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Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport



COMMUNITY FUND

THE DULVERTON TRUST

Young People in Community Business

A legacy report from the #iwill programme



Introduction

This report is the legacy of the #iwill project, funded by the Dulverton Trust in partnership with the #iwill Fund (a joint investment between The National Lottery Community Fund and Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport), and delivered by the Plunkett Foundation from 2022 to 2023 – to help community businesses engage, involve and employ young people.

Community-owned businesses provide local opportunities – for jobs, training and volunteering. Often the last remaining service in a rural village such as a shop or a pub, they provide a place to meet, a focus for social activities and help people feel less isolated, lonely and enjoy improved wellbeing.

The mission of the #iwill programme was to create opportunities for young people within community businesses, providing valuable life skills and work experience to help rural young people flourish. The project supported rural community businesses to engage, employ and train young people (aged between 16-20 years) across rural England.

The support involved developing resources, training events and webinars as well as one to one business support and peer networking, to help the businesses navigate the necessary legislation and embed best practice.

This report offers an overview of what the programme achieved, what we learned during the course of the project and what the future opportunities could be for involving young people in community business. Stories and quotations are drawn from community businesses supported directly by the programme, as well as other longer established community businesses who, despite not being supported directly by the programme, could provide additional insights and inspiration for this report.

What is a community business?

Any type of business that trades for community benefit and which is democratically owned and controlled by the local community.





The #iwill programme: helping community businesses engage with young people

With funding from the Dulverton Trust, Plunkett delivered a series of networking events, focus groups, training sessions, resources and an associated communications campaign. The result was a measurable increase in confidence in working with young people amongst rural community businesses in England. 64% of those we spoke to said their confidence had increased after receiving our support, and 23 social action opportunities have been created as a direct result of the programme with more to follow.

23 social action opportunities created

64% of community businesses had increased confidence to work with young people

As part of the #iwill programme, the Plunkett Foundation consulted community businesses about the benefits of involving young people, and the difficulties they felt were hindering them from involving more young people. Over the course of the programme, Plunkett held three discussion groups to understand the needs of community businesses who wanted to involve young people more in their business. We've recorded what we learned in this report, so that the information can benefit grassroots organisations and shape future programmes working with young people and community businesses.

The Benefits of Involving Young People in Community Business

Why do community businesses want to get young people involved?

Community business representatives at the discussion groups shared a range of reasons why involving young people benefited the business, the wider community and the young person themselves. Here is what they said about their motivations for wanting to involve more young people.

“As a community-owned business, it important for us to be inclusive – that means involving people from the whole population.”

“We want to have a diverse range of volunteers from the local community. We need younger people having an input to help us plan for the future and be more sustainable in the long term.”

Community businesses have an inclusive, democratic ownership structure, so they are naturally motivated to involve members of the community from all age groups and backgrounds. Sometimes, the desire to involve young people is part of a specific mission to improve mental health and wellbeing, or provide training and routes to employment.

“We want to enable access to green space for young people who don't have it already, and also doing something about the current mental health crisis.”



Particularly in rural areas, there are fewer social and employment opportunities available within easy access for young people who cannot drive or do not have a car. This can have a knock-on effect on rural communities, and combined with high house prices can lead to depopulation. Rural community businesses can help to reverse this trend of young people moving away, by offering training and jobs. Often, the community business may be the only employer in their immediate local area.

“We wanted more volunteers, but we also wanted to create accessible opportunities for volunteering in an area without public transport.”

In turn, involving young people builds valuable intergenerational relationships within the community. Social cohesion is improved through these relationships, making communities more resilient and attractive places to live and work.

“Young people can gain an appreciation of different generational needs in the community – bridging the gap between ages.”

Young volunteers and employees can benefit from the experience and knowledge of older mentors, and over time bring their own skills and knowledge to different areas of the business.

“They bring new and original ideas to the business.”

Young people may also bring a fresh perspective to the business. They are keen to learn new things and may have new ideas for improving the way the business is run. School, college and university leavers may also have qualifications that other volunteers may not have.

