



Brown Girl Surf Spring 2020 Newsletter

Dear Brown Girl Surf Community,

As we all work hard to stay positive and connected during extended Shelter in Place, we wanted to look back on our amazing Fall and Winter. We hope this will be a reminder to us all of the power of our community, the strength each of us has inside us, and the joy we feel when we are connected to each other and the ocean.

In this newsletter, we'll share with you:

- 1) Program highlights since this past Fall
- 2) Our Impact Beyond Programming
- 3) Staff and Development Updates
- 4) Looking Ahead

Program Highlights

On September 21, we held our annual **Creek to Bay Day Kayak Cleanup**. This is a part of International Coastal Cleanup Day, when people all over the world work together to clean up waterways and coastlines. At Brown Girl Surf, it's an opportunity for us to enjoy the experience of kayaking on Oakland's estuary while picking up hard to reach trash on inaccessible banks.



2019 Creek to Bay Day Kayak Cleanup

This year, we had **so many participants (32!)** that our partners at California Canoe and Kayak had to bring kayaks in from other stores around the Bay area. For many, it was their first time ever on a kayak. We started the day with a lesson about plastic pollution in the form of a game. Each participant followed the trail of a piece of plastic, to discover that all plastic, even the plastic we recycle, ends up in the environment, and a huge amount ends up in the ocean. Many participants were surprised to learn that **only 10% of plastic we put in the recycling bin actually gets recycled**, and that microplastics are in most of our clothing and travel from washing machines to waterways. Huge thanks to California Canoe and Kayak Company who has supported this event for 5 years in a row with free and discounted kayak rentals for our volunteers, and to the City of Oakland for a grant to make sure the event was accessible to all.

Surf Sister Saturdays

This fall, we held five **Surf Sister Saturdays** with a total of 66 participants and volunteers. We set aside our Oct. 5 Surf Sister Saturday for brand new participants, which helped ensure that new participants could sign up even if registration fills up quickly. Our Nov. 2 Surf Sister Saturday was reserved for returning participants, so we could work on more advanced surf skills. We are proud that so many of our community members who began their surfing journey with us continue to surf with the Brown Girl Surf community as they further develop their skills, with many eventually becoming volunteers.



Surf Sister Saturday for beginners on October 5

In addition, we designed a special program with **Día de los Muertos** in mind. We created an **altar** using **marigolds**, and one of our youth Rising Leaders brought rice and salt for the altar. We did a guided meditation circle while honoring departed loved ones.



Mindfulness circle (left); Altar for Día de los Muertos (right)



Jackie N., Volunteer Surf Instructor



Surf Sister Saturday for beginners October 5

Rising Leaders Youth Program

This fall, we dramatically revamped our **Rising Leaders** program. Thanks to the success of summer camp, we had **13 youth Rising Leaders** – more than we’ve ever had in the history of our program. The youngest ones were 11 years old, and were in the newly created “Groms” group. We also created “Carvers” and “Chargers” groups, with different levels of responsibility based on the girl’s age and experience in the program.

We kicked off the season with our first ever Rising Leader Family Orientation pizza dinner, a chance for our youth’s families to meet our staff and volunteers and build community together. 40 people attended, excited for the season! At our December 7 Rising Leader Celebration Dinner, we enjoyed amazing sustainably sourced tacos donated by Little Chihuahua, and reflected on the accomplishments of the season.

Highlights included recognizing one of our “Chargers” who was hesitant in the water when she first joined three years ago. On her last Surf Sister Saturday of the season, she paddled for a really big wave and caught it briefly before falling down. We also appreciated one of our newest Rising Leaders who first started surfing at summer camp

last year. When a wave broke in her face the first time, she cried. On the Nov. 16 Surf Sister Saturday, she caught ALL of the waves. And once her surf session was over, she grabbed a boogie board and caught even more waves!



November 16 Surf Sister Saturday with Rising Leaders

Volunteer Program

None of this would be possible without our amazing volunteer corps, who we were able to celebrate during our annual **Volunteer Appreciation Surf Day** on Sept. 7. We gathered in Pacifica for a morning of surfing, followed by a picnic lunch and appreciation ceremony. This year, we were able to create special awards for different categories of volunteers, such as: volunteers who attended our Environmental Stewardship events; those who volunteered during summer camp; those who spent over 50 hours, 100 hours, and 200 hours. Big thanks to **Sanuk** for providing us with hats and changing towels, hammocks, and umbrellas which we were able to share with our rock star volunteers.

