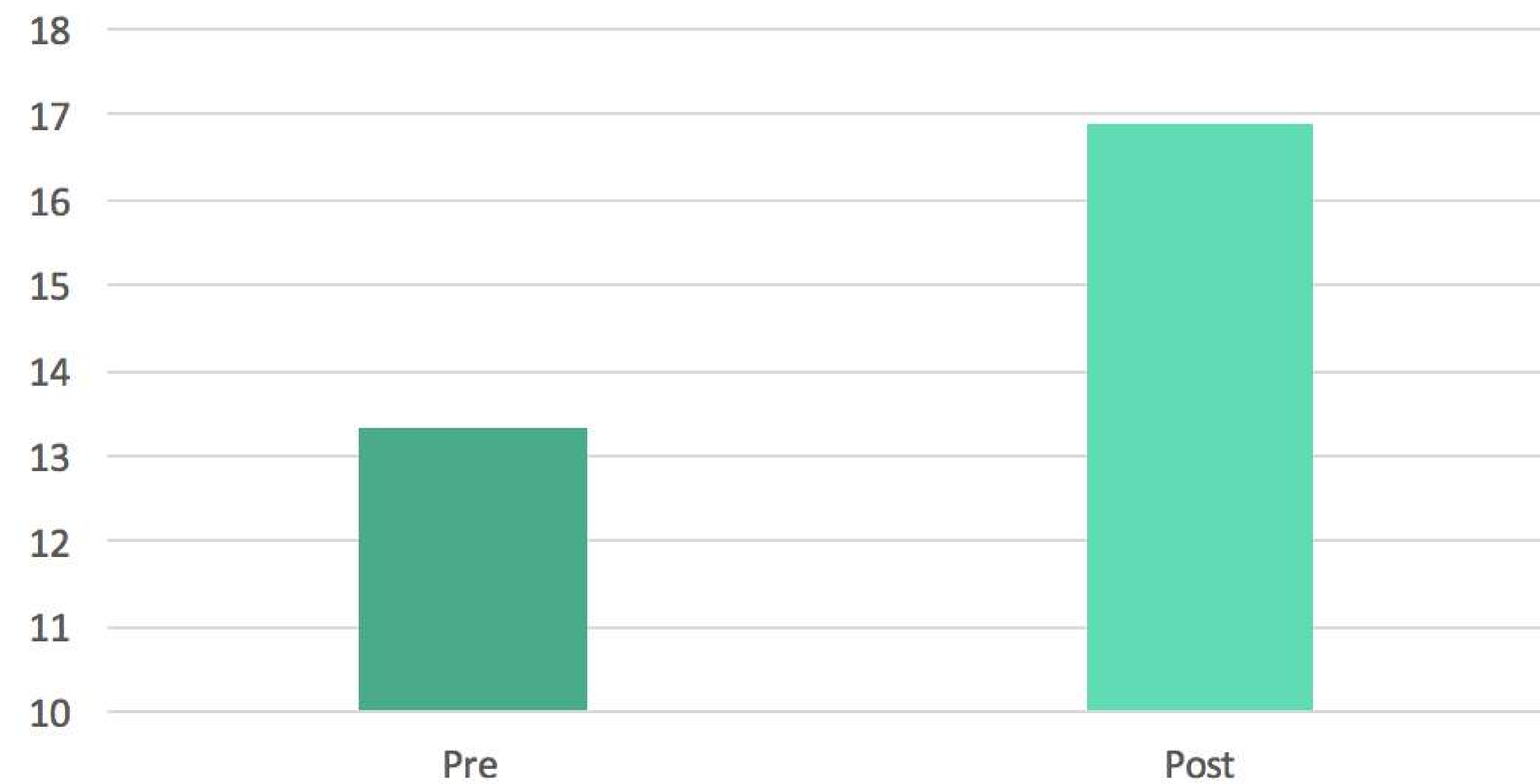
The participant's well-being was measured in the same manner as the community intervention and were structured in a similar manner though private sessions were run on a shorter more condensed schedule (4 sessions / one session weekly for one month) and included mindfulness activities done during the sessions as well as at home.

The private sessions led to a very large change to well-being of 3.5 points. This correlates with qualitative feedback from suggesting privately delivered surf therapy is associated with positive changes to mental health.

### COVID-19 PANDEMIC

It is also worth noting that these sessions were significantly less impacted by COVID-19 and may support the notion of suppressed scores within the community intervention. While the sample size for these private sessions remains small, they present a strong proof of concept for private surf therapy that could in turn support the community element of the intervention.

Overall Well-Being as Measured by (S)WEMWBS





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**FEEDBACK**



07

## Feedback

### EXPERIENCE WITH WAVES FOR HOPE

Participants, parents, guardians and mentors were asked to describe their or their children's experience with Waves for Hope. They were also asked for any general comments about the project.

The feedback was very positive - what follows is an annotated version of clients' comments.

### WHAT THE PARTICIPANTS SAY

"My favorite part of the session is when we hold hands and take five steps into the water, making sure that everyone is ok and safe. I like the coaches because they are caring and they look out for each other."

