

SURF PROJECT

Surf lessons for children with Down syndrome, autism or ADHD



Impact Report

Welcome

Surf Project was set up in 2014 with the aim of building self-confidence through surf lessons in children aged 8-18 with Down syndrome, autism and ADHD.

Surf Project is an official foundation and in possession of an ANBI status (a Public Benefit Organisation (PBO) which means at least 90% of the institution's efforts are focused on the general good). Surf Project is fully organized by volunteers. We are open to children from all walks of life, regardless of background and origin.

For all children participation in sports is crucial. It not only makes them physically stronger but it also builds their self-confidence and social skills. And therefore they will more likely be able to take part in our society.

Surfing is a cool sport with a positive image. However, children with a developmental disorder or disability typically do not have access to this sport, due to the need for professional guidance and individual coaching. Surf Project provides surfing lessons for these children, in a SAFE, predictable and controlled environment, with the help of a large group of enthusiastic and professional volunteers. The children surf in small teams, but receive individual support within the team. They feel connected to the tough and positive culture and lifestyle that goes with this challenging sport. The children learn from each other in the team, and at the same time realize that they are not the only ones with problems. Surfing in a team shifts the focus to something positive.

It's clear that surfing makes the children feel proud of themselves and this, in turn, boosts their self-esteem. These improved skills are crucial in their everyday lives. Parents report that their children strongly benefit from the lessons; they see their children's self-confidence and self-esteem build up immediately during the first few lessons and are happy to see their children enjoy the surfing lessons.

The last six months we achieved some important goals. We restructured our lessons. In this new structure we can approach children more at their individual level. We set up our fourth location alongside the Dutch coastline. We received help from two important ambassadors. Pro surfer Kaspar Hamminga and Neuropsychologist Erik Scherder. Both also known from Dutch television. Surf Project aims to have surf therapy integrated in regular health care in the future. In order to do so, objective research is needed. Therefore, together with a team of psychiatrists and psychologists, we continue our important research on the effect surfing has on these children.

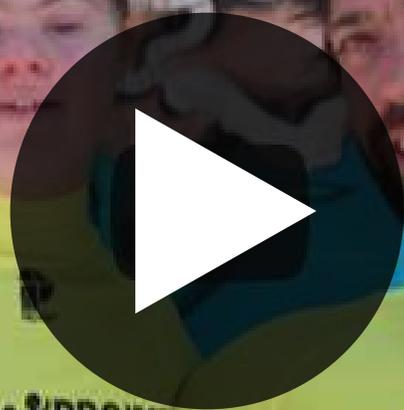
We would not have been able to do all this without our dedicated volunteers, over a hundred and fifty this year, who we rely on to help us change these children's lives. We would like to thank each one of our volunteers, along with our sponsors and funding partners across the country, for working so hard to be part of everything we have achieved for the children this year. We are very proud of you, our work and the organisation we are building together!

Finally, we would like to thank the children and their parents. It is our privilege to work both with and for them. Their stories continue to inspire us, and remind everyone at Surf Project how important it is that we do all that we can to ensure these children are given the opportunity to participate in surfing and therefore will be given the chance of a brighter future.

