Who we are

The Robertson Trust is Scotland’s largest independent funder distributing around £18m per year across Scotland to organisations which are working towards delivering our main strategic aims of reducing inequality and realising potential for the communities and people they work with.

Our involvement in sport

Over the last five years, The Trust has invested £1.8m into organisations utilising sport and physical activity as a way of delivering positive change. We refer to this as Sport for Change.

We define Sport for Change as: “where sport and physical activity is intentionally used to deliver social impacts for individuals and communities and to address inequalities”. These impacts include increased physical activity levels, improved health and wellbeing, skills and confidence, social inclusion and cohesion.

Implicit within our definition is the understanding that these positive impacts can only happen for people who are engaged and retained within the sporting organisation or activity.

In this way, participation in sport and physical activity becomes a driver to enable positive social change, rather than being seen as an end goal in itself.

Through our work in Sport for Change we aim to:

- Increase understanding of Sport for Change approaches and ‘what works’ when supporting the development of sustainable sports organisations that meet the needs of their communities
- Develop the evidence base on what type of approaches are most likely to be effective when engaging and retaining people in sport and physical activity and delivering intentional positive impact as a result of this
- Support funded organisations to deliver better impact through sport and physical activity
- Inform the policy and practice environment around Sport for Change

We have funded programmes within two main portfolio areas over the last five years:

**Strategic Support and Sector Development:** Building evidence and understanding around the core skills, resources and infrastructure required to support a sports sector that addresses inequalities, is impactful and sustainable.

- We commissioned independent research to look at the current landscape for Sport for Change in Scotland, how it fits into the wider policy agenda, and how sporting organisations can be supported to deliver social impact in line with this policy agenda. Draft report available on request.
- We joint funded with Scottish Government the £1m Legacy 2014: Sustainable Sport for Communities Fund. In addition to supporting the 33 organisations funded through the Programme to become more sustainable, learning from the programme will be used to improve understanding of the critical success factors in asset management, organisational sustainability and delivering social impact. Baseline evaluation available on request.

**Working with Young People:** Developing the evidence base about what approaches are likely to be most effective at engaging young people who would not normally engage with sports.

- We funded the Youth Work in Sport programme which investigated whether adopting a youth work (rather than a sports development approach) might assist sports organisations to engage more hard to reach young people in sporting activities and developments resulting from this. Full evaluation report available on request.
- We funded a Legacy programme in Glasgow called Active East which aimed to look at the impact of supporting young people (and particularly those at risk of dis-engagement) to develop their skills and volunteer through sport. Also looked at how youth work skills could enhance the core offer of sporting organisations. Full evaluation report available on request.
Key message

From our extensive work in this field over the last five years, including independent evaluations and research, we have identified the following key messages:

- **A clear rationale for sport investment** – there needs to be agreement at a national level around the rationale and purpose for investing in sport and physical activity. To what extent is the priority about high performance, and to what extent is it about delivering outcomes around health, wellbeing, personal and social development? What role does participation play in this?

- **Clarification on the purpose of participation** - There needs to be a clearer articulation of how participation in sport and physical activity supports this wider policy agenda. At the moment, participation is often referred to as an end in itself. Within this new framework, it should be seen as a necessary component of supporting positive change for individuals and communities.

- **Addressing inequality** - Participation in sport can only make a difference for those who get engaged and stay engaged. Therefore sports delivery agencies need to consider who they’re engaging and retaining (and perhaps more importantly, who they are not). A whole population approach is unlikely to engage beyond “the usual suspects”.

- **Barriers to participation** - Consideration should be given to the wider barriers to participation in sport and physical activity. Whilst cost can often be a barrier, it is by no means the only one. Factors such as confidence, peer pressure, negative previous experiences and the availability of family support can all be substantial barriers to engagement.

- **Person centred rather than sports centred approaches** – sports based programmes are more likely to be successful in engaging, retaining and developing individuals if they:
  
  - recognise that sport is a tool to engage people rather than an end in itself
  - develop better relationships with non-sports partners
  - build relationships with individuals and recognise their needs
  - Create progression routes for participants that go beyond sporting performance pathways (e.g. leadership, volunteering)

- **Supporting effective delivery** – to maximise their impact and sustainability, there is a need for additional support to be developed for organisations delivering sport and physical activity:
  
  - **Sustainable organisations**: providing support to organisations around their governance, infrastructure building capacity, working with staff and volunteers, finances and organisational structure
  - **Quality of delivery using a Sport for Change approach**: support understanding around what works, how to achieve change, clarity of purpose around the purpose they are best placed to achieve, learning from others.
  - **Evidencing impact**: supporting organisations to better understand and articulate the impact of their work beyond the assumption that participation in sport is intrinsically good
  - **Accessing Funding**: Supporting organisations to talk about their impact beyond sporting participation will open the doors to a broader range of funding opportunities
  - **Ensuring the right type of funding support is available**: Direct funders of sports and physical activity should ensure that funds available do more than support the sporting offer and building of capital assets. Targeted resource and support is required for business planning, capital development and revenue costs.

For further information

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