

# Using evaluation and surfing to reduce violence in high-risk youth

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## Introduction

In the field of evaluation, the question of whether and how evaluations are used is not new (Ledermann, 2012). In fact, evaluation theorists have, for over forty years, attempted to determine the optimal strategies and factors that lead to usage. Due to evaluations being resource-intensive the last thing an organisation or an evaluator wants is for an evaluation to have no effect. Especially in the non-profit sector where evaluations, although most often employed for demonstrating effectiveness, could also be used for programme improvement, publicising activities, reviewing the mission, raising funds, motivating volunteers and staff and determining expenditures (Wiener, Kirsch & McCormack, 2002).

This paper looks at how Waves for Change, a sport for development and peace non-profit in Cape Town that utilises surfing to reduce violence in high-risk youth, used two evaluations to improve programme design and delivery. The evaluations were conducted in partnership with the Monitoring and Evaluation Master's Degree Programme at the University of Cape Town (UCT).

## Waves for Change

Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) organisations are defined as non-profits who through “the intentional use of sport, physical activity and play attain specific development objectives in low- and middle-income countries and disadvantaged communities in high-income settings” (SDPIWG, 2008). Waves for Change (W4C) uses surfing to affect children from three local impoverished communities; namely Lavender Hill, Khayelitsha, and Masiphumelele.

Unemployment, abuse, violence, school drop-out, gangs, substance abuse, disease, and lack of resources are common features of these communities. This is mainly as a result of Apartheid legislation which selectively excluded certain areas from receiving essential services necessary for the promotion of safety and security (Ward, Dawes & Matzopoulos, 2013).

Researchers have found that victims of antisocial behaviour and abuse may model their own behaviour on that of the perpetrator(s) and may also approve of antisocial behaviour as a life strategy (Hawkins et al., 2000; Shahinfar, Kupersmidt, & Matz, 2001). Individuals who engage with these behaviours in middle childhood and adolescence are more at risk of developing life-course persistent

antisocial behaviour which will continue the cycle of violence and community disruption (Fairchild, Goozen, Calder, & Goodyer, 2013; Hawkins et al., 2000; Moffitt, 1993).

Exposure to violent and traumatic events are also known to increase mental health problems (Hamilton, Foster & Richards, 2016). Unfortunately, South African children from disadvantaged areas are not only at risk of being exposed to these events (in many cases repeatedly) but also unlikely to have any support to cope with the after effects of being a victim of violence or abuse. Figure 1 shows how W4C children's exposure to risk factors compare to a nationally representative sample<sup>1</sup>.

