

JOY Centre Tokeh Surf Therapy Pilot Evaluation Report



An evaluation of the impact of surf therapy on 20 young people between the ages of 10 and 18 years including orphans and children affected by environmental challenges, living in abject poverty and exposed to violence and crime in the community.



JOY MISSION STATEMENT

We are JOY (Job Opportunities for Youths), a not-for-profit youth-led development organisation. We work in Tokeh beach with young girls and boys between the ages of 10 to 18 years who are orphans, affected by a number of challenges, living in abject poverty and exposed to violence, crime, health hazards in the community.

We provide an internationally recognised evidence-based surf therapy programme, with knowledge and life skills development that give JOY to the kids and allow them to cope with traumatic experiences.

This programme is delivered by caring adults in a child-friendly safe space, which enable the kids to engage, learn, and achieve as they prepare for the world of work and to become productive citizens.



At JOY Centre: mentors, kids and government's representative who visited to monitor the programme.



BACKGROUND

Tokeh is a coastal resort town along the peninsula in the Western Area Rural District of Sierra Leone. Tokeh lies approximately twenty miles east of Freetown and near the neighborhood town of York. The major economic activity in Tokeh is fishing and tourism. Tokeh is home to a large resort of sand beaches known collectively as Tokeh Beach, which attract a large number of tourists to the town. The Tokeh beach is one of the largest and most attractive beaches in West Africa. Tokeh is also known for its mountains, forests, resort hotels, and nearby Tokeh Island, an uninhabited island a short boat ride from Tokeh town.

The JOY Centre has spent some years developing youth-led programmes for young people and local communities in Tokeh, with a focus on orphans, children affected by a number of challenges, living in abject poverty and exposed to violence, crime and health hazards in the community.

In 2018, JOY Centre started the surf therapy programme in Tokeh. The surf therapy programme was introduced by the organisation -The Wave Alliance and Messeh Leone Foundation Trust. On the recommendation of the Messeh Leone Trust Foundation Trust, two members from the JOY Centre were invited by the organisation -The Wave Alliance to participate in a surf therapy training in Cape Town, South Africa. The Ministry of Tourism and Culture and the National Tourism provided assistance in securing the visas to the delegation who participated in the training. The Wave Alliance provided curriculum, training tools, remote monitoring tools, and programme documents. The Wave Alliance starter packs helped the JOY Centre grow locally-owned Surf Therapy and introduced new child-friendly health services to at-risk young people in Tokeh who are now transforming previously disused stretches of coastline into community-owned safe spaces.

Following the training in Cape Town, JOY centre was accredited as a member of the Wave Alliance – a platform of qualified and trained surf therapy specialists. The Tokeh pilot programme was delivered by caring adults in a child friendly Safe space that enabled the kids to engage, learn and achieve. The programme was inclusive and provided a safe space for all kids, regardless of background, where they can come and make new friends, gain self-confidence, have an amazing time. The Surf Project is all about enhancing the personal, social, mental and physical wellbeing of young people! The Surf Therapy programme fuses the adrenaline of Surfing with cutting edge mind/body therapy, to improve the mental health and wellbeing of youth at risk of mental health challenges. JOY uses Surf Therapy to improve the mental and physical health of vulnerable young people growing up in challenging communities.



PROJECT AIMS

The aims of the pilot project were:

1. To provide an internationally recognised evidence-based surf therapy program with knowledge, coping and life skills activities that bring JOY to the kids and allow them to cope with traumatic experience.
2. To help build self-esteem and self-confidence in young people, and empower them to be able to positive relationships with their peers and communities and maintain a sense of belonging.
3. To discourage young people from becoming street children without care, and prevent them from being involved in drug abuse, crime, teenage pregnancy/early marriages and other difficult situations.
4. To enhance personal, social and mental health through surfing; driven by a dedicated group of caring adults, with a passion for surfing, with a view to encourage, challenge, nurture and inspire young people through unique events, surfing, workshops, cultural exchanges and educational programmes.





PARTICIPANTS

20 participants were registered in the surf therapy programme and 19 successfully completed the course. Participants were between the ages 8 to 18 years and were referred by local partner organisations, schools, community leaders and parents/guardians.

