

University of the West of Scotland (UWS)

*Evaluation of Surf Therapy Provision by
Groundswell Scotland in 2021*

Dr Rosie Arthur



Evaluation of Surf Therapy Provision by Groundswell Scotland* in 2021

Contents Page

Executive Summary of Key Findings	p.3-4
Introduction & Methods	p. 5
Post-Therapy Course Participant Interviews	p.7 - 17
Participant Well-Being Before and After a Surf Therapy Course	p.18-20
Discussion and Implications	p.21
References	P.22
Appendix I – Interview Guide	P.23-24
Appendix II – Questionnaires used	P.25-27

**Groundswell Scotland is a short name for Groundswell Community Project Scotland CiC SC444676*

Dr Rosie Arthur and Groundswell Scotland would like to thank all the participants who took part in this research and Dr David Carless for his support and advice during the project.

Project executive summary

This evaluation was designed to understand the experiences of those who had been part of a surf therapy course with Groundswell Scotland from 2020 to 2021, in order to get a better understanding of the collective experience, the impact of the programme and recommendations for future practice. From 5 completed surf therapy courses in total, participants from course 3 and 4 (Aug 2020-June 2021) were invited to be interviewed after they participated on a Groundswell surf therapy course and participants from course 5 (Aug-Oct 2021) completed validated questionnaires before and after the course to track changes in their well-being, social support, life satisfaction and closeness to nature.

Key findings

Outcomes of being on a Groundswell Scotland surf therapy course

All participants who were **interviewed** suggested that Groundswell Scotland surf therapy courses made a significant difference to them in areas such as their quality of life, mental and physical health and sense of social connection.

“In terms of what it’s giving my body and my mind and whole health, it’s huge” (P2)

“During the sessions as well as discovering myself and I just suddenly sort of realised yeah, things have happened to me. It’s not my fault. I can forgive myself and it felt incredible.” (P1)

The **questionnaire results** from different participants on another course mirrored some of the findings from the interview data, there were trends of increasing mental-wellbeing, life satisfaction and feelings of being close to nature as a result of participating on a Groundswell Scotland surf therapy course.

Some interviewed participants felt that the benefits that Groundswell Scotland provided were unique in relation to other therapy they had experienced.

“It really sinks in the things that I realised while I was there, compared with anything that I maybe started to realise sitting on a chair in some therapy session.” (P1)

Delivery of the Groundswell Scotland surf therapy course

The course created emotional and physical safety for participants. The experiences of spending time in the sea, talking and sharing whilst the course facilitators did the same, and somatic activities using physical objects and activities were thought to be particularly beneficial.

“Just being around the people that are at Groundswell just feels good “ (P1) “They meet you where you are.” (P2) “It was definitely a safe place.” (P4)

“It’s not just like the people on the course like sharing their experiences. Like everybody’s human and everybody’s got a story.” (P4)

“That’s what I get from the sea is joy.” (P1) “It makes you forget, like, everything else, like, when you’re in the sea.” (P4)

Recommendations for future activities

Some participants suggested they would have benefitted from a more in-depth induction process before starting the course, clearer referral pathways to access additional support if needed, and more preparation for leaving the course and facilitation to stay involved with GS activities.

“When it’s hard to say goodbye and people want to come back, it’s a sign that it works really well.” (P4)

The data suggests that the donation of wetsuits to participants and access to mobility aids to assist getting to the beach could be key enablers worth considering for future investment.

Introduction

Groundswell Scotland is a surf therapy organisation which is part of an international community which aims to support those who identify as women to surf and spend time in the sea as a vehicle to achieve enhanced mental health, well-being and community with a particular focus on supporting women who have experienced trauma. Groundswell Scotland surf programmes having been running in Scotland since 2018; stemming from the lack of gender diversity in surfing and increasing mental health concerns, alongside research publications which indicate significant mental health benefits from being in and around water (a 'blue mind'), and health benefits of surfing (the mind-set and fitness that goes with taking part in the sport). Since 2018 Groundswell Scotland has delivered 5 surf therapy courses, supporting 26 participants and 15 facilitators and volunteer peer mentors. In addition, Groundswell Scotland has hosted 4 surf festivals and 44 Community Sessions, engaging with a further 442 participants and 20 facilitators and volunteers in person. Groundswell Scotland is also taking action and demonstrating engagement to increase the diversity of genders, race and backgrounds who can access and benefit the surf therapy courses and other Groundswell Scotland activities.

The surf therapy programmes are run with an experienced course leader, a qualified Psychotherapist, at least one Surf Instructor, group facilitator and volunteers who may have previously been participants on the courses. Their facilitators are trained in trauma awareness & beach lifeguard qualified. The programmes take a holistic approach to supporting mental well-being via creating a safe space where women share and empower each other via learning about themselves whilst spending time in the sea. The current report aims to investigate how the Groundswell Scotland programmes may be beneficial for those who identify as women. Drawing from participants experiences, we also aimed to investigate how Groundswell Scotland's surf therapy programmes function and facilitate change, and possible ways the programmes could be improved.



METHODS

There were two methods of evaluation conducted

- 1) In-depth interviews with participants who had been on a Groundswell Surf Therapy course.
- 2) A comparison of participant well-being before and after participating in a Groundswell Surf Therapy Course.

