

Sport for Change Research

**For: The Robertson Trust, Scottish Government,
sportsotland and Sport for Change Network**

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Executive Summary

**Research
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www.researchscotland.org

katy.macmillan@researchscotland.org

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

About the research

The research explored how the 'sport for change' approach could be developed and supported within Scotland. It was commissioned by The Robertson Trust, Scottish Government, **sportscotland** and the Sport for Change Network Scotland. The research was undertaken by Research Scotland.

What is sport for change?

Sport for change is a term which is used in different ways to describe different things. Throughout the course of the research, we explored what sport for change meant to people in Scotland. We jointly developed a definition of sport for change as:

Sport for change: By which we mean using physical activity and sport intentionally to bring about positive benefits for individuals and communities, to address specific needs.

The key considerations in developing this definition were that:

- sport for change is activity which **intentionally** aims to bring about change;
- sport or physical activity is the **tool**, hook or method to bring about change;
- the term 'sport' in this instance is intended to cover both **sport and physical activity** – to ensure it is an inclusive concept; and
- most research participants **liked the term** 'sport for change' and did not agree on an alternative term that better described the approach.

Evidence is that sport and physical activity can bring about change

A review of literature and research around sport and physical activity highlights that they can bring about positive changes in terms of:

- **Preventing** death and diseases;
- **Reducing** health harming behaviours, anxiety, social isolation, depression, suicide, dementia and Alzheimers;
- **Improving** brain health, behaviour at school and engagement in school learning;
- **Developing** team work, social and communication skills;
- **Building** social capital, connectedness and sense of belonging; and
- **Making savings** for the NHS.

Sport for change can contribute to national and local policy priorities. It can help to support wellbeing and resilience in communities, which is an important aim within the Active Scotland Outcomes Framework. And it can contribute to policy priorities around physical and mental health; education and progression; tackling crime and antisocial behaviour; community cohesion; and economic development.

The sport for change approach in Scotland

Our survey of organisations delivering sport and physical activity in Scotland found that:

- **25%** used sport or physical activity to bring about benefits for individuals and communities
- **6%** only wanted to increase participation and performance in sport
- **69%** used sport or physical activity both to bring about benefits and to increase participation and performance.

Most activity focused on work with young people. Organisations were using sport and physical activity to:

- get people active and healthier;
- increase confidence and self-esteem;
- develop skills for life, learning or work;
- tackle isolation;
- reduce crime and antisocial behaviour; and
- engage hard to reach groups.

What works

The key success factors in effectively using a sport for change approach were:

- a team of committed, passionate and inspirational staff (and volunteers);
- understanding community and individual needs;
- taking an inclusive approach;
- adopting a youth work or community development approach;
- working jointly with others;
- consistency and sustainability of approach; and
- a clear intention to bring about change through sport and physical activity.

Support needs

The key challenges and barriers were:

- funding and resources in a competitive environment;
- evaluation and demonstrating outcomes;
- fragility of staff and volunteer teams;
- the perceived low priority of sport for change work; and
- challenges around joint working.

The three most commonly highlighted support needs related to funding, building capacity and sustainability, and evaluation. Many said that they found it challenging to measure the impact they were having. Organisations experienced particular challenges around having the capacity to take time to reflect and the skills to undertake evaluation.

Recommendations for action

Talking about 'sport for change'

The words we use to describe how to use sport and physical activity for positive outcomes are tricky. While sport for change was seen as a pragmatic and broadly acceptable phrase, there was recognition that it was not ideal – due to perceptions of 'sport' and the fact it doesn't immediately make clear that physical activity is included.

There is a need to:

- agree a common language and intended outcomes – this would consolidate the outcomes framework developed with research participants (which is included at section 8 of this report);
- raise awareness of these intended outcomes; and
- support the gathering of evidence against these outcomes and collate evidence at Scottish level to demonstrate impact of the approach.

Leadership

Leadership was identified as a clear priority for action, to drive forward the sport for change approach in Scotland. Most importantly, leadership is required to raise awareness of the current and potential contribution of sport and physical activity to change; encourage and support organisations to use a sport for change approach; and link sport for change with national and local priorities, frameworks and systems.

There is a need for the Scottish Government, **sportscotland** and others to:

- provide clear support for sport and physical activity as tools of change;
- integrate the new sport for change outcomes framework within the Active Scotland Outcomes Framework;
- provide clarity more broadly on how sports participation can contribute to the Active Scotland Outcomes Framework;
- raise awareness of the sport for change approach and the role it can play in achieving outcomes, across local and national organisations; and
- take action to firmly place change within the sporting sector and system for sport.

Networking

This research found a high level of interest in networking opportunities which brought together delivery organisations aiming to bring about change through sport and physical activity – including very small grassroots organisations. The purpose of these networking opportunities would be to enable organisations to share practice, receive training and support collectively and to promote joint working.

Importantly, the networking opportunities should link with existing related networks of sport, physical activity and outcomes focused organisations, to ensure that they complement – and don't duplicate – other activity. We suggest a review of the form and function of the existing Sport for Change Network in Scotland. The creation of additional sustainable and effective networking and support opportunities would

need to be accompanied with some resources and would need to be co-ordinated by an individual or organisation, to ensure clear responsibility.

Supporting effective delivery

The main areas of support required were around:

- Funding – accessing funding, describing the sport for change approach, linking with key priority areas such as obesity and attainment.
- Sustainable organisations – building capacity, working with staff and volunteers, finances, organisational structure – to ensure that quality of delivery is high and aligned to the desired outcomes.
- Using a sport for change approach – understanding what works, how to achieve change, clarity of purpose around connections to the outcomes they are best placed to achieve, learning from others.
- Evidence – how to align with outcomes and report against these effectively, providing guidance and tools for different settings.

Support resources should be offered, linked to the outcomes framework, to enable organisations across the spectrum to engage and achieve as much change as possible.

Connecting funding opportunities

Finally, the research highlighted the need for a clearer funding environment. There is a need for:

- more information about the funding available to support using sport and physical activity to bring about change;
- better connections and signposting between funding streams;
- promotion of the sport for change approach to ensure funders understand its potential benefits (and how it is different from traditional sports activity);
- support for organisations to complete funding applications; and
- greater consistency in the evidence collated by funders around achievement of outcomes – potentially aligned to the new outcomes framework.