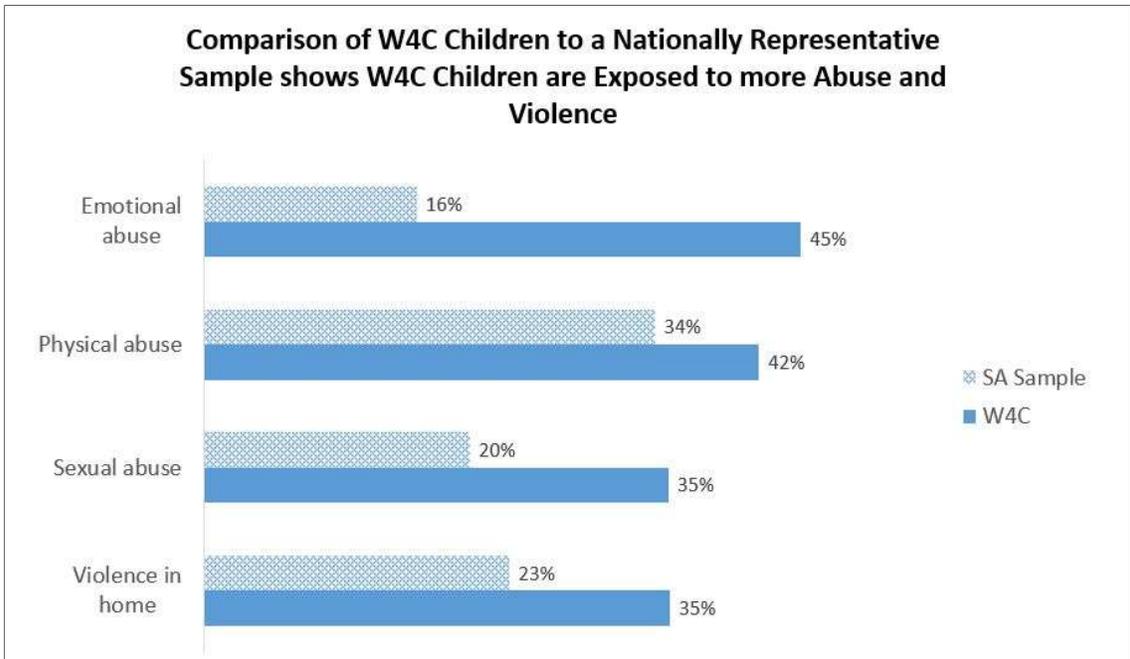


Figure 1: W4C children are exposed to more abuse and violence than the average South African child.

Waves for Change was established in 2011 with the aim of changing the rhetoric from focusing on the negatives towards positivity and hope. The organisation uses surfing to “hook” vulnerable children, and through a psychosocial curriculum delivered by W4C coaches, beneficiaries are provided with skills to cope with trauma and subsequently reduce antisocial behaviour.

Due to more than one in three local young adults not in education, employment or training (NEET) (Statistics South Africa, 2014) Waves for Change prides itself on employing and training locals to be coaches instead of relying on volunteers. Essentially the coaches monitor and mentor the children in the surf therapy programme and, in doing so, get the opportunity, through on the job training, to build knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSAs) required in the field of youth care. Through W4C they also have the opportunity to be enrolled in a nationally accredited child youth care course delivered by the National Association of Child Youth Care Workers (NACCW) which is intended to both improve their

<sup>1</sup> National data from research conducted by UCT and the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (2015). W4C data collected during 2015 and 2016 through intake questionnaires.

engagements with youth in the surfing programme and increase their opportunities for employment in the longer term, preferably in the youth care sector. They are also provided with opportunities to become certified in lifesaving (through the Fish Hoek Surf Lifesaving Club), surf instructing (through the International Surf Association) and first aid (through St John's Ambulance).

The coaches also create networks in the community by visiting homes and delivering teacher training sessions at local schools. Interacting regularly with the key caregivers in the children's lives ensures a more holistic engagement with participants and promotes community support for the program.

## **The Evaluations**

Both evaluations were formative in nature meaning that they were meant to be used to improve programme design and performance. One focused on the children as primary beneficiaries (Snelling, 2015) and the other on the coaches (Rolfe, 2015).

The objective of the Snelling evaluation was to assess the feasibility of W4C to improve the wellbeing of local children whereas the Rolfe evaluation provided W4C with accurate and rapid feedback to help develop and improve the coach programme. W4C also requested recommendations for improvements in future program delivery and implementation.

A variety of well-suited data collection methods were employed which included surveys, observations and interviews. The evaluators were given access to all activities and participants from February until October 2015.

## **Findings and Use**

Both evaluators suggested that the theory of the respective programmes (child and coach) is plausible, meaning that if W4C delivers services as intended, they should achieve the intended objectives.

The child programme was found to be suitably targeted, but inadequate completion of programme tasks by coaches, and inadequate attendance by children meant that children did not receive the full curriculum. The design and delivery of the coach programme needed fine-tuning. The rapid feedback the Rolfe evaluation was able to provide meant that there had been developments in organisational structure, the coach pathway, retention strategies and monitoring.

Recommendations from the evaluations included: increasing female attendance, simplifying the curriculum, improving internal monitoring, addressing gaps in staff roles and diversity; and providing better support to coaches. The next section will look at each of these in turn and describe how W4C used the feedback to improve the delivery of their service.

## Female attendance

The Snelling evaluation showed that low attendance and high drop-out rate were most prominent amongst girls. In fact, only one of the three sites had girls attending. The evaluator suggested that girls felt unsafe walking to the site and that they should be accompanied by coaches on the 15-minute walk. Waves for Change responded by purchasing 2 bicycles that coaches now use to accompany girls to site.