All the data within this report was collected, analysed and reported by Groundswell Scotland's Academic partner at the University of the West of Scotland (Dr Rosie Arthur). Dr Rosie Arthur is a Sport and Exercise Psychology researcher who has extensive experience of conducting and publishing evaluations of physical activity and health interventions using both interview and questionnaire data. Ethical approval for all data collection processes was awarded by the University of the West of Scotland ethics board and informed consent was taken from all participants prior to them taking part.

Post-Surf Therapy Course Participant Interviews

Post-Therapy Course Participant Interviews

Methods

The participants who had completed one of two surf therapy courses (courses 3 and 4) with Groundswell between August 2020 and June 2021 (n = 7) were invited via email to participate in an in-depth, semi-structured interview with Dr Rosie Arthur (who had not been involved in the delivery of either programme they were involved in). Five participants responded to the email and n= 4 participant interviews were organised (n = 1 did not respond after initial email). A list of open-ended questions guided the interviews to capture participants' experiences of the programme and their opinions of what could be improved (Appendix I). Prior to the commencement of the study, all questions were reviewed and adapted to ensure that they would not lead participants to particular responses and encourage a depth of answering. Four participants (all self-identified as female, all white British, all over the age of 18, all had experienced trauma, and had received psychological therapy from other health professionals) accepted the invitation and the interviews were conducted in-person (n=1), over the phone (n=2), or over an internet video call (n=1) as selected by the interviewees. The interviews lasted for an average of 75 mins 29 seconds.

Analysis of Interview data

All the interviews were transcribed by a company Dictate-To-Us and Dr Arthur then analysed the transcripts using a process of thematic analysis (Terry, Hayfield, Clarke & Braun, 2017). In this process of analysis, firstly the transcripts were read whilst listening to the interviews and taking notes to become familiar with the content. Then the researcher went through each transcript identifying all comments or phrases which described concepts (nodes) which could be considered meaningful to understanding the participants experiences or views regarding Groundswell Scotland's programmes. Rosie then copied each node or idea into a Microsoft Word document, titled them and where possible, grouped similar ideas. Following the initial identification of ideas, she then iteratively organised and grouped ideas together into themes which shared meaningful characteristics and drafted themes into results tables. Once the data had been analysed, all participants who had been interviewed were sent a draft report of the findings to comment on. All participants read and approved the report, with some suggesting it was a powerful experience to read their voices within the report and one suggestion was made, and so the report was subsequently changed before being shared with the Groundswell team.

Interview Findings

Starting a Groundswell Surf therapy course		
<i>"I was so scared like but nervous and I was excited." (P4) "I felt welcomed immediately." (P2)</i>		
Some participants benefitted from meeting/knowing the facilitators beforehand.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some participants had previously done one to one surfing sessions • Some participants had previously worked with the surf therapist • Some participants had previously done sea-self-love group community sessions. 	<i>"it's (Surf therapy) is a hard thing to kind of explain without experiencing it so to have gone into any with more than just one other person would have been quite intimidating I think." (P1)</i>
Participants felt anxious before their first session.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nervous about meeting the other women on the course • Concerned about physical ability. • Worrying about their body shape and size (giving wetsuit size) 	<i>"I don't know if I'm allowed to say this but I was shitting myself. I was so scared like but nervous and I was excited but I remembered like driving to the beach and I was like alright and like as I was driving I could see the sea and stuff and I was like oh this just looks amazing, so I was like a wee kid like I was excited, but scared at the same time." (P4)</i>
They felt very welcome on arrival.		<i>"And the Course Leader, just a huge smile, welcomed you, you know, I felt welcomed immediately and the <u>other girls</u> doing the course were so sweet and they're really welcoming." (P2)</i>

Perceptions of the Groundswell environment

"Just being around the people that are at Groundswell just feels good." (P1) "They meet you where you are." (P2) "It was definitely a safe place." (P4)

Themes	Subthemes	Example quotes
Emotional safety with perceptive and caring facilitators who were accepting and non-judgemental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants needs were understood by facilitators Facilitators adapted to the participants needs without being asked No pressure to do anything Participants felt accepted Going at the participants pace 	<p><i>"They made me feel very accepted and that was all fine and, you know, again, I think it was emphasised all the way through and for particularly, what's really good was it doesn't matter what you're bringing, it doesn't matter what state your body's in or your mind's in or emotions are in, like everybody sees you as fine. If you don't surf it's fine, if you go and just look at the water it's fine. I think that was incredible, that acceptance." (P2)</i></p>
<p>A group atmosphere of listening, celebrating and supporting others</p> <p>Sometimes participants had concerns about others in the group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listening each other share their thoughts and feelings. Being happy for others achievements. Having people to go to each week to share your aspects of life with. Looking after each other. Some participants had concerns about disclosures from others in the group due to 1) being reminded of difficulties they had with other people in the past, and 2) concerns as to the other person's welfare. 	<p><i>"We would come out (of the sea) and we would like either sit down and just share like, how that was for us and like how we felt." (P1)</i></p> <p><i>"You make something and then someone goes like, 'Wow, that's amazing.' You're like, 'Oh, thanks.'" (P3)</i></p> <p><i>"I just think because everybody respected one another and like everybody took the time to listen and erm, they were just there for each other." (P4)</i></p> <p><i>"I've met people like that before and they've been really horrible to me and when she started talking about that, it kind of set off alarm bells in my head." (P3)</i></p>
Facilitators sharing as part of the group brought a meaningful sense of equality and cohesion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The sharing gave a feeling that 'we are all in this together' Not feeling like a patient or someone with something wrong with them. 	<p><i>"It's honouring to us that we aren't the sick people" (P2)</i></p> <p><i>"It's not just like the people on the course like sharing their experiences. Like everybody's human and everybody's got a story." (P4)</i></p> <p><i>"very good (for facilitators) to provide peer support and share, but not to be doing that for themselves." (P2)</i></p>
Physical safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adhering to COVID restrictions Clear safety procedures in the water 	<p><i>"The Surf instructor, who would tell you, and the course leader told you about how to keep safe and they're watching all the time.....I'm not really particularly... you know, I'm quite a risk taker, but they were so careful. And Sally even said to some of the girls who wanted to go out further into the sea and she was really, 'no, not on my watch'. And once she said that, I loved that. I'm like, good on you, you know, you absolutely keep them safe."(P2)</i></p>