“They had a university qualification that other staff did not, but had been unable to find a placement or internship. Getting food growing experience at the community business enabled a young person to step into a part time job.”

Involving young people also widens the community business’s social impact, because it can by extension involve their families in community activities.

“The best thing about having young people is that our customers love seeing them, it brings them and their families into our community.”

Why do young people get involved in community businesses?

We also ran discussion groups exclusively for young people who were currently involved in community businesses in a variety of paid and volunteer roles, such as working on a till in a community shop, serving customers in a pub or working in a restaurant kitchen. They shared their motivations for getting involved, and what they got out of the experience.

The key factors that prompted them to get involved initially were practical:

- **Easy access** – most of the young people we spoke to were between the ages of 16-18, and unable to travel far. The community business was very often within walking distance and easily accessible without a car.
- **Paid work** – with few other options for work in rural areas, casual or part-time work that can fit around educational commitments was an essential way for young people to earn money.
- **Work experience** – whether paid or unpaid, the opportunity to gain work experience was perceived as a good way to boost their CVs and gain transferable skills, to improve their chances of getting a job in the future.
- **Links through schools** – most of the young people in volunteering roles said that they had to complete volunteering as part of schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Some community businesses already had established connections with the schools, which enabled young people to easily find somewhere to complete their community service.
- **Being encouraged by family and friends** – more than one person said that they had been told about opportunities to get involved through a family member or friend in the village, who was either already involved in the business or had seen a news item.

It was often a combination of the above factors which was essential – the community business had to be within an accessible distance and benefit the young person's career progression or fulfil requirements for an award or qualification.

The fact that young people often got involved through schools or family and friends suggests that a good communication strategy is essential for any community business wanting to involve young people: something as simple as making yourself known to local schools as a volunteer-supported enterprise, or inserting a job advertisement in the village newsletter, could create inclusive opportunities. It was often the first time that the young person had undertaken work experience, so the recommendation of the business by a school or acquaintance was helpful for encouraging them to take that first step.



The list of motivations does not appear at first glance to be unique to community-owned business – it might be a list of reasons for why a young person would want to work at any type of rural enterprise. However, the fact that the shop or pub existed at all was often thanks to community ownership – meaning that if the community hadn't set up the business, there would have been fewer or no employment and volunteering opportunities for young people in the local area. Research by the Plunkett Foundation backs this up: **around 1 in 3 community shops and pubs are situated more than 2 miles away from the nearest alternative business**, meaning that opportunities would be reduced for people who were unable to drive.

Not all of the young people we spoke to knew about the community ownership model before they got involved with their local community business. In some cases, they learned about this gradually while working there. In others, finding out that the business was owned by the community was part of its appeal.

“Knowing the business was community-owned made me want to start volunteering there, so I could participate in my local community.”

Volunteer at a community shop

When we delved deeper into the benefits that young people experienced, we found that community ownership made working at the businesses a uniquely rewarding experience for young people.

What do young people get out of volunteering or working at a community business?

In many ways, the experience of working and volunteering at a community business met the young people’s expectations: they were paid, developed new skills, and added experience to their CV.

However, they also benefited in ways that were not necessarily part of their initial motivation to get involved. They gained confidence as well as skills, which helped them feel generally more comfortable with themselves and around other people. They also felt more integrated within the local community, because they got to know a lot of people and heard about local events going on. The fact that the business was community-owned meant that it was a supportive learning environment for them, with regular customers they could speak to and get to know.



What is the best thing for young people about being involved in a community business?

For the participants of the focus groups, being involved in a community business meant improved wellbeing and a sense of belonging in their community. Young people felt more connected with what was going on locally, and became more confident – both as an active member of the community and in themselves.

“It has helped me come out of myself and speak to more people.”

“You get to know about local events that you may not have known about if you didn’t work there.”

“I’ve been able to meet so many people and I now know most of the people in my village. It’s also really helped me build confidence.”

