



**What are the effects of surf  
therapy ?  
Why does it work?**



**Dr Rosie Arthur**

**Sally Harris**

**Shane Padamada**

**Natalie Small**

**Anne Marie Gufferty**





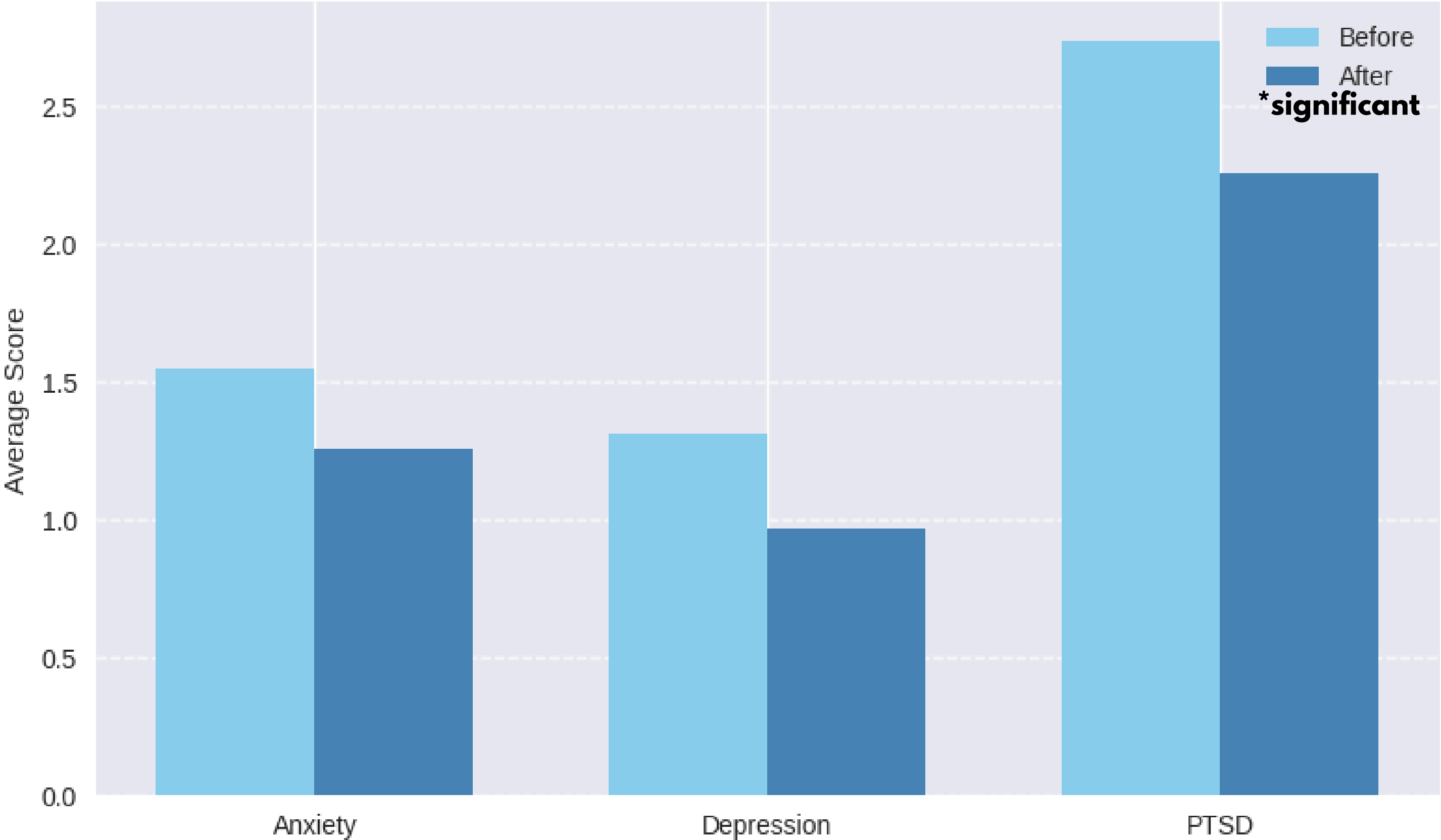
## Evaluation Project

2023- 2025

- Participants in 7-8 week Surf Therapy Programmes provided by the Groundswell Community project (both in San Diego and Hawaii) and Groundswell Scotland.
- 43 Participants before their courses started, 36 Surf Therapy Participants after the course.
- 19 Surf Therapy Participants' questionnaires could be compared before and afterwards.

