



World Sailing

The Skipper Foundation Case Study

sport / nature / technology





Introduction

The Skipper Foundation, based in Mossel Bay, South Africa, is dedicated to changing lives through sailing, sports, and recreation. Inspired by Nelson Mandela's belief that sport can change the world, we use water sports to uplift and empower children from vulnerable communities. We believe sport fosters pride, discipline, and respect, qualities essential to overcoming the systemic issues of poverty, unemployment, and social inequality. While water sports are part of school programs globally, in South Africa they remain inaccessible to many. Through our foundation, we aim to change that and ensure that every child, regardless of background, can dream of a better future and gain the tools to achieve it.

Our approach goes beyond teaching sailing techniques. We foster resilience, responsibility, and vision in young people who often grow up without exposure to positive role models or aspirational goals. By providing them with structured, safe, and consistent programming that includes sport, nutrition, education support, and personal development, we equip them with a chance to break free from cycles of poverty and limited opportunity. The sea becomes a platform, not just for recreation, but for transformation.



Aims of the Project

Our primary aim is to open the world of water sports and recreation to children in vulnerable communities. We strive to offer broader sporting choices that do not put additional pressure on schools or teachers. The project seeks to improve physical health, school performance, and long-term career prospects by engaging youth in sailing and related water sports. We promote a recreational culture where respect, responsibility, and resilience are central values.

Our model also aims to bridge the gender divide in sports, particularly for young girls in communities where cultural norms still limit their freedom. We empower all children equally to access opportunity, be it in sport, employment, or education. The project is designed to help children who may not thrive in traditional team sports, providing them a sense of belonging and achievement. Through sustainable and inclusive programming, we intend to build stronger individuals who can become leaders in their communities.



How and why the Project Started

In 2005, Mossel Bay was identified as an ideal location for teaching sailing and developing sporting careers. A sailing school was established within the Mossel Bay Yacht Club to provide access for anyone interested in sailing. This initiative evolved into the Skipper Foundation, registered as an NPC in 2016, with a focus on vulnerable communities.

Our work began with the understanding that many children in townships grow up without the chance to dream of something more. They face systemic challenges like poor schooling, violence, poverty, and lack of opportunity. The Skipper Foundation aims to replace these obstacles with hope. We do this by creating consistent, enriching programs that meet children where they are, and support them until they're ready to step into the world as confident, capable adults. We prioritize discipline, teamwork, and character as much as technical ability.

We also saw the need to create a pathway to employment. With training in water safety, powerboating, marine guiding, and sailing instruction, our youth are empowered to pursue careers in resorts, camps, and international yachting. Many former students now work locally or abroad in marine and tourism sectors. Our mission is to equip every child not only with dreams, but with the means to realize them.



Key Successes

The Foundation has impacted over **4,000 children**, sending 20 to international competitions and offering part-time and full-time jobs to local youth. Our programs have reached schools throughout Mossel Bay and contributed to the local economy. One of our biggest successes has been the recycling of **13 Topper boats**, donated from the UK, which now form the backbone of our performance sailing team. This initiative not only built our fleet but also taught students technical skills in boat repair and maintenance.

Our beach rental program empowers students to run summer operations, teaching them responsibility, customer service, and money management. This program benefits **21 families annually**. In terms of recognition, the Foundation is an internationally certified sailing centre through SA Sailing and World Sailing, meeting high standards of training and safety. Our coaching team includes an Olympic coach, further solidifying our international credentials.



Changes and Developments Throughout the Project

Over the years, we've expanded far beyond basic sailing lessons. Our Learn to Sail program now includes kayaking and stand-up paddleboarding, introducing students to broader aquatic disciplines. Performance sailing is supported by structured levels of participation, from basic training to international competition, based on commitment, not just skill.

We introduced nutritional support when we realized many children were struggling with concentration due to hunger. Meals are now served before and after sailing. Although we started a homework support program, it became unsustainable without dedicated staff. A key goal is to hire a permanent tutor for two hours daily to provide consistent academic help.

In terms of accessibility, we're working with the local municipality to create facilities for children with disabilities, including ramps and accessible toilets. We've also made progress in promoting gender equity, though we continue to face cultural challenges. Our programs have become more holistic, addressing not just sport, but nutrition, education, mental health, and job readiness.



How to get involved

FINANCIAL DONATIONS

Financial donations can be earmarked for specific needs, such as child sponsorship (\$110/month), feeding programs (\$2/day per child), tutor salaries, or transportation. Unrestricted donations are also welcome and allow us to respond flexibly to urgent needs.

EQUIPMENT DONATIONS

We are actively seeking equipment donations, including RS Zest and ILCA training boats, safety boats, and computers. Our 'Recycle-a-Boat' program invites international partners to send retired boats to South Africa, where they are refurbished by our students and put back into use. This project is both environmentally and socially sustainable.

VOLUNTEER

Volunteer support is equally vital. We are especially in need of help with marketing, communications, and outreach. We also welcome collaboration with employers willing to offer internships, jobs, or mentorship opportunities to our graduates. Every contribution, no matter the size, makes a meaningful impact in helping us change lives through sailing.

To find out more
please visit the
Skipper Foundation
website



World Sailing
Office 401, 4th Floor
3 Shortlands
London W6 8DA
United Kingdom

www.sailing.org

sport / nature / technology

Official Partners