Loneliness affects every generation, including young people - particularly those in transitional phases of their lives, such as changing schools or starting university. The cost of living crisis has meant that many young people are working two jobs, so they have less time to enjoy activities and interactions that protect their mental health.

In rural areas, there are reduced opportunities for social activities outside school for young people. Community businesses provide volunteering and paid opportunities for them to build lasting connections, which lead to improved health and happiness.



What is different about being involved in a community-owned business?

A community-owned business is, by its very nature, an enterprise that brings people together. The young people we spoke to described a completely different experience to working in a conventional business.

Community businesses are rooted in their local community and tailored to its needs, meaning that they build a supportive network of loyal customers. The young people involved in the focus groups said that they enjoyed the experience of volunteering or working in a business that did not have a merely transactional relationship with its users and customers. For example, a community shop was not just somewhere to buy essentials, but was also a social space where people could stop for a chat and catch up with each other. Being behind the counter would mean that young people could be at the centre of that and feel the benefit of meeting a range of people from the local area.

“You feel part of a team and you make a difference to the community.”

Molly, Broughton Community Shop

Due to the inclusive ownership model, community businesses actively involve local people in decision making. Day to day, that also means that they are receptive to the opinions and needs of their staff and customers. From the start, young people who enjoyed being involved in a community business felt welcomed and that their voices mattered. In turn, managers welcome the fresh perspective that younger members of the team can bring, whether it was about introducing a new service or altering a shop display.

“There’s more interaction with customers as most of them are regular shoppers. Lots of events are run in the shop, which are attended by regulars and attracts new customers. I now have an understanding of the finances and the business, and I can make suggestions for ways to get more customers into the shop. I now try to shop locally and support other community-owned businesses as I see the impact on the community.”

Emily, Dig In Bruntsfield

Finally, the social mission of community businesses to improve the lives and wellbeing of local people is something that the young people we spoke to valued being a part of. Sometimes this was their reason for joining, but that was not the case with everyone we spoke to. For some people, they gradually gained a better understanding of how the business played a role in creating a welcoming space for all, supporting other local businesses and contributing to a more sustainable economy.

“The people I feel are a lot warmer. I don’t feel like I’m just part of a huge corporation, I genuinely know the management. All our produce is locally sourced (within reason) so it feels more sustainable and friendly than what larger shops do.”

Krish, Lion Corner Shop

Taking food as an example, young people could learn about how it was produced and where it came from locally. They could learn about the existing UK food system and how sourcing from small, ethical and sustainable suppliers that were based locally could help tackle the climate and ecological crisis. This is something that they may not have had an interest in or knowledge of before joining the business.

Summary of benefits of involving young people in community businesses:

For young people

- Inclusive opportunities – feeling welcomed and included
- Supportive peers and friendly environment to learn in
- Learning new things – such as how a business is run and the different roles
- Gaining in confidence – personally and professionally
- Feeling valued – that they're part of a team, and their contribution matters
- Feeling more involved in the community and connected with others
- Feeling part of a wider movement for social benefit, and giving something back to the community/local area

For community businesses

- Young people bring a unique set of skills that other volunteers may not have
- They bring new ideas that could improve the business
- They are keen and often quick to learn new skills and roles
- Recruiting young people as staff or volunteers can increase the business's capacity to run services
- Having a diverse pool of volunteers to draw on makes the business more sustainable in the long term
- Broadens the community business's social impact, reaching a wider range of people in the local area

The challenges facing rural community businesses

During the course of the #iwill programme, Plunkett consulted rural community businesses on the challenges that were holding them back from engaging more young people in their business. In February 2023 we ran a workshop for community business leaders, to identify the key problems and potential solutions. The group was made up of people with mixed levels of experience of working with young people – some people were confident and had been doing it for years, whereas others had joined the session to learn about how to take the first steps.

