



From Positive Outcomes to Lasting Impact

An independent evaluation of The Wave Project's impact on
vulnerable young people over 3 Years from 2013-2015



Authors: Dr Hannah Devine-Wright, Cath Godfrey MSc

September 2015

FOREWORD

By **Professor Michael Depledge**

Founder of the European Centre for Environment and Human Health



Lifestyles and values in the modern world vary widely and are changing rapidly. For young people growing up today, it can be difficult to decide how to live, who to spend time with, how to behave and which avenues in life to explore. Difficult socio-economic circumstances can put families under great strain and local living conditions may be harsh and demoralising. Constraints usually outnumber opportunities. Often without the help of their families, and in the absence of friends, some individuals may be left to struggle alone. But there are things that can be done to improve the situation.

The Wave Project: from positive outcomes to lasting impact brings together the findings and practical recommendations of studies conducted over the last 3 years that were designed to help vulnerable young people. It provides new insights into how to confront mental health issues and the challenges of social integration. In particular, it reports the findings of work that explores how spending time in natural environments (e.g. the sea or coast) and pursuing outdoor physical activities can make a difference. The Wave Project builds on the Blue Gym concept, taking it further through encouraging involvement in surfing that lead to health and wellbeing benefits. Furthermore, it demonstrates that this kind of approach is both feasible and effective.

The work of the Wave Project team should provide inspiration and motivation to others wanting to improve the lives of young people who find themselves in difficult circumstances. More work of this nature deserves the strong support of the health and social services, and the wider public.

Professor Michael Depledge DSc FRSA, FRSB, FRCP

University of Exeter Medical School

September 2015

“Every week can be different, but we would be at sea without the Wave Project.”

Suzanne Sutton, parent

Executive Summary

This report marks the second phase of an independent evaluation of The Wave Project, a charity that provides peer-led surfing lessons to help young people improve their mental health and wellbeing. Extensive survey data was collected for 167 Wave Project clients over two years across seven sites in Cornwall. As recommended in the previous report¹ the present study investigates the real, lived experience of impact over time and supports this with the qualitative survey data. Taking a case location of mid-Cornwall, this study focuses on interviews and other qualitative data from the Surf Club and presents examples of incremental change and analysis of main impacts, along with perceived reasons for change from the client and parent perspectives.

The results show transformation as well as progression and a conclusion is that young people change from isolated and vulnerable to being engaged, motivated and more resilient. A key impact for young people is that a more enjoyable, capable and active identity emerges as 'A surfer' and as 'Part of something' (the Wave Project) and pride in this self-image underpins opportunities for further success and evolution. For young people who are finding life hard, The Wave Project seems to become a significant part of their lives and sets them on a more positive path. Clients may end up 'giving back' through volunteering and taking part in other things and there is evidence that change extends to other parts of their lives.

The particular characteristics of the Wave Project are important: an ethos of acceptance, support and non-competitive challenge and with this, the sensory, revitalizing elements of being in the sea and surfing. The combination appears a powerful one and benefits accrue for the client, the immediate family and wider community. Cost effectiveness is not calculated but is considered good because of effectiveness and comparisons are made with other prevention and with the cost of mental ill health.

¹ How structured surfing courses supported by volunteers impacted on the emotional health of 100 vulnerable young people in Cornwall and Devon (Devine-Wright, Godfrey, 2014)

Introduction

The Wave Project aims to help vulnerable and isolated young people through surfing and being in the sea. It provides effective one to one support for surfing in a group setting and combines this with an ethos of acceptance, fun and positive identity. In this way, the Wave Project aims to reduce anxiety and boost core life skills and wellbeing, ultimately, improving life chances and social engagement. Over the last 5 years, the Wave Project has directly reached over 500 vulnerable young people aged 8-21 who faced mental health issues, isolation and social exclusion.

From inception in 2010 as a volunteer-led pilot scheme for just 20 young people in Cornwall, The Wave Project has become a charity with over 400 volunteers and 10 surfing coordinators. The Wave Project works with up to 150 children per week in 20 locations across Cornwall, Scotland, Wales and the Isle of Wight. There are currently 170 clients on the waiting list, with 10-15 new referrals coming in weekly from professional services. On referral around a third of clients have diagnosed mental health issues, a third suffer social deprivation and family breakdown and a third are socially excluded because of disability, being 'carers' or being bullied. All are vulnerable to further isolation and mental ill health and most are not taking part in other activities.

Clients attend an initial 6 week surf course in a small group, led by volunteers and a surf coordinator. A follow-on Surf Club enables clients to continue their surfing on a regular basis and to maintain friendships and affiliation with the Project. The Surf Club is a larger group, who surf at various locations and while many families arrange their own transport, this is provided for those who need it. Clients pay a membership cost of £10 per year and £5 per session. In Cornwall, where the Surf club has been running for over three years, the results are impressive: around 40% of clients attending the initial six week course have gone on to join Surf Club and 10 % of those who are over 14 and able to do so, have become volunteer helpers and surf mentors for The Wave Project. Through the network of Surf Club, young people who had previously found it difficult to socialise, mix flexibly, as new members join. Social events that take place throughout the year cater for both clients and their families.

An extensive survey designed by independent evaluators was administered over 2 years (2013-2014). The survey aimed to examine wellbeing outcomes of the initial six week surf course, from client, parent and referrer perspectives. Wellbeing was seen as multifaceted, comprising autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, life purpose, mastery and positive relatedness (Ryff and Keyes 1995).

Data for the first year showed a consistently significant and robust improvement for boys and girls, across all seven Cornwall locations and up to three months after intervention (Godfrey, Devine-

Wright and Taylor, 2015). As well as improved wellbeing, clients felt safe and supported and made new friends. As confidence and mood improved, parents and carers reported positive changes in behaviour, school progress and communication all of which had a beneficial impact on family life. Parents valued their children having an active hobby and taking part in local culture (beach life), having an antidote to problems and feeling more 'comfortable in their own skin'. Reporting these results, the authors concluded that the positive outcomes should also be examined over time to assess the wider impact and value of the Wave Project to individuals, families and the wider community.

AIMS OF THE 2015 STUDY

This study had three aims:

1. To use case based, qualitative data to show the real, lived experience and positive effects of initial outcomes on clients and their families over time;
2. To measure wellbeing 'in participant's own words' (Commission, 2009);
3. To reflect wider impact over a longer period of time - up to three years from first contact with the Wave Project using qualitative methods.

METHOD

A mixed method approach included case study location interviews, content analysis of comments left in the Surf Club Log Book and analysis of phase two of the baseline and follow up survey. The data are seen as good indicators for the kind of change that may occur and they help demonstrate themes that emerge from the more extensive survey data collection.

