



City Kids Surfing



CASE STUDY SUMMARY

Organisation:	City Kids Surfing charity
Location:	London
MiSP Curriculum:	Paws b
Age Group/s:	7-11
Author:	Tom Franklin
Role:	Founder / Primary Teacher

Tom Franklin founded and runs the City Kids Surfing charity which gives children from city schools the chance to ‘fall in love with the ocean and change their life for the better.’ In 2019 MiSP provided a supported place for Tom on the Teach Paws b course ... this is his story:

I was a class teacher in a small primary school in Lewisham for 10 years. Unfortunately, although the school had a lovely community, it was often overshadowed by news of local violence and crime. Many of the children never got the chance to leave their housing estates and a trip to the shopping mall was the highlight for many of them.

I used to run a few mindfulness sessions and lunchtime clubs from time-to-time, knowing how much the teachers and children needed it throughout the day – but I wanted to do more, and in 2017 had the idea of

getting some of the children out to Cornwall, to experience the elements of the ‘surf lifestyle’; fitness, swimming, movement, and a mindful approach to life.

Mental health problems in 7 – 12 year olds are at an all time high. 1 in 5 kids in the UK have never seen the sea.

I developed City Kids Surfing project, a six-week programme that built towards a ‘graduation’ night and a four-day trip to Newquay.

We go into schools and promote ‘ocean literacy’ and surfing as a lifestyle choice and invite applications to the programme. The project works mostly with pupil premium children, recommended by their teachers with some referrals from councils, and their families. Children who have not seen the ocean are prioritised for selection.

Successful applicants join a group of trainee ‘Urban Oceaners’ where they learn to swim against the elements, basic beach safety and life-saving skills. They qualify as conservationists and plan and deliver a speech on an environmental topic before ‘qualifying’ to train as a surfer!

The project culminates in the trip to the coast where we stay in youth hostels, visit a surf school for two days, eat round the campfire and share stories of the waves to heal our over-stimulated minds from the

modern world.

In 2019, we were planning for twice as many kids and a great new location in Devon. But having moved forward with my own personal mindfulness journey, I realised that what was lacking was the element of formal mindfulness that I saw as vital: I needed to deliver mindfulness as a skill integrated in the project, but I was unqualified to deliver it.

That's when the Teach Paws b course came to the rescue! I had researched various courses and felt that Paws b was the strongest. The course in London landed just at the right time for us, and the supported place was very much appreciated as we run the project on extremely limited funds.

The overall objective of the project is to use the lifestyle choices, attitudes and attributes of surf communities to tackle life. We teach the kids how to think positively, prepare, look after personal wellbeing, take risks but stay safe and, of course, how to charge a wave. Free, natural adrenaline is a better choice than crime and violence.

Mindfulness is a key element of all of it. The first two sessions of Paws b are taught in their schools and then we take the 'sits' with us to the beach. We sit together to calm nerves in dorms and then on the beach. Beach sits are glorious, so many sounds and new experiences. We sit in the evening before bed too.

The changes we see over four days are miraculous, I am in no doubt that Paws b is a vital part of the experience for these children, it ties in perfectly and the kids have been showing their parents too!

As the program strengthens and numbers increase, our use of Paws b will too. We can direct the groups in the future to MiSP's online sits and hopefully have some guest teachers down to the beach!



Children have responded miraculously. If it was not for the Paws b element, I can say categorically that some of them would be too nervous to go into the sea. Some would not have made it onto the trip due to behavioural issues. To be able to teach the course and then just say "Pause and be, bro" and they know what we mean, is a gift. Many analogies are made to waves, emotions and ocean layers, but the core is their understanding of mindfulness.

We make sure we explain the mindfulness element to schools and families as an integral part of the project and we talk through the benefits of mindfulness for the children. Aware that mindfulness may not be appropriate for everyone, we give the children the choice to opt out of the mindfulness sits, but last year, out of 19 kids they all asked for more!

The Future ...

Unfortunately we had to cancel this year's trip due to COVID, but we are planning something bigger in 2021! We are now working with two schools and a youth community in Brixton. The charity's trustees are looking at how the Paws b element can be strengthened and made the most of, especially post-project.

My recent experiences with online platforms have given me many ideas, although the pastoral care element has to be carefully considered. We have been looking to develop an online presence to keep the kids involved post-project since the beginning, so I am now looking at possibilities.

2021 will see 30 children on the trip, which for us is huge!