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SERVICES AND FAMILIES



EVALUATION AND IMPACT OF THE SURF ACTION COMMUNITY FUND PROJECT

TITLE – CHANGING MINDS

28 JUNE 2021 – 30 JUNE 2024

(Progress report)



Kindly funded by the Community Fund



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‘Changing Minds’ is a 3 year innovative health and wellbeing project which will help people living in Cornwall aged between 7 and 65 who are living with medical, mental health and emotional/behavioural difficulties which are limiting their lives and their ability to participate in the community. This will range from children who have specific health and educational needs, people who are, or have been, in the criminal justice system, those who have become isolated, struggling families and many others.

Early intervention and working with whole families are important because if an individual within a family is struggling it is no good just addressing the needs of that individual however, by involving the family; the chances of a successful long-term effective intervention are much increased.

There is overwhelming scientific evidence that being physically active leads to a healthier and happier life and that these benefits are even more prevalent when activity takes place in or near the ocean and/or green spaces. Even as late as 2022, the science still indicates that 150 minutes of slow pace exercise or 75 minutes of intensive exercise reduces huge risks of heart disease and many other ailments. Surf Action has been at the vanguard of the development of ocean-based activities and its acceptance in the mainstream. It is a complimentary therapeutic approach, that enables an element of space, creativity and fun that is often lacking in traditional therapy options. Surf Action has been delivering surf therapy to the armed forces community for over ten years and latterly, it has been asked to work with vulnerable families and individuals from the wider civilian community.

There is a common tendency when reporting on services for beneficiaries/family’s to use a lot of pictures showing the children active and smiling and to ‘let the picture tell a thousand words’ and Surf Action is not totally immune to this however, we realise that a picture is only the encapsulation of emotions at that specific moment. This report seeks to examine the effects of our surf therapy programme, sea swimming programme and the green space programme when there is not a photograph to consult.

Surf Action has collected both quantitative and qualitative data throughout the Changing Minds project and this report is an examination of that aggregated data to examine the delivery, efficacy, and outcomes of the Surf Action Surf Therapy model over the duration of the project. This data is wholly based with the consultation of the Charities beneficiaries and the clients we engage with.

We are not a surf school that provides free surfing! Through our funding streams and ethos, Surf Action uses surf therapy, sea swimming, and outdoor walking groups as a therapeutic tool but wants its service users to be able to move on in their lives and are delighted when this means they do not need our help anymore. This also indicates that have been progressive with our assistance to create new mind-sets along the way. Those who wish to take up surfing as a sport as a result of their participation are taught all the necessary health and safety considerations and encouraged to do so however it needs to be done at their own expense either individually or by joining a surf school. The sea swimming is also created for the beneficiaries to enjoy and then move onto sea swimming groups where they gather friends and move forward from social isolation. Similarly, if someone has moved on

in their life, but feels the need to return to us for a spell, we will always try to accommodate them. The legacy of Surf Action's programmes is for families and individuals to partake in more community focused activities, and create their own groups, while moving forward with support and independence. The fact that most beneficiaries join a social circle indicates that they are ready to embrace change and reduce barriers. The confidence they gather creates a feeling of being calmer and more motivated, helping make good decisions for themselves.

Surf Action is very fortunate in benefitting from a wide range of skills possessed by its invaluable and dedicated volunteers, each acting as a life coach with different levels of involvement. One of the most important forms for capturing on an emotional level is the emotional needs audit, really drilling down to the effectiveness of Ocean Therapy, Sea swimming and Walking in Green space therapy and with this Surf Action can develop bespoke programmes to fit the need of the beneficiary.

This form is the backbone to the impact the project has made on someone's life, giving our coach and mentors a greater understanding on what is needed to be put in place. The immediate intervention is crucial to a successful outcome.



Clients reported having improved and more fulfilling family relationships

During and after the course, families reported having improved fulfilling family relationships and better inter family communications, this improved their motivation, resilience and feelings of calm all of which lead to improved psychological wellbeing. The essence behind all the activities as a group are to improve the individuals teamwork and hence life skills through communication and instruction from our coaches. The fact that they have to listen to be safe and secure in nature gives them a more purposeful experience as allot of beneficiaries are out of their comfort zone.

