



SURF THERAPY REPORT

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS IN
CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN CHORRILLOS

September 2019 – February 2020

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To grow up in an at-risk community with poverty and delinquency is common in a city like Lima. In this environment, there are many negative influences that affect the development of the most vulnerable populations, namely youth and adolescents.

In Alto Peru there are opportunities for children to break out of this pattern and become positive influences for the children of Chorrillos. One of these opportunities is sports. Proyecto Alto Peru has been facilitating sports programs in Alto Peru for thirteen years to elevate the wellbeing of the youth in the community.

Our mission is to transform Alto Peru into a safe and healthy community where children can thrive, to create opportunities for learning and development, and to expand our model to other communities in need.

The surf therapy program has helped us to realize our mission, serving not only the children of Alto Peru, but similar at-risk groups throughout Chorrillos and other areas of Lima.

SURF THERAPY PROGRAM

The surf therapy program was designed to promote physical and mental wellbeing by combining surfing with recreational activities. The program was designed to increase participants' personal wellbeing, confidence, and self-esteem, as well as improve emotional intelligence, communication skills, and their interpersonal relationships.

Originally the program was designed to last an entire year; however due to COVID-19, we had to stop in March. As such, the program ran for seven months. During those seven months, we worked with 89 boys and girls with ages ranging from eight to fourteen years old.

Due to COVID, it was very complex to complete our post-program analysis, and as a result, this report is based on a less comprehensive data set.

BACKGROUND

For over ten years, Proyecto Alto Peru (AP) has been utilizing sport as a tool to connect with the children in the neighborhood, Alto Peru. From the beginning, we understood that sports programs can be used to promote wellbeing in children by creating a safe space that allows for the growth of individual abilities and the development of a collective identity. However, we did not have a structured format for our programs.

At the start of 2019, Waves for Change, an organization based in Cape Town, South Africa, helped us start our pilot for what would become the Alto Peru Surf Therapy Program. Waves for Change shared their established and proven surf therapy methodology and allowed us to use it as a foundation for our own program. We ran our first surf therapy pilot with the children of Alto Peru and clients (children from other districts) between January and March of 2019. We ran two sessions a week with each group and each session lasted two hours.

During our first pilot program there were 28 children. In the client group 69% were girls as opposed to 28% in the Alto Peru group. In April, we began our second pilot which consisted of two sessions a week in the afternoon, with each session lasting two hours. The second pilot has 22 participants from Alto Peru and surrounding districts. Forty-five percent of the participants were girls, and 49% of the participants were from Alto Peru.

We learned a lot from our successful pilots, and we used these lessons along with the expertise from Waves for Change to improve our group activities and ensure that the Alto Peru Surf Therapy Program would have the greatest possible impact on the lives of the children in our community.

After our two pilots, two members from our team were invited to South Africa to train on site with Waves for Change. This experience helped to formalize the relationship between our two organizations and provided us with the expertise to train our team in Lima.

Our training took place over five three-hour sessions in which our team learned about the four pillars of surf therapy: access to a safe space, the role of the adult mentors, creating fun and challenging activities, and developing tools and skills to face day-to-day challenges.

The team also received first aid training in two three-hour sessions where they acquired basic knowledge in emergency medical care both in and out of the water. Finally, all of the mentors met with a psychologist to reflect on the weeks' activities and discuss how to apply sound scientific principles to better serve the children of Alto Peru.

Between September and December, we began to put into practice all that we had learned in our training and pilots. Amongst these new lessons, we also learned how to relate to the kids, how to generate a safe space, and how to create playful activities and techniques to help resolve conflict.

Thanks to the Wave Alliance (a team consisting of Waves for Change and other organizations dedicated to promoting mental health using surf as a therapeutic tool), we were able to start our Surf Therapy program by adapting the Waves for Change methodology while taking into account all we have learned from our experience serving the youth of Chorrillos for over ten years.

PARTICIPANTS



**Children
ages**

8 - 14 old

From Chorrillos, San Genaro, Pacifico, and Alto Peru.

The kids who participated in the surf therapy program were at-risk, disenfranchised youth exposed to violence, delinquency, and drugs. These factors are a significant barrier to healthy development and community wellbeing.

Number of participants:

September-December: 33 children

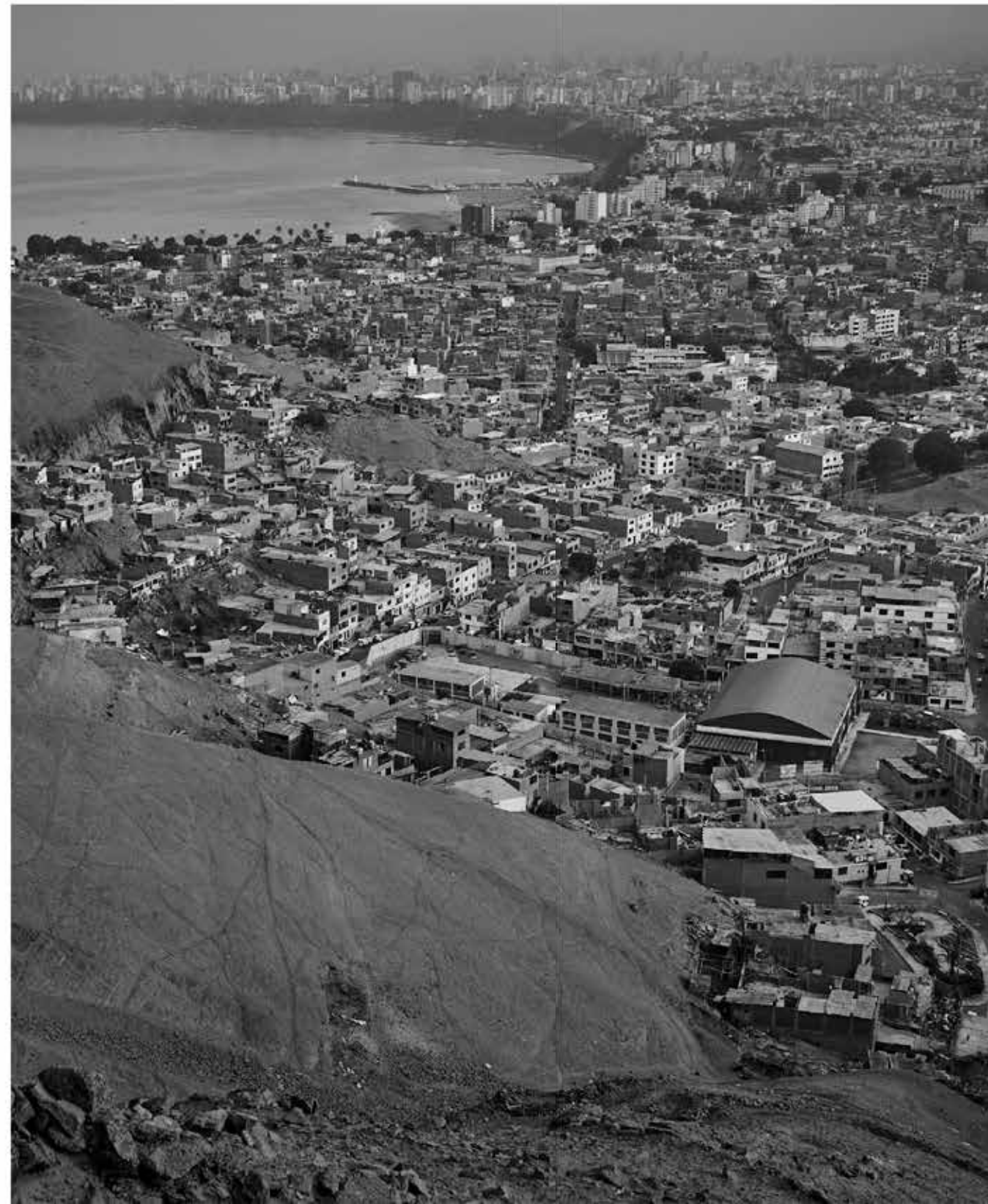
January-February: 55 children

66%

66% of the participants have witnessed or experienced violence, stabbings, or gunfire.

