



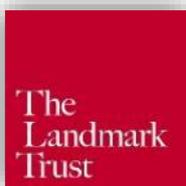
SUPPORTING SERVING AND FORMER  
MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES,  
EMERGENCY SERVICES AND FAMILIES



# Evaluation Report

## The Surf Action 'Health and Wellbeing Residential Week' held at Crownhill Fort in Plymouth.

12/03/18 – 16/03/18



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[www.surfaction.co.uk](http://www.surfaction.co.uk) | Registered Charity No. 1140191



Surf Action was established in Cornwall in 2009 and is a registered Charity (number 1140191). An award winning and pioneering project, Surf Action aims to promote and protect the physical and psychological wellbeing of serving and former serving members of the armed forces and the blue-light emergency services and their families who are living with physical and/or psychological difficulties because of their service, and to assist them into making the transition into civilian life, in particular but not exclusively, by:

- Introducing them to surfing, high intensity water sports and involving them in peer group activities.
- Providing access to support, guidance, signposting and education.
- Providing access to information and peer support relationships for their families.
- Engaging them in various projects within communities.

By making use of the stunning coastal environment and offering holistic support which considers the practical, social and psychological difficulties which some service-users can experience, we do not seek to replicate the valuable work carried out by existing military and civilian organisations and charities, but to complement, signpost to, and work with them to fill the gaps identified by the service-users who come to us. Published PhD research recently carried out with Loughborough University has lent support to the Surf Action model and significantly extended previous knowledge on physical activity, military veterans and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) by highlighting how nature-based physical activity – encapsulated in the conceptual notion of the “Blue Gym” – can significantly promote well-being among military veterans and other service-users.

**Surf Action is the only organisation providing evidence-based ocean therapy to support the mental health and wellbeing of serving military, veterans and their families in the UK.**

Since being founded Surf Action has also championed **social inclusion** and **cohesion** between the **military, veteran and civilian communities**. It has sought to help individuals, families and communities by providing educational information as a tool with which to empower them to make positive changes in their lives and communities.

## **Background**

Over the past few years Surf Action has developed a pilot residential model in-order to identify what activities and content best benefit the veterans’ recovery from physical and/or psychological injuries. They have taken place at large, relatively remote properties in coastal settings such as ‘Porth-en-Alls House’ and Sea View House at Prussia Cove and Northcott House at Bude (Northcott House was a former RAF convalescent home for wounded pilots) and Hawkers Cottages 1 & 2 at Coombe near Morwenstow. Much has been learned during this time and Surf Action now includes this provision as part of its core ‘Joined-Up Recovery Model.

## **Aims for veterans**

- To put them into an atmosphere which is very different from that of their day-to-day life
- To be kept relatively free from the worries of day-to-day life by being contactable by others only at specified times agreed with the veteran
- To give them the opportunity to identify, concentrate on and develop their own recovery path
- To make them more receptive to learning new things during their stay
- To benefit from on-site psychological support
- To develop strong peer support relationships
- To learn from the experiences of others and offer their own experiences to others
- To live healthily both physically and emotionally
- To discover new adjustment strategies
- To learn about other coping skills and education within a group setting
- To learn about, and the benefits of, educational, work and volunteering opportunities
- To benefit from and learning about new things
- To give their families a chance to relax and concentrate on their own wellbeing

## **Activities/Events**

- Daily High intensity Watersports such as surfing, co-steering, kayaking etc
- Coastal walks and environmentally beneficial activities
- One-to-one and group psychological support and education
- The benefits of the Buddy System in aiding recovery
- Creative arts workshops
- Visiting speakers on a variety of interesting and beneficial subjects
- Opportunities in education and personal development
- Pathways back into work and how to move forward within the workplace
- The benefits of volunteering

Because the venues need to be spacious, relatively remote near the coast capable of sleeping up to 10 people, the residential events are mostly run outside of the main holiday season for reasons of cost and venue availability.

The living regime is very much communal and camaraderie driven with veterans being expected to help with meal preparation when required, washing-up and basic cleaning/tidiness.

Veterans are asked to agree specific times that they will be contactable to others via their personal mobile devices during the week and asked to turn their devices off outside of those times. This allows them to concentrate of getting the most out of the week. A 24-hour emergency contact to the venues is always available via landline or Surf Action staff.

The residentials are free to the veterans but Surf Action has a duty of care in spending charity money and asks to see confirmation any injury was incurred during a veterans' service prior to attendance.

## The Landmark Trust



### Giving new life to buildings at risk

The Landmark Trust takes on historic places in danger and carefully and sensitively restores them. By making them available for holidays, they make sure they can be enjoyed by all, both today and for future generations. They have in their care nearly 200 buildings in Britain, several in Italy and France and one in Belgium.

Though they range from the sober to the spectacular, all their buildings are rich in history and atmosphere. They include picturesque pavilions and medieval long-houses, artillery forts and Gothic follies, clan chiefs' castles and cotton weavers' cottages, the homes of great writers and the creations of great architects, from Browning to Boswell, from Pugin to Palladio.

### Landmark Trust 50 For Free Scheme

The Landmark Trust has rescued over 200 extraordinary historic buildings, now let for self-catering holidays to pay for their future maintenance. All are restful, inspiring and restorative places to stay. As a building preservation charity, it's important to them that as wide a range of people as possible experience staying in such places. The 50 for Free Scheme has been run for several years and reaches out to those who might especially benefit from such an experience but might not otherwise be able to afford it.

50 for Free is simply about seeking to extend the benefit of staying in its buildings to those who need it most. Charities, educational and social enterprise/non-profit organisations are all eligible to apply. The cost to the Landmark Trust is met by a generous private donor.

In November 2017 Surf Action applied to the Landmark Trust through its '50 For Free 2017' round and asked to run a residential event at their historic property, Crownhill Fort in Plymouth.