<p>Physical environment provided a sense of belonging and peace</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nice to create a special space on the beach • The caravan is a relaxed and therapeutic space. • Nice memories and feelings of being there. 	<p><i>"The caravan is just a nice place to be because of the memories and stuffAnd then every week, there was like more little bits and pieces appeared like bits and pieces going up and the shells and the diffusers and the candles and it's just a nice, really relaxed place." (P1)</i></p> <p><i>"We had some little shells and rocks and stuff set out and made our own little space which was good, rather than just being sort of out in the open on the beach."(P1)</i></p>
--	--	--

Perceptions of the therapeutic activities delivered during Groundswell surf therapy course

“It really sinks in the things that I realised while I was there, compared with anything that I maybe started to realise sitting on a chair in some therapy session.” (P1)

Themes	Subthemes	Example quotes
Reflective journal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helpful to provide quiet time for reflection and build self-awareness. • Good to have a record to look back on. • Some participants found it difficult to complete and weren't sure what to write and it felt a bit like school-work at times. 	<p><i>“That was good because it sort of, gives you that little bit of quiet time to sit and think about what was going on and what, how I was feeling on the day and especially afterwards as well. Otherwise, without the journal I think I wouldn't have reflected properly on what I've gained from each session. And it's good still to have now, I've not worked through it yet but I think I will work through it sometime in the future just to sort of remind myself.” (P1)</i></p>
Breath work & grounding techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some found the groundings and breathing really helpful • Saying the standard phrases out-loud within the groundings didn't always feel meaningful to participants. 	<p><i>“We'd walk down and you'd take a moment and just think of, like appreciate the nature and I don't know, just even like looking far out and just imagining what it's like under the sea and what's on the other side.” (P4)</i></p> <p><i>“Even just like sitting there and teaching you how to breathe like you're filling up your belly and like slow breathing out and the breathing in and just telling you that you respect yourself and stuff like that.” (P4)</i></p> <p><i>“At the beginning of the programme you would do a ground speech, like mother ocean...talk about the way you were connected to the ocean, I felt that it was just words in a way.” (P3)</i></p>
Somatic & Physical activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dancing was relaxing and joyful and participants could let go. • Physical actions paired with intentions or affirmations made things real and memorable for participants (writing on stones, throwing stones into the sea, burning writing) 	<p><i>“Something compared with like sitting speaking to a therapist or something and saying yeah, I need to do this or whatever actually physically, doing it together is what made the difference, I think. And there was, I'm saying there's quite a few things that would come up whether it was leaving on the sand or whatever. And there was the burning and that sort of stuff. It really sinks in the things that I realised while I was there, compared with anything that I maybe started to realise sitting on a chair in some therapy session.” (P1)</i></p> <p><i>“And I wrote on the rock..... And I remember it was hard to write it, I knew that's what I needed to do and then we had to physically place it in the circle in the middle. And the action of actually doing that made it real.” (P1)</i></p>
Having symbolic & transitional objects to take away	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having objects (Flower, Stones, Photographs, Clay Shells, wetsuit) to take away was very meaningful to participants and facilitated memories of positive experiences. 	<p><i>“We handed a flower to somebody else and said something good....something positive about them. That was a little bit of, it was good to be able to take something away and still have that. This sounds a little bit silly but it was being able to physically have the flower and see it every day and know that I still had that part of, that had brought that away from me from the course. It's a little thing but there is meaning behind it and what we said to each other as we passed them around. It's same with the rock, writing on it. Yeah, those little things helped.” (P1)</i></p>