In addition, this focus on increasing female attendance led Waves for Change to start girls-only surfing days at its other two sites. These changes have resulted in a more than three-fold increase in female participation numbers from 24 (in 2015) to 84 (in 2016).

## Curriculum simplification

Another recommendation from the Snelling evaluation that touched upon attendance concerned curriculum delivery. Attendance dropped over the June/July winter school holidays meaning that participants were not receiving as much of the 12-month long curriculum as intended. In addition, the evaluator found that the curriculum was too complicated for coaches to deliver and that several concepts were too abstract for children to fully understand and apply.

To remedy these two concerns, the curriculum designer simplified the curriculum to focus on key topics aligned with the Theory of Change and made the sessions more practical to provide children with opportunities to apply learnings outside of surfing. Simplifying also meant that the curriculum could be shortened to 5 months, run twice during the year with a break during the lower attended period.

Although data collection for 2016 has not been completed, preliminary data analyses suggest an improvement in key outcomes such as prosocial behaviour, confidence, coping skills, and violence reduction.

## Improving internal monitoring

Both evaluators indicated that monitoring of attendance and programme impacts could be improved. The employment of a full-time monitoring and evaluation manager in January 2016 showed W4C's commitment to improving their monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) capacity. Newly improved MEL systems mean that W4C is now able to track implementation, in real-time, and can respond to programmatic challenges as they arise. Improving the capacity of Site Managers to capture attendance remotely on electronic devices means Waves for Change can action 1:1s and home visits for participants with poor attendance and can refer individuals to the in-house social worker if necessary. This could lead to reduced drop-out rates, higher dosage, children returning to the programme and stronger program effects.

The adoption of a caseload system (every child in the programme is allocated to a coach) has made it possible to set and track targets for child attendance, 1:1 and home visits. Caseload performance is factored into site and coach performance reviews. Site-assessments have also been introduced to assess the delivery of the curriculum sessions at the beach. Overall, these new systems have helped to foster an expectation of high quality service delivery.

### Addressing gaps in staff roles and diversity

The evaluations found that the organisation lacked staff in key positions and lacked cultural diversity (most management positions were filled by white foreigners). By early 2016 the organisation had employed three more South African citizens to fulfil management positions on the interdisciplinary (ID) team. This means that the ID team is currently 100% South African consisting of 1 black male, 2 black females, 2 coloured females, and 1 white female.

### Providing better support to coaches

The Waves for Change coaches are recruited from the same communities as the target children and are often exposed to the same risk factors. Based on the recommendation from both evaluations that coaches needed more support, the organisation has implemented a weekly coach debrief session, where coaches have the opportunity to share concerns about their caseloads with a registered counsellor. Private counselling has also been made available.

In addition, processes such as coach recruitment, training and post-W4C placements have been revised to ensure W4C coaches possess the key child-care skills necessary to boost the psychosocial support they provide to the children, as well as their long-term employment prospects.

As an aside, a recent report by GrassRoots Soccer, an organisation with a similar coach training model as Waves for Change, entitled *Young People in Meaningful Work: Using Sport to Generate a Positive Social Return on Investment in South Africa* showed how investing R1 in a sports coach yields a return of R1.72 over 5 years, an impressive return of 72%. Making it financially and socially viable to invest in the training and employment of local young adults instead of volunteers. This provides additional validation for the W4C coach training model.

## Conclusion

In order for an evaluation to be useful two conditions are paramount. The evaluator needs to understand the needs of the organisation and the organisation needs to be willing to adopt recommendations. From the above it is clear that in this case both of these conditions were met.

In sum, W4C has demonstrated how it values and uses feedback to improve the delivery of the service they provide to young South Africans. As a result, this case can be cited as an example of how evaluations can be used to improve programme delivery and ultimately impact.

From the smiles one sees when one visits any of the sites it is clear that they have been successful in creating a safe space for children to momentarily escape their daily challenges whilst simultaneously learning healthy ways to cope with them.

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