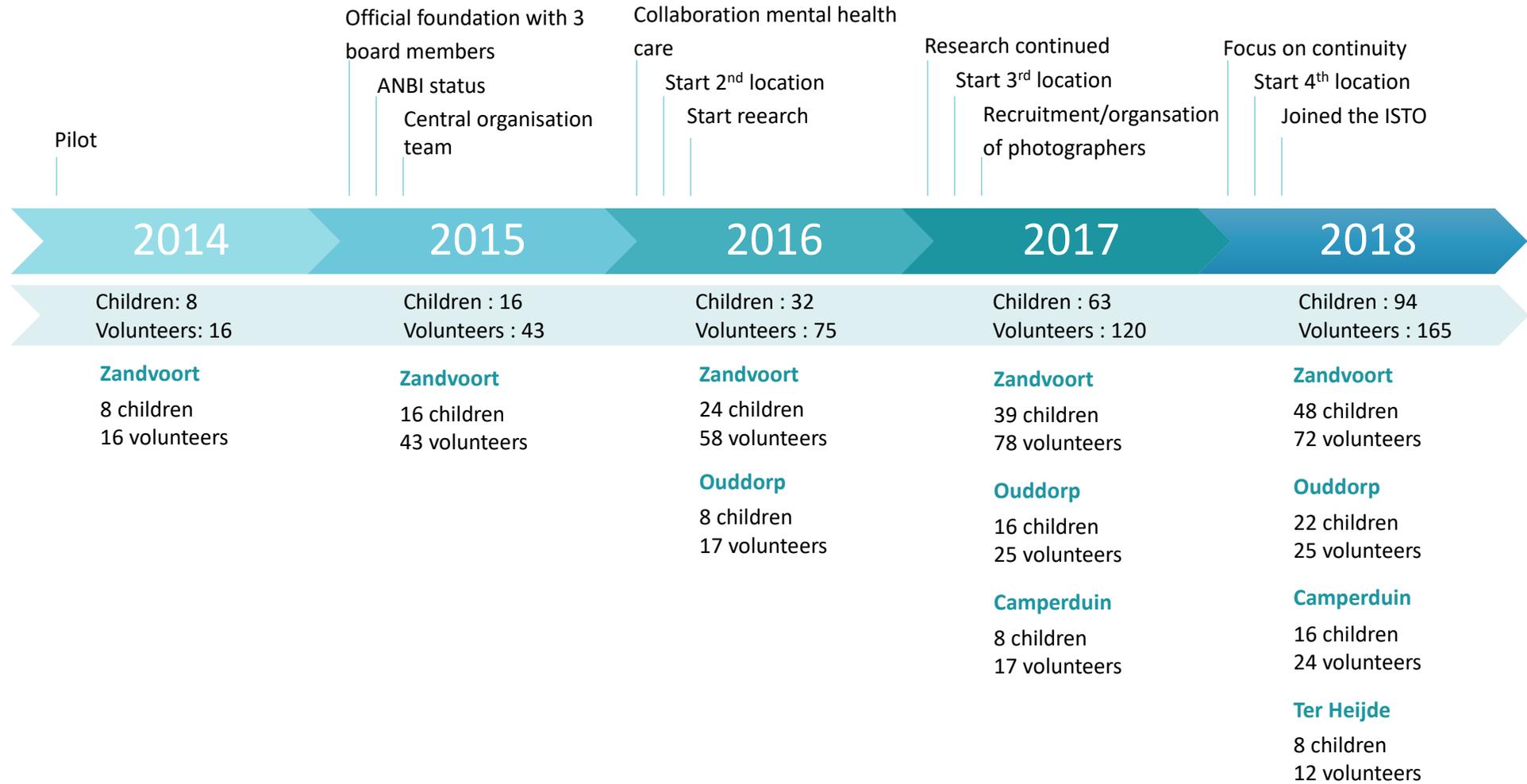


**Suzanne van den Broek-Dietz
Founder Surf Project**

Het Surf Project



Our timeline



Meet Jeroen

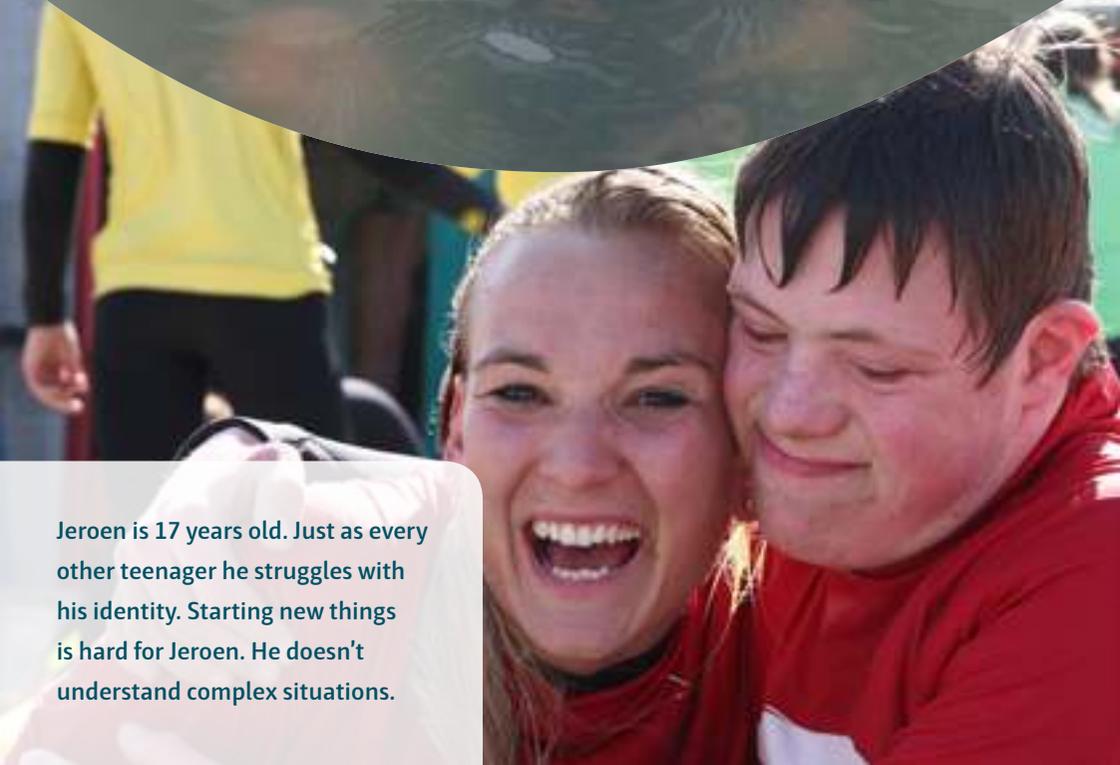
This is Jeroen. Jeroen is full of life. He is very energetic and loves to swim. Jeroen has Down syndrome, a mental disorder and a low intelligence level. He has difficulties expressing himself verbally, and therefore social interaction and making friends are not easy for him. He cannot participate in team sports. Simply because he doesn't understand the rules and other people don't understand his behaviour.



