

## Strategic Partnership between the Voluntary Action Fund & Assist Social Capital

The Voluntary Action Fund (VAF) has been a leading independent grant making organisation since 1982. Over the last two years we have grown considerably and in 2014-15 we will distribute around £20 million to the third sector, mainly funded by the Scottish Government.

VAF also works with a wider range of organisations and covering more social policy areas than ever before. Our funding programmes currently support organisations that:

- support volunteering and community action
- promote equality and tackle discrimination
- support safer and stronger communities
- tackle all forms of violence against women
- provide services for older people in Glasgow

VAF has always believed that funders need to invest “more than just money” if they want to have positive social, environmental and economic impact and achieve long-term change. As a grant maker that values the relationship with funded organisations, we have developed our approach to include development support to, and sharing learning between organisations by providing knowledge transfer and networking opportunities. We know that this brings added benefits to the third sector organisation and additional outcomes for the funder.

However, we have recognised in recent years that financial investment and capacity building alone does not guarantee lasting social change. Something is missing!

VAF believes that the missing piece of the jigsaw is the need to develop connections, trust, relationships, shared values, and mutually beneficial support – in essence - social capital. We also believe we need to build on strengths that already exist, and not solely focus on trying to fix things that appear to be wrong.

In 2012, the VAF Board agreed to seek expertise from outside the organisation to help build our understanding of how to develop Social Capital in grant making. Although VAF had been working closely with organisations and partners to build connections and relationships, we were aware that we lacked the expertise in the theory, and how to develop policies and practice to maximise Social Capital.

VAF approached Colin Campbell from Assist Social Capital CIC in 2012 to help the organisation better understand the concept of Social Capital. Since then Colin and his team have worked closely with the VAF Board and staff to take a strategic

approach to Social Capital development. Colin has provided training to the board and staff over the last eighteen months to build our knowledge and understanding, and also to explore how we can embed Social Capital development into our “more than just money” approach to grant making.

In 2013, Colin worked closely with VAF to develop our Strategic Plan 2014-18, to be launched in May 2014. This was a significant step forward in VAF’s journey which allowed us to develop and better articulate our Vision, Mission and Strategic Aims.

VAF’s experience of working with Assist Social Capital has been extremely positive and has resulted in a formal Strategic Partnership covering the period of our Strategic Plan. Over the next period, Assist Social Capital will work closely with VAF to provide support in three main areas:

1. Developing knowledge and skills around Social Capital and within the organisation
2. Building VAF’s capacity to develop Social Capital through grant making and our “More than just money” approach
3. Increasing the understanding of the role of Social Capital as a vital community asset across VAF stakeholders – funders, policy makers – to achieve social change.

We believe that this successful partnership is based on a number of Social Capital principles – mutual trust and respect, shared values, a reciprocal benefit to both organisations and a desire to make lasting change by building on strengths and assets.

We understand that this is the beginning of a journey for the Voluntary Action Fund, but with the help of Colin and his team at Assist, we have been given a great start and we are also much clearer about our destination.

## OUR VISION

That people and communities are thriving, active, self-organising, resourceful, and connected.

## OUR MISSION

To release existing and potential resources within communities by investing money, increasing capacity and building relationships.

Keith Wimbles

Chief Executive

Voluntary Action Fund

May 2014