The benefits of the sea/surfing experienced during the programme	
<i>“Understanding what the sea can bring and that it’s part of your healing and knowing it’s part of your healing and why, is huge.” (P2)</i>	
Being in the sea brings joy, respite, freedom to play	<p><i>“That’s what I get from the sea, is joy” (P1)</i></p> <p><i>“It makes you forget, like, everything else, like, when you’re in the sea (P4).”</i></p> <p><i>“Makes you think back to your inner child, sort of, thing. And that’s brought that out in me and aye, I probably am quite immature and like act like a kid when I’m in the sea, so, aye, it’s quite fun.” (P4)</i></p>
Experiencing different sea conditions help to make sense of different emotions and experiences	<p><i>“There was always a way of making sense of whatever was in my head by the way the sea was, whether it was calmer today and sometimes you need that or realising that you can, the crazy day when the waves are all massive and crashing and smacking in the face and knocking you off the board but that’s okay. And you can maybe find peace out the back or whatever was going on, it could relate to the ocean and sort of answer the questions in my head somehow or another.” (P1)</i></p>
The sea has a constant and reassuring presence	<p><i>“Mother ocean thing is quite a powerful like word, like the mother. Like a mum thing and you just feel like when you’re in the sea you’re getting a cuddle from your mum and being hugged.” (P4)</i></p> <p><i>“The sea is still there so actually what it (the course) does is, to introduce you to something that can change your life and not just for X amount of weeks.” (P2)</i></p> <p><i>“Because it (the sea) reminds me of everything we did with Groundswell.” (P1)</i></p>
Swimming and surfing in the sea provides a sense of achievement	<p><i>“Then I got a wave, that was a brilliant moment.” (P1)</i></p> <p><i>“Sometimes I think it just taught me like I kept going, like, this is just like life like things do hit you in the face. And then you feel quite proud, you’re like I actually kept that kept doing, I didn’t wuss out and I continued doing what I was doing.” (P4)</i></p>
The sea brings people together, providing a feeling of belonging,	<p><i>“It’s water people almost, people who love the sea, so you find a tribe of some kind it’s feeling belonging with people who understood the sea....I didn’t know people loved the sea like I did.” (P2)</i></p> <p><i>“I think it helps sort of bring together people with the similar sort of way of being, similar personalities when you all enjoy the water.” (P1)</i></p>
Supported swimming/surfing provides experiences of being looked after	<p><i>“I’m on board and she (surf instructor) just stood right in front of it and she just held on. So, she went through quite a few waves with me and just held on because I’m hanging on, I’m hanging on, just go with it, you know. It was beautiful, we do that together, and she was like, “Oh,” and I’m like, “Yeah, it’s okay,” you know, because again that kind of, oh my gosh, someone’s looking after me. She was like, oh, and she said it was really a pleasant experience for her too that just being able to take someone through that fear and literally hold them.” (P2)</i></p>
Having a wetsuit had significance as a protector, enabler and a symbol of positive identity.	<p><i>“I’m a wee bit self-conscious, at least when you’re in the sea you’ve got, you’re covered up with your wetsuit.” (P4)</i></p> <p><i>“Feeling like it’s yours and you’re part of something, wetsuit protects you and makes you feel looked after and it’s an enabler, a huge enabler.” (P2)</i></p>

Participant outcomes of the surf therapy course

"In terms of what it's giving my body and my mind and whole health, it's huge" (P2)

Themes	Example quotes
Improvements in quality of life and well-being	<p><i>"It's (my life is) a lot better." (P1)</i></p> <p><i>"And everybody saw it... he went, oh my God, and I said 'sorry? He said, "Oh my God," he said, "Look at you," and I'm like, "What do you mean?" He said, "You just look completely transformed these two months. You look like a different person." He said "I can't believe it.".....,we should all be doing this (surf therapy)..... I think it was my whole demeanour he said I was happier, healthier, I was a lot fitter, the sea gets you fitter without you noticing it...he saw that joy and that's what I get from the sea is joy". (P2)</i></p>
Increased sense of self-worth and self-acceptance	<p><i>"I think it was a mixture of some of the nice things that people had said to me during the sessions as well as discovering myself and I just suddenly sort of realised yeah, things have happened to me. It's not my fault. I can forgive myself and it felt incredible." (P1)</i></p> <p><i>"I think because like when we talked about like how we were feeling and stuff, like we acknowledged it. And, you know, I had a chance to like face head on things that were bothering me, and, you know, hang-ups about myself, and realising that like only you can actually like, you know, love yourself..... you have to love yourself, not the other way around, like have people love you. Like you have to be able to just accept the way you are." (P3)</i></p> <p><i>"suppose like it's taught me that I can...I can do anything. Like if you try, if you put your mind to it, you can...you can achieve it, but there's no rush as well." (P1)</i></p>
Increased resilience	<p><i>"I learned that I was braver than I knew, I learned that I had...I could surf the waves, I didn't have to sink, that I can fall down and get back up again" (P4)</i></p> <p><i>"Life has huge highs and lows which you can learn to accept them, like the waves in the sea, 'just surf it.' We get up and we go again. it's like you can surf and you can learn to deal with it, you know? Dealing with the wipe out and the only way to deal with it, was to relax." (P2)</i></p>
Wanting to live life more (less suicidal thoughts)	<p><i>"I remember like, you know I said like I would go to the beach and sit on the rocks and like stare into the sea and stuff like, there would be wee times when I used to think...I used to want to go in the sea, but not come back out (permanently). But now, like, with Groundswell, I would go out into the sea, but I would want to come back out. So that sticks with me quite a lot as well actually." (P4)</i></p> <p><i>"Having the surf sessions gave me a reason to want to get up and enjoy life a bit more." (P1)</i></p>
Use of the strategies taught on the programme	<p><i>"Kind of get up and do a little bit of yoga and a shower in the garden with a hose in cold water, it sounds crazy but it feels good! And then just sort of doing some different sort of breathing techniques and stuff and taking that time for me..... yeah, a lot of that stuff had come from Groundswell." (P1)</i></p> <p><i>"They like they taught me so much as well. Like even things like kind of breathing techniques and ways of relaxing and aye, just like wee things like that that you've picked up like the tiny wee things, but they stick with you." (P4)</i></p> <p><i>"I've been to the beach myself, like just going on a walk or whatever. And then I've just like sat in the sand and all the deep breathing like deep breaths in and stuff</i></p>