In early March 2020, we trained our biggest cohort of BGS volunteers yet, with **18 new volunteers**. When we were caught in an unpredicted rainstorm, one of our new volunteers offered her house for the on-land portion of our training. The sun came out just in time for us to practice surf instruction on the beach, in the bright Northern California sun, with a focus on trauma-informed facilitation techniques. We are so excited to welcome this amazing group of womxn to the Brown Girl Surf volunteer community!



Volunteer Appreciation Surf Day



2020 New Volunteer training

This fall, we were able to analyze the impact of our newly developed marine education curriculum that we piloted at **Summer Camp in 2019** as well as our **Creek to Bay Day** plastic education curriculum.

95.5% of youth participants surveyed

88.2% of youth participants surveyed

reported that because of their Brown Girl Surf Summer Camp experience, they care more about the animals that live in the Bay and the ocean.

As for Our Creek to Bay Day event, **93.8%** of our Creek to Bay Day participants stated that after the event, they feel more inspired to reduce their plastic use.

reported that because of their BGS camp experience, they understand how the choices they make in their daily life can affect ocean health.

100% of participants reported that they felt more connected to the environment of Oakland as a result of their participation.

We are deeply grateful to the California Coastal Commission, Whale Tail license plate fund which supported the development of this successful new curriculum.

Brown Girl Surf's impact beyond programs

This fall was that one of our youth Rising Leaders, **Justine**, was selected to be a keynote speaker at the **Alliance for Girls 6th Annual Conference: A Movement for Equity**, which took place in Oakland in October. Justine has spent 300 hours with Brown Girl Surf, starting in 2015. She shared how Brown Girl Surf changed her life, and also helped her see herself as a surfer. She described her experiences in nature prior to Brown Girl Surf, compared to after Brown Girl Surf, and how she has been able to find her place.



Justine (right) with BGS Staff at Alliance for Girls 6th Annual Conference

This sentiment was echoed by [Jessica](#), another youth Rising Leader, who was selected as a 2019 recipient of a [Global Surf Industries Life is Better When You Surf Scholarship](#). She will receive two brand new surfboards and \$1000 towards school expenses. Jessica learned to surf with Brown Girl Surf, and has been a youth Rising Leader since early 2017. She has also joined us in the Protest Against Offshore Drilling in Sacramento in 2018. She shared with us that surfing has been an important way to relieve stress. She wrote in her application:

“Surfing has become such a big part of my life. It's become a passion and a constant pastime for me; it gives me the feeling of being connected to my environment. I surf as often as I can with friends ... Being a surfer is like being a part of a huge family all over the world. You feel connected by one universal thing - the Ocean.”