**In January 2018 Surf Action was delighted to hear that it had been selected to run its residential at Crownhill Fort under the Landmark Trust's 50 for Free scheme.**



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### Surf Action Health and Wellbeing Residential 2018

at Crownhill Fort, Plymouth PL6 5BX, 12th (pm)—16th (am) March



The Landmark Trust has very kindly donated the use of the Officers' Accommodation at the wonderfully preserved 19th Century Crownhill Fort to Surf Action for use as the base for our 2018 health and wellbeing residential. If you are serving/a veteran going through recovery and would like to:

- Spend 4 days in a unique historic location and atmosphere very different from your day to day life and divest yourself of the many modern communication mediums which tend to preoccupy our lives whilst benefiting from the support of a friendly and welcoming peer group;
- Take part in extensive moorland walks, watersports and other healthy outdoor activities in the stunning Devon moorland and coastal environments whilst also learning about the importance of living as physically and emotionally resilient lives as possible;
- Discover new adjustment strategies, learn about coping skills and the importance of education in recovery all within a supportive group setting with onsite psychological and occupational therapeutic support;
- Take time to identify, concentrate on and develop your own recovery path for the long term whilst having a lot of fun;

Then email us at [info@surfaction.co.uk](mailto:info@surfaction.co.uk)

All food, accommodation and activities are free



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This property marked a change in the type of property that we normally used because it was in a city and did not have immediate access to the coast. This represented a challenge so extra thought had to be given to how to achieve our outside activities to best support the attendees.

At the end of January 2018 Surf Action started to promote the event with the adjacent flyer and it was distributed through all the charity's communications channels including social media.

A detailed programme of daily activities was prepared including plenty of provision for very wet weather as the weather in the week prior to the residential was highly inclement including snow!

The activities were based around the ethos and learning from Surf Action's Ocean Therapy Course.

Surf Action's standard 8-week Ocean Therapy Course is based on developments of the research of Carly M. Rogers, OTD, OTR/L at the University of Southern California.

- Rogers C, Mallinson T, Peppers D (2014), 'High-Intensity Sports for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Depression: Feasibility Study of Ocean Therapy With Veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom', American Journal of Occupational Therapy 68, 395-404.

Qualitatively and quantitatively evaluated at Surf Action and published by Dr Nick Caddick of 'The Peter Harrison Centre for Disability Sport', School of Sport, Exercise and Life-sciences at Loughborough University:

- Caddick, N., Smith, B., & Phoenix, C. (2015). The effects of surfing and the natural environment on the well-being of combat veterans. Qualitative Health Research, 25, 76-86.

- Caddick N & Smith B (2014), 'The impact of sport and physical activity on the well-being of combat veterans; A systematic review.' *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 15, 9-18.
- Caddick N<sup>1,2</sup>, Smith B<sup>2</sup>. & Phoenix C<sup>1</sup>. (2015) Collective stories and well-being: Using a dialogical narrative approach to understand peer relationships among combat veterans experiencing posttraumatic stress disorder (*Journal of Health Psychology* 2015, Vol. 20(3) 286–299) (<sup>1</sup> European Centre for Environment and Human Health, University of Exeter Medical School. <sup>2</sup> Peter Harrison Centre for Disability Sport, University of Loughborough)
- Caddick N.<sup>1,2</sup>, Smith B<sup>2</sup>. & Phoenix C<sup>1</sup>. (2015) Male Combat Veterans' Narratives of PTSD, Masculinity and Health. (*Sociology of Health and Illness*, 2015). (<sup>1</sup> European Centre for Environment and Human Health, University of Exeter Medical School. <sup>2</sup> Peter Harrison Centre for Disability Sport, University of Loughborough)

PTSD and depression frequently co-occur and both are associated with functional and social disruption, including weakened interpersonal relationships and diminished psychological resilience and self-efficacy, limited activity engagement and role function and increased risk-taking behaviour. Returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have reported specific occupational performance needs in leisure (social relationships), self-care (physical health, driving, sleep), and productivity. Some veterans engage in high-risk behaviour such as speeding, substance abuse, or aggressive acts to satisfy feelings of "invincibility" or sensations of "adrenaline rush"

High-intensity sports such as surfing, kayaking, windsurfing, snowboarding, and rock climbing provide a socially acceptable alternative to risk-taking behaviours such as speeding and substance abuse. In addition, high-intensity sports may be an attractive treatment alternative for veterans who need support for reengagement in civilian life because such sports reflect the military culture of athleticism and patterns of engagement that involve physical, psychological, and environmental challenges. Participants in high-intensity sports describe them as transformative, creating new perspectives, and promoting courage through "balancing the natural state of fear with knowledge based on personal capabilities and technical expertise". Additionally, high-intensity sports that produce an adrenaline rush and that are more in line with military culture might be beneficial as an adjunct to evidence-based treatments for PTSD such as exposure-based cognitive-behavioural therapies and medication management.

Surf Action's community-based, sports-oriented occupational therapy course (Ocean Therapy) uses the high-intensity sport of surfing in an experiential, skills-based experience specifically adapted for military personnel and veterans seeking mental health services. Consistent with conceptualizations of the transformative nature of engagement in meaningful occupations and the dynamic influence of environment on a person's performance this course combines surfing performance, focused group processing, and social participation to create opportunities for veterans to examine ways in which their individual values, abilities, and experiences can support successful transition to civilian life.

### **The Ocean Therapy Components:**

Ocean Therapy is based on principles of occupational science and occupational therapy in which participation in meaningful activities within the natural environment (e.g., surfing) is both part of the therapeutic process and a desired outcome.

- One intention of the intervention is for participants to develop sufficient skills that they are confident and competent to paddle out, catch a wave, and ride it in to shore safely.
- The intervention is also designed to provide a supportive setting in which participants can reflect on the process and experience of acquiring new skills in a safe but unpredictable environment such as the ocean. For example, examining participants' responses to situational challenges on the beach, such as getting along with others or dealing with frustration if good waves do not come along, may provide lessons for successful transition to civilian life.
- Resiliency: Surf Action defines Resiliency as: A person's ability to apply successful coping strategies in response to stressful life situations to resume usual activity, engagement and social relationships. Resiliency in response to traumatic events can be facilitated by enhancing positive beliefs and attitudes and supporting creative processes (Ahmed 2007). Five themes of resiliency are used to conceptually frame the Ocean Therapy across the 8 week course;
  1. Role Identity. Many veterans have reported finding that their military service, skills, or leadership positions do not necessarily translate into civilian life, which can lead to frustration and a diminished sense of purpose. The content of this module is designed to guide participants in identifying their own positive traits and reflecting on the ways in which these traits are strengthened while learning to surf.
  2. Leadership and Trust. To address this theme, participants make connections between the leadership skills learned in military training and how they can use those skills in civilian life. Participants also consider how these same skills are manifest in learning to surf (e.g., how their instructors led in the water, how trust was built with their instructor).
  3. Community Building. The analogy of the "surfing family" is used to explore ways to build community or "brotherhood" (an important concept in military culture) among civilians. For example, participants reflect on the friendships made while surfing and the way their sense of community strengthened over the 8 weeks. Participants also reflect on lessons learned in surfing etiquette and how aspects of surf culture facilitate communication skills such as self-advocacy and conflict resolution.
  4. Problem Solving. Many veterans have reported difficulty navigating what they perceive to be the less disciplined nature of civilian life in contrast with the order and stability to which they were accustomed in the military. In addressing this theme, participants are assisted to identify the particular approaches to problem solving they used during the surfing lesson and how those skills can also be used in negotiating daily life challenges. Working with their surf instructor to stay calm in a novel environment is an example of a tangible problem-solving skill applicable to assuming the role of college student or new employee.
  5. Transition. In the last session, participants discuss their surfing progress achieved throughout the eight sessions and describe the ways they have begun to use the resiliency themes in their daily lives.