	<i>and close my eyes and listen for the sounds and feeling the sand or like the water in your toes. Like things I wouldn't normally concentrate on before."</i> (P4)
Better Sleep	<i>"I would sleep like a baby like that night and like I do have problems like sleeping sometimes. So like after doing all of that, I remember driving home and I'd feel quite refreshed and happy and then come to the afternoon, I'm like woah, I'm ready for my bed."</i> (P4)
New relationships and a sense of community	<p><i>"I definitely made, like friends for life I would say."</i> (P4)</p> <p><i>"We all swapped like numbers and Facebook friends and stuff. It's official when you're Facebook friends. And then we've met up...we've met up a few times."</i> (P4)</p> <p><i>"It's just lovely to know these people like caring and doing, and I've been in contact with other groups nowit's a start, it's not an end."</i> (P2)</p> <p><i>"It's lovely to think that, so you are part of a huge community of people that love the sea."</i> (P2)</p>
Increased connection and time spent in the sea	<p>All participants wanted to do more swimming and surfing in the sea and some were also encouraging their children to join them.</p> <p><i>"I've started doing like the cold-water dips and stuff but it's not even just the cold now. I know if I go to the sea, things will be better."</i> (P1)</p> <p><i>"I actually went sea swimming in a swimming suit for the first time recently and. But I don't think I would have done that if I hadn't have done the Groundswell."</i> (P4)</p> <p><i>"I've learned more about that (the moon) as well. To do with the tide and stuff, you know. It's like wow, like I think that would be really interesting."</i> (P4)</p>
Appreciation of nature	<i>" Like just appreciating like how beautiful it (nature) looks and how calming it is and if you see like litter lying about, like that's disgusting like, I'll go and pick it up or put it in the bin or whatever, like outside my house actually there's like some trees...and I was watching some kids and they're like breaking the branches off and like wrecking the tree..... I get quite protective of it."</i> (P4)
Creative and intellectual pursuits	<p>Motivation to find out more about Trauma</p> <p>Increased confidence and engagement in artistic activities (Poetry, Art work)</p> <p><i>"You (create) something and then someone goes like, 'Wow, that's amazing.' You're like, 'Oh, thanks,'"</i> (P3)</p>

Participants suggestions of opportunities for Groundswell

“When it’s hard to say goodbye and people want to come back it’s a sign that it works really well.” (P4)

<p>Induction process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making the purpose and detail of the programme clearer before participants start. • More information online about GS (e.g., website) • Provide more details about the course to participants before it’s starts (e.g., how many people were going to be there; more information and visual pictures or film to help participants visualise where they were going would be useful) • Consider a pre-course session with the therapist to ensure all participants are ready for the course, has appropriate support outside of the course and team have appropriate background information. 	<p><i>“I think it’s just the unknown like not really knowing who’s going to be there, how many people, what they were going to be like, what sort of level of surfing everybody else would be, what we were actually going to do.” (P1)</i></p> <p><i>“Probably someone like The Therapist ...beforehand, having a little chat so she can affirm just, you know, if there’s somebody got something, say they were frightened of—say their trigger was, I don’t know, anything or something....., just so that you know and you can be aware of that. And I’m sure that would come out but I think it makes a person feel safer.....it’d be just good to know before you come that you’re safe. Because when you get there you’re safe.” (P2)</i></p>
<p>Referral pathways before, during and after the programme</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearer routes to referral to other mental health professionals. • Clearer guidance regarding accessing support from the course therapist during or after the course. 	<p><i>“A chat with the therapist, where can I go to get more support - Very important for people who are thinking about self-harming.” (P2)</i></p> <p><i>“I think once you start it’s hard to stop. So, I think if you’re someone that hasn’t had the chance to share before coming to the programme, all the stuff coming out I think it’s important to plan for that.” (P2)</i></p>
<p>Ideas for delivery of the course</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More dancing and use of music both in and out of the water. • Writing letters to leave in the sea. • Swimming in your swimsuit. • Groundings and affirmations could be personalised to resonate more. • Possible changes to surf journal • Adaptions for disabilities to get the beach (buggy or bike) • Evening fire on the beach 	<p><i>“Imagine if you like thought of a song that kind of had some kind of meaning to you. And then you bring it into sea and bring a (waterproof) speaker into the sea or something and play the song....something empower you...say if you had bad feelings about something or someone.....it’s kind of like this is my song, like this is me like fighting back as you are swimming.” (P3)</i></p> <p><i>“More swimming in costumes to get the proper sense of the cold hitting you.” (P3)</i></p>