Survey

A second year of survey results is included in this phase, providing repeat data for two years, enabling comparison for consistency and also providing a broader base to support the qualitative findings. See Appendix A for results of paired sample t-tests on major indicators of wellbeing in 2013 and 2014.

Location Interviews

A case study location of 'Mid Cornwall' was chosen as it was where the Wave Project had been operating for the longest period of time. In June 2015 we conducted interviews with eight people involved with the Surf Club: six Wave Project participants (3 interviewed directly and 3 indirectly through a parent) and two volunteers who had been helping the Wave Project for over a year. Of the six participants, two had progressed to volunteering through the Surf Club, two were potential volunteers and two were unlikely to volunteer. Around the same time we conducted telephone interviews with two referrers, who had each referred at least ten clients to the Wave Project.

Each of the interviews was loosely structured, to allow people to give real examples of impact over time and to tell their own story. Interviewees were asked to describe their involvement in the Wave Project, to comment on any changes that they had observed over time in themselves or others, and to tell us about what they thought were the most important aspects of the Wave Project.

Case studies

In order to show the progression of impact over time, case studies of three of the interviewees along with a log book summary are presented in Appendix B. The case studies illustrate the kind of 'story' that participants experience over time.

Surf Club log book

From unstructured entries in the Surf Club log book made by 28 people from July 2013 - Jan 2015 (a period of 18 months) we selected ten participants about whom comments had been made at two or more points in time. The Log Book provided an insight into 'noteworthy' issues from parents and coordinators perspectives - these are presented in Appendix C. Log book entries for individuals were collated to show incremental progress over time and then analysed for main themes.

The interviews were transcribed and thematically analysed alongside these. Main themes were coded as either '**Impacts**' or 'reasons for change' , labelled '**What makes the Wave Project Unique**' and are presented in these two categories, after the survey results below, with quotes from participants, volunteers and referrers to illustrate each theme.

RESULTS

Narratives and log book entries showed clear progression and characteristically, *transformation* from start to finish. Harry, aged 13, is typical of those referred to the Wave Project:

“[He] had been excluded from school, didn't really have friends, wasn't part of any clubs. This wasn't for the want of trying, he just didn't fit in, he couldn't follow instructions therefore it would end with yet another negative experience. He didn't really see anyone apart from immediate family. I could see my boy becoming more withdrawn. The [Wave Project] lady on the phone put me at ease and told me he would have fun so we signed up.” ... “He is back in school now, he has a few buddies and he has stuff going on in his life” “The Wave Project was very important at a time when he needed it and he will always be a part of it. He now goes to other activities but we would have been reluctant to try these before. He had a foundation because he succeeded at the Wave Project first”. (interview with Harry's mother)

Table 1: Effects of Six Week Surf Sessions with the Wave Project

| <i>Client Perspective (167 Clients over 2 Years)</i> | 2013 clients (N=93) % | 2014 clients (N=92) % | Average |
|--|------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|
| I feel better than before | 96 | 99 | 97.5% |
| I feel more happy | 98 | 96 | 97% |
| I feel fitter than before | 87 | 91 | 89% |
| I made new friends | 89 | 85 | 87% |
| I had fun | 99 | 100 | 99.5% |

Figure 1: Significant Change in Wellbeing Indicators Before and After the Wave Project
Six Week Surf Sessions: Repeat Survey for 2013, 2014

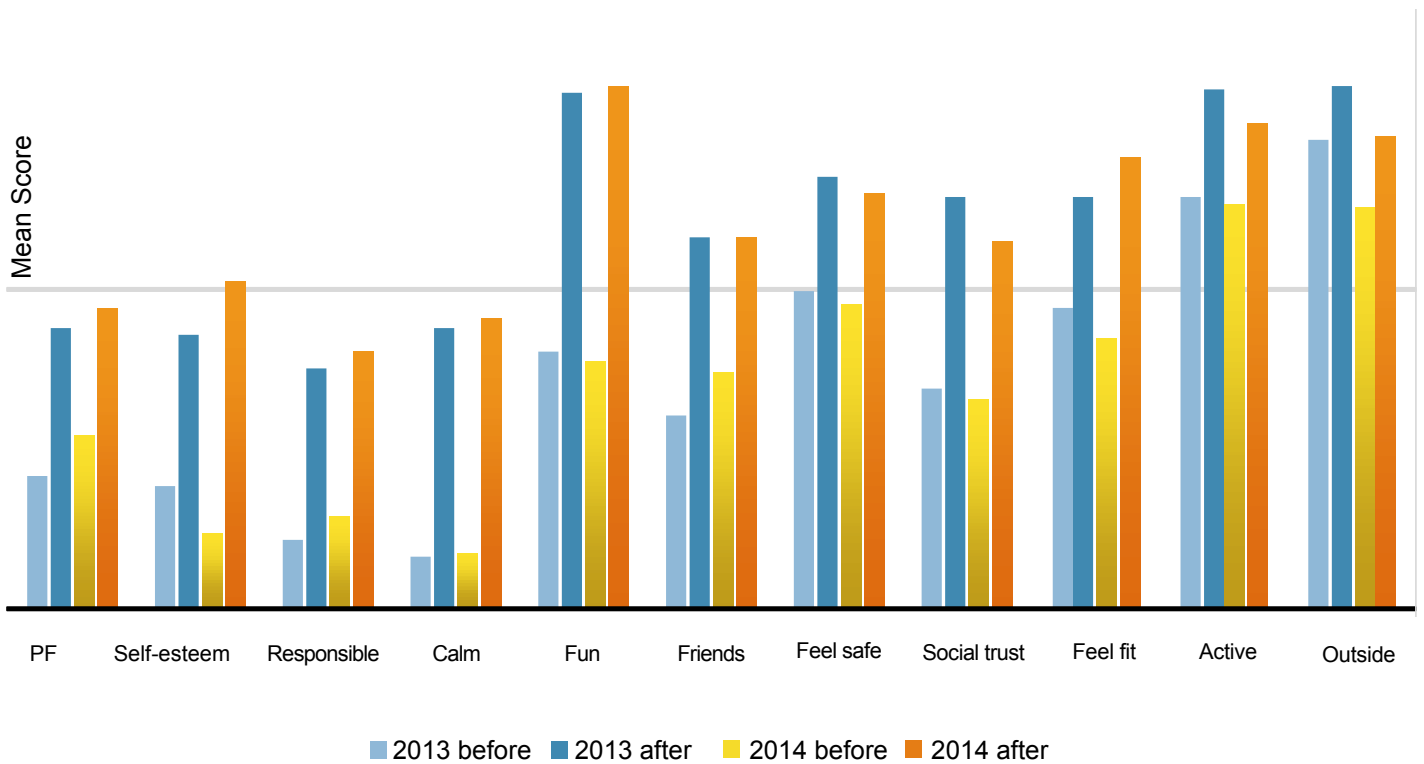
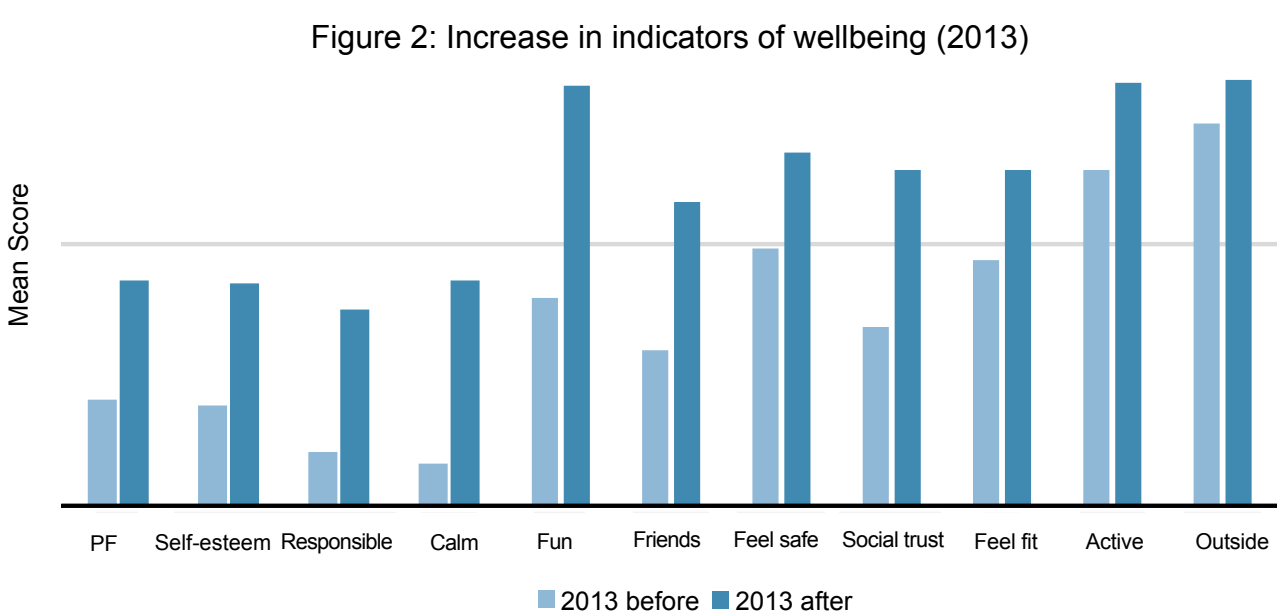


