



WORLD'S FIRST SURF THERAPY SYMPOSIUM

"We launched 'ISTO' with the help of a grant from Laureus and Comic Relief in 2017/2018. This is the first year the conference has been self-funded, and it's amazing to see the growth. From 8 orgs in 2017, to over 200 people (Orgs, Clinicians, Researchers, Government policy makers) this round. The personal highlight for me: since ISTO's founding in 2017 the number of academic papers on Surf Therapy has more than tripled! A great outcome for the collaboration." **Tim Conibear, Founding Director of Waves For Change**

3RD ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL SURF THERAPY ORGANIZATION CONFERENCE ALIGNS WITH AND HOSTS THE WORLD'S 1ST SURF THERAPY SYMPOSIUM



EL Segundo, Manhattan Beach California, November 8 – 10: The International Surf Therapy Organization (ISTO) hosted the WORLD'S 1st Surf Therapy Symposium. ISTO is a nonprofit out to prove that surf therapy promotes mental and physical wellbeing, increases social support, and develops surfing skills for a holistically empowering experience for participants. By partnering together like-minded organizations from around the world to achieve this goal, ISTO is embodying the motto, "go far, go together. ISTO stands on its 3-pillars of sharing best practices, advocacy for the sector, and reaching outside the surf culture for further exposure and understanding.

The best practices of ISTO state that:

- To provide best practice, we must consider a holistic approach to healthcare, including the outdoor environment. Nature-based therapies offer added benefits to those carried out in traditional settings.
- Surf therapy, like all therapy, should be strengths-based and recovery-focused, centered around the 'whole person.
- Surf therapy must include a rigorous approach to safety provision, governance, evidence, and inclusion in practice.

Since the inception of ISTO in 2017, thanks to a grant awarded to Waves for Change, surf therapy practitioners, scholars, professors, and researchers have come together to determine best practices and present emerging research in the surf therapy space. But, for the first two years, this was limited to select invitees. After ISTO's 2nd conference in 2018, hosted in South Africa, ISTO doubled in size and CEO, Kris Primacio, was appointed. Primacio took the lead in producing the 2019 outward-facing symposium dedicated to surf therapy. The 2019 Symposium allowed ISTO to emerge on a much grander scale.



The 3rd Annual International Surf Therapy Organization (ISTO) Conference took place throughout the South Bay of Los Angeles over 5-days in November 2019. During the first 2-days, 60-surf therapy practitioners attended an intensive workshop at Beach House Hotel in Hermosa Beach, representing 30-surf therapy organizations and research institutions from 25-different countries around the globe. Over the next 3-days of the ISTO Surf Therapy Symposium, 120-people attended daily at Cross Campus in El Segundo for the world's first public-facing symposium dedicated to surf therapy.



(Guest Speakers: Carly Rogers, Betty Michalewicz-Kragh, Suzanne van den Broek, Elizabeth Benninger, Cash Lambert, Tim Gras, Eddie Donnellan, Mark Sawyer-Chu, Gregor Sarkisian, Hanneke van Ewijk, Kristen Walter, Giovanni Martinez, Jamie Marshall, Sean Swentek, Larry Harper, Vipe Desai, Joe Taylor, Roxanne Avant, Tijs van Bezeij)

Appropriately, the 2019 Symposium concluded in the ocean at El Porto, Manhattan Beach providing surf therapy to a mixed population of "athletes" including Veterans, cancer survivors, at-risk youth, children on the spectrum, children with mental and physical disabilities and first responders. Over 60-surf therapy practitioners from around the world used their skillsets to serve these athletes. This global coming together was a visible manifestation of the research proving surf therapy's benefits.

Research shows that surf therapy is an effective treatment for mental health disorders, in reducing the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression, aiding addiction recovery, healing trauma, stroke recovery, breaking gender and cultural barriers, and women's empowerment. The first published surf therapy article was published in 2011. Between 2011 and 2017 another 8-articles were published. Since 2017, the number of academic articles on surf therapy has doubled. ISTO is gathering the research and providing tools to increase our global data and, therefore, our knowledge. Data is the currency, especially in the healthcare profession, so to effect real change, we are helping organizations capture this information.



**"ISTO PROVIDES A SENSE OF BELONGING. IT IS A GROUP OF LIKE MINDED PROFESSIONALS THAT IS WILLING TO SUPPORT EACH AND EVERY ORGANISATION WITHIN THE SURF THERAPY COMMUNITY."
BEN, FOUNDER OF SURFIVOR**

With the collective efforts by ISTO Contributors, by March 2020, we'll see an additional 11-surf therapy research papers published through the Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice, Special Issue dedicated to surf therapy. Surfing works. Surf therapy programs around the world prioritize marginalized communities, underserved populations and developing regions. Prescribing evidence-based programming requires sound economic and factual arguments. By showing that surf therapy can lower healthcare costs, improve performance, and increase social (and community) adjustments, the sector is building an unshakable case for time in the ocean.

The groundbreaking 2019 ISTO Surf Therapy Symposium was an electrifying collection of leaders who are revolutionizing the surf therapy sector and their experiential approach to mental and physical health. The symposium's 12-panels were comprised of 40-guest speakers. Speaker's expertise included nonprofit leaders, professors, licensed therapists, authors, women pioneers in surf therapy, government counterparts, and professional surfers. 66th District Assemblymember Al Muratsuchi and Mayor of El Segundo Drew Boyles spoke during the Change Makers panel. Professional surfers Alex Gray, Aritz Aranburu, Jose Ferreira, and Dane Gudauskas (pictured) shared during The Pros panel. Saturday afternoon closed with keynote speakers Wallace J Nichols, author of Blue Mind and ocean and surf photographer, Aaron Chang (pictured).



**ISTO 2019 CONSISTED OF A GATHERING OF RESEARCHERS, ADVOCATES AND PRACTITIONERS WITH CLEAR PASSION TO DEVELOP THE SURF THERAPY SECTOR FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL. I LEFT THE CONFERENCE FEELING THAT THE GOAL OF SURF THERAPY ON PRESCRIPTION WAS NOT ONLY CLOSER, BUT NOW FEELS INEVITABLE.
JAMIE MARSHALL, PHD RESEARCHER, EDINBURGH NAPIER UNIVERSITY.**



As a result of the 2019 ISTO Surf Therapy Symposium, the needle moved toward proof and support of surf therapy. ISTO is uniting the surf therapy sector like never before and will continue its mission relentlessly to create access to evidence-based prescription surf therapy.