## Key Process Elements:

Experience gained in engaging many veterans with surfing has indicated that four key process elements may enhance the therapeutic experience of this occupational therapy intervention by connecting participants' surfing experiences to their previous military identity and current challenges:

1. **Relating Surfing Culture to Military Culture** - Concepts used to describe military culture include masculinity, attention to the physical body, discipline, adrenaline, and a mission-centred brotherhood (Greene, Buckman, Dandeker, & Greenberg, 2010). Returning veterans may have difficulty finding a similar culture in civilian life. The surfing culture is defined by many of the same dynamics as military culture: It is a male-dominated sport in which fitness is required to manage in vigorous ocean conditions, and the "mission" of riding a wave can be an intense challenge pairing one's actions with an unpredictable environment (Fuchs & Schomer, 2007). At its core, surfing is a sport associated with feeling a "rush" or adrenaline surge by dropping down the face of the wave (Diehm & Armatas, 2004). As a veteran participant commented, "In combat, you wait and you wait, and then you engage in an intense adrenaline rush fighting for your life. In surfing, you wait and wait; then you engage in a natural adrenaline rush riding a wave." Both surfing and military cultures have created specific languages that have many similarities. Surfers use various terms to define the intense and uncontrollable experiences of the sport, including "wiping out," "blown up," "demo'd" (demolished), "feeling stoked" and "what a rush." Military personnel use similar phrases to describe the violent, uncontrolled experience of combat.
2. **Creating a New Kind of Brotherhood:** We ensure that we integrate surf instructors and veterans into the program. The designated surf instructors have an extensive background in surfing, surfing instruction, and ocean safety. The Volunteers come from a variety of professions, social and ethnic backgrounds, and military service appointments. Both program participants and surf instructors have reported developing a sense of kinship or brotherhood with one another over the course of the sessions. Trust is built in the water, where participants rely on the surf instructor to support their skill acquisition and safety in a novel and variable environment. Trust is simultaneously built among participants when they begin to support one another both in the water and on the beach; some eventually make plans to surf together outside of the program. As a sense of belonging or community develops, participants identify with one another and with the sport.
3. **Storytelling and Storymaking:** Making sense of experiences in ways that create connections with others. Surf instructors have described the emergence of storytelling in the water as veterans begin to recount aspects of their injury and service in the military. This concept of storytelling is common in surf culture; surfers often spend time in the line-up waiting for waves, "talking story" about past surf adventures, or discussing personal issues at home or at work (Ford & Brown, 2006). Veterans have reported a similar experience while on deployment, during which much of their time is spent waiting or recovering from combat, and storytelling emerges as a way to process traumatic events (Adler, Castro, & McGurk, 2009). The use of narrative as a therapeutic tool in processing traumatic events is well documented; narrative functions to re-create a new life history or build an understanding and acceptance of illness or injury (Carless & Douglas, 2008; Mattingly, 1998). In one discussion session, a

veteran shared, “I’ve never shared this openly, but my drinking is affecting my daily life. I don’t go outside. Now I look forward to surfing.” During the program, storytelling merges into storymaking (Clark et al., 1996), in which participants, veterans and surf instructors extend their life stories by “riding waves” in the present, providing the content for future narratives.

4. Re-framing the Mission: Promoting competence and self-efficacy. Veterans, who are trained to be effective in an environment in which actions are guided by orders and interactions are governed by rank, may experience disrupted self-efficacy when faced with unstructured and unpredictable civilian environments (Pietrzak et al., 2009). For example, when enrolling in a class at college, directions or procedures may be unclear; the order of actions may not be clearly defined; and the behaviours of other students and staff may appear erratic. Individuals with a high sense of self-efficacy believe in their capability to successfully perform the tasks required to accomplish life goals (Benight & Bandura, 2004). In acquiring surfing skills and witnessing their personal achievement in a novel but supportive environment, program participants are able to renew their belief in their ability to achieve goals and obtain a productive role in civilian life (Kielhofner, 2008). With direction from the Staff and Volunteers, the intervention may support self-efficacy by creating opportunities for autonomy and self-reflection and by fostering trust between participants and instructors. One veteran stated, “I didn’t think I would stand up [on the board], and I did. I wonder what else I can do!”

## Ocean Therapy Session Structure:

The standard program comprises eight 3-hour sessions occurring weekly for 8 consecutive weeks. The sessions combine the active experience of surfing with focused group-processing and collaborative social participation among civilian volunteers and fellow veterans. Each group consists of a maximum of 10 participants, who are supported throughout by the qualified and SurfingGB registered Surf Instructor and the volunteers. All group members, including participants, volunteers, and staff, engage in the discussions to enhance group partnership and trust, key elements that support the success of the surf lesson and foster transition skills.

SURF ACTION 8 WEEK OCEAN THERAPY COURSE STRUCTURE AND CONTENT								
Session	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven	Eight
Surfing Theme	Surf Safety, Parts of the Board	Paddling Out and Standing Up	The importance of Wave Selection	Ocean Currents and Conditions	Surfing Etiquette	Turning on the Board	Improve your Surfing Technique	Improve your Surfing Technique

