

Charity regulator urges those in charge of dormant accounts to 'act now'

Scottish charity regulator urges people such as advisers and trustees dealing with dormant accounts to act now.

The Revitalising Trusts project has so far released over £5 million for public good.

This is a collaboration between The Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) and major funder, Foundation Scotland, which has been working with legal teams the length and breadth of the country to release dormant charitable funds for public benefit. More than 300 inactive charitable trusts of varying sizes and purposes have been identified to date with funds often lying dormant in accounts for several decades and in some cases well over a century. The project team notes that there's significantly more to come.

Since its set up in 2005, OSCR has kept a record of the thousands of charitable trusts which exist across the country, with each charity required to submit an annual return. It is through these regulatory checks that inactive trusts are identified, where they have either had no income or expenditure or donated less than 30% of their total income over the last five years.

The Revitalising Trusts project team then makes contact to offer support and assistance to help reopen, repurpose or wind up the trust, all with the overarching aim to release the

funds for public good. Foundation Scotland takes the time to work alongside trustees and legal teams to ensure that any inactive charitable funds are spent and make a difference in keeping with “the spirit” of the original intentions.

Foundation Scotland has over 25 years’ experience distributing funds which provide long-term benefit for communities. As part of this national project, they are using their specialist expertise to support advisors and trustees to release inactive funds so that they can be redistributed to good causes across Scotland. Alternatively, Foundation Scotland will provide the support needed to breathe new life into the charity, for example by changing charitable purpose to help address new needs in local communities.

The success of the Revitalising Trusts project relies on the cooperation of legal firms managing the hundreds of historic charitable trusts which exist across Scotland. The firm does not need to have a charity specialist as the project team undertakes the work required including the preparation of the reorganisation scheme and the application to OSCR, free of charge.

Locally the team have worked to help release funds from the Ronnie Williamson Trust, set up in 2005 in memory of the long-standing elder and member of Palmerston Place Church and The Edinburgh & Lothian Trust Fund (ELTF).

Steve Kent, Policy Manager at OSCR said “Of the many things we have to do as a regulator, none is more rewarding than working with Foundation Scotland to track down historic underused charitable funds and find new ways of putting them to good use. The donors and philanthropists of the past may not always have been able to envision the challenges that would face future generations, but one thing we can be sure of is that they would have wished their money to make real differences to people’s lives. We are proudly and diligently helping to ensure this happens.

“The Revitalising Trusts Project works across the country and is often dependent on the support of local legal firms who manage a network of historic trusts set up years ago by clients with specific charitable wishes.

“We are confident that there is plenty more still to be found and would encourage legal firms across Edinburgh to get in touch, as we would be delighted to help support the revitalisation of any dormant Trusts they manage. Don’t wait for us to find you!”

Interested firms can contact Steve Kent, Policy Manager OSCR, directly steve.kent@oscr.org.uk for free advice and to discuss next steps. Further information can be accessed here <https://www.foundationscotland.org.uk/revitalise-trust>



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