Most participants were aged under 18. The ratio of male to female was 2:1 (see below)

Table 1: participant gender/age

Age	8-11	12-15	16-18
Male	3	5	2
Female	0	6	4

We note that 1 child completed the programme but did not take part in the post-test survey for this evaluation report, hence could not be featured in this report. The child was moved/transferred by her parents to another village and so was difficult to participate in the final stages of the programme.

Table 2: participant gender/tribe

Ethnicity	Krio	Temne	Sherbro	Limba	Fullah	Mende
Male	1	4	3	1	0	1
Female	1	5	2	1	1	0

The Tokeh community is dominated by Krios, Temnes, Sherbros, Limbas, Fullahs and Mendes. This is also largely due to the ethnicity make-up of the country. The good news is that programme was able to engage children from all backgrounds regardless of tribes or ethnicity.



INTERVENTION DESCRIPTION

The project was modelled from an evidence-surf therapy programme being implemented by Waves for Change in Cape Town. Surf therapy projects are being established across the world. Our international partner –Waves for Change in South Africa runs similar programmes. Through connections to safe spaces, caring mentors, and a weekly curriculum, the programme gives young people skills to cope with stress, regulate behaviour, build healing relationships, and make positive life choices.

Members of JOY Centre have completed training and vetting process in Cape Town, South Africa which helped us design surf therapy programme that aligns with the needs of our community in Tokeh as well as best practice and evidence globally. We are grateful for the support provided by The Wave Alliance, Messerh Leone Foundation Trust, Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs and National Tourist Board towards the training. We are now collaborating to implement Surf Therapy programme in Sierra Leone, with a view to use surfing to improve the mental health of vulnerable and differently abled youth.

JOY Centre has been accredited as a member of the Global Wave Alliance in Sierra Leone, involving surf therapy professionals, senior mentors and coaches. The Wave Alliance is an initiative led by the NGO-Waves for Change based in the South Africa, with networks in the UK and USA. The Alliance provides the training, equipment and mentoring needed for passionate individuals to introduce locally-owned evidence-based surf therapy to their coastlines.

The JOY Centre Surf Therapy Programme in Tokeh was set up with representatives from key stakeholders and the young people in the community who provided oversight to the programme and ensure the programme was implemented for the intended purpose on a long term basis.

Participants were referred by community leaders, parents and local institutions and placed on a course lasting for five months. Sessions took place on weekends, mostly on Saturday and Sunday evening, between 3:00 pm and 4:30pm. Sessions were ran at the Tokeh beach close to the community. Surf boards, games, rash suit and other materials were provided by the Messerh Leone Trust Foundation, The Wave Alliance and the community stakeholders. The sessions were managed by two project coordinators including Mr Mohamed Sorie Bangura and Mr Josephine Conteh who were trained in surf therapy. Sessions were also coordinated by team of local coaches/volunteers who were allocated to work with one child per coach in the water and a life guard.

Funding for transport was available for coordinators to run the sessions and other activities that were relevant to participants. Participants met up at the Chief compound (Local authority) where they changed and later moved to the beach walk within 100 meters carrying their surf boards. They firstly participated in some warm up games. Later participants and local coaches assembled on the beach for a safety briefing with local mentors and ran the sessions together. Some participants have their own personal coaches, but it was not necessarily the same person at each session. However, in some cases participants move towards certain coaches who they felt comfortable with, and later they were left to work together. The main focus was always to ensure the children are comfortable with their peers and coaches, and in a safe environment. This method empowered the participants to decide who they wished to work with.

Over the course of the programme, participants got to know the coaches, learn about surfing and gained more confidence in the ocean as they improved. They coped well with the slightly cold water. A bad weather plan had been put in place in case of high winds. Whenever there was a flat sea and too much rain, participants and coaches will move to the community center to do some fun activities and coping skills without going out to the rain or ocean.

EVALUATION MEASURES

The programme was evaluated to determine whether the sessions had a positive effect on participants. We also looked at hard measures such as session attendance figures and positive changes made to their lives after project, such as making friends or joining a surf club. We sought qualitative feedback from participants, parents and local community leaders to better understand the experiences of participants.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

1. ATTENDANCE

Attendance was good on average. The mean attendance score for the project overall was graded good at 63.8%.