Figure 1 shows mean scores on a 5 point rating scale. All wellbeing indicators showed a statistically significant change after intervention, using paired sample t-tests.

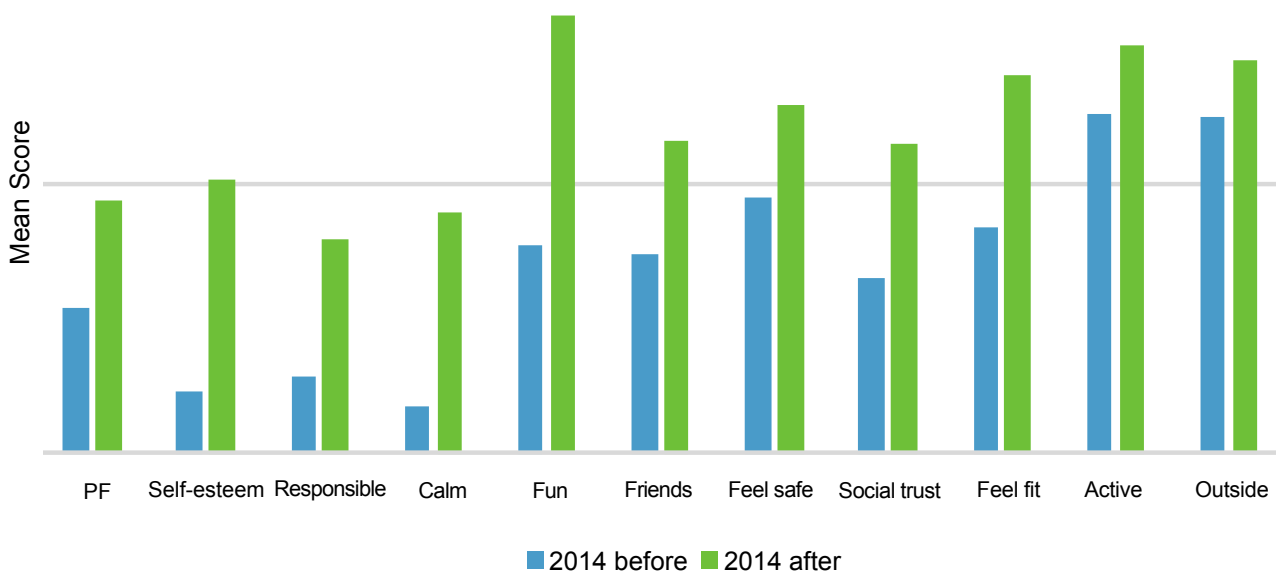
Key: PF = 'Positive Functioning': The 6 item scale from the Stirling Children's Wellbeing Scale (SCWBS), (Liddle and Carter, 2010). See Appendix A for details about each wellbeing indicator.

Figure 2: Increase in indicators of wellbeing (2013)



Key: PF= 'Positive Functioning' (SCWBS). Mean scores are on a 5 point scale before and after intervention. All indicators showed significant change after intervention using paired sample t-tests

Figure 3: Increase in indicators of wellbeing (2014)



Correlations

Correlations describe the relationship between two or more quantities (or variables). The higher the correlation the greater the relationship. However, when two or more variables are highly correlated we cannot tell from a correlation how they are related, that is, we cannot tell the direction of causality.

Correlations hinted at key features of the intervention and the experiential effects on clients: Feeling calm became associated with 'Enjoying Being Active' and 'Enjoying Being Outside' became associated with 'Positive Functioning'; reflecting that a new increased enjoyment of outside went along with other aspects of wellbeing.

Improvement in Self-esteem were linked to the nature of the intervention i.e. physically challenging, outdoor activity with other people, because after the Wave Project, 'Feeling good about myself' became strongly correlated with 'Positive Functioning', plus weakly correlated with 'Enjoying being Outside' and moderately correlated with 'Having fun', 'Thinking other people are basically good', 'Having enough friends', 'Feeling safe with friends', and 'Feeling fit/healthy'.