Family Plan/Individual Plan.

As the client progress through their course with us, the coach/mentor will be discussing what they would like to achieve in the future. The coach and mentor will identify activities or services that can improve their health, wellbeing or personal

situation. This is more than just signposting, there will be a genuine partnership between the client and the coach/mentor; Building rapport, exploring interests and barriers, and connecting clients with activities and services that they will enjoy and benefit from, further building on their potential. The most important factor is that the beneficiary is connect to the geographical area in which they live as traveling creates more anxieties for some.

The coach mentor will make any referral with the agreement of the client and will contact the organisation to pass over the relevant information.

The coach mentor will attend the initial meeting and then stay in contact with both the client and referral organisation to monitor how things progress.

The area of referral may include physical/psychological violence, counselling, education/preparation for re-joining employment, local socialising groups.

Clients reported improved psychological health, improved self-esteem, feeling calmer, more motivated, improved sleep patterns, stronger social relationships, improved life skills, communication and resilience during the courses. The younger beneficiary really enjoyed the outdoor experience especially with the family as it gave them time to have fun and just be themselves with no barriers. This also challenged the way they think as there was no Wi-Fi communication.

Children were more focussed with a little help and encouragement on improvements in sleep patterns, stronger friendship networks, improved attention span, feeling more motivated and resilient and improved family relationships.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: PROJECT STORY

2022-2023 has been a busy year. We were delighted to have received second year funding from the Community Fund and this enabled us to facilitate the needs of many.

Another year of great liaison and dedication from our volunteer's and our Surf providers 'Global Boarders', our specialist surf provider, we have achieved another amazing year facilitating our beneficiary's needs.

We successfully ran 12, six-week Changing minds Ocean therapy courses, 8 Changing Minds Sea Swimming courses and 8 Changing Minds Walking Groups. Working with a whole family approach, facilitates the needs of the individual that is struggling in this unit and so you address theirs and their family's needs as a whole with greater understanding of what they are struggling with.

The outcomes of the Changing Minds families' scores are summarised below.
(2022-2023)

- The group scores for the 35 families showed a statistically significant wellbeing increase of 23% with a greater than 87% certainty that the outcomes are

accountable due to participation in our Changing Minds project and not to other environmental factors.

- The female clients who showed the lowest initial wellbeing scores benefited the most and exhibited an average increase in their wellbeing scores of 58% by the end of their courses.
- The male clients who showed the lowest initial wellbeing scores benefitted the most and exhibited an average increase in their wellbeing scores of 62% by the end of their courses.

The outcomes from the Emotional Needs Audit (ENA) from the 59 parents/carers who completed them showed that:

- As a population, they were mostly stable and satisfied in the most important areas of their lives.
- Many participated in private talks with the on-site counsellor/coach and mentor and asked for advice on specific subjects.
- 29 separate adults showed relatively low ENA scores and are working with us on ways to increase them in the medium term. (More intervention and psychologically intervention is needed)

INVOLVEMENT: OWNERSHIP

The feedback from the participants was excellent and demonstrates that Surf Action is providing a practical and invaluable services to the community. During this time, it was evident that the immediate intervention with our psychological team was paramount especially helping parents deal with parenting skills and understanding of children's and parents' development. What was evident was that working over a six-week period and introducing walking in green spaces and sea swimming produced the same outcomes. The emotional needs audit and WEMWBS reporting gave the people within our community insight into emotional levels and needs and with this they were able to give us feedback on how Surf Actions programmes were going and how we might change if they felt it necessary on our delivery. The whole community and individuals within are always given a voice as the delivery is only one part and as a whole this breeds success. This really involves people and gives them ownership of the project.