Resiliency Theme	Intro to Surf Action and the course	Trauma and the brain	Role Identity	Leadership and Trust	Community Building	Problem Solving	Transition	Do you feel different now compared to the start?
Key Process Elements	 The elements evolve and intertwine across each session of the Course  “Adrenalin-Rush” “A New Kind of Brotherhood” “Story-Telling and Story-Making” “Reframing the Mission”							
WEMWBS Monitoring	✓			✓				✓
Notes	<p>Each session is broken down into:</p> <p>A 30 minute Presentation – Setting the framework and Resiliency theme for the week and addresses pragmatic concerns such as the schedule for the day, safety information and introductions.</p> <p>A 15 minute Stretching and Warm Up Session preparing the body for the physical demands of surfing.</p> <p>A 20 minute on-beach instruction and practice session on the surfing theme of the day (Each of the techniques required to successfully paddle out, stand up, and ride a wave in are taught in the first lesson but are specifically strengthened and developed across the eight sessions).</p> <p>A 90 minute Surf Lesson supported by the Instructor, volunteers and staff.</p> <p>A 35 minute Focused Group Session in which participants share the sensations and emotions evoked by the experience of surfing and describe how this experience relates to the resiliency theme being addressed during that particular session. Consecutively, surf instructors reinforce participant experiences by providing candid observations of the participants’ accomplishments and challenges during the surf lesson. Participants then identify a surfing skill they can improve on for the next session. Over a cup of tea and some refreshments the group reflect on how the process of learning new surfing skills and experiences while interacting with other veterans and civilians in a somewhat unpredictable environment can be applied to their current life situations.</p> <p>All wetsuits, boards and other equipment are provided by Surf Action but if participants wish to use their own it is generally allowed provided it is all in good condition. All participants need to provide their own towels etc.</p> <p>Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) is a positively worded 14 area measure developed by Warwick and Edinburgh Universities in 2006 in conjunction with NHS Scotland, measuring emotional and psychological wellbeing.</p> <p>The Surf Instructor is Emergency 1<sup>st</sup> Aid trained and a 1<sup>st</sup> Aid Kit is available at all times.</p> <p>Participants with any specific medical conditions such as asthma which may impact on their involvement must make sure that the Surf Action staff and Surf Instructor are informed.</p> <p>All activities and venues are fully risk assessed.</p>							

Although primarily designed for serving military and veterans the Surf Action Ocean Therapy Course easily translates to other uniformed services such as the Blue Light Emergency Services which also have a rank structure, valued ethos, sense of identity and strong workforce camaraderie and which work in a stressful environment.

#### The Physiological Benefits of Ocean Therapy

- Thomson Koon, J. Boddy, K. Stein, K. Whear, R. Barton, J. and Depledge, M.H. 2011. Does Participating in Physical Activity in Outdoor Natural Environments Have a Greater Effect on Physical and Mental Well-being than Physical Activity Indoors? A Systematic Review. Environmental Science and Technology DOI: 10.1021/es102947t
- HM Government “No Health without Mental Health”, A Cross Government Mental Health Outcomes Strategy for people of all ages. (2011)
- MIND Report “Ecotherapy for Mental Wellbeing, Resilience and Recovery” (2013) (endorsed by Public Health England)
- House of Commons Health Select Committee Report “Impact of Physical Activity on Diet and Health” (March 2015) (The Chair of the Committee, said "The extraordinary benefits of exercise in improving physical and mental health should be made clear and accessible to everyone, whatever their current level of fitness. The committee calls on the NHS, Local Authorities and the government to work together to prioritise prevention and public health and we have set out achievable recommendations for action which could help to transform people's lives and wellbeing.")

There is overwhelming scientific evidence that being physically active leads to a healthier and happier life. Taking care of our body and getting fit can also boost self-esteem and self-confidence. The ‘Blue Gym’ is the concept of using our stunning natural ocean, coastal and beach environments as a resource for pursuing human health and wellbeing through surfing and other strenuous water based activities.

Surf Action’s Ocean Therapy Course uses the concept of the ‘Blue Gym’ and offers the opportunity to those who engage to experience the outdoor classroom environment and an exhilarating physical, emotional and social experience which can act as the foundation for improvement in health and wellbeing.

- Taking exercise, especially vigorous exercise like surfing, in good natural light has long been known to be beneficial. When we exercise, hormones called ENDORPHINS are released by the PITUITARY GLAND, creating a sense of well-being.
- Exercise also increases the flow of oxygen throughout the body, stimulates the nervous system and affects levels of brain chemicals such as SEROTONIN which in turn relieve tension, induce calm and make it easier to handle anxiety and stress. SEROTONIN is a neurotransmitter linked to feelings of well-being and levels of it are artificially raised by some anti-depressants.

Indeed research suggests that the benefits of regular exercise can be very powerful and comparable to those of an anti-depressant for mild to moderate depression.

- MELATONIN is a hormone closely associated with regulating our sleep. In prescribed form it is used as a sleeping aid. When dusk falls, SEROTONIN naturally converts into MELATONIN, allowing us to drop off to sleep more easily. If we have built up a good supply of SEROTONIN during daylight hours by taking vigorous exercise such as surfing, this conversion can take place more efficiently.
- PTSD is all about the fight/flight response and high states of emotional arousal. When our body prepares for fight or flight or is in a high state of emotional arousal it is preparing for vigorous physical activity and a whole host of stress-related hormones like ADRENALIN and CORTISOL are produced. The constant high arousal that is a symptom of PTSD and the unpleasant symptoms of extreme anxiety and panic attacks are caused when hormones such as ADRENALIN and CORTISOL are not used up by fighting or fleeing. Vigorous physical activity like surfing uses up the ADRENALIN and CORTISOL thus allowing the system to calm down.
- Surfing is a very social activity and laughter boosts the immune system by decreasing stress hormones and speeding up the rate of flow through the lymphatic system by up to a factor of 15 thus increasing immune cell production and infection fighting antibodies. Like strenuous exercise, laughter triggers the release of endorphins, the body's natural feel-good chemicals. The endorphins can also temporarily relieve pain.

**Although attendees on the residential could not benefit from the full ocean therapy experience, we were able to arrange activities, which meant that they still experienced many of the benefits, which Ocean Therapy offers.** All equipment such as wetsuits, boots, gloves and surf-boards were provided by Surf Action. Fully trained Surf Action surf instructors and lifeguards attended at all times.

## Evaluation Measures

An important part of the Health and Wellbeing Residential was evaluating whether the sessions had a positive effect on the participants.

Psychological well-being is now largely accepted as covering two perspectives: (1) the subjective experience of happiness (affect) and life satisfaction (the hedonic perspective); and (2) positive psychological functioning, good relationships with others and self-realization (the eudaimonic perspective). The latter includes the capacity for self-development, positive relations with others, autonomy, self-acceptance and competence. Thus, we wanted to use an easy but psychometrically robust, validated wellbeing scale which would reflect both the hedonic and eudaimonic perspective.

Our preference was for the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) with its respondent 1 – 5 Likert Scale.

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale was funded by the Scottish Government National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well-being, commissioned by NHS Health Scotland, developed by the University of Warwick and the University of Edinburgh, and is jointly owned by NHS Health Scotland, the University of Warwick and the University of Edinburgh.

