



Laureus
SPORT FOR
GOOD

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**GENDER EQUALITY
BEYOND THE BINARY:**

TRANSGENDER AND NON-BINARY INCLUSION IN SPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Trans youth are at greater risk of stigma, social isolation, homelessness, poor mental health, and discrimination.¹ In many places around the world, this is compounded by a lack of legal protections. Studies have shown that trans youth face additional barriers to participation in sport and physical activity, often due to negative experiences surrounding their gender identity.² Sport for Development (SfD) initiatives have the opportunity to be inclusive and welcoming to trans youth and give them positive experiences in sport.

The focus of this research is on transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming inclusion in SfD programmes and less so on LGBTQI+ identities. One is about Gender, the other about Sexuality. The research is not about intersex/male/female characteristics, such as chromosome patterns, either.

There is an intrinsic link between trans and LGBTQI+ inclusion in sport, and many of the experiences and barriers overlap and intersect with the barriers and prejudices experienced by the greater LGBTQI+ community. Therefore, many discussions and recommendations in the research are equally valid

across the two areas. Still, it is important to understand and recognize the distinct experiences and barriers that affect trans individuals.

The SfD organisations who participated in this research began by asking themselves what they need to do to include trans youth. An organisation should not consider itself 'inclusive' without taking steps to understand how and why different people have been excluded from its programmes. Furthermore, such an organisation should then seek to understand what must be done to create a programme and environment where trans youth feel included.

Throughout this research, there are actionable examples that can serve as a guide for organisations working in different contexts. The examples are adaptable and the particular challenges for each context should be considered as part of the process to be trans inclusive. As one of the participants in this research put it, it should not matter if an organisation does not have any trans participants from the community yet, they should still work to become a place where trans youth feel comfortable and empowered to be themselves.

1 Stonewall: https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/trans_stats.pdf

2 Jones, B. A., Arcelus, J., Bouman, W. P., & Haycraft, E. (2016). Sport and transgender people: A systematic review of the literature relating to sport participation and competitive sport policies. *Sports Medicine*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1007/s40279-016-0621-y



BACKGROUND

Very little research exists about transgender, non-binary and gender nonconforming (trans)³ inclusion and participation in community sport, even less exists for SfD programmes. Most existing literature concerns competitive and elite sport, not community level sport where there is a greater focus on social outcomes rather than individual progression. This research project is a necessary first step toward understanding how SfD organisations can begin to be inclusive and supportive of the trans community in different contexts. The ethos of the SfD sector is based on evidence that shows the many different personal and social benefits of participating in sport.⁴ Trans youth are unequally at risk, stigmatized and excluded across the globe,⁵ yet there seems to be a general invisibility and lack of trans youth in SfD programmes. This is a clear sign that the SfD sector can do better to include trans communities. Furthermore, barriers to participating in sport may be exponentially greater for trans people who are non-white, have a disability, live in contexts of conflict or insecurity, as well as many other factors. Sport organisations, particularly SfD programmes, should take action to become more inclusive.

Gender equality and equity, as well as social inclusion, are common outcomes and goals among SfD initiatives. However, when asked about trans inclusion and participation, many organisations who aim to achieve

gender equality or inclusion outcomes say they have few, if any, trans participants in their programmes. As there is a seeming lack of knowledge and practical action to include trans youth in SfD programmes, this research aims to present insights for organisations that want to increase such inclusion and extend their work for gender equality beyond the binary.

Nine Laureus Sport for Good partners participated in this research and shared the actions they have taken to be trans inclusive and how those have worked for them. These nine organisations are:

- ▶ The Wave Project, UK
- ▶ The Naz Foundation (India) Trust, India (Naz)
- ▶ Skateistan, South Africa, Cambodia, and Central Asia
- ▶ ChildFund Sport for Development, Global – including Laos
- ▶ Active Communities Network, Northern Ireland and UK
- ▶ School of Hard Knocks, Wales and UK
- ▶ Waves for Change, South Africa
- ▶ Slum Soccer, India
- ▶ The Running Charity, UK

3 This research chooses to use “trans” as an umbrella term to refer to transgender, non-binary and all other gender diverse identities.

4 De Moor MHM, Beem AL, Stubbe JH, et al. Regular exercise, anxiety, depression and personality: a population-based study. *Prev Med.* 2006;42(4):273–9. & Maltby J, Day L. The relationship between exercise motives and psychological well-being. *J Psychol.* 2001;135(6):651–60. and <https://www.sportanddev.org/en/learn-more/health/health-benefits-sport-and-physical-activity> and Sport England: <https://www.sportengland.org/why-were-here/mental-wellbeing>

5 Divan V et al. *Journal of the International AIDS Society* 2016, 19(Suppl 2):20803 <http://www.jiasociety.org/index.php/jias/article/view/20803> | <http://dx.doi.org/10.7448/IAS.19.3.20803>



FINDINGS

The nine organisations are all at the beginning of their journey to include and support trans participants. The insights that they shared about how they have been working to prepare themselves and to be trans inclusive emerged in the following four themes:

- ▶ Organisational culture and design for inclusion.
- ▶ Preparation and training for staff and coaches.
- ▶ Creating an inclusive and supportive environment for trans youth.
- ▶ Opening access and continued support for trans participants.