Once the water had cooled down, we were able to start our coastal and green space walking groups over a six-week period. These started in earnest in October in all sorts of weather and the resilience shown was fantastic. The most pleasing thing was the different age group and their participation. Working with our coach and mentors, we were able to instil confidence into this age group. The walking group included many veterans of the armed forces and their families within the Bodmin area of Cornwall. During the second year, more individuals who wanted to improve their fitness and create more of a positive mind-set joined the groups. While there may have been anxiety about joining a group each beneficiary was made to feel very welcome. Part of the course is about communication with each other and they were encourage to swap telephone numbers hence creating group and friendship circle that reduced a lot of social isolation. This created a sense of real local community and support through many connections, not just from service many years ago, but also through lived experiences and what their needs were now. The walking groups always incorporated a stop at a café or pub, this was the ideal

setting for conversations to begin in earnest, and group chats were very important to these groups, shared experience and learned knowledge grew understanding and camaraderie and a community feel. A few members planned longer walks, which they used to improve their fitness levels, knowing that walking as a group improved their commitment to attend and perform. While it is suggested that community reduces social isolation, it really is up to the individual to embrace change and friendship by confiding in people, which builds a level of trust. This basic requirement was seen throughout all the groups and was classed a basis to human need.



Clients reported feeling less social isolation and stronger social relationships.

Intended Outcome. The walking groups led to a feeling of less isolation especially with the older beneficiary. Modern technology meant that they could communicate with each other and support each other, which gave them more confidence. Trust is a huge thing as a human need and it was pleasing to see that the older beneficiary had no problem opening up about their lives. This cemented friendship and support.



Clients reported better communication and improved positive mind-set.

Background of the Charity. (A sense of Knowledge and understanding)

Surf Action is the trading name of Combat Surfers, a Cobseo registered military charity (Charity Number: 1140191). Surf Action promotes good physical and mental health through personal development, good personal choices, solution focused therapy, education and empowers its service users to lead healthy, fulfilled, and independent lives and to become valued and active members of their community. Core to achieving this is the use of progressive lifestyle medicine and the blue and green gym concepts and involving our service users and their families in high intensity water-sports in the magnificent coastal environment around us with the resulting recognised physical and psychological health and resilience benefits.

Surf Action has developed a pioneering and highly cost-effective physical and mental health, wrap-around, 'Joined-Up Recovery Programme' for the community, working with individuals and families many of whom have complex physical and/or psychological problems including PTSD, depression and anxiety in particular as a result of life events.

The wraparound recovery programme was developed because Surf Action believes that recovery:

- Does not necessarily mean getting back to where you were before
- Happens in 'fits and starts' and, like life, has many ups and downs

- Is profoundly influenced by people's expectations and attitudes
- Requires a well organised system of support from family, friends and/or professionals
- Requires services to embrace new and innovative ways of working.

The efficacy of Surf Action's surf-therapy for adults has been independently examined, researched and its outcomes endorsed by several universities. The resulting published papers include

- Caddick, N., Smith, B., & Phoenix, C. (2015). The effects of surfing and the natural environment on the well-being of combat veterans. *Qualitative Health Research*, 25, 76-86.
- 'Exercise is medicine for mental health in military veterans: A qualitative commentary' (2017) by Dr Nick Caddick (Veterans and Families Institute, Anglia Ruskin University) and Professor Brett Smith (School of Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation Sciences, University of Birmingham)



Clients reported improved teamwork and feeling more motivated.

THE PROJECTS AIMS AND INTENTDED OUTCOMES.

The aim of the project was to support the physical/psychological wellbeing of the local communities around Cornwall. We helped local families/individuals best deal with the emotional effects of the past two years and using the knowledge the charity had gained over many years working with military families and all the emotional anxieties they go through when family members are deployed across the world. We use healthy activities in the blue and green gyms in the magnificent Cornish coastal environment.

The Surf Action Changing minds Project is an evidence-based variation of our adult surf-therapy programme, an experiential learning opportunity to help address the problems outlined above by the provision of supportive activities for children, young-people and families to take part in within Cornwall's stunning natural, outdoor environment. It was tailored for families and children of all ages who were facing challenges and experiencing difficulties in everyday life to support their resilience, ability to cope and to boost wellbeing.