46%

46% have had to seek medical care due to violence at home.



The Team and the Living Conditions in Alto Peru

The team for this program consisted of three psychologists and four young-adult mentors who grew up in the community. One of the psychologists has taken a leadership role in which she supervises the entire process and facilitates weekly meetings with the team. The other two psychologists work in conjunction with the mentors in the field.

The mentors were all participants in the Proyecto Alto Peru Sports for Development program as children. As time passed, they grew, acquired new skills and responsibilities, and now - after completing our training program - are valued members of our team.

As a part of the training process the Surf Therapy team analyzed the living conditions and daily challenges in the lives of the children they serve.

They identified a variety of factors and challenges (such as violence, abandonment, lack of opportunities etc.) and evaluated how these can negatively affect the children's self-esteem, feelings of sadness, or lack of interest in daily activities. Other consequences identified of equal importance were the lack of support and lack of access to education.



LIVING CONDITIONS OF ALTO PERU

After analyzing the living conditions in Alto Peru, the mentors identified key aspects to consider while working with the at-risk kids.

- POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP AND MENTORSHIP
- SAFE PLACES
- EMOTIONAL CONTROL
- SELF-ESTEEM
- LISTENING
- BONDING
- HEALTHY HABITS
- HYGIENE

These aspects are bound to mental, social, and physical health.

With these key aspects in mind, the mentors adapted the surf therapy program to be directly tailored to the children of Alto Peru.



OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM

**“PROVIDE
TOOLS TO
CONTROL
STRESS”.**

To achieve this, we made the following
specific objectives.

**STRENGTHEN
TRUST AND
SELF-ESTEEM**

**INCREASE
CONTROL OF STRESS**

**INCREASE
SELF-EFFICACY**

**DEVELOP
SOCIAL SKILLS**

**INCREASE
EMOTIONAL
INTELLIGENCE**

INTERVENTION

7 months / **once a week**

INITIAL
CIRCLE

▶ BEACH
CLEAN UP

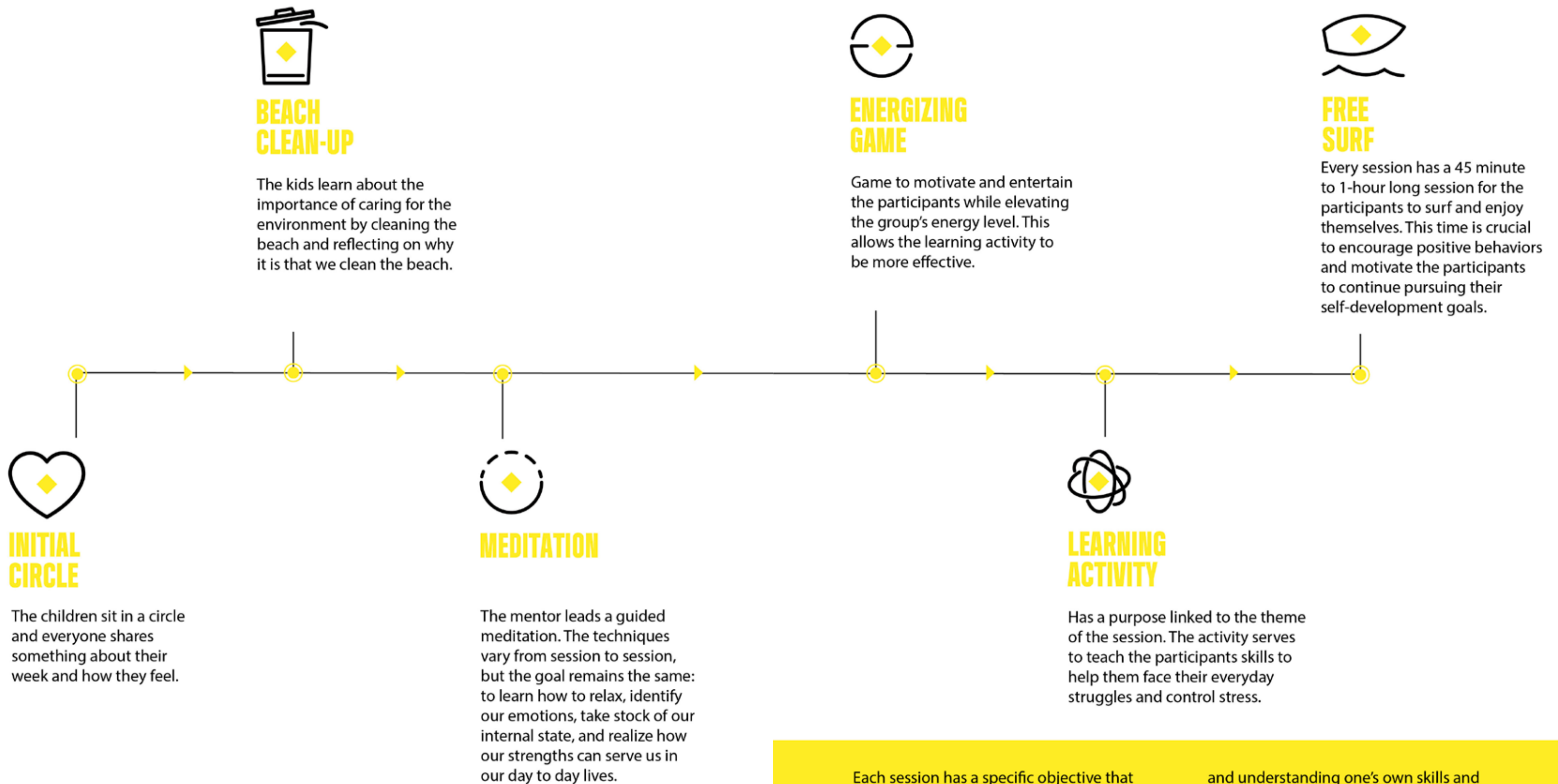
▶ MEDITATION

▶ ENERGIZING
GAME

▶ LEARNING
MOMENT

▶ SURF AND
FINAL CIRCLE





Each session has a specific objective that was planned beforehand and said objectives informed the structure of the program, our program was designed with three stages:

- a) Create healthy relationships (strengthen trust and empathy).
- b) Develop skills to face stress (learning to identify emotions, use breathing techniques,

and understanding one's own skills and strengths).

- c) Prepare the kids to be independent (identify when and where they can use these skills in their day to day).

Each session was designed to address one of these stages so that we could have a positive impact on the lives of the children.