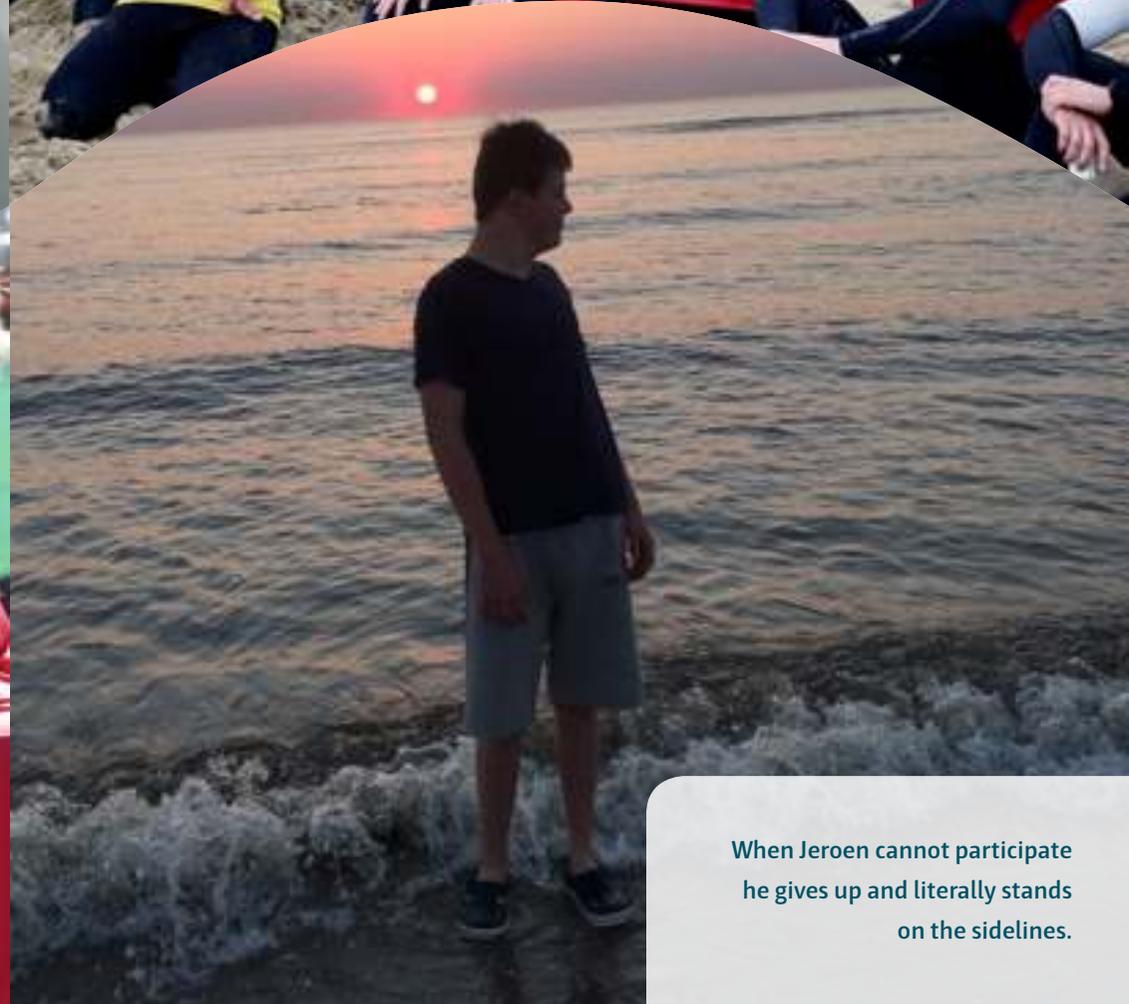
Jeroen's behaviour is impulsive. Not because he wants to be bad. Not at all, but he doesn't understand that his behaviour is sometimes inappropriate. It's just his way of communicating.



Jeroen needs an outlet for all his energy.



Jeroen is 17 years old. Just as every other teenager he struggles with his identity. Starting new things is hard for Jeroen. He doesn't understand complex situations.



When Jeroen cannot participate he gives up and literally stands on the sidelines.

Jeroen needs help to experience success. He needs help to realize he matters and he is just as important as everybody else in this world.



Surfing at Surf Project is a great experience for Jeroen. It makes him feel special and gives him more self-confidence.

Our lessons

We work with local surf schools and local Surf Project teams. They are fully equipped and know the local circumstances best.



The participating children surf in small teams of four. Each team has a certified surf instructor, and each child is individually guided by one of our volunteers. Surf Project makes certain the children have one on one guidance by the same buddy during the first three lessons. They get confident by seeing the same face. The children belong to a team and to their own colour. This helps them grow their social skills.

And at the same time, they don't have to play together to win. There is no competition but many high fives are given in the water. Everybody is a winner. You surf with your team and you are happy for everybody who glides the waves.

The flow of the sea makes you forget everything, and just concentrate on what you are doing. Surfing is known as an extreme sport; outdoor, wild nature and waves that cannot be controlled. So without professional guidance these children cannot participate.