At the core to achieving all the intended outcomes are a series of water-based, land-based activities. Participants experience the benefits of being active in the outdoor environment and an exhilarating physical, emotional, and social experience, which could act as the foundation for improvement in long-term health, wellbeing, lifestyle, and family relationships. We wanted to harness the research-endorsed physical and psychological health benefits of being regularly active in the great outdoors. These include:

- Improved Vitamin D levels from being active in sunlight
- Improved quality of sleep due to boosted Melatonin levels

- Improved core body strength
- Stronger muscles
- Improved balance
- Improved sense of self-worth
- Improved relaxation and mindfulness
- Being a respected part of a friendship group
- Feeling satisfaction and pride in their achievements
- Better social integration & reduced isolation
- Better able to discuss their situations with others
- Improved anger management
- An active lifestyle reduces the severity of the symptoms in some life-long health conditions such as cystic fibrosis by strengthening the lung function and the immune system, thus aiding the clearing of mucus and boosting the quality of life
- Helping some who are on the autistic spectrum by helping reduce sensory overload and interrupting obsessive-compulsive routines thus improving their quality of life
- A reduction in the severity of the symptoms in PTSD and a wide range of related mild to moderate depressive mental health conditions.
- Being in an atmosphere which is very different from that of the day-to-day life
- The opportunity to identify and concentrate on and develop one's own recovery path
- Being more receptive to learning new things
- Enhanced peer support relationships
- Enhanced self-confidence and self-esteem
- Learning from the experiences of others and offering their own experiences
- Improved physical and psychological resilience
- Learning about new adjustment strategies
- Learning about new coping skills and education within a group setting
- Learning about the benefits of, education, work and volunteering opportunities improved family cohesion, relationships and understanding.
- **Intended Outcomes:(Throughout the course period)**
- Clients suffering from social isolation and/or psychological health challenges will report improved psychological wellbeing and improved self-esteem.

- Clients will report feeling calmer, more motivated and resilient.
- Clients will report feeling less socially isolated and have better, stronger, social relationships and friendship networks.
- Clients will improve their life skills, such as communication and teamwork, giving them better life chances.
- Clients will have improved and more fulfilling family relationships.
- Surf Action will have networked with national and local organisation's such as the NHS, local and National Government in order to improve the awareness of its activities and outcomes in order to improve the long-term sustainability of the project.
- **Bonding Time:** Spending quality time together as a family allows everyone to bond. Whether this is partaking in everyday activities or going on holiday, creating warm memories is so valuable for children. In fact, strong child-parent bonds are only formed through consistent communication and meaningful time spent together.
- **Happier children:** Even though the entire family benefits from being together, it can have really a positive effect on children's general wellbeing and happiness and it's the quality of interactions not the quantity that really count. Making small changes when spending time as a unit can make all the difference. Putting aside distractions and listening to each other can help make everyone feel loved and appreciated.
- **Improved self-esteem:** When people feel as though they're valued by their partners/friends and spend regular, quality time together, it helps build up a positive sense of self-worth. This self-esteem often translates across to their social and working lives. Even better, family time doesn't have to be expensive - activities such as going for a walk or a bike ride hold just as much worth. The important part is spending time together and enjoying each other's company.
- **Improved mental health:** The importance of family time on people's mental health is significant. People who feel engaged and connected in their family dynamic are more likely to be sociable, perform better in life and have less behavioural issues. In fact, recent reports have shown that people who have infrequent family dinners are twice as likely to use tobacco and alcohol. Stability is the key.



Families reported feeling calmer, more motivated and improved wellbeing

MEASURING WELLBEING

Surf Action has always taken a well-being approach in its delivery and in assessing outcomes because it enables us to:

- Move beyond a narrow focus on what can go wrong in people's lives, to look also at what makes people's lives go well.
- Move beyond looking only at what people lack or need and look at the positive things people bring to situations and communities – their assets. This in turn can help us think about the ways that people can be empowered to contribute to improvements in their own lives.
- Move beyond just focusing on economic circumstances to include the important areas of people's emotional and social needs.

When we understand what makes people's lives go well, see the positive things people bring to situations, and understand people's emotional and social needs, projects and services can be better designed to respond to the many aspects of people's lives.