The researcher organised the examples from these four themes into concrete steps for clear action. The four steps and summary of the actions presented in the guide are:

1 Self-Assessment: Are you inclusive of trans people? Why are you not inclusive? Why are trans youth not coming to your programme?

ACTIONS:

- ▶ Reflect on inclusion to understand if you are being truly inclusive and what you need to do to include trans youth.
- ▶ Leaders create an inclusive culture through advocating for trans inclusion.

- ▶ When in doubt, ask a trans young person about their needs and if your programme is meeting them. Listen to the response.
- ▶ Review the language in your forms and paperwork so that it reflects gender diversity and inclusivity.
- ▶ Try practical activities to open conversations that promote inclusive culture.

2 Build knowledge and understanding within the organisation

ACTIONS:

- ▶ Seek and organise training and support for staff from a local organisation that has a knowledge of trans inclusion.
- ▶ Build a network of people who are trans, or who have knowledge and understanding of the trans community, and who can be critical friends and a resource to your organisation.
- ▶ Develop relationships with other organisations in the community who work with trans youth for support and referrals.



3 Create policy

ACTIONS:

- ▶ Consider where in existing policies you can be more inclusive to gender diversity.
- ▶ Consider how local laws might support policy.
- ▶ If creating policy in a conservative context, consider how you can create an internal policy to build understanding and support without making it external immediately.
- ▶ Signal trans inclusion to the community when it is safe and can help youth see that your organisation is a supportive space.

4 Embed Reflection: Reflect, re-think and re-design your programme to create better access and support for trans youth.

ACTIONS:

- ▶ Reflect on and design the structure of your programme to be inclusive of all genders. This may include renaming your programme and considering the accessibility of facilities you use for activities.
- ▶ Coaches and staff should create spaces where trans participants feel safe, understood and supported.
- ▶ Using the right language is important and can be key for to support trans participants.
- ▶ Coaches' attitudes matter, as a coach can set the tone for an entire group, or team, by being welcoming and understanding, rather than alienating a trans youth who joins an activity.

As we know, every country and context are different and the actions that work in one context may not work in another. It is important when considering the examples in this research and guide to contemplate how they will work in your context. For instance, one of the programmes operating in what we would consider a culturally conservative context has adapted its approach to addressing LGBTQI+ accordingly. Instead of talking about LGBTQI+ or trans inclusion in the program, they talk about gender and bullying. Using the topic of bullying to address homophobia and transphobia, and to open conversations on LGBTQI+ topics, is also described in several existing international guides cited in the resources list.



RECOMMENDATIONS

This research was designed to be foundational and therefore open the door to further research and understanding of how SfD programmes can include and support trans youth. Topics that need to be further explored include, how organisations in other contexts beyond the nine in this research are being trans inclusive and what organisations who are further along on a journey to trans inclusion have to share. In addition, research is needed that seeks to gain a deeper understanding from trans participants in SfD programmes about their experiences.

As trans inclusion in SfD grows, it will be important to continue to do research and create spaces for organisations to share knowledge and learn together. The group of nine organisations who participated in this research have developed relationships and connections that are already leading to further learning and mutual support. It would be beneficial if organisations can continue to exchange on this topic. As the research shows, safer spaces to connect on this topic can lead to organisational change.



THE RESEARCHER

ALISON CARNEY:

Alison's experience in sport started as a football player and coach. Through her own experience and the experiences of teammates and players she recognised that sport could feel like an empowering space for gender expression, equality and inclusion, but that it could also be extremely exclusive and limiting for some. She has spent the last decade working with this challenge. Alison is an independent consultant, facilitator, researcher and advocate and works mainly with sport for development and community sport initiatives. She specialises in gender inclusive programming, MEL (monitoring, evaluation and learning), supporting learning communities and research. Her consultancy and research are guided by a gender justice perspective and seek to support the growth of gender equality and equity across sport and development. Her research takes a participatory



ALISON CARNEY

approach and has focused on themes of gender equality, the importance of girls' and women's leadership, sexuality and LGBTQI+ experiences, and sport as a tool for social change. Her work has been published in the International Review for the Sociology of Sport and has contributed to the Institute of Development Studies' Toolkit on Sexuality and Social Justice.

CONTACT LAUREUS

Dr. Morten Schmidt

Global Director of Programmes and Grants

Laureus Sport for Good

morten.schmidt@laureus.com



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