Social trust (indicated by 'Other people are basically good') also became associated with 'Positive Functioning' and all the other items.

Interview and Log Book Results

These effects were examined more closely in the qualitative data collected by interview and entries in the Log Book. We identified 7 impact themes that varied from emotional responses through individual to social processes:

1. Positive Emotions;
2. Coping, Self-Management and Empathy;
3. Confidence and Motivation;
4. Social Trust;
5. Identity and sense of belonging;
6. Trajectory and Future Self;
7. Wider Impact.

These 7 impact themes formed 4 overlapping clusters that could be seen as sequential:

- (1) Shifts in positive emotion, coping, self-management and empathy
- (2) Increased confidence, motivation and social trust that led to more engagement
- (3) Changes in self-perception, social identity and trajectory
- (4) Wider impact on family and community

(Cluster 1): Shifts in positive emotion, coping, self-management and empathy

Impact theme 1 - POSITIVE EMOTIONS (calmness, happiness, joy, awe, playfulness, laughing, excitement)

“He’s been completely different. He’s never wanted to do anything outdoors before...doing this [surfing] makes him really happy and wants to do it again and again.” (Joe’s mother).

“Often when I go in the water, I feel like a child again, everyone’s having so much fun! There’s no pressure to do anything...helping people have fun and be happy is addictive! It’s changed my life, my job and my attitude.” (John, volunteer)

“[She] is in a better mood after Wave Project. She needs to expend energy and she enjoys it.” (Lily’s father)

“When we tell them that they can do surfing with the Wave Project they get really excited.” (Referrer)

Impact theme 2 - COPING, SELF MANAGEMENT AND EMPATHY (adapting well to change and social interactions)

“She now has a tolerance of change...the last session finished early because one of the other clients became unwell, I expected her to be anxious but in fact she expressed empathy for the other person.” (Lily’s father)

“He’s developed self-regulation and self-management.” (Louis’ mother)

“When I’m at surf club I focus on the surfing but when someone else does something good I say well done and If there’s a good wave I could get, I let someone else take it.” (Joe)

(Cluster 2): Increased confidence, motivation and social trust that led to more engagement

Impact theme 3 - CONFIDENCE AND MOTIVATION (willingness to try something new, sense of achievement, decision-making, communication)

“The benefits are huge and in so many ways in my life, for example confidence in school, like mixing with a crowd.” (Alex)

“Only surfing has made her motivated about other things. I know these improvements are due to the Wave Project and not just growing up.” (Lily’s father)

“He spends a lot of time looking at the surf reports and he can make decisions, e.g. ‘I won’t take my board today, I’ll borrow Candy’s’...I think they DO all progress, even if they don’t stay on to the club. A big reason for this is the confidence it builds and kids then access other things.” (Louis’ mother)

“Surfing is what Joe feels good at when he doesn’t feel good at anything else. He is knowledgeable and in charge (when he is surfing) and is able to show his sister. Joe struggles at school. He calls himself stupid and not clever but he is skilled when surfing. He has a confidence that he never had before.” (Joe’s mother)

It’s given me confidence, built my self-esteem and opened many opportunities for me (Alex)

“Max has organised his own fundraising.” (Parent of Max, Log Book)

Impact theme 4 - SOCIAL TRUST (feeling safe and supported, recognising boundaries)

“Now she is happy if she sees a teacher in town. She does not get upset if a stranger approaches her and talks to her about her dog. She realises that you have to get on with others. Because she has had to get used to people and getting on with people at the Wave Project.” (Lily’s father)

“The children accept each other, they will rub each other up the wrong way BUT, no one holds it against you afterwards. Everyone just moves on. The rules are very clear cut and so everyone knows it’s fair. This is a massive thing for them.” (Louis’ mother)

“Max has made friends that he cares about, improved social skills, is meeting and interacting and feels supported and safe.” (Parent of ‘Max’, Log Book)

(Cluster 3) Changes in self-perception, social identity and trajectory

Impact theme 5 - IDENTITY and SENSE OF BELONGING (pride, being 'a surfer' or an 'active' person, a sense of achievement, distinctiveness)

"Someone yesterday said 'I'm no longer afraid of surfing...' We get them to FEEL like surfers: getting into a wetsuit you say 'you're a proper surfer now and this is what you have to do'." (John, volunteer)

"Surfing is a huge part of my life and who I am...it's massive in my life!...People know at school that I surf, that's one of the massive things about me and I'm proud of myself for sure." (Alex)

"She will continue to surf even without Wave Project - it has given her a lifelong interest - something she'll always do." (Lily's father)

"He has become a volunteer and good role model. He communicates positively and notices when others are restless or nervous and redirects their attention. He is a sensitive and positive role model." (Surf club log book entries over several months)

"[He] had wanted to be 'part of something' and The Wave Project is cool, so he became part of something cool too. When they gave him a medal, he was over the moon!" (Harry's mother)

"This is the ONLY thing Louis does. Always loved the water and tried swimming, body boarding etc. but can't be part of other groups because of his behaviour. This is HIS thing, HIS friends. BELONGING is a huge part of the joy he get and this is increasingly important for him...It makes them feel NORMAL. ... it's his tribe." (Louis' mother)

"We're not just a surf school we're a family. We all look out for each other and we're there for each other. We are all part of something together. Even if you leave the Wave Project, you're part of it, no matter what happens we are always going to be there for each other even if we go our own ways." (Alex)

"I was nominated for volunteer of the year in the British Isles by the Wave Project and was well pleased by that... The Volunteers are friends as well. Actually, we get together for BBQs and things like that. It's like a little social community. Yes it's a culture with its own thing." (Ian, volunteer)

(Cluster 3) Changes in self-perception, social identity and trajectory (cont.)

Impact theme 6 - TRAJECTORY AND FUTURE SELF (becoming a volunteer, a positive future self, connection to the wider community, fundraising)

“I’m on the way to getting my Surf Instructor qualification through Wave Project - they are helping to fund it. In the future, I would love to teach surfing. I am very proud to be part of Wave Project.” (Ebony, former Wave Project participant, Wave Project volunteer)

“I’ll carry on surfing for years and I’m thinking of going into the Royal Air Force, my sister’s godmother’s boyfriend also works for the RAF but he’s also a BRILLIANT surfer.” (Joe)

“I will carry on surfing and volunteering. I’d definitely like to move up the ranks to become and instructor, maybe to run my own surf school one day. When I’ve finished school I hope to become a carpenter. A surf school is another option for me.... [Maybe I’ll even make wooden boards and hand boards.]” (Alex)

“[Louis’ twin brother] volunteers with Wave Project as part of his Duke of Edinburgh last year. The Wave Project are very good to encourage that.” (Louis’ mother)

“I did the Wave Project six week course and then I saw an ad in the paper and Wave Project were looking for volunteers so me and my dad started volunteering. It’s been great. My dad loves surfing too.” (Ebony)

(Cluster 4) Wider impact on family and community

Impact theme 7 - WIDER IMPACT (on family, public perception of less able/vulnerable people, inclusiveness, building social capital)

“The kids and parents love it when the beach is packed and the public see them. They all look really good out there on the beach. It is their natural habitat – and that sight should be normal... people seeing these young people having fun along with everyone else and in the public eye should be normal.” (Louis’ mother)

“It adds value to the entire family -all the time because - it builds confidence and this has a positive effect on behaviour within the family.” (Joe’s mother).