It became clear during the course of the #iwill programme that training was required to help introduce committee members of community businesses (who are themselves volunteers) to the relevant policies and procedures that are legally required for working with people under the age of 18. There was often a lack of confidence in tackling this particular area for people without prior experience, due to the weight of responsibility attached to working with this age group. However, it was widely acknowledged during our discussions and conversations with community businesses that school aged children, particularly between the ages of 16-18, were the most likely to get involved in community businesses because they needed to fulfil a volunteering requirement (e.g. for the Duke of Edinburgh Award) or wanted to gain work experience. Therefore, there is a definite need to provide entry-level training to community leaders about working with young people, to give them the confidence to go further. Signposting to peer networks, existing resources and support organisations is also a useful starting point for community businesses with no prior experience of involving young people.

In the table below, we have summarised some of the main problems that community businesses raised, as well as the potential solutions that were suggested by those businesses that were more experienced.

Problem	Cause	Suggested solutions
Not knowing where to start, if no young people are currently involved	<p>Lack of prior experience</p> <p>Uncertainty about existing resources or organisations that could help</p> <p>Not current in touch with any young people</p>	<p>Talk to your community – especially parents, schools and youth clubs/scout groups – to find out what you could do for young people in your area</p> <p>Get inspiration by looking up examples of other community businesses who have successfully involved young people in their operations</p>
Being a small rural operation, may be competing with larger companies and better known brands in cities	<p>Young people are attracted to opportunities that might lead to a future career</p> <p>Perceived lack of opportunities in rural areas</p> <p>This issue tended to affect rural communities with transport connections to urban areas</p>	<p>Improve your marketing to promote the specific mission of your community business – to support local people and make your community a better place to live</p> <p>Approach people directly to ask whether they have any particular skills or interests that they would like to contribute to develop – which could be anything from photography to baking</p>
Young people have limited availability due to education commitments	<p>This applies to school pupils and college/university students</p>	<p>Consider altering opening hours to include evenings/weekends</p> <p>Focus recruitment campaigns during school/college vacations</p> <p>Consider casual/virtual involvement outside of normal opening hours, such as social media management</p>
No funding to/ financial resources to develop opportunities	<p>Community businesses are small businesses and may not have the capital required upfront to create paid opportunities, or activities and schemes</p>	<p>Draw on the existing knowledge of schools, local authorities, other community businesses and support organisations such as Plunkett to identify funding opportunities to get started</p>
Little or no prior knowledge of relevant policies and procedures, such as safeguarding	<p>No prior experience of working with people under 18 years of age</p> <p>Limited time of committee members (who are unpaid volunteers) to track down information</p> <p>Lack of confidence – working with people under 18 involves taking on a lot of responsibility, which may be over and above what volunteers signed up for</p>	<p>Do a risk assessment – which will benefit all staff and customers</p> <p>Contact another organisation such as a school or youth charity to check what policies you might need</p> <p>Get in touch with other community businesses who might have been through a similar learning process</p>
Limited capacity and time to train and supervise young people	<p>An issue for community businesses that have trouble recruiting staff/retaining volunteers</p> <p>As small businesses, they often have a small staff team, which may be too small to supervise a young person if they have additional requirements or a disability</p>	<p>Identify existing community anchor organisations based locally, which already work with young people and that might be able to send someone to help with supervision (such as SEN schools)</p> <p>Recruit former volunteers as youth mentors (e.g. age 21-25) who can provide support and encouragement</p>

How to create an inclusive community enterprise

What did we learn from young people about how to include them in community businesses?

By speaking to young people who had been volunteers or employees at a community business, we were able to identify their needs from their own perspective. We asked our discussion group participants what they would suggest to community businesses who wanted to involve more young people. Some of the suggestions related to the specific needs of young people, such as fitting volunteering around full-time education, but many of the suggestions are part and parcel of good practice in volunteer and staff management, as well as community engagement.