<p>Leaving the programme</p>	<p>Participants found it hard when the programme ended – suggestions to make this easier were provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants valued the leaving ceremony. • There could be a tapering off of the sessions/activities (e.g., every two weeks). • Some type of meal or extra time to chat as group as closure to the course. • More speaking about and preparing for the end of the course. • Clearer direction regarding how they could stay involved with/contribute to Groundswell. • To have a check-in a month later 	<p><i>“It was, like it's like breaking up like....I know it probably sounds a bit creepy aye but it was like breaking up, like with your partner.” (P4)</i></p> <p><i>“Sort of ceremony thing like at the end, oh, that like totally, like that was quite emotional actually even like I was like tearing up listening to other people. Like it was so nice and like the way they'd done it like picking a flower head and you'd pass it to like your surf sister and, oh aye, it was quite emotional.” (P4)</i></p> <p><i>“I think the only sort of thing I'd say that, it's not even, it seems to very much end kind of abruptly. We went from seven weeks of every Friday, that's when I went and that's what I did and I got used to it and then suddenly, it wasn't there anymore.” (P1)</i></p>
<p>Opportunities to continue activities with Groundswell</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make the Facebook page more active. • Participants appreciated being able to attend Sea-self love sessions (one off community surf sessions) • All participants were looking to get involved with volunteering or fundraising opportunities. • Would like Informal meet-ups at the caravan to surf, get together for coffee, would be welcomed. • Monthly 'Sand Circle' meet ups are appealing. 	<p><i>“It would be really nice to have those links. to be included in some way, in some connection will be lovely.” (P2)</i></p> <p><i>“We were told, we want to keep in touch and for you to be part of Groundswell, but how?” (P2)</i></p> <p><i>“So, maybe even if there is some sort of way where that could still be accessed.....other people or just to be able to go down and have like a coffee once a week or something or every now and then have it setup that you can just go down and meet everybody again.” (P1)</i></p>

Participant Well-being Before and After a Surf Therapy Course

Participant Well-Being Before and After a Surf Therapy Course

Questionnaire Methods

With a focus on increasing diversity, in August 2021, 5 members of the African-Caribbean Society (Edinburgh), and 1 volunteer were invited to part in a 7-week Surf Therapy course (all self-identified as female, ethnicity = 2 African; 2 white; 2 White-African; all over the age of 18; two participants were receiving psychological support during the course). All participants and volunteers were invited to complete a series of validated and reliable quantitative questionnaires during; 1) the first week of the surf therapy course, and 2) the last week of the course. The questionnaires captured their perceived; a) mental well-being; b) life satisfaction; c) available social support and d) closeness to nature. All participants were informed that their individual responses would be kept confidential and would only be accessed by Dr Rosie Arthur.

The participants completed the following surveys which are published, valid and reliable self-report questionnaires which have been shown to be related to significant health and behavioural change (See Appendix 2 for the scales used);

Mental Being: The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS; Tennant et al., 2006)

Life Satisfaction Scale: Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985)

Perceived Social Support: Oslo Social Support scale (OSSS-3; Kocalevent et al., 2018)

Closeness to Nature: Illustrated Inclusion of Nature in Self Scale (IINS; Kleespies et al., 2021).