It is a positively worded scale measuring emotional and psychological wellbeing, validated for use in Great Britain.

We asked the participants to complete a simple questionnaire that used this scale to measure their self-esteem, self-confidence, relationships and achievements.

The WEMWBS questionnaire consists of 14 positively worded statements each with 5 possible responses:

1. I've been feeling optimistic about the future
  2. I've been feeling useful
  3. I've been feeling relaxed
  4. I feel been feeling interested in other people
  5. I've had energy to spare
  6. I've been dealing with problems well
  7. I've been thinking clearly
  8. I've been feeling good about myself
  9. I've been feeling close to other people
  10. I've been feeling confident
  11. I've been able to make up my own mind about things
  12. I've been feeling loved
  13. I've been interested in new things
  14. I've been feeling cheerful
- All of the time (scoring 5 points)
  - Often (4 points)
  - Some of the time (3 points)
  - Rarely (2 points)
  - Not at all (1 point)

**The minimum score possible on each form was 14 (a score of 1, meaning 'not at all', for each of the 14 questions) and the maximum score possible was 70 (a score of 5, meaning 'all of the time', for each of the 14 questions).**

The WEMWBS form was completed on arrival and again on leaving. Success was determined on measurable self-reported improvements in mental health and self-confidence, but also included qualitative feedback e.g. enjoyment of learning a new skill, meeting new people and being part of a community and improved family relationships.

Group means for each of the 14 questions were then calculated (falling between 1 and 5) and the data analysed. By the questions being positively worded, the lower the WEMWBS score the more stressors are indicated in the participant's life. Means and standard deviations were calculated for the overall group so that progress could be tracked. An improvement in wellbeing would be indicated if there was an increase in the mean at the end of the residential and a narrowing of the standard deviation thus indicating more consistent grouping around the improved mean. This could then be validly interpreted as an improvement in wellbeing.

## Surf Action Health and Wellbeing Residential 2018

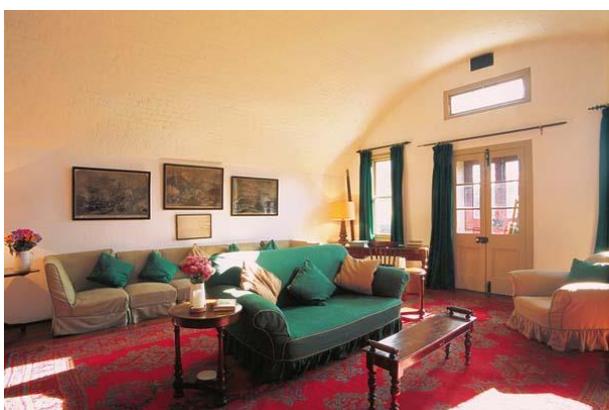
In all some 5 veterans signed up to the course (The property could accommodate a maximum of 8 people including Surf Action staff) from as far afield as Wales and Weymouth. Due to the highly unseasonable weather and the after affects of the snow in the week prior to the residential 2 people had to pull out at the last minute due to work commitments and it was too late by this time to bring in any reserves.

### Monday 12<sup>th</sup> March.

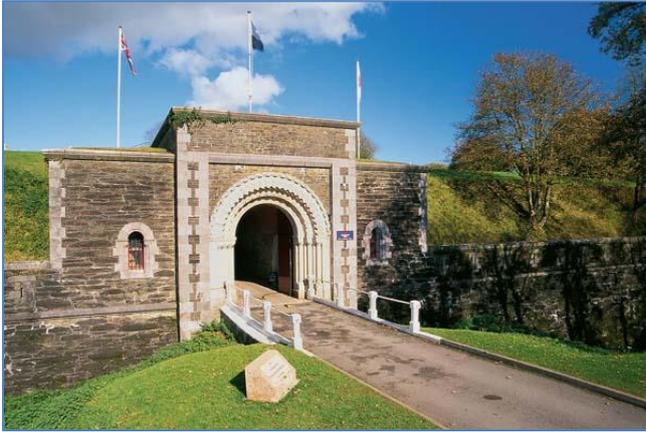
Participants were asked to be at the venue by 17.00 and this gave Surf Action time to pre-position the necessary equipment and food to ensure the smooth running of the residential. Everyone was delighted with the venue as Crownhill Fort was a truly remarkable property,



the like of which, nobody had stayed in before. The gates to the fort are huge and heavy and you feel different as you go through them into the depths of the impressive building. Once in the accommodation the length of the end-to-end corridor was huge, and the kitchen was bigger than many people's homes but with a great view to the main gate. The rooms were also very well heated which you noticed immediately on entering. The old pictures hanging on the wall, the décor and the subtly hidden power-points gave it all a sense of being part of living history. We wouldn't have been surprised to encounter a properly uniformed 18th century soldier!



In the late afternoon, after the attendees had arrived and completed the inevitable but necessary paperwork and signed in there was an exploration of the battlements of the



fort and buildings so that everyone got some exercise after their journeys and it presented an ideal opportunity for people to get to know one another. After the evening meal, the ethos of the week was explained along with the outline of the arrangements for the next few days. Following this there was a presentation about Surf Action, the blue and green gyms and general health and

wellbeing. Each participant got their own document pack containing a 'goal setting' diary and lots of invaluable mental health and healthy living leaflets amongst other things which they could take home with them.

There was a great sense of theatre involved in opening and shutting the main-gates at night. It felt like you could shut out the rest of the world. It was great to wander around the top of the walls and listen to the sounds of the city of Plymouth, but they felt a long way off. Once back inside we were in our own friendly world which was ideal.