Summary of suggestions from young people:

- **Use social media** to advertise volunteering opportunities, as well as **talking to schools and parents**. Consider a targeted outreach programme, and invite a young person to lead on it.
 - **Create a flexible rota** to enable staff and volunteers to fit work around education commitments.
 - **Consider changing your opening hours** to allow people in college or school to be able to help out – even opening just one evening a week or longer weekend hours could help.
 - **Offer paid opportunities** – it's true that there will be young people looking for skills to enhance their CVs and to get involved with the community, but for many in rural areas the community business is the only local employer and therefore the only opportunity to earn money.
- **Make young people visible in your business** by giving them a variety of roles beyond stacking shelves and acknowledging their contribution. They may recommend getting involved to their friends, and having young staff and volunteers visibly working for the business will attract more young people.
 - **Involve young people in discussion and decision making** – for example, invite them to a committee meeting or AGM, and involve them in discussions and decision making (consider inviting a young person to apply to be on the committee – anyone over the age of 16 can do this).
 - **Provide good training and support while they are learning**. Young people liked learning new skills but found it a smoother process when they were able to be mentored by someone with experience. Having a clear volunteer or staff handbook, printed checklists and schedules for routine tasks are simple but effective means for helping everyone.
 - **Talk to them about community ownership** – when they started at their community business, not all young people were sure what the committee was or how the business was run. Integrate a chat about the ins and outs of community business into your training for new staff and volunteers. This helps them understand why the business is special, and makes them feel part of something meaningful rather than it being “just” a job.

“You feel like you’re part of something bigger”

Lenny Watson founded the community group Sister Midnight in London at the age of 22 along with two other women, on a journey to save the Ravensbourne Arms pub from closure as a music venue. Although the group had to subsequently find an alternative venue, in March 2022 they managed to raise £257,870 from 870 community shareholders. The group received support from the Plunkett Foundation through the More than a Pub programme.

Lenny’s advice is for getting young people engaged **is to communicate the social value and impact of the business, and to educate people about the wider community ownership movement.**

“It’s not just about getting something on your CV. Many young people feel uninspired and detached from politics, but by helping out at a community-owned shop they realise that it is possible to make a difference within their community. By helping the community business, they also learn about and help other local businesses – which is all part of a wider movement to take power into the people’s hands and decentralise wealth. You feel like you’re part of something bigger. You can affect change.”

“We asked them to tell us how they could help.”

Jim McNeill is the founder of Stoke Ferry Community Benefit Society, which bought the Blue Bell pub. As the last remaining pub in the village, it was seen as a vital asset to retain, without which there would be no other opportunity for people to meet in a social space in both an ad hoc and organised fashion. From the start, Jim and the steering group were keen for local people to take ownership of the project – not just by buying shares, but also through helping with the renovation of the pub building and garden. Now, the once run-down pub is a thriving multi-purpose hub that includes a new café, providing valuable opportunities for young people to gain vital work experience and become more integrated with the local community.

Jim is passionate about making volunteers of all ages and backgrounds feel included and connected with one another and the business. **His advice is to make all volunteers – including young people – feel valued for their unique contribution.**

“When we started out, we needed volunteers for a variety of tasks such as helping to renovate the pub. Instead of just asking people to sign up for specific roles, we asked them to tell us how they could help. We created a list of people who were willing to volunteer, along with their skills and interests – anything from photography and marketing to gardening and baking. That helped us identify volunteering opportunities that suited them. It worked for everyone, not just young people!”

The legacy of #iwill: what happens next?

The delivery of the #iwill programme has benefited community organisations by connecting them with the advice and training they needed to improve their confidence and knowledge, in order to include more young people in their community business. The programme resulted in the direct creation of social action opportunities, but its impact does not end there. What we learned during the programme is that involving all generations in a community business is a long-term process and one that should be part of the enterprise's overall strategy to include local people in decision making.

Including discussion groups with young people and committee members of community businesses enabled us to take an iterative approach to the programme, tailoring and adjusting our support according to what we learned from the people we spoke to. Gathering feedback throughout the programme, rather than just at the end, allowed us to shape the training and advice we provide to suit peoples' needs, for example filling a knowledge gap in terms of staff and volunteer policies relating to young people.