Therefore during our lessons, much attention is paid to structure and predictability. Safety and a positive experience of the participant are always paramount. New participants will initially follow three surf lessons in three consecutive weeks.

After the first three lessons we celebrate their courage with a well-deserved medal and a diploma during a grand finale. Children who have participated before can take a total of three to six Surf Club lessons spread over the summer months.



Children often take their whole family to the beach. This works for everybody. Parents, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts and grandparents, see how much fun this child is having on a surfboard. Seeing them in such a positive, healthy and even cool setting makes them feel proud. This has a great impact on their everyday family lives.



Surf Project would not exist without the help of all our passionate and important volunteers. All the people who join Surf Project choose to be there. They are extremely motivated to help and share their own passion with these children. This makes the atmosphere incredibly positive and happy.

Look at Jeroen now! Jeroen's mom tells us he is more self-confident since he can surf. He feels proud of himself. At Surf Project he can grow physically and emotionally. Others are interested in his new passion. They actually listen to him. Every year at Christmas there is a calendar under the tree. Surf Project is one of the first things written down on it.



What parents say

"For once I didn't have to explain his behavior. He just belonged in the water with Surf Project."

"I don't exactly know what happened in the water. But I haven't ever seen him so free before. Free from his fears and anxiety, free from the restraints of his autism. When we drove back from the surfing lessons we couldn't stop laughing. For me it was such a big gift."



"My child never dared to speak in public. But now at school she made her own presentation about Surf Project and her new surf skills. This opened a new world for her. A world where she can be herself and where she's not afraid of what people might say about her disability."

"He has learned so much from surfing. He feels stronger in all different ways. He wants to help me carry the groceries and at the dinner table he starts a conversation. He opened up. This has never happened before and it is a big change in our family life."

"It was like there was no disability while taking part in Surf Project."

"It's great that I trust these people for 200%. I leave my kid surfing with them and at the same time I can simply have a coffee and relax. This doesn't happen very often."

"Before my daughter went surfing with Surf Project I wondered if she was ever able to live independently or if she can live the life she wants to live. But now, after taking part in this project, I see she is dedicated to get there. Maybe it takes her a little bit longer than someone else, but I am confident now that she can do it. This is the biggest gift anyone could give to me."



Design and safety

Surf Project pays a lot of attention to the safety and the specific needs of the individual child when developing and executing surf lessons. For example, an extensive interview is held with every registered child together with its parents, the lessons are explained by pictograms and we use colored shirts for clarity. Much attention is paid to structure and predictability.

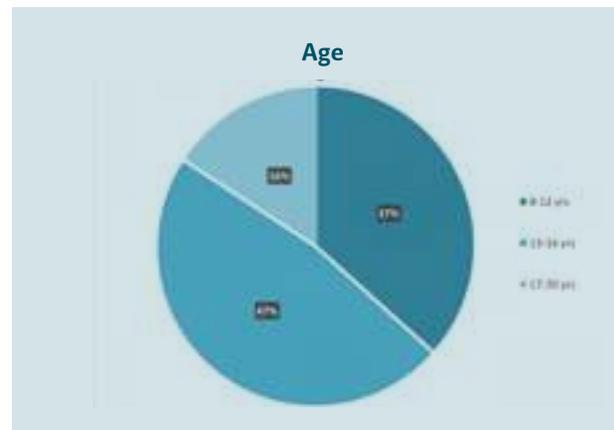
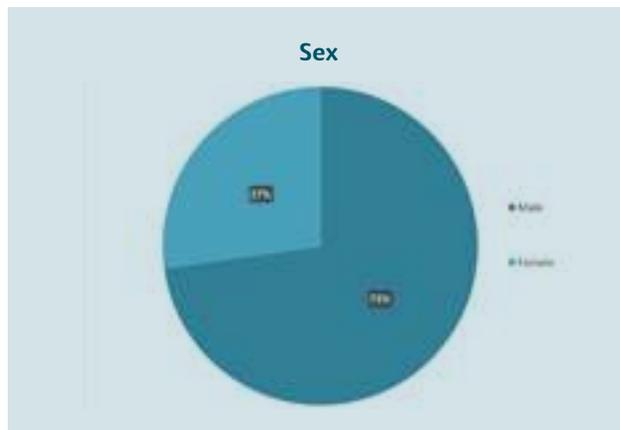
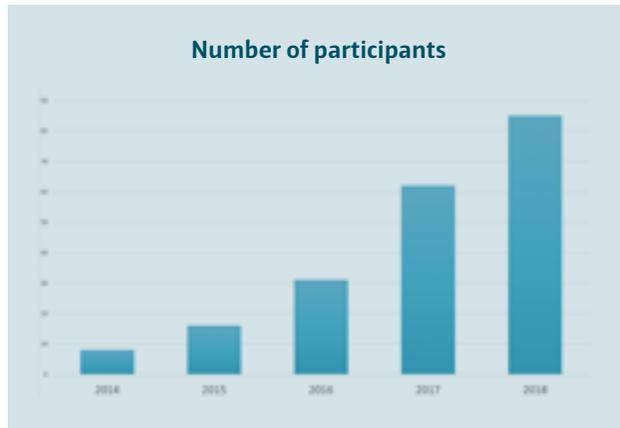
There are various professionals from health care and sports education involved and a rescue team is present. All surf instructors are certified and work at connected surf schools.