### **Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> March.**

We awoke on Tuesday to a cloudless sky and a magnificent spring morning which was much better than the forecast had suggested. This led to the first change of plan in that we had





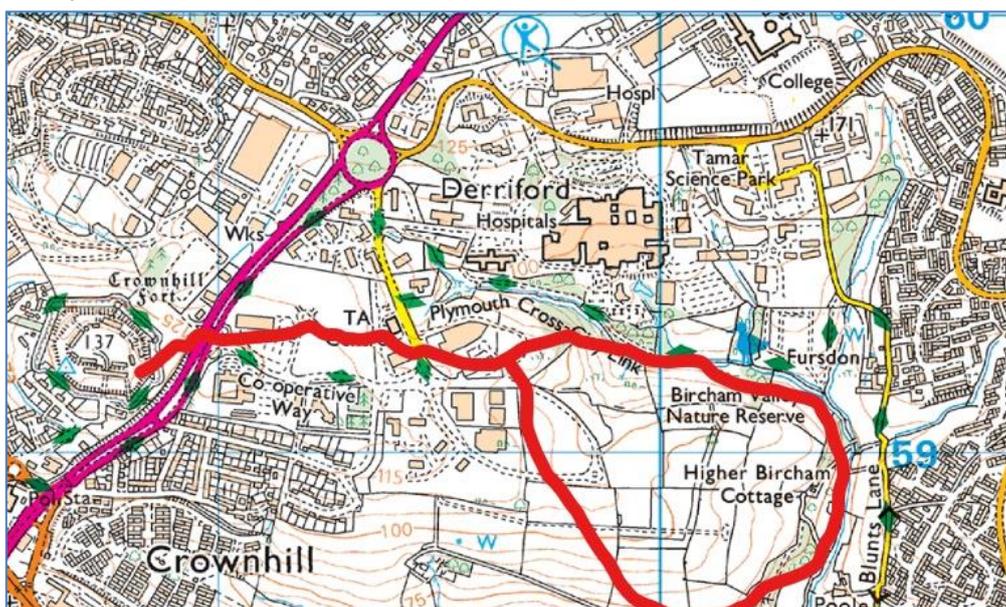
intended to go for a long coastal walk, but this was ideal weather to get into the ocean and experience its many benefits. We went initially to Wembury to look at the magnificent views towards the Mew Stone and Plymouth and to assess the surf conditions. It was remarkably busy with UK and Dutch warships departing from Devonport which pleased the naval contingent amongst us. We did some deep-breathing and relaxation exercises whilst looking at, and listening to, the rhythmic waves of the ocean and standing in the sun. This was to demonstrate a method of activating the para-sympathetic nervous system in times of stress to be able to maintain control of emotions. We also spoke to a lot of dog walkers who were out enjoying

the weather, dogs are excellent conversational ice-breakers! Having got changed in bright sunshine we then had our first session in the ocean. The conditions were challenging with very strong waves and rip currents however it was a great success. One attendee

immediately decided that surfing was an activity he could participate in with passion once he was back at home.



The excellent weather also resulted in everyone catching the sun. We then returned to Crownhill Fort for a light, late lunch before going for a late afternoon walk through Bircham Valley Nature Reserve. This is in the middle of Plymouth but once you are in it you are in an oasis of peace and quiet and beautiful countryside. To access it we had to cross some major roads and were surrounded by many building sites with the associated traffic and loud noise. For some attendees, the breathing exercises which we had done earlier came in very handy to help calm their nerves. This was a considerable achievement for them.





After dinner there was a presentation and discussion about physical and psychological wellbeing based around the Surf Action pamphlets and articles contained in the attendee's personal packs. This proved challenging for some of the attendees and some excellent progress was made.



#### **Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> March.**

The weather could not have been more different to Tuesday with heavy rain and very strong winds. We had originally intended to go up to Dartmoor for a long walk however this would not have been particularly enjoyable or sensible in such conditions, so we had a slow start to the day and after breakfast had a recap on the events of the previous day whilst waiting to see if the weather looked like improving. It became obvious that it was in for the day, but we had prepared for this sort of weather and had already arranged with the nearby University of St Mark and St John (Marjon) to make use of their excellent gym. Thus, after an early lunch we went across to the university. One of the attendees was a fully qualified personal trainer and he put

everyone through a comprehensive and challenging, structured gym session including weights, medicine-balls and boxing!



We were joined for dinner by Tom and Lauren, two third year psychology students from Plymouth University who are researching the benefits of surfing on the physical and psychological wellbeing on veterans who have been affected by their service. They have been visiting Surf Action for several months doing veteran interviews and volunteering at the Saturday surf clinics. They were able to do some further interviews during the evening to help towards their dissertations. After dinner there was the Surf Action presentation concerning 'Trauma and the Brain' which looked at the physiology and psychology of the brain which was very well received, especially by the students.

#### Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> March.

The weather was much improved, so we returned to Bigbury for a second ocean-therapy session to build on the achievements of the previous three days. The water conditions were once again challenging but provided an excellent complementary blue-gym workout to Wednesdays exertions. Walking across the beach we encountered an area of quicksand which was unusual and unexpected! The rip currents were even stronger than on Tuesday

and were almost impossible to walk against. Surfing is a relatively low impact sport on the body which is good in such conditions however everyone was very tired by the end of 90 minutes.



We then returned to Crownhill Fort for a late lunch and to give the participants a quiet afternoon during which they could rest and recoup their energy! By then the heavy rain had returned!! For our final evening meal, we were joined again by Tom and Lauren along with Warrant Officer 1 Dan Glaze from Stonehouse Barracks (who has a brief covering psychological health and wellbeing for the Royal Marines based there) and by another third year student, Kieran, but this time from Marjon University, who is researching the green and blue gyms and their effects on physical and psychological wellbeing. The students were able to complete their interviews/data-gathering and to participate in a very relaxed social atmosphere over a meal where health and wellbeing was freely discussed, and experiences recounted. The final residential paperwork was also completed.

### Friday 16<sup>th</sup> March.



The beautiful spring weather returned, and it was a fantastic and stunning morning with cloudless skies and bright sunshine. Having had breakfast and made sure that we had left the cottages in good order there were lots of goodbyes and exchanges of contact details and everyone was away by 08.30 bringing a very successful residential to a close. There was a sorrowful final locking of the fort gates of a venue which had contributed massively to the success of the residential and been our very happy home for four days.

## Surf Action Health and Wellbeing Residential Outcomes

On return to Surf Action’s headquarters at Longrock the residential was reviewed and the WEMWBS forms analysed. Average WEMWBS scores were then calculated for the group