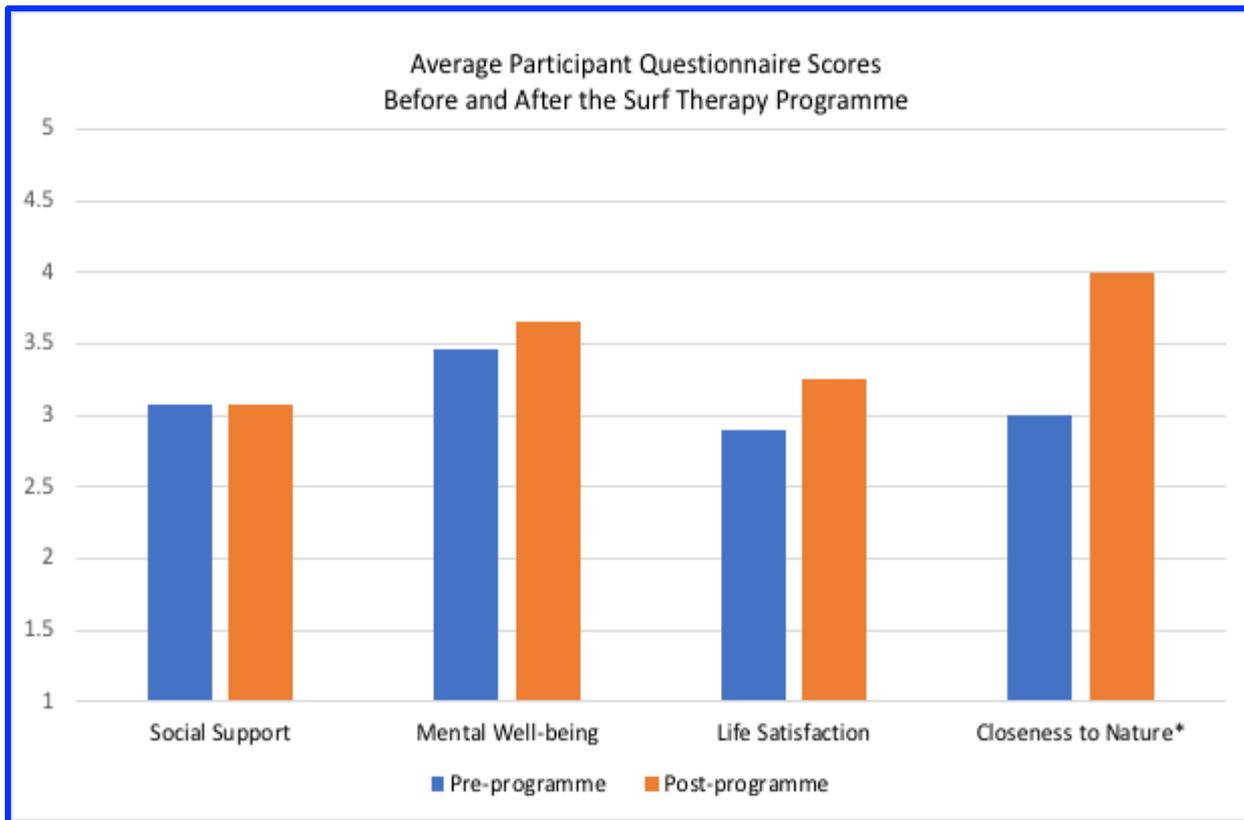
Questionnaire Analysis

Post course-questionnaires were not completed and/or included for two participants who were absent at the last session (so a total of 4 questionnaires were analysed).

The questionnaire data was analysed by calculating each participant's average response score on each questionnaire, and this data was used to calculate the groups average response for both a) before the surf therapy programme b) after the surf therapy programme.

Due to the small sample size (n=4), it would not have been meaningful to conduct any statistical tests of difference to compare the pre and post programme data, thus it is important to exercise caution when interpreting the quantitative data as being representative of significant change.

Questionnaire Results



**The data from the Closeness To Nature scale was converted to be on a range of 1-5 to allow display with the other variables.*

As displayed in the graph, there seem to be trends suggesting increases in mental well-being and satisfaction with life and larger increases in how close the participants felt to nature, as a result of participating on the Groundswell Surf Therapy course. Again, these differences have not been tested statistically, so caution is required, but the findings echo the findings from the participants who were interviewed that participating on a Groundswell surf therapy course can improve participants' mental health, appreciation of nature, and life in general.

Unexpectedly, according to the questionnaire responses perceived Social Support did not seem to increase during the course. This result is not in line with interview responses where participants suggested they "made friends for life" and a felt that whole new community had become available to them. One reason for this could be, that the participants on this specific course were from the Afro-Caribbean society and already knew each other before the course, so were less likely to gain new friendships, expand their social network and so increase their sense of social support whilst being on the course.

Overview of Findings and Implications

The findings from this report suggest that the Groundswell Surf therapy can have a powerful effect on women's quality of life, mental health and sense of social connection, particularly for those who have experienced trauma. According to the interview data, the benefits seem to arise from the emotional safety and the therapeutic practices provided by the course facilitators, combined with the provision of supported and safe experiences of the sea, which seemed to bring a sense of mastery, resilience and emotional regulation to participants. Whilst the data needs to be interpreted with caution due to the small sample sizes, the findings support a growing body of evidence regarding the benefits of surf therapy in different populations (e.g., Marshall et al., 2020). Indeed, the data does suggest that Groundswell surf therapy courses are likely to be of benefit to vulnerable women in East Lothian who have experienced trauma. Furthermore, there were some indications within the data that Surf Therapy possibly assists participants in different ways to more traditional therapies. In particular, the group sharing which included course facilitators and therapists sharing their feelings alongside participants, and the use of somatic activities and transitional objects (such as stones) seemed to be particularly powerful for participants.

As well as improving the quality of life for participants, the data suggest that an appreciation and closeness to nature increases as a result of being a participant on a Groundswell Surf Therapy course. This is not just relevant to mental health outcomes but also the climate and environmental emergency, as there is robust evidence that those who feel close to nature, are more likely to engage in pro-environmental behaviours (Whitburn, Linklater & Abrahamse, 2019). Thus, by Groundswell facilitating more women to spend time in the sea they are likely to encourage pro-environmental behaviours which are of great local and global importance.

Within the interviews, there were several recommendations from participants including: a more in-depth induction process before starting the course; clearer referral pathways to clinical expertise if additional support was needed; and more preparation for leaving the course and facilitation to stay involved with Groundswell activities. Indeed, participants suggested it would be helpful to be clearer about when and how they could access support from the course Surf Therapist or other mental health professionals. Furthermore, a sea/surf community group where participants could stay involved and access continued support following their participation on a Surf Therapy course could be really well received. Wetsuits were also mentioned as a key enabling factor, whereby participants could continue to enjoy the sea and its benefits independently if they had one. Therefore, Groundswell may want to consider seeking funding for wetsuits to be donated to participants, as a method of further increasing the sustainability of positive outcomes. Furthermore, participants suggested that mobility aids (buggies/bikes/wheelchairs) would enable more people who found it difficult to walk to the beach to benefit from the Groundswell courses.

It is hoped that these positive results and documented experiences provide a springboard for future funding in order to support more individuals who identify as women to take part in Groundswell Surf Therapy courses. It is also hoped that the rigorous evaluation of these courses will be ongoing, to further support this work and assess its success in changing the lives of vulnerable women across East Lothian and beyond.