Out of 20 referred participants, only one (1) did not complete the full five-month course. It was as a result of one young boy whose parent transferred to another community. The new location for the child was about three miles away from the Tokeh community where the surf therapy activities were held. The parents are average income-earners, and so they could not afford the transportation cost for the child to attend the session. This matter has been brought to the notice of Messeh Leone Trust Foundation and the organisation has committed to provide some assistance for the next phase of the project to allow the child to benefit from the programme.



RESULTS AND FINDINGS

PARTICIPANTS SELF-EVALUATION SCORE

Participants were asked to know their satisfaction in the whole surf therapy programme pilot by answering YES/NO questionnaires. Safety questions were also asked to know how safe the surfing project.

Table 3. Number of participants registered positive change

While I was surfing	YES	NO	Satisfaction rating %
I felt safe	17	1	94
I had fun	18	0	100
I made new friends	17	1	94
I want to join a surf club	18	0	100





RESULTS AND FINDINGS

3. PARTICIPANT'S DESCRIPTIVE WORDS

In post evaluation, participants were asked to write down up to 10 words to describe 'me and surfing'. This was designed to give a different insight into their experience. More frequently occurring words have written in a bigger font.





RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.PARTICIPANTS' FEEDBACK

Participants were asked to analysis what made them feel great different, and what they felt they achieved, from taking part at JOY Centre SL surfing project. Participants were also asked to share out general comments on how the surf pilot project was to them. Feedback provided was overwhelmingly positive.

Below are some of the comments from participants.

“I am trying to learn and be consistent at the JOY Centre to gain more surfing skills. I really enjoy surfing. Surfing is so good to me” Surf Therapy Participant

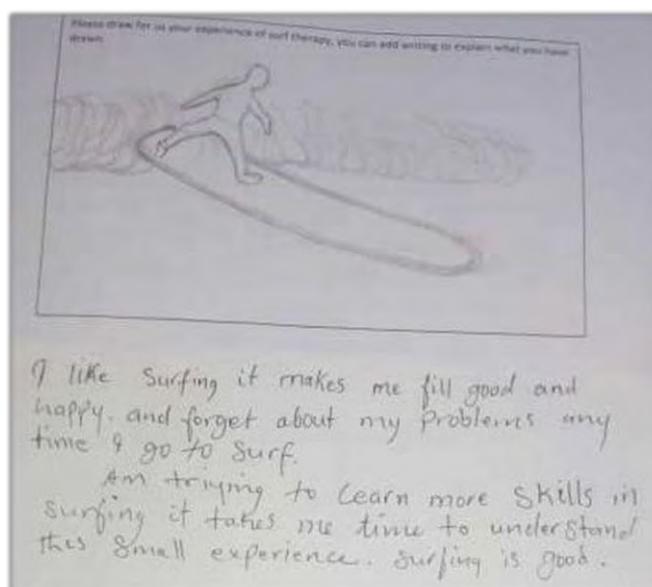
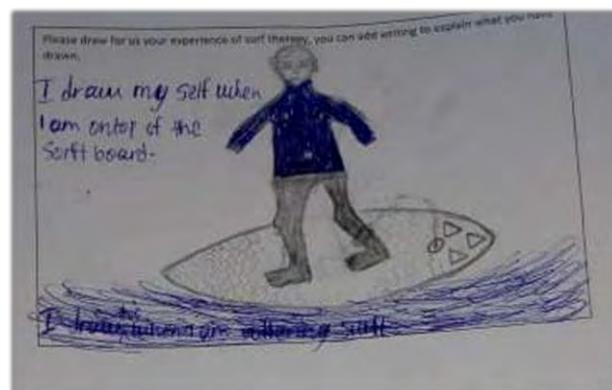
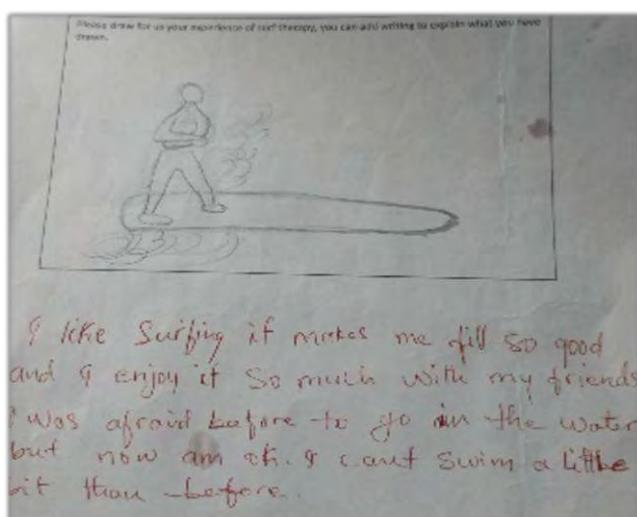
“It was fun when we usually meet with my friends. I feel belong among my friends.” Surf Therapy Participant