"I learned how to share with the snacks and with surfing. And I now share my snacks at home with my brothers."

"How I deal with all the bad things happening in the community is, I just take my board and go surf. I can clear my mind and have my peace when I surf."

"I am so happy for this opportunity to learn tools that help me deal with my emotions better."

"I always said I just need to get out of the village. But then I realized the village is good, but it's the people that are bad. We need more positive adults in the community, who support and encourage us and adults we can trust."

"First I didn't like to come to the programme because I wasn't good at surfing, but I still came because it was an opportunity to just get away from my home and the community. Now that I am good at it I really like it."

"Drug addiction is one of the biggest problems in our community. It's important for kids to be around good people and good things like surfing."

"I have learned the Take 5 activity that helps me when I am stressed out at home or in school. I have been able to cope and get along with others better and more often."



07

## Feedback

### WHAT THE PARENTS/GUARDIANS SAY

"I really noticed that my boys are more relaxed at home."

"My grandson came to me and told me I should sit down and meditate. He then showed me how to close my eyes and take deep breaths. And he started to count to 5."

"I hope my niece will grow up and be like you. Fit, healthy and nice."

"I can see that when he is about to get rude or angry, he stops and it's like he takes a moment to calm down."

"The community needs more people like you who make time for the children and educate them and surround them with positive things."

### WHAT THE MENTORS SAY

"Being able to help the kids change to the better really makes me feel good. Since I became a mentor I think I am a much more aware person."

"Surf therapy helps the kids in my community by making them feel free, it helps them get along better, teaches them respect and it helps build their confidence."

"I wanted to become a mentor because I like to see children smile and I like to teach them good things. And I feel needed and happy!"

"Being a positive role model for at-risk youths is very essential as kids orient themselves on adults to learn about the world around them and to model behaviours as they grow."





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**FINDINGS /  
CONCLUSIONS**



08

## Findings / Conclusions

01

### SURF THERAPY WORKS

The results from self evaluation, feedback and attendance levels give a strong indication that the Surf Therapy pilot had a positive impact on the lives of the participants. Both, the community sessions and the private sessions increased the overall well-being of the participants.

21 out of 24 participants completed the course. Of the 19 young people who completed the course, all showed positive change across at least one measure of wellbeing. These changes were reflected by individual feedback. Two participants have gone on to become future mentors with the programme and will be helping at the WFH Youth Club.

Some of the narrative reports given by clients described beautifully their own personal, social and emotional progress. Those 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 - fun, relaxed, happy.

#### CONCLUSION

Surf Therapy works and we will continue offering both community and private sessions. Off-the-beach workshops will be included in the curriculum. The Waves for Hope Youth Club will be established and will provide ongoing opportunities for all participants who graduate from the Surf Therapy programme. We will discuss if the entry age to the programme should be increase.