“This has effects on the family and family life. Although her sister does not like the water, both girls do BF Adventure now, so it has led to something that is ‘shared by both’. At BF [she] shows [her sister] what to do, but this wouldn’t have happened without Wave Project first, so it’s impacted on their relationship and the opportunity for other things.” (Lily’s father)

“We are proud of Louis. He had his picture taken with [his twin brother] the other day or the first time in years – fantastic...It’s hard to be the sibling, as your needs are out shadowed, but with Wave Project, there are a whole group who think your sibling is great... this makes [his brother] proud and makes him see Louis in a new light.” (Louis’ mother)

“Great for our service because it lets sibling carers go too, where they don’t meet criteria for other funded activities.” (Referrer)

“I also do ad hoc volunteering – I want “to give something back”. It’s also a good work out...[Her mother] has raised money for Wave Project.” (Lily’s father)

“Whole family involvement includes his dad’s friends at work sponsoring him to raise money for Wave Project. It’s all good, good for all of us.” (Louis’ mother)

“I can see the difference made to families and to be honest it’s also a way to forget my own problems too. Giving makes you feel good, plus I like surfing! I feel proud. Life is a little bit less stressful and more stable. I feel more connected and it keeps me busy and active. For a while I did get despondent with life in general, my life was very hard but I wish I could do Wave Project as a job... I’ve found something good.” (John, volunteer)

What makes the Wave Project unique?

Having identified the seven impact themes we examined the data to find out what might motivate change across the thematic areas. Impacts of positive emotion, identity and belonging were regarded as mechanisms for change, but additionally, people described three distinguishing features of The Wave Project: (a) The Sea (b) Surfing and (c) Support and Culture of the Wave Project:

(a) The Sea

Water provides a restorative environment: *“The water itself has an amazing effect. Always calming.”* (Harry’s mother) *“You forget your inhibitions, your schoolwork and your stuff and you go and have fun with friends. Being in the water is like being on a different planet.”* (Alex) *“Being on the beach, whether they go in the sea or not seems to be really beneficial for them all. Once in the sea, they lose themselves and their problems go away.”* (Referrer)

People feel a connection to nature when they are in the sea: *“The ocean is such a natural place, it gets them away from the computers videos and TVs.... after school it really helps them unwind.”* (Ian, volunteer)

(b) Surfing

Surfing provides a positive sensory experience that helps learning and builds resilience: *“The calming, sensory elements of surfing are extremely important...He doesn’t rock (to comfort himself) but steps from foot to foot. Being in the water rocks him from side to side. We think that is comforting to him. He gets a lot of sensory feedback via his feet.”* (Louis’ mum) *“Surfing is physical, adrenaline, focused time with adults, not supervised by family he gets a sense of independence.”* (Joe’s mother) *“Developing skill in surfing happens a bit, but because of my height, I struggle to stand up on the board and I’ve got dyspraxia so it’s hard for me to use my hands and my bones. I guess it maybe helps me co-ordinate myself.”* (Alex, participant) *“The kinetic aspects of teaching are at play here. The kids are feeling everything through their bodies and so they learn and understand better.”* (John, volunteer)

(c) The Support and Culture of the Wave Project

A culture of acceptance helped people feel included: *“When he’s behaved terribly they haven’t given up on him. This is massive for him and I think for all the kids that come here.... The benefit of acceptance and non-judgmental patience from the Wave Project, who understand that his mental health problem won’t go away so, you can only enhance lives (not change them) and make people feel confident about who they are – to experience who they are and relax”.* (Louis’ mother).

Positive reinforcement and acknowledgement helped confidence: *“Every adult was so positive and said such positive things to him. You could see his shoulders would go back a little. The other children had similar issues and there was a real acceptance.”* (Harry’s mother). *“Kids see that volunteers are choosing to spend their time with them. That’s an amazing thing, its genuine.... We’re sharing more than teaching.. its more about everyone being on the same level in the water”* (Ian, volunteer)

Positive role modelling was also seen as a particular benefit: *“We are role models for the kids but also the carers too because we can show how to help children be at ease in the water and laugh at themselves. We share the experience with the children and they take their cues from us...so our positive happy reaction helps theirs. The parents also see that we’re volunteers and yet we still want to help their child.”* (John, volunteer)

Regular access and the trust and learning that allowed, was also recognised as valuable: *“For lots of kids, it’s the first time they have been on a beach, even though they live in Cornwall and some struggle at first. There are lots of behavioural issues when they first arrive, but the adults are brilliant at encouraging them.”* (Referrer) *“He is learning what’s expected for reasonable behaviour. Repetition over time and continuity is needed for him to learn something and the Wave Project have been able to give this and to accept him and stick by him. He sometimes is very challenging at the Wave Project but over time, he has progressed fantastically. From last summer he seems to have really LEARNT how to behave and to regulate himself.”* (Louis’ mum)

DISCUSSION

Similar to 2014, the 2015 survey results showed a robust positive impact of the 6 week surf course on wellbeing and behaviour and this effect was sustained over the time measured (a few months). This data clearly supports the themes over a longer time period (up to three years) in the qualitative data from members of the Surf Club.

Correlations between wellbeing items suggest ways the nature of the intervention: a fun, challenging outdoor activity with support and friendship, was highly effective: 'Self-Esteem' became associated with 'Positive Functioning' and 'Social Trust' became associated with all the wellbeing items. This is noteworthy because for those in the Surf Club, their 'stories' up to 3 years later, highlight transformation to a more positive identity and more social engagement, perhaps building on these aspects.