“Surfing is good. It makes me enjoy my time in the water. I try to gain my balance in using the surfboard and this makes me feel happy whenever I am on the surfboard.” Surf Therapy Participant

“When I am in the beach, I always feel happy because I play with my friends, we dance, we sing and run during the session” Surf Therapy Participant

My coach help. I always feel safe in the water when with my coach, he takes us to the water and show us how to surf. Coach show love, listen to us and talk to us” Surf Therapy Participant

Participants were also asked to reflect on their experiences of surfing and provide a drawing about their time with JOY surf therapy. Some examples with participant comments are provided below.





RESULTS AND FINDINGS

6. COMMENTS FROM PARENTS/GUARDIANS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS:

We also asked parents/guardians of participants and community leaders such as teachers and local headmen to reflect on what they have seen from the surf therapy. Their feedback is provided below.

“My child is so positive now as result of the introduction of the surf program in this community. Usually during weekends my child was hardly around me or in the community but now there is a sense of fear in my child that if he does not stay home, I will ask the coordinator of the surf program to remove him from the surf club. Now he is so active at home and making fun with his young ones, he always memorise all what he learnt from the surf project to teach me and his young ones at home.”

Adama Manasary, parent.

“My child hardly makes friends and she did not have sharing culture but now over the months, I had seen all those negative cultures are wiping off away from her now. I can see friends coming home to call her and go for surfing. Also whatever she has (food or drinks) at hand, she will share and is always happy when she is with her friends”.

Serah Sesay, parent.

“My child was a so weak and hardly active and was not happy. My child did not have time to go to school but after the introduction of this surf club, now he can spend his leisure time playing with his friends, teach them school songs that they will sing before the beginning of the session. I can see positive changes with my child.”

Jonatha A Cole, parent/mentor/community leader

“Our children from the school were part of the surf club. They explained what they learn and I also saw some sessions. It was a great experience with our kids gaining more from the program. They have been able to learn how to love, respect and listen to each other. The kids can now ask questions and interact with friends. As a result of the programme, I have now decided to join as a mentor in the Surf therapy programme”

Community Teacher

“Before now, kids use to be involved in violence in the community, but since the arrival of this project, the kids have been engaged in the beach with positive behaviours and they are happy. We will continue to support the surf programme”

Community leader



Some parents and local mentors with the kids.



JOY Programme Coordinator, President of Messeh Leone Foundation Trust, and the village chief/ community stakeholders.



CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

7. MAIN FINDINGS

The results from self-evaluation, participants and parents/guardians' feedback and (in particular) attendance levels give a strong indication that the surf therapy project had a huge positive impact on the lives of participants who took part. 19 out of 20 participants completed the course.. Participant satisfaction was very high and 3 participants have already been recruited as volunteers/mentors with the project. They have been trained and are now part of the team of mentors for the project.

Some of the narrative reports given by participants described beautifully their own personal, social and emotional progress. Those participants who were less able to articulate their feelings were able to describe their progress using drawings. Some comments from the participants were however stated in the local krio language and some were interpreted into English and included in this report. As noted in feedback from participants above, the programme was useful, engaging and attractive to the children. Comments from the kids included "when is the next session", "When are we going back to the water", " Surfing is sweet and makes excise and me relax". This suggests JOY Centre SL surf therapy programme produces positive outcomes.

