

---

# Impact is not all about numbers



**Jude Reid**  
**Development**  
**Manager**  
**(Sport)**

---

I recently wrote about how the Scottish Household Survey 2019 concluded that 80% of the population are active and 20% inactive.

The integrity of the data which informed this statistic troubled me. However, what also bothered me was that at least 20% of our society participate in even less than 30 minutes of activity once a month.

There are a wide range of real barriers which stop people from being active. Are we really making enough effort to identify what these are and implement lasting solutions to address these? Solutions which really work for the people who need them?

There are sport social enterprises who are working incredibly hard to engage people who are disadvantaged and face inequalities. They identify problems and barriers faced by the communities in which they operate, and they look for opportunities to enable people to participate in sport and physical activity. Engaging those who are excluded, for whatever reason, takes effort and time, but the potential impact is huge.

Although it does seem that the time and effort to engage the inactive is becoming more widely recognised, when it comes to investing, there still seems to be an overwhelming tendency within the sport sector to expect success to be demonstrated by reporting high numbers of participation or by way of awards. However, when some of the greatest impact comes from working with these harder to reach communities, even though this may not lead to high participation figures, surely this needs to be encouraged and supported.

I think it's really important to consider the context in which each individual organisation is operating and understand that if they are genuinely working to engage with hard to reach groups, that it takes effort to find them, connect with them, and develop a solution which genuinely works. They then must work closely with these people to keep them involved longer term.

There's also a need to empower people to be able to continue to participate in activities even when the initial support has gone. It's important to ensure that people have the confidence and means to continue, and don't necessarily become completely dependent on a free or subsidised service.

Encouraging people who either have no desire or confidence to be active, or who have physical or psychological barriers which prevent them, needs long term investment in order to create change. It takes a change in mindset and habits, and the length of time this takes will vary depending on individual factors.

This is where person-centred and participant-led approaches are vital. Packages of support must be developed with the needs of the person in mind, and it's important to ensure people from the group you are targeting are represented. What you might think is a good idea, and what you might have seen work for others, might not always be the best solution due to unique circumstances. Although asking people what they want, or need, might not necessarily mean a solution you try will work, it will certainly help and could provide ideas you might not have considered.

This point touches on one made in my last blog, about investors and agencies offering opportunities for organisations to explore and experiment with an approach. Working directly with user groups may not result in the development of a solution to a problem immediately, but opportunities to try, fail and learn must be available.

Sport social enterprises can really excel at this type of approach. They are embedded within their communities and they want to make a lasting difference for people who face inequalities. With a bit more willingness from investors to take a risk on social enterprises and show confidence in them to use investment wisely and as they determine is needed, the impact on people and communities could be huge – and not only in increasing their physical health and fitness.