Taking survey, log book and interview data together, results suggest that the initial wellbeing shift is exponential, as clear impacts occur in various ways and continue over a substantial time. Transformation was described and four sequential areas of impact were identified: Shifts in positive emotion, coping, self-management and empathy; Increased confidence, motivation and social trust that led to more engagement; Changes in self-perception, social identity and trajectory; Wider impact on family and community

The Role of Sea and Surfing

Thematic analysis of interviews and comments in the Log Book suggested that primary triggers for improvements were affective and sensory, particularly the experience of joy and happiness which accords with a positive psychological approach (e.g. Seligman, 2002). Feelings reported by participants included those that have been associated with the restorative effect of nature visits (feeling calm, relaxed, revitalised and refreshed) (White et al., 2013). In particular, the effects of surfing and being in the sea were seen as powerful and helpful in various ways, e.g. a comforting, stabilising environment, sensory stimulation and experience that enhances learning, and as a special place or context for happiness and self-actualisation, reflecting themes associated with 'Blue Mind' literature (Nichols, 2014). Through surfing, particularly in the sea, aspects of resilience may build, as people develop 'signature strengths' (Seligman, 2002), including tolerance, confidence and courage that translate into better self-management and more frequent, quality social relations with other people.

The Role of Support in Enabling Progression

Results showed transference of skills such as coping with stress and better self-regulation of mood and behaviour. Four out of six interviewees also said that increased confidence and social skills led directly to them accessing other activities and hobbies. They also said progression was

helped by support and acceptance from the Wave Project. Feeling safe and supported as a context for decision making is an essential component of wellbeing for young people (The Good Childhood 2015, p.14).

Social Identity and Belonging

People expressed a strong sense of belonging and redefined themselves, with pride, as 'surfers'. 'being a surfer' represented a positive and distinctive social identity and one that was highly accessible for these vulnerable young people. Combined with the shifts in wellbeing and resilience, this identity represented a transformation towards continuity, self-esteem, self-efficacy and distinctiveness (e.g. Breakwell, 1992) associated with surfing and with The Wave Project.

The Role of Belonging

These young people had been at risk of becoming increasingly isolated. Accessing a surf club, or often any other kind of club, was often not feasible or successful before the Wave Project, as their behaviour or needs created obstacles (even despite very engaged and supportive parents); or they faced other barriers such as lack of confidence, lack of family support, money and regular leisure time. They saw themselves as 'not interested' 'not able', 'not part of something'.

Wider Connection and Giving Back

All interviewees described feeling more connected to others, by making friends and/or having regular access to the project. This illustrates a sustained impact of the Wave Project: young people remain in the club and attend social gatherings and events and many go on to become volunteers or surf instructors themselves and give their support to other, newer Surf Club members. Some gain training and accreditation as part of this, with positive implications for their future.

The positive impact of volunteering is well documented (Okenden and Stuart 2014) and without the Wave Project, these young people may otherwise not access this sort of opportunity. Survey data showed that soon after course completion, the majority do not intend to go on to volunteer, yet this profile changes with time and many do ultimately volunteer. This progression seems to be part of their developmental journey via Surf club and their affiliation to the Wave Project, rather than an expectation or target that they feel they need to achieve. This fits the ethos of the project, of encouraging, accepting and allowing young people to 'flourish' (Good Childhood Report, 2015) and thereby improving life chances in all sorts of ways.

CONCLUSIONS

The Wave Project provides surfing, a physical, outdoor, group activity that enables vulnerable young people to experience positive and restorative emotions, alongside tailored support from dedicated Wave Project staff and volunteers.

The particular characteristics of the project are important: an ethos of acceptance, support and non-competitive challenge and with this, the sensory, revitalising elements of being in the sea and surfing are also very significant. This may be particularly valuable for those with sensory and neurological issues. The unique combination of surfing and Wave Project culture seems to have a powerful effect for young people

A key impact for young people is that a more enjoyable, capable and active identity emerges as 'a surfer' and as 'part of something' (the Wave Project) and pride in this self-image underpins opportunities for further success and evolution. For young people who were finding life hard, The Wave Project seems to become a significant part of their lives and sets them on a more positive path. 'Giving back' through helping, volunteering and taking part in other things, also helps build a better trajectory for clients and for their families.

Initial Shifts in wellbeing, include positive emotion, coping, self-management, empathy, self-esteem and social trust and these create breakthroughs for more engagement and a change in self-perception. In this way, the Wave Project enables transformation of young people from being isolated and vulnerable to being engaged, motivated and more resilient, thereby helping to improve life chances.

Taken together, the case data and the more extensive survey over two years provide good evidence of impact on individuals over time, as well as impact on families and the wider community. The qualitative results point out impacts that are valued by clients and families and it outlines their perceived reasons for change. Alongside the survey data, this evidence will be useful for project delivery and a 'theory of change' approach to reviewing delivery and developing the service.

Costs

The Wave Project appears cost effective. While there are too many situational factors to report an accurate figure on savings, the project clearly does save money through addressing ill health by enhancing physical and mental wellbeing, improving competency skills and building a positive social identity. According to the Kings Fund (2008) it costs £2,148 per person per annum to treat mental ill health. By comparison, a preventative intervention such as school based emotional learning, has been calculated to save £3,206 per child to the public sector over a ten year period (Knapp et al 2011).

The cost of the Wave Project is £1300 per client over 3 years i.e. £430 per year. Importantly the cost goes down over time: the first year costs £7-800 and this drops in the second year. By year three, the participant may be 'cost neutral', as they go from client to volunteer themselves, and end up actually giving something back to the project. Clients may continue with the Surf Club beyond this time and gain benefit at no project cost at all.

Furthermore, the Wave Project accrues benefits to the immediate family and also builds social capital. The service is largely volunteer based, creating a cost effective mode of delivery and volunteers also develop wellbeing through their involvement and via training they receive.

As societal awareness of the Wave Project gathers momentum, there are wider benefit to beach communities: the Wave Project is a beacon for inclusiveness, it promotes beaches as a place for recreation and learning as well as 'Blue Gyms'. This is not insignificant as the estimated UK annual short-term costs of emotional, conduct and hyperkinetic disorders among children aged 5–15 is £1.58 billion and the long-term costs to be £2.35 billion (Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer, 2012).