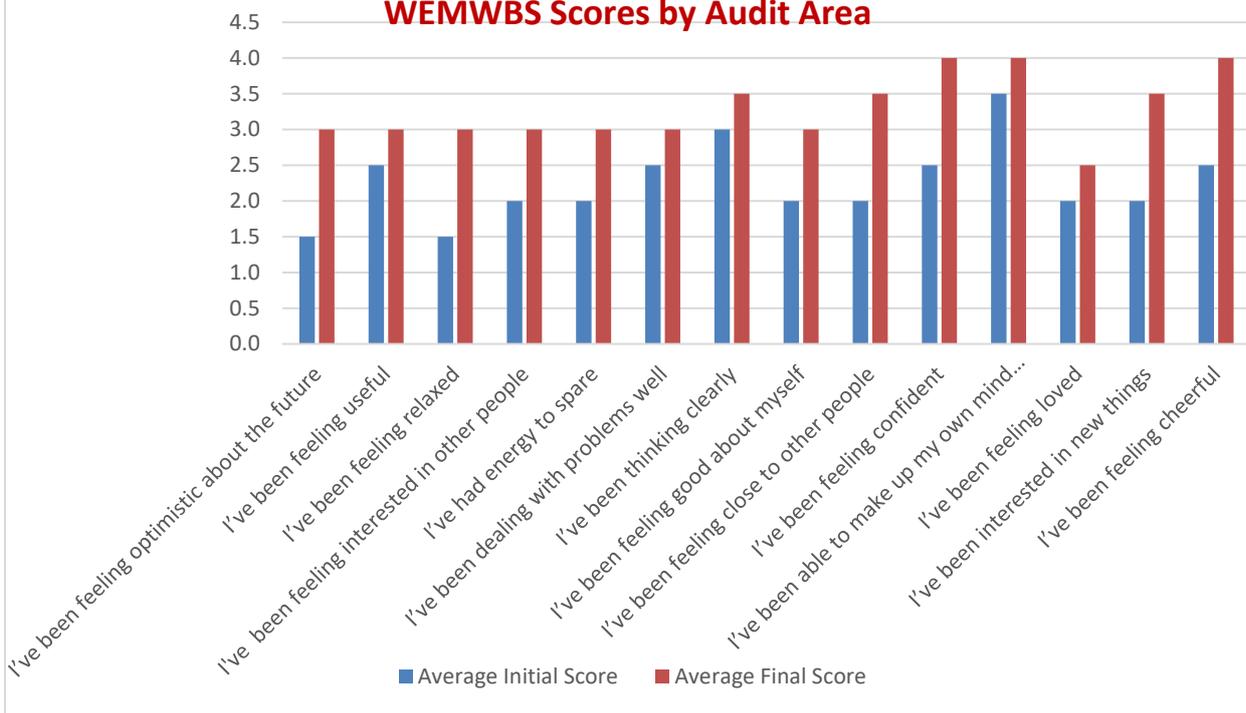
WEMWBS Statement		Average Initial Score	Average Final Score	% Change in scores
1	I’ve been feeling optimistic about the future	1.5	3.0	100.0
2	I’ve been feeling useful	2.5	3	20.0
3	I’ve been feeling relaxed	1.5	3	100.0
4	I’ve been feeling interested in other people	2.0	3	50.0
5	I’ve had energy to spare	2.0	3	50.0
6	I’ve been dealing with problems well	2.5	3	20.0
7	I’ve been thinking clearly	3.0	3.5	16.7
8	I’ve been feeling good about myself	2.0	3	50.0
9	I’ve been feeling close to other people	2.0	3.5	75.0
10	I’ve been feeling confident	2.5	4	60.0
11	I’ve been able to make up my own mind about things	3.5	4	14.3
12	I’ve been feeling loved	2.0	2.5	25.0
13	I’ve been interested in new things	2.0	3.5	75.0
14	I’ve been feeling cheerful	2.5	4	60.0
Average WEMWBS Score		2.3	3.3	46.0

The table above shows a 46% increase in the groups average WEMWBS score across the 4 days of the residential. All the 14 audit areas showed a progressive score with the smallest increase being 14.3% whilst 6 audit areas saw an increase of over 50% in the average score and in 2 audit areas, the average scores doubled. This was most encouraging and demonstrates the advantages of the residential format when combined with living together in an iconic venue which is totally different to the average dwelling. The comparative scores are further illustrated in the 3 diagrams below.

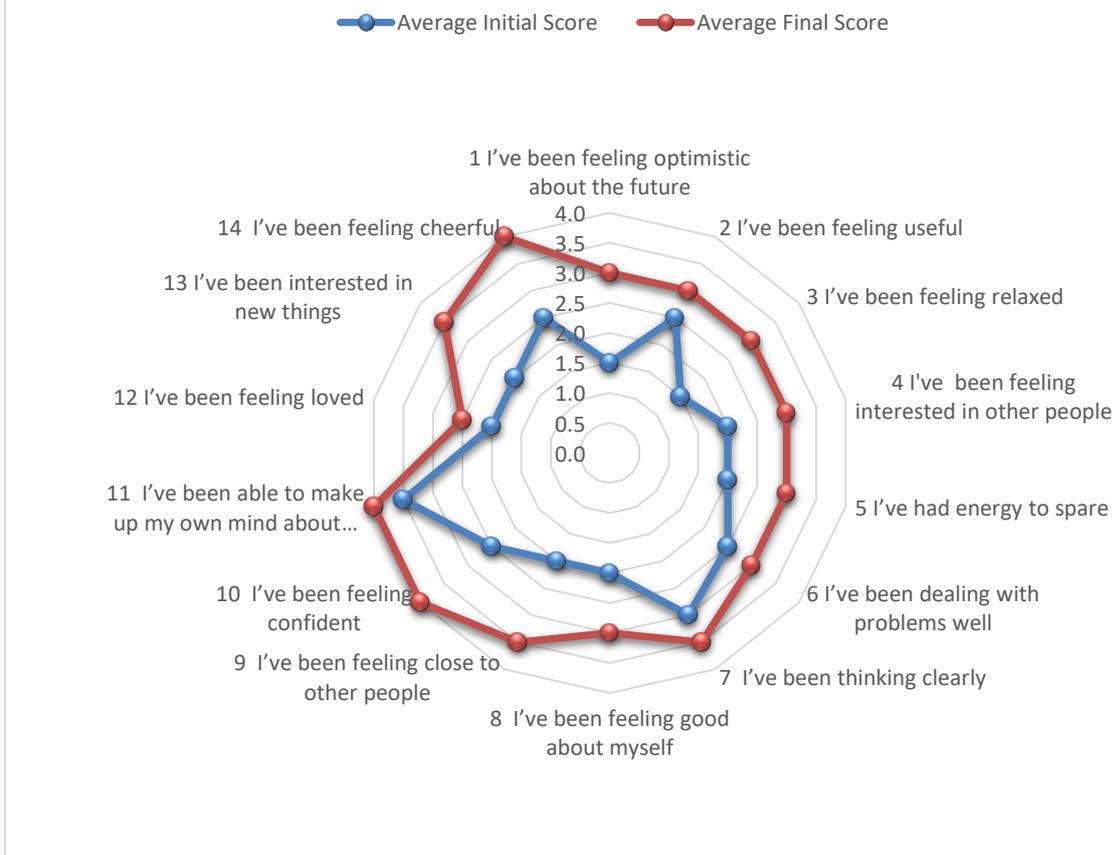
As an aide-memoire, the WEMWBS scores are interpreted as follows;