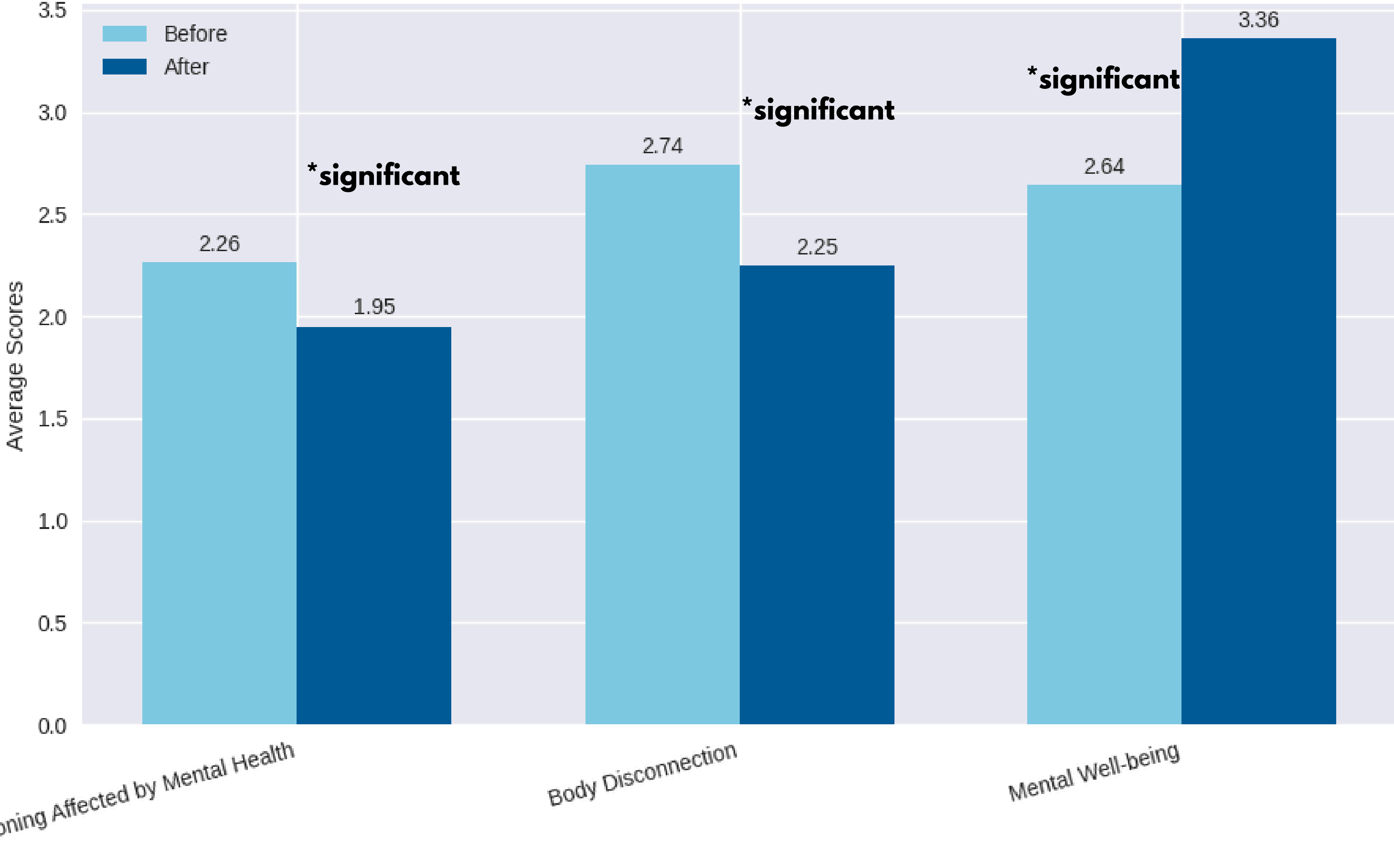
# Mental health before and after surf therapy