All volunteers have experience or affinity with the target group and water sports, and receive specific training for Surf Project. All volunteers deliver a Declaration on Behavior (VOG). This will ensure that participation is as safe and positive as possible for the children and their parents. Throughout Surf Project, the safety and experience of the child is paramount.



About our participants

We surf with amazing children aged 8-18 with Down syndrome, autism and ADHD. We are open to children from all walks of life, regardless of background and origin. Below you will find the data concerning our participants.



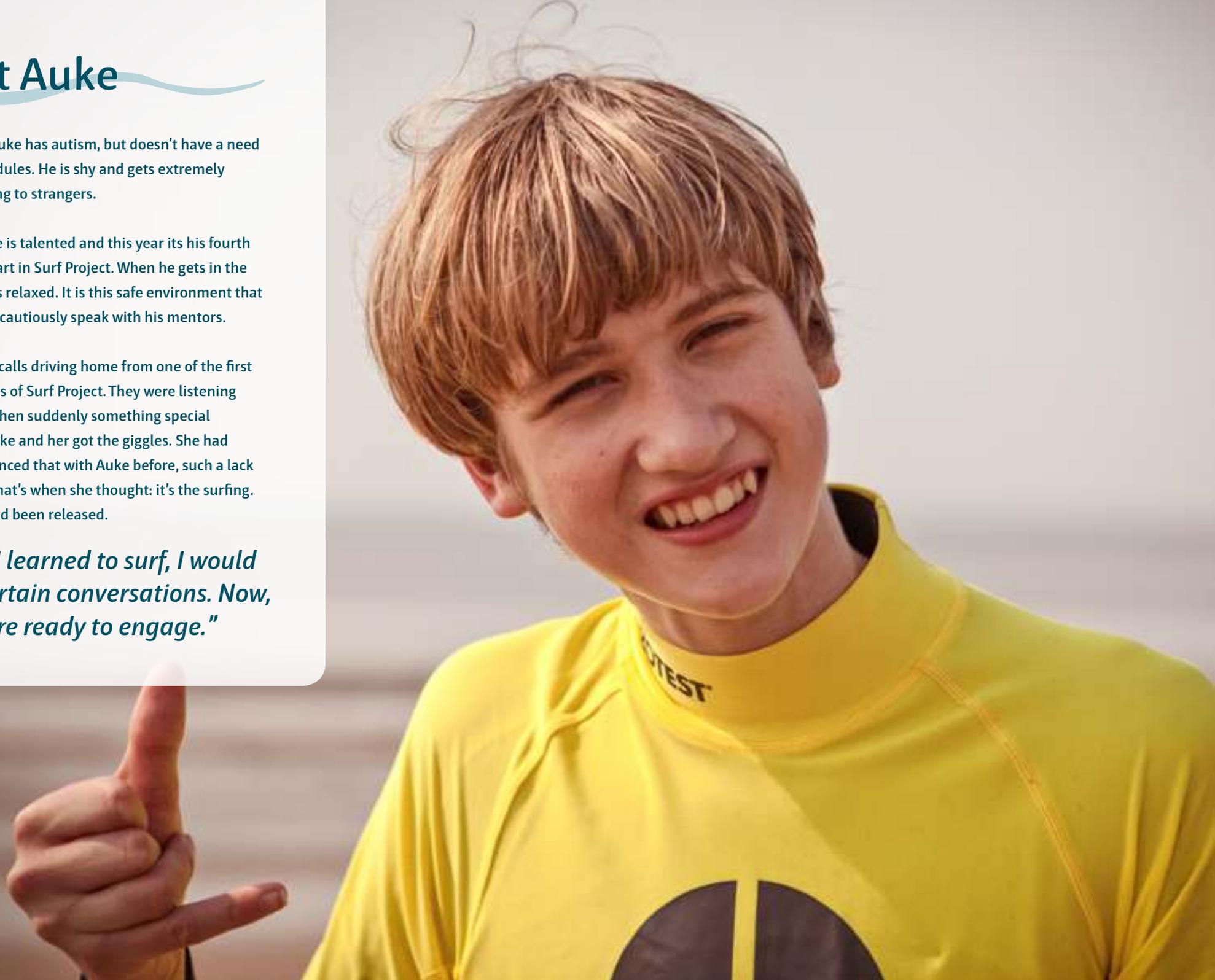
Meet Auke

13-year-old Auke has autism, but doesn't have a need for fixed schedules. He is shy and gets extremely nervous talking to strangers.

However Auke is talented and this year it's his fourth time taking part in Surf Project. When he gets in the water, he feels relaxed. It is this safe environment that allows him to cautiously speak with his mentors.

