

Advancing Racial Justice in Scotland: how can we work together?

On Friday, 27th October 2023, The Robertson Trust held a half-day workshop on *Advancing Racial Justice: how we can work together?* to discuss together what is the change we want to see and lay the groundwork for setting up a co-production group to take forward this work with us next year.

The Advancing Racial Justice workshop was split into three sessions. This document summarises the key points from the discussions during each session. If you would like to explore any of the summarised points in more detail, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Session 1: What change do we want to see?

The Trust shared what we've heard from Advancing Racial Justice conversations. Group discussions focused on the change we all want to see around the following five key themes/issues:

Education/
Schools and
Young People

Wellbeing/
Mental Health
and surviving
everyday
oppression

Work and
Higher/ Further
Education

Challenging
dehumanising
policy and
systems

Public
narratives and
media
representation

1. Education (schools) and children/young people

- Young people's voice is represented in decision-making and schools are upholding young people's rights and addressing bullying – young people have rights, but they don't know they do.
- Address inequality in provision and ensure no stigma is attached to children from No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) families (asylum seekers/refugees/international students) - addressing inequality in free school meals for primary school children – currently asking why aren't getting food when classmates are.
- Holistic family support is offered to parents who do not know Scottish education system, so they have an equal footing with others to make good choices for their children (particularly at S2 stage) including investment in homework clubs.

2. Work and Higher/Further Education

- Work experience properly recognised – there are people with lots of job experience but being forced to start from scratch and in jobs not related to past experience.
- Qualifications properly recognised – people have lots of education qualifications but often these are not recognised.
- Employers find ways to say yes and offer a chance rather than finding reasons to say no or dismissing people (or discriminating against people), recognising they can benefit as much as New Scots.

3. Wellbeing/ Mental Health and surviving everyday oppression

- The unique and layered mental health stressors for asylum seekers and refugees are recognised and addressed. People often face significant trauma experiences in getting here; everyday experience of being 'other'; practical and material challenges of living with poverty [layering of stress factors of wellbeing and mental health].
- Processes for accessing housing, education, healthcare, social security respond to and support diverse communities, including people in the asylum system, so that the impacts of systems – housing, education, asylum process – do not exacerbate stress/tension/trauma [address bureaucratic violence and systemic and structural racism in current systems]. This work should not be left to small community organisations to support people in navigating these systems.
- People from multi-ethnic communities are represented in and able to access more appropriate mental health and wellbeing services where there is a strong and professional understanding of racism and racial trauma and understanding of refugee experiences.
- Training and encouraging long-term skills development so that people with lived experience of racial trauma can lead/co-lead and deliver professional services.

4. Challenging dehumanising policy and systems

- Community development has **embedded** collective decision-making powers – more than lived experience advisory boards – with diverse representation and direct engagement e.g. with local and national government processes.
- Issue-based **mobilising** around changes we need to see NRPF, Right to fair work, Right to travel (free bus travel campaign) – with effective alliance building around change in the most dehumanising policies and systems. As well as deepening practice in Scotland and UK we heard inspiring examples from global south – National Union of disabled people in Uganda.
- Participatory grant making acts as a route into wider participatory decision-making (learning from and building on examples such as The National Lottery Community Fund's partnership with the Scottish Refugee Council).

5. Public narratives and media representation

- Visibility and normalisation of positive images of People of Colour replacing stigmatising and stereotyped images.
- A media which does not promote bias and division – train editors and media decision makers in anti-racism and anti-racism accountability (proper process and mechanisms to review and hold to account).
- More capacity building and opportunities for communities to come together to tackle division and negative narratives.

Session 2: How can we work together?

Workshop participants were led through a reimagining exercise, exploring how different things would be and feel in a more just and sustainable world.

We reimagined how people and funding organisations could work together. Keywords from this exercise included (numbers indicate how many times word was shared):

- Fairness x3
- Funding generates joy! It's fun!
- Thriving not surviving x2
- More unity
- Collaboration x2
- Cohesion
- Resilience
- Mobilised communities
- Inclusive x4
- Interactive
- Equal and balanced relationships x3
- Open
- Transparent
- Sharing
- Supportive
- Different language
- No jargon
- Building trust
- Sharing knowledge
- Cultural exchange
- Spending time with each other
- Shared learning and understanding
- Meeting outside of the office
- Starting with a conversation
- Funders speaking to each other
- Not creating competition
- Learning from grassroots groups
- Capacity of small organisations understood

We reimagined what society would be like. Keywords from this exercise included:

- Confident and resilient Black and ethnic minority young people
- Diverse skills and enriching the economy
- Public services giving fair treatment and human rights to all
- Electoral reform and public opinion shifted (a government like this can never be elected again)
- Less hostile systems
- All citizens together - feeling proud, happy, helping society
- All bringing ideas to help others
- Spreading the wealth
- Better coordination of services
- Balanced needs with resources
- Prevention to tackle root causes
- Everyone supported in a crisis
- More humane society

Session 3: Moving Forward: Creating a co-production group to design a fund for racial justice

The Trust shared a broad overview of plans to move forward with the creation of a coproduction group. The intention is for the group to share power with the Trust to design and deliver a participatory grant-making project to advance racial justice. Workshop participants shared a range of insights, questions, and suggestions.

Notes from the general chat about participation and participatory grant-making:

- We need a clear role description and a sense of expectations for people before they submit an Expression of Interest (EOI).
- Share a brief with people and something akin to a 'terms of reference'.
- Also, keep things open – it is good to engage up to 12 people in a coproduction group, but keep in touch with the wider group of people you've been engaging with and create ways for people to share ideas that they want to feed in.
- Opportunities for people to stay involved need to be clear and plentiful.
- Remuneration needs to be clear and it's helpful to state the options/amounts too.
- This is a fund that should have an impact but it's also about the Trust changing over time.
- Frequent reference to bigger organisations getting funding and the money going to paying third sector wages, but most of it is not reaching the people it should be reaching.
- Break down barriers between smaller organisations and funders - close the gap that currently exists.
- Discussion around immediate need versus big structural issues.
- Important to share what the ambition is for the fund from the Trust's side - understanding how the Trust came to this initiative and what it has done so far.
- People will want to learn about the Trust and its story. How did you get here? Where are you now?
- Some people have been doing anti-racism work for 20+ years, so be honest with them and start where you're at.
- Participation means inclusivity, bringing voices in and reflecting the voices of people in their communities.
- Alongside lived and learned experience, need to make sure that anti-racist knowledge is a baseline.
- Intersectionality - must include that and recognise that there is marginalisation within groups and experiences.

Questions to The Robertson Trust:

- There will be participation in the codesign process – but where will that end? Will there be a design process and then leave it to the Trust to distribute funds or involvement in assessment and decision making etc?
- Giving voice – how far will you support our voice? Posing yourselves as the agent of change?

The Trust would like people to feedback on:

- What kind of group would you like to be part of?
- What kind of opportunities would you be interested in?

The Trust's input and response to the general chat:

- This work must reflect needs and diversity and be underpinned by social justice.
- There is a constant balancing of addressing immediate need with finding space/resources to work on structural change.
- We're committed to social change and racial justice – not just mitigating problems, but looking at underlying structural root causes.
- The advancing racial justice initiative is about taking a step forward together with a specific focus. It's also about learning from this experience about what we need to change in our wider funding processes; and learning more about how to do participation and co-production well across our work.
- The details of the WHAT and the HOW are open to the coproduction group to develop.
- The Trust is open to new ideas and will give flexible and clear parameters.