Surprised by these consistent successes with support from local communities, we sought to discover how far we could develop the model with the least amount of resources. Working through established local communities, we identified land where a safe space could be created. The safe space has been used to store equipment/surf boards, provide informal education or other needs related to young people. It's a centre where young people can come together to play, relax, eat, express themselves, feel supported, and learn skills to deal with the challenges they face, in particular families affected by the war, ebola, and other traumatic episodes. Our safe spaces are designed for young who may be unsafe or otherwise exposed to inappropriate adult activities on the beaches including violence, crime, and prostitution.

8. CHALLENGES

While some milestones have been achieved and surf therapy appears to be gathering pace in the Tokeh Community, major challenges remain whose tackling are also vital for a better programme and the march towards sustainable surf therapy development in Sierra Leone. Overall feedback from clients and professionals was very positive, but some also made suggestions for improvements. These included:

- **EXPECTATION:** High level of poverty, unemployment and underemployment, especially among the families and vulnerable groups was a major challenge. The Surf Therapy Programme was seen as a donor driven initiative to bring money in the community while empowering the young people. Few members of the community indicated that the surf therapy programme must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and address a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while running the surf therapy programme. This expectation is entirely understandably and is a common expectation across the country with project of this nature, given that the communities are also seeking external assistance. Meetings have been held with community leaders and have made great efforts to explain to the community the purpose of the surf therapy programme. Expectations from the community have now been addressed due to their later understanding of the importance of the mental health, and the community members have vowed to support the project with or without donors. In fact, they have provided a space on the beach front for the project and the community plans to use that space to engage in fund raising activities to support the surf therapy programme for the benefit of their children. Thanks the leadership of the community. The ideal situation is to run community workshops on the importance of mental health so expectations are manageable.





8. CHALLENGES

- **PARTICIPATION:** Several participants reported that they wanted the sessions to be longer. However, there was also the issue of water safety. The programme provided training on safety and some rash suits, but a few participants complained of being cold. However, no participant dropped out or missed sessions for this reason. Some of the participants complain of being hungry after sessions, and this affected their attention on the programme. Some funds have been provided by the Wave Alliance and the Messeh Leone Trust Foundation to assist with small snacks for the kids.
- **SUSTAINABILITY:** The JOY Centre had been successful in establishing partnerships the local community and agencies but had not created the necessary ‘space’ for maximum effectiveness in raising funds for the smooth operation of the programme. While the Messeh Leone Foundation and The Wave Alliance provided support for the pilot project, this was yet no financial commitment for the future of the programme, albeit the Messeh Leone Foundation and The Wave Alliance have provided small funds for project coordinators. The JOY Centre lacked an agreed model for their responsibilities. Operational arrangement for the pilot phase and inputs worked well, but the operation of the programme for then future has not been agreed. This need to be agreed before any next steps. The Wave Alliance is now providing some technical assistance towards the next important steps.
- **MONITORING AND EVALUATION:** Evaluation is important within ongoing surf therapy delivery and the JOY Centre prioritizes addressing challenges experienced around capturing quantitative data in this pilot. Issues were experienced around lack of technology, including access to mobile phones and errors were made in data collection. To address these challenges a streamlined evaluation process has been developed for the next phase of surf therapy and training has been delivered to account for lessons learnt in the pilot. Future evaluations will include quantitative data (using the World Health Organization Well-Being Scale) to triangulate with qualitative feedback as seen in this evaluation.



9. NEXT STEPS

As already mentioned, no further funding is currently available to continue the JOY Centre Surf Therapy programme in Tokeh Village. However, on the basis of this successful pilot, it seems clear that a service would benefit young people with mental health challenges in Sierra Leone, just as it has benefited young people in other parts of the world. The next step will be to try and obtain further funding to continue the programme in Tokeh and set up a safe space there that will provide on-going opportunities for young people and their community.

An ideal scenario would be one in which the JOY Centre SL worked with local and global funders to support an on-going project. The proposed international sport for peace conference in Freetown could help in many ways to engage donors and fund raising for the surf therapy programme. The coordinators would also be responsible for raising money towards the projects. This system has worked well in South Africa and Scotland, where significant funding has been raised towards surf therapy projects.

Longer term, it is hoped that some participants who took part in The JOY Centre Surf therapy programme in Tokeh will go on to volunteer on future programmes, and help run the surf club. In fact, this has happened already, with three of the participants from the pilot scheme already signing up as a volunteers for future projects.