References

- Diener, E., Emmons, R.A., Larsen, R.J. & Griffin, S., (1985). The life satisfaction scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 49 (1), pp.71-75.
- Kocalevent, RD., Berg, L., Beutel, M.E. *et al.* (2018). Social support in the general population: standardization of the Oslo social support scale (OSSS-3). *BMC Psychol* 6, 31.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-018-0249-9>
- Kleespies, M.W., Braun, T., Dierkes, P.W., & Wenzel, V. (2021). Measuring Connection to Nature—A Illustrated Extension of the Inclusion of Nature in Self Scale. *Sustainability*, 13, 1761. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13041761>
- Marshall, J., Ferrier, B., Ward, P. B., & Martindale, R., (2020). “When I was surfing with those guys I was surfing with family”: A grounded exploration of program theory within the Jimmy Miller Memorial Foundation surf therapy intervention, *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice*, 11(2). <https://www.gjcpp.org/en/article.php?issue=36&article=208>
- Tennant, R., Fishwick, R., Platt, S., Joseph, S., & Stewart-Brown, S. (2006). Monitoring positive mental health in Scotland: validating the Affectometer 2 scale and developing the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale for the UK, Edinburgh, NHS Health Scotland. <http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/1719/5776-affectometer-wemwbs-final-report.pdf>
- Terry, G., Hayfield, N., Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2017). Thematic analysis. In C. Willig, & W. Stainton Rogers (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology* (17-37). (2nd). London: SAGE Publications.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 1

Participant Interview Guide

Consent Script for In-Person Interviews (to be read at the start of each interview): Before we begin the interview, I want to ask you to read the informed consent form for this study.

(Waits for the participant to read the form) Now that you have read this, do you fully understand the written informed consent or do you have questions? (If the participant has questions, then the investigator will answer these questions before repeating the question about whether the participant fully understands the written informed consent; this will be repeated until the participant is able to answer “yes” to that question. The participant will then ask the participant to sign the consent form.)

Introduction

Through this interview, I am hoping to gain a better understanding of your life, along with your experiences of the Groundswell Surf Therapy Programme. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and you may choose not to answer any of the questions I pose today. If you feel you would like to take a break at any time, just ask. There are no right or wrong answers. I am most interested in hearing about your experiences, your perspectives, your beliefs, and your stories.

1. To begin, I'd like to you find out more about you, could you tell me a bit about yourself?
2. Prior to groundswell, what was your involvement in water-based activities?
3. How did you come to hear about Groundswell?
4. Why did you decide to attend Groundswell?
5. Tell me about your first session with Groundswell.....
6. Did you continue to attend all sessions (why or why not?)

Prompt- what are your thoughts on the sessions and number of sessions provided?
What lead you to that conclusion?

Prompt- what barriers did you experience to attending sessions, could you tell me about one of those times?

7. What was your most memorable moment on the programme?
Prompt – can you tell me what happened? How did you feel?
8. What did you enjoy the most as part of Groundswell?
Prompt – Can you describe what happened?
9. Was there anything you didn't particularly enjoy?
10. What did the Groundswell staff do that was especially helpful?
Prompt – what happened to lead you to this view?

11. What could Groundswell staff do better in future?

Prompt – what happened to lead you to this view?

12. What advice would you give anyone planning to take part in a Groundswell Programme.

I would also like to understand if being part of Groundswell has affected your life in anyway

13. How (if at all) has your life changed since being part of Groundswell – Can you tell me more?

14. Has participating in Groundswell has changed your mental health? (yes/no) – Can you tell me more? (*prompt*: How has participating in Groundswell changed the way you think about yourself; can you tell me about a time when that happened)

15. Do you think participating in Groundswell has changed your physical health? (yes/no) – Can you tell me more?

16. Is there anything you do differently, as a result of your time a Groundswell?
Probe: relationships, time in nature

17. What aspect(s) of Groundswell had the biggest impact on you?

I would like to finish thinking about the next steps on your journey

18. What would you like to happen next?

19. Would you be interested in follow-on activities with the Groundswell surf community? – tell me more about what these might be

20. Would you be interested in becoming a volunteer in future programmes (yes/no) – can you tell me more about why?

I would like to thank you very much for you time and participation in this research. If you feel like you would like to add anything, please do (await response).

**this is a semi-structured interview guide so the questions and the order in which they were asked changed slightly within each interview to allow the interviewee the freedom to share as they wished, but overall topics and style of questioning remain the same.*

Perceived Social Support:

Adapted Oslo Social Support scale (OSSS-3; Kocalevent et al., 2018)

We are interested in your life experiences at the moment.

How many people are so close to you that you can count on them if you have great personal problems? (please circle)

- 1- *'none'*
- 2- *'1-2'*
- 3- *'3-5'*
- 4- *'5+'*

How much interest and concern do people show in what you do? (please circle)

- 1- *'none'*
- 2- *'little'*
- 3- *'uncertain'*
- 4- *'some'*
- 5- *'a lot'*

How easy is it to get practical help from people you know if you should need it? (please circle)

- 1- *'very difficult'*
- 2- *'difficult'*
- 3- *'possible'*
- 4- *'easy'*
- 5- *'very easy'*

Mental Being Measure:

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS; Tennant et al., 2006)

Below are some statements about feelings and thoughts.

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

STATEMENTS	<i>None of the time</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Some of the time</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>All of the time</i>
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
I've been feeling good about myself	1	2	3	4	5
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

Life Satisfaction Measure:

Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I am satisfied with my life.	1	2	3	4	5
2. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.	1	2	3	4	5
3. In most ways, my life is close to ideal.	1	2	3	4	5
4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The conditions of my life are excellent.	1	2	3	4	5

Closeness to Nature Measure

Illustrated Inclusion of Nature in Self Scale (IINS; Kleespies et al., 2021)

Select a circle from those below that represents your self and nature.