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Appendix A: Results of paired sample t-tests on indicators of wellbeing in 2013 and 2014

| Wellbeing Indicators | Paired sample t-test results 2013 | Paired sample t-test results 2014 |
|---|---|---|
| Validated items ask 'How I've been feeling over the past couple of weeks' on 5-point Likert scale from 'none of the time' to 'all of the time.' | | |
| Positive Functioning: Stirling Children's Wellbeing Scale (SCWBS); 6 item positive outlook scale: 'I think good things will happen in my life', 'I've been able to make choices easily', 'I can find lots of fun things to do', 'I feel I am good at some things', 'I think lots of people care about me', 'I think there are things I can be proud of.' | T1 (M=3.41, SD=.66) and T2 (M=3.87, SD=.64); t(82)=-6.42, p<.000. | T1 (M=3.54, SD=.61) and T2 (M=3.94, SD=.85); t(82)=-4.61, p<.000. |
| Self-esteem: WEMBWS item 'I've been feeling good about myself' validated for use with 13-16 year olds | T1 (M=3.38, SD=1.01) and T2 (M=3.85, SD=.86); t(81)=-3.87, p<.000. | T1 (M=3.23, SD=1.00) and T2 (M=4.02, SD=.87); t(81)=-6.68, p<.000. |
| Self Esteem: 'I'm good at managing my daily responsibilities' validated item on Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale | T1 (M=3.21, SD=1.09) and T2 (M=3.75, SD=1.07); t(79)=-3.59, p=.001. | T1 (M=3.28, SD=1.02) and T2 (M=3.80, SD=1.05); t(80)=-3.81, p<.000. |
| Emotional well-being: 'I've been feeling calm' SCWBS validated as a single item on the scale's Positive Affect component | T1 (M=3.16, SD=.96) and T2 (M=3.87, SD=.91); t(81)=-5.92, p<.000. | T1 (M=3.17, SD=.86) and T2 (M=3.90, SD=1.07); t(80)=-5.81, p<.000. |
| Vitality: 'I've been having fun' Own item | T1 (M=3.80, SD=.90) and T2 (M=4.61, SD=.64); t(80)=-7.94, p<.000. | T1 (M=3.77, SD=1.02) and T2 (M=4.63, SD=.66); t(81)=-6.62, p<.000. |
| Friendship: 'I have enough friends' Children's Society validated item in draft Children's Wellbeing Scale | T1 (M=3.60, SD=1.14) and T2 (M=4.16, SD=.99); t(79)=-3.73, p<.000. | T1 (M=3.74, SD=1.12) and T2 (M=4.16, SD=.91); t(79)=-3.73, p=.001. |
| Friendship: 'I feel safe with my friends' Children's Society validated item in draft Children's Wellbeing Scale | T1 (M=3.99, SD=.91) and T2 (M=4.35, SD=.70); t(76)=-3.20, p=.002. | T1 (M=3.95, SD=.93) and T2 (M=4.30, SD=.80); t(80)=-3.07, p=.003. |
| Social Trust: 'I think other people are basically good' Recommended as a question by NEF, but no validated item available | T1 (M=3.69, SD=.85) and T2 (M=4.26, SD=.71); t(79)=-5.26, p<.000. | T1 (M=3.65, SD=.89) and T2 (M=4.15, SD=.78); t(79)=-4.68, p<.000. |
| Physical health: 'I feel fit and healthy', National Obesity Observatory Standard Evaluation Framework suggest this item for determinants of activity behaviours, e.g. attitude to physical activity | T1 (M=3.94, SD=.94) and T2 (M=4.29, SD=.88); t(78)=-2.87, p=.005. | T1 (M=3.84, SD=1.11) and T2 (M=4.41, SD=.80); t(80)=-4.89, p<.000. |
| Physical health: NEF (2012) 'I like being active', National Obesity Observatory Standard Evaluation Framework suggest this item for determinants of activity behaviours such as attitude to physical activity | T1 (M=4.29, SD=.89) and T2 (M=4.62, SD=.63); t(78)=-3.47, p=.001. | T1 (M=4.26, SD=.95) and T2 (M=4.52, SD=.79); t(80)=-2.37, p=.020. |
| 'I enjoy being outside' Own item | T1 (M=4.46, SD=.69) and T2 (M=4.63, SD=.66); t(78)=-2.48, p=.015. | T1 (M=4.25, SD=1.08) and T2 (M=4.47, SD=.82); t(80)=-2.27, p=.026. |

Note: A paired sample t-test compares each person's mean score on a particular item. In this table we compare the mean score on a scale of positive functioning and ten single items that reflect different aspects of wellbeing. The data is reported in a standard psychological format: T1 = time 1, that is, baseline data pre-intervention; T2 = time 2, post-intervention data; M = mean score, SD = standard deviation (indicative of the range of scores), t shows the number of cases in brackets and p = the degree of statistical significance.

Appendix B: Case Studies

Case Study 1: Lily (surf club member)

Lily is 15 and autistic. Before the Wave Project Lily was defined by what she would not do rather than what she would do: she would not socialise, talk to strangers, try or enjoy new things. If she saw a teacher in town she would not approach them as they were 'out-of-place'. Neither horse-riding, dancing nor Outward Bounds had 'enthralled' her so her parents were not hopeful when she started the Wave Project especially as it was not a 'nice' day.

"But when we came back, Lily was carrying her own board, she was chatting, she was smiling - she wanted to come again! She loved it and wanted to go all the time and has been going ever since. Now Lily loves getting in the sea. She says: "the waves miss me". She is not too bothered about who is there, she is just happy to get in the water." (Lily's father)



Being active helps Lily physically and emotionally. She needs to expend energy and surfing makes her feel tired. It helps her cope with heavy periods and 'up to a point' makes her more communicative. Lily enjoys surfing and it improves her mood.

After the Wave Project Lily can be defined by what she does do: she wants to try different things - she has started doing Outward Bound activities - with her sister, whom she shows what to do; she is happy if she sees a teacher outside of school; she is able to get on with others; she talks to strangers if they ask her about her dog; she is more patient, communicative, tolerant of change and empathic.

"It was only really the surfing that made her try different things and actually want to do things. She has a huge problem with the concept of time but she anticipates coming to the Wave Project and crosses off the days ready to come. The regularity helps her. When the last session finished early because one of the other clients became unwell, I expected her to be anxious but in fact she expressed empathy for the other person. She now has a tolerance of change. I see that in other aspects of her behaviour. This wouldn't have happened without the Wave Project." (Lily's father)

The Wave Project has had a very positive impact on Lily and her family. In 2014, Lily was awarded 'Disabled Surfer of the Year', at the UK Pro Surf Awards at the Atlantic Hotel in Newquay.

“One year ago before the Wave Project Lily would not have got on the stage to receive her award. She would have cried and not moved. But now, after the Wave Project, Lily got on the stage to receive her award. Pirate FM came and Lily let them speak to her - this would have been unheard of prior to the Wave Project. As parents we were very proud.” (Lily’s father)

To ‘give something back’ Lily’s father started volunteering with the Wave Project and her mother runs to raise money for the Wave Project. For now Lily attends Surf Club 2-3 times a month and uses the Flowrider facility in the winter. But as young people like Lily get older there are less resources available to support them. Nevertheless, the Wave Project has given Lily a lifelong interest, she will continue to surf, it is something she’ll always do.

Case Study II: Louis (Surf club member)

Louis is 16 and has brain and behavioural difficulties. He requires 24 hour 1:1 care and support. He can't coordinate on land, as he has extremely poor fine and gross motor skills, for example, his brain tells his left leg to go left all the time.