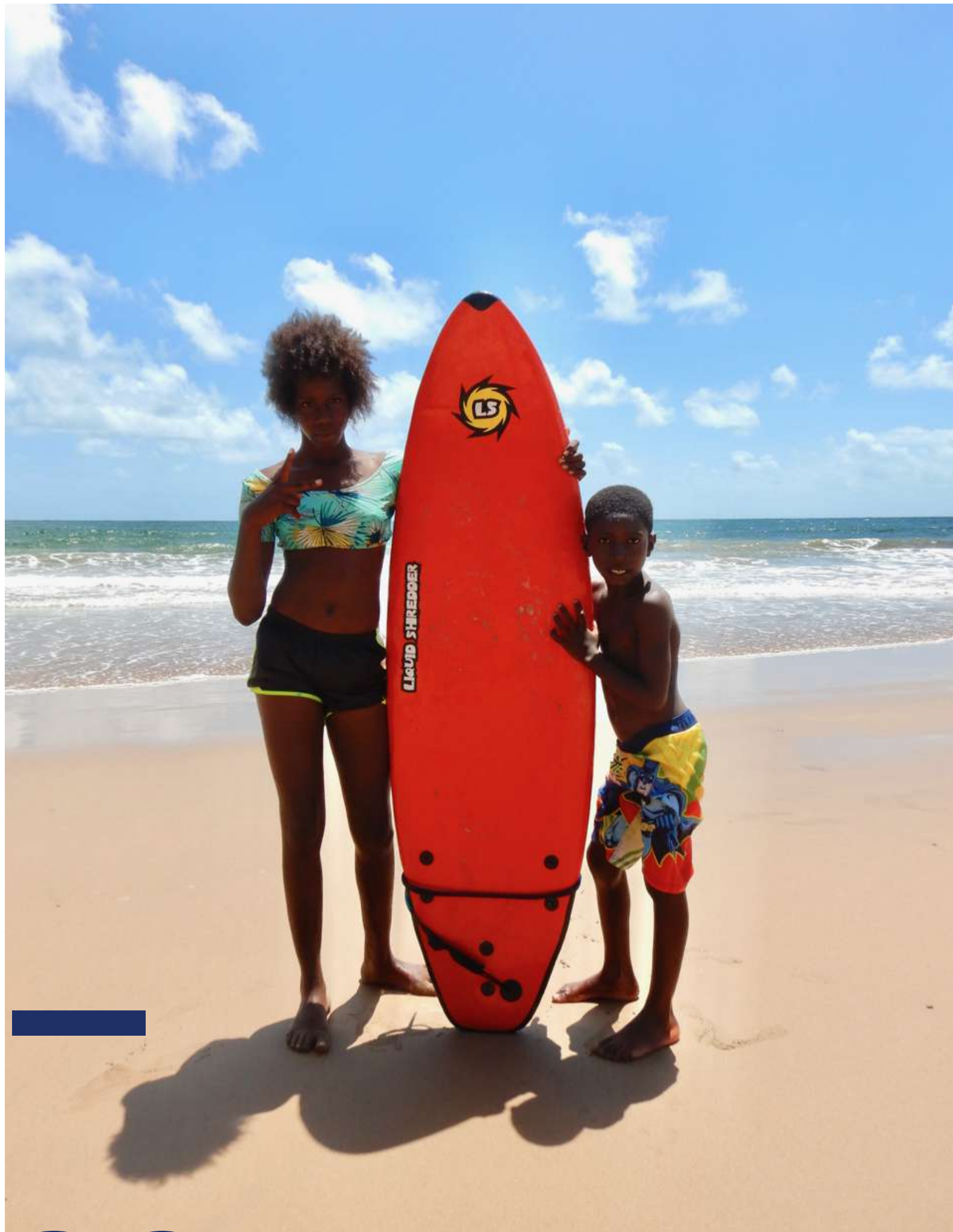
02

### FUNDING

On the basis of this successful pilot, it seems clear that a Surf Therapy service would benefit young people with mental health challenges in under-served communities across Trinidad & Tobago.

#### CONCLUSION

We hope to obtain further funding towards the programme and the Surf Club. The private sessions, which are not free of charge, could become a source of income.



08

## Findings / Conclusions

03

### TRAINING

It's become very clear to us that the execution of the programme and each session's success depend very much on the mentors. Being a mentor and role model is a critical contribution to the programme and it's important that the mentors are authentic and live by what they teach the participants, during the sessions but also in the community.

#### CONCLUSION

Continuous trainings for mentors are essential. More time needs to be spend on knowledge transfer: background information as to why and how Surf Therapy works aswell as repeating and internalizing the excercises used in our programme.

We will put more focus on the personal mental wellbeing of the mentors and practice the calming and coping skills as a routine when we surf together or on a weekly meeting.

04

### WAVES FOR HOPE SITE / WAVES FOR HOPE YOUTH CLUB

The weekly interaction with the participants has proven to be very bonding. The scores for feeling supported by the mentors when trying something hard and being able to talk to the mentors when having problems have shown a massive increase in the post-surveys.

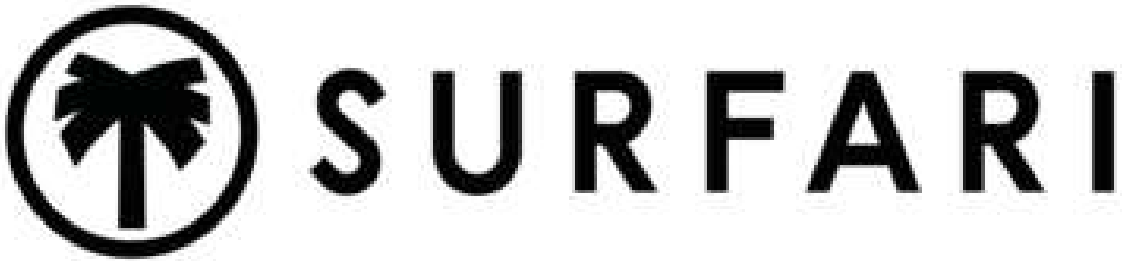
The need for trusting adults in the community was highlighted during our workshops and we want to be more present in the community and offer a wider range of support to our participants and graduates.

#### CONCLUSION

We would like to open a Waves for Hope site in the community of Balandra, which would also function as the hub of the Waves for Hope Youth Club. The site would be open during dedicated hours and would offer a safe space in the community. Ideas on what to offer include a homework center, yoga classes, art and music workshops and lifeskills trainings.

A container, space and funding needs to be sourced in order to establish the site.

A BIG THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS, SUPPORTERS, FAMILIES AND FRIENDS FOR THEIR SUPPORT TOWARDS THIS PILOT PROJECT!



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**PARTNERS /  
SUPPORTERS**

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# CONSIDER SUPPORTING US?

## PROVIDE A KID WITH SURF THERAPY

Cost per child per programme\*: USD 400

## SPONSOR A FULL SURF THERAPY CYCLE

Cost per programme\*: USD 9'600

## CREATE A JOB: HELP TRAIN & EMPLOY MENTORS

Mentor stipend per programme\*: USD 800

\*A programme runs for 6 months and includes 24 kids & youths.





**THANK  
YOU**



**LEARN MORE:**  
[www.waves-for-hope.org](http://www.waves-for-hope.org)

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  [wavesforhopetrinidad](https://www.instagram.com/wavesforhopetrinidad)