Jessica Knox, recipient of 2019 Life is Better When You Surf Scholarship

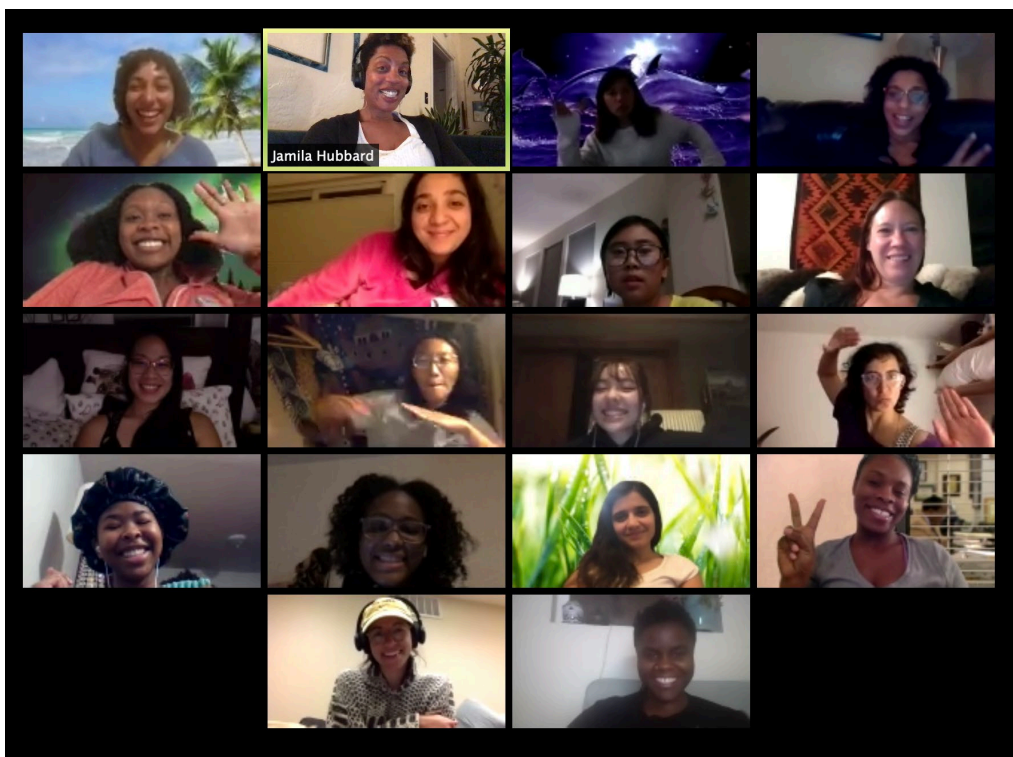
In September, there was a [New York Times article](#) that uncovered the racism embedded in California surf culture - as well as the history of our state, at large. The author wrote that he first started thinking about the lack of representation in surfing when he heard about Brown Girl Surf. After the article came out, we received many emails - one from the mom of two summer camp participants, who shared her and her families' experiences of discrimination at swimming pools in the Bay area. She wrote of her daughter's camp experience:

“It was only a one week camp, but it has made a great impact in their life. Not only did it teach them to respect and value the environment, it also taught them that we as brown women can do anything we put our minds to. Stereotypes and segregation are only barriers that are set to oppress us and need to be broken. I want to thank BROWN GIRL SURF for helping break those barriers and allowing my girls to grow in ways our past family members were denied the opportunities.”

In September, our [Executive Director](#) presented to the [Environmental Educators Funding](#) collaborative about how Brown Girl Surf is achieving outcomes around social-emotional learning and health and wellness. She talked about Brown Girl Surf’s approach of building a surf culture and community in our own image, our intergenerational program model, and the importance of grounding our connections to nature at the emotional and somatic level.

In January, we were featured alongside the amazing women of Black Girls Surf, in [this great article by Yolanda Evans](#) in Zora online. In the article, Evans talks about the widespread perception that “surfing is for white people,” and how groups like Black Girls Surf and Brown Girl Surf changing the surfing landscape, and creating new possibilities.

In February, [NBC Bay Area featured Brown Girl Surf](#) as part of their Bay Area Revelations documentary series, [Riding the Wave](#), which told the story of surfing and surfers in the Bay Area.



April 14, 2020 Bay Area Revelations community watch party via zoom

We are honored to be a part of this rich history and share the screen with surf heroines Bianca Valenti, Sachi Cunningham, and Jane “the Lane” McKenzie. You can watch the movie [here](#).

This also gave rise to our first ever Brown Girl Surf virtual event, our Riding the Wave watch party. 25 Brown Girl Surf community members attended, including 5 youth and 5 brand new volunteers. Program Manager Marlim Reynosa set a gold standard for zoom facilitation – with interactive polls, breakout rooms, and an agenda that made everyone feel that they had spent quality time together.

Finally, we are honored to have been honored in Sunset magazine’s [2019 Travel awards](#).

Staff Updates

This past fall, we had the great pleasure of working with [Celeste West](#), from the Berkeley Public Service Internship Program this fall. Celeste is a poet, artist, educator, and a member of the Cal Women’s Basketball team. She helped us with data management, social media, website updates, and evaluations. She hopes to start her own youth-development non profit close to her hometown of Bakersfield, CA.

This March, we brought on a new member to our Brown Girl Surf team. We are thrilled to welcome [Adriana Guerrero](#) to our staff in the new position of Associate Director.