His mother recalls driving home from one of the first surfing lessons of Surf Project. They were listening to the radio when suddenly something special happened. Auke and her got the giggles. She had never experienced that with Auke before, such a lack of restraint. That's when she thought: it's the surfing. Something had been released.

"Before I learned to surf, I would avoid certain conversations. Now, I am more ready to engage."



Meet Eva

18-year-old Eva has Down syndrome. When she joined Surf Project a year ago, she was shy. Verbal communication is very difficult for her.

Eva's mentor at Surf Project made sure to adjust his way of communicating to hers. From that moment onwards, Eva fully devoted herself to surfing. According to her mother, she usually needs to be urged on to get going, but during Surf Project, she literally couldn't wait to jump on the board.

At last year's National Gala for Disabled Sports, Eva was named 'Unique Talent in Sports of 2017'. In her red ball gown, she danced on stage with one of the Netherlands' most famous rappers. She's a lot less interested in her toys now, her mother says. She behaves more like an adult.

The morning after the gala where she was named Unique Talent in Sports of 2017, Eva said to her mother:

"I'm a big girl now, aren't I?"



Meet Dailin

When 16-year-old Dailin was little, she often said that she wanted to die. She didn't think she was good enough. Her mother would be better off choosing a different child. Dailin has ADHD, autism and a minor form of intellectual disability.

It's Dailin's fourth consecutive season at Surf Project. The fact that she is able to stand upright on the board gives her the confidence that other things will work, too. At school, she signed herself up for an internship; she wanted to prove that she could assume responsibility. She got permission, which is quite unusual given that Internships don't usually happen at this age.

Dailin recently got tested. The results showed that her performance had gone up exponentially, allowing her to skip a whole year. Her mentality has changed from 'I'm not good at anything' to 'there's no fault in trying, and I can surf!'

*'What I like most about surfing?
That it works! When I stand on
my board, I get a warm feeling
inside'*



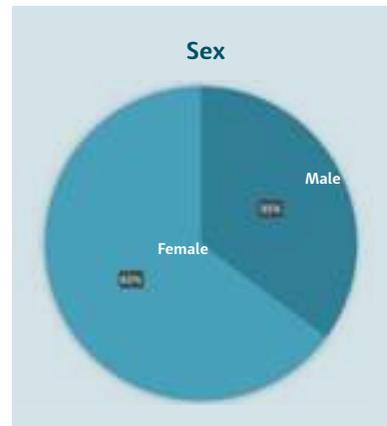
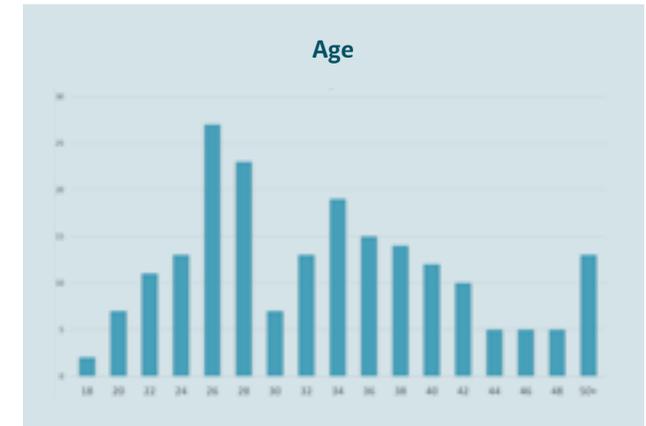
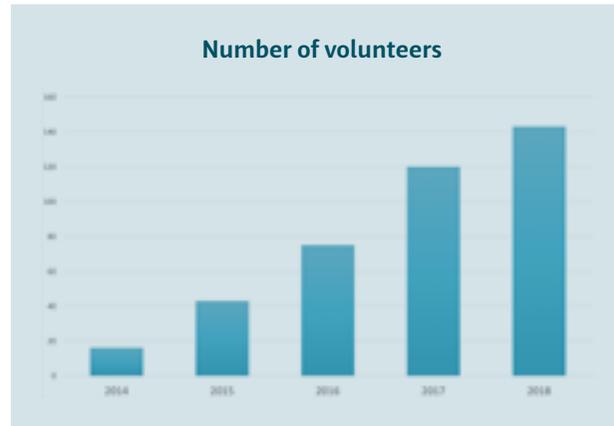
About our volunteers

Our volunteers are the reason why we exist. We work with so many important volunteers. They are extremely motivated to help share their passion with the children. This creates an incredibly positive and happy atmosphere.

In a positive and enthusiastic way our volunteers help the children to gain success in the water and catch some waves. The children don't have to become pro surfers. They can surf in a way which suits their capacities: lying down, on their knees or standing up. It is all about the success experience and the fun factor. Volunteers help the children by explaining the exercises and help them to remember the instructions.

We also have a team of photographers. These volunteers are very important too. Their pictures make sure children and their parents can look back on a beautiful experience. They capture the moments they can be proud of and hereby keep their self-confidence high throughout the whole year.

On the right you will find the data concerning our volunteers.