RESULTS

To evaluate the impact of the program, we chose to use three psychological tests to measure each participant's progress. The plan was to use these tests before, during, and after the program. The program was initially designed to last a year, but due to COVID it ran for only seven months.

Initially, we planned to use the tests to track the progress of every participant, but this plan was disrupted due to COVID-19. Data from 15 participants were acquired before the program was interrupted by the pandemic.

The tests utilized were as follows:

Warwick Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale (WEWS):

A psychological test that measures mental wellbeing through a seven-question survey (a version adapted by Waves for Change). For our purposes, questions were translated from English to Spanish.

STRENGTHS AND DIFFICULTIES QUESTIONNAIRE (SDQ)

A test that detects possible cases of behavioral or mental disorders in children aged 4-16. The test asks about 25 attributes that are divided between five scales. Four of these scales focus on emotional symptoms, and the fifth scale focuses on positive behaviors. Questions were translated from English to Spanish.

WORD ASSOCIATION

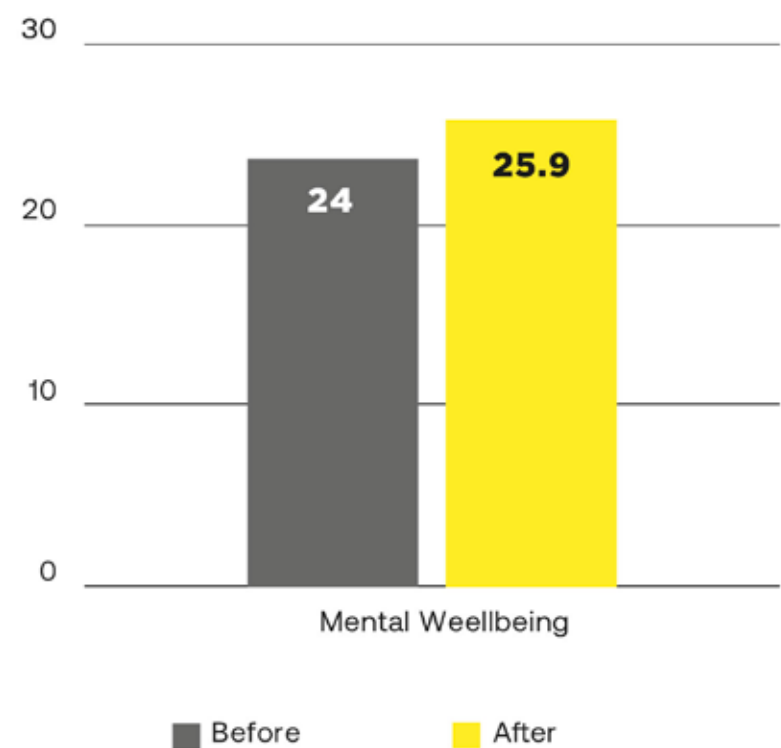
A test that allows us to identify what words the participants associate with the beach and surfing. Test implementation was done in a playful way, wherein the kids responded as fast as possible with the words that they have associated with the beach and surfing.

The results found in the SDQ, Warwick wellbeing scale, and the word association all demonstrated positive changes in the lives of the participants. The SDQ and Warwick wellbeing scale are validated in Spanish-speaking countries, such as Chile and Spain.



RESULTS AND FINDINGS

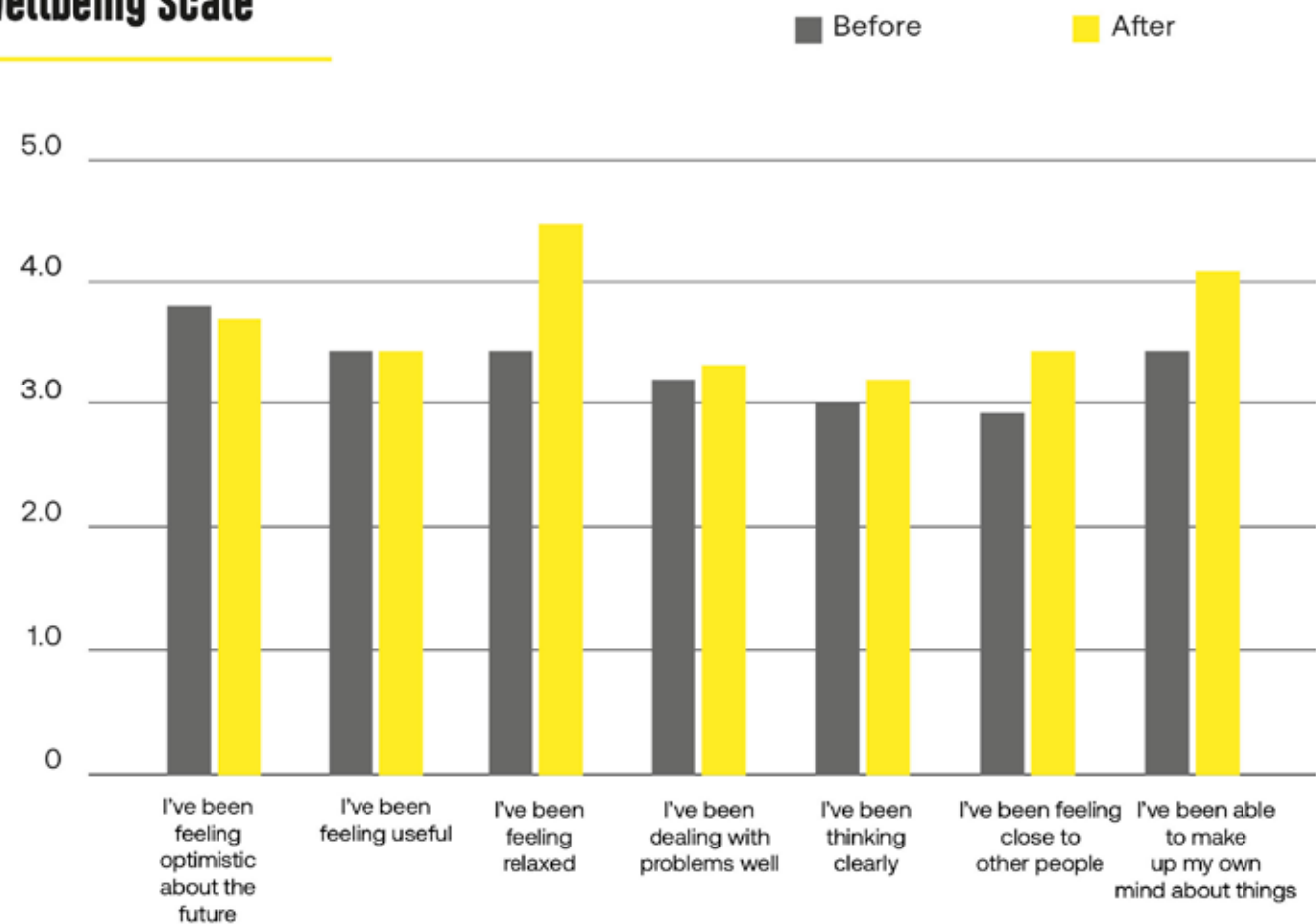
Warwick Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale



As you can observe in the graph, the average mental wellbeing of the group increased from 24.0 to 25.9 indicating an improvement in the mental wellbeing of the participants.

In order to have a better understanding of the results, we analyzed individual items of the WEWS before and after our intervention.