In 2014 Surf Action opted to use the WEMWBS scale, a positively worded measure developed by Warwick and Edinburgh Universities in 2006 in conjunction with NHS Scotland, measuring emotional and psychological wellbeing, validated with children aged 8 upwards.

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) is a scale with five response categories on a Likert scale, which have been specifically designed to measure both the feeling and functioning aspects of positive mental well-being. These questions meet various statistical tests of robustness, and they also have 'face validity' as measures of aspects of flourishing within the dynamic model, i.e., on the face of it, the questions really are about wellbeing! For example, good

feelings ('feeling relaxed'), sense of meaning ('feeling useful') and good relationships ('feeling close to other people'). Warwick and Edinburgh Universities were commissioned to develop this in 2006, and it has been academically validated as having good psychometric properties, good validity, and reliability with the ability to distinguish between population groups. WEMWBS has been widely used in population surveys in the UK, including in the Health Survey for England in 2011.

Although the scale is validated for people aged 8 and above, the minimum age for participation in our activities was 7 so after consulting amongst our trustees and professionals, we decided to let the 7-year-olds complete the forms. There was a 'neutral' Surf Action volunteer available during this process to further explain questions and to find examples in day-to-day life which helped explain the various questions.

INCLUSIVITY

We wanted the project to be as inclusive as possible and made the decision to, unlike many organisations, integrate any participants with special needs with their peers whenever possible taking into consideration our duty of care and safeguarding requirements. All these clients reported feeling less isolated and having better, stronger, social relationships and friendship networks.



Clients reported feeling less socially isolated and having stronger, social and friendship relationships

METHODOLOGY

Preparation

The Changing Minds Project Ocean/green spaces therapy courses were comprehensively advertised from June 2021 onwards through social media and the local services within the community including volunteer Cornwall. This gave us access to lots of different agencies working within Cornwall who could refer to us.

There were plenty of applications and the courses were quickly filled and in fact over-subscribed. All applicants also completed relevant 'Photographic Consent' and 'Disclaimer' forms. There was a good age and gender mix amongst the participants which was very pleasing.

Evaluation Measures

Adults and children completed the wellbeing paperwork that was described earlier. The adults were also engaged in conversation by the Surf Action volunteers and qualitative data was gathered about what changes they had experienced as each course progressed. Some

The six-week programme gives everyone time to build trust with each other and form new friendships and communities, these milestones were key in delivering a successful project.

TATEMENTS	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
I've been feeling optimistic about the future	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling useful	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling relaxed	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling interested in other people	1	2	3	4	5
I've had energy to spare	1	2	3	4	5
I've been dealing with problems well	1	2	3	4	5
I've been thinking clearly	1	2	3	4	5



Clients reported feeling calmer, more motivated and resilient.

I've been feeling good about myself	1	2	3	4	5
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I've been feeling close to other people	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling confident	1	2	3	4	5
I've been able to make up my own mind about things	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling loved	1	2	3	4	5
I've been interested in new things	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling cheerful	1	2	3	4	5

Surf Action - Changing Minds

Below are some statements about feelings and thoughts.

Please tick the box that best describes your experience of each over the last 2 weeks

Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS)

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Changing Minds Emotional Needs Audit

How well are your innate emotional needs being met?

Nature has programmed all of us with physical and emotional needs. These are the 'human givens' that cannot be avoided. How stressed we are depending upon how well our needs are being met, and how well we deal with the situation when they are not. Rate, in your judgement, how well the following emotional needs are being met in your life now, on a scale of one to seven (where 1 means not met at all, and 7 means being very well met), by ticking the appropriate boxes.

NO SOMETIMES YES

1. Do you feel secure in all major areas of your life (such as your home, work, environment)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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2. Do you feel you receive enough attention?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

3. Do you think you give other people enough attention?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

4. Do you feel in control of your life most of the time?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

5. Do you feel connected to some part of a wider community?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

6. Can you obtain privacy when you need to?

7. Do you feel an emotional connection to others?

For instance, do you have an intimate relationship in your life, one where you are totally physically and emotionally accepted for who you are by at least one person (this could be a close friend)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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8. Do you feel you have status that is acknowledged?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

9. Are you achieving things and feeling competent in at least one major area of your life?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

10. Are you being mentally and/or physically stretched in ways which give you a sense that life is meaningful?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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Families reported increased family communication and more fulfilling relationships

Data Protection

Surf Action is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office under the registration number Z3463898 and is GDPR compliant. All information and data collected during this project was treated and stored in accordance with current data protection regulations.