What volunteers say

"Being in the ocean makes these children feel free. In the beginning surfing is very tense, but step by step they see something very big become smaller for them. Also because of the trust they get from the people surrounding them in the water. They learn to see their own true identity and not 'the child with the disability'. I love working with them. I learn so much from these pure children."



"As a volunteer at Surf Project I feel I can make a difference in someone's life. It brings me so much joy to see a happy child in the water. You can count on me next year and the year after and..."



"Thank you all for this wonderful experience. This project enriched my surfing life. Share the stoke and bring back the fun."

"I am very proud to have been a volunteer at Surf Project this year. I realize that it's important to give your trust to a child, but in the mean time you get so much back. I feel honoured that I could be a part of this amazing project. I will miss the happy faces from all the children and the volunteers. I am glad there are so many videos and pictures to look at this winter. Thank you for changing my life."



"Last year I got the opportunity to be a mentor of SAM. He is the most stoked surfer on the planet. He loves to joke around, romp with everybody, make people laugh (even if that means farting in his wetsuit and I love him for it, cracks me up every time) and surf's like a pro. He is a true bundle of joy. He doesn't take life too seriously and is honest, pure and always shares his love and

motivation with others! The children from Surf Project all have a disability which has them living in the moment and taking nothing for granted, what a life lesson to us all. I will be forever grateful for this opportunity! Surf Project crew, keep up the amazing work you're doing! See you in 2018! And Sam - keep on sharing your stoke!"

Our research

Background

Surfing is a cool sport with a positive image. However, children with a developmental disorder or disability typically do not have access to this sport, due to the need for professional guidance and individual coaching. Surf Project provides surfing lessons for these children, in a safe, predictable and controlled environment, with the help of a large group of enthusiastic and professional volunteers. Parents report that their children strongly benefit from the lessons; they see their children's self-confidence and self-esteem build up over the first few lessons and are happy to see their children enjoy the surfing lessons, often 'without disability'. Surf Project aims to have surf therapy integrated in regular health care in the future. In order to do so, objective research is needed.

In 2016, Surf Project set up a collaboration with a team of psychologists and psychiatrists at "Triversum", a large Centre for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry in the Netherlands. Together they set up a pilot study, aiming to evaluate whether research was possible in this group, and if so, which instrument(s) would be useful. Conclusions from the pilot study were:

1. It is feasible do to research with the KIDSCREEN-27¹, a parent-rated questionnaire measuring quality of life;
2. It is not feasible to have children fill in the KIDSCREEN-27¹, due to the complexity of the questions;
3. The NOSIK² questionnaire on parental stress is not sufficiently relevant for this group, and should not be used in further research;
4. Preliminary results on the KIDSCREEN-27¹ show a positive effect of surfing on the quality of life of participants.

Although first results appear positive, the results should be interpreted with care since they were obtained in a small group of children (24 participants, surfing on one location during one season).

In 2017, the research was repeated and data of new participants was added, aiming to replicate the previous findings in a larger group of children on different locations during different seasons.

Methods

The initial sample consisted of 86 children. These children participated in Surf Project in 2016 and 2017, on three different locations. The children followed a series of 3 surfing lessons, during different times of the year (but always between April and September, considering the water temperature).

Parents of these children were asked to fill in the KIDSCREEN-27¹ questionnaire three times: T1 (before surfing lessons commenced), T2 (in the week after the third surfing lesson was completed), and T3 (a follow-up measurement 3-4 months after the surfing lessons ended). The KIDSCREEN-questionnaire measures quality of life in five domains: Health, Feelings, Family, Friends and School. The questionnaire was sent out digitally; parents received an e-mail with a link through which they could fill out the questionnaire, using Qualtrics (www.qualtrics.com).

Total scores and scores on the five subscales of the questionnaire were compared between the different time points using paired sample t-tests.

Results

Data was complete for T1 and T2 for a total of 46 children. Of these children, 71% was male and 29% female. Ages ranged between 9 and 19 years old. Children were enrolled in Surf Project with various backgrounds and disabilities, amongst which Down syndrome, ADHD and autism spectrum disorder. Sample characteristics are summarized in Table 1.

A large portion of questionnaires on T3 was not filled out. Therefore, T3 was left out of the analyses. Qualitative results show that after sending out several reminders for the questionnaire, it was not feasible to ask parents to fill out a follow-up measurement 3-4 months after surfing had ended.

Results for T1 and T2 showed a significant change in the Total score of the questionnaire ($p=.022$), as well as the Feelings domain ($p=.002$). Scores on both domains were higher on T2 (after three surfing lessons) compared to T1 (before surfing). These results confirmed previous findings, in a larger group. Results are shown in Figure 1 and summarized in Table 2.

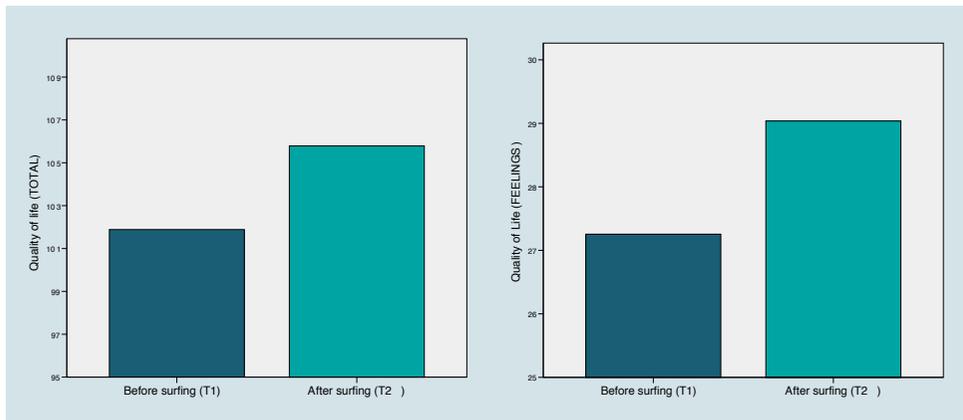


Figure 1. Mean scores on the Total score and Feelings subscale of the KIDSCREEN-27 questionnaire for quality of life (parent-rated version).

Conclusion

The results of this study show that children participating in Surf Project show significant improvement in their quality of life after three surfing lessons. The results suggest that the greatest improvement is seen in the 'feelings' domain, also resulting in a better total score and thus a better general quality of life.

Future research

In 2018 the research will be continued, adding new participants to the dataset. With a larger dataset, we hope to be able to conduct more complex analyses in the future. As a result, it may be possible to investigate whether the effects of surfing are similar or different for different age groups, disabilities, or locations.

In addition to doing quantitative research, Surf Project values qualitative research as well. Over the past few years we have collected a wide variety of qualitative data, by sending evaluations to parents and volunteers, and interviewing parents and children about their experiences. In 2018 we plan to share our qualitative and quantitative data in a publication in a professional journal.

Furthermore, we will attend a large meeting with the worldwide network for surf therapy (international surf therapy organization, ISTO), in order to share our data and experiences and learn about research that is being done in other countries. We believe this will be an important and exciting step towards professionalising our research programme, which will help attain our goal of getting surf therapy integrated in health care as an evidence-based therapy option.

References

- 1 Ravens-Sieberer, U., Auquier, P., Erhart, M., Gosch, A., Rajmil, L., Bruil, J., ... & Mazur, J. (2007). The KIDSCREEN-27 quality of life measure for children and adolescents: psychometric results from a cross-cultural survey in 13 European countries. *Quality of Life Research*, 16(8), 1347-1356.
- 2 Brock, A.J.L.L. de, Vermulst, A.A., Gerris, J.R.M. & Abidin, R.R. (1992). NOSI, Nijmeegse Ouderlijke Stress Index. Experimentele versie. Handleiding. Lisse: Swets & Zeitlinger.

Table 1. Sample characteristics

Number of participants (N)	46
Age (M, SD)	13.45 (2.5)
8-12 years (N, %)	15 (32.6%)
13-16 years (N, %)	27 (58.7%)
17-19 years (N, %)	3 (6.5%)
Sex (% male)	70.9%
Disability or disorder (N, %)	
ADHD	5 (10.9%)
ASS	12 (26.1%)
ASS+ADHD	1 (2.2%)
Down	23 (50%)
Other	5 (10.9%)

Table 2. Results of the statistical analysis

	M (SD)		Test statistics	p-value
	T1	T2		
<i>Quality of life</i>				
Total score*	101.73 (12.77)	105.42 (9.61)	t(45) = -2.38	0.022
Health	16.07 (2.94)	16.2 (2.51)	t(45) = -0.31	0.761
Feelings*	27.28 (4.28)	28.96 (3.03)	t(45) = -3.28	0.002
Family	28.21 (3.56)	28.87 (2.73)	t(45) = -1.32	0.192
Friends	13.5 (3.32)	14.16 (3.54)	t(43) = -1.1	0.276
School	15.96 (2.65)	16.4 (2.96)	t(44) = -1.04	0.306

* Significant difference at $p < .05$.



Thanks to our sponsors

Surf Project is a professional organization and is organized and run mainly by volunteers. Since 2017 parents pay a small contribution for surf lessons (€ 20 per 3 lessons). This amount is deliberately very low so that it is accessible to parents from all walks of life. Until now, the costs are covered by (mostly) one-time donations and sponsoring. We'd like to thank each one of our sponsors and funding partners across the country, for working so hard to be part of everything we have achieved for the children this year.



Plans for the future

Our key objectives for the coming period 2018 - 2020 are:

1. Further professionalisation of the organization.
2. Grow to 6 locations along the NL coastline (opening our 4th location this year)
3. The recruitment of structural sponsors to ensure financial continuity.
4. Surf Project aims to have surf therapy integrated in regular health care in the future. In order to do so, objective research is needed.
5. Actively join the global network 'International Surf Therapy Organization (ISTO)' in which we share best practices and investigate the effect of surfing on the children.
6. Adapting the management model and the organizational structure, in line with the growth in the number of locations. In this way we want to ensure that the quality and safety of Surf Project is the same everywhere with an umbrella board and an executive team per location.





www.surfproject.nl | +31(0)6 14 39 81 31 | info@surfproject.nl