In consultation with the community, parents and other stakeholders, the following next steps have been identified:

1. ONGOING SURF THERAPY SESSIONS AND TRAINING

The weekly surf therapy sessions are expected to continue. Already, the Wave Alliance and Messeh Leone Trust Foundation have provided small funds to cover travel costs for the coordinators to implement the programme for the next six months. Providing safety and minor first-aid is very important for the programme. The National Tourist Board advised that some mentors must do a written and practical test as lifeguards to make sure that they are capable of saving another's life and not endangering young surfers in the water. There is a plan to organise lifeguards training workshops for the team in partnership with the National Tourist Board.

2. FUND RAISING AND INCOME GENERATING

The completion of pilot phase will act as the catalyst for the delivery of next phase – fund raising – which will provide another layer of facilities to further benefit the Community and support the ambitions of Sierra Leone Wave Alliance and JOY Centre SL to not only become a world class centre but to also significantly improve the surf therapy experience for young people and transform the Tokeh beach to attract more tourists both domestic and international. A grant proposal will have to be developed to secure funding for the long term.

3. SAFE SPACE

- JOY Centre SL seeks to commence the construction on its new state-of-the-art Safe Space. The first phase will include the building of a small wooden house/safe space with indoor meeting place for activities, inclement weather plans and storage of surf boards.
- The next phrase, subject to funding, will include adding a kitchen and computer room for the kids. The kids in Tokeh have little or no access to the computer and such a space could assist them especially with their schoolwork.
- The long-term vision for the safe space includes a range of other facilities within the structure. This will act as a hub at Tokeh beach and a catalyst for wider community outreach, delivering essential, best-in-class professional training facilities, outstanding Youth Development opportunities and community use seven days a week, incorporating programmes for visitors.





Appendix 1:

10. PROJECT COORDINATORS' REPORT

Indeed, there is much to say to advocate for this programme in Tokeh, as this initiative may lead to attracting other investments opportunities to the costliness of Sierra Leone, with a view to supporting local communities grow therapeutic surfing, boost tourism, create jobs.

Ensuring healthy lives and promoting the well-being at all ages is essential to sustainable development. There is a need to engage and empower young people - to help boost economic growth and reduce poverty through charity, private sector development and attraction of foreign direct investment. Safe Spaces in beaches will act as a platform to empower local communities and young people and as serve as advertisement for investment in the tourism sector and more importantly, the Safe Spaces as a platform to change Sierra Leone.

The JOY Centre surf therapy Programme in Tokeh is being coordinated by Mohamed Sorie Bangura and Josephine Conteh. Both attended a very successful training with partner organization in South Africa-The Wave Alliance. They have been accredited as part of the Sierra Leone Wave Alliance.

This surf therapy program has proved an incredible success. The first thing to note is that the reception by both the community leaders and the partner organisations we worked alongside was very encouraging. At many sessions we were over our quota for kids and volunteers and of note is the significant support from the The Wave Alliance, The Messeh Leone Foundation Trust and community stakeholders. We could have easily doubled the number of courses given the scale of interest from referral organisations and young people, but our resources were limited. Every household want their kids to be involved, but we had to create a balance and ensured kids from all background participated. The local chief and other stakeholders gave their overwhelming support to the project. They all came on board to assist and helped resolved many of the challenges alongside local mentors.

The conclusions we draw from this Project Pilot are primarily of excitement for what the future holds for the Project in this amazing community. The local leaders are at the forefront and have taken on this programme as a top priority. They want their kids to succeed and are doing everything possible to sustain the project.

Having participated in the The Wave Alliance training in Cape Town previously, we were aware of its positive effects, however having now run this pilot project, we have seen things in a new light. The achievements and improvements of the group of young people we worked with since we first met them before the course began have astounded us and subsequently fostered a real drive to sustain these positives and reach more young people. There is a clear need from a range of different state and non-state actors in Sierra Leone for interventions that foster confidence and boost the emotional wellbeing of young people.

We are excited! We are look forward to a bigger surf therapy programme in Tokeh.

Mohamed Sorie Bangura

Josephine Conteh

5 June 2020