RESULTS.

Attendance

The overall attendance figure of 98% was very pleasing and this was indicative of how enjoyable the participants found their courses. Several people withdrew due to unforeseen illness/injury but were mostly replaced provided it was in the early weeks of the course. These figures show the full impact of a family driven policy for engagement to strive and shows the charities reach within its environment and community.

Summary: What we have learnt.

Another extremely successful year for Surf Action, we feel we have really reached out to the community and began to put in strong, best practice skills for many people. We have offered a range of coaching tools and techniques, which will support individuals to break out of self-imposed limitations into new possibilities,

opportunities and better wellbeing and buffers against mental illness, such as anxiety, stress, trauma and depression. With these new tool and thought processes, they will now be able to work on their personal and family dynamics with strong, purposeful lessons and tools. As they now move forward, they will in the future lean to identify and act to keep themselves more focussed, resilient and able to cope with life ups and downs. What the most pleasing thing to see was the effects of the Ocean Therapy/Green space/Sea swimming courses reducing this anxiety and levels of negative thought process, especially with some older beneficiaries. This in itself went well and the structure of six weeks left people feeling a purpose and a sense of belonging. Through this interaction, it leads to stronger feelings of self and community. Our evaluation process proved invaluable to not only the Coaching and mentoring team but to the individuals as well – these gave them the opportunity to see where they wanted to improve and in the final assessment, see their growth. This for some people was stounding to see and appreciate how hard some of the work had been. The coach and mentor team ensured that all individuals were given support to seek out community groups and projects that would continue to provide a sense of community engagement and strong social connections. Many of the wellbeing course students continue to meet weekly to sea swim, share a cup of coffee and have a natter. Our work is continuing by its own creation and for us to see such positive results is extremely powerful. Individuals are continuing their commitment to create stronger personal skills and contribute to community and society. There were some who required further psychological intervention and Surf Action has facilitated this.

Feedback

Some of the Feedback evaluation we have been given this year really show how relevant and purposeful our courses were –

I have just completed the most recent Wellbeing course and it was really helpful. I gained some really useful insight and strategies to take forward. Nick was kind empathetic and supportive thank you Surf Action – K Thompson

This is a fantastic course that was beneficial for me, it brought many aspects of my life bringing clarity with the tools that I can use for years to come. S Lark

The ocean therapy course with Surf Action this summer, was just what my family needed – I have a 13-year-old son who is diagnosed with ASD – The whole family finds this hard to cope with his behaviour and it is affecting everyone in the family. We were looking for something to do as a family to try to connect again. This 6-week course delivered that and so much – we had such fun and learned so much about each other – we can now talk as a family instead of shouting !! . We all have a new approach to family life and we are so much stronger now – thank you for everything - S Duffield.

The way we work in year two of the project will be under evaluation for some time with feedback from our beneficiaries but we believe we can stay fluid in our delivery as circumstances change. The third year July 2023-June 2024 will consist of much of the same as far as delivery as we appreciate the Blue Health/Green Health concept is not for everyone, but for the individuals who take up these courses

together with warmer water and sunnier conditions we endeavour to deliver great service and help them thrive in our communities.



What is Resilience??

Resilience is the ability to withstand adversity and bounce back from difficult situations and life events. Being resilient does not mean that people don't experience stress, emotional upheaval suffering.... Resilience is important because it gives people the strength needed to process and overcome hardship.

The project funded by the Community Fund has enabled Surf Action to not only endeavour to teach this but with its wrap around services help make people stronger and thrive through communication and connection.

We are happy that the outcomes demonstrate that 'The Surf Action Changing Minds Project' so far, is a well-designed and targeted provision with proven and sustained wellbeing outcomes which is ideally suited to help combat the growing physical and psychological health worries within the community in these challenging times.



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