Adriana comes to Brown Girl Surf with over 13 years of experience in education and youth development, and a wealth of experience in fund development, program leadership, and operations. She also holds a Masters Degree in Nonprofit Administration from the University of San Francisco. Prior to working at Brown Girl Surf, she was the Annual Fund Manager at Outward Bound California. Outside of work, Adriana has served on the leadership team for Women's March Oakland and currently serves as the Secretary on the Board of Directors at Camp Phoenix.

Adriana shares that she is excited about working at BGS because "I have always had a deep connection and respect for the ocean, and witnessed the healing power of nature. I am also excited to be part of the Brown Girl Surf community and join a social justice organization that centers women of color surfers and artists and is leading the movement on equitable access to the ocean in the Bay Area."

Development Updates:

We are deeply grateful in 2020 to be continuing our partnerships with several of our long-term supporters, including the [State Coastal Conservancy](#) through their [Explore the Coast](#) program, [Youth Outside](#), and [Patagonia](#). We are also thrilled to continue into 2020 partnerships started last year with the [California Coastal Commission](#) through their [Whale Tail](#) grant, the [San Francisco Foundation's Youth Access to Nature](#) fund. We have also received support this year from [Evo](#), a major outdoor retailer based in Seattle, as part of their corporate giving program.

Just before Thanksgiving last year, [Patagonia](#) surprised us and many other environmental nonprofits with their Black Friday and holiday season Gift of Giving Campaign. In this campaign, they matched all donations made on Black Friday and beyond, up to a total of 10 million dollars. [We are deeply grateful to our many individual donors and Patagonia who, together, helped us raise over \\$24,000 in year end funds.](#) We are also grateful to [Sanuk](#), who provided us with another year of support in 2019, in addition to the awesome merchandise they've been sharing with us since 2018 to honor our volunteers and youth leaders.

Finally, we are excited to announce that last October, [we received a two-year grant through the Packard Foundation's U.S. Marine Program](#), to support our work building community around ocean connection, and to help us build our capacity around ocean advocacy. As part of this relationship, we've also received two consulting grants to build our capacity in financial management, and to build our organizational resilience in the face of Covid-19.

In related news, you may notice a new look in our photographs. We are no longer only wearing pink! Now we've got green, blue, and even orange in the mix. This is for safety reasons, so that we can quickly identify who is a participant, instructor, staff member, youth leader, etc. We want to give big props to Miriam Roberts, superstar volunteer and purchasing and logistics expert who led us through the surprisingly complex process of sourcing materials. Also a big thanks to Doug Armstrong, Ocean Beach's National Park Service Ocean Rescue Supervisor, who helps us review our ocean safety protocol each year.

Looking Ahead

We find ourselves in new and challenging times as we face an ongoing pandemic that changes the way we are able to meet, be in community, and support each other. Our hearts ache for those who have died and for the tremendous suffering that this pandemic has brought to all corners of the globe. We seek a more just world, where all humans have equal access to quality health care, and the burden of exposure does not fall along lines of race and income.



The next generation of Brown Girl Surf, in orange!

In these times, the outdoors, and the healing power of nature are more crucial than ever. Research increasingly shows that the outdoors is the safest public place to be right now, and the solace provided by open green and blue spaces is essential for maintaining mental health and releasing toxic stress. This is even more important for communities of color who are disproportionately impacted by this pandemic.

As the pandemic stretches on, we know we have to find better, more equitable ways for people to access nature safely. Brown Girl Surf is committed to working with land managers to reopen beaches in safe ways. We imagine that in the coming months, our programming may look very different. Surf lessons with close contact between learners and instructors may no longer be possible. But there are many things that ARE possible – there are ways for us to be together (at a safe distance) in the outdoors and the ocean, to feel free and joyful in our bodies, to learn about and celebrate the ocean that we love,

and continue to build community together. And now more than ever, our voices and efforts are needed to rebuild our world with justice, peace, and environmental sustainability at the center. [At Brown Girl Surf we are focusing on what IS possible.](#)

In the coming months, we invite you to join in conversations to help us re-imagine Brown Girl Surf programming, work towards equitable and safe beach access, and rebuild a better world. [If you are interested in being part of these conversations, please share your information and interests here](#) so we can be in touch.

Thank you for being a member of our community. Please help us grow the movement by spreading the word and supporting our work. 30% of our operational funds come from individual contributions.

Click [here](#) to support the programs of Brown Girl Surf