Warwick Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale



The most significant positive differences among the individual items can be found in items 3, 6, and 7.

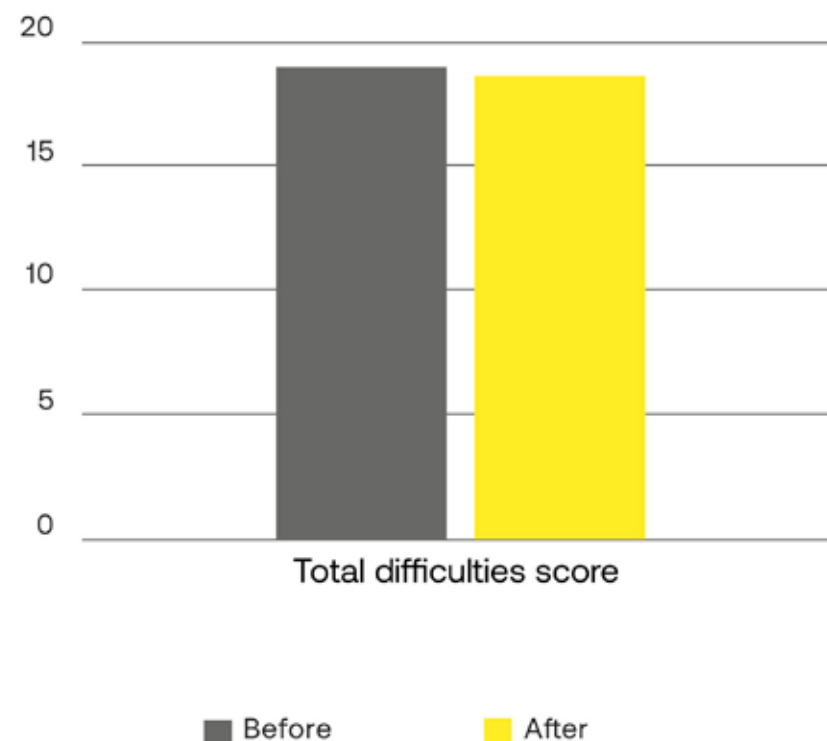
The increase in item 3, "feeling relaxed", is related to the participants' reduction in stress. During the program, participants had the opportunity to play and develop tools to face stressful situations (breathing techniques, or identifying emotions).

The increase in item 6, "feeling closer to others", indicated that the participants had better interpersonal relations and learned new, healthier ways to become closer with others. Both are important for social development and the participants' wellbeing.

The increase in the participants' feelings of autonomy (item 7), indicated greater confidence in ones' abilities to make decisions, greater personal development, and greater security in one's self and in one's abilities.

In contrast, we observed a small negative difference in item 1, which assessed optimism for the future. This effect could be explained by findings obtained from our pilot with the WEWS. In the pilot, participants had difficulty understanding this question. Despite adaptation of the item, the question "do you feel that things will go well in the future?" may have continued to cause difficulty with comprehension. Because of this, it is likely that results do not represent actual changes in item 1.

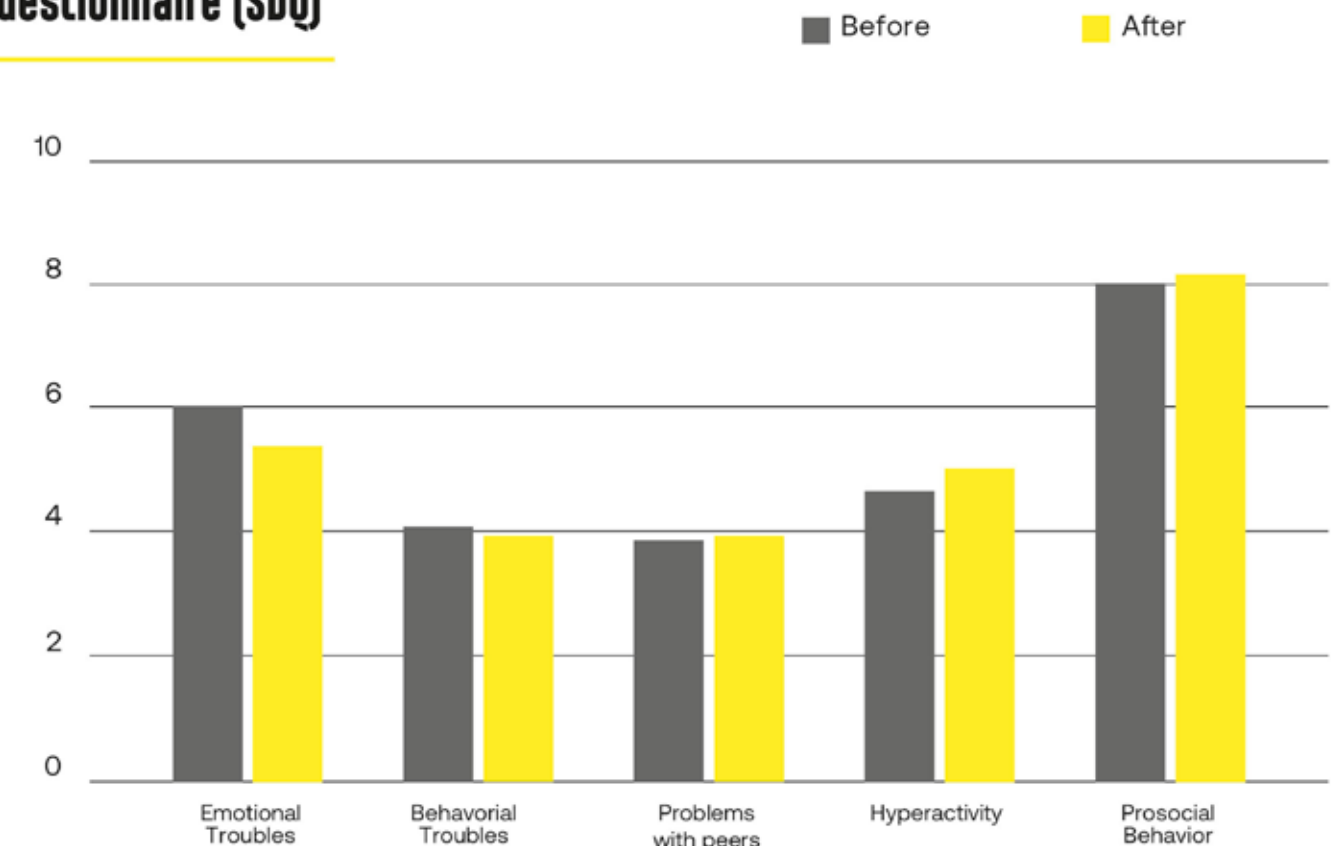
Results from the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)



The total score of difficulties decreased slightly, from 18.50 to 18.30. This indicates that participants expressed a decrease in the level of difficulty they faced in their day to day lives throughout the duration of the program.

In order to have a better understanding of the results, we broke down each areas of measurement below.

Results of Questionnaire (SDQ)



The three areas we evaluated using the SDQ that showed the greatest changes were: emotional problems, behavioral problems, and prosocial behavior.

The reduction in the score of emotional problems (area 1) indicated a decrease in the feeling of fear or worrying and an increase in feelings like happiness and motivation.