Slide 1 - Mental Health Outcomes



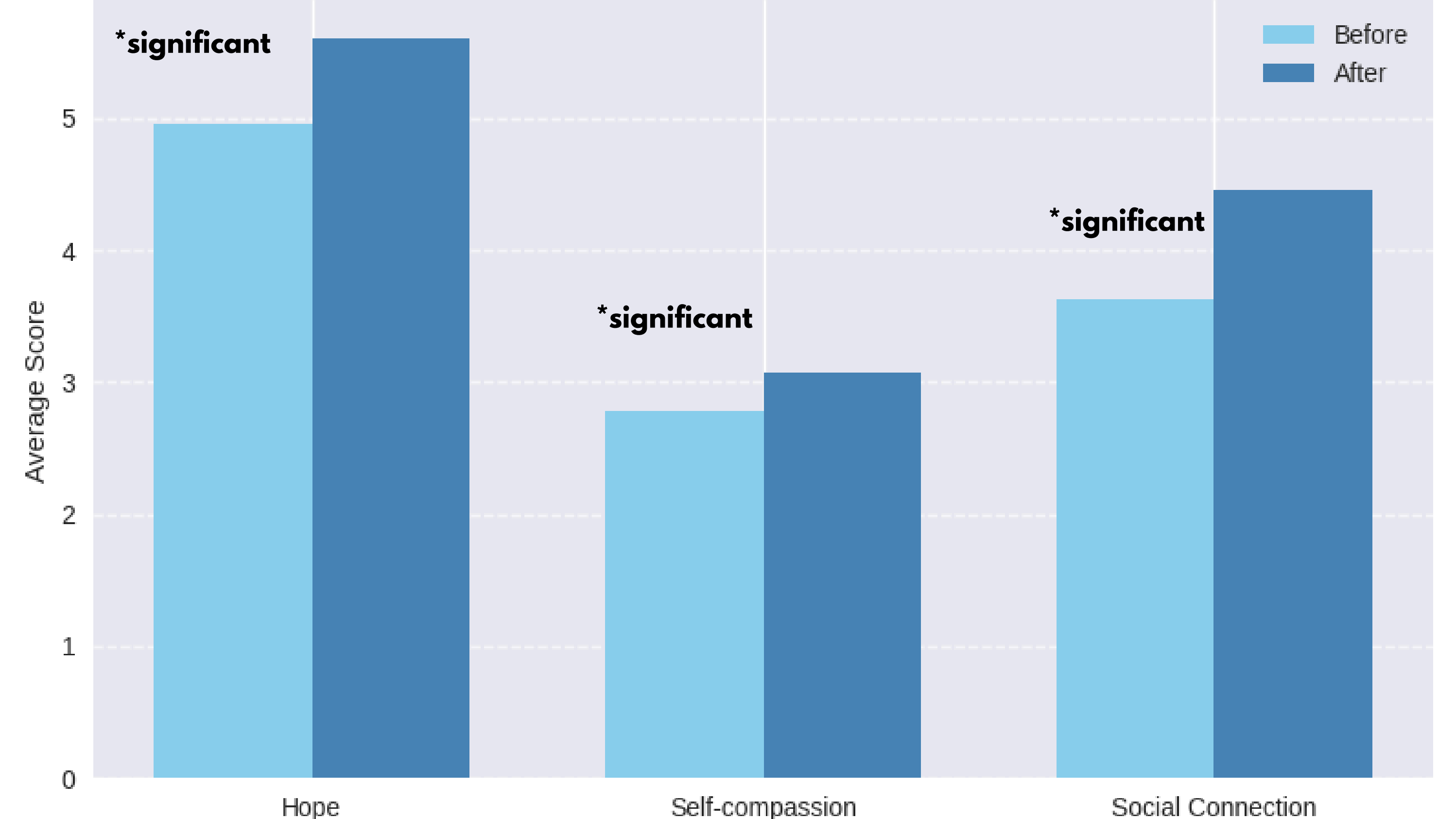
# Mental Well-being before and after surf therapy

Mental well-being & Functioning Outcomes



# Well-being before and after surf therapy

Slide 3 - Positive Psychological Outcomes



## Personal Impact of Surf Therapy

Participants described meaningful shifts in identity, confidence, calm, and embodied well-being.

Reconnection with self — feeling like themselves again, rediscovering humour, voice, and identity.

Body reconnection — improved mind–body awareness, grounding, and presence.

Growing confidence and agency — feeling stronger, more capable, and able to face challenges.

Calm and emotional regulation — learning to let go, feel safe in the moment, and reduce overwhelm.

Safety after trauma — rebuilding trust in their bodies and the world after difficult experiences.

Joy and play — rediscovering fun, laughter, and the desire to keep surfing.

“PTSD from health hospitalizations made me feel weak and vulnerable. Now I feel safe to try things again”

“I have learnt that I am good enough. That I am constantly evolving. To believe in myself & to speak up, not be pushed down when trying to speak out about what I feel & believe in”.

“For the first time in months i gave myself permission to have fun, play, be silly and laugh”

“I feel I found myself. My voice, my humour.”

“Surf therapy has taught me that I’m strong and able to challenge myself and **SUCCEED.**”

## Programme Experience & Delivery

The programme's design, staff, and group environment were central to participants feeling safe, supported, and able to grow.

- Gentle, supportive approach
- Caring, skilled staff — facilitators described as compassionate, competent, and trauma-informed.
- Safe and welcoming — participants quickly felt accepted, grounded, and comfortable.
- Community and belonging — strong peer connection, inclusion, and shared experience.
- Inclusive, peer-led model — participants valued equality, choice, and shared learning.
- Positive energy and playfulness — a warm, uplifting tone that made healing feel accessible.
- Helpful self-regulation practices — grounding, nature, and physical activity work together.

“Excellent facilitators and volunteers — compassionate, competent, trauma integrated.”

“Acceptance, gentleness, playful approach to fundamental topics”

“The program is very positive in bringing together the supportive techniques used each week. The combination of physically active learning a new skill, being in nature & with others who believe in you”

“High calibre women that welcomed me in and showed me I belonged and got to have FUN again”



**Thank you!**

**[rarthur@qmu.ac.uk](mailto:rarthur@qmu.ac.uk)**