We found that for community businesses, confidence and capacity were sometimes the key obstacles to overcome, because the elected committee members running the business were themselves volunteers. Community groups that were already equipped with the relevant skills and experience were able to approach us with their ideas and seek advice on putting it into practice. However, for community group leaders who had little or no prior experience in working with young people (particularly those under the age of 18), there was a need to understand what was required of them, particularly regarding safeguarding responsibilities, before they felt comfortable proceeding. Part of Plunkett's resources were subsequently pivoted during the programme to provide free training to those groups that needed to take this step before they could start to develop a strategy or outreach programme for young people.



The most important thing that we learned during this project was that young people should be at the centre of any project or initiative to create opportunities that are meant to benefit them. As with community ownership, the beneficiaries of an initiative also need to be its architects, in order for it to work well. Therefore, we will continue to encourage community businesses to involve younger generations in their work, and also emphasise the importance of including all ages from the very beginning of any community ownership project.

As a UK-wide organisation, the Plunkett Foundation also commits to involving young people in all strands of its work. While a dedicated youth engagement programme has its advantages, we understand better than before that we need to be involving young social activists wherever possible. For example, at the start of the programme, Plunkett Foundation committed to setting up a Young Person's Community Business Panel, which would be run separately but alongside our existing Community Business Membership Panel. Based on what we have learned from our conversations with young people over the course of the project, we have decided to change our approach. Rather than setting up a panel consisting purely of young people, we will look instead to ensure the voice of young people is heard by making space for a young person or young people in our existing Community Business Panel. We also introduced a Young Person's Award at our annual Community Business Awards and have invited young people to speak at our 2023 conference.

Plunkett has also committed funding and staff time, outside of this project, to develop resources and training for our Adviser Team regarding supporting young people in community businesses. Our network of advisers is briefed and trained to deliver advice on engaging community businesses with youth social action. We are in the process of commissioning an external trainer to deliver safeguarding training to our Adviser Team. In all of these ways, we will continue to implement the learnings from the #iwill programme, and encourage all community businesses – whether they are in their start-up phase or are already trading – to get in touch with us if they are seeking advice and support.

Resources for community businesses, made available through the #iwill programme:



Employing Young People: Key Things To Know



An introduction to supporting young people with additional needs in your community business



An introduction to engaging young people in your community business



Practical safeguarding advice for your community business

About Plunkett

The Plunkett Foundation is a UK-wide charity with a vision for resilient, thriving and inclusive rural communities. To achieve this, we support people in rural areas to set up and run a wide range of businesses that are genuinely owned by local communities, whereby members have equal and democratic control. Today, we represent over 750 community businesses throughout the UK, from shops and pubs through to woodlands, farms and fisheries.

Our support is delivered through a core staff team and network of 50 business advisers across the UK. Plunkett raises awareness of the community business model UK-wide and provides business support and training to help these businesses start-up and go on to thrive. As a membership organisation, we also seek to represent the interests of rural community businesses through research, policy and public affairs.

For more information about what we do, visit our website or get in touch:

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About the #iwill Fund:

- The #iwill Fund is made possible thanks to £40 million joint investment from The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to support young people to access high quality social action opportunities.
- The #iwill Fund brings together a group of organisations who all contribute funding to embed meaningful social action into the lives of young people.
- Social action involves activities such as campaigning, fundraising and volunteering, all of which enable young people to make a positive difference in their communities as well as develop their own skills and knowledge.
- The #iwill Fund supports the aims of the #iwill campaign - to make involvement in social action a part of life for young people, by recognising the benefit for both young people and their communities.
- By bringing together funders from across different sectors and by making sure that young people have a say in where the funding goes – the #iwill Fund is taking a collaborative approach. More information is available on the #iwill website: www.iwill.org.uk
- During 2021 and 2022, the [Dulverton Trust](#) partnered with the #iwill Fund to award £610,000 to grants for youth social action in rural communities and in the heritage sector through the Dulverton #iwill Fund.