"We don't know how he can surf. His muscle tone is very poor in his hands and upper body." (Louis' mother)

Louis only understands 30% of what is said to him - he attends a special school. His biggest challenge is lack of understanding of life around him but Louis has always loved the water.



"Louis doesn't rock but steps from foot to foot. Being in the water rocks him from side to side. We think that is comforting to him. He gets a lot of sensory feedback via his feet. When he's in an anxious state, he goes in the shower – the pounding helps him. Like the pounding of the waves. The calming, sensory elements of surfing are extremely important." (Louis' mother)

Louis has surfed since he was about five years old. He joined the Wave Project three years ago. Until then his behaviour had prevented him from being part of a group.

"On a surf board is the only place he can be alone. He feels safe in the sea, things don't change – the rules don't change. But an element of danger can be good, even with a disability. You can do things that give you a kick in life...it challenges them all and they all manage it." (Louis' mother)

Louis feels safe at the Wave Project. Staff and volunteers at the Wave Project have had to work hard to get to know him but Louis has developed a strong sense of belonging.

"This is his thing, his friends. Belonging is a huge part of the joy he get and this is increasingly important for him. The Wave Project accept him and stick by him. Sometimes he is very challenging but over time, he has progressed fantastically. From last summer he seems to have really learnt how to behave and to regulate himself. Louis has benefited from acceptance and non-judgmental patience at the Wave Project, they understand that mental health problems won't go away. The Wave Project enhances lives, they make people feel confident about who they are – to experience who they are and relax. It makes them feel normal. They're outside in a caring environment, with other people. They are joyful. Louis loves it. But it takes time. Louis has learnt that it's every week and it's an important part of who he is and his sense of belonging...it's his tribe." (Louis' mother)

According to his parents, since joining the Wave Project Louis' confidence, competence, tolerance and behaviour have improved. He spends a lot of time looking at the surf reports and is able to make decisions about what equipment to use.

“He can fall off and do it again and again. Repetition over time and continuity is needed for him to learn something and the Wave Project have been able to give this. The ‘grey area’ of instability, falling, going wrong on land, doesn’t matter in the sea. He is more able to function without behavioural issues, he has become more tolerant of change. He is learning what’s expected for reasonable behaviour. It’s the only place he can self-regulate.” (Louis’ mother)

The Wave Project is having a sustained positive effect on Louis and his family: Louis has allowed a photograph to be taken with his twin brother Archie who volunteered with the Wave Project for his Duke of Edinburgh award.

“The Wave Project helped Louis to understand that his brother is a volunteer so might have to help other kids instead. Now Louis is OK with this and with being in the water without him. His brother helped at the autism awareness day, the Xmas surf and has volunteered to work with other clients. This is important for Louis. He wants to take part in the events, but he can’t do it alone and he doesn’t want parental help. He thinks it’s cool to be on the water with his brother.” (Louis’ mother)

The family can’t go on holiday together (because Louis finds change too stressful) so surfing has become ‘what our family does together’, it is a ‘normal’ shared interest and a source of pride.

“It is the only thing we do. Surfing is the only thing that Louis can do alone. Everyone can relax. The kids and parents love it when the beach is packed and the public see them. They all look really good out there on the beach. It is their natural habitat – and that sight should be normal... people seeing these young people having fun along with everyone else. We are proud of Louis and of his involvement in the Wave Project. Louis won the 2012 Disabled Surfer of the Year. Limelight is not ok for him, but it was brilliant – he did it. We are proud of him.” (Suzanne, Louis’ mother)

Louis’s father’s work colleagues are raising sponsorship to enable long term access and continuity - because in Louis’ own words, the Wave Project “gets better and better.

Case study 3: Ebony (young carer, former participant, volunteer, trainee Surf Coach)

Ebony is 16 and joined the Wave Project four years ago when she was a young carer for her severely disabled uncle. She has always loved surfing. For Ebony the Wave Project was “a nice release because I was with other people like me, in the same situation and it was nice being part of an environment where everyone was understanding and we could have fun.”

After completing the six week course Ebony saw an ad in the paper looking for Wave Project volunteers - she and her dad both love surfing so they volunteered. The Wave Project has provided funding for Ebony to do her ISA Surf Coach award - she needs to complete a further twenty hours of voluntary surf coaching to complete the award - another first for the Wave Project.



“As a volunteer I give encouragement and help where I can...In the end you know what works for them...there are people who come who are so nervous, they don't even like the water...You can see the progression, you see them become a lot more open. They are shy but then they start chatting to other people and mixing with each other. I like to see that. It's amazing! In the future, I would love to teach surfing. I am very proud to be part of the Wave Project.” (Ebony, volunteer and former participant).

Appendix C

Log Book Results

Incremental Themes from the log book were:

- REDUCED ANXIETY (feeling happy and revived/free from worries)
- CONFIDENCE (increasing communication and confidence)
- FRIENDSHIP (sharing, empathy and friendship)
- BETTER ENGAGEMENT (changes to behaviour and socialising beyond the club)
- EVOLUTION (evidence of taking on and becoming a good role model as a volunteer)

Examples of Incremental Progress:

‘Nothing can describe the steps that it helps them to make. They are insignificant to most but massive to us’

CHILD A: From never leaving the house now has a hobby. Everyone (school, family) notices a big change in behaviour. Makes friends and socialises with them. Family go surfing together for the first time

CHILD B: Depressed and pessimistic, becomes more positive in outlook and life is good. Gets own surfboard (this child went from strength to strength and won awards, became active all round)

CHILD C: confidence improves. Starts to join in with others (wouldn't before). Gets award at school. Able to get dressed much better and confidence and ability improves

CHILD D: Struggling. Starts to share feelings. Looks forward to sessions and forgetting worries. Gains confidence and makes friends. Shares surfing as happy time with family (brother)

CHILD E: Says cleanses him of bad mood. Makes friendship, laughing, helping each other. Socialises with them outside on another activity

CHILD F: Co-operation and communication gets better (e.g. swapping a board when asked). Led to having own surfboard and is a regular/new hobby

CHILD G: Chatting, encouraging others and making a friend. Now organizing own lifts and is a regular. Buys own wetsuit

CHILD H: After only few sessions, smiling, belonging, trying new things, not afraid to fail, mix all walks of life. Parent takes them surfing outside club

CHILD I: Great behaviour improvement, waiting chatting, carried board, listened to instructors, enthusiastic and goes to water on his own, controls excitement / waits. Surfing takes away problems and worries. Organises own fundraising. Making friends they care about, social skills, meeting and interacting and feeling supported and safe.

CHILD J: becomes volunteer and good role model. Communicates positively and notices when others are restless or nervous and redirects their attention. He is a sensitive and positive role model.