The reduction in the score of behavioral problems (area 2) indicated a reduction in aggressive or impulsive attitudes and an increase compliance with rules and social norms.

The increase in the score of prosocial behavior (area 5) indicated a greater sense of friendship, freedom to share and express oneself, and desire to help others.

The next two areas in the chart (problems with peers and hyperactivity) show the most notable maladaptive changes before and after our intervention. Problems with peers and hyperactivity increased.

Both results, we believe can be explained by the home and community environment that the participants live in, variables that our intervention cannot address and are constant challenges for the children.

On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that 3 of the 15 participants did not participate in the program consistently, and those participants showed the lowest amount of improvement. Importantly, the measurements presented in this report were taken halfway through the program, so we can expect that these areas would have improved if the program had been allowed to run to completion.

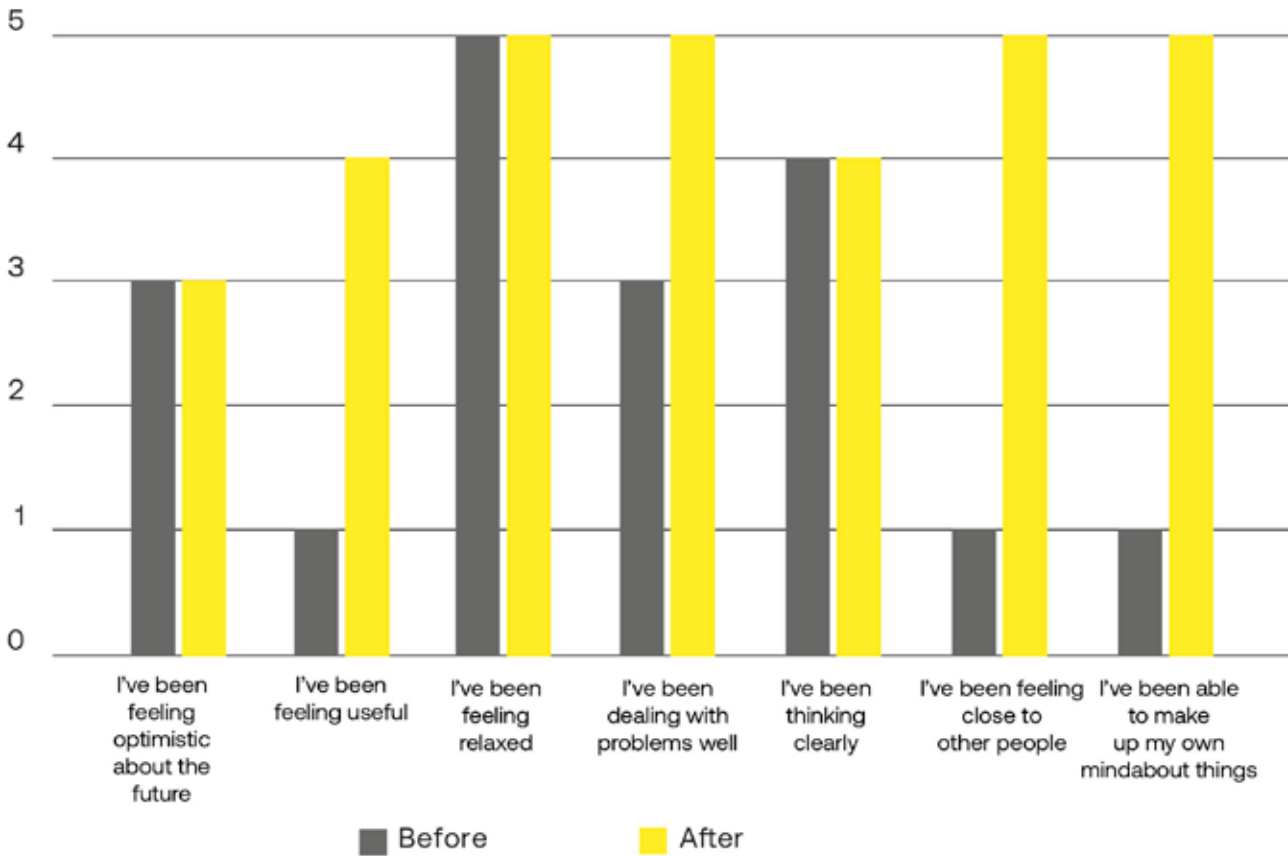
SPECIFIC CASES

Some participants showed exceptional progress after completing the program. Some of these individuals' results will be shown below due to demonstrate their growth.

CASE 1

As you can see in the chart, Case 1 showed very low scores in items 2, 6, and 7 in the pre-intervention measurement. However, after participating in the program consistently their scores increased considerably, showing increases in their ability to execute tasks, feeling closer to others, and feeling confident in making their own decisions.

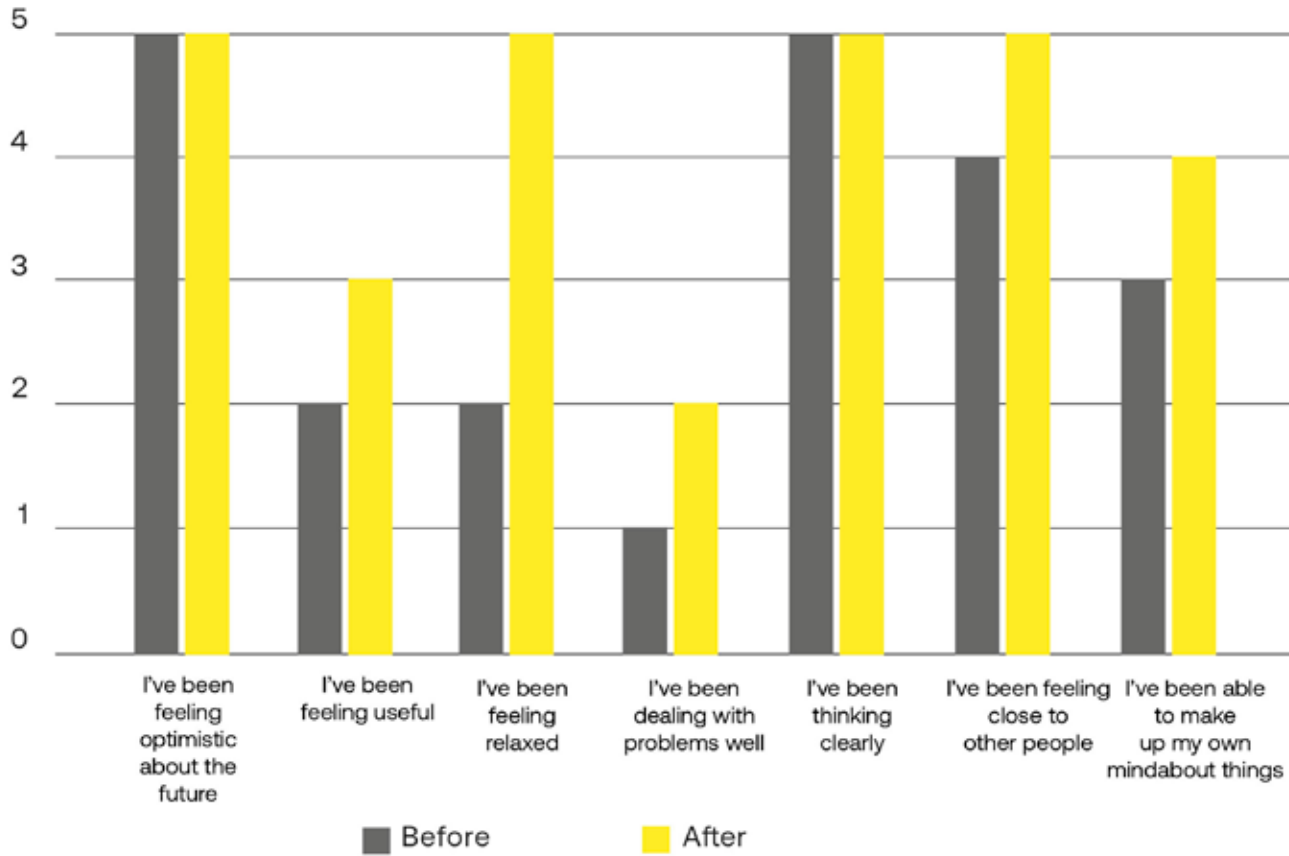
Warwick Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale



CASE 2

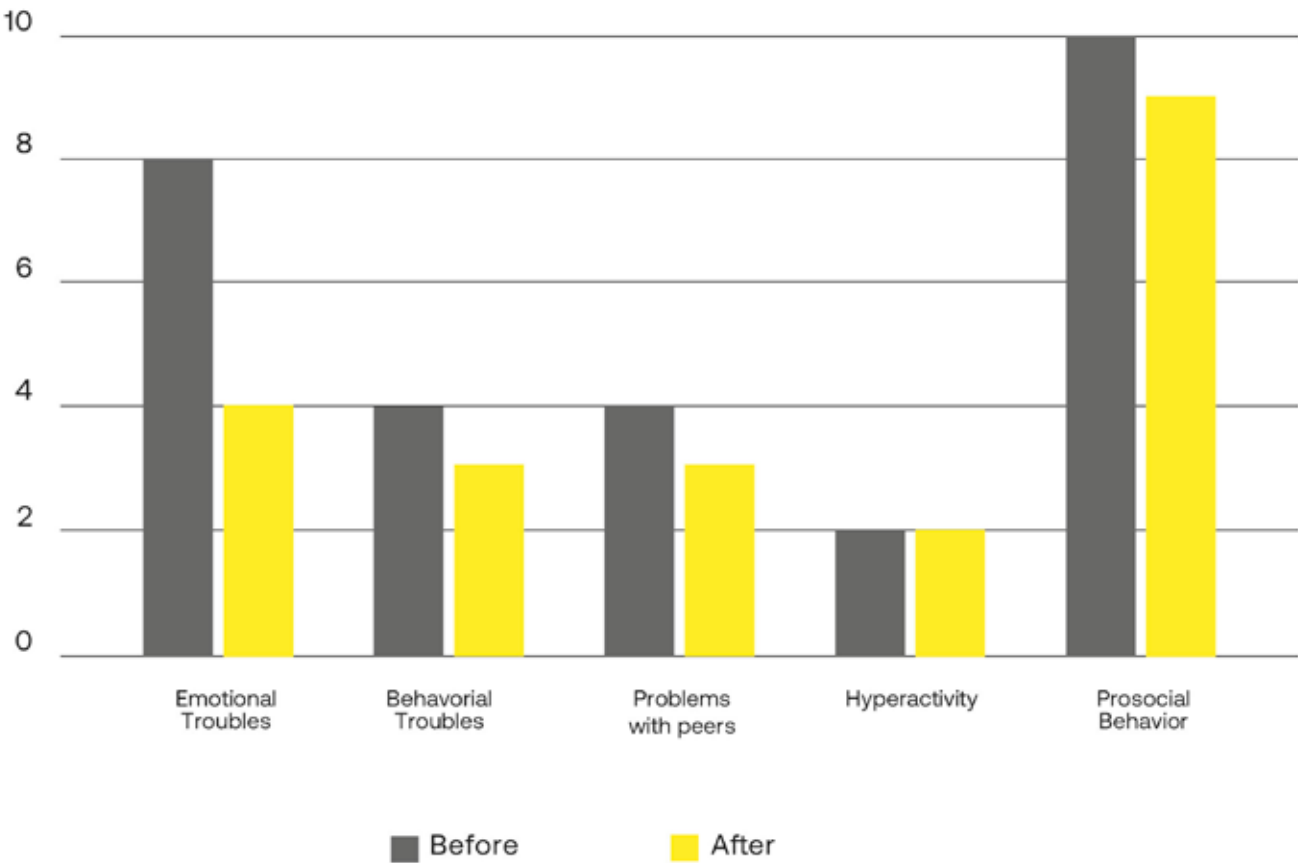
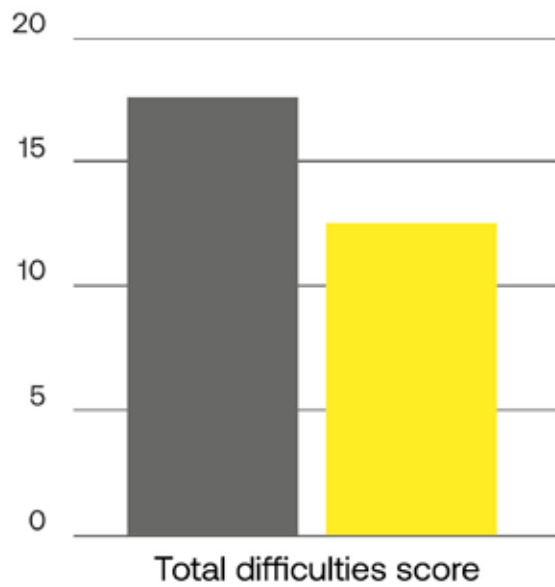
As you can see in the chart, Case 2 shows very low scores in items 2, 3, and 4 pre-intervention. However, after participating in the program consistently their scores improved considerably showing increases in their ability to face problems, feel relaxed, and their ability to execute daily tasks.