- All the time (scoring 5 points)
- Often (4 points)
- Some of the time (3 points)
- Rarely (2 points)
- Not at all (1 point)

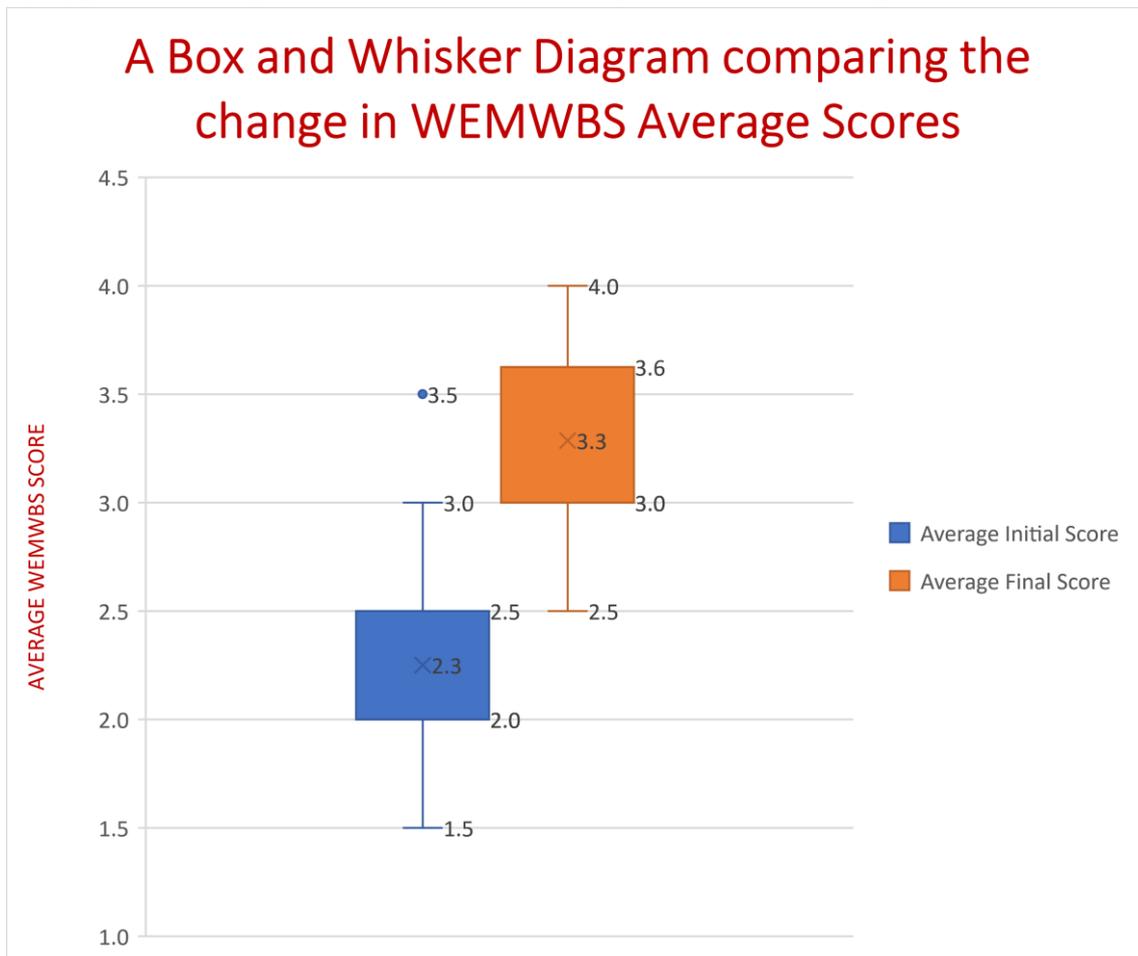
**A Comparative Bar Chart showing Average Initial and Final WEMWBS Scores by Audit Area**



**A Spider's Web diagram comparing the average Initial and Final WEMWBS Scores by Audit Area**



The blue initial WEMWBS score polygon is entirely contained within the red final score polygon and this shows that no scores reduced during the residential. The widening of the red polygon shows a general increase in wellbeing in all 14 audit categories.



The Box and Whisker diagram gives an important overall view of the spread of the individual attendee initial and final WEMWBS scores. The top whisker in each diagram shows the maximum individual score and the bottom one, the lowest individual score. The box itself shows how the central 50% of the scores were grouped. Hence it is gratifying to see that the red average final score diagram is much more compact and translated up the WEMWBS scale compared to the blue initial score diagram. This again shows a general increase in wellbeing and a more consistent group of scores with a smaller range between the whiskers and a higher mean score during the residential.

Thus, the quantitative data backs up the qualitative data which was gathered through speaking to the attendees throughout the residential.

To recap, at the outset we said the aims for the attendees were;

#### Aims for veterans

- To put them into an atmosphere which is very different from that of their day-to-day life

- To be kept relatively free from the worries of day-to-day life by being contactable by others only at specified times agreed with the veteran
- To give them the opportunity to identify, concentrate on and develop their own recovery path
- To make them more receptive to learning new things during their stay
- To benefit from on-site psychological support
- To develop strong peer support relationships
- To learn from the experiences of others and offer their own experiences to others
- To live healthily both physically and emotionally
- To discover new adjustment strategies
- To learn about other coping skills and education within a group setting
- To learn about, and the benefits of, educational, work and volunteering opportunities
- To benefit from and learning about new things
- To give their families a chance to relax and concentrate on their own wellbeing.

Through the innovative way in which Surf Action designed their 2018 residential through a busy programme of physical, educational and emotional activities within the wonderful atmosphere created by the magnificent Crownhill Fort and its wide variety of easily accessible environments, all the listed aims were met. This is evidenced by the qualitative and quantitative data as presented and discussed above. We recognise that everyone was only together for four days and that retaining their enhanced wellbeing within their own lives over the next few months presents a challenge for some of the attendees but they are better equipped to do this having attended the Surf Action residential than if they had not. We will remain in contact with them and monitor how things go however several have already expressed a wish to return to Cornwall soon.

Surf Action would like to express its great thanks to the Landmark Trust on behalf of its trustees and the attendees for their provision of the superb accommodation through their '50 for free' initiative. Without this generous gift, the residential would not have been able to take place. Once again, many thanks.



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