

Luke Müller of HopeTown



By [Ilse van den Berg](#)

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The youth in Ocean View, like in a few other places in the world, grow up slightly different than the average young person. Yes, they also love to spend time outside, hang out with their friends, and desire to get an education and have a purpose in life. However, poverty and dangerous living environments make it all the harder.



Luke Müller, HopeTown

Luke Müller leads HopeTown's surf therapy sessions which includes beach lessons, mentoring, and training upcoming leaders. He offers the youth of Ocean View an afternoon away from their homes - which are sometimes troubling places.

"When my wife and I got married, we knew that we wanted to travel the world and serve people. But where to start? The world is big! We got connected with the leaders of HopeTown and asked if we could do a six-month internship. They agreed and we were off to South Africa!" he recalls.



Way better than a paycheck

Previously a businessman in Switzerland, Müller was moved by the fact that there are people in the world that are helpless because they don't have money. "There has to be people who offer help for free. I want to see people live their lives to the full and if I can play a role in helping someone achieve their goals and see them succeed in life, that's way better than a paycheck!"

“I’ve been working here for four years and I haven’t seen many young people with a passion for something. Also, the youth in Ocean View can’t just ‘be young people’ - they are dealing with adult challenges. Surfing brings passion and purpose into their lives - a hobby, an afternoon of focusing on just one thing. Afterwards, they feel like they have achieved something and they are proud of themselves.



“Surfing teaches them to look out for one another. I also believe that nature is a place where healing can happen - healing from trauma, loss, and many other hurts.”

Unfortunately, HopeTown’s surfing activities are heavily affected by the coronavirus situation at the moment. They can’t go surfing with their young people and they can’t gather them to do anything else.

“Under normal circumstances, our young people show up every single Friday - without having to wait for them or wonder where they are. They are usually waiting for me, because they are all super excited,” he explains.

At the moment there are three coaches and two assistant coaches (from Ocean View). Müller says he is passionate about training these two amazing young men from Ocean View to become proper surf coaches.

Recognising the boys’ potential, he says, “They both have a high level of responsibility and they look out for the kids in an incredible way. Both of them are in their matric year now so that also keeps them busy.”

Müller says the progress is immense. “I’m super proud of the kids - especially when I realise how many of them have gone from not being able to swim at all and being afraid of a little ankle-deep wave, to becoming surfers who take on a two-metre wave almost fearlessly,” he says.



Building self-confidence and perseverance

At the beginning of this year, they also started a girls class. “We were busy teaching them how to swim, be comfortable in

the water, and to overcome fear in our swimming pool at home. As we were almost ready to start sessions with them on the beach, the whole corona pandemic broke out. So we've placed everything on hold for now.

"I can't wait to get back in the water with them. But in the meantime, we are keeping in contact and trying to support them and their families as best we can," says Müller.

"I realised, speaking to the parents of the kids, that surfing and almost being a little surfing community, helps the kids to live life with more confidence. They are suddenly 'surfers' and not just 'township kids' anymore. They have something to look forward to, to train and practice for, and it teaches them to persevere.



"If I can help change only one young person's life here in South Africa for the better, then it was worth giving up everything in Switzerland and coming here," he concludes.

For more, go to www.hopetown-network.com.

ABOUT ILSE VAN DEN BERG

Ilse is a freelance journalist and editor with a passion for people & their stories (check out Passing Stories). She is also the editor of Go & Travel, a platform connecting all the stakeholders in the travel & tourism industry. You can check out her work here and here. Contact Ilse through her website here.

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