Warwick Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale



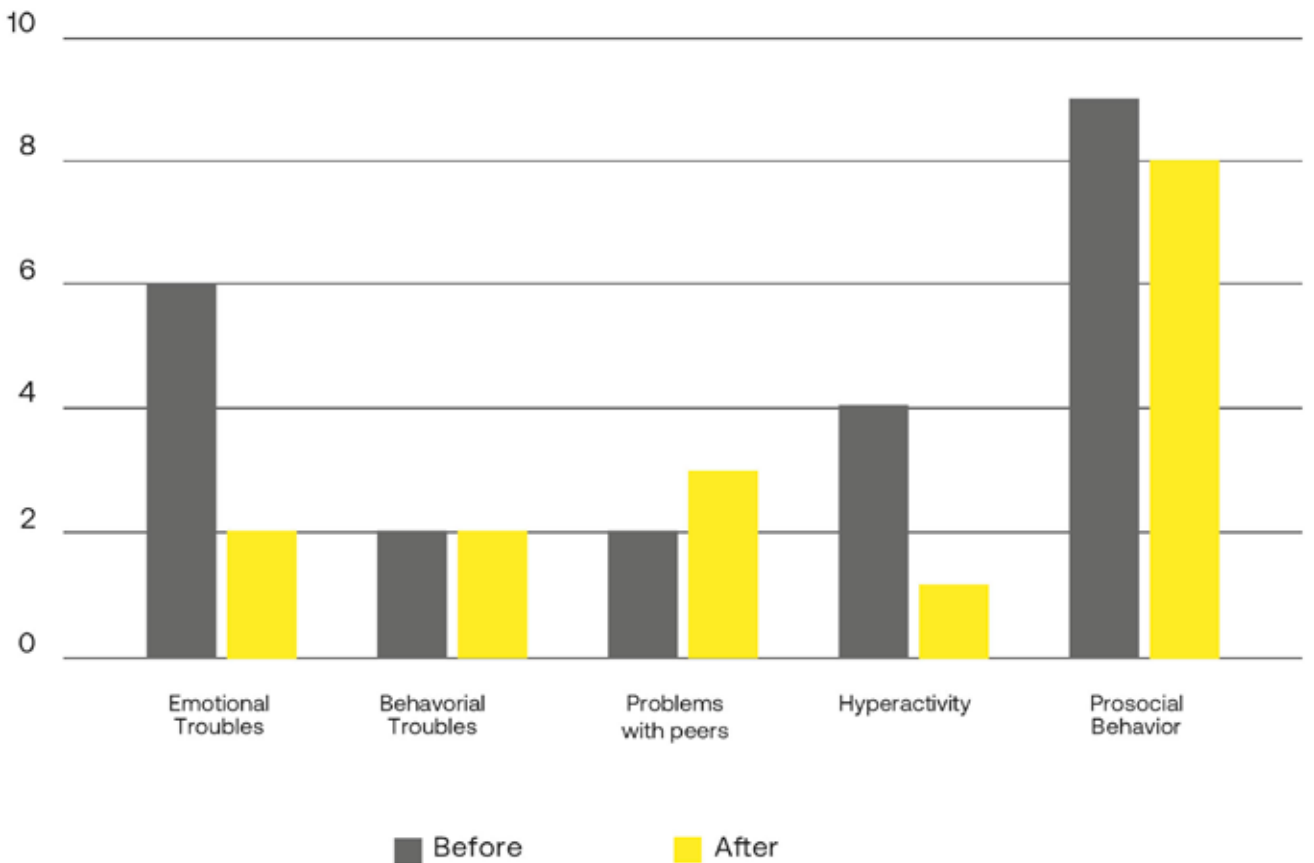
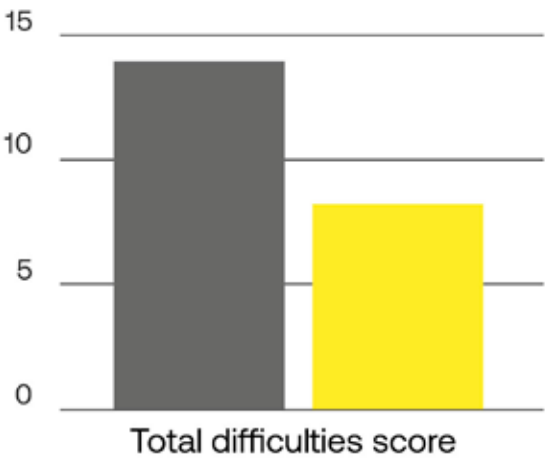
CASE 3

As you can see in the chart, Case 3 significantly reduced their score of total difficulties from 18 to 12. According to the SDQ manual, after completing the surf therapy program, this specific participant's score reflects that they dropped from a category of "high risk" to "close to average risk" in relation to their risk of facing serious difficulties in life due to their behavior, emotions, hyperactivity, and their relationships with others.



CASE 4

This individual also reduced their score of total difficulties significantly. Their score decreased from 14 to 8 points. Both score reductions according to the SDQ manual – demonstrated that this individual reduced their risk to face serious difficulties in life related to their behavior, emotions, hyperactivity, and their relationships with others. Here it is important to highlight that the scores relating to emotional problems and hyperactivity reduced significantly, showing obvious improvement.



Before starting the program, we asked the participants to say the first thing that came to mind when they think about the beach and surfing.

▼
WAVES
SURFBOARD ▶
SWIM
BOAT

And after the program we asked the same question.

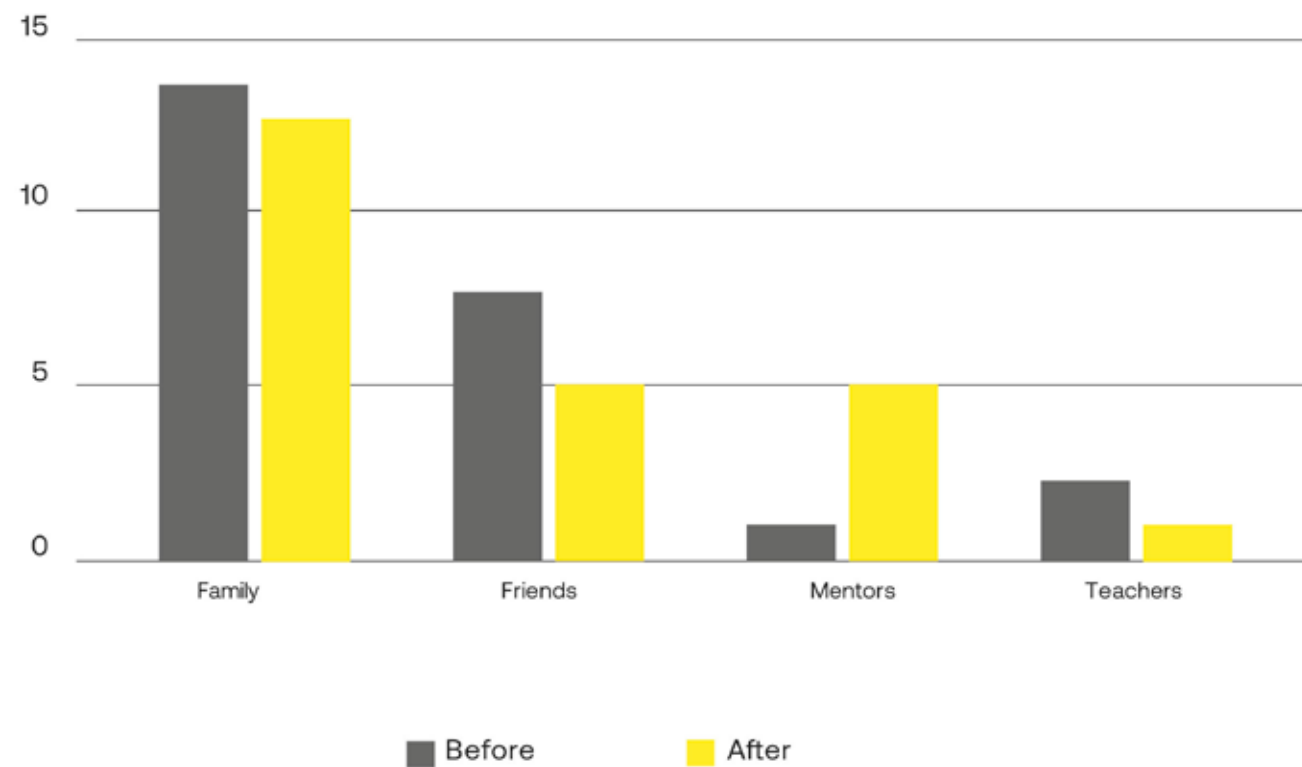
▼
RELAXING
BEING HAPPY
LEARNING
FUN
HAPPINESS

In the word association, most of the participants initially related surfing and the beach with words such as "swim", "boat", "surfboard", "waves", or the "regattas club". After six months of the program, the beach and surfing were associated with "relaxation", "happiness", "fun", "learning", and "being happy".

These findings demonstrated the positive effect that the program has had on the participants and suggests that the intervention was effective in creating safe spaces with adult mentors that facilitated learning through fun activities.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

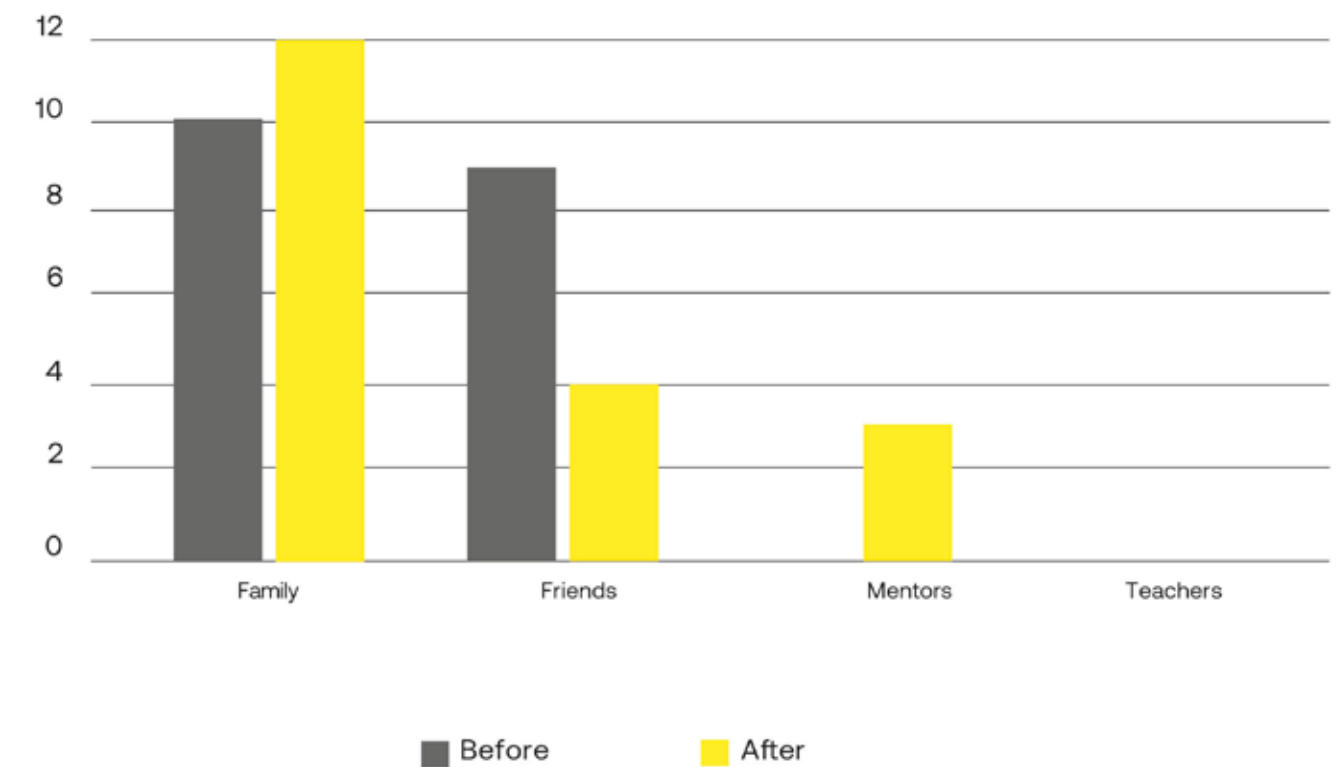
When you have difficult things to do who gives you the strength to overcome them?



This chart indicates who the participants can turn to when their tasks become difficult.

As you can see, after the program we found that the participants listed the mentors of the surf therapy project as people they could turn to.

When you have problems and you feel sad or annoyed who can you talk to?



As you can see, family and friends are the primary form of social support for the participants. However, after the program the mentors of the surf therapy project became another source of support for the children who participated in the program.

Both results showed how those who worked in the program developed into their roles as mentors using the skills they developed during their training program.

MOTHER'S TESTIMONIALS

As we have seen friends and family are the primary form of social support for the participants. By the time the program came to an end the mentors became an additional source of social support for the participants.



"I like how my child developed a bond with nature and the group and that they felt cared for and respected"

"I like that the program promoted caring for the environment. The mentors quickly established bonds with the children and created a secure environment for them"

"I like that it helped my daughter strengthen her relationship with the ocean and not be scared of it anymore"

"I like the how the mentors created a comfortable, friendly, and respectful space"

"I like the games and how the mentors cared for my child, and helped teach them to learn from and respect the ocean"

Also, the parents mentioned that they noted differences in their children over the course of the program. Some of their answers were related to the connection that the children had to the ocean and the skills they learned to face difficult situations.

"I saw that she was more resilient in the face of, and was more able to reflect upon some the challenges that arrive in daily life."



TESTIMONIALS FROM THE TEAM

"at the start we thought that we weren't going to be able to make significant change, however with time, we saw a transformation in many of the children. Changes in the way that they express themselves, the way they shared and helped their friends, many went from being the tough guys in the group to becoming calmer and more secure. I think the program helped a lot of the kids to improve their attitudes."

JESÚS VERANO



"I think the program helped the kids gain social skills, and taught them to be a part of a team and support their teammates. Also, they learned how to enjoy themselves and connect with nature. We helped the kids overcome things they thought were impossible, and helped them to conquer their fears. We helped them develop ways to have fun without harming their mental health."

ELÍAS AGUIRRE



I accompanied a group of kids for a few months and at the start it was complicated, but I feel that the program has helped a lot. One area where the kids improved is in their feelings of responsibility, tolerance, and an overall better attitude and outlook on life.

DANILO TUESTA



CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The Surf Therapy program was effective and created a positive change in the participants before being interrupted by COVID-19. In the six months that the program ran, it increased the overall well-being of the participants.

All the same, it is important to highlight that some of the participants experienced greater changes than others. These changes include improving social connections, reporting feeling more relaxed, and showing less difficulty in overcoming emotional difficulties or problems with their peers.

Additionally, it is important to mention that the results of those who did not demonstrate the same level of change can be attributed to the fact that those children did not complete the program, and we believe that more time is required to demonstrate profound changes. Additionally, some of the participants did not participate consistently in the program, which affected their results at the time of measurement.

As for the social support, we can conclude that at least one group of participants identified the mentors as a source of support, and they felt that they could come to the mentors to talk. This is evidence that we were able to generate a safe space for the kids.

Despite the difficulties connected to the program ending prematurely, we are encouraged by the results from the first 6 months of the intervention. We remain dedicated to our mission, we will reflect on the reasons that not all of the participants saw the same positive changes, and we are working to replicate this service as it positively impacted many young boys and girls in Alto Peru. It is also worth mentioning that the collective mental health of our country is in decline, and this type of intervention, in addition to being effective, is fun and attractive to kids.









El programa de Surf Therapy
se llevó a cabo